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**Smashing the monuments and saving the pedestals: Washington  
Allston and Edgar Allan Poe's mandate for the American artist**

**Weston, Debra Faye, Ph.D.**

**The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1992**

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SMASHING THE MONUMENTS AND SAVING THE PEDESTALS:  
WASHINGTON ALLSTON AND EDGAR ALLAN POE'S  
MANDATE FOR THE AMERICAN ARTIST

by

Debra Weston

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the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
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Approved by



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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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WESTON, DEBRA, Ph.D. *Smashing the Monuments and Saving the Pedestals: Washington Allston and Edgar Allan Poe's Mandate for the American Artist.* (1992). Directed by Dr. Murray Arndt. 318 pp.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the artist in nineteenth-century America as it was conceived by Washington Allston and Edgar Allan Poe. Washington Allston was the first American painter and Edgar Allan Poe the first American poet to define their aesthetic theories and practice in an attempt to fashion a more definitive and prominent role for the American artist. Allston's and Poe's contributions as artists and aesthetic theorists are significant in that both men seek to construct a mandate for the artist in an American environment void of both a native tradition and the necessary resources to promote and sustain American art and artists. In an effort to overcome these obstacles, Allston and Poe find themselves attempting to reconcile a number of paradoxes in their mandates: questions of the artist as elitist or democrat, the artist as aesthete or instructor and the artist as advocate of the traditional or the original. These were all issues confronted and reconciled in their mandates. For Allston and Poe the reconciliation of these paradoxes is, in turn, the similarity of their visions.

Moreover, from a biographical perspective the lives and careers of Allston and Poe, each rife with ironies, similarly parallel. Both men spent childhoods in privileged circumstances in the antebellum South and adulthoods in a constant struggle with poverty in an industrial and

unsympathetic North. Much of the ideology that shapes their mandates can be seen as a direct result of the social, cultural and political conflicts that existed between these two environments.

These regional conflicts also have a direct relation to the ultimate failure of Allston and Poe to realize their mandates. As Romantic artists in a period when Ralph Waldo Emerson and Transcendentalist thought was considered the paradigm of American Romanticism, Allston and Poe found themselves on the fringe of this Romantic movement: neither man could accept the democracy, liberalism, or the theology inherent in Emersonian philosophy. As a result of both choice and circumstance Allston and Poe remained aloof from the mainstream of American Romanticism, with their mandates largely ignored.

The importance then of Allston and Poe as aesthetic theorists, and indeed as American artists, is their desire to both recognize and rectify these paradoxes inherent in both the role of the artist and in American society. Given this, Allston's and Poe's conception of the American artist's mandate was a truly independent one.

## INTRODUCTION

That Edgar Allan Poe did not like either the painting or poetry of Washington Allston should not surprise anyone familiar with Allston's work or Poe's criticism. In his work on *Autography*, Poe writes of Allston's paintings: ". . . the most noted of them are not to our taste," and on Allston's poetry: ". . . the faults of his pen and pencil are identical" (*Works* 9: 302f). Critics cannot fault either man for his consistency. Present research has not uncovered any account of Allston's judgment on the younger Poe, even though Allston was certainly familiar with that poetry of Poe's appearing in the 1842 edition of Rufus Griswold's *The Poets and Poetry of America*. This first edition of Griswold's perennial anthology<sup>1</sup> was dedicated to Allston as "the eldest of the living poets in America and the most illustrious of her painters" (iii).

Readers of Griswold's dedication may concede a degree of correctness in his acknowledgement of Allston's place in American letters—at this time and in this volume. By the 1840s Allston had, for many Americans, answered the call to lead the New World in its cultural expression, for, whatever his successes and failures, Allston had become America's idea of an artist. His career as an *American* artist indicates the same level of promise and disappointment that readers find in Griswold's anthology.

In truth, Allston, like many of the writers included in *Poets and Poetry of America*, is just another of the "Sunday poets," as they were defined by an anonymous reviewer of this first edition in the *North American Review*, yet, for this reviewer Allston's work has "a moderate share of poetic faculty [and a] good deal of poetic feeling" (6). Allston's prominence in the anthology (in addition to the dedication Griswold also gives a full page biographical introduction as well as several pages of Allston's poetry) is testimony to Griswold's critical bias and further evidence of his notoriously poor critical judgment. For example, not only does this edition fail to recognize the merits of a Longfellow, Lowell, or Poe compared to a Charles Fenno Hoffman, Lydia Sigourney, or even an Allston, but both the diversity and disparity of the volume also make the case clear: Griswold's dedication notwithstanding, America's literary tradition still lacked direction and leadership.

Even Griswold seems somewhat aware of this absence of leadership, for in his "Historical Introduction" he adds his voice to the general call that American writers need to be "free from the vassalage of opinion and style which is produced by the constant study of the literature of that nation whose language we speak" (v). Allston, the "eldest of the living poets" at age 63 has neither the skill, energy, or desire to answer Griswold's call to become a literary pioneer. The task is left for some other writer to pick up, and to "free" American writers from their "vassalage" in much the same

way the younger Allston had been able to successfully "liberate" American painters, earning for himself the accolade as "the most illustrious of [American] painters."

This leadership that Griswold, and many others, called for and that Allston is too old to consider seems to have fallen to Edgar Allan Poe and, in retrospect, Poe's place on the fringe of American letters in 1842 served him and his art well, considering the obstacles nineteenth century America hurled in the paths of her artists. Artists were expected to survive and thrive in an environment eagerly engaged in material pursuits and oriented toward technical achievement. Given this country's largely Protestant-bourgeois beginnings, Americans preferred action to contemplation, facts to ideas, and practice to theory. During the early years of the nineteenth century, the arts, for the most part, were utilitarian. Van Wyck Brooks writes that artists were given this mandate by the people of the young republic: "The statesman wished to have his portrait painted. Oratory, history, portrait painting were all connected with statesmanship; they had a *raison d'être* in politics and thrived in an age of nation building" (162).

Clearly, Poe's theory and practice placed him outside of such a mandate for artists; however, critics can understand how such a mandate could arise. In the flurry of activity—the clearing and cultivating of the land, the building of cities, and the expansion westward—Americans were, as Richard Dana described them, "blinded by the dust that is raised in the

clutter of material things." He further warned that the "almost exclusive pursuit of the physical" could be harmful if the "higher order of the mind was ignored" (qtd. in Bjelajac 159). Yet Poe, and to a certain extent Allston, definitely appealed to this "higher order" of the mind; in fact, this appeal to the intellect, and not to materialism nor patriotism, provided the focus for Poe's work and for Allston's.

Poe and Allston, however, struggled against this mandate in an attempt both to hurdle the obstacles America threw in their paths and to free themselves and their ideas from English influence. Literary history shows that Poe, ultimately, is more successful than Allston in accomplishing this feat. E. P. Richardson, in his biography *Washington Allston*, offers a perspective on the circumstances of Allston's, and Poe's struggle:

What the artists of a new land needed to learn most was to organize the raw material of life into a decisive plastic expression. Here in America there was material enough for art, and intellect and curiosity enough. But merely to produce art is not sufficient. There are subtle, difficult skills of expression to be mastered which are the inheritance from centuries of artistic discipline and accumulated experience. The artist in America was isolated from this experience and unsustained by it tradition. (85)

Thus, artists wanted to liberate themselves from the past and create for themselves their own tradition. This choice required a great deal of courage and a willingness to experiment—all at the risk of losing one's voice in the din created by a growing society.

Allston, though aware of the need for risks and severing ties from the past, is willing to concede some value to the traditions of his European antecedents. He asserts in one of his lectures that the past prevents us from wasting life "in guesses, and to guess at last that we have all our lives been guessing wrong" (*Lectures* 12f.) However, he goes on to add that this tie to the past does not subordinate him or what he calls his "abiding Interpreter,"

which cannot be gainsaid, which makes our duty to God and man clear as the light, which ever guards the fountain of all true pleasures, nay, which holds in subjection the last high gift of the Creator, that imaginative faculty whereby his exalted creature, made in his own image, might mould, yet unborn forms, even forms of beauty, grandeur, and majesty, having all of truth. . . . (13)

Poe, also has reservations about completely severing ties from the past; moreover, his theory and practice seem to concur with Allston's notion about the "imaginative faculty" that is capable of molding "yet unborn forms."

Thus both men, facing various obstacles from America and from abroad, share in the search for a clearly defined and uniquely American method of expression. And both men happen upon defining the purpose and meaning of their art in some surprisingly similar ways. First, both men leave as a legacy for other American writers an art for the new nation that places the highest priority on *beauty*. Second to *beauty*, both Allston and

Poe value the workings of the *imagination*. Third, both men leave for future American writers and painters a model for "*the modern artist*": a man who worked not for material things but for aesthetic quality and universal values. Also, it is worth noting that these two men, whose public profile and private temperament were a lesson in diversity, would, nevertheless, share common roots and later life experiences that would make a study of the beautiful and imaginative a logical consequence of their development.

For many, this assertion that Poe and Allston essentially led parallel lives may seem, at best, curious; at the worst, absurd. This confusion is compounded by the fact that few have encountered Washington Allston in American literary history. Thus, before tracing out the extent of their parallel development—as well as some notable differences—some background on Washington Allston is needed.

For Allston both the beautiful and the imaginative have early nurturing. The poet and artist spent the first six years of his life on a rice plantation on the Waccamaw River in Charleston that is now one of America's most beautiful sculpture gardens.<sup>2</sup> Allston's father, Captain William Allston, served under Francis Marion in the Revolutionary War and his mother of French descent was considered one the most beautiful women in the colony (Flagg 2). Born in 1779, Allston was of that first generation of Americans to know political independence and to witness the formulation of a democracy. However, the Treaty of Paris ended only the

political revolution; the cultural one was just beginning. John Adams, reflecting on the gap between political independence and cultural dependence, observed that "the real American Revolution had not taken place on the battlefields but in the hearts and minds of the American people—a change not so much in their society and politics as in their values and aspirations" (qtd. in Link 104). Washington Allston's life as an artist reflects this notion.

In spite of the tragic death of his father when he was an infant,<sup>3</sup> Allston's childhood offered an education in beauty and a stimulus to an already precocious imagination. As an adult, Allston recounted for William Dunlap, the author of *The History of Arts of Design in the United States*, his early creative efforts:

My favorite amusement . . . was making little landscapes about the roots of an old tree in the country—meagre enough, no doubt; the only particulars of which I recall, were a cottage built of sticks, shaded by little trees which were composed of the small suckers . . .

. . . . Another employment was the converting of the forked stalks of wild ferns into little men and women, by winding about them different colored yarn. . . . These childish fancies were the straws by which, perhaps, an observer might then have guessed which way the current was setting for after life. (2: 296-97)

Jared Flagg, Allston's nephew and chief biographer, cites many other anecdotes concerning the young Allston's imaginative abilities. For example (8), Allston once sketched a ship on the bottom of a wooden chair during his confinement for an offense committed in school, and in another incident the child locked himself in his room over a vacation only to emerge with a picture of a full blown Vesuvius which exhibited such talent that the family "feared he might disgrace them by becoming a painter."

At age seven Allston was sent by his stepfather, Dr. Henry Collins Flagg, to Newport for an education that would prepare him for college. During this time Allston was a frequent visitor to the shop of a quadrant and compass maker, Mr. Samuel King, who was also a part-time painter. King encouraged Allston in his drawing and Allston returned the kindness by doing a portrait of King (*Samuel King* ca. 1800). Also during this time, Allston became friends with Edward Malbone, one of the foremost miniature painters of the day and also made the acquaintance of two families whose influence and friendship would be life long: the Channings and the Danas.

Both Edmund T. Dana and William Ellery Channing were classmates of Allston's when he entered Harvard in 1796. However, his performance at Harvard, though respectable, was nothing to distinguish him as a man who was to become America's "most illustrious painter." William Gerdtts and Theodore Stebbins note that the records of Harvard prior to 1800 are "filled

with reports of Allston's punishment for tardiness at prayer, absence at prayer, absence at recitations, and absence from college as well as admonishment for neglecting collegiate duties" (22). Even though Allston admitted to his procrastination and laziness, in a letter to Charles Leslie that he had seen the sun rise "about as often as Falstaff saw his knees" (qtd. in Flagg 172), he did manage to serve as secretary, vice-president, and poet of the Hasty Pudding Club (Gerdtz and Stebbins 22).

His reading and drawing, similar to his academic performance and his lifestyle, seem broad and undirected. Allston told William Dunlap

My leisure hours at college were chiefly devoted to the pencil, to the composition equally of figures and landscapes; I do not remember that I preferred one to the other; my only guide in the choice was the inclination of the moment. (2:300)

Allston's reading, as his drawing, seemed "the inclination of the moment."

A letter to Flagg from Allston's friend and classmate, Leonard Jarvis, offers a picture of Allston's reading and writing:

Allston was fond of reading and writing, but he paid no more attention to our college studies than was necessary to secure a respectable standing. . . . His favorite reading[s] were plays and romances, particularly romances of the German schools, and he would sup on horrors until he would be almost afraid to go to bed until he had made sure that no goblin was under it or in the closet. (Flagg 27)

These readings from German romances stimulated his imagination in such a manner that one of his earliest drawings he ascribes to such influences: "The earliest compositions that I remember were the storming of Count Roderick's castle, from a poor (though to me delightful) romance of that day . . ." (qtd. in Dunlap 2: 299). This early work in addition to a series of pen and ink caricatures done at Cambridge in the manner of Hogarth, titled *The Buck's Progress*<sup>4</sup> early manifested Allston's lifelong tendency to link the visual with the narrative and to draw subjects for his canvasses from the pages of his books. E. P. Richardson (WA 29) remarks that Allston's *The Buck's Progress* is probably the most successful of all Allston's satires because "it is a mood in which undergraduates excel[:] an undergraduate's high spirits and lively sense of mockery."

Jarvis cites an anecdote that shows how the young Allston could combine his reading of German romance with what Richardson calls "high spirits" and a "lively sense of mockery" to produce a rather elaborate hoax:

. . . the students of Harvard were surprised at seeing upon the boards for advertisement in the chapel entry a summons for the meeting of a secret society, and while they were seeking to elucidate the mystery, another paper appeared in the same place solemnly warning them against indiscreet curiosity, and denouncing the most dreadful penalties against anyone who would seek to lift the veil. This was followed by a second summons in irregular verse, in which all ingredients of a hell broth were made to boil and bubble. All these papers were ornamented with altars, daggers, swords, chalices, death-heads and cross-bones and other paraphernalia of German

romance. . . . All this was the work of Allston. . . . (qtd. in Flagg 29)<sup>5</sup>.

In Thomas Flexner's view, "Allston was amusing himself with an elaborate hoax. A new kind of man had entered American art" (*Light* 125).

Upon graduating from Harvard and at the risk of disgracing his family, Allston announces his vocation in a letter to his mother:

It is so long since I have mentioned anything about my painting that I suppose you have concluded I have given it up. But my thoughts are far enough from that I assure you. I am more attached to it than ever; and am determined, if resolution and perseverance will effect it, to be the first painter, at least, from America. (qtd. in Flagg 20)

This declaration was followed by a return to South Carolina where he sold his patrimony at a sacrifice, as one of his more harsh critics, Mariana Van Rensselaer observes, "like a born artist he was ignorant and reckless in money matters" (145) and did not realize that he might have lived comfortably on the interest of this legacy. Entrusting the proceeds from this sale to a London banker, Allston financed his first trip to England, but after this trust was exhausted, Allston began a lifelong struggle with poverty.

Allston was only one of a number of artists who made the pilgrimage to Europe in America's early years.<sup>6</sup> Allston left for Europe with his friend

Edward Malbone to study under Benjamin West at the Royal Academy. In her book, *Artistic Voyagers*,<sup>5</sup> Joy Kasson finds:

Even more than in literature, a career in the visual arts seemed to demand an apprenticeship and initiation into professional mysteries. From the practical matters of pigments and the preparation of a canvas to the more abstract problems of perspective and composition, painting required technical skills that the novice could best learn from an experienced artist. America in 1800 offered few opportunities for such learning, and Allston sampled most of these. (45)

Allston's training at the Academy and the tutelage of West prove to be the genesis of Allston's development as a painter. The standard practice for students at the Academy, according to Gerdtz and Stebbins, was for the student to initially draw plaster casts and then graduate to live models. Also, the celebrated Swiss painter, Henri Fuseli, was acting as both lecturer and instructor during Allston's tenure, and no doubt, he gave the young American his first true lesson in the tenets of Neo-Classicism—"respect for antiquity, belief in the perfections of form and the superiority of drawing over color . . ." (28). However, at the same time Allston was receiving neo-classical instruction from Fuseli, he was watching this same instructor produce canvasses full of dream imagery and dramatic effects.

Regardless of the gap between his instruction and his practice, Allston's admiration for Fuseli is evident. For example, Allston's later canvasses and his personal library reflect his homage to Fuseli: he owned

a copy of Fuseli's *Lectures on Painting* (Johns 37) and Flagg cites a letter in which Allston exclaims:

. . . I often refresh my memory of [the old masters] with some of the articles in *Pilkington's Dictionary* [edited and enlarged by Fuseli], and [Fuseli] brings them before me in a way that no other man's words could; he even gives me a distinct apprehension of the style and the color of some whose works I have never seen. I often read one or two articles before I go into my painting room; they form indeed almost a regular course at breakfast. (39f.)

After a two-year sojourn at the Royal Academy under the training of West and Fuseli, Allston left England for Paris and, as Flagg reports, Allston became a "constant and diligent student in the galleries of the Louvre" (55) where he viewed the Renaissance Masters: Titian, Tintoret, and Veronese. In a letter to William Dunlap, Allston recalls these impressions:

. . . [the Renaissance masters] took away all sense of subject. . . . I thought of nothing but of the gorgeous concert of colors, or rather of the indefinite forms (I cannot call them sensations) of pleasure with which they filled the imagination. It was the poetry of color which I felt; procreative in its nature, giving birth to a thousand things which the eye cannot see, and distinct from their cause. I did not, however, stop to analyze my feelings—perhaps at that time I could not have done it . . . . But I now understand it, and *think* I understand *why* so many great colorists . . . gave so little heed to the ostensible *stories* of their compositions. . . . They addressed themselves not to the senses merely, as some have supposed, but rather through them to that region . . . of the imagination which is supposed to be under the exclusive dominion of music, and which, by similar excitement, they caused to teem with visions that "lap the soul in Elysium." (*History* 2: 309)

Thus, in Allston's forming art theory, the subject is made by the *spectator's* imagination, and if the viewer has no imagination, then the composition, as Allston related to Dunlap, will have little more meaning "than a calico counterpane."

As the importance of the imagination became more central to Allston's aesthetics, so did the role of experience. In the spring of 1804, he left Paris, passed through Switzerland to Siena, and arrived in Rome in 1805 (WA 68). The Italian environment was rich in potential subjects and friendships for Allston. According to Wolfgang Born in his book *American Landscape Painting*, the Rome of Allston's day was a veritable work of art itself: Rome was not the open air museum or modern metropolis of later days, but a "picturesque array of ivy-clad stone arches, of crumbling laurel covered walls, of pine groves, medieval churches and Renaissance palaces. . . ." (30). Artists and poets from everywhere were drawn to Rome at this time, for as Born asks, where else might they "discuss painting and verse in the shadow of Michelangelo and Raphael?"

In this rich setting for ideas and subjects, Allston forged a momentous relationship. Soon after Allston's arrival, Washington Irving came to Rome with his own hopes or pursuing a career as a painter. Irving and Allston spent a good deal of time together, as Irving recalled in his *Miscellanies*:

A young man's intimacy took place immediately between us and we were much together during my brief sojourn in Rome. . . . We visited together some of the finest collections of paintings, and he taught me how to visit them to the most advantage, guiding me always to the masterpieces, and passing by the others without notice. . . . He was exquisitely sensible to the graceful and the beautiful. (173)

A third was soon to join the pair on their excursions to the collections of Rome—an English poet and essayist, S. T. Coleridge. Flagg comments on this rather curious mix and attributes the attraction to “a moral magnetism, such as binds together kindred souls despite the varying circumstances and influences of life” (61). Indeed, the three remained correspondents and friends until the death of Coleridge in 1834 and Allston's death in 1843.

The influence of this relationship with Coleridge upon Allston is difficult to assess. Allston does acknowledge a considerable debt to Coleridge in a conversation Allston had with his nephew and biographer, Jared Flagg:

To no other man do I owe so much intellectually as to Mr. Coleridge, with whom I became acquainted in Rome and who has honored me with his friendship for more than five and twenty years. He used to call Rome “the silent city,” but I could never think of it as such while with him, for meet him when and where I would, the fountain of his mind was never dry, but, like the far-reaching aqueducts that once supplied this mistress of the world, its living stream seemed specially to flow for every classic ruin over which we wandered; and when I recall some of our walks under the pines of the Villa

Borghese, I am almost tempted to dream that I have once listened to Plato in the groves of the Academy. (64)

At present, no records are available of Coleridge's impressions at the time of young Allston because soon after their friendship began, Coleridge had to take quick leave of Rome because of Napoleon's advance on the city and the poet's notes apparently were lost in his hurry to leave.<sup>7</sup> David Bjelajac reports that soon after Coleridge's departure, Allston, too, was forced to leave Rome, primarily because of the question about American neutrality in the European war (71).

Aside from his meeting Irving and Coleridge, Allston's time in Rome had another significance. Richardson writes that the overall experience

sharpened [Allston's] awareness of life and formed his conception of the powers of art. . . . The remainder of Allston's life would show how deeply the love of that Roman gravity and silence, the brooding sense of the past . . . and the grandeur of the timeless entered into his consciousness. (WA 79)

From this point on Allston's art reflects the sense of mystery, the love of color, beauty and imagination that he had found in the works of the Italian masters.

Allston returned to America in 1808 and married the sister of his college friend, William Ellery Channing. Allston had been engaged to Ann Channing during his European tour and the marriage seems to have helped

him continue the same creativity and productivity he had experienced on the Continent. Soon after the marriage, Allston painted some of his best portraits,<sup>8</sup> and he was also able to call forth his poetic muse. Allston penned his volume of verse, *Sylphs of the Seasons*, published in both London and Boston in 1813, thus establishing himself not only as a painter, but also a poet.

Three years after the marriage and this burst of creativity, Allston's wife and a pupil, Samuel F. B. Morse, accompanied Allston on his second trip to England. Morse not only became Allston's prized pupil but a lifelong friend and admirer (Flagg 86). This trio was quickly joined by another art student, Charles Leslie, who would become in later years Allston's chief advocate and correspondent. Also, Leslie shared Allston's and Morse's love for the theater and the three soon became friends with the actor John Howard Payne (Gerdtz and Stebbins 63).

These seven years Allston spent in England were both inspirational and successful. Unlike his earlier trip, this time he was no apprentice looking for a master: Allston came to England as a professional artist who was looking for more lucrative patronage and a more open environment to artists. Moses Sweetser, in his 1879 biography of Allston, reports that during this time:

. . . Allston worked with marvelous rapidity. The *Uriel* was finished in six weeks, and he said, "I painted at a heat,—for the Royal Academy Exhibition." The *Elijah* was done only in three weeks. The *Belshazzar*, the source of most of the master's failure, was sketched out before April 1817. During the same year he painted the *Clytie* and at the Exhibition of 1818 he was represented by a Shakespearean scene, *Hermia and Helena*. Another work of this period was the *Falstaff and his Ragged Recruits*, a picture about four feet long and containing a dozen figures, most of which were actors from the English stage. (82f.)

In addition to his prolific painting, Allston also published the book of verse which he composed earlier in America; his painting of *Uriel in the Sun* won a prize at the British Institution; he rekindled his friendship with Coleridge and through this renewed acquaintance, Allston met Wordsworth. These activities culminated in 1818 when Allston was elected to membership in the Royal Academy.<sup>9</sup>

However, these years were of mixed happiness. For example, due to overwork and neglect of his health, Allston became critically ill with a stomach ailment in 1813. Finding little relief in London, Allston, in the company of his wife, Morse, and Leslie, left London for "a change of air" in Clifton. Flagg cites Leslie's account of the events of Allston's arrival at Clifton:

. . . Allston became so extremely unwell . . . that Mr. Morse returned to London to acquaint Coleridge, who, as you know, was affectionately attached to Allston, with the alarming state of his friend. Coleridge came the same afternoon . . . with Dr.

Tuthill, and they both stayed at the inn with Allston for the few days that he was confined there. (97)

Within two years of Allston's illness and recovery, and, perhaps, as a result of the fatigue in caring for her husband, Mrs. Allston died suddenly, leaving Allston deeply depressed. However, the wise counsel of Morse and Leslie proved beneficial, as Flagg summarizes: "Morse and Leslie persuaded [Allston] to . . . take up his lodgings with them. . . . Gradually, old associations and pleasant company dispelled paralyzing grief, and led him for his overshadowing sorrow into comparative cheerfulness" (110).

And art, too, was essential in rescuing Allston from his grief. Years later, recalling this experience while talking with his nephew, George Flagg, about the first painting—*The Cavern Scene from Gil Blas*—he completed after his wife's death, Allston remarked that it was accomplished "while he was in deep affliction, and constantly in tears. [George] said, 'I do not understand how it is possible to paint under such circumstances.' 'Ah, George,' [Allston] said, 'nothing can prevent my painting but want of money; that paralyzes me' " (qtd. in Flagg 111).

Illness and the death of his spouse were not the only concerns Allston faced late in this second trip to England. Soon after his wife's death, Allston had to come to terms with—as he tells George Flagg—the "want of money [which] paralyze[d]" him. His patrimony, which had been in trust

with a London banker since his first trip to London in 1801, was exhausted and Allston recognized that he had to survive for the first time solely on his craft.

Knowing that his craft was not a lucrative one, especially in America, and against the advice of friends such as Washington Irving, who saw this decision as a retreat from a successful reputation that promised a prosperous career in England (Welsh 497), Allston decided to return home. Flagg cites several reasons for this decision, ranging from Allston's "love of country" to the "incessant importunities" of street beggars who were a nuisance to Allston "at home and in the streets" (136).

These suggestions, along with the loss of his wife, his health, and his patrimony, seemed to work together, forming a constellation of reasons for Allston's quitting England for America. He made the voyage home, bringing with him his unfinished canvas of *Belshazzar's Feast*, a work that Allston believed would make his reputation in America.

And Allston's reputation seemed to have preceded him, for on his return, Allston was received as one of the most celebrated and sought after men of his day. Moses Sweetser records (136-37), however, that even though the painter had a "small but choice circle of friends, including his kindred and a few intellectual companions, and [Allston] frequently welcomed artists and travellers to his studios," he was, for the most part, reclusive. Allston declined "the hospitalities of the great families of Boston"

in order to "devote his life to nobler pursuits," these being in Sweetser's mind a "high religious concentration" and a reverence for "the true and the beautiful."

Among the close circle of friends, Allston admitted Richard Henry Dana, Sr. Dana, a poet who also appears in Griswold's anthology, had been asked to leave the editorship of the *North American Review* because of an editorial he wrote defending the poetry of John Keats. Thus, in need of income and encouraged by the financial success of Irving's *Sketchbook*, Dana began his own miscellany, titled *The Idle Man*, in 1821 (Hunter 42). As a favor to Dana, Allston wrote two essays and a novel for publication; however, the magazine folded before the novel, *Monaldi* was printed (WA 124-25). Allston seems to have exploited his own experiences for this novel, for the plot focuses on an Italian artist and it relies heavily on Gothic conventions and Allston's aesthetic and religious beliefs. As a result of *The Idle Man's* collapse, *Monaldi* was placed in a desk and forgotten until its publication in 1841, just two years before Allston's death (Flagg 312-13).

Around the same time of the composition of *Monaldi*, Allston was actively engaged in the completion of what he considered to be his masterwork: *Belshazzar's Feast*. This piece, however, was to ultimately become a millstone rather than a milestone in Allston's career. For the painter's part, the work was nearly complete when he brought it from England in 1821; however, after leaving England, he had asked his fellow

painter, Gilbert Stuart, for an assessment. Stuart's comments concerning the alteration of the perspective took Allston months to complete. In the meantime, the focus and taste of America's art and Allston's had gone in quite different directions. E. P. Richardson points out:

The fact is simply that Allston had grown into another period of his life, in which the tranquil and the meditative element of his art, reinforced by the introspective atmosphere of his new environment, displaced the grandiose and dramatic interests predominant in the preceding fifteen years. As a result, although he worked at the *Belshazzar* doggedly, he never could recapture the feeling which he had begun to express so many years before. (WA 125)

Indeed, though he worked "doggedly" on this painting, at Allston's death in 1843, the *Belshazzar*, which he had started over twenty years earlier, was still incomplete.

This "new period" in Allston's life, besides becoming more tranquil and introspective, was also characterized by his increased interest in the literary. For example, among his papers found at his death were an essay on religion and four lectures on art that reflected both his experience and his aesthetic, as well as providing a gloss for the understanding of his poetry and fiction. Apparently the lectures, though unpublished in his life time, were read to Longfellow and C. C. Felton in 1842 (Sweetser 148). The lectures, however, were published, posthumously, in 1850.

Allston remarried in 1830 to Martha Remmington Dana, sister to friend Richard Henry Dana; the only other events of note for Allston's last years were some exhibitions,<sup>10</sup> a flow of visitors to his Cambridgeport home, his struggle with "Bel" (his nickname for the incomplete *Belshazzar's Feast*) and his continuing fight with poverty. These circumstances were underscored by the problems Allston had with his health in his later years; increasingly, he found pain and frustration when he attempted to mount the ladder to his studio to face the 16 x 17 foot canvas of "Bel." Allston died on 9 July 1843, after a day's work on the uncompleted painting.

An account of Allston's funeral was recorded by Elizabeth Peabody, a long-time admirer of his work and a sister-in-law to Nathaniel Hawthorne. She recalled the impressive display of the funeral occurring at twilight in the Cambridge churchyard where "the students of the University came over with torches and gathered around the open grave" (19).

This sketch of Allston's life and work may leave the impression of name-dropping; however, readers must remember that Allston did, indeed, have contact—either directly or indirectly—with some of the most important figures of his day. Also, numerous examples abound of his influence on others—to the point that some historians, Albert Gardner and Joy Kasson among them, give Allston a place in their assessments of the time primarily because of his contributions to the development of American art as a teacher and a friend to others instead of for his own work. Other critics,

notably David Ragan in his study of "Allston's Aesthetics and Creative Imagination," are more cautious about the role they see Allston having in the making of American art. Ragan sees, for example, the contribution of Allston as "modest" but "genuine":

His preoccupation with imaginative life and his emphasis upon the art of the past enable later American artists to develop in ways which Allston could not foresee and which, ironically, would obscure the role he played. He was in many ways a pioneer; his value may be ultimately expressed as he himself summed up the contributions of earlier artists: "For the dead in Art may well be likened to the hardy pioneers of our own country, who have successfully cleared before us the swamps and the forests that would have obstructed out progress, and opened to us lands which the efforts of no individual, however preserving, would enable him to reach." (D7)

For this very reason—Allston's role as a "pioneer"—this present study of Allston's role in American art and Edgar Allan Poe's congruent role in American letters is justified. Not only may this careful study reveal more about each man's productions, but readers may also find something more about the growth of cultural expression and the relationship between the picture and the word in 19th century America. With this focus on parallel lives and the role as "pioneers," the following study is organized in the following manner:

Chapter One will look at both men's early lives in the South and how the vestiges of Southern culture shaped both the character and the art of Allston and Poe.

Chapter Two will look at how, as adults, Allston and Poe responded to life in the North. This chapter will examine how their art and character were changed by the cultural environment and political influences of the North.

Chapter Three will then consider the protean nature of Washington Allston's aesthetic, and how he established himself as an independent voice in fashioning a mandate for the artist in America.

Chapter Four will also look at the protean nature of Poe's conception of the role of the artist in America. This chapter will examine Poe's role as both critic and poet and how his quest for independence helped to shape the future of American Literature.

## INTRODUCTION CONTENT NOTES

<sup>1</sup>From 1842 to Griswold's death in 1857, *Poets and Poetry of America* went through 17 editions and more than 20 imprints were made between 1857 and 1892 when a new edition, under different editorship, was issued.

<sup>2</sup>This land is now Brookgreen Gardens. The development of these gardens is the result of Archer and Anna Hyatt Huntington. Myrna Eden relates that when the Huntingtons first saw the advertisement for the sale of Brookgreen Plantation and three adjoining plantations—one being The Oaks, birthplace of Allston—"They were both impressed by the beauty of a once grand rice plantation whose avenues of oaks were eighteenth century landscaping and had since become a lush swamp wilderness, the habitat of waterfowl and wild creatures." Eden adds that the garden built by the Huntingtons was based on the pattern of the old garden (25).

<sup>3</sup>The death of Allston's father occurred under rather mysterious circumstances. Flagg reports that:

In 1871 Captain Allston, on his return from the famous battle of Cowpens, was seized with a mysterious illness, from which he died. It was believed that he was poisoned by a trusted servant. Just before his death at his request, the infant Washington was brought to his bedside; he then uttered these prophetic words: "He who lives to see this child grow up will see a great man." The young mother cherished the prediction of the dying father as a sacred legacy. (4)

<sup>4</sup>These three works done in pen and watercolor on paper were consecutively titled: *The Buck's Progress: No. 1, The Introductions of a Country Lad to a Click of Town Bucks*; No. 2, *A Beau in his Dressing Room*; and No. 3, *A Midnight Fray with the Watchmen*, and all were dated 1796 (WA 183-84). Gerdtz and Stebbins believe that these drawings may "reflect Allston's immediate recollection of himself as something of a country bumpkin when introduced to the quasi-sophistication of the elegantly garbed drinking set of Harvard students . . ." (20).

That Allston adopted the narrative manner of Hogarth's more famous *The Rake's Progress* (1732) and *Marriage a la Mode* (1743) in a series of sketches possibly in order to relate his own story may well indicate the beginnings of his search for a method of narrative painting.

<sup>5</sup>Apparently, a political essay by one of Harvard's faculty members seems to have been behind this particular hoax of Allston's. Leonard Jarvis's account, which Flagg cites, goes on to note that in 1798, the campus was "a great stir and much ado about nothing" regarding a Professor Robinson's essay, "Proofs of a Conspiracy" that claimed "*Illuminati* and other secret societies were about to turn the world topsy-turvy. All regular governments were to be overthrown, and Christianity itself was to be abolished" (28). Allston picked up on the undercurrent of excitement this claim created on campus and produced the hoax as a response.

<sup>6</sup>John Thomas Flexner, in his article "The American School in London," writes that "Amazingly enough, the first generation of American artists to escape from colonial limitations and cross the Atlantic were as a group more influential and successful abroad than any subsequent group of artists has ever been" (64).

The earliest and most successful was Benjamin West in 1763 and John Singleton Copley in 1766. Afterwards, as Flexner indicates, "one after another the Colonials arrived from the provinces, rummaged briefly in the storehouses of traditional art, and then startled England and the Continent with new and exciting forms that resulted from the mingling of American thought and European skill" (64). Among those who were able to "startle" Europeans were Allston, Gilbert Stuart, John Trumbull, Charles Leslie, John Vanderlyn, Thomas Cole, Samuel F. B. Morse, Charles Wilson Peale, and Ralph Earl.

<sup>7</sup>Flagg's account of Coleridge's hasty exit from Rome (61-62) states that Coleridge's notebooks recording his time in Italy were jettisoned when, at the captain's request, the boat he was departing on was being chased by a French vessel. Kathleen Coburn, the editor of Coleridge's *Notebooks*, acknowledges that the notebooks of the poet's days in Rome and Italy during 1806 are incomplete (xvi). She suggests that either the notebooks were lost at sea, much as Flagg indicated, or they were lost in transit

because Coleridge entrusted his papers and his luggage to a number of friends and associates between his return from Malta until his arrival in England (xviii).

<sup>8</sup>Allston's marriage marked the beginning of one of his most prolific periods—especially in portraiture. The works completed during this time include: *Francis Dana Channing* (1808-1809); *Edmund T. Dana* (1809); a portrait of his mother, *Mrs. Henry C. Flagg* (1809); his step-brother, *Henry C. Flagg* (1809); his wife, *Ann Channing Allston* (1809-1811); *William Ellery Channing* (1811); and *Mrs. William Ellery Channing* (1811) (WA 194). E. P. Richardson concludes that as far as Allston was concerned, he was “never again . . . engaged in the study of personalities” (WA 90).

<sup>9</sup>This information, with the exception of the information about the meeting of Allston and Wordsworth, may be explored throughout pages 96-140 of Flagg or in the “Biographical Summaries” provided by Richardson in WA, pages 97f. and 133.

Allston's association with Wordsworth may be seen in Martha Hale Shackford's “Wordsworth's Interest in Painters and Pictures,” pages 27f. and 33-36.

<sup>10</sup>Allston's painting of *Jeremiah* was exhibited in 1831 in a private residence in Boston (Flagg 247f.) However, the most important exhibit of Allston's life time took place from April 1--July 10, 1839 in the Harding

Gallery of Boston. Forty-seven of his paintings were gathered from the artist and from private collections for this showing. Also, this exhibit was to receive the largest number of critical notices. Among the most noteworthy of these are Elizabeth P. Peabody, "Exhibition of Allston's Paintings in Boston, 1839," in her *Last Evening with Allston and Other Papers*; Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Exhibition of Pictures Painted by Washington Allston at the Harding Gallery, School Street," *North American Review*, April 1840; Margaret Fuller, "A Record of Impressions, Produced by the Exhibition of Mr. Allston's Paintings in the Summer of 1839," *Dial*, July 1839.

CHAPTER I  
LIFE IN THE SOUTH

Before the lines of sectionalism were drawn between the North and the South in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, life for the wealthy in the South focused on large estates with imposing mansions, troops of slaves, ostentatious living, and the sharp division of society into classes that were defined by wealth and color. This plantation life of the antebellum South also offered its share of comfort and beauty for the landowners and their families, and in the case of both Washington Allston and Edgar Allan Poe, these experiences were neither lost nor wasted. Both Allston and Poe spent their early years as either the stepchild or ward of a wealthy landowner: Allston in Charleston, Poe in Richmond. Both grew up surrounded by the natural beauty of the southern landscape and with a clear understanding invested in them of the power their race and their station afforded.<sup>1</sup>

This knowledge of their place and its advantages came to both young artists under somewhat tragic circumstances. Each lost his biological father at age two<sup>2</sup> which resulted in the development of a very close and abiding relationship with women—either a mother or mother figure. Orville Burton, in writing about the South and motherhood, makes the observation that

Despite the romantic plantation literature, the aristocratic southern white wife was not the only figure idealized. All successful southern men owed their accomplishments to their mothers; whatever heights they attained were attributed to their mother's love, teachings, sacrifices, and examples. (1111)

Allston remained close to his mother and his sister throughout his life and Poe, with both his foster mother, Mrs. Allan, and later to Jane Craig Stanard, the mother of his boyhood friend, Rob Stanard. These women provided for both men early and enduring symbols of perfect womanhood. These nurturing women and the warmth and comfort they offered in their planation surroundings seem to have had a significant influence on how Allston and Poe render women in their art.

Critics, such as Marie Bonaparte and Joseph Wood Krutch, have quickly pointed to the link between Poe's fictional treatment of women and the early deaths of his actress-mother, Elizabeth Poe, and his young wife, Virginia Clemm.<sup>3</sup> Poe's work seems to reflect a pact he has with his female creations: he will idealize them in print and in exchange for their youth and beauty, they must die young—perhaps, unconsciously, as he felt they should.

Allston, too, evidences the same characteristics of idealized youth and beauty in his renderings of women. With the exception of the portraits of his mother and mother-in-law, which, as George Winston notes are portraits of "older women with strength and character in their faces" (310),

Allston seems unable to execute a painting or a drawing nor to fashion a sculpture of a woman who is not young and who, in his hands, does not represent his idea of beauty: a well-proportioned form that is both regular in features and graceful, with no distinguishing marks that would either individualize her or mar her perfection.<sup>4</sup> Many of Allston's subjects, who as literary prototypes which may assumed a life on the page, rarely exhibit this vitality on his canvasses. His subjects, for the most part, have young, ethereal faces with features so neo-classically regular and well-proportioned that they seem generic.

Thus, though Allston and Poe clearly have similar and significant experiences in their early life that tie them to notions of beauty and idealized womanhood. Examples of this idealization can also be seen in their visual representations of women, in this instance their wives. Allston's painting of Ann Channing titled, "The Valentine" (1809) (see fig. 1.1) and Poe's pencil sketch of Virginia Clemm Poe (1845) (see Fig. 1.2) both illustrate the dreamy, virginal quality in their conception of womanhood. However, Allston, unlike Poe, has difficulty investing his women with character or drama. This characteristic of Allston's work leads Margaret Fuller in her 1839 review of his Harding Gallery exhibition to write that *Miriam, the Prophetess* (1821) seems to reflect most of Allston's "dreamy virgins": The female figure displays a "want of depth," and

. . . the face, though inadequate, is not false to the ideal. Its beauty is mournful, and only wants the heroic depth, the cavernous flame of eye, which should belong to such a face in such a place. (78)

George Winston, in his unpublished dissertation on Allston, concurs with Fuller and further defines the problem with Allston's depictions of women:

. . . the failure of [Allston's] women to come alive can be blamed not so much on the idea of a perfect form as on the accompanying insistence on moral "decency". . . . [Allston's] gallery of dreamy virgins is a fitting tribute to a sentiment that would inhibit the artists of the age that they could not let their women live. One cannot call these women sterile for they have never been awakened. (303f.)

Even though Poe's women, in contrast to Allston's, *do* assume distinct identities, evidence character, and come to life—or back to life—in dramatic situations, he *does* share with Allston the same careful treatment of women. Poe's canon manifests his own dictum: ". . . let nothing vulgar be *ever* said or conceived" (Harrison Works 10.184 ). Joseph Moldenhauer, in his article "Murder as Fine Art: Basic Connections between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision," asserts that

For all the monstrosity and morbidity they record, his stories are free from taint of "impurity". . . . [There are] no exposurs of the flesh, no overt sexual encounters mar the relationship of the hero and the heroine—even when they are wed under the law. Poe's women are remote, virginal, asexual—as asexual, indeed, as the cameo or marble bust with which they are compared. (285)

Moreover, this idealized—nearly chilvaric—treatment of women is not confined to Poe's verse or his fiction. As Stedman and Woodberry note in the introduction to Poe's volume of criticism: "[Poe's] notices of women are always kind, in one or two cases overwhelmingly so . . ." (6: xxi). Poe even makes explicit this matter. In his review of the poetry of Mrs. Mowatt, Poe states:

Where the gentler sex is concerned, there seems but one course for the critic—speak, if you can commend—be silent, if not; for a women will never be brought to admit a non-identity between herself and her book. (*Works* 7: 409f.)

And Joseph Wood Krutch adds his view of Poe's critical attitude toward women in this manner: "Men were to be slaughtered, but in women praiseworthy intentions were sufficient defense" (220).

That the South might have provided the genesis for both men's later idealization of women becomes clearer simply upon examining the milieu of the South. W. J. Cash in his *The Mind of the South* writes:

The upshot [of Southern Womanhood], in this land of spreading notions of chilvary, was downright gyneolatry. She was the South's Palladium, this Southern woman—the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in face of the foe. She was the lily-pure maid of Astolat and the hunting goddess of the Boeotian hill. And—she was the pitiful Mother of God. Merely to mentions her was to send strong men into tears—or shouts. There was hardly a sermon that did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech that did not open and close with the clashing of shields and the flourishing

of swords in her glory. At the last, I verily believe, the ranks of the Confederacy went tolling into battle in the misty conviction that it was wholly for her that they fought. (86)

Cash's assessment of broad cultural attitudes toward women in the South is testimony that he, just as Allston and Poe, feels classic examples of womanhood best illustrate the reverence that South paid its women. And, as already seen in the early life of Poe and Allston, Cash shows how easily a woman can become a symbol representing the values of virtue, gentility, moral and physical strength, and the family. Furthermore, in the aesthetics of Poe and Allston, *she* symbolizes more than these values and idealized beauty, *she* offers transcendence.

These ideas about women are commonplace in Poe's poetry<sup>5</sup> and in Allston's writing and portraits.<sup>6</sup> Also, Allston's *Lectures* give clear evidence of the link he sees to beauty, womanhood, and these ideas about Southern culture:

Could we look, indeed, at the human form in its simple, unallied physical structure,—on that, for instance, of a beautiful woman,—and forget, or rather not feel, that it is other than a *form*, there could be but one feeling: that nothing visible was ever so framed to banish from the soul every ignoble thought, and imbue it, . . . with primeval innocence. (19)

However, Allston adds that it is not merely the physical form that is judged beautiful, but the combination of the physical, intellectual, and moral nature. He is convinced that if one aspect of these three becomes “an object

of thought," then the other two—the "natural allies"—make their presence known—at least as "some obscure shadowings" (21). He offers as a contrast this case:

Let us suppose, then, an unfamiliar object, whose habits, disposition, and so forth, are wholly unknown, for instance, a bird of paradise, to be seen for the first time by twenty persons, and they all instantly call it beautiful;—could there be any doubt that the pleasure it produced in each was of the same kind? or would any one of them ascribe his pleasure to any thing but its form or plumage? . . . Men do not dispute about a rose. And why? Because there is nothing beside the physical to interfere with the impression it was predetermined to make; and the idea of beauty is realized instantly.

Thus, "true" beauty, for Allston, emerges from "some predominant expression, either moral, intellectual, or sensual with which [individual observers] are in sympathy, or else the reverse" (22). This aesthetic suggests some level of knowing beauty that went beyond the property of a pleasing form—as witnessed by the rose or the bird of paradise. An honest rendering of what is perceived cannot be beautiful unless the artist is able perceive more than just the sensual, but also the moral and intellectual. Allston believed that beauty—when "united with virtue and intellect"—is almost "All power" (28). In this view, beauty becomes the

embodied harmony of the true poet, his visible muse; the guardian angel of his better nature, the inspiring sibyl of his best affections, drawing him to her with a purifying charm, from the selfishness of the world, from poverty and neglect, from the low and the base, nay, from his own frailty or vices:—for he cannot approach her with unhallowed thoughts, whom

the unlettered and the ignorant look up to with awe, as to one of a race above them; before whom the wisest and the best bow down in idolatry but for a higher reverence. No! there is no power like this of mortal birth. (28)

Implicit in Allston's aesthetic is the notion that "perfection" is possible through the elevation of beauty beyond the realistic human attainment and that the role of the artist is to be the sensor of that perfection. Beauty of the human form, therefore, takes on a symbolic function for Allston; it is invested with his aesthetic, religious, and cultural beliefs—all echoing the deeply rooted conception Allston had of Southern Womanhood.

The poetry of Poe also evidences a heavy investment in the perfection or the preternatural beauty of his women. Most notably, Poe's early poetry is marked by, as critic Ralph Boas called them, his "dream women" who are "little more than a tenuous idea": they are indefinite, remote from fashion and custom, and exist virtually as the product of a dream (77). In "To Helen," the subject's statuesque beauty, her "hyacinth hair," her "classic face" provokes the dream of the "glory" and "grandeur" of classic time (*Works* 10: 79). Helen, a name synonymous with beauty and extracted from the annals of ancient history, does not function as a woman for Poe; she is a symbol of beauty poised in a window niche, as on a pedestal, who, with lamp in hand, illuminates the regions of dream that she had inspired. Just as the woman in Cash's description, the power invested in her presence calls to man's virtues and fashions his dreams of home.

Even in his later works, such as his "Hymn" (1835), Poe creates in Maria, the "Mother of God," an image of woman that is both virtuous and powerful. What seems strange, however, is why Poe, a man with tenuous religious conviction and no formal connection with Catholicism, would chose to address the "Mother of God" in his prayer. Arthur Hobson Quinn, Poe's biographer, cites this piece as "indicating a devotional feeling not otherwise to be found in his work" (217). A more likely explanation for this uncharacteristically "devotional feeling" is the powerful and nurturing presence of Southern Womanhood that leads Poe to the "Mother of God" (a phrase also used by Cash) for solace in troubled times.

Such an assertion as the one above seems only natural, for Poe would certainly be inclined to look back to his days in Richmond which were far less troubled than his adult life in the North. Moreover, the veneration of women that seems to emerge in both Allston and Poe was linked to the secure and nurturing environment of the South and the plantation setting where both found home and comfort after tragedy. Yet more than these noble and aesthetic responses were aroused by this early setting. The South also provided Poe and Allston with an early awakening of the imagination.

Evidence of this early stirring of the imagination is found in William Dunlap's *History of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834).<sup>7</sup> In this work, Allston recounts for Dunlap that as a young boy in the South, Allston

delighted in "being terrified by the tales of witches and hags, which the negroes used to tell me," and how on a return trip to Carolina, he experienced special pleasure to "revisit a gigantic and wild grapevine in the woods, which had been the favorite swing for one of the witches" (2: 297). Dunlap views this experience as the beginning or "germ" of poetic talent that later manifested itself in the artist's work. Indeed, a number of Allston's early compositions either employed the elements of the supernatural or focused on violent scenarios. These works,<sup>8</sup> mostly drawn from the German romances or created from Allston's fascination with banditti, were further evidence of a keen interest in the more dramatic powers of the imagination. Washington Irving, in his recollections of Allston, noted that Allston was an admirable storyteller: "[F]or a ghost story none could surpass him" (*Miscellanies*: 175). But the terror generated by these tales and others of violence eventually lost their charm as Allston aged. As he told Dunlap:

It seems that a fondness for subjects of violence is common with young artists. . . . Perhaps the reason . . . may be found in this: that the natural condition youth being one incessant excitement, from the continuous flux of novelty—for all about us must at one time be new—it must needs have something fiercer, terrible, or unusual to force it above its wanted tone. (2: 301)

Whatever "germ" this early plantation experience of ghost stories and witch tales gave to the growth of Allston's imagination, by the time of this

discussion with Dunlap, Allston was moving away from these "fiercer" fancies toward something quite different and far less dramatic. However, for Poe who seems to have shared similar experiences as a child in Richmond, the drama of this "something fiercer, terrible" never ended. Susan Weiss in her *The Home Life of Poe* relates these accounts of this early time in Poe's life:

Mr. Vallentine [father to Mrs. Allan] also delighted in getting up wrestling matches between Edgar and little pickaninnies with whom he played, rewarding the victor with gifts of money. But there was one thing which no money or other reward could induce [Edgar] to undertake, and this was to go near the country churchyard after sunset, even in the company with these same darkies. Once, in riding home late, Edgar being seated behind Mr. Valentine, they passed a deserted log cabin, near which were several graves, when the boy's nervous terror became so great that he attempted to get in front of his companion, who took him on the saddle before him. "They [the dead] would run after us and pull me off," [Edgar] said, betraying at even this early age the weird imagination of his maturer years. (17f.)

According to Weiss, this episode with Mr. Valentine lead to further investigation and

[I]t was discovered that [Edgar] had been accustomed to go with his colored "mammy" to the servants' rooms in the evenings, and there listen to the horrible stories of ghosts and graveyard apparitions . . . . It is not improbable that the gruesome sketch of the "Tempest" family, one of his earliest published, whose ghosts are represented as seated in coffins around a table in an undertaker's shop, and thence flying back to their nearby graves, was not inspired by some such story heard in Mr. Allan's kitchen. (18)

Weiss's book, published in 1907, comes from her mother's recollection of the family and from her own experiences with Poe himself. If such anecdotes are accurate,<sup>9</sup> they certainly reflect the thinking of a specific time and region. However, she continues that these ghostly narratives the young Poe heard were responsible for more than "those weird and ghoulish imaginings" that haunt his fiction. Weiss further relates that the poet in his later life "always avoided cemeteries, hated the sight of coffins and skeletons, and would never walk alone at night even in the street." He apparently believed, even as an adult, that "evil spirits haunted the darkness and walked beside the lonely wayfarer, watching to do him a mischief" (18f.). Whether Weiss's assertions about Poe are valid or not, with the publication of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and the *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* in 1840, Poe's literary motives were quite clear: his work would echo the call of the fat boy in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* who boldly announced to his audience that he was "going to make their flesh creep."

That these plantation ghosts served as a catalyst to the young and impressionable imaginations of Allston and Poe is highly probable. Even though Allston appeared to grow beyond the "sensation" while Poe was able to take the same "sensation" and make it the objective of many of his tales, for both the investment of Southern culture seems evident. Thus, in the art of Allston and Poe, Southern culture seems to have affected both

men's attitudes toward women and beauty as well as supplied subjects for their art. But this influence of the South does not end here; it also provided both Allston and Poe with a code of behaviors so potent that it, too, permeated their work.

The antebellum South was so saturated with notions of the aristocratic ideal, the code of chivalry and gentlemanly conduct, that one-half century later, Mark Twain half-jokingly blamed the Civil War on the romantic idealizations of Sir Walter Scott's novels. For Poe and Allston, even when they were no longer residents of the South, the aristocratic ideal helped to fashion their role in society and as artists. In his book, W. J. Cash writes that manner "was the badge and ensign of the aristocratic claim" (68). However, Cash's insight into the manner of the gentlemen planters in the South was largely a blend of what these men witnessed in the colonial aristocracy and the "homespun of the frontier." The flaw in the South's aristocracy, as the historian views it, is that:

[I]t was ultimately not an emancipation from the proper substance of men who wore it, but only a fine garment to put on from the outside. If they could wrap themselves in it with seeming ease and assurance, if they could convince themselves for conscious purposes that they were in sober fact aristocrats and wore it by right, they nevertheless could endow their subconsciousness with the aristocrat's experience. . . . In their inmost being they carried nearly always, I think, an uneasy sensation of inadequacy for their role. And so often the loveliness of their manner was marred by a certain more or less heavy condescension—a too obvious desire to drive home the perception of their rank and value. (68f.)

Poe's struggle with his heritage, the fact that he was born of actor parents with no valid claim to the society he was forced to inhabit and was never legally adopted, made for an adolescence full of tension and resentment (Krutch 26). However, in the "garment" of the Southern aristocracy, he found he could hide his insecurities and indulge his concern "with the glories of tradition," "the mystique of 'a good name,' " as well as indulge his "inherited sense of the histrionic" (Sinclair 52). Furthermore, David Sinclair's biography of Poe points out that the young poet learned, in the house of Mrs. Allan, the "courtly and rather affected Southern manners" that he practiced the rest of his life. These manners, according to Sinclair, impressed

some people particularly women, but caus[ed] amusement among members of New York Society with whom he later mixed during an ill-fated attempt to establish himself as a literary personality in the North. (56)

Allston, similarly, found the "garment" of aristocracy essential; however, unlike Poe, histrionics had little to do with Allston's manner. Rather, a sense of propriety seemed to have dominated the painter's conduct. Having been born the legitimate heir to a South Carolina planter, Allston had none of Poe's insecurities. He came from that area of South Carolina referred to in the old regional adage as a "mountain of conceit" with Virginia being the second mountain and North Carolina lying between the two as the "valley

of humility" (Pyron 1117). Seemingly in contrast to Cash's assertion above, Allston's conduct appears to have never been blatantly condescending; he was much more subtle. Recorded in the journals of Allston's brother-in-law, R. H. Dana, and cited in an article for the *Atlantic Monthly* by Charles Francis Adams is this account of the painter and his link to the code of Southern aristocracy:

Mr. Allston had been reading the *Quarterly's* review of Dickens's *American Notes*, and the *Aberdeen Correspondence*. He is less a Republican than ever and says that if things go on as they promise now, "in eighty years there will not be a gentleman left in the country." He says that the manners of gentility, its courtesies, deferences, and graces are passing away from among us. Whether they pass away or no, he is a good specimen of them. Born of a distinguished family in Carolina, and educated into the feelings and habits of a gentleman with a noble nature, a beautiful countenance and a graceful person, what else could he be? (637)

Indeed, this depiction seems to be a fair summary of how most of Allston's contemporaries viewed him, and this type of deportment had a great deal to do with the power he assumed not only as an arbiter of taste, but in establishing the role of the artist in the New World.

Though some may take issue with the far-reaching role their Southern heritage played in their later lives, if nothing else, this heritage gave both Allston and Poe an elevated vantage point from which to view American society, to assess it, and to choose—each in his own way—to remain aloof from it. Each man made his own form of protest against the

"crude middle-class hustling" of the time (Sanford 58) and industrial progress that threatened to replace the importance of art with the importance of money. As early as his college days at Harvard, Allston sensed the ruinous state of the American arts and attributed the situation less to the absence of tradition and style than to a large population of middle-class Americans with little or no instruction in taste. Before his first trip to Europe, he wrote to John Knapp, 23 October 1800:

The same taste (or rather no taste), the same architecture, and the same sentiments are to be found in all parts of the United States. If one meets with a curiosity, it is either a bear, a dancing dog, or a learned pig. (qtd. in Winston 294)

As a promising artist and a young Federalist at the time, Allston was astute enough to realize that he had little future as an artist in his homeland without a significant change in the American environment. Allston's first trip to England attested to the fact that "he believed its art represented the highest development in taste" (Bjelajac 64), and without this experience he could not develop his art.

Poe also held fast to the importance of the development of taste in society and asserted his qualifications to be its standard bearer. Testimony to this role of taste in the developing art of America may be seen in the connection he makes between his aesthetic and beauty. Writing in "The

Poetic Principle" Poe states that taste "informs us of the Beautiful," and Beauty

contents herself with displaying the charms:—waging war upon vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonies—in a word, to Beauty. (*Works* 6: 11f.)

In Poe's triad of Pure Intellect, Taste, and Moral Sense, Taste becomes Beauty's sentinel, implying a rather elitist notion that only those with taste can know beauty. Even though Poe did not agree with the young Allston that a transatlantic voyage was a prerequisite to the development of good taste, he does address the American readers' mania for British publications in his "Letter to B," published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, where he writes that "one might suppose that books like their authors improve by travel" (501). Poe did not necessarily believe that any specific geographic location monopolized the tenets of good taste; however, if the literature of the art of one country happened to agree with his taste, then that was another matter.

Always ready to offer his opinion on the aesthetics of his surroundings, Poe writes in "The Philosophy of Furniture":

In the internal decoration, if not in the external architecture of their residences, the English are supreme. The Italians have but little sentiment beyond marbles and colors. In France, . . . the people are too much a race of gadabouts to maintain those household properties of which, indeed, they have a

delicate appreciation, or at least elements of proper sense. The Chinese and most of the Eastern races have a warm but inappropriate fancy. The Scotch are poor decorists. The Dutch have, perhaps, an indeterminate idea that a curtain is not a cabbage. In Spain they are *all* curtains—a nation of hangmen. The Russians do not furnish. The Hottentots and Kickapoos are very well in their way. The Yankees alone are preposterous. (*Works* 9: 213)

Outside of his extensive reading and a few years in England spent as a boy, Poe had little opportunity for the first hand and wide ranging knowledge he suggests in this passage. Moreover, he seizes this chance to voice his opinion on why, in his litany of assessments, the “Yankees alone” have no taste:

How this happens it is not difficult to see. We have no aristocracy of blood, and having therefore as a natural, and indeed inevitable thing, fashioned for ourselves an aristocracy of dollars, the *display of wealth* has here to take the place and perform the office of the heraldic displays in monarchical countries. By a transition readily understood, and which might have been as readily foreseen, we have been brought to merge in simple show our notions of taste itself. (*Works* 9: 213f.)

This “aristocracy of dollars” that replaced the “aristocracy of blood” in American society was the focus of much of Poe's criticism. He was in complete agreement with Allston's opinions concerning the rough-hewn, money oriented and tasteless middle class and he also shared the painter's belief that the state of the arts in America offered little encouragement. In

his *Marginalia* which appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* of June 1849, Poe writes:

We of the nineteenth century, need some worker of miracles for our regeneration; but so degraded have we become that the only prophet or preacher who could render much service would be St. Francis who converted the beasts. (336)

To Allston and Poe, as it had been to the third Earl of Shaftesbury, the "taste of a cultivated gentleman was very nearly equivalent to a system of ethics" and in the case of the poet and the painter, a system of aesthetics. As Robert Jacobs explains, "The man of taste would be prone to avoid vice, if for no other reason, simply because it was deformed—ugly!" ("Earthly" 413). For the Allston and Poe the cultivation of gentlemanly behavior was tied to their Southern roots and to their vision of themselves as artists. James Russell Lowell was convinced that Allston was sent into the world "to fill the arduous office of Gentleman" (qtd. in Flexner 182), and Allston's lifelong friend, the landscape painter William Collins<sup>10</sup> is quoted in Sweetser's biography:

Were anyone to meet Washington Allston in the street, with a sack of coals on his shoulders, he would at once recognize him as a gentleman. (172)

Flagg also records numerous accounts in his biography of Allston which attest to the fact that the painter's "dignity and refinement were so

tempered with gentleness that the common people accosted him with freedom though always deferentially" (242). Yet the most significant reference to Allston's demeanor comes coupled with his role as artist. In his 1888 article, "Boston Painters and Painting," William Downes assesses Allston's role in the shaping of an American art tradition:

He made the profession of the painter more respected than it had been in Boston before his day; for he was distinctly a gentleman, and among those who might have been vulgarly disposed to look down upon his calling, he insisted upon its dignity, and made people take off their hats when they were in the presence of a work of art. (260)

Downes seems convinced that Allston performed a real service to art and artists and that "much was gained when art was, so to speak, clothed like a gentleman, and introduced to good society on equal footing."

The evidence is clear: Allston carefully cultivated the embellishments of a gentleman the code of which he first learned in his Charleston home. For example, he was always prudent in his dress and speech and demonstrated elegant manners. In his memoir of Allston, Washington Irving described Allston as a man "of intellect and refinement," whose conversation was "enlivened at times by a chaste and gentle humor" (*Miscellanies* 2: 173). Culberth Wright's essay on Allston in *The New England Quarterly* was quick to point out that "if one's humor can remain chaste in Paris, the chances are that it will be even more chaste in Cambridge" (623).

Allston also seems to have had an appreciation for finer pleasures: tastes most likely gained from his aristocratic rearing and from his travels in Europe. In his journals, R. H. Dana, Jr. recalls his uncle's devotion to his cigars and Madeira (qtd. in Adams 642) and according to Sweetser, Allston "was one of the most graceful dancers . . . distinguished for a rare suppleness and ease" (174). Allston's "healthy delight in the sweetness of life," as E. P. Richardson calls it, led the painter to reminisce about past dinners in Paris and to eat even during his most impoverished years his meals at Rouillard's French Restaurant in Boston, a restaurant known for its good food (WA 19). In Richardson's opinion, Allston possessed the "artist's nobility to savor the passing moment which makes any spot a place to work and without which, I think, a man cannot be an artist in any environment."

Even though the events in Poe's life did not allow him the luxury to "savor the passing moment," he, nevertheless, cultivated many of the external characteristics of the gentleman and this cultivation seems to have affected his art. Poe, just as Allston, paid careful attention to his dress and manner. For example, Quinn relates that Poe had a "fastidious love of neatness" regarding his personal appearance. In a letter to Mrs. Clemm, dated 14 July 1849, Poe complains after the journey from Philadelphia to Richmond that "my clothes are so horrible, and I am so ill" (qtd. in Quinn 620). His concern for his appearance also manifested itself in his love of

being photographed. The director of the Poe Museum in Richmond asserted in an interview that "I think Poe had more pictures made of himself than any other man of his time" (qtd. in Ladd H-1), and James Harrison, an early editor of Poe's complete works, wrote in 1904: "Poe was frequently daguerreotyped and ambrotyped, but as far as I know only once painted" (qtd. in Schulte 37).<sup>11</sup>

Poe's concern with presentation also appeared in his deportment—sometimes. Accounts of his behavior seem balanced between Poe's dignity and his demon. In George Peck's review of Nathaniel Parker Willis's book *The Works of Edgar A. Poe* which James Russell Lowell and Rufus Griswold printed in the March 1850 edition of the *American Whig Review*, Peck defends the memory of the poet as a man "having departed, (upward, we trust, since he held his face upward while here, through much oppression and depression) but his spiritual vigor [is] left to diffuse itself among his countrymen." Peck viewed Poe as a "pure-minded gentleman—of a strange fancy, it is true, but never low or mean . . . but in the wildest of his extravagancies does not forget his native dignity" (303). Nathaniel Parker Willis, who served as editor of the *New York Mirror* when Poe was employed there, also defended the poet's deportment as a gentleman in an editorial dated 26 December 1846 in the *Home Journal*: "A more considerate, quiet talented, and gentlemanlike associate than he was for the whole of that time, we could not have wished" (5).

However, not all of Poe's associates recognized his gentlemanly qualities, especially those who felt the heat of his critical temper. In the introduction to Poe's critical works, Stedman and Woodberry remark that: "His critical bearing is scarcely that of good breeding and conciliation; it exhibits impatience, arrogance, and disdain" (*Works* 6: xvii). The editors also note that Poe seems to have had difficulty getting through some of "his more serious essays without lowering his dignity by a side snap or a passing jeer" (6: xxi). Poe's aggression, however, was not confined to his critical writing. Quinn's biography deals with the issue of Poe's dual nature and the radically different opinions that existed about him. Quinn writes:

At times under the influence of liquor, he undoubtedly said and did things to which his enemies could point without the possibility of contradiction. These incidents, magnified in that isolation which makes facts sometimes the most terrible untruths gave color to Griswold's slanders. But these actions were pitiable rather than dishonorable, the bitter things he said concerning his enemies were often fair, and therefore hurt all the more. (693)

Clearly, Poe's literary reputation and his reputation as a gentleman became, at best, checkered with Griswold's edition of the *Works of Edgar A. Poe* in 1850 (Quinn 660). But reputation aside, pronounced elements of Poe's art testify to his understanding of the gentlemanly graces that most likely emerged from his Southern roots. The most significant of these elements is Poe's preference for form over matter in art. G. R. Thompson

cites Poe as a "highly conscious man of letters [who] modifies theme and mode from an almost exclusively aesthetic concern for a particular effect" (269). Poe's aesthetics indeed implied that poetry should have the grace and ease of music. He saw no place for didactic considerations, no realism, and certainly no vulgarities disguised as passion. Moreover, his belief, as he states in "The Philosophy of Composition," that "the death then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestioningly the most poetical topic in the world" (*Works* 6: 46) functions almost as a parody of, in Cash's words, "the downright gyneolatry" that the South held for its women.

That the South deeply impressed its culture and traditions on the early character and art of Washington Allston and Edgar Allan Poe is evident. But even after the move North—Allston to Rhode Island and Massachusetts; Poe to Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York—their southern heritage remained the nucleus of their aesthetic and a guide to their conception of the role of the artist. Their idealization of women, their aversion to democracy as a form of government, and their definition and practice of the code of the gentleman, all remained with Poe and Allston in various degrees until their deaths. It was in the South that both the poet and the painter were provided with their first brush of beauty and imagination, and these early experiences became even more significant when they each went North because these experiences were a source of

tension—to a lesser degree for Allston; a greater for Poe—as they acclimated themselves to the values and traditions of this very different region.

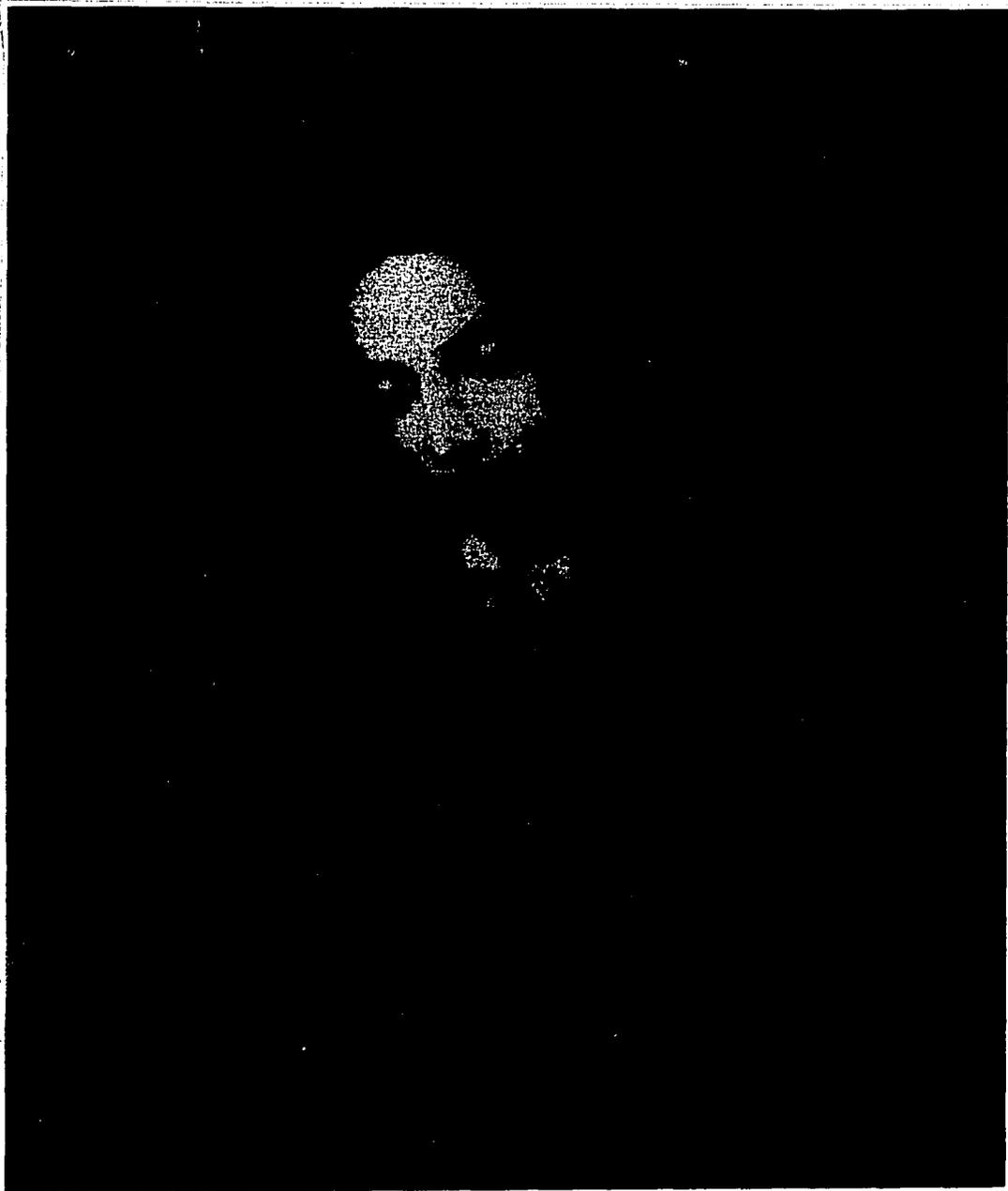


Fig. 1.1. The Valentine by Washington Allston (1809). Gerdts and Stebbins, Plate 22.



Fig.1.2. Portrait of Virginia Clemm Poe by Edgar Allan Poe (1845)  
Hjerter, 31.

## CHAPTER I CONTENT NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Darden A. Pyron in *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* discusses the ordered relationships on the Southern plantation:

. . . relationships are ordered along hierarchical lines and the patriarchal family is the central defining device and metaphor. The well-born father/plantation master and his sons dominate the structure; beneath them are the women, wives and daughters, then children, and finally white dependents and black slaves. (1116)

No reason is apparent to believe that both Allston and Poe were unaware of their place in this hierarchy, however tenuous the place may have been, especially in Poe's case. See Krutch p. 22 for further discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Hobson Quinn, in his biography of Poe, is uncertain of the exact date of David Poe's death. He does, however, make the following note:

A press clipping without date or place stating that [David Poe] died October 18, 1810, at Norfolk, is on the authority of Dr. T. O. Mabbott, printed on paper that proves it to be much later in origin. A careful search of wills, inventories, and audits of estates for the Borough and the County of Norfolk and of the city and county records of Richmond discloses no record of the death of David Poe. The Charleston Bureau of Vital Statistics has no death records prior to 1821. (44)

Also see n. 3 in the Introduction.

<sup>3</sup>Marie Bonaparte's book on the life of Poe is devoted entirely to making the case that Poe's fiction manifests the tragic events of the poet's early life and his own repressed sexuality. Writing in the *Foreword* of Bonaparte's book, Sigmund Freud states

Thanks to [Bonaparte's] interpretive effort, we now realize how many of the characteristics of Poe's works were conditioned by his personality, and can see how that personality derived from intense emotional fixations and painful infantile experiences.  
(xi)

Bonaparte cites numerous examples of *displacement of psychic intensity* in Poe's fiction where the *Live-in-Death Mother* is recreated in Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, and Madeline. Bonaparte argues that "this simple displacement served to keep P. ignorant, as for almost a century his readers, that these ailing sylphs were but forms of Elizabeth Arnold" (643).

Regarding Virginia Clemm, Bonaparte finds that many of his fictional creations with "supernatural aura" are a *condensation* of the women he loved. Berenice, Madeline, and Eleonora "especially reveal characteristics of Virginia his small cousin, as much as his mother Elizabeth" (649).

Joseph Wood Krutch believes that throughout his life Poe's mother exercised a "baneful fascination" over her son. His characters—Ligeia, Berenice, Madeline, and Morella—were "wasting away with an inexorable disease. It may have been also in part the memory of his mother which made him see in sickness one of the necessary elements of highest beauty"

(24). Virginia Clemm's illness nurtured this memory. Krutch believes that Clemm's illness rescued him from his "torturing conflict between desire and repugnance and to present him the situation which contains for him the acme of voluptuousness—the death of a beautiful woman" (86).

<sup>4</sup>As an art movement Neo-classicism focuses on the deliberate imitation of nature. It takes its norms from the art of ancient Greece and Rome. These norms imply an idealized conception, a classic posture and well-proportioned human form. Facial features evidence regularity and expressions are often emotionally detached or serene. Linear and symmetrical lines are preferred and the painting especially reflects a flatness rather than a plasticity. The movement began with the archeological excavations in Rome in the early eighteenth century and as a reaction against the excesses of Rococo and Baroque. It was, however, the writing of the German historian Winckelmann that solidified the movement. The *Oxford Companion to Art* states:

Winckelmann predicated that modern art should follow nature as ideally expressed in the sculpture of the antiquity, but in addition he emphasized the *moral qualities* to be found in ancient art, qualities which should be the standard of every artist worthy of the name. (768, emphasis added)

The Neo-classical movement reaches its height in the late eighteenth century, and with Allston's arrival in London in 1801, he was strongly influenced by it. Moreover his mentor at the Royal Academy, Benjamin

West, was considered one of the harbingers of neoclassicism when he arrived in England from Rome in the 1760s. While in Rome, West had become friends with Winckelmann and studied with Winckelmann's chief exponent, the painter Raphael Mengs.

<sup>5</sup>Critic Floyd Stovall writes that no other American poet "has been so consistent . . . in his use of women as the subject of poetry." Of the 52 poems attributed to Poe, 25 of them have women as subjects. Stovall continues, "Other poets have created a larger number of women characters and have written more and longer poems about them, but they have written in a more impersonal way" ("Women" 197). In Stovall's view, Poe saw women not only in a more personal manner, but also found them a "continual inspiration." Thus, this manner of dealing with his women is further testimony of his veneration of them.

Thomas Hubert, in his article "The Southern Elements in Poe's Fiction," claims that one "social aspect of his writing is . . . Poe's veneration of women [which] is, of course, part of the Southern chivalric code or ideal of honor, dignity, and courtesy" (202). A number of women in Poe's verse exemplify one or more of the qualities of beauty, morality, gentility, strength, and family that were attributed to his Southern ideal of womanhood: "Annabel Lee," Mrs. Clemm in the verse "To My Mother," Irene in the poem "The Sleeper," Ligeia and Nesace in "Al Aaraaf," and Sarah Elmira Royster in "To Sarah" and "Eulaie."

<sup>6</sup>George Winston in his dissertation makes the following observation regarding Allston's "dreamy women": He describes *Rosalie* (1835) as the epitome of an Allston type and believes that the phrase—"dreamy women"—

may originally have been spoken by Longfellow or one of the Danas. Whoever it may have been, the words are appropriate as to have become all but automatically apposite when one of Allston's women is mentioned. (295)

Winston adds that the painter was "a man of his environment" in that his portraits of women, in a number of cases, seem to be visual renderings of the literary creations of writers Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, and Nathaniel Hawthorne (296).

However, the best characterization of Allston's women comes from Margaret Fuller. She examines *Beatrice* (1819) and finds what is true of most of Allston's women:

She is not a lustrous, bewitching beauty, neither is she a high and poetic one. She is not a concentrated perfume, nor a flower, nor a star; yet somewhat has she of every creature's best. She has the golden mean, without any touch of the mediocre. She can venerate the higher and compassionate the lower, and do to all honor due with most graceful courtesy and nice tact. She is velvet-soft, her mild and modest eyes have tempered all things round her sphere; yet, if need were, she could resist with as graceful composure as she can favor or bestow. . . . Fair as a maid, fairer as a wife, fairest as a lady mother and ruler of a household. . . . (83)

Fuller's remarks in many ways echo those qualities the South chose in venerating Southern Womanhood. Other portraits that qualify as "dreamy women" are *The Sisters* (before 1818), *Miriam the Prophetess* (1821), *The Valentine* (1809-1811), *Contemplation* (1817-1818), *The Spanish Girl in Reverie* (1831), and *Evening Hymn* (1835).

<sup>7</sup>William Dunlap was a very early and an important figure in American art history. In many ways he seemed to follow the same path of men like Charles Wilson Peale, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and even Allston in that he had many talents and chose to pursue them all. James Thomas Flexner, in his introduction to the 1969 edition of Dunlap's *History of the Arts of Design*, points out these talents:

Dunlap was himself a painter, who had shared in the excitements about which he wrote, and who was personally acquainted with many of the men whose careers he so evocatively described. However, his greater gift was as a writer. An author-producer, he composed some fifty plays, many of which found permanence in print. He had also completed a history of the American theater and various biographies when, at age 66, he set to work on his history of the arts of design. (vii)

Samuel Isham, an art student, gave Dunlap the title of the "American Vasari," because of Dunlap's method of fashioning his *History*. Isham describes this method:

[Dunlap] had a feeling for accuracy rare at the time. . . . It is only in his pages that we seem to touch the reality of West and

Stuart and Trumbull and Allston and Sully. (qtd. in Dunlap 2: 264)

Dunlap's interview with Allston provides one of the few published personal accounts that Allston gave during his lifetime.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Henry Dana, Jr. reports in his preface to the 1850 edition of Allston's *Lectures on Art and Poems* that "romances of love, knighthood, and heroic deeds, tales of banditti, and stories of supernatural beings were [Allston's] chief delight in his early days (iv). Again Allston can be seen linking his art to his reading. During his early years, Allston produced *Man in Chains* (1800), *Robbers Fighting with Each Other for the Spoils of a Murdered Traveler* (1801), *A Rocky Coast with Banditti* (1801-1802), and *The Robbers* (1809). Among his later work is "a return to this picaresque subject matter of his youth" (WA 115) witnessed by his *Donna Mencia in the Robber's Cavern* (1815) from *Gil Blas*, *Polyohemus Immediately After his Eye Was Put Out, Groping About his Cavern for the Companions of Ulysses* (1818), and *Spalatro's Vision of the Bloody Hand* (1831) which is taken from Ann Radcliffe's novel, *The Italian* (1797).

William Ware, Allston's earliest biographer, adds this observation about the painter:

The supernatural terror springing from objects obscure and ill-defined; remorse, a tormented conscience, the human being agitated by emotions arising from these and similar sources of woe, afforded subjects for art, which seemed to think himself

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The supernatural terror springing from objects obscure and ill-defined; remorse, a tormented conscience, the human being agitated by emotions arising from these and similar sources of woe, afforded subjects for art, which seemed to think himself capable of treating more effectively still . . . and to which he proved himself entirely equal. (97f.)

<sup>9</sup>Published in 1907, Susan Archer Weiss's book received this notice in *The Nation*; it is "the sanest and truest book yet published" about Poe's life. Also, the reviewer adds, "Mrs. Weiss is right in laying Poe's errors to weakness of will and not to viciousness." Weiss's chief service, according to the reviewer, "is in presenting a thoroughly human likeness of one about whom legends were not slow to flourish . . ." (192).

Yet Weiss's has been challenged. Her sources are the testimony given her by her mother and her own first-hand knowledge of Poe. Quinn's definitive biography relates that Weiss was a "young woman whose verses Poe had praised and who had achieved the immortality of being included in Griswold's *Female Poets of America*" (622). Quinn characterizes Weiss's book as one of the "most irritating of the Poe biographies." He claims that her articles appearing in *The Independent* (May 5 and August 25, 1904) and her biography "grow steadily more misleading." He asserts that Weiss was

incapable of judging evidence and any accounts, except those based on her own first-hand knowledge, are untrustworthy. Griswold, in his introduction to her verses in the *Female Poets*, states that she was completely deaf, and while this cannot, in the light of her conversations with Poe, be correct, yet her hearing may have been impaired. (622n.)

Strangely enough, however, Quinn gives several citations in his biography to Weiss's earlier work.

<sup>10</sup>William Collins (1788-1897) was a British landscape painter and member of the Royal Academy. He and Allston became friends in 1814 when they were introduced by Charles Leslie (Flagg 374). In a letter to Richard Dana, dated 6 September 1843, Collins wrote the following on hearing of Allston's death:

. . . the affectionate kindness he showed toward my mother and brother upon his frequent visits to our abode, so completely cemented the bond of our union that I always considered him one of the family. (qtd. in Flagg 374)

Indeed, Allston's connections with the Collins family were close and gratifying. William Collins was the father of the English writer Wilkie Collins, author of *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868). Allston was also the godfather to Collins' second son, Charles Allston Collins, who followed in his godfather's profession, studying at the Royal Academy and making painting his career (Flagg 374).

<sup>11</sup>In her 1926 study of Poe's portraits and daguerreotypes, Amanda Pogue Schulte catalogues seven daguerreotypes, 19 extant sketches and engravings, as well as several photographs—some taken of the earlier daguerreotypes—that were available to her. She concedes that the catalogue was probably not exhaustive, but she adds that “While some of the portraits of Poe were reproduced during his lifetime, of course, the greater number of them, and daguerreotypes too, did not appear until after his death” (37).

Her investigation concludes that there were a larger number of portraits than daguerreotypes and that many of these paintings were *not* produced from life, rather they were produced by painters working from the few extant daguerreotypes. She also believes that these daguerreotypes—or portraits taken from them—fashion much of our idea of what Poe looked like.

For a man of meager means such as Poe, this volume of photographs and portraits is very revealing. Seven of the better known portraits are distinctive for two reasons: their painter and their placement. The Samuel Osgood portrait is perhaps the best known. Painted by Osgood, the husband of the poet Frances Sargent Osgood, the portrait has been reproduced in Griswold's *Life of Poe; The Virginia Edition of Poe, vol. 1; The Centenary Volume of Poe*, p. 32; James Harrison's *Life, Letters, and Opinions, vol. 1*; and Woodberry's *Life of Poe, vol. 1* (Schulte 41).

The other most notable portrait of Poe was painted from life and done by the famous painter, Thomas Sully, whose nephew, Robert, Poe had known as a youth in Richmond (Quinn 85). The portrait has never been reproduced (as of the date of Schulte's study) and the following description of it by Dr. Heysinger, a former owner, appears in Biddle's *The Life and Works of Thomas Sully*:

The portrait of Edgar Allan Poe was painted by Thomas Sully in 1839 or 1840 while Poe was reading in Philadelphia. George R. Bonfield the artist, was well acquainted with both Poe and Sully. All three attended social meetings of artists, actors, writers, etc. in the old Falstaff Hotel. . . . It was the fashion at this time to call Poe the American Byron, and Murray's Childe Harold edition had recently appeared . . . and Sully posed him, for his own pleasure, in the Byronic attitude, modified by Poe's dress. James McMurtrie furnished the cloak. (249)

Poe's physical countenance apparently offered an intriguing subject for other known painters of his day. Rembrandt Peale painted a likeness of the poet in 1833 in Philadelphia. The work was done about the time Poe was 24 and according to Schulte: "It seems very unlike Poe in separate features, as well as in the expression, and it seems, if meant for Poe at all, to represent an ideal conception of poet rather than an actual likeness" (41).

Schulte believes that it is possible that Peale knew Poe and may well have painted the picture from life; however, she qualifies this assessment by adding that it is "improbable that the picture is an authentic likeness."

Poe's countenance also intrigued the French painter Edouard Manet who did a sketch of Poe for the frontpiece of the French edition of Poe's poems. The original sketch is now in the library at the University of Virginia (50).

Quinn makes an interesting observation about Poe's portraits and daguerreotypes in the biography. He thinks the duality of Poe's nature is closely reflected in the poet's countenance:

Take a full face daguerreotype of Poe, lay a card upon it, so that first one side and then the other will be concealed. One side you will see a high forehead, an eye large and full, a firm mouth and a well-shaped chin. On the other will appear a lower brow, a less lustrous eye, a mouth painfully drawn, and a chin less certain. That is why an artist like Sully chose to paint Poe's three-quarter face. (693)

Whether Quinn held to the doctrine of correspondence or not, this observation by him suggests some connection between the inner person and the outward appearance.

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE IN THE NORTH

The life of wealth and promise that Allston and Poe experienced in the antebellum South of their youth fast became a memory as each man moved into his career. The 1820s and 1830s were decades of rapid change for America. The social and political structure of the South was put to its toughest challenge in the face of Jacksonian democracy, the heat of increased sectionalism, the escalating number of immigrants, and the almost explosive growth of industry in the North. Not only were manners and codes of behavior becoming more democratic, but the nervous hurry and fluid lifestyles of the cities in the North were a vivid contrast to the slower pace and rigid hierarchy of the Southern plantation that Allston and Poe had experienced in their youths. Even though Allston's move to the North took place at age seven, when he was sent to school in Newport, Rhode Island, and Poe's at age 23 when he left Richmond for West Point, the cultural adjustment had long-term ramifications for both. In fact, the North—so antithetical to their values and life experiences—actually helped to further define the Southern elements in their character and their art. The definition of these elements occurs in three distinct experiences for both men: their ever increasing isolation, brought about by their wish to

affect a gentlemanly aloofness and by the need to protect their artistic vision from the rush of industrialization and democracy; their distrust of democracy because of the elitist values engendered by their earlier experiences on the Southern plantation; and their having to balance their plantation experiences and attitudes about slavery with the growing abolitionist movement.

For men whose lives and developing aesthetic appear more and more parallel, one surprising contrast, is that after his graduation from Harvard in 1801, Allston made only one return trip home to South Carolina—to sell his legacy to finance his first trip to Europe. After his return from his second trip to Europe in 1818, Allston remained in the North, his adopted home, for the rest of his life. Poe, however, was at intervals always returning to Richmond.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it often seemed that in various ways the South always drew the poet home. He righteously defended the South's novelists and poets in critical writings;<sup>2</sup> he wrote open attacks on abolitionists; and he became increasingly depressed and vulnerable to drink, living in, what in many ways, was an antagonistic environment. Poe constantly found himself attacking in print the "cliques" of the northern critics and journalists who failed to recognize merit in southern writers.

For example, in his review of Griswold's *The Female Poets of America*, which he published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe reflects his

frustration over the regional bias of the northern critics. He congratulates Griswold for

doing what northern critics seem to be at great pains *never* to do—that is to say, [Griswold] has been at the trouble of doing justice, in great measure, to several poetesses who have not had the good fortune to be born in the North. . . . [His selection of these southern women] reflect[s] credit upon Mr. Griswold and show[s] him to be a man not more of taste than—shall we say it?—of courage. Let our readers be assured that, (as matters are managed among the four or five different cliques who control our whole literature in controlling the larger portion of our critical journals) it requires no small amount of courage . . . to hint, even, that anything good in a literary way can by any possibility exist out of the limits of a certain narrow territory. (126)

That Poe became the South's standard bearer in a foreign territory is not surprising, nor should anyone be surprised that by his doing so, he alienated himself in his adopted region by doing the unthinkable: defending the South to the North, espousing beauty as an aesthetic doctrine in a region still largely influenced by Puritanism, and holding fast to *Old World* traditions in the very hub of a region that was fast becoming known for its *New World* reforms.

Compounding Poe's alienation in this hostile region was, quite simply, the affected gentlemanly behavior that seemed to grate on many of his contemporaries in the North. George Boas in his article "Romanticism in America" writes that "Poe was essentially the lonely man; he had neither disciples nor friends." Boas explains that even though

a few poor souls as lonely as he were kind to him, but what communion could there have been between so keen a mind as that which wrote his critical essays and a woman like Mrs. Clemm? The women who loved him, even Sarah Whitman, were pale copies of womanhood. There was no place in America for such a man. His whole life shows, detail after detail, the steady search for something to satisfy his hunger for both truth and beauty. (198)

Though the North seemed to offer him a richer intellectual environment than he could have found in the South, still Poe remained aloof from both the regional biases and many of its inhabitants.

Thus, Poe's time in the North became a time of artistic isolation brought about by his need to defend his demeanor, his values, and aesthetics, particularly the value of beauty, to a hostile society. T. S. Eliot in his essay "From Poe to Valery" discusses Poe's poetic legacy and why it had such a strong appeal to the French Symbolists of the turn of the century. Eliot argues that in Poe's "life, his isolation and his worldly failure, . . . Baudelaire found the prototype of *le poete maudit*, the poet as outcast of society" in order to defend an aesthetic (37). This prototype, originating with the myth surrounding Lord Byron (ironically Poe was known as the American Byron, see n. 10 previous chapter), sets itself in opposition to a society valuing "middle class morality." Eliot asserts that this Byronic model "corresponds to a particular social situation." But, for Poe, the model is different. Quoting Baudelaire, Eliot underscores Poe's quite different sense of isolation: Poe "believed . . . , true poet that he was, that

the goal of poetry is of the same nature as its principle, and that it should have nothing in view but itself." Thus isolation from his environment emerged for Poe for several reasons: his continued ties to the South in a region increasingly hostile to the South and its values; his own deportment and his occasionally acerbic style; his value of the beautiful as opposed to the useful; and his definition of the role of the artist—isolated, not because he had *divergent* views, but because he had only *one* view, his art.

Poe's assertion of artistic independence seems markedly different from and more dramatic than Allston's. The drama arises, perhaps, as a result of Poe's influence on the Symbolists and their influence on critical values of this century. The Symbolists' work and their attribution to Poe kept Poe and his work the focus of critical and—to a certain extent—public attention for decades after his death. But what time and critical tastes have given to Poe's reputation, they have taken from Allston's. In the decades immediately following his death, numerous exhibitions of Allston's work and several museum acquisitions of his paintings are recorded.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Gerdts and Stebbins report, nearly all of this response to Allston's work was confined to the Boston area (163). This limited response to the painter, in contrast to the international response to the poet, is testimony to both the cultural exclusivity of Allston's art and the fact that his work seemed to appeal to the "critical cliques" of the North; nevertheless, Allston, as Poe, responded to his life in the North by withdrawing into his Cambridgeport

home and isolating himself as a way to maintain his gentlemanly aloofness and as a way to work.

Part of Allston's acceptance by these "critical cliques" came from his seeming to appeal to the cultivated tastes of his northern home. Allston's viewers and reviewers were, for the most part, familiar with classical learning, literature, and the Bible. His audiences could cite the influence of a Michelangelo, a Raphael, a Sir Joshua Reynolds, or a Benjamin West. Also, these patrons and critics knew something of British, continental, and classical art. Allston's appeal in the North was a fortunate happenstance for the painter because the very values that gave him some critical acceptance were the very values that he carefully developed from early in his life.

David Bjelajac asserts that Allston was "especially proud of his intellectual accomplishments and the superior development of his taste" (52). Thus, a decision Allston made early in his life to distinguish himself "from the great mass of American society [by] his education [and] his growing knowledge of art and literature" (52) satisfied his inherited elitist tendencies while at the same time gave him life experiences that the Northern intelligentsia expected from their artists. However, Allston's decision to return to America after a professionally successful visit to England (see the introduction for the personal hardships he experienced on this sojourn) was understood by many of his friends and colleagues as a

mistake, even though Allston did experience some degree of success in the Boston area. The reason that so many have called his move a mistake is that Allston's life in the North, regardless of his success among the "critical cliques," was marked by an increasing personal and professional isolation in Boston, as well as inability to complete what Allston intended to be his major work, *Belshazzar's Feast*.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps another reason for calling Allston's abandoning of England a mistake comes from his rather surprising decision not to move to his original home in South Carolina where he may have been able to capitalize on his British reputation and make a comfortable living.<sup>5</sup> Instead, he returned to his adopted home in New England, specifically the Boston area, where his chances of exploiting his reputation were slimmer. Allston seemed to be attempting his own method of isolation by rejecting all that a continued stay in England or the comforts of his boyhood would afford him.

Washington Irving remarked that Allston's decision to return to America showed Allston's rejection of a setting where he was "surrounded by everything to encourage and stimulate him." Specifying the opportunities from which Allston separated himself, Irving added that he had "no doubt [Allston] would have been at the head of his art" (*Miscellanies* 2:178), if he had remained in England. Flagg concurs with Irving's assessment of Allston's possibilities in England by saying, "[H]ad Allston remained in

England he would have succeeded West as President of the Royal Academy" (136). Yet he rejected these opportunities and his native South Carolina, where he still had a devoted family and a following, for a belief that he would succeed in acquiring liberal patronage in Boston and "hoped to found [in Boston] an English school of art" (Sweetser 96).

Allston's beliefs about the opportunities of the Boston area were partly correct. He was not able to establish "an English school of art" at all; however, he was successful in two endeavors: isolating himself in order to complete *Belshazzar* and finding the patronage he needed to do so. In terms of Allston's isolation from others and in his working habits, his friend and fellow painter, Chester Harding, gives a good rendering:

[Allston's] habits were peculiar in many respects. He lived alone, dining at six o'clock, and sitting up far into the night. He breakfasted at eleven or twelve. . . . I sometimes called at his studio. It was an old barn, and as cheerless as any anchorite could desire. He never had it swept, and the accumulation of the dust of many years was an inch thick. You could see a track, leading through it to some remote corner in the room, as plainly as in a new-fallen snow. He saw few friends in his room; lived almost in solitude, with only his great thoughts to sustain him. (qtd. in Sweetser 94)

In terms of his patronage, Allston had some limited success. For example, in a letter to Gulian C. Verplanck<sup>6</sup> written in March 1819, Allston recounts:

At present I am engaged on two small pictures, which will be finished in a few days. After these I shall proceed with some on commission, somewhat larger, and probably by June I shall be enabled to go on with the large picture I began in England of *Belshazzar's impious feast*, which I hope to make profitable by exhibition. (qtd. in Flagg 149)

Though he was able to find commissioned work, Allston still found difficulty returning to *Belshazzar* as he had indicated in his letter to Verplanck. As E. P. Richardson describes this period of time following his return, Allston "found that the money from one [picture] was spent while he was painting the next," thus the *Belshazzar* "remained rolled up while he painted . . . for immediate sale"(WA 125). Sweetser summarizes Allston's difficulty in completing *Belshazzar* in this manner:

The dreary consciousness of pecuniary embarrassments, the lack of proper models and other properties, and the delicate health of the artist combined to persuade him, from time to time, that he had undertaken a task too great for his means and his strength, and caused him to put [*Belshazzar*] aside in discouragement and dissatisfaction. (125)

An attempt to deal with the "dreary consciousness of pecuniary embarrassments" which would supply Allston with the "means," at least, of completing *Belshazzar*, was the formation of the Allston Trust. This trust was formed by ten "gentlemen of Boston," who subscribed one thousand dollars each. This money, in turn, would allow Allston "living expenses

while he completed the painting" (WA 125). Yet even this arrangement failed to give Allston incentive to complete this work.

The isolation needed to work and the limited patronage—though necessary—that Allston enjoyed in the North mark a curious love-hate relationship that the painter seemed to have with this region. As with Poe, Allston's attempts to come to terms with the cultural shifts from his deeply rooted Southern traditions may well have had lifelong ramifications. Bjelajac describes this love-hate tension in this way:

Thus, although Allston retained the genteel manners and social conservatism of his Southern plantation background, he was formally educated within the spartan environment established by New England Puritanism. The sudden change in moral atmosphere may have contributed to a certain tension and sense of guilt in Allston's mind. Having been used to the more leisured pace of plantation life, he found himself apologizing to Mr. Rogers [his schoolmaster in Newport] for his habitual laziness and tendency toward procrastination, a condition that later, of course, contributes to the incompleteness of *Belshazzar's Feast*.<sup>7</sup> (54)

Whatever "tension" that life in the North brought the painter, along with it came challenges and, later in his life, opportunities.

In a letter to his step-father, dated 21 October 1796, written during Allston's first year at Harvard, the young man praises his landlord, Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, for the encouragement he had received; however, Allston also complains about the "great distance" he must travel from his

classes which serves "to make my exercises very disagreeable" (qtd. in *Bjelajac* 57). Allston would have received little sympathy from most of his classmates on this issue and certainly none from Dr. Waterhouse, a professor of medicine (WA 10) who, according to *Bjelajac*, "prided himself in delivering orations upon the virtues of exercise and the evils of intemperance and luxury" (57).

Allston's temperament seemed never to adjust to the more rigorous and "virtuous" lifestyle of New England. Even more so as he aged, his habit remained to pass the majority of the night in reading or in conversation and rise late the next day (Flagg 242). One of his students, Sarah Clarke—sister to the poet James Freeman Clarke and friend to Margaret Fuller, once informed Allston that "she was engaged in painting a sunrise scene and rose early in order to see the sun when it passed above the horizon. 'How does it look?' asked he, in perfect good faith" (qtd. in Sweetser 137f.).

Though apparently never adapting to the New England expectations, Allston, nevertheless, chose the region for his home. With his second wife, Martha Dana, Allston lived in an area called Cambridgeport until his death in 1843. Allston seldom strayed far from his home. William Ware in his *Lectures on the Works and Genius of Washington Allston* (1852) writes that

Mr. Allston was essentially a solitary. In Catholic times, he would have been a monk. . . . You can not think of him in public places, mingling promiscuously with men; you can not imagine him making dinner speeches, as present at, seeking or enjoying crowds. Yet, a few he sought and loved, and none enjoyed such society more, or adorned it more, just as he instinctively shrunk from the many. (117)

Ware even goes so far as to link Allston's propensity for single figure paintings with his tendency to reclusiveness:

What he loved and preferred in life, he did in art. He loved most and excelled most, in single figures. He sought his happiness, and found success and fame, in the class of ideal forms,—in his *Uriel* and his *Jeremiah*; particularly in the female ideal forms, *Rosalie*, *The Spanish Girl*, *The Valentine*, *Jessica*, *Miriam*, which especially captivated his imagination. The same inclination for the solitary shows itself in his landscapes, as the Swiss landscape, and the *Elijah*. (117f.)

The tensions of life in the North offer a reasonable explanation for Allston's "inclination for the solitary" both in his life and in his art.

Moreover, Allston's choice to remain essentially reclusive may reflect his need for separation from external influences in order to preserve his artistic integrity. In his article, "The America of Washington Allston," Richardson elaborates on this possibility. He believes that Allston exhibited a "dreaming, brooding spirit, which runs throughout American art and which is characteristic of it when it is most profound . . ." (221). This same spirit seems to also have equal application to the literary arts. Certainly,

Poe was exemplary of this "dreaming, brooding spirit." And as Richardson continues his discussion of Allston, the image of Poe looms in the background:

[The] relation of the human spirit to its environment is not mechanical and obvious as the geographical fallacy would make it. The artist, who is profoundly sensitive to his environment, feels keenly any lack of balance or harmony in his spiritual world. And because he is creative rather than a mere passive creature of his environment, his reaction to a want is to create what the heart craves. The very fact that the American artist has lived in an unfinished world, some what disorderly by reason of the bricks and timbers scattered about during the building of a new society, is one reason why [Allston's] art has so often been delicate, quiet, dreamy, and tender. It is his way of creating the harmony, order, and inner quiet the spirit needs. (221)

In the work of Poe and Allston, artistic independence is maintained and Southern influences are preserved by the artists distancing themselves from that environment both found "wanting." Also, just as Richardson believes, both the poet and the painter reacted to this "want" by "creat[ing] what the heart craves."

Other American painters have found kindred spirits in the image of the artist alienated from his society, an image that Poe and Allston defined. In her biography of the American realist Charles Demuth (1883-935), Emily Farnham recounts Demuth's fascination with Allston which seems to have come about from his viewing of Allston's paintings in the Boston museum. This experience compelled Demuth to write something about Allston for

*Arts* magazine at a time when Allston's reputation was at its nadir. In a letter that Demuth wrote to the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, dated 15 August 1927, Demuth describes his understanding of the fallow art environment of the North that greeted Allston on his return from England in 1818:

Washington Allston. No you've never heard of him—so many American painters have never been heard of. Well, he's not a discovery of mine. Henry James wrote about him. James used him as proof that America is no land for the artist. Allston went mad after returning to America from years spent in Europe. Perhaps James was right—I know America is only for the very strong. Hemingway—yes, he lives in Europe. . . . (qtd. in Farnham 23)<sup>8</sup>

No one should be surprised to see that Henry James, devoted Anglophile that he was, should conclude that Allston was driven “mad” by the American environment. The truth of the matter, however, is that instead of being driven “mad,” Allston seemed to have taken the tension this environment created and turned it into an opportunity for growth.

Life in the North provided Allston and Poe with an opportunity—a need—to exercise an independence that may have been denied them in the South. Also, life in the North served both of them in a second, and rather surprising, way: the experiences of life in the North produced in each a political voice and a gave each occasions to use it. However, the political voice of each reflects the political thinking and the cultural mores of the

South and this Southern influence, though modified to an extent by the thinking and mores of the North, remained central to the painter's and the poet's response to the political events circulating around them.

Allston, more than Poe, seemed to have responded to the Puritan element of the North by blending his Southern political values with a strong didacticism—though at times this didacticism emerged as satire. Poe, by holding fast to his aesthetic doctrine extolling beauty and excluding didacticism, seemed immune to Puritan influence as his political voice developed. However, his political views, much like Allston's, seldom deviated from the customs of the South that had helped to shape his aesthetic. He did, in one instance, recognize the South as lagging behind the North on certain social issues<sup>9</sup>, yet, both men continued to embrace a fundamental political vision that remained untouched by life in the North and that reflected the influence of the plantation life both men experienced as boys: they continued to assert their belief in a rigid, paternalistic, social hierarchy even in the face of the “great leveling” that Jackson's presidency promised. This political agenda of a classed society with clear patterns of dominance and control manifested itself in both men's work as a distrust of the middle class and a paternalistic attitude toward the increasingly heated debate of slavery.

Allston held a lifelong belief in the importance of social rank and how both his education and refinement served to distinguish him “from the

great mass of American society." Allston, according to Bjelajac, was typical of "his generation of young Federalists who advocated education as a means to counter the growth of democracy. With property losing exclusive political rights, [Allston believed that] perhaps the cultivation of talent and virtue could stem the tide" (52f.). In concert with Allston's undemocratic and elitist views, he found life in the North exhibiting his worse political fears: his "natural aristocracy" that ruled the country because of its wealth and property was falling victim to mob rule (51). Thus, life in the North for Allston, especially in 1830s and 1840s, forced him to consider two very distinct responses: either he could retreat from his deeply seated political values or he could engage the "mob rule" from a position afforded him by birth, rank, and education.

Peter Dobkin Hall in his book *The Organization of American Culture* clarifies the Federalists, and Allston's, political vision:

. . . the Federalist vision of the dangers posed by democracy and popularly defined authority, the threat of society's collapsing into either chaos or dictatorship, remained a basic theme of their rhetoric until the Civil War. Events constantly kept the theme alive: the association of Jeffersonianism with slavery, the virtual dictatorship of Andrew Jackson, and the restive agitation of laborers and urban mobs. (89)

Given this political vision, Allston's response to the political events around him was to "engage" the threats he perceived to his political world instead

of "retreating." His "engagement" of the "mob rule" appeared in his art in two significant ways: his work became more symbolic and more moralistic.

Even as early as his time at Harvard, Allston was "engaging" the threats to his undemocratic, elitist, and Federalist views in his art. During this time, William Ellery Channing, Allston's good friend, assumed the role of Harvard's "fervent politician" and kept issues of "the social agitations of the age" alive on the campus (W. H. Channing 34). Channing authored a letter addressed to President John Adams which was printed in the 19 May 1798 edition of the *Boston Centennial* [sic]<sup>10</sup>. In this letter, Channing sounded the united voice of the Harvard student body in its declaration of Federalist principles and in its condemning of France for its revolutionary activity.

There is little doubt that Allston not only signed Channing's letter<sup>11</sup> but echoed these same sentiments in his own letter to his friend John Knapp in 1800 during the election of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's election triggered clarion calls from Allston and his Federalist brethren of impending doom. These Federalists not only objected to Jefferson's democratic views but also to his non-Christian faith. In his letter, Allston called the new president "the unruly madman of society" and the "assassin who lets himself for hire" (qtd. in Bjelajac 63).

Beyond his signature on Channing's letter and his own angry letter to Knapp, Allston created a small composition he titled *Man in Chains* in

1800 (see Fig. 2.1). This solitary figure, half-dressed with disheveled hair and wild eyes, pulls at his shackles seemingly with more impatience than frustration. Bjelajac believes that in this "study in human madness," Allston may well have intended a metaphorical reference to Jefferson or at least a symbolic response to the "dark cloud of pessimism" that hung over the Federalists at the time (63).

Further evidence suggests that Allston indeed intended Jefferson as the model for his madman. Richardson reports that Allston executed the painting while in Charleston after seeing an exhibition of Fuseli's work in the library there, an experience that, according to Richardson, "deepened [Allston's] interest in the contemporary school of romantic melodrama" (WA 46). Moreover, Richardson points to the preliminary sketch of *Man in Chains* on the flyleaf of Allston's "copy of Charles Churchill's<sup>12</sup> works which was inscribed 'Harvard College 1799.'" Perhaps more than a coincidence was at work that the Federalist Allston would be thinking of Jefferson while reading the work of the dissipated and worldly Churchill and that Allston would be, like Churchill, looking to use his craft to satirize his target for political comment.

Dumas Malone, in his multi-volume biography of Jefferson, relates that in April of 1800, when Allston was in Charleston and the painting was done, Jefferson's party (the Jeffersonian-Republicans later to become the Democratic Party) was quite active in Virginia, distributing political

pamphlets and campaigning in local elections with favorable results (3:xxix). Since Virginia was the other "mountain of conceit" in the South, Allston surely was aware of this canvassing and its success which would have further inflamed his Federalist ire.

More evidence, other than the preliminary sketch and Jefferson's proximity and success in Virginia, suggests Jefferson as the subject of Allston's political parody, which had become a fact of life and a source of great amusement for him while he was a student at Harvard. The subject of *Man in Chains* is a solitary figure that is classically proportioned and is composed in such a fashion as to recall some of the prominent features of the statuary of the Hellenistic Period (323-30 BC)<sup>13</sup>. Unlike the more conservative statues of the early Greek *Kouros*, the work of the Hellenistic Period focused on the emotions of the subject; the statues often exhibited facial expressions of anxiety, tragedy, or sentiment. They were often created to depict energetic movement—twisting, turning, or running. The drapery and the hairstyles of these statues were very often disheveled or windblown.

This composite certainly describes Allston's composition of *Man in Chains*; however, a more important characteristic of the Hellenistic Period was the sculptor's desire to individualize the work and to make it the portrait of a famous person by fashioning a recognizable face.<sup>14</sup> A comparison of Allston's composition and Rembrandt Peale's portrait of Jefferson done in 1800 (see Fig. 2.3) suggests this type of resemblance. If the likeness

is credible, then the irony of Allston's using classical methods to portray a *madman* cements the parody and further ties the piece to the initial sketch on the flyleaf of Churchill's work. Allston was both mocking the tendency of the "mob rule" to deify their leaders in their art and using his brush as Churchill had his pen—as a means to create a satiric statement as well as promote his own political beliefs.

Bjelajac views other works by Allston as invested with political or social messages where he furthered his Federalist agenda against the mob rule of the industrialized and democratized North. Bjelajac writes:

Several of his paintings, now all lost, *Satan at the Gates of Hell*. . . , *Judas Iscariot*, and *St. Peter When He Heard the Cock Crow*, speak of the imminence of Satanic evil, the willful betrayal of Christ through greed, moral weakness, and cowardice, all sins alluded to in his letter to Knapp [which charged Jefferson with these `sins']. (63)

Throughout the painter's career, Allston constantly intermingled his political positions with moral ones. This intermingling is most evident in one of his most tenaciously held political views —his refusal to accept the principle of the separation of church and state.

As already noted, one of Allston's objections to Jefferson was Jefferson's Deism. Furthermore, he was convinced of the "moral obligation" of the "economic and social elite" to rule the country (Bjelajac 51) and save it from the "sins" of "greed" and "moral weakness." Both of these

issues—an “elite” body of individuals and salvation of sins—are fundamental Christian precepts acknowledged in Allston's day. The most obvious assertion of his refusal to acknowledge the separation of church and state came in 1830. Verplanck, Allston's friend and chairman of the committee on public buildings of the House of Representatives (Flagg 228), asked him about the possibility of contributing to the painting of the Capitol Rotunda and using as his subject a scene from the War of Independence. Allston refused, saying “I will undertake only one [panel], and I choose my own subject. No battle piece” (qtd. in Dunlap 2:333).

Allston's counter-proposal was in a letter to Verplanck, dated 1 March 1830:

There is another class of subject, however, in which, were I permitted to choose from it, I should find exciting matter enough, and more than enough for my imperfect skill, that is from scripture. But I fear this is a forlorn hope. Yet why should it be? This is a *Christian* land [emphasis added], and the scriptures belong to no country but to man. The facts [the scriptures] record come home to all men, to the high and the low, the wise and the simple. . . . Should the government allow me to select a subject from them, I need not say with what delight I should accept the commission. With such a course of inspiration and the glory of painting for my country, if there be anything in me, it must come out. . . . Well, supposing a commission given, there's a subject already composed *in petto*, which I have long intended to paint . . . the three Mary's at the tomb of the Savior, the angel sitting on a stone at the mouth of the sepulchre. I consider this one of my happiest conceptions. The terrible beauty of the angel, his preternatural brightness, the varied emotions of wonder, awe, and bewilderment of the three women, the streak of distant daybreak,

lighting the city of Jerusalem out of the darkness, and the deep toned spell of the chiaroscuro [sic], mingling as it were the night with the day, I see now before me; I wish I could see them on the walls at Washington. (qtd. in Flagg 233)

Not surprisingly Allston suggestion was denied. Verplanck's response, dated 9 March 1830, asserted, "To scripture I fear we cannot go in the present state of public opinion and taste" (qtd. in Flagg 235). Verplanck went on to suggest that Allston select some theme from American history, yet Allston refused, urging Verplanck to consider his old pupil, Samuel F. B. Morse, in his place (Sweetser 139)<sup>15</sup>. Flagg offers the possibility that Allston refused the commission because of "his inexperience in the line of subjects to which he might be restricted" (228f.) This analysis of the case at hand must be qualified because of Flagg's tendency to ignore any political motives of the painter; however, a more probable analysis is simply Allston's attempt to further his, and the then defunct Federalist, vision in the face of church and state separation favored by Jacksonian democrats. Such a reading of Allston's motives concerning the use of his art for political leverage and the promotion of his Christian beliefs seems all the more valid in light of his hopes for completing *Belshazzar's Feast*.

This work, as noted elsewhere, was Allston's most ambitious work and carried his most powerful political and moral message. The vision of the New Jerusalem had crossed the Atlantic with the first settlers and had remained an important idea in politics, theology, and art until well past the

Civil War. The original intent of composing *Belshazzar*, which Allston took from the book of Daniel, was to invest this painting with moral significance.

Bjelajac is convinced that

*Belshazzar's Feast* was to be Allston's plea for a humble, self-abasing attitude before God. Pride had blinded the heart or conscience of the king until it was too late. Glorification of the self had led him down the path of materialism and luxury. (98)

All of these "sins" Allston could just as easily have ascribed to the "ruling mob" and the middle class of nineteenth-century America as to the ancient Babylonian king.

Joy Kasson, in *Artistic Voyagers*, also sees moral and political implication in *Belshazzar*. She extends Bjelajac's notions to include the idea that echoes a familiar theme among American romantics, such as Hawthorne: "Allston pays homage to the visual splendor associated with the Old World, its art treasures and rich history, yet [*Belshazzar*] sounds a warning against [the Old World's] spiritual inadequacies" (75). Thus, Allston hoped that this work would, in Donald Ringe's words, "represent . . . [an] attempt to 'elevate' the position of painting," along with America's spiritual awareness of her providential mission in the New World ("Hudson" 79). Bjelajac's assessment describes how the American art environment merged these two missions:

American artists and poets found it useful to argue before a public skeptical of the value of art that the so-called primitive authors and prophets of the Bible had themselves been artists. They had been the first to demonstrate the value of art in elevating the spirit of God and in creating a unified consciousness. (159)

Allston's concern with demonstrating the "value of art" also appears twofold. Not only was he attempting to link art to religion in hopes of engaging larger audiences and increasing the possibility of patronage, but more importantly he was trying to make art acceptable to an audience heavily influenced by Puritanism which would recognize itself and its mission in biblical history and comprehend the lesson of the dangers of material luxuries to human morality.

Beyond *Belshazzar*, Allston painted some twenty canvasses with biblical themes. These works are not only among the largest of his composition, but also the best known.<sup>16</sup> In some ways, Allston—like John Milton—used his art to teach his audience to think of themselves in terms of Old Testament archetypes. And, as in Milton, Allston's art was heavily infused with the Puritan message: human depravity and the living presence of evil, yet a promise of hope in the millennium.

For Allston much of this hope was in the possibilities of the political situation in America. Given this notion, Allston's motives for beginning *Belshazzar's Feast* in 1817 (while still in England) are clear: his composi-

tion was in response to the dynamic changes in American politics—specifically, the rise of Andrew Jackson. Obviously, Jackson's intense popularity and his unambiguous political ambitions would have unsettled a good Federalist such as Allston.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Jackson represented the Federalists' worst fears: he was rising to power on the shoulders of “mob rule” and many commentators of the day—even without the Federalist bias—likened Jackson to Napoleon.

For example, John William Ward's *Andrew Jackson: Symbol of an Age* shows that “It was Napoleon's energy and daring that captured the American imagination” (183) just as Jackson's was doing. Napoleon, like Jackson, was a self-made man who had climbed into the political ranks from a military post. Each man served his country's need for a military leader and hero; both men appealed to the masses for their strength.<sup>18</sup> Ward believes that “[I]t was almost inevitable that these two symbols should fuse, to the extent that a painter setting down the features of the American general should see in him the French emperor.” Ward's reference here is to an 1817 biography of Jackson that included as a frontispiece a portrait of Jackson that made him, especially his hair, look very much like Napoleon.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous references occurred in political oratory and in print linking the two men,<sup>20</sup> and the commonplace nature of these comparisons,

perhaps, influenced Allston to render the prophet Daniel as he did in *Belshazzar*. In 1852, Ware assessed the painting in this manner:

The prophet Daniel fails of any good effect; the figure wants not only expression but force; the form is good but the head and face want grandeur and power. The story used to run, that the great Daniel of today [Daniel Webster] was to be represented in the prophet. (129 and see Figure 2.8)

No evidence is forthcoming that Allston admitted to the possibility of his rendering of the prophet being a metaphor for the statesman, yet neither does he admit to any of his other visual metaphors. However, given the political climate and Allston's inclinations, the suggestion is not unreasonable that he intended, at least early on, *Belshazzar's Feast* to be a political allegory where certain figures echo Napoleon—and by extension, the powerful and corrupt Jackson, and Webster as the prophet who warns about “the writing on the wall.” Furthermore, Bjelajac concurs with such a reading when he points to Allston's modifying the portrait of Daniel to one, perhaps, of Daniel Webster who would be “New England's law-abiding answer to the Napoleonic personality of Andrew Jackson” (131).

Other commentators have remarked on the political implications of *Belshazzar*. Richard Henry Dana, Jr. and General A. H. S. Dearborn, an early reviewer of the painting, both cite a Napoleonic presence in the work. Dana found in the figure of Belshazzar's wife, “a Bonaparte countenance”

and admitted to being attracted to the Queen's "character and energy" (qtd. in Kasson 71). And Gen. Dearborn discovered a great deal more that suggested a political reading of the painting. In his review, "Allston's Feast of Belshazzar," in the 1844 edition of *The Knickerbocker*, Dearborn writes: "The head of Napoleon appears to have been the model on which that of the Queen was formed, and the similitude is discoverable in that of her son"<sup>21</sup> (208).

Clearly Dearborn believed that Allston was investing more in the countenance of the Queen than just her resemblance to Napoleon. She was to become a symbol that awakens "those transcendent powers of the mind" in the audience and was to bring them to the more startling realizations about their morality, their materialism, and the threat to their country. social problems that appear in his art were probably not only engendered, but intensified by his residing in the North. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and certainly Washington were the centers for the major political and social debates prior to the Civil War: sectionalism, westward expansion, economic growth, and slavery. Given these issues, no one should be surprised that a man as intelligent and outspoken as Edgar Allan Poe would be attracted to the North—regardless of his deeply rooted Southern traditions. However, unlike Allston, Poe failed to settle in one place or make a satisfactory career anywhere he did travel.

Quinn notes in his biography of Poe that the poet's career failures are not seen in the proper light: that Poe "was an alien in the North has not been sufficiently appreciated" (616). Quinn argues the case by drawing the following comparison between Poe and Allston:

[Poe] was the only important Southern man of letters in this period to leave his section and make his fight for fame in the North. Washington Allston did go to Boston after his long European stay, but he was a painter rather than a poet, and his creative power collapsed, in any event, after his return to the United States. Poe must have felt the growing sectional hatreds that were, twelve years later, to bring on the Civil War, and we may be sure he never hesitated to speak his mind. It was therefore quite natural that he should turn toward his own country and exchange commercial opportunity for the prospect of living in a section where people thought as he did. When two sections of a land dislike each other for their faults, trouble will ensue, but when they dislike each other for their virtues, the case is more serious. Poe's impulsive excitable nature, his keen sense of personal honor, and his contempt for purely material values, were not likely to endear him to the metropolis where standards were being based more and more on commercial prosperity. (616)

Poe, like Allston, seems to have felt the need to respond to the offense against his Southern sensibilities through his art. However, in spite of the earlier discussion here of Poe's isolated personal life while in the North and the sentiments of critics such as Parrington who are convinced that Poe's alienation was due more to his being Poe than to his being caught in the throes of increasing sectional tensions,<sup>22</sup> the poet was, indeed, very much aware of the political stirrings about him. By virtue of the fact that he was

a journalist by profession and read and reviewed countless books on countless subjects and also as an observer of the life around him, Poe deserves credit for his industry.

Killis Campbell, in his essay "Poe in Relation to his Times," makes the case that even though Poe, "transcended his environment to an extraordinary degree" and made little use of American scenery, occasions, or legends in his poetry or fiction (293), the poet did evidence an awareness of his political and social surroundings. In his poetry<sup>23</sup>, his fiction<sup>24</sup>, and especially his critical writings, Campbell sees the "most conclusive evidence" (299) of Poe's responding to—engaging—the political world of the North.

Poe passed literary judgments on almost every American and British writer of any importance, and he sometimes used these occasions to present his own opinions on the authors' politics or the political questions their work raised. Several examples illustrate Poe's tendency to use his criticism to set up his own soap box. For example, his review of James Russell Lowell's "Fable for Critics," which appeared in the March 1849 edition of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, is not so much an examination of Lowell's work as it is an attack on Lowell's stand on slavery. Poe's pen is at its sharpest when characterizing Lowell as

one of the most rabid of the Abolition fanatics; and no Southerner who does not wish to be insulted, and at the same time

revolted by a bigotry the most obstinately blind and deaf, should ever touch a volume by this author. (190)

Later in the same review, Poe asserts:

A fanatic of Mr. L.'s species is simply a fanatic for the sake of fanaticism, and must be a fanatic in whatever circumstances you place him.

His prejudices on the topic of slavery break out everywhere in his present book. Mr. L. has not the common honesty to speak well, even in a literary sense, of any man who is not a ranting abolitionist.

Apparently not satisfied with the *ad hominem* here, Poe shifts his strategy to another front. Always an issue with Poe was his belief in the unfairness of Northern reviewers to Southern writers (see Poe's review of Griswold's *Female Poets of America* in Chapt. 2, p. 2). On this point, Poe decided to attack Lowell further:

With the exception of Mr. Poe (who has written some commendatory criticisms on his poems) no Southerner is mentioned at all in this "Fable." It is a fashion among Mr. Lowell's set to affect a belief that there is *no such thing* as Southern Literature. Northerners—people who have really nothing to speak of as men of letters—are cited by the dozen and lauded by this candid critic without stint, while Legare, Simms, Longstreet, and others are passed by in contemptuous silence. Mr. L. cannot carry his frail honesty of opinion even so far South as New York. All whom he praises are Bostonians. Other writers are barbarians and satirized accordingly—if mentioned at all.

As this example illustrates, Poe was ready to use his pen, as Allston did his brush, to respond to Northern politics.

Though this brief example from Poe's criticism suggests little of Poe's politics other than the question of sectionalism, his views in other works are remarkably similar to Allston's. Both men were ready to engage what they perceived to be a threat in the "mob rule" of Jacksonian democracy. Also, Poe seems to have shared Allston's desire to preserve the Federalist and elitist notions brought from the plantation experience, which, in light of Jackson's agenda, highlight Poe's and Allston's undemocratic tendencies. The only difference in terms of their political voice in the North was that while both promulgated their views in their art, Poe stopped far short of the moralizing and didacticism evident in Allston's painting.

Poe's political views, as evident in the review of Lowell above, often appeared in his critical work. Since Poe was a journalist by trade, such an assertion is not surprising. What maybe surprising to some readers is Daniel Hoffman's critical reading of Poe's *fiction* which, Hoffman claims, presents some of Poe's most effective statements against democracy and the ruling mob of the middle class:

Being Edgar Allan Poe, he didn't write ordinary journalism or set forth his withering views of the democratic dogma in the customary form. For so to do would be to compromise the originality of his own aristocratic genius with the very forms and thoughts designed by catchpenny scribblers to tickle the vulgar palate of that demagogic monster, the masses. (189)

Hoffman believes that Poe wanted to avoid the straightforward presentation of his views in a form that the masses might be inclined to take too seriously. Poe used, as seen above with *Allston*, satire and metaphor to accomplish his political goals. Not only did this method of dealing with his undemocratic and elitist leanings satisfy his "aristocratic genius," it also protected him from angry readers or helped him to win readers in the first place; therefore, much of his political commentary—beyond the reviews—ends up being "political science fictions, send ups, and grotesques" (189).

For example, in his "Melonta Tauta" (1849), Poe demonstrates his dislike of democracy and the supposed "progress" it offered by projecting his readers into the future—to the year 2848. Writing from a pleasure excursion balloon (note the elitist tendency even in his setting), the character "Pundita" shares Poe's perspective and writes to a friend to alleviate her boredom. She composes seven letters and in the fifth reports her conversations with a fellow passenger who "can speak of nothing but antiquities." In one such conversation, her companion tried to convince her that

the ancient Amriccans *governed themselves!*—did ever anybody hear of such an absurdity? . . . . [A]fter the fashion of the "prairie dogs," . . . they started with the queerest idea conceivable, viz: that all men are born free and equal. . . . Every man "voted," as they called it—that is to say meddled with public affairs—until, at length, it was discovered that what is everybo-

dy's business is nobody's, and that the "Republic" (so the absurd thing was called) was without a government at all. (*Works* 4:327f.)

Pundita's reflections continue as she considers the "fraudulent schemes" that universal suffrage invites and as she asserts the "rascality" of "a fellow of the name *Mob*." She describes this man "Mob" as a "giant in stature—insolent, rapacious, filthy; [he] ha[s] the gall of a bullock with the heart of a hyena and the brains of a peacock." Pundita concludes her letter with the following assessment:

As for Republicanism, no analogy could be found for it upon the face of the earth—unless we except the case if the "prairie dogs," an exception which seems to demonstrate, if anything, that democracy is a very admirable form of government—for dogs. (329)

Though the irony and verbal play is purely Poe, the ideas reflected by his personae, "Pundita," echo the undemocratic and elitist ideals of Allston. The metaphor of "Mob" and the sense that chaos is loose in the land clearly mirror Allston's concern with Jefferson and his willingness to make *Belshazzar* a political allegory.

"Melonta Tauta" is not an isolated case in Poe's canon. Another example of the same anti-democratic notions is available in Poe's story, "Some Words with a Mummy" (1845). The tale centers on the awakening

of an ancient Egyptian mummy, Count Allamistakeo, who offers his perspective on the current politics of the North: the Count offers a parable about thirteen Egyptian provinces that by the practice of democratic principles wanted to "set up a magnificent example to the rest of mankind." Yet this noble experiment "was ended, however, in the consolidation of the thirteen states, with some fifteen or twenty others, in the most odious and insupportable despotism that was ever heard of upon the face of the earth." When asked the name of the despot that suspended the constitution of these democratic states, the Count says, "as well as [he] could recollect, it was *Mob*" (*Works* 2: 369).

Poe's lack of patience with democracy and its promise of reforming society emerges in his positions on other issues. As suggested in "Melonta Tauta," Poe sees little promise in the burgeoning feminist movement. First, the energetic and independent feminists such as Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody would have been an anathema to Poe and his conception of womanhood. Also, from Poe's perspective, feminists were disrupting the hierarchy of the natural aristocracy which he had embraced with his growing up in Richmond; they were a threat to what had been. Thus, regardless of his admiration of the writing of someone such as Fuller, he, nevertheless, had to challenge her, for she and her ilk shook the foundations of his beliefs.

In "The Literari," for example, the poet commends Fuller's review of Longfellow, then Poe offers his judgments on her book, *Women in the Nineteenth Century*. This book, he asserts, is one "which few women in the country could have written, and no woman in the country would have published, with the exception of Miss Fuller" (*Works* 8:76). Even though he does undoubtedly recognize Fuller's genius, Poe seizes this occasion to defend his own beliefs and to be a bit condescending at the same time. He continues in the discussion of her book by writing:

Not that [her ideas] are too bold, by any means—too novel, too startling, or too dangerous in their consequences, but that in their attainment too many premises have been distorted, too many analogical inferences left altogether out of sight. I mean to say that the intention of the Deity as regards sexual differences—an intention which can be distinctly comprehended only by throwing the exterior (more sensitive) portions of the mental retina *casually* over the wide field of universal *analogy*—I mean to say that this *intention* has not been sufficiently considered. Miss Fuller has erred, too, through her own excessive subjectiveness. She judges *woman* by the heart and intellect of Miss Fuller, but there are not more than one or two dozen Miss Fullers on the whole face of the Earth. (*Works* 8:76)

Aside from her potential threat to his idealized view of women and to his deeply seated Southern traditions, what may have disturbed Poe even more about Fuller was professional rivalry and her extreme liberalism. Perry Miller, in his introduction to Fuller's works, writes this about early American literary criticism: "Only a few of the better pieces of Edgar Allan

Poe can stand beside the body of her *Tribune* articles" (xii). Also, Miller asserts that as "the first working woman member of the `working press'" (xi), Fuller had placed herself at the forefront of democratic reform, and she often "proved herself one of the rigorous liberals of her age by criticizing most angrily the cowardice of liberals" (xxviii). These aspects of her professional life would probably have been enough to unsettle Poe.

In fact, Poe spent a good deal of his time and energy also denouncing the liberals of the North. Poe cherished his attacks on liberals, democrats, on any one faction that sought to challenge his aristocratic beliefs or what Ernest Marchand calls Poe's "deep-rooted sense of uniqueness, worth, and dignity . . ." (33). In the notice on *Men of Genius* in his *Marginalia*, Poe's entry seems autobiographical:

I have sometimes amused myself by endeavoring to fancy what would be the fate of an individual gifted or rather accursed, with an intellect *very* superior to that of his race. Of course, he would be conscious of his superiority; nor could he (if otherwise constituted as man is) help manifesting his consciousness. Thus he would make himself enemies all points. And since his opinions and speculations would widely differ from those of all mankind—that he would be considered a madman is evident. . . . Hell could invent no greater torture than that of being charged with abnormal weakness on account of being abnormally strong. (*Works* 7:270)

The rule of the "Mob," the feminist movement, his own sense of being an Ishmael in the land where he chose to work and to live, all of these events

conspired against his aristocratic beliefs and led Poe to write things that “[not] since Hamilton's ‘The people, sir, is a beast’ have [been] so antidemocratic, [and] so prejudicial . . . ” (Hoffman 191).

Poe's belief that democracy was little more than mob rule and that it usurped the natural order or structures of society was reflected in his attitudes toward one of the most divisive issues of his day: slavery. Here, as with his beliefs about the rigid plantation structure of dominance and control and the elitist and undemocratic perspectives he maintained, Poe is once again in concert with Allston's views.

As transplanted Southerners, Poe and Allston had first hand knowledge of both arguments on the issue of slavery, and each man had views that—on the surface—seem different but hold intact the Southern model of class distinctions in terms of gender and, in this case, race. Not only did each man during his life time have to deal directly with the question of slave ownership<sup>25</sup>, but both the poet and the painter responded to the pressures of the Abolitionist movement in a similar way—by taking the paternalistic position which was implicit in the hierarchy of the Southern plantation tradition.

Inherent in Allston's early life in Charleston was the nearly inflexible vision of class and social order that he maintained in spite of challenges brought to bear in his adopted home of the North. Bjelajac cites Allston's belief in self-improvement and one's ability to transcend class; however,

"[Allston] could never really discard his belief in a natural chain of being"

(53). According to Bjelajac, Allston

conceived the body politic in traditional, organic terms. Some people were the hands and feet of society, mechanically reproducing the material conditions of life, while others, the natural leaders of society, engaged in intellectual labor, reproducing the spiritual necessities of life.

Consequently, the responsibility of those who were the "natural leaders" was to care for those who were "the hands and feet." This manner of thinking appeared to explain a great deal of Allston's interactions with blacks and his position on slavery.

Even as early as his years at Newport, Allston was aware of the plight of blacks, and once again he turned to his art to help voice his political convictions. During this time Allston painted a portrait of a *Santa Domingo Black Boy*, "wearing a liberty cap, a refugee from a revolt on the Caribbean Island" (Gerdtz and Stebbins 13). Gerdtz and Stebbins comment that even though the "contemporaneity of the subject seems foreign to our understanding of the later Allston, his sympathy with the black, however, was long lasting." Bjelajac, on the other hand, counters Gerdtz and Stebbins assertion of Allston's long lasting sympathy with blacks. Pointing to the same picture, Bjelajac asserts that

While it is true that one of his early paintings was of a Santa Domingo black boy with a liberty cap (now lost), [Allston] apparently also represented the figure with a boot in one hand and a shoe brush in the other, performing a typically menial task. (52)

Gerdts and Stebbins overstate Allston's attitude, for if Bjelajac's information is correct, the best that can be said about Allston's "sympathy with the black" is that his sympathy is ambivalent: blacks may, at some time, acquire liberty, yet they will continue to be of the "hands and feet" of society and will need the benign watchfulness of society's "natural leaders." Allston's hierarchy of dominance and control, therefore, remained intact.

The question of Allston's attitude about slavery appears again when, later in his life and due to an inheritance, he became a slave owner. When Allston's stepfather, Dr. Henry Collins Flagg, died, he bequeathed a slave named Diana to Allston, who—according to Gerdts and Stebbins, "immediately sent her papers of manumission" (157). And later, in 1841 after his mother's death, Allston, his brother, his sister, and two others inherited slaves who had been with the family since his grandmother's generation. Because he was living in Cambridgeport at the time and his brother and sister remained in South Carolina, communication and transactions were time consuming.

In a letter dated 24 March 1841, Allston wrote to his friend and fellow artist in Charleston, John Cogdell, who had close ties to the Allston family (Flagg 208). Allston summarizes in this letter an earlier letter he had received from his brother William that detailed the disposition of the inherited slaves. Allston quotes his brother who wrote, "I agree with you that [the slaves] should not be separated if possible. . . , nor be sold to be carried out of the State" (qtd. in Flagg 308). The negotiations and directions Allston gives to Cogdell, who will act as Allston's broker, are somewhat confusing. Since the slaves were to be divided equally between five family members, and sixteen slaves were to be sold, Allston tells Cogdell that

the whole sixteen [should] be rated as the court has already decided, at \$550 each; my fifth part of the proceeds, say three (as to the fraction I give it in) slaves, would then be \$1,650. Well, instead of paying me this sum for my fifth, let [Mr. Belin, the prospective buyer] pay me but \$300. And, moreover, let this contract be entirely private between you and him. I wish no one to know anything about it, for it's nobody's business but mine. (qtd. in Flagg 309)

Allston adds that Cogdell

must not think the offer here proposed . . . too great a sacrifice. No, my friend, and I assure you, on the word of a gentleman and a Christian, were the sum ten times greater, I would rather relinquish it to effect the desired object. It has not cost me one moment's hesitation, I consider it in fact no sacrifice at all, for it will give me peace of mind, in order to do justice to the important work on which I am engaged.

Apparently after looking at this evidence, Gerdts and Stebbins can write that Allston "freely renounced his claim to his inheritance." Also they characterize Allston's concern over the "fate of the slaves" as "quite moving" (157). Though a \$1,300 dollar loss can be seen as a "sacrifice," the sum Allston was to recoup from the sale of his fifth of the 16 slaves is hardly a "renunciation." Also, Allston's motives seem to come from more than compassion. His allusion in the letter to Cogdell about his "important work" shows that Allston, quite simply, was too busy with the vain attempt to finish *Belshazzar* and, perhaps, with preparing his lectures, to bother with the slave sale. If Allston was so quick earlier in his life to send "papers of manumission" for the slave Diana, why did he not bother to emancipate the three who were his share?

Bjelajac also considers this question of Allston's dispensing with his inheritance of slaves. His assessment of Allston's attitude toward the issue of slave ownership differs markedly from Gerdts's and Stebbins's analysis. Bjelajac sees Allston's attitude as less than benevolent. Rather, he believes that the painter's treatment of this inheritance did not "contradict, but probably enhanced his sense of paternalism" (52). This assessment seems appropriate when, in the letter to Cogdell, Allston avers his actions are those of a "gentleman and a Christian." Note that Allston thinks of himself as a "gentleman" first and a "Christian" afterwards. Also, Bjelajac continues that "Acts of charitable benevolence were, after all, the special

responsibility of a ruling elite, particularly in reform-minded New England.”

Bjelajac's understanding of Allston's “benevolent” handling of his slaves seems accurate. That Allston enjoyed playing a paternal role and offering advice and guidance whenever the opportunity presented itself was well-known among his friends and family.<sup>26</sup> If, indeed, Allston's motivations were paternal, then they also were paradoxical: the appearance of his actions are belied by his motives. His actions toward his slaves come from his deeply-rooted plantation values of master to slave and not from enlightened social reform. Little doubt should remain that his paternal feelings were rooted, not only in the framework of control and dominance from the Southern plantation hierarchy, but also in the painter's belief in his own elitism. Thus, his actions, though driven by his Southern values, gave the appearance of his being in concert with the political and social milieu of the North. Allston, therefore, was fortunate in his handling of the slave question and was able to preserve his semblance of a “reform-minded” Bostonian. Poe was not so fortunate in his handling of the slavery issue.

Poe's position on the abolitionist reform is unambiguous. As shown in his review of Lowell cited earlier, the abolitionists were “fanatics.” Not all of his reviews, however, degenerated into *ad hominem* discourse. He would, on occasion, use his review both to point to the Northern bias concerning the slavery question and to justify slavery to its detractors. In

his review of *The South West*, by a "Yankee," which appeared in the February 1836 issue of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe commends this "Yankee" because the writer seemed to have "laid aside the general prejudices of a Yankee" (122). According to Poe, this author, who traveled to the Southwest to see for himself the nature of slavery, found it quite different from what he initially expected. Indeed, the author "has discovered . . . that while the physical condition of the slave is *not* what it has been represented, the slave himself is utterly incompetent to feel the *moral* galling of his chain." Poe finally praises this "Yankee" author for his "strict honesty, impartiality, and unprejudiced common sense on the trying subject which has so long agitated our community." Poe obviously cannot be similarly credited.

Poe reveals his attitudes in another review where he is supposedly criticizing two new books, but instead, spends most of the time building an elaborate scheme that is designed to justify slavery and assert "the will of God." In the April 1836 edition of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe in one review offers commentary on two books about slavery: J. K. Paulding's *Slavery in the United States* and an anonymous book titled *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists*. In the same manner as his reviews of Lowell and *The South West*, Poe seizes the opportunity to voice his position on slavery rather than review the books.

His review begins with a lengthy analogy about how the human mind, like comets, may be attracted by one sun, then another. The two "suns" that Poe establishes for the "comet" of the human mind are fanaticism and irreligiosity. These two "suns" attract the human mind away from its true course, which is the pursuit of happiness and the acquisition of property. When either of these two "suns" exerts its influence, "property and all governmental machinery provided to guard it, become insecure" (337).

Poe sees this threat to the security of property having already occurred in English and French history. He points to Cromwell's "revolution" and to the French Revolution as examples of how the "eccentric comet" of the human mind can be swayed by the influence of fanaticism so that "public sentiment" swells up and makes the cry " 'Turn the fat bigots out of their sties, sell the property. . . , and let all things be in common.' " In both instances of this threat to humanity, the rallying cry has been "liberty" and "the first object of attack was property in slaves. . . ."

Recent events in the West Indies<sup>27</sup> and in the United States, Poe continues,

give an awful importance to these thoughts in our minds. They superinduce a something like despair of success in any attempt that may be made to resist the attack on all our rights, of which that on Domestic Slavery (the basis of all our institutions) is but the precursor.

Thus, after several lines of rationalization, the heart of Poe's argument becomes evident: a threat to slavery is a threat to all Americans' freedom, for this current debate masks "the lawless appetite of the multitude" who have fallen sway to the influence of the "sun" of fanaticism.

At the risk of losing sight of his purpose to review two books on slavery, Poe now expresses his gratitude to Paulding, "a Northern man [and] the faithful picture he has drawn of slavery as it appeared in his visit to the South" (338). Poe also commends the other book, which he "take[s] to be from a Southern pen." This book, in contrast to Paulding's, seems

more calculated to excite our indignation against the calumnies which have been put forth against [the South], and the wrongs meditated by those who come to us in the names of our common Redeemer and common country—seeking out destruction under the mask of Christian Charity and Brotherly Love.

But after this relatively brief interlude concerning the books he is to be reviewing, Poe moves on to a further defense of slavery on, ironically, moral grounds. He speaks of "the moral influences flowing from the relation of master and slave, and the moral feelings engendered and cultivated by [this relation]." He cites a "correspondent" Paulding used in his book who "justly speaks of this relation [between master and slave] as one partaking the patriarchal character, and much resembling that of clanship."

After this assertion, Poe turns to the Abolitionist argument which asserts that blacks, "like ourselves, [are] the sons of Adam, and must therefore, have like passions and wants and feelings and tempers in all respects." He refutes this Abolitionist view saying:

This [likeness], we deny, and appeal to the knowledge of all who know. But their authority will be disputed, and testimony falsified, unless we can devise something to show how a difference might and should have been brought about. Our theory is a short one. It was the will of God it should be so. But the means—how was this effected? We will give the answer to any one who will develop the causes which might and should have blackened the negro's skin and crisped his hair into wool. Until that is done, we shall take leave to speak, as of things *in esse*, in a degree of loyal devotion on the part of the slave to which the white man's heart is a stranger, and of the master's reciprocal feeling of *parental attachment* [emphasis added] to his humble dependent, equally incomprehensible to him who drives a bargain with the cook who prepares his food, the servant who waits at his table, and the nurse who dozes over the sick bed. That these sentiments in the breast of the negro, and his master, are stronger than they would be under like circumstances between individuals of the white race, we believe. That [these sentiments] belong to the class of feelings "by which the heart is made better," we know. (338f.)

This seemingly idyllic relationship between the master and his slave echoes Allston's and the Southern plantation owner's system of control and dominance, as well as the "natural leader's" moral obligation to care for the "hands and feet" of society. Poe, as Allston, reflects the responsibility toward blacks that was felt by the educated and the aristocratic men of the South who saw this "parental attachment" in terms of protection. Thus,

Allston's paternalism manifests itself in his monetary "sacrifice," while Poe's appears in this long argument which concludes "that in continuing to command the services of their slaves, [the owners] violate no law divine or human, and that in the *faithful discharge of their obligations* lies [the owners'] *true duty*" [emphasis added] (339).

In yet another review in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, this one of Robert Montgomery Bird's novel *Shepherd Lee*, Poe again sets forth his conviction on the relationship between the slave owner and his slaves. The focus for Poe's comments here is one of Bird's characters, a black named Jim Jumble, who is steadfastly loyal to the son of his previous master and who refuses to be set free. Poe summarizes the relationship in this manner:

Having some scruples of conscience about holding a slave, and thinking him of no value whatever, but, on the contrary, a great deal of trouble, our hero [Shepherd Lee] decides upon setting him free. The old fellow, however, bursts into a passion, swears he will not be free, that Mr. Lee is his master and shall take care of him, and that if he dares to set him free he will have the law of him. . . . (663)

Thus, Poe pulls from Bird's novel words from a slave's own mouth that support Poe's understanding of the relationship between master and slave. In the case of Jim Jumble, Jim's recourse to preserve the relationship is man's law, unlike Poe's assertion of "God's will." Yet in either case, the

intent is the same: the hierarchy remains intact and the status quo between black and white is preserved.

Vernon Louis Parrington's comment that Poe took from the South "what was bad rather than good" (55) seem confirmed by Poe's views on slavery catalogued above. Ernest Marchand ties Poe's bringing the "bad" with him to the same source that shaped Poe's attitude toward women, the Southern plantation life:

Just as [he] received his views on women as a gift of his time and place, so Poe revealed his views on slavery and swallowed them whole, unseasoned by criticism. He brings to the defense of the South's peculiar institution the same rationalizations that issued from a thousand Southern pulpits every Sunday and from a thousand Southern presses every day of the week for more than twenty years. (37)

Marchand underscores a provocative irony, an irony that is also evident in Allston, in Poe's life and works. For Poe, a man who created his own aesthetic, constructed his own philosophy and his own cosmology, and was as cerebral as anyone of his day, his defense of slavery and his apparent unwillingness to bring to it the same careful examination he seemed to bring to everything else can be understood only within the context of the plantation hierarchy and the deeply rooted values it established in him.

Besides his reviews, Poe's fiction also tells something of his seeming unwillingness to bring critical attention to the debate on slavery. Several

black characters in his fiction confirm the ideas expressed in reviews. As in the reviews, careful readers will see that Poe's attitude toward blacks is once more essentially the same as Allston's—paternalistic. Campbell, in his article "Poe's Treatment of the Negro and of the Negro Dialect," summarizes Poe's presentation of blacks in this way:

The trait of the negro slave which Poe makes most of both in tales and in his reviews is that of the negro's loyalty and faithfulness to his master. It is his picture of this trait . . . that he makes most of whenever he attempts any characterization of the negro. (114)

Poe, then, like Robert Montgomery Bird, William Gilmore Simms, and even Northerner James Fenimore Cooper, characterized blacks in their fiction as not only loyal and faithful, but as the passage Poe cites from *Shepherd Lee* above illustrates, hapless. In Poe's fiction, blacks are never seen as anything but slaves. His most notable black characters are Jupiter in "The Gold Bug" (1843) and Pompey, who appears in, perhaps, three stories: "How to Write a *Blackwood* Article" (1838), its sequel "A Predicament" (1838), and "The Man that Was Used Up" (1839). Also, according to Campbell, black men are mentioned in the stories "The Journals of Julius Rodman" (1840), "The Elk" (1844), and "The Spectacles" (1844) ("Negro" 107f.). In every case where Poe refers to blacks, Campbell is convinced that

Poe means "the negro slave in America, either . . . the negro in bondage in the South or to slavery in the abstract" (108).

Of all of these depictions, perhaps Jupiter is the clearest example of the qualities Poe saw in blacks: the faithful, but somewhat hapless, servant to his paternalistic master. At times, the portrait of the relationship between "Jup" and his master Legrand seems to challenge Poe's description of the relationship as "parental attachment." For example, Legrand calls "Jup" an "infernal scoundrel" (*Works* 3:26) and an "infernal black villain" (32). "Jup," in return, tells the narrator (and the readers) that he "had a big stick ready cut for to gib [Legrand] a d—d good beating when he did come—but Ise sich a fool dat I hadn't de heart arter all—he look so berry poorly" (13). This sort of repartee between master and slave notwithstanding, Jupiter exemplifies the loyalty that Poe was convinced lay at the heart of a master/slave relationship. "Jup," regardless of his threat to give Legrand "a d—d good beating," still accompanies his master and the narrator on their trip into the forest and does, without question, Legrand's bidding to carry tools, climb out on limbs, muzzle dogs, and dig holes. This portrait of the master/slave relationship certainly parallels Allston's conviction that blacks belong to the "hands and feet of society."

Pompey, Poe's other prominent black character, is more difficult to assess mainly because of his limited appearance in two of his three stories. Certainly, however, Poe seems to be casting Pompey as a more refined,

more domesticated version of Jupiter. In the first story, Pompey is mentioned in passing, along with a "little-lap dog Diana," as escorts to the narrator/ heroine, Signora Psyche Zenobia, who has gone to Edinboro looking for "difficulty, pursuant to [Mr. Blackwood's] advice" from which she will compose an article for *Blackwood's Magazine* (*Works* 4:256)—that follows.

In the sequel, Pompey follows his mistress about the city while readers are treated to Psyche's careful following of Mr. B.s' advice about a successful *Blackwood* article. The story culminates with Psyche climbing into the belfry of a gothic cathedral so she can attain a more panoramic view of the city. There, Pompey and Psyche are put into a burlesque skit where Pompey trips and falls on top of Psyche. Angered by his striking her "full in the—in the breast" and their falling—with him atop her—"upon the hard, filthy, and detestable floor of the belfry," Psyche exerts a revenge that

was sure, sudden, and complete. Seizing him furiously by the wool with both hands, I tore out a vast quantity of the black, and crisp, curling material and tossed it from me with every manifestation of disdain. It fell among the ropes of the belfry and remained. Pompey arose, and said no word. But regarded me piteously with his large eyes and—sighed. Ye gods—that sigh! It sunk into my heart. And the hair—the wool! Could I have reached the wool I would have bathed it with my tears, in testimony of regret. But alas! it was now far beyond my grasp. As it dangled among the cordage of the bell, I fancied it still alive. I fancied that it stood on end with indignation. (262f.)

In the midst of this comic scene, Poe's vision of the relationship between master and slave is evident. Though the whole tale is intended as a sham, this episode describing Psyche's remorse for her anger and mistreatment of Pompey is consistent with Poe's accounts from the more serious reviews. Clearly, Psyche's remorse arises from a serious notion—though presented in purple prose—concerning the obligation of an owner of slaves to maintain the appropriate “paternal attachment.”

Campbell looks at this episode and explains it in terms of Poe's treating blacks with “good-natured contempt” (112). Admittedly, readers can take Psyche's last lines, apparently uttered miraculously from her severed head,—“Dogless, niggerless, headless, what *now* of unhappy Signora Psyche Zenobia”—as “good-natured contempt.” However, in light of Poe's reviews, another reading presented by the ending is obvious: Psyche's losing first her eyes and then her head suggests that Pompey's mistreatment exacts a quick justice. Psyche's insensitivity to Pompey and her failure to recognize her paternal role as a slave owner is perhaps reason enough for Poe's chosen ending—after conceding that his primary intent was to lampoon *Blackwood's Magazine*.

In “The Man that Was Used Up” the relationships also maintain the status quo between master and slave; each knows his role and place in society and each is aware of his obligation to the other. Here, Pompey, as in “The Predicament,” is the faithful servant. His duties for General A. B.

C. Smith are similar to the duties he performed for Psyche. Pompey helps to maintain the general's appearance as a dashing veteran of some obscure war in spite of Smith's being "used up," that is, he is nothing more in his "undressed state" than "a large and exceedingly odd-looking bundle of something [lying] . . . on the floor" (*Works* 4:66).

Again, as in "The Predicament," Campbell's assessment of the relationship between Pompey and General Smith may be understood as "good natured contempt." Yet, in light of Poe's strong sentiments in his reviews about the institution of slavery being the foundation of Southern society, a metaphoric reading of the theme suggests itself: the South, like General Smith, exists in a reciprocal relationship with the institution of slavery. The white male affects the air of the gentleman and, when possible, engages himself in his role as the natural leader of society, while the black slave functions as "the hands and feet . . . reproducing the material conditions of life"] (Bjelajac *op. cit.*). If the slave, in this case Pompey, is absent, nothing remains of the general—or as Poe seems to be suggesting—of the South as a political entity. In this story, therefore, just as the reviews and the other tales have already illustrated, Poe makes his position clear: he sees a threat to the Southern plantation hierarchy of white male dominance in the abolitionist movement, he is a staunch defender of the institution of slavery; and he fervently believes that any erosion of the right to own slaves or any abrogation of the moral responsibility to interact

appropriately with slaves threatens the fundamental structures of Southern society.

Both Poe's and Allston's experiences of the Southern plantation shaped their later attitudes and art. This shaping influence comes into sharp relief when the two make the North their adopted homes because both were essentially foreigners there and both were forced by this circumstance to either modify or defend their deeply rooted Southern ideologies. One way the poet and the painter chose to cope with the tensions of living in the North was to simply isolate themselves in an attempt to preserve their gentlemanly aloofness and to better fix their understanding of the role of the artist in America. Though choosing to isolate themselves to protect their Southern values and their art, both took opportunity while living and working in the North to incorporate these very ideals into their art—either as value system from which they understood the world or as a source of invention for their expression.

The challenge to class distinctions brought about by the advance of democracy in the industrialized North was, for both men, provocation for response. On Allston's canvasses and Poe's pages the threat that democracy and its proponents posed to the orderly society of the Southern plantation hierarchy was exposed a loss of morality, the growth of materialism, or the advent of political anarchy.

Each retained much of what the South had taught him and as the pressures of sectionalism increased in the first half of the nineteenth century, each found himself having, in some way, to take a stand on the issue of slavery. For both, the Southern engendered paternalism was the source for their beliefs and their artistic response to this divisive issue.

Both the painter and the poet, therefore, had to reconcile one of the basic tensions in art: on one hand, for Poe and Allston, art was communication and shared experience; yet, on the other hand, art was seen as intensely personal. The following chapter will look at how both of these men drew on their past and looked at their present experiences in the North to carefully shape theories they believed would explain why they did as they did. Thus, an examination of their aesthetic theories will further illustrate that, as transplanted Southerners, as products of the Southern plantation ideologies, and as thinkers who regularly incorporated these experiences into their work, the prospect of Poe and Allston having parallel lives becomes more apparent.



Fig. 2.1 Man in Chains by Washington Allston (1800).  
Richardson, WA Plate III.



Fig. 2.2 Portrait of Thomas Jefferson  
by Charles Wilson Peale (1791).  
George Hornby, ed. The Great Americana  
Scranbook. New York: Crown, 1985: 136.



Fig. 2.3 Portrait of Thomas Jefferson  
by Rembrandt Peale (1800).  
Malone op cit: frontispiece.



Fig. 2.4 A life mask of Jefferson  
made the year before his death.  
Hornby op cit: 139.



Man in Chains (See Fig.2.1) detail.



Fig. 2.6 Le code Napoléon couronné par le Temps (detail)  
by Jean Baptiste Mauzaisse (1833). Encyclopedia Larousse.



Fig. 2.5 Portrait of Andrew Jackson by John Wesley Jarvis  
(1819). Hornby op cit: 153.

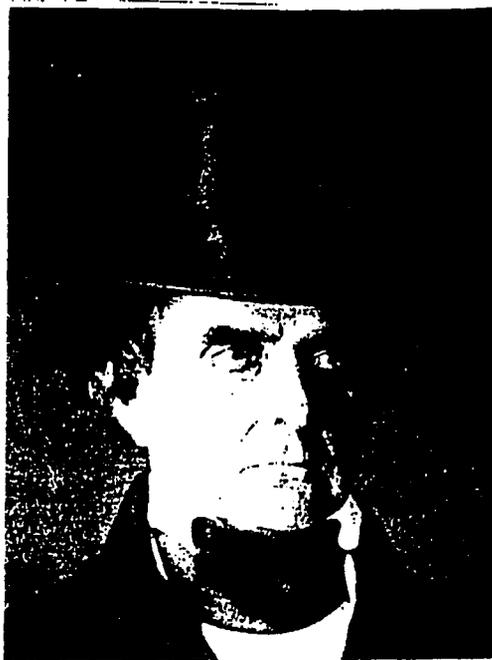


Fig. 2.8 Photograph of Daniel Webster  
(date unknown).

Hornby op cit:250.



Belshazzar's Feast (See Fig. 2.7) detail.



Fig. 2.9. John Wilkes: a caricature by Hogarth, "drawn from life" (1763). David Bind man. Hogarth. London: Thames and Hudson, 1981: Plate 163.



Fig. 2.10. "The Bruiser C. Churchill (once the Reverend!) in the Character of a Russian Hercules..." (1763). Bindman op cit: Plate 164.

## CHAPTER II CONTENT NOTES

<sup>1</sup>According to Arthur Hobson Quinn, Poe left Richmond for the first time in March 1827 after having attended the University of Virginia and found that his engagement to Sarah Elmira Royster had been broken by her parents (116). Poe made several return trips to Richmond: after being discharged from the Army in 1827 (119); Poe returned to Richmond sometime between December 1829 and May 1830 while he was working for an appointment to West Point (166). After his discharge from West Point, he lived for a while in New York and Baltimore. Then, in August 1835, he assumed a position as editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond and remained there until 1837. After his dismissal from the *Messenger*, Poe did not return to Richmond until after undertaking a lecture tour which brought him back in July 1848 (568). He came back to Richmond one last time in 1849. This visit lasted several months during which time he delivered a series of successful lectures and visited some old friends. His last lecture was delivered on 24 September 1849 (635).

<sup>2</sup>G. R. Thompson, in his article "Edgar Allan Poe and the Writers of the Old South," makes the point that during Poe's editorship, *The Southern*

*Literary Messenger* began its campaign to promote the cause of Southern Writers. He asserts:

As the most enduring of the Southern magazines (1834-1864), *The Messenger* also reflects the shift away from the accommodation with the North. In its early years, it actively sought contributions from Northern writers and maintained a moderating position on Northern and Southern difference on the issue of slavery. Its pages featured certain insistent themes: the beauty of the Southern landscape; the history of idealism and chivalry in the Southern people; the rightness of Southern institutions. Another theme appeared early: the need for a professional class of men of letters to awaken the genius of the South. (262)

Poe's encouragement of Southern writers and his sometimes uneven assessment of the literature they produced are evidence of his investment in this cause.

While at *The Messenger* Poe reviewed a number of works by Southern writers. Several of the most notable of these are August Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes, Characters, and Incidents in the First Half Century of the Republic*. In his review, written in April 1836, Poe writes that the author "is a clever fellow, imbued with the spirit of the truest humor, and endowed, moreover, with an exquisitely discriminative and penetrating understanding of character in general, and of Southern character in particular" (287). Poe concludes his review by asserting that this book is

"very humorous" and "clever," and it provides "a sure omen of better days for the literature of the South" (289).

Poe also admired the work of South Carolina writer William Gilmore Simms. Poe reviewed Simms's *The Partisan: A Tale of the Revolution* in *The Messenger* of January 1836. Even though he had trouble with some of Simms's "manifold blunders and impertinences," Poe praised the work for its "historical details . . . replete with interest" (121). Poe reviewed another by Simms, *The Wigwam and the Cabin*, for the *Godey's Lady's Book* in January 1846 offering his best overall evaluation of Simms's works. Note that in spite of Simms's literary errors, he is still pronounced a literary genius:

The "bad taste" of the "Border Beagles" [an early novel by Simms] was more particularly apparent in "The Partisan," "The Yemassee" and one or two other of the author's earlier works, and displayed itself most offensively in a certain fondness for the purely disgusting or repulsive, where the intention was or should have been merely horrible. . . . His English, too, was, in his efforts, exceedingly objectionable—verbose, involute, and not infrequently ungrammatical. . . . Neither was he at this period particularly dexterous in the conduct of his stories. His improvement, however, was rapid at all of these points, although, on the two first counts of our indictment there is still abundant room for improvement. But whatever may have been his early defects, or whatever his present errors, there can be no doubt that from the very beginning he gave evidence of genius and of no common order. (121)

Poe gave favorable reviews to Southerner Robert Montgomery Bird for his novels *Infidel*, *The Messenger*, vol. 1; *Shepherd Lee*, *The Messenger*, vol. 2; and *Hawks of Hawk Hollow*, vol. 2. In *Graham's Magazine*, he favorably reviewed two other Simms's novels —*Confession*, vol. 19 and *Beauchampe*, vol. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Gerdts and Stebbins, in their *The Art of Washington Allston*, say that after his death in 1843, Allston's reputation was maintained primarily through exhibitions in and around the Boston area. *Belshazzar's Feast* had an annual showing at the Boston Athenaeum and sometimes it was shown with other works loaned by private owners or by Martha Dana Allston. In 1850, 49 of Allston's works were shown, most of these loaned by private owners for this occasion which, as Gerdts and Stebbins believe, served as a memorial exhibition to the painter.

Throughout the 1850s, 1860s, and early 1870s, Allston's work was shown intermittently in the Athenaeum. Also, exhibitions were held in 1863 in the Boston Sanitary Fair and in the galleries of the Boston Art Club in the Massachusetts Centennial Exhibition. During this period of two or three decades, the Athenaeum continued to increase its Allston collection with the purchase of *The Student* in 1855 and the donation of two early landscapes and Allston's rendering of the *Casket Scene* the *Merchant of Venice*. In 1870, one of Allston's best early works, *Elijah in the Desert*, was acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

In 1881, however, following an exhibition of the work of another noted Boston painter, Gilbert Stuart, the Boston Museum decided to exhibit over 100 drawings and paintings from Allston in tribute to Boston's artistic heritage (163).

Richardson notes that Allston's reputation during his lifetime was at its zenith in the first half of the century, not only in America but in Europe also. He writes that by a "common consent of most Americans, Allston was considered the greatest painter we had produced" (WA 1). However, in the second half, when the Realist of American art launched a successful battle against the Romantic Idealists, Allston was "considered a charming person but a personal failure" (2). This belief was held, according to Richardson, by those "much-traveled Americans who represent international culture of the closing decades of the nineteenth century" and who were not concerned with Boston's loyalties to its artistic heritage.

<sup>4</sup>The reasons why Allston did not complete what was to be his masterwork, *Belshazzar's Feast*, are numerous and wide-ranging. Countless art critics and devotees have spent hundreds of hours speculating on what specific circumstance or blend of circumstances created what is for some commentators one of the most colossal failures in American art. Arguments here seem to fall in essentially four categories: some attribute its incompleteness to the rapid change in American art from 1817 when "Bel" was begun until 1843 when Allston died. The shift in invention from

religious and historical canvasses to romantic revelry, landscapes, and genre scenes—coupled with the desire of America to establish its own art tradition that was distinct from the influence of the Old Masters and from Europe, left little room for Allston's method. "Bel" was to be a "sermon in paint, an expression of the evangelical spirit sweeping antebellum America, admonishing the viewer to repent and reform before the sudden and unexpected arrival of death" (Bjelajac 3).

However, with this new art tradition emerging, a new "religious" response was emerging also. With the advent of Transcendentalism and Unitarianism and the move away from the sterner Puritan beliefs which focused on the Old Testament God of wrath and vengeance, the message carried in Allston's painting was losing its impact on its audience. In effect, "Bel" was a painting that outlasted its time.

A second category of speculation arises from an understanding of Allston's temperament. Not only was he a perfectionist, but he was given to whimsical indulgences and as he aged, these two traits became exaggerated. Art historian Frederick Sweet comments on Allston's constant but futile attempts to perfect "Bel":

Allston was overly preoccupied with the *Belshazzar* to complete many other canvasses. He drew in figures only to become dissatisfied, paint them out, and start over again. Gilbert Stuart, who, as a crotchety old man, was living out his last days in Boston, criticized the drawing in the picture, thus heaping further discouragement on Allston's already distracted

soul. Everyone awaited anxiously a view of the great masterpiece, but the more people clamored, the more secretive he became until he reached the point of hiding it from everyone. The picture became at once a fetish and a tormentor, dominating his life, reducing him to a state of inescapable moroseness. (22)

Bjelajac joins with Sweet's assessment and finds evidence to support his view in the sermon of a Unitarian minister, a Reverend C. A. Bartol, who based a sermon on Allston's *Belshazzar* entitled "Perfection." The sermon, according to Bjelajac, questioned how Allston expected to perfect such a sublime and exalted conception. Bartol used Allston's failure as an example against the "theology of perfectionism, espoused by some of the more radical revivalist preachers and Transcendentalist philosophers" (18). However, the irony of "Bel" is what Allston demonstrated to other artists through his dedication. Not only did he insist that his labor, and consequently, his perfection of it, was intellectual in nature, but in his painstakingly obsession with "correctness" of color, perspective, and intent, he insured his own martyrdom to the canvass. Also, Bjelajac points out "[Allston's] refusal to compromise the artistic principles he had gleaned from his education in Europe was implicit criticism of American anti-intellectualism and common sense materialism" (144).

The third and most often cited reason for *Belshazzar's* incompleteness is the climate of Boston or America as a stifling environment for its artists.

Van Wyck Brooks in *The Flowering of New England* explains that Allston "wrote his poems and nursed his dreams of Titian under a cold and distant sky" (165). Brooks describes the climate of New England a detrimental to the likes of Allston, even though the artist claimed much attentions from its inhabitant. Brooks expands his case:

Cambridge was [a] depressing place for painters. Even more to the point was the want of criticism, or rather the quality of criticism, along with various other deprivations. The people who adored poor Allston's genius said that he made his women much too plump. These intimations of carnality disturbed their quiet minds. They did not like their limbs to be flesh and blood, they liked their limbs to be metaphysical, though how one was to another Titian *without* the carnal reminder,—and they wished to think that Boston had produced the last great man of the Renaissance,—might have puzzled even the metaphysicians. This would have mattered less if Boston had given Allston a few carnal models; but, wherever he turned for a model, he only found another metaphysician. Everyone talked metaphysics, everyone praised the artist because his work was metaphysical. . . . His mind bathed in the fluid mist, grew thinner and thinner every day. (166)

Brooks's assessment of Allston's "failure" is shared by such men as James Russell Lowell, Horatio Greenough, William Wetmore Story, and Henry James (see n. 9 below). Other opinions, however, do not concur with Brooks's assessment. Thomas W. Leavitt and Joy Kasson believe that Allston's "tragedy" was not so much due to lack of attention, but rather from *too much*. The pressure that was placed on him by the Allston Trust

and the public attention—and the press—were the precipitating factors that led to his inability to complete “Bel” (see Leavitt 13 and Kasson 68).

The fourth category of speculation surrounding “Bel’s” incompleteness is aesthetic. Richardson believes that “the very nature of romantic art” demands that the painting remain indefinite and, therefore, more open to subjective interpretation (124). Coleridge may have fashioned the example for his friend in the fragmentary nature of many of his works, such as “Kubla Kahn” and “Christabel.” In an article in the *American Quarterly Review* published in 1836, Coleridge is challenged for his “lack of commonality” and the fact that he seems remote from the “doings of the world.” His obscurity, the writer believes, is the result of delicate and indistinct associations which were “peculiar with him” (qtd. in Charvat 81f.). That Allston might have been capable of the same “indistinct associations” in trying to render such a sublime subject in visual form and ultimately realized that his aspirations outstripped his executive ability is quite possible. Bjelajac seems to think that whether Allston actually finished the painting or not mattered little to the painter. The unfinished or fragmentary nature of the painting “would become an emblem of the aching void within the heart which never could be filled on earth” (188). Lastly, had Allston finished the painting, it certainly would not have received the critical attention that it has today.

<sup>5</sup>As an American painter, Allston was fortunate in that he met with some success in acquiring patrons among both the wealthy and the titled while in London. However, at times, their dealings with him do not always appear fair. Allston considered his friend and correspondent Sir George Beaumont among “one of the most important of his English patrons” even though as Kasson remarks, “Beaumont's support consisted primarily of encouraging words rather than commissions” (52). Flagg cites one case that illustrates the unfairness of patrons such as Beaumont. Allston painted for Beaumont his religious canvass, *The Angel Liberating St. Peter from Prison* for 200 pounds, but Flagg states that “five hundred pounds even at that time would have been only a fair price” (91). Coleridge, too, joins with Flagg in pointing to the unfair treatment of Allston at the hands of his British patrons. In a letter to mutual friends, Coleridge writes that Allston was “cruelly used” by the likes of Beaumont, Benjamin West, and others in London. He goes on to express this anger at the “excessive meanness of patrons” and their “malignant envy & brutality of the Race of Painters” (*Letters* 3: 534).

Though misused by his British patrons, Allston still experienced their requests for commissions after his leaving England for America. According to Flagg, Lord Morpeth, who visited Allston on a trip to Boston in 1841, requested another painting from Allston on behalf of Morpeth's sister, the Duchess of Sutherland who had purchased *Urtiel in the Sun*. But even the

temptation of a 5000 pound commission could not be seduce Allston to delay his work on *Belshazzar*. Flagg writes that Allston's response to Morpeth's request was "I would not undertake to paint a picture for any crowned head in Christendom till *Belshazzar's Feast* is finished" (qtd. in Flagg 350).

These two cases show that although misused by patrons, Allston, had he remained in England, would have been able to support himself comfortably—though at what cost to his principles is difficult to estimate. Perhaps in returning to America in 1818, he had read the "handwriting on the wall" for himself and had noted what the future prospects were for American artists in London. Kasson writes, "with the waning of royal patronage, Benjamin West had begun to exhibit his paintings as an independent enterprise. . . ." Meanwhile, the situation of [Benjamin] Haydon [another painter who lived in constant struggle with poverty], who was falling ever more deeply into debt despite the success of *The Judgment of Solomon* in 1814, provided a sobering lesson to Allston (53). This lesson, in contrast to the apparent livelihood Allston may have maintained while staying in London, may well have been another of the contributing factors to his decision to return to America.

<sup>6</sup>Gulian Verplank (1786-1870) was a New York lawyer, journalist, politician, and author who provides a link between Allston and Poe. Allston first met Verplank in London in 1817, and they met again in Paris. The

friendship and correspondence between the two lasted some 25 years. Allston often served as a sounding board for Verplank, offering advice and encouragement. For example, in a letter to Verplank from Allston, dated 12 March 1819, the painter writes that he has just read his friend's *Discourses and Addresses on Subjects of American History, Arts and Literature*. Allston evidently had a good deal of respect for this work and writes,

Now that your pen is resumed, I hope that you will not soon lay it aside. We want some good books on national subjects and you have shown yourself equal to the task of supplying them (qtd. in Flagg 149)

The extent of the relationship between Verplank and Allston is further illustrated by Verplank's dedication of his *Essays on the Nature and Uses of the Various Evidences of Revealed Religion* (1824) to the painter (Gerdtz and Stebbins 138). Allston responds to the dedication by writing to Verplank,

I read your book . . . with more than pleasure, I trust with spiritual profit; many of the arguments appeared to me new; the whole I thought cogent and eloquent. Also to the dedication; I could wish I had better deserved it; at any rate, I am grateful for its kindness. (qtd. in Flagg 215)

Note the discussion earlier in this chapter of Allston's correspondence with Verplank in relation to the Rotunda panel commission.

Poe's estimate of Verplank's work seems to echo Allston's estimation. In "The Literati," Poe writes that Verplank's reputation has been established "less from what he has done than from what he has given indication of his ability to do" (*Works* 8: 39). Verplank's scholarship, Poe believes, is "respectable" and his "taste and acumen are not to be disputed." Poe also notes Verplank's "legal acquirements" and writes that when in Congress

he was noted as the most industrious man in that assembly, and acted as a walking register or volume of reference, ever at the service of that class of legislators who are too lofty-minded to burden themselves with mere business particulars or matters of fact. (8:40)

Furthermore, evidence in "The Literati" suggests that Poe had met Verplank, even though Quinn does not record such a meeting. Poe describes Verplank in detail, making remarks that only an acquaintance could make: "[Verplank's] eyes [are] dark blue, with what seems, to a casual glance, a sleepy expression—but they gather light and fire as we examine them."

Under what circumstances these observations were made is not known. Poe concludes his remarks on Verplank by stating that "Altogether, his person, intellect, tastes, and general peculiarities bear a very striking resemblance to those of the late Nicholas Biddle" (40), a politician and banker who believed in a strong national bank and who courageously

challenged the Jackson administration on the matter. The reference is, no doubt, a compliment.

<sup>7</sup>At various intervals in his life Allston found himself admitting to or defending himself against the charge of indolence. Early in his life is evidence of this indolent tendency. For example, in a letter to his tutor in Newport, Robert Rogers, dated 28 October 1797, Allston readily admits to his fault:

It is my greatest misfortune to be too lazy, and by few mortifications I have already met with on that account I predict many evils in my future life. I have always the inclination to do what I ought; but by continually procrastinating for tomorrow the business of to-day [sic], I sensibly delay, until at the end of the month I find myself in the same place where I began it. (qtd. in Flagg 17)

Gerdts and Stebbins attribute Allston's infrequent visits to see his family as a result of this character flaw. Ship voyages from Boston to Charleston were "relatively fast" although they were hazardous. Allston's last trip to South Carolina was made in 1800 with the intent of claiming patrimony and seeing his ill step-father. The only other visit Allston had with his mother was when, in advanced age, she journeyed as far as New Haven to meet him. Gerdts and Stebbins note:

Rather for all his youthful enthusiasm and worldly charm, Allston had already developed a reticent nature, which

manifested itself in hesitation, long deliberations, and ultimately, an inability to bring many a project to completion. (23)

This notion speaks for itself concerning the incomplete state of *Belshazzar*.

Further evidence of Allston's tendency toward indolence may be culled from his letters where he often apologizes for his hesitation to respond to correspondence. Such an example appears in a letter to Charles Leslie, dated 20 May 1830:

So many things must have been done in the Art since you last wrote, that I begin to feel not a little impatient for some account of them but as I have so long owed you a letter, I have no right to expect one from you till I pay my debts; so I must e'en lazy as I am, write you. (qtd, in Flagg 165)

And to John Knapp, Allston writes 28 July 1803, and apologizes for the delay of his response:

My silence, I dare say, you will attribute to laziness, and you know me to well to expect that I shall deny it; you will therefore excuse me if I do not attempt a thorough vindication. (qtd. in Flagg 49)

And from his friend Verplank, Allston receives the following on 19 May 1819: "I have been intending for the last fortnight to answer your kind letter, but I fear you have communicated to me some portion of your spirit of procrastination" (qtd. in Flagg 153).

However, the most public and for Allston the most painful confrontation of his "laziness" came from comment made by William Dunlap in his *History*. Dunlap offers the following statement in his account of his interview with Allston:

It has been said of Mr. Allston that when, in London, he had produced a picture of great effect, he did not follow it up. The public heard no more of him for years. That the time he threw away in smoking his cigar, and delighting his friends with conversation and delightful stories . . . should have been employed in keeping up, by a successions of efforts, the name he had obtained. . . . I would not be the excuser of late hours at night even with temperance, and the waste of heaven's light by appropriating the day to sleep; but I can feel for a mind and frame like Allston's, and though I regret that much of his time has been spent without pencil in hand, I do not believe they time wasted which appeared to be spent in idleness—such mind are never idle. (2:333f.)

Allston took offense at Dunlap's public exposure of his personal habits and wrote the following to Dunlap on 20 March 1835:

At present I will only point out one [error]—the only important one—which is contained in the last paragraph but one, which but only two grains of truth; namely that I smoked and sat up late; the rest, that is, what is supposed to have been connected with these habits, is not true. You must not think that I am here wincing at the mention of my faults. I know that I have faults enough and to spare, and what is more, I have long learned to bear the mention of them. But the fault imputed to me by inference, in this paragraph, is really not mine. (qtd. in Flagg 277)

Whatever part Allston's procrastination might have played in *Belshazzar's* incompleteness is still open to speculation; however, I believe Bjelajac errs in attributing the painting's failure to this one circumstance.

<sup>8</sup>Demuth is apparently referring to a passage in James's biography of William Wetmore Story, an American sculptor who lived and worked in Rome. James's account is a response to an 1885 letter that Story wrote to Lowell concerning Allston's last years in Cambridgeport. Story's letter reports:

Allston starved spiritually in Cambridgeport—he fed upon himself. There was nothing congenial without & he introverted all his powers & drained his memory dry. His work grew thinner & vaguer everyday & in his old age he ruined his great picture [*Belshazzar*]. I know no more melancholy sight than he was—so rich and beautiful a nature, in whose veins the South ran warm, which was born to have grown to such height & to have spread abroad such fragrantcy, stunted on the scant soil & withered by the cold winds of that fearful Cambridge-port. I look at his studio whenever I pass with a heart pang. (qtd. in *James Story* 297f.)

With this letter in mind and while contemplating the shared fate of Allston the artist and his work *Belshazzar's Feast* in the New England environment, James writes in his 1903 biography of Story:

Irrepressible memory plays up again at this touch, not of the beautiful colorist and composer himself, withering in the cruel air, but of the indistinct yet irresistible inference that his great strange canvas, so interrupted but so impressive, at the old Boston Athenaeum, used, at a particular restless season, to

force one to draw. The unfinished, the merely adumbrated parts of this huge *Daniel before Belshazzar* would certainly have boded sufficient ill had it not been for the beauty of these other portions which shone out like passages of melody, of musical inspiration in some troubled symphony or sonata; and the lesson of the whole picture, even for a critic in the groping stage, seemed to be that it was the mask of some impenetrable inward strain. (308)

Since James only refers to Allston in one other place, a review—"The Old Masters in London"—where, in passing, James compares Allston to George Romney who was a British portrait painter, only this passage could have led Demuth to his conclusion about Allston's being "proof" that America "is no land for the artist."

<sup>9</sup>In *The Southern Literary Messenger*, dated January 1836, Poe reviewed an address given by Lucian Minor, titled "Education as Connected with the Permanence of our Republican Institutions," which was delivered before the Institute of Education, Hampton Sidney College, 24 September 1835. Poe used the occasion of this review to voice his opinions on one crucial social issue—education in the South. He writes:

The most lukewarm friend of the State must perceive—if he perceives anything—that the glory of the Ancient Dominion is in a fainting—in a dying condition. Her once great name is becoming, in the North, a by word for imbecility—all over the South, a type for "the things that have been." (66)

Poe then calls for the South to recognize its shortcomings in the organization of its education and to act to correct these shortcomings. He calls for his readers to "proceed, at once, to the establishment throughout the country, of district schools, upon a plan of organization similar to our New England friends" (67). At least on this one point, Poe seems willing to acknowledge that the North had bettered the South and that the South must make amends to correct this grievous error.

<sup>10</sup>A better understanding of the university climate during the time Channing's letter was written can be obtained by reading the account given to William Henry Channing by Joseph Story, a classmate of Channing and Allston, as well as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and the father of sculptor, William Wetmore Story. Story explains:

There was one circumstance of a public and political character, which was felt with no small intensity among us near the close of our collegiate life. I allude to the political controversies between our national government and that of France, which then agitated the whole country, and ultimately led to a sort of quasi-war and non-intercourse which the public history of the times has fully explained. The party then known by the name of Federalists possessed a very large portion of the wealth, the talents, and the influence of the country. President Adams [who was sympathetic to many of the Federalist causes] was then at the head of the national administration; a majority of Congress supported all his leading measures; and in New England his popularity was almost unbounded, and sustained by a weight of opinion and of numbers which is without example in our country. The opposition to his administration [the Jeffersonian Republicans] was comparatively small, although in the Southern States it was formidable. Party spirit ran exceedingly high, and indeed, with almost irrepressible

fury. Badges of loyalty to our government and of hatred to France were everywhere worn in New England, and the cockade was a signal of patriotic devotion to Adams and Liberty. (qtd. in W.H. Channing 34f.)

Readers should note the similarity of "Adams and Liberty" to the British slogan "Wilkes and Liberty" discussed below in n. 12.

Story adds that after a meeting called and presided over by Channing, a letter was sent to President Adams "who made a written reply in a very commendatory style; and both the address and the answer were published in the newspapers of the day and received general applause" (35).

<sup>11</sup>Given the friendship of Allston and Channing and Allston's own Federalist views, one is safe in assuming Allston signed Channing's letter. Beyond these obvious and compelling connections, a deduction can be made by appealing to Channing's biography which asserts that the said letter was signed by 170 students at the time of its circulation in 1798 (W. H. Channing 35). To this assertion, William Henry Channing adds a footnote, explaining that at this time Harvard contained "about 173 students, according to the number of graduates in the Triennial Catalogue" (35: n.1). That Allston's name was among the 170 signatures is a near certainty.

<sup>12</sup>The connection of Charles Churchill (1732-1764) to Allston's concerns about politics can be made fairly easily. Churchill was a celebrated British writer, critic, and satirist who linked himself early and completely in his career with the notorious politician of the late eighteenth century, John Wilkes. Churchill's political ties to the cause of "Wilkes and Liberty" had special relevance for America. In Wilkes's struggle with the government of King George III—especially his chief minister Lord Bute who, according to Brown, "had taken office with the avowed purpose of restoring the king to autocratic power" (91), America was similarly headed in the direction of a confrontation with the crown.

Churchill's alliance to Wilkes and his struggle was one of "unqualified loyalty and deep personal affection" (89). Wilkes's enemies became Churchill's enemies and Churchill obviously enjoyed the excitement brought about by the friendship. Both men were engaged in a pamphleteering and crusading campaign that would restore liberty to the people. Their most notable collaboration was in writing and editing *The North Briton*. Even though this pamphlet was published anonymously, Brown assures his readers that the two men were responsible for all 45 of the issues and that their collaboration was "an open secret" (93). The satiric attacks in *The North Briton* range from one on "the Scottish people by ironically recommending that their Presbyterians take over the Church

of England!—" to an epistle written to the painter William Hogarth—one of Wilkes's major opponents.

Given Churchill's "socially and politically inspired" writings (96) and his obvious sympathy with the cause of liberty, several possibilities present themselves as to why Allston may have seen a tie between Churchill and Jefferson. The most obvious link in the chain tying the two is Jefferson's and Churchill's shared vision of liberty. The second link is Churchill's use of satire to lampoon political opponents, a strategy Allston had already employed. The third link lies in Allston's perception that Jefferson shared with Churchill a dissolute, worldly, and irreligious life. The fourth link comes from Allston's sympathies with Hogarth. Allston's approval of Hogarth can be seen early in his career (see n. 4 of the Introduction), and little doubt exists that Allston would have seen and applauded Hogarth's caricature of Churchill entitled "The Bruiser" (see Figure 2.10).

Raymond Smith's biography of Churchill describes this caricature as a

striking portrait . . . depicting the [Churchill] as a bear wearing tattered clerical bands. The left paw of this "Russian Hercules" grips a club; the right a tankard of foaming ale. The tattered bands represent Churchill's role as an Anglican priest, which he abandoned soon after . . . [the] success of his poetry. The tankard of ale suggests Churchill's unpriestly lifestyle. The poet was an avowed hedonist. (13)

This portrait was executed by Hogarth "as a means of revenge against Churchill for his poem *An Epistle to William Hogarth*, which was blunt enough to hold up to ridicule the infirmities of the aging Hogarth."

With all of this said, I believe *Man in Chains* was composed as an American caricature of a proponent of liberty, in much the same way that Hogarth had ridiculed Churchill in "The Bruiser."

<sup>13</sup>This information and that following concerning Hellenistic statuary was culled from my lecture notes of Claire Kelleher's Art 402—Greek Art, Spring 1987.

<sup>14</sup>That *Man in Chains* is an ironic distortion of the features of Thomas Jefferson seems plausible given the extant descriptions and the fact that the engravings of his portraits were, as his biographer Malone asserts, "widely distributed in America and Europe" (451). Allston would have had easy access to an image of Jefferson from which to render his parody.

Portraits of Jefferson were done by such prominent artists as John Trumbull, Gilbert Stuart, Charles Wilson Peale, and his son Rembrandt Peale. Paintings by these last two artists are important to this discussion. Charles Wilson Peale executed his portrait of Jefferson in 1791, when the politician was 53 (see Fig. 2.2). The elder Peale depicts Jefferson with long sandy hair and high color, and when this portrait is compared to the one completed nine years later by the younger Peale, Jefferson appears a picture of strength and vigor. However, the Rembrandt Peale portrait of 1800

was to become what Malone cites as "the source of the visual image of Jefferson most impressed on the public mind at the height of his national prominence" (452f.) (see Fig. 2.3). In this later portrait, Jefferson's hair is whiter and his visage serene and composed. Biographers Fawn Brodie and Page Smith note that Jefferson was tall, thin, and sandy-haired (Brodie 56, Smith 73). Yet a more complete "pen portrait" exists in the account of William Maclay, a Pennsylvania Democrat who met Jefferson in New York:

Jefferson is a slender man; has rather the air of stiffness in his manner; his clothes seem too small for him; he sits in a lounging manner [and] . . . his face has a sunny aspect; his whole figure has a loose shacking air. He has a rambling look; and nothing of that firm collected deportment which I expected would dignify the presence of a secretary or minister. I looked for gravity, but a laxity of manner seemed shed about him . . . . But even his discourse partook of his personal demeanor. It was [also] loose and rambling. . . . (qtd. in Smith 232)

The "vacant look," the "laxity of manner," and "the loose and shackling air" would have all served nicely for an artist with an eye for caricature, as would have Jefferson's tall and slender form, his flowing white hair, and his aquiline nose.

With these features to work from, with Allston's familiarity with Hogarth (see Introduction n. 4) in general, and with Hogarth's lampooning of Wilkes (see Fig. 2.9 and Churchill (see Fig. 2.10), specifically, all of this

evidence argues that Allston had a parody of Jefferson in mind when he composed *Man in Chains*.

<sup>15</sup>At the time Allston recommended Morse as his replacement as the artist to complete a panel in the Rotunda, Morse was the President of the National Academy of Design. Sweetser relates that at this same time John Quincy Adams was pushing a resolution through Congress which would allow the hiring of foreign artists instead of American ones. Adams believed, according to Sweetser, that "there were no American painters competent to the work." As a response to Adams's sentiment, James Fenimore Cooper, a good friend of Morse, wrote an anonymous letter to the *New York Evening Post*, which was mistakenly attributed to Morse himself. This error on the part of the paper cost Morse the commission. Allston, ever the gentleman, was quick to offer his consolation to Morse (139).

<sup>16</sup>In her 1894 article "Early Religious Painting in America," Clara Erskine Clement writes of a time "when a few gifted and original artists inaugurated a new epoch and imparted a lustre to art in our country which has revolutionized painting in all directions and not the least is the representation of sacred subjects" (401). Allston, no doubt, was one of these "gifted and original artists." His paintings based on biblical material account for about one third of his total production. His interest in biblical subjects arose from two convictions: that biblical accounts were historical accounts and, therefore, consistent with the tradition of the Old Masters

and that compositions based on biblical material gave viewers an opportunity for moral and spiritual elevation. From a purely aesthetic perspective, Gerdtz and Stebbins point out that with biblical subjects,

Allston could demonstrate the power of the sublime—the effects of startling drama with forces proceeding from the Deity—as it at once affects human consciousness in great variety and reveals eternal truths. (69)

Allston's religious canvasses include: *Head of Judas Iscariot* (1800), *Head of St. Peter When He Heard the Cock Crow* (1800), *Satan at the Gates of Hell Guarded by Sin and Death* (1801) (This painting, as the title suggests, is heavily influenced by Allston's reading of Milton), *Christ Looked at Peter* (1801), *Jason Returning to Demand His Father's Kingdom* (1807-1808), *David Playing Before Saul* (1805), *Moses and the Serpent* (1805), *The Dead Man Revived by Touching the Bones of the Prophet Elijah* (1813), *The Angel Releasing St. Peter from Prison* (1812), *Christ Healing the Sick* (1813), *The Agony of Judas* (1814), *Belshazzar's Feast* (begun in 1817, incomplete at Allston's death in 1843), *Jacob's Dream* (1817), *Elijah in the Desert* (1818), *The Repose in Egypt* (Sweetser lists this work among those Allston completed in England before 1818. See Sweetser's catalogue, 187-90), *Jeremiah Dictating his Prophecy of the Destruction of Jerusalem to Baruch the Scribe* (1820), *Saul and the Witch of Endor* (1820), *Miriam the Prophetess* (1821), *Gabriel Setting the Watch at the Gates of Paradise*

(1833), *Heliodorus Driven from the Temple* (n.d.), *The Angel of Wrath Over Jerusalem* (an incomplete chalk study on canvass, n.d.).

<sup>17</sup>After considering the accounts of Allston biographers Ware, Sweetser, Flagg, and Richardson, no other politician, except Jefferson, galled Allston as much as Andrew Jackson. With Jacksonian democracy and Allston's ardent Federalism, the opposition Allston maintained to Jackson's political agenda is to be expected. However, evidence suggests that Allston's animosity toward Jackson was more than a political disagreement; Allston seems to have nursed a personal dislike of the man Jackson.

After appealing to Allston's own conduct and his refined behavior, as well as his aristocratic background, one is safe to conclude that Allston would have found Jackson's bravado, his legendary temper, and his crude beginnings offensive. Sweetser recounts that Allston had "a violent dislike to President Jackson and once declined to paint a battle in which he commanded, in terms almost of anger" (97).

Gerdtz and Stebbins (150) flesh out this incident over Allston's "violent dislike" of Jackson. In July 1828, before Verplank made the formal request to Allston in 1830, plans were being discussed about the panel paintings for the Capitol's Rotunda. Allston's name was introduced by then governor of South Carolina, James Hamilton, who requested that the painter be asked to render one of the panels the Battle of New Orleans,

Jackson's most important military victory. Allston refused in the manner Sweetser indicates. Governor Hamilton, unwilling to concede the issue, engaged the services of Governor Everette of Massachusetts who, according to Sweetser, attempted "his good offices in softening the obdurate painter, but in vain" (97).

<sup>18</sup>Historian Robert Remini, in his biography of Jackson, explains that Jackson was more than just a military hero, he was also a shrewd and capable politician. Jackson's popularity sky-rocketed after his victory at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 and with his handling of the Seminole Indian uprising in 1817. After Florida was purchased from Spain in 1819, Jackson was appointed provisional governor—a position he held for only four months. Remini writes of Jackson's popularity and ambition at this time:

Now his laurels were adjusted to his satisfaction and his honors and victories all intact, he left Washington and began a triumphal tour of the Middle Atlantic States, visiting the leading cities of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York and seeking a popularity to equal that which he already enjoyed in the West and long the frontier. Everywhere his presence prompted celebrations, parades, and illuminations, and the General responded instinctively by waving to the crowds and tipping his hat. A proud man might find tipping his hat impossible; but a politician can spring it off his head at the first sight of a crowd, and Jackson was one the fastest hat slingers in the business. (86)

<sup>19</sup>John William Ward sets forth how the pictorial semblance between Andrew Jackson and Napoleon had its beginnings. In 1817, after the Battle

of New Orleans, an unknown painter named Wheeler produced a portrait of the battle's hero, Jackson. The engraving from this portrait was later used as the frontispiece to a biography of Jackson written by Reid and Eaton. From this frontispiece, the painter John Wesley Jarvis rendered a more graceful version of the general in 1819. Jarvis's portrait was, in turn, engraved and this engraving was so widely distributed that many assumed Jarvis had worked from life rather than from another painting. Ward writes that the Jarvis portrait is important

because it demonstrates how subjective attitudes can distort objective fact [in much the same way as the two Peale portraits of Jefferson reflect the painters' subjective view]. Now, in this case, the victorious general present in the artist's imagination caused him to distort the physical features of the sitter, Andrew Jackson. (181f.)

Ward goes on to point out that Jackson's most pronounced feature was his "bristling gray hair, which even until his old age rose straight back from his high forehead." Jackson's hair, however, painted by Jarvis and Wheeler was not his, but that of Napoleon's (182) (see Figs. 2.5 and 2.6). The facial expression, to an extent, and certainly the costuming encourages the comparison of the two leaders.

<sup>20</sup>Ward offers ample evidence of the connection that was created in the American press between Napoleon and Jackson:

Shortly after Andrew Jackson's victory at New Orleans, Napoleon's sudden return from exile and his dash to Paris with guard of six hundred filled the columns of the American press.(182)

But Napoleon's exploit captured more than momentary interest. Ward adds that Napoleon made his way into the McGuffey readers of the day, which seems a strange preoccupation for a democratic culture. Ward cites another example of the comparison in John Frost's book, *Pictorial Life*. Here, the young Andrew Jackson's refusing to clean the boots of a British officer is portrayed as "having one hand plunged into his tunic" and his hair reminiscent of the "curly locks" of Napoleon.

In the oratory of the time, comparisons were regularly made. For example, following Jackson's "aggressive" behavior in the pursuit of the Seminoles into Florida, the French minister proclaimed Jackson a "*Napoleon des bois*," a "backwoods Napoleon" (qtd. in Ward 184.) Henry Clay contributed to the comparison between the two, when in a address to the House of Representatives he cautioned his colleagues about the repercussions of failing to reprimand Jackson's actions in Florida:

Remember that Greece had her Alexander, Rome her Caesar, England her Cromwell, France her Bonaparte, and that, if we would escape the rock on which they split, we must avoid their errors [and not heap praise on Jackson, . . . for] if [we] do, in my humble opinion, it will be a triumph of the principles of insubordination. . . . (Mallory 1: 444)

Ward goes further in suggesting a comparison between the two when he points to “no less than five biographies of Napoleon” in the personal library of Jackson (184).

<sup>21</sup>The queen referred to in Dearborn's statement is Belshazzar's mother, wife of Nabonidus, not the wife of Nebuchadnezzar as the writer of the Book of Daniel asserts. The *Oxford Annotated Bible* explains that three Babylonian kings ruled between Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus.

In Allston's painting, the queen stands to the right of her son; he, naturally, is the figure seated on the throne. In Dan. 5: 10, the *queen* is reported to have called for Daniel when the handwriting appears. She enters the banqueting halls and speaks: “O king, live for ever! Let not your thoughts alarm you or your color change. There is in your kingdom a man in whom is the spirit of the holy gods.” She alone recognizes Daniel's power.

<sup>22</sup>In *Main Currents of American Thought*, Parrington discusses “the problem of Poe” in his volume and attributes his difficulty in placing Poe into American thought more to the man himself and less to Poe's inability to find a niche for himself either in the North or the South. Parrington explains that Poe's

romanticisms were of quite another kind than those his countrymen were pursuing; and the planter sympathized with them no more than did the New York literati, or the western

men of letters. In a world given over to bumptious middle-class enthusiasms, there would be scant sympathy for the craftsman and the dreamer. There was no unearned increment to be got from investments in "the misty mid-region of Weir," which Poe threw on the market. (55)

Given this view of Poe's marketability to the middle-class mores of his day, Parrington goes on to assert that abnormal psychology best explains Poe's "neutral instability amounting to almost a disassociated or split personality, his irritable pride, his quarrelsomeness, his unhappy persecution complex."

With this said, Parrington concludes that Poe "lies outside the main current of American thought" (2: 56) and, therefore, spends little time assessing Poe's ideas.

F. O. Matthiessen seems to have shared Parrington's reserve concerning Poe's place in America's literary history. In *American Renaissance*, Matthiessen excludes Poe because in Matthiessen's judgment, Poe and his work "seemed relatively factitious when compared with the moral depth of a Hawthorne or Melville" (xii n. 3).

<sup>23</sup>In Campbell's "Poe in Relation to his Time," the author argues that Poe's poetry is, in part, a product of its time: [Poe] betrays the influence of his times in virtually every poem that he wrote (294). Campbell points to Poe's poetic links to his contemporaries:

He began his career as a poet by imitating Byron and Moore; he came later under the spell of Shelley; and both in his theorizing as to poetry and in his appreciation of these theories in his own art he proclaimed himself the disciple of Coleridge.

Two of Poe's poems, moreover, deal with contemporary events—"Politian" and "Eldorado." John H. Ingram, a biographer of Poe, discusses the plot of "Politian," Poe's unfinished verse drama, as being based on a tragedy that took place in 1825 in Kentucky. According to Ingram, Solomon P. Sharp was killed by Jeroboam O. Beauchamp, who was hanged for the crime which was immediately followed the suicide of Beauchamp's wife. The facts of this incident, Ingram explains, "are fully as romantic as the poet's fiction" (90). Quinn joins in this chorus with Ingram by asserting the influence "current American events"—the gold rush in this case—had on the composition and publication of "Eldorado" (Quinn 605).

Campbell cites three more Poe poems that contain contemporary references: to Napoleon in "A Dream within a Dream"; Letitia E. Landon (L. E. L.) in "An Acrostic"; and Henry T. Tuckerman in the phrase, "Tuckermanities" in "An Enigma" (295). Campbell also asks readers to take into account the number of verses Poe wrote to those around him: Mrs. Clemm, Virginia Clemm, Sarah Helen Whitman, Jane Craig Stannard, Mrs. Shaw, and Mrs. Richmond.

<sup>24</sup>In his "Poe in Relation to his Times," Campbell believes that "as many as half of Poe's tales were based, in whole or in part, on contemporary happenings or were suggested by contemporary publications" (297). Regardless of this influence, however, Campbell explains that "despite a strain of realism here and there, [Poe's tales] were like his poems, a product of the Romantic Movement . . ." (298). According to Campbell's argument, Poe simply took contemporary events and modified them using "the conventional devices that distinguish the work of the Gothic romancer."

A clear example of Poe's casting his "conventional devices" over news events is his adaptation of the mysterious death of Mary Rogers, a young woman who sold cigars to Poe while he lived in New York. This murder became "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (see Samuel Worthen's "Poe and the Beautiful Cigar Girl." *American Literature* 20 (Nov. 1948): 305-12.) In addition to this tale, George Woodberry points to Poe's indebtedness to Captain Morrell's account of his South Sea voyages in 1832 as a source for *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (191): "the detailed account of the South Seas is taken almost textually [by Poe] from Morrell's *Voyages* . . . by the easy process of close paraphrase." Woodberry points to other indebtedness in *Pym* to "other lately printed books, such as Irving's *Astoria*, an early account of an Oregon town and a history of its fur trade."

Quinn notes that Poe's story, "King Pest," owes a great deal to Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Vivian Grey* and that Poe's "The Assination" is

a melodrama which Poe borrowed from E. T. A. Hoffman's "Doge and Dogaressa" (214). Quinn also explains that Poe probably borrowed some of the reportage concerning the cholera plague which ravaged Baltimore in 1831 for "The Masque of the Red Death" (187).

<sup>25</sup>Quinn reports that Poe's persona in his review of Paulding "was of a Southerner who had grown up in a family which owned slaves and who had sold a slave himself." (5) Mary Garrettson Evans in an article for *The Evening Sun*, 6 April 1940, reveals that Poe did indeed at one time sell a slave for his mother-in-law Maria Clemm. Baltimore courthouse records reveal that on December 10, 1829, Poe, acting as agent for Mrs. Clemm, sold a 21-year-old negro named Edwin to Mr. Henry Ridgeway. However, it is the terms of this sale that are revealing about Poe and his feelings about slavery. In the bill of sale it was stipulated that Edwin should not work for Mr. Ridgeway any longer than past the age of 30,--at that point he was to be granted his freedom. Also Evans points to the fact that records indicate that it was very likely that in this transaction Poe may well have sold Edwin to another black man. Whether the terms of this bill of sale were Poe's idea or that of Mrs. Clemm is uncertain; however, what is certain is that the sale was conducted with the welfare of Edwin in mind.

<sup>26</sup>That Allston's paternalism extended beyond his politics and his attitudes toward slaves even to his own family is evidenced by his role as teacher and family patriarch. Sweetser cites a presentation address by

Morse, one of Allston's earliest and most distinguished pupils, as an example of Allston's paternalistic attitudes. In this address, Morse cites that Allston was "more than any other my master" and he explain that he and fellow pupil Charles Leslie, who was "as a brother," "lived together [with Allston] for years in the closest intimacy in the same house" (qtd. in Sweetser 59).

That Allston relished this paternal role can be seen in a letter he wrote while he and Morse shared "the closest intimacy" in London. The letter, addressed to Morse's father and dated 4 August 1815, explains that London, as evil as it was, had not corrupted the young Morse:

It is a subject of no slight gratification to me that I can with sincerely congratulate you on what religious parents must above all others appreciate[:] [t]he return of a son from one of the most dangerous cities in the world with unsullied morals. (qtd. in Bjelajac 122)

The devotion Morse felt for his "master" is most obvious when, as John Welsh reports, Morse "regretted that his telegraph fortune [came] after Allston's death [and] was too late for him to set up his master in luxury" (494).

Allston's paternalism is found in his relationship with other artists—especially younger ones. Allston told art historian Anna Jameson that he considered counsel to young artists "a duty" and that he especially

was in the habit of showing his own works in "their various stages, in order to illustrate the principles on which I proceed" (351f.)

Even though Allston had no children of his own, he manifested his paternal inclinations in his very close ties with his nieces and nephews. His nephew and biographer Flagg relates Allston's last evening at home before his death:

His last words to the retiring guests on that night of his departure were to his niece, Miss Charlotte Dana, whom he regarded with the affection of a father. They were words [of] counselling, intellectual, moral, and religious development unto perfection. And they were accompanied with his last benediction, "God bless you, my child," and sealed with a kiss upon her forehead. (329f.)

<sup>27</sup>The events in the West Indies to which Poe alludes and as cited as inspiration for Allston's *Santa Domingo Black Boy* were a series of revolutions by black workers who were inspired by

the breath of egalitarian zeal; for when Paris set free all the slaves in the French colonies, the news aroused the blacks in wild hopes and the masters to stubborn resistance. Hence came servile risings which wrecked the settlements of San[ta] Domingo and sent hundreds of refugees flying for their lives in Jamaica. (Rose 2: 43)

Events such as these became for Poe a clear warning of what might happen if the institution of slavery was challenged.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST: ALLSTON'S MANDATE

In *The Dial* of 1843 and 1844, William Ellery Channing—nephew and namesake of the brother-in-law of Washington Allston—published a serialized romance in epistolary form entitled, *The Youth of the Poet and the Painter*. This serial romance chronicles the trials of a young painter and his main correspondent, a prospective poet, who both endure opposition from family, from society, and from their mutual environment in a fictional representation of New England as they try to define their roles as artists. Edward Ashford, the potential poet, and James Hope, Ashford's painter counterpart, find their efforts of defining their role as artists frustrated by the American middle-class values, especially the value of materialism, and by democratically defined taste. A third correspondent, Mathews Gray, who is a mutual friend of both, reveals this aspect about the two budding artists in Letter VII of the romance: “[T]he center of their creed consists in the disavowal of congregations . . . and they wander solitary and alone, the true madmen of the nineteenth-century” (4.3 180).

Regardless of the middle-class perception of both as “madmen,” the poet and the painter pursue their role as artists, and in the novel's final installment, James Hope acknowledges his understanding of his role as

artist and what this role means to him and Ashford: "It must be all or nothing; and in fully feeling this, I found my right to become a painter. He who truly aspires to the loftiest has the consolation of knowing he can make no failure" (4.5 55). Such comments have become the stereotyped view of the nineteenth century artist; however, two artists from this period, Allston and Poe, would balk at Hope and Ashford's vision of art and their role as artists.

Unlike the fictional pair in *The Youth of the Poet and the Painter*, Allston and Poe do *not* share the full-blown romantic perspective of the artist; certainly Allston and Poe would *not* agree with Ashford's commentary:

Did not Wordsworth make a radical mistake to write verse on a plan? I have no conception of anything which has a right to be called poetry, unless it came living out of the poet's nature, like the stream gushing from the rock, free and clear. (4.3 273)

Nor would the careful craftsmen and theorists<sup>1</sup> Allston and Poe, ever see themselves wandering aimlessly in the world, uncertain of their direction—in contrast to Ashford's testimony when he writes, "I see myself only as what I do not know, and others, as some reflection of this ignorance, an iceberg among other icebergs, slowly drifting from the frozen pole of death through a sunny sea" (4.2 176). Allston and Poe had neither the time nor the interest for such romantic angst or for ignorance.

Allston and Poe's task, to perfect and to promote their art, demanded both intelligence and imagination, not romantic posturing. For Allston and Poe, this intelligence was credited, at least in part, to the formal education society had given them. On this point too, they differed significantly from the fictional artists whose posture of antipathy toward institutions manifested itself in Ashford and Hope's abandoning college because they "could see no poetry there" (4.2 178). These young artists chose, instead, to "play among the purple mountains and silver trees" and take their lessons from natural surroundings (179).

Though Channing's presentation of Ashford and Hope has become a major perception of the artist's life that has endured well into this century, this fictionalized portrayal of the Romantic artist<sup>2</sup> becomes increasingly problematic when compared to the actual life of the artist, especially artists such as Allston and Poe. From the twentieth-century's post-romantic perspective, it is easy to understand how and why Allston and Poe are often viewed as anomalies in nineteenth-century art and literary history (see Chapter 2 n. 22). Not only were Allston and Poe the premier painter and poet in America to link the practice of their art to their own written theories, but they were also the first Americans to establish their art as a pursuit that was independent from social expectations.

Central to their theory and practice, art became the responsibility of the artist *alone*, and the function of his work was to match his intentions

for it. It can indeed be said of Allston, as it often was of Poe, that he developed his aesthetic theories to match his practice. In the case of both Allston and Poe, the artistic intentions were to "elevate" the readers or viewers to a transcendent awareness—in Poe's case, of beauty; in Allston's, of morality. Thus the role of the artist became the fulfillment of the artist's *own mandate*, not a following of societal expectations—especially society's notion that art should please and instruct. Unlike the previous generation American artists who found themselves tied—either willingly or unwillingly—to European traditions, to material pursuits, or to the democratic traditions of the emerging republic, Allston and Poe are two early artists who seek to become an independent voices in fashioning an independent aesthetic. Essential to this independence, to responding to their "own mandate," is Allston's and Poe's conviction that the success or failure of the artist's work depends on his *own* assessment, not that of patrons, critics, or society as a whole. With this issue of assessment in mind, these next two chapters will consider two aspects of Allston's and Poe's aesthetic: First, how Allston and Poe define their roles as American artists, and secondly how—from this definition—emerge the criteria for assessing their work, rejecting the demands of society and patrons, and establishing the importance of tradition and originality in their conception of the role of the artist.

In the January 1839 issue of the *Christian Examiner*, William Ellery Channing, the Unitarian minister and uncle to the above mentioned Channing, published an essay titled, "Remarks on National Literature." In this essay, Channing joins his voice with the hundreds of literati (Poe and Allston included) who desire a national literature; however, Channing's call for a national literature differs from the others in that he argues:

The great distinction of our country is, that we enjoy some peculiar advantage for understanding our own nature. Man is the great subject of literature, and juster and profounder views of man may be expected here, than elsewhere. (286)

Channing's vision of an American art untainted by the "political and artificial distinctions" found in Europe provides the rudiments of his position that "[a] country, like an individual, has dignity and power only in proportion as it is self-formed" (281). American art, like the country and its citizens, has the opportunity and the capability of being "self-formed," independent of what Channing sees as those European antecedents that are detrimental to man's moral and spiritual welfare: "The institutions of the Old World all tried to throw obscurity over what we most need to know, and that is, the worth and claims of a human being" (282).

Channing was not only Allston's school mate at Harvard, his brother-in-law, and friend, Channing was, as Richardson states, "the American writer closest to Allston" (WA 37). There is also evidence in Poe's criticism

that he had a knowledge of both Channing's ideas and his works.<sup>3</sup> Evidence in Allston's life and aesthetic theory point to the fact that much of Channing's politics, his patriotism, and his religion influenced the painter; however, it was more than Channing's "fiery independence" and his vision of an "untainted" American art that helped Allston fashion his own mandate concerning the role of the artist. Not surprisingly this role was for Allston, as it was for Poe, a curious mix of the Old World and the New, of the heritage of a Southern society and the demands of a Northern one, and most importantly, the concerns of an imaginative life and the pressures of a practical one. It was through this maze of conditions and restrictions that both the poet and the painter defined with "fiery independence" their "self-formed" roles as artists, and thus affirming what Channing believed to be the most important and most American of all mandates: to "define the worth and the claims of the human being."

In an address to the New York Art Association delivered February 1, 1848, the American landscape artist Thomas Cole assessed his view of the artist's role in the following remark: "An artist should be in this world but not of it; its cares, its duties he must share with his contemporaries, but must keep an eye steadfastly fixed upon his polar star, and steer by it" (qtd. in Harris 312f.). As a contemporary of Allston and Poe and the first American painter to transform landscape into religious allegory, it is understandable that Cole's vision of the artist would have him poised

between the worlds of color and mass and light and spirit<sup>4</sup> and that he should define the artist's mission as one of illumination of the material world by the spiritual one. Even though this perception was not shared by all-American artists of the time, especially those with more material concerns, it was shared by Allston. However, unlike Cole who lived no more than a decade on American soil during his short career, Allston's own belief was reinforced by an environment where vestiges of a Calvinist doctrine still existed. William Charvat in his book on *The Origins of American Critical Thought: 1810-1835* notes that even though the gradual dispelling of Puritan doctrines and the conception of a benevolent God were notable changes in the society of Allston's day, there still remained "a principle of moralism" and most specifically, "the older conception of religion as a force for restraint and a teacher of duty persisted" even in the face of growing optimism among Americans about their God and their country (19). There is really no way to measure the extent of the influence that these vestiges of Calvinism, an experience confined mainly to Allston's life in the North, may have had on his mandate for the artist. There is reason to believe, however, that the influence of Calvinism was a lifelong one considering the pervasive influence of Puritanism in the antebellum South of the painter's youth, the fact that his home background was one-half Huguenot, and that he remained a devoted reader of Bunyan throughout his entire life.<sup>5</sup> It is, however, very clear that Allston saw his role as artist as totally merged with

his conception of the "Christian gentleman." Evidence of this belief is witnessed in his *Lectures*. In the chapter titled, "Art," Allston outlines what he sees as the proper education suitable for a young artist. It is interesting to note that, while he stresses the necessity of a spiritual life for the artist, he also emphasizes the necessity for worldly experience. This desire to reconcile contradictions marks much of Allston's theory concerning the role of the artist:

We use the word *education* in the widest sense, as involving not only the growth and expansion of the intellect, but a corresponding development of his moral being; for the wisdom of the intellect is of little worth, if it not be in harmony with the higher spiritual truth. Nor will a moderate, incidental cultivation suffice him who would become a great Artist. He must sound no less than the full depths of his being ere he is fitted for his calling; a calling in its very condition lofty, demanding an agent by whom, from the actual living world, is to be wrought an imagined consistent world of Art,—not fantastic or objectless, but having a purpose, and that purpose in all its figments, a distinct relation to man's nature, and all that pertains to it, from the humblest emotion to the highest aspiration; the circle which bounds it being that only which bounds the spirit,—even the confines of that higher world, where ideal *glimpses of angelic forms* are sometimes permitted to his sublimated vision. Art may, in truth, be called the *human world*; for it is so far the work of man, that his beneficent Creator has especially endowed him with the powers to construct it; and, if so, surely not for his mere amusement, but as a part (small though it be) of that mighty plan which the Infinite Wisdom has ordained for the evolution of the human spirit; whereby is intended, not alone the enlargement of this sphere of pleasure, but of his higher capacities of adoration;—as if, in the gift, he had said unto man, Thou shalt know me by the powers I have given thee. The calling of an Artist, then, is one of no common responsibility; and it well becomes him to consider at the threshold, whether he shall

assume it for high and noble purposes, or for the low and licentious. (109f.)

In this prescription for the education of the young artist, Allston shares with Poe a vision of the artist's being indeed, "in this world, but not of it." From the artist's "sublimated position" on earth, a corresponding position Poe describes in "The Poetic Principle" as one "of the sights, sounds, and odors, and colors, and sentiments which greet [the poet] in common with all mankind . . ." (Works 6.12f.), the artist is able to translate into his work what is for Allston "glimpses of angelic forms," and for Poe "brief and indeterminate glimpses" of a world beyond the physical one. For Poe, it is this ability that is the artist's proof of his "divine title." The implied divinity of the artist is, for both the poet and the painter, not only a means of validating the artist's place at the pinnacle of society, a place consistent with Allston's and Poe's perception of themselves as gentlemen, but, more importantly it empowers their art with a value beyond the quality of its craftsmanship. For a country whose earliest response to the artist was predicated on a Calvinist antipathy towards the artist and his craft,<sup>6</sup> Allston's and Poe's conception of the artist's role and his link to divinity, was in its own way, a declaration of independence.

Numerous writers and art historians have explored the possible effect this early antipathy for the artist may have had on artists and potential artists

of Allston's generation and the earlier one, often blaming the environment not only for the exodus of artists to Europe, but for the poor quality of the art and the abundant quantity of portraits being produced by those who remained behind in America.<sup>7</sup> In a retrospective study of religious painting in America, art historian Clara Erskine Clement writes in an 1894 article:

To such an extent was the prejudice of the Puritan carried, that the very name of "artist" was a term of reproach; less bitter, indeed, than that of "play-actor," but quite sufficient to deter a sensitive nature from incurring the criticism which followed every unusual act, in a community where one stringent rule was made for all; where such individualism as cannot walk in the prescribed path was at least suspected of being an emanation from the father of evil. (388)

For Allston, then, to establish his mandate was no small task. Where the vestiges of Calvinism may have aided Allston in justifying the spiritual quality of his work, these vestiges were, early in his career, the shadow on the painter's conception of the artist as individual and originator.

Fortunately, for America, this shadow was gradually diminishing. Neil Harris in his study, *The Artist in American Society*, charts this change in America's art environment. He writes that by the time of the Civil War,

[on a spiritual level] art had been legitimized to an extent incomprehensible to the Revolutionary generation. In that period of war and crisis the pursuit of art was condemned as wasteful, vain and enervating, using up scarce supplies of money, diverting energy from more appropriate tasks and effeminizing and emasculating the population. (313)

It was, according to Harris, this period between America's Revolutionary and Civil Wars that marked monumental transitions for the artist. Art not only became "legitimized," but it became a recognized pleasure and pastime for a number of Americans.<sup>8</sup>

In a historical context, America's altered vision of her artists can also be attributed to the increased acceptance of the Unitarian and Transcendental belief linking art, beauty, and religion.<sup>9</sup> By the year 1830, Allston found a much more receptive environment for his claims of the artist's divinity, for his claims of the artist as individual, and for his preference for a mental reality over a physical or political one.

Allston shared a great deal with Transcendental thought and, indeed, drew the attention of some of its leading figures. In fact he was viewed by a number of them as a role model for other America artists—a man to be emulated.<sup>10</sup> Critics Robert Burkholder and John Benz also note Allston's philosophical connection with the Transcendentalists. Burkholder, for example, asserts that Emerson's own early aesthetic "owes a great deal to Allston's ideas on the role of originality in artistic creation,"(7) and Benz relates that Allston's art theory "is one further reflection of the unique New England mind of the first half of the nineteenth century which was responsible for the distinctly American brand of Transcendentalism"(114).

If Allston's ideas did not precede the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other Transcendentalists in print, then they certainly did in

fact and practice. Evidence suggests that Emerson was not only familiar with Allston and his works, but on occasion Emerson proved to be one of the painter's most ambivalent critics.<sup>11</sup> The common ground between Allston's conception of the role of the artist and the Transcendentalist's conception of the artist or the poet as Emerson defines him is most notably seen in the attempt to reconcile in this role both the essential and cognitive nature of originality and the use and appreciation of tradition.

Defining the mandate of the artist was for Allston, as it was for a number of American Romantics, a case of asserting independence by smashing the monuments while saving the pedestals. For American Romantics like Allston, Emerson, Hawthorne and Thoreau, tradition proved to be the foundation for generating the original in art. In his biography of Allston, Edgar Richardson notes this fact. Artists and writers of this time believed they "must study the masterpieces of [their] profession and must set [their] standards for [their] own work by comparison with the greatest" (88). Allston's admiration of the "Old Masters," works primarily of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, is discussed earlier (see Introduction pages 13-14); however, the depth and the longevity of this admiration is evidenced not only on Allston's canvasses,<sup>12</sup> but in his writing, his conversation, and most importantly, his advice to young artists. For Allston, and his mandate for the artist, a study of the past was an imperative for the present.

Accounts of Allston's enthusiasm for advising young artists to seek out and study the works of the Old Masters are numerous. Jared Flagg reports being present on an evening when Allston was conversing with a young artist and hearing the elder painter give the following advice:

I have frequently been told by friends of yours, sir, that they were afraid that you were running after the old masters. Now if that frightens them, *I would make every hair on their heads stand on end!* For you may depend upon it that you cannot go to better instructors for your art. From them you will learn the language of your art, and (will learn) to see nature as they saw it. You will understand, of course, that I am not recommending that you *imitate*, but to *study*, them. By studying their works you will imbibe their spirit insensibly; otherwise you will as insensibly fall into the manner of your contemporaries. The old masters are our masters, and there is hardly an excellence in our art which they have not individually developed. (qtd. in Flagg 197)

Throughout his life, Allston was consistent in his instruction to those beginning the profession. In a letter to his friend Henry Pickering, and written as a memorandum of counsel for the young Thomas Cole, dated 23 November 1829, Allston tells Pickering to advise the young painter to "select his models from among the highest . . . they make us better acquainted with what we cannot as well as what we can do" (qtd. in Flagg 205). An account by Julian Hawthorne, whose mother, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, sought advice from Allston in her youth, notes that Allston told the young lady " she ought to copy only the masterpieces—nothing second rate" (I. 65). And in a letter written to Charles Leslie, dated 8 May 1822,

Allston writes, "Ah the old masters, after all, are the only masters to make a great artist; I mean an original one" (qtd. in Flagg 173).

Clearly Allston's mandate for other artists was the same one he outlined for himself. Moreover, it would not stretch the imagination too far to conceive that Allston saw himself as an artist whose mandate was to fashion the careers of other artists, and thus set the course for American art well into the future. Evidence of this appears in the last chapter of his *Lectures* when the painter creates a metaphorical relationship, that would have certainly pleased Emerson, between art's old masters and America's first settlers:

The artist, therefore, must needs owe much to the living and more to the dead, who are virtually his companions, in as much as through their works they still live to our sympathies . . . . For the dead in art may well be likened to the hardy pioneers of our own country, who have successfully cleared before us the swamps and forest that would have obstructed our progress, and opened to us lands which the efforts of no individual, however persevering, would enable him to reach. (164)

Certainly if Allston, as America's premier Romantic artist, had intended to manipulate the course of American art, his goal would be consistent with his beliefs in the divine powers invested in him as an the artist, in the talent and wisdom which, consequently, assured his fitness for leadership,

and in the Federalist and elitist values that he inherited from his Southern roots.

The metaphor in the above quotation that likens the artists to the pioneers of the past also illustrates what Joy Kasson sees as Allston's desire for "a sense of participating in a tradition, of adding his talents to those of the great artists of the past . . ." (47). This willingness to participate in a tradition of artists is revealed in Allston's response to William Dunlap's request for information about his art training. Allston sends to Dunlap the following:

Though I never had any regular instructor in the art . . . I had much incidental instruction, which I have always through life been glad to receive from anyone in advance of myself. And, I may add, there is no such thing as a self-taught artist. . . . [F]or the greatest genius that ever lived must be indebted to others, if not by direct teaching, yet indirectly through their works. (298)

That Allston, did indeed, have this desire to be part of an ongoing tradition of artists is also seen in a conversation with Elizabeth Peabody recorded in her essay "Last Evening With Allston." Allston affirms Kasson's assertion when he tells Peabody,

"I have enough sketches" he said, "indeed I have work enough planned out in my studio for a hundred years to come. Were I rich, I would open a school, as the old Italian artists did, and sketch and finish only, leaving my students to do the rest of the work under direction." (2)

Ostensibly his study of the old masters gave Allston both his knowledge of the use of color and introduced him to the technical skills of painting; and it also, unquestionably, left him with a desire for the immortality these old masters gained through their works.

In one of Allston's last letters written to his friend John Cogdell on 4 July 1842, on the occasion of Codgell's trip to Italy, Allston writes, that "[a]s to the glowing works of art by which you will be surrounded in Rome—they will breathe new life into you. Even at this distance of time I live upon them in memory" (qtd. in Flagg 319).

The obvious reverence that Allston holds for tradition is testimony to his belief in the immortality of great art-and consequently of great artists. Allston, who according to his biographer, Moses Sweetser, referred to his paintings as his "children" (141), saw his art as well as his desire to instruct young artists, as a means to communicate his vision and his mandate to future generations, just as those artists of the past had communicated their ideas and knowledge to him. The ideas that shaped Allston's conception of the artist's mandate as participating in a tradition where the art of the past was both revered and studied was most certainly shaped by his early reading of Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses* and his subsequent "unbounded" admiration for the eighteenth-century painter.<sup>13</sup> For Reynolds, the past was the only teacher and the British painter's adulation for Renaissance artists, especially Michaelangelo, is unequivocal-

ly stated in his *Discourses*.<sup>14</sup> Also addressed in Reynolds's work is his conception of the artist's role in relation to society, a conception, not surprisingly echoed by Allston.

In *Discourse IX* Reynolds writes the following as part of a lecture to be delivered to young artists at the Royal Academy in London.

The Art which we profess has beauty for its object; this is our business to discover and express; the beauty of which we are in quest is general and intellectual; it is an idea that subsists only in the mind; the sight never beheld it, nor the hand expressed it; it is an idea residing in the breast of the artist, which he is always laboring to impart, and which he dies at last without imparting; but which he is yet so far able to communicate as to raise the thoughts and extend the views of spectator; and which, by a succession of art, may be so far diffused that its effects may extend themselves imperceptibly into public benefits, and be among the means of bestowing on whole nations refinement of taste: which, if it does not lead directly to a purity of manners, obviates at least their greatest deprivation, by disentangling the mind from appetite, and conducting the thoughts through successive stages of excellence, till that contemplation of universal rectitude and harmony which began by Taste, may as it is exalted and refined, conclude in Virtue. (171)

For Reynolds, then, the role of the artist was to use his craft to increase man's awareness of beauty, to point the way to refinement and taste, and finally through "successive stages of thought," to elevate man and society to a more virtuous state.

When Allston writes in his *Lectures* that "next to the development of our moral nature, to have subordinated the senses to the mind is the

highest triumph of the civilized state" (9), he aligns himself with Reynolds in the belief that the power of art lies in its appeal to the intellect, not the senses, and the test of this power lies in its ability to elevate the spectator to new levels of virtue, or in Allston's case, spiritual awareness. Moreover, for Allston, this triumph of the intellect is not only in accordance with our "moral nature," but also essential to the proper development of the human being. In his *Lectures* the painter further clarifies his belief that the "civilized state" induced by art is a *natural* consequence of man's intellectual growth. He writes that this growth

is presupposed by the very wants of his mind; nor could it otherwise have been, any more than could have been the cabin of the beaver, or the curious hive of the bee, without their preexisting instincts; it is therefore in the highest sense natural, as growing out of the inherent desires of the mind.  
(10)

Art, then for Allston, becomes a manifestation of truth—a means of giving visual form to the formless, of making the abstract concrete. Not surprisingly, the painter often uses the term "poet" to note the highest accomplishment, the expression of truth, that any artist can hope to achieve. In his *Color Book*, a journal that Allston kept containing his reflections and observations on his profession, Allston writes: "to make a landscape where there is a positive harmony. . . . The artist who does this, by the act rises into a poet" (qtd. in Winston 255). Indeed, Allston shared Emerson's view

that the poet is "the beholder of ideas and [the] utterer of the necessary and causal" (Works 2. 8). Allston's reverence for the poet and his craft is revealed not only in his own personal attempt at constructing poetry,<sup>15</sup> but in one of his own poems titled "To A Lady, Who Spoke Slightly of Poets." In this verse the painter defends the poet by gently instructing the lady to

O censure not the Poet's art  
 Nor think it chills the feeling heart  
     To love the gentle Muses.  
 Can that which in a stone or flower,  
 As if by transmigrating power,  
     His generous soul infuses;—  
 . . . . .

O Lady, then, fair queen of earth,  
 Thou loveliest of mortal birth,  
     Shun not thy truest lover;  
 Nor censure *him* whose keener sense  
 Can feel thy magic influence  
 Where naught the world discover;—  
     (Works 269f.)

Allston's believes that the poet, and indeed the artist, are capable of knowing and seeing more than most men, and it is an essential part of that role to convey truth. Allston makes this belief clear in his *Lectures* when he writes

Thus the wildest visions of poetry, the unsubstantial forms of painting, and the mysterious harmonies of music, that seem to disembody the spirit, and make us creatures of the air, -even these, unreal as they are, may all have their foundation in immutable truth; and we may moreover know of this truth by its own evidence. (10)

This belief that civilization is a natural consequence of man's moral and spiritual growth is shared by Emerson in both his essay "Nature"(1836) and in his 1841 lecture on "The Method of Nature." In these works the Transcendentalist agrees with Allston, and with Reynolds, that, indeed, civilized man and man in his natural state can be one in the same. Also evident is Emerson's alliance with Allston in the belief that art, man's power to construct, is at the nucleus of humanity. In its ability to merge the past with the present, tradition with the original, art is one more indication of the Transcendental belief in man's constant evolution. In "Nature," for example

. . . we talk of deviations from natural life, as if artificial life were not also natural. . . If we consider how much we are nature's, we need not be superstitious about towns, as if that terrific or benefic force did not find us there also, and fashion cities. Nature, who made the mason, made the house. We may easily hear too much of rural influences. The cool disengaged air of natural objects makes them enviable to us, chafed and irritable creatures with red faces, and we think we shall be as grand as they, if we camp out and eat roots; but let us be men instead of woodchucks, and the oak and the elm shall gladly serve us, though we sit in chairs of ivory on carpets of silk. (*Works* 3. 183)

For Emerson, then, the evolution of man in nature was closely linked to his intellectual growth, and consequently to the growth and improvement of man in society, and his civilization. Thus for Emerson, there is a crucial connection between nature and civilization which is not antagonistic—

civilization is just an outgrowth of man's nature—his intellectual self—which would be “unnatural” to deny.

And later in his lecture “The Method of Nature,” Emerson cites this evolution of civilized man as both an intellectual and a spiritual one:

I love the music of the water wheel; I value the railway; I feel the pride which the sight of a ship inspires; I look on trade and every mechanical craft as education also. But let me discriminate what is precious herein. There is in each of the works an act of invention, an intellectual step, or short series of steps taken; that act or step is the spiritual act; all the rest is mere repetition of the same a thousand times. (*Works* 1.192)

Allston, too, would share in this celebration of the “acts of invention” inherent in the examples cited by Emerson. Also, Allston would support Emerson's assertion that a key aspect of this inherent “invention” is that “spiritual act” which identifies that which is the “same” and also “precious” in what are seemingly divergent “creations.”

As an artist Emerson drew not only from the physical evidence of the world around him, but from the literary masters of the past, just as Allston had drawn from the visual ones. Neither the painter nor the Transcendentalist viewed art as a profession of solitary geniuses, as Channing's Ashford and Hope did, nor did they believe that man creates things out of himself alone: all men must consider the tradition from which and in which they work. F. O. Matthiessen, in *American Renaissance* emphasizes the

acknowledged debt that nineteenth-century writers such as Emerson owed to writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century: Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton and Sir Thomas Browne in particular. However, like Allston, Emerson looked to the past masters as providing an art to be *studied*, not *imitated*. Matthiessen notes that as an artist Emerson was more inclined to "pick up some of the stones these earlier poets used, and handle a few of their tools, but he could not build in their style" (115). Like Allston, Emerson recognized the past as a valuable resource, but unlike the painter, he did not see himself indebted to them. In his essay, "Thoughts on Modern Literature" printed in the second edition of *The Dial*, October 1840, Emerson defends modern literature by asking "[h]ow can the age be a bad one, which gives me Plato and Paul and Plutarch, and St. Augustine, Spinoza, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Donne and Sir Thomas Browne, beside its own riches" (1.141).

While there was in American Romanticism an enthusiasm for antiquity and tradition in art, there was also a contrary emphasis on originality. A high premium was put on the "self-formed," the original in art, by a new nation that desired that its art reflect its character. Writing in his *Journals* in 1837, Emerson prescribed the following:

The American artist who would carve a wood-god and who was familiar with the forest in Maine where enormous fallen pine trees "cumber the forest floor"[,] where huge mosses depend-

ing from the trees and the mass of the timber give a savage & haggard strength to the grove—would produce a very different statue from the sculptor who only knew a European woodland,—the tasteful Greek, for example. (5.373)

Where Allston and Emerson both hold that the role of the artist is to be familiar with the tradition that preceded him, they also see the artist's role as originator, seer and innovator as equally important, in the mandate the artist sets for himself and future artists.

In his article "The Idea of Tradition in American Art Criticism," Hilton Kramer makes the point of that Allston and Emerson were both aware, and that is that the "concept of tradition is meaningless if the tradition in question is incapable of accommodating and indeed giving meaning to new artistic developments" (323). For Allston and Emerson these "new developments" involved the production of an art that was essentially an "infusion " of the mind with nature.

Max Baym, in *A History of Literary Aesthetics in America*, notes that "Allston believed that the language of art may be learned from tradition, but he held that the thoughts expressed must be those of the individual artist; they must come to him from nature" (36). Indeed, Allston defends his belief in the artist's capacity to create from nature in the last chapter of his *Lectures*: "Every original work becomes such from the infusion, so to speak, of the mind of the author; and of this the fresh material of nature alone seem susceptible" (163). In Allston's theory the artist is able to

reproduce in his work the feelings or images produced by this "infusion." In accomplishing this, then, he becomes an originator.

Allston further distinguishes in his *Lectures* two types of creation: the natural and the ideal. Originality in its "natural" state is merely new combinations and arrangements of the known forms of nature; originality in its "ideal" state is a transformation of the known or fragmentary into a vision of the possible or even the unknown. Written among the list of aphorisms preserved on Allston's studio walls, a list which seemingly served as a commonplace book for the painter, is the following observation on originality that testifies both to the artist's powers and the place of truth in art: "Originality in art is the individualizing the Universal [sic]; in other words, the impregnating some general truth with the individual mind" (qtd. in Flagg 417).

Emerson echoes Allston's fundamental belief both in his *Journals* and his essays that it is man in combination with nature that produces art. In his *Journals*, Emerson writes that art is, in essence, "a mixture of the human mind with nature" (5.141) and in his essay "The Poet" (1844) he states that

this insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or the circuit of things through forms and so making them translucid to others. ( *Works* 3.26)

Also in his essay titled "Art" (1837), Emerson writes of the artist as capable of ordering and composing the elements of the physical world into a meaningful landscape: "[the artist] will come to value the expression of nature and not nature itself, and so exalt in his copy the features that please him" (Works 2. 351). Consequently, for Emerson and Allston the process of constructing art involves not only the use of the intellect in the act of recombining or rearranging the concrete elements of nature, but in imparting the truth of an unseen power to an imitated work. In "The Poet" Emerson writes of the poet and his art that "[n]othing walks, or creeps, or grows, or exists, which must not in turn arise and walk before him [the poet] as an exponent of meaning." With Emerson's consideration that, all before man in nature offers opportunity for art, he defines the power of the poet to rearrange and recombine as virtually inexhaustible. He continues: "All the creatures by pairs and by tribes pour forth into his mind as into Noah's ark, to come forth again to people a New World" (Works 3.40).

Allston is in agreement with Emerson that nature offers inexhaustible occasions for art. However, where Emerson understands the role of the artist to be essentially a "divine instrument" through which a higher power circulates, Allston sees this same artist in a more scholastic sense. In his chapter on "Art" in his *Lectures* he writes:

As to what some have called our *creative* powers, we take it for granted that no correct thinker has ever applied such expres-

sions literally. Strictly speaking, we *make* nothing: we can only construct. But how vast a theatre is here laid open to the constructive powers of the finite creature; where the physical eye is permitted to travel for millions of miles, while that of the mind may, swifter than light, follow out the journey, from star to star, till it falls back on itself with the humbling conviction that the measureless journey is then but begun! It is needless to dwell on the immeasurable mass of materials which a world like this may supply to the Artist. (94)

Thus the physical world for both men offered not only an opportunity for, but an invitation to art. However, art was more than a novel construction. For Allston and Emerson the desired result of this work of art, be it a painting, poem, or musical composition, was to again express the artist's original conception in such a way as to convey the meaning of this same conception to the viewer.

It is perhaps at this point that the influence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his "organic principle" is best witnessed on the aesthetic theories of Allston and Emerson. Readers, however, need to be aware of the distinct shadings of Coleridgean aesthetics that are at work with Allston, Emerson, and Poe. Though Allston has clear biographical connections with Coleridge (see Introduction pp. 13-14) and his most productive years preceded Emerson's appearance as a significant literary figure by more than a decade, Allston seems to be less influenced by certain aspects of Coleridge than does Emerson or even Poe. Yet, to fully understand the arc of romanticism as it developed in the early nineteenth century, readers can

best see these nuances at this point by juxtaposing Allston and Emerson, and in the next chapter, Poe.

Matthiessen, in *American Renaissance*, has traced the origin of American aesthetics, especially the theories of Emerson and sculptor Horatio Greenough, who was also Allston's first student, to the prose of Coleridge. Matthiessen notes that from the English poet's organic theory Emerson learned "that the duty of the artist is continually to renew elemental experience" and that the American romantic ascribed to his British counterpart's belief in explaining "how the artist creates his forms" (133).

Coleridge's best statement of his organic principle is found in his discussion of Shakespearean criticism. In a lecture on the characteristics of Shakespeare's genius Coleridge writes:

No work of true genius dare want its appropriate form; neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so neither can it, be lawless! For it is even this that constitutes it genius—the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination. . . . The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give what ever shape we wish it to return when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one in the same with the perfection of its outward form. . . . Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms. Each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror. (*Criticism* 1. 223f.)

In notes to this passage, editor Thomas Raysor cites the debt, albeit the paraphrasing, by Coleridge of the ideas of the German romantic philosopher, A. W. von Schlegel. According to Raysor, Schlegel provided Coleridge with many of the fundamental tenets of his aesthetics.<sup>16</sup> The philosophical connection between the aesthetics of Coleridge and Schlegel provides an important link fusing the aesthetics of the Transcendentalists to Allston and ultimately to Poe.

The extent to which Allston and Emerson ascribed to Coleridge's organic principle is a distinctive factor in how each man ultimately shaped his mandate for the artist. M. H. Abrams in his important work on Classical and Romantic theory, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, writes that the "historical importance of Coleridge's imagination has not been overrated. It was the first important channel for the flow of organicism into the hitherto clear, . . . stream of English aesthetics" (168). Abrams's discussion of Coleridge's aesthetics notes that most of the poet's writing on the imagination "are explicitly in terms of a living, growing thing" (169). Coleridge's use of the plant metaphor was indeed at the root of all his aesthetic conceptions.

Even though Coleridge's organicism, was according to Abrams, "part of his all-out war against the 'Mechanico-corpuscular philosophy' on every front," the aesthetic opportunity that Coleridge placed before American Romantics like Allston and Emerson allowed them a chance to develop an aesthetic that, at least in Emerson's view, reflected the ideology of a growing

nation. Abrams sees Coleridge's theory as a chance for the aesthetic community of the nineteenth century to make a

contradistinction between atomistic and organic, mechanical and vital—ultimately, between the root analogies of machine and growing plant. As Coleridge explored the contraceptive possibilities of the latter, it transformed radically many deeply rooted opinions in regard to the production, classification, anatomy and evaluation of works of art. (170)

For Emerson this "transformation" to an organic aesthetic was much more complete than it was for Allston. There are a number of reasons why Allston held in abeyance his full commitment to an organic theory of art, especially as Emerson defined it. Both Allston's religious convictions and his elitist values would not accommodate the Emersonian belief in a man-centered universe or the belief that "every man is so far a poet as to be susceptible of these enchantments of nature. . . . The people fancy they hate poetry, and they are all poets and mystics" (*Works* 2. 15f.). For Allston, living in a democracy did not necessarily imply that all men were nascent artists. Rather he viewed the occupation as much too sacred, and the requirements much too stringent, to see the role of the artist as having any democratic implications. However, in spite of this difference of opinion with his countryman, there is little doubt that Allston found the questions posed by his British friend, Coleridge, and his theory of organicism

challenging the core of the teleological belief that the artist does control, and indeed is responsible, for some portion of his production.

In his *Lectures* Allston devotes his last two chapters to a discussion of form and composition, hardly the concern of a man who fully believes that the artist functions only as a vehicle for the expression of higher powers. The questions posed to Allston and Emerson by Coleridgean aesthetics were ones that addressed the following concerns: exactly how much can an artist hope to have his material "shap[ing] and develop[ing] itself from within?" How much can the artist rely on the "perfection of its outward form" as it issues pristine from the artist's mind without revision or review? And ultimately, what is the risk of formlessness, and consequently, meaninglessness in such a production?

For Emerson the response to these questions was the abdication of the artist's responsibility to the demands of divine powers. In his lecture on "Art," delivered in 1836 to the Masonic Temple in Boston, Emerson writes: "[I]n sculpture, did ever anybody call the Apollo a fancy piece? Or say of the Laocoon how it might be made different? A masterpiece of art has in its mind a fixed place in the chain of being, as much as a plant or a crystal (*Early Lectures* 2. 49f.). And in "The Poet" Emerson recounts the following story illustrating the artist's complete resignation of the rational faculties of control and responsibility, and his consequent dependence on "feeling" in fashioning his works of art.

I knew in my younger days the sculptor who made the statue of the youth which stands in the public garden. He was as I remember, unable to tell directly what made him happy or unhappy, but by wonderful indirections he could tell. He rose one day, according to his habit, before the dawn, and saw the morning break, grand as the eternity out of which it came, and for many days after, he strove to express this tranquility, and lo! his chisel had fashioned out of marble the form of a beautiful youth, Phosphorus, whose aspect is such that it is said that all persons who look on it become silent. [Likewise] the poet also resigns himself to his mood, and that thought that agitated him is expressed, but *alter idem*, in a manner totally new. The expression is organic, or the new type which things themselves take when liberated. As, in the sun, objects paint their images on the retina of the eye, so they, sharing the aspiration of the whole universe, tend to paint a far more delicate copy of their essence in his mind. (*Works* 3. 24f.)

David Bjelajac notes that: "Whereas Emerson gloried in the power of self to become one with its infinite object, Allston [and Poe] saw the individual self as an insurmountable obstacle to objective truth" (183). Indeed in Allston's estimation, to reveal the true in art was a rare occasion for the artist. In a recollection of the painter titled *Washington Allston's Art*, by one of his early pupils Henry Greenough, Allston is quoted as saying:

An artist must give the impress of his own mind to his works or they will never interest however academically correct they may be. If you work in this spirit, you will often find yourself working for months and months without effecting your purpose and at last some accident or chance touch will produce an effect which something within you will recognize as true. (qtd. in Winston 98)

In this statement Allston is not only echoing his mentor Sir Joshua Reynolds's belief about the elusive quality of art, but he is aligning himself with the aesthetic thinking of Poe in his belief that it is the artist's struggle to transcend the limitations of self that lead to truth in art.

However, Emerson viewed the landscape differently. For Allston the construction of art required the artist's acknowledgment of his own limitations; for Emerson there were no limitations to acknowledge. Emerson's poet was not only "liberated" but he is, as stated in "The Poet":

the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart. (*Works* 3.6)

Thus the powers Emerson invested in the poet, the powers gained as a result of the Transcendentalist's belief in the organic process, were sure disclaimers to Allston's conception of the artist's responsibility to his mandate and the artist's place in relation to truth. Moreover, Allston viewed in Emerson's adoption of Coleridge's aesthetic theory a sincere threat to his belief in the shaping forces working *outside* the organic process that the Allston saw as essential to the artist and to his production.

Vivian C. Hopkins in her book on Emerson's aesthetic theory, *Spires of Form*, notes that

Coleridge's analysis of creative power especially satisfied Emerson, because Coleridge considered the mind as a unit, not as an assortment of such faculties as sensation, judgment, memory, and will; and because he viewed the mind from within, analyzing its autonomous power, rather than considering it an instrument acted upon from without. . . . (8)

Allston does not see the mind of the artist in Coleridgean terms. Rather, the development of the mind, and consequently the quality of the work that the mind constructs, is not alone the product of an "autonomous power": it is also the product of the separate mental entities of the artist's will and cultivation. These entities, individual to each artist, reflect those external forces that have developed and shaped the artist's conceptions. Thus by adopting this variation on organicism, Allston is theoretically restoring a portion of control in the construction of the work of art to the artist. The painter writes in his *Lectures* that it is through the will, and the cultivation of the artist through education and life experience, *in addition* to the organic process, that the artist can hope to express truth in art. In the "Introductory Discourse" to his *Lectures* Allston writes:

An imperfect development [of the artist] especially as relating to the intellectual and moral, we know to depend, in no slight measure, on the *will* of the subject. Nay, (with the exception of idiots,) it may safely be affirmed, that no individual ever existed who could not perceive the difference between what is true and false, and right and wrong. (48f.)

It is then the *will* that Allston defines as a "reflective faculty" through which "the mind can attain to mature growth," that is the ultimate judge in recognizing the true from the false in art (*Lectures* 54f.). Likewise, cultivation in the artist is equated with education and refinement: the results of formal education and life experiences. It is for Allston the artist's faculty of cultivation that judges the technical quality of a work of art, and that can judge its worth in the light of tradition. Consequently then, Allston is in agreement with Emerson in that an original work of art has its own pre-determined organic form. However, he differs radically from the Transcendentalist in his belief that it is only with the addition of the will, the artist's capacity to reason morally, and the artist's cultivation, that the artist can hope to truly express an organic form.

Clearly Allston was very selective in what he "borrowed" from Coleridge in the development of his own aesthetic. Regina Soria in her article, "Washington Allston's *Lectures on Art: The First American Art Treatise*," writes that "[i]n the insistence on truth, feeling, life, Nature, work of art as organic whole, the two friends were in accord" (343). However, on some very important aesthetic issues concerning composition, the value of craftsmanship and the qualifications of the visual artist, Allston and Coleridge parted company. Even though Allston no doubt gave polite deference to the ideas Coleridge shared with him in Rome, London and through a lifetime of correspondence, the painter, not surprisingly, did

much of his own thinking in shaping his aesthetic. E. P. Richardson in his biography of the painter notes "Allston's conception of expression in the plastic arts is evidently his own, not an echo of his friend" (111). In contrast, to Allston's selective borrowing, Emerson, a lifelong reader and admirer of Coleridge, wrote in his early lecture "Modern Aspects of Letters" that Coleridge's biography is written

in that sentence of Plato, 'He shall be as a god to me who shall rightly define and divide.' He [Coleridge] possessed extreme subtlety of discrimination; and of language he was a living dictionary, surpassing all men in the fineness of distinctions he could indicate, touching his mark with a needle's point. (*Early Lectures* 1. 378)

Emerson had only one encounter with Coleridge in August of 1833 at the English poet's home at Highgate (Rusk 191f.) The meeting proved disappointing for Emerson who was read to for a full hour, but in spite of the encounter, Emerson, according to his biographer Ralph Rusk, still found in Coleridge's works "some of the most subtle of human speculations than are met with in the pages of any other thinker" (193).

It is then, perhaps ironic, that in assessing Allston's and Emerson's aesthetic theories, the influence of Coleridge's thought is marked more distinctly in the poet's theory than in the painter's. Matthiessen accounts for the impact Coleridge's organic principle had on Emerson and other American Romantic writers, and the risk these writers took in the name of

both art and independence in transplanting English Romanticism to American soil.

The manifest risks for art in such [an organic] doctrine is that its exclusive emphasis on the inner urge rather than on the created shape can quickly run to formlessness, particularly when it insists on the same spontaneous growth for a poem as for a plant. In fact, it could be argued that the various degrees of formlessness in Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman were owing to the varying lengths to which they carried this analogy. On the other hand, they themselves felt the greatest release for their creative impulses when they could believe their work integrally subordinated to natural force, and beating in harmony with it. (134)

For the American Romantic writers who then "subordinated" their art to a "natural force," they were not only delegating to this force the shaping and developing of their art, but in Matthiessen's estimation they were viewing this art as a "form of expressive growth from the poet's intuition." Moreover, that growth of intuition became in turn "an outwelling from the Universal mind"—and consequently, beyond the reach of any critical or technical discussion (135).

For American Romantics like Allston, the complete submission to a "universal mind" was tantamount to self-negation as an artist. As both a romantic and a theorist, Allston found it necessary to fashion a mandate that was true to himself as an artist and as a man. It should be evident at this juncture, that it was only in this spirit of a "self-formed" independence that Allston could hope to present a mandate for the American artist who

would be true to himself and the generations of artists who followed him. Therefore, unlike Emerson, Allston chose to view the American artist as both craftsman and critic, in addition to his role as conveyer of truth.

As aestheticians Allston and Emerson are in fundamental agreement in their belief that a study of tradition was an essential learning tool for the poets and painters of the present. Moreover, even though both men desired a sense of "participating in a tradition," the poet and the painter concurred that the past masters of art were only useful in so far as they could be *studied and not imitated*, thus setting the foundation for the importance of originality in the construction of art. Important then to their conception of the artist as originator, constructor, and arranger is Allston's and Emerson's shared belief that the evolution of civilization and man's moral and intellectual growth within a civilized society are the logical consequence of mankind's natural development. Thus, for Allston, the growth of civilization insures the proper use and direction of art; for Emerson it promises an expansion of the intellect and spirit that results in more opportunity for art.

The painter and the poet were also in accord on selected points regarding the artist and originality. Art was for Allston and Emerson a product of the "infusion" of the human mind with nature. This required a process of recombining and rearranging the natural elements infused through the senses, and consequently using them to convey a truth of

nature through an imitated work of art. It is after this premise, however, that Allston's and Emerson's aesthetic are forced by the theory of organicism onto diverse paths. Emerson takes the position that the artist's mandate is not the artist's to fashion. That beyond being a "divine instrument" for the expression of higher powers, the artist operates on no more than "feeling" in fashioning his work. Thus, the burden of responsibility for his work has been lifted from the artist's shoulders, and as a result of Emerson's belief in the organic principle, the artist is liberated from the role as craftsman.

However, for Allston's artist there is no such liberation; in fact, to borrow Abrams's metaphors and their attendant meaning, it appears that Allston's "mirror" has its most accurate reflection in the light of Emerson's "lamp." Allston cannot share the Transcendental belief that art can completely shape and develop itself from within. In further opposition to Emerson, Allston holds to the necessity of the outside forces of will and cultivation in addition to a pre-determined organic form in the construction of a work of art. Perhaps most importantly, Allston cannot surrender his control as artist and his control as a craftsman, to a theory that would leave his work without the impress of himself as artist. It is in this light then, that Allston reflects not only his own originality as a theorist and the independence of his thinking, but the paradoxical nature of his mandate for the artist. Allston attempts to reconcile in his theory of art and the

artist's role in society elements of the critical tradition of the past and the romanticism of the present: to synthesize for the artist both freedom and restraint, faith and reason, and the traditional with the original. On these last points in particular, Allston is in alliance with the aesthetic theories of Poe.

In defining the artist's mandate both Allston and Poe were engaged in an aesthetic tug-of-war in an attempt to reconcile the obvious paradoxes in their ideas about art and the artist. For both men this attempt proved to be a continual source of frustration in their lives and their careers. It is also reasonable to assume that their attempt at originality and independence in shaping an aesthetic that reconciled these paradoxes led, in their lifetimes, to their misunderstanding as theorists and a qualified acceptance of their art. It is then no surprise that when Nathaniel Hawthorne penned his short story "The Artist of the Beautiful" published in his *The Twice-Told Tales* of 1851, he referred to Allston to exemplify Owen Warland's frustration at his inability to reconcile the perfect with the living. Hawthorne writes:

The poet leaves his song half sung, or finishes it, beyond the scope of mortal ears, in a celestial choir. The painter—as Allston did—leaves half his conception on canvass, to sadden us with its imperfect beauty, and goes to picture forth the whole, if it be no irreverence to say so, in the hues of Heaven. (*Works* 10. 467)



Fig. 3.1 Moonlit Landscape by Washington Allston (1819).  
Gerdtz and Stebbins, Plate 54.

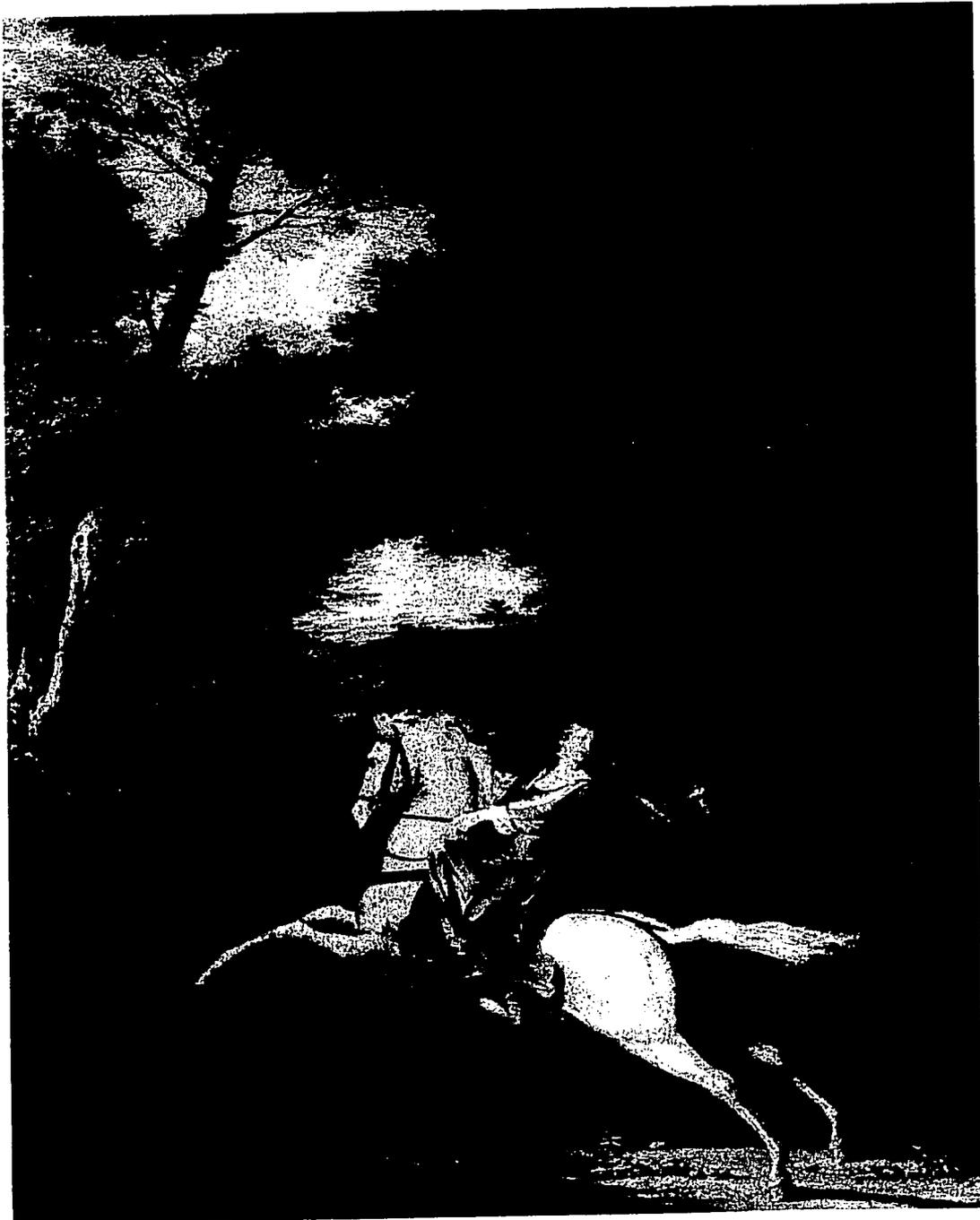


Fig. 3.2 The Flight of Florimell by Washington Allston (1819).  
Gerdts and Stebbins, Plate 52.

## CHAPTER III CONTENT NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Critics, especially those in the twentieth century, have probably been kinder to both Allston and Poe in assessing their work than the painter and poet were to themselves in the nineteenth century. Not only did Allston and Poe share the quality of being ardent perfectionists, but they were unafraid of constant revision in the name of craftsmanship. Early in their careers both Allston and Poe manifested the tendency (1) to set high critical standards for the work they produced and (2) to appoint themselves as sole judge and critic of that work. In assuming the role of both artist and critic, the painter and the poet invited a great deal of frustration in their lives by constantly revising their work in an attempt to achieve perfection.

For Allston this frustration is best evidenced in his ill-fated work *Belshazzar's Feast* (see Flagg pp.334-46, Kasson pp.64-76, Bjelajac pp.143-5 passim), and his careful study of the Old Masters which he transformed into an involved and meticulous painting technique (see note 12 below). In each case Allston's attempt to achieve perfection both on his canvasses and through his technique resulted in correction and recorection often to the point of abandonment. Moreover, Allston's desire for perfection was not limited to just his work as a painter. In a review of Allston's *Lectures on Art and Poems* written by W. L. Kingsley and published in *The New Englander*

and *Yale Review* in 1850, the painter's work was praised for its "exactness of expression" and its "clearness and condensation of thought" (445), while in his introduction to the 1850 edition of the painter's *Lectures*, Richard H. Dana, Jr., writes that especially in the poetry and painting of Allston's later work, there is an "extreme attention to finish, always his characteristic . . . ." (viii) However, George Winston given the advantage of historical perspective, writes in 1955 that

Allston [was] not only a successor of Horace but a predecessor of Hawthorne and Henry James. And in Allston, as in some Jamesian characters if not James himself, this desire for perfection goes at times to the point of over-correction. Some paintings were corrected and polished until there was little left of the inner idea. . . . (209)

Moreover, Allston makes his own statement regarding his desire for perfection in his *Color Book*. Appropriately citing a Renaissance master as his source, Allston writes:

. . . the following hints are from Leonardo da Vinci-It will be proper for the artist to quit his work often and will take some relaxation, that his judgment may be clearer, at his return, for too great application is sometimes the cause of many gross errors. (qtd. in Winston 209)

As a result of this desire for correctness Allston was throughout his career constantly evaluating his work and assuming the role of his own harshest critic. Early in his career in a letter to John Knapp, 24 August 1803, Allston asserts his independence and designates *himself* as the only critic who will receive his attention. He gives Knapp the following advice on a writing career:

If you will not write for yourself, at least write for your country; and should the critics attack you, answer them in the language of Euripides, when the Athenians criticized him, "I do not compose my works to be corrected by you, but to instruct you."

. . . I do not see why every author is not adequate to judging his own performance. Surely the mind which is capable of conceiving a great plan may also possess an equal power to analyze its principles. (qtd. in Flagg 52)

In his work and in his life Poe also manifests the same desire for perfection and the same desire to acknowledge only his own judgment as the important critical force in shaping his work. John P. Fruit in his book *The Mind and the Art of Poe's Poetry* writes that

Poe claimed that poetry was with him a passion, and his handiwork corroborates the claim. One would suppose that since he sets so much store by passion, that he would let passion find its own utterance; but he was keenly cognizant of the value of the technique of verse. The evidence of this we have in his being a constant reviser of his poems. Conspicuous

in the edition of 1829 is the revision of *Tamerlane*, and the further revisions of other poems in 1831 and in the volume of 1845. (47)

Other critics have made similar observations about Poe's very conspicuous goals as an artist. Floyd Stovall in his essay, "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allan Poe," argues that not only was Poe a conscious craftsman of his work, but a die-hard perfectionist in the balance. Stovall asks: "How else can we account for his frequent and meticulous revision?" (174f.) And Pasquale Jannaccone writes that for Poe the

harmonious and proportioned work, the work without blemish or defect or weakness, the perfect and beautiful work in one word, finally, does not—contrary to general opinion—seem impossible to Poe. (8 f.)

Indeed, in his *Marginalia* Poe confirms his belief in man's constant struggle for perfection in a work of art. In his discussion of *Men of Genius* he states:

The truth seems to be that genius of the highest order lives in a state of perpetual vacillation between ambition and *the scorn of it*. The ambition of a great intellect is at best negative. It struggles—it labors—it creates—not because excellence is desirable, but because to be excelled where there exists a sense of the power to excel is unendurable. (*Works* 7.271)

Clearly Poe had himself in mind as an artist and the vacillations of his own personal life and his career in this particular discussion. Not surprisingly, however, Poe sees this same desire for perfection as an important influence on his critical ideas and on his function as a critic. Poe shares with Allston a belief in the right of the artist to declare his independence from social expectations, and for Poe his art included not only his poetry but his criticism as well. In a letter dated 17 March 1845 to J. Hunt Jr., editor of the *National Archives* Poe defends his critical independence:

Can you suppose it possible that any human being could pursue a strictly impartial course of criticism for 10 years . . . without offending irreparably a host of authors and their connections?—but because these *were* offended, and gave vent at every opportunity to their word you consider my course an iota the less honorable on that account? (*Letters* 1.282)

Moreover, Poe's critical independence applied to his own works. Joseph Wood Krutch writes that “[t]he creations of his imagination satisfy perfectly his critical theories because the theories were made to fit the works” (22). For Poe, how better could he appoint himself the sole judge of his work than to fashion the criteria himself?

<sup>2</sup>Neil Harris in his *The Artist in American Society* chronicles the changes that took place in the fictional representation of the American

artist. In the early part of the century Harris sees the fictional depiction of the artist as represented in essentially two ways:

Fictional artist heroes were quiet, elegant well-read gentlemen, generally modest and refined, whose speech displayed no accent and whose boasting was a clue to the size of their hopes or the nature of their fears, not an indication of vulgar egotism. Beyond that, these writers [of fiction] vigorously attacked the clowns, the ill-educated boors, the mechanical mass producers of art with heavy-handed anger. (234)

Harris proceeds to relate that by the 1830s and 1840s writers who included artists in their fiction had modified their characterizations in order to depict their artist "heroes" in a decidedly romantic profile, a profile heavily influenced not only by British but also German Romanticism.

Harris also notes that

The two great artist heroes of the era—Washington Allston and Thomas Cole—fitted in easily with the passive, feminine, introspective personalities of their fictional counterparts. Their lives contained the proper amount of grief and depression, and an appropriate sense of frustration hung over both careers. . . . Many critics tearfully sentimentalized the artist's vicissitudes in a hostile, materialistic community. Cole and Allston were ideal foils to the selfish egotistical society the moralizers described, for both were composites of saint and martyr. (237)

Evidence exists that this fictional division between the "saints and martyrs" of art and those "mechanical mass producers" of art lasted well

past the middle of the century. Perhaps one of the clearest illustrations of this division in the fictional typecasting of the American artist can be seen in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1860 novel *The Marble Faun*. In his novel, Hawthorne's creates the American artist, Hilda, whose innocence and "depth of sympathy" for her work as a copier of masterpieces is meant to stand in clear opposition to those artists Hawthorne describes as "Guido machines, or Raphael machines" who lack Hilda's passion. These mechanical producers of art are destined to produce work that will "leave out that indefinable nothing, that inestimable something, that constitutes the life and soul through which the picture gets its immortality." (*Works* 4. 59f.) Thus, for Hawthorne as it also was for Henry James later in the century, the measure of the value of the work of art existed almost exclusively in the spirit and the morality of its creator.

<sup>3</sup>In spite of his feelings about the other members of the Transcendentalists group, Poe saw much in Channing that he admired. Poe spoke of Channing as "the great essayist"; moreover most all the other references that Poe made to the orator, preacher and friend of Allston were all surprisingly positive.

Evidence of Channing's popularity and consequently, Poe's knowledge of Channing, is documented by William Charvat in his book on American

critical thought. In the years 1810-1835 Charvat cites Channing as one of the ten most significant critics of the period (6), with at least one of these years overlapping Poe's service as editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger* (1835-1836). However, even though Channing was, according to Arthur Hobson Quinn, more concerned with the "social implications of literature rather than the ideas of art," he along with other prominent critics of the time (W. C. Bryant, W. H. Prescott and R. H. Dana) did find common ground with Poe in their dislike of the mob and their belief in a social hierarchy (242).

Poe does, however, mention the elder Channing in a passing reference made in a review appearing in *Graham's Magazine* June 1841 on *Macaulay's Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*. In this review Poe discusses the British historian's tendency to seduce readers with the "luminousness" of his style rather than the "luminousness" of his ideas. However, Poe uncharacteristically writes in favor of the seduction.

In the case of Macaulay—and may we say *en passant*, of our own Channing—we assent to what he says, too often because we may so clearly understand what it is intends to say. . . . when we are attacked by precision of language, by perfect accuracy of expression, by directness and singleness of thought, and above all by a logic the most rigorously close and consequential . . . nine of us out of ten are content to rest in the gratification thus received as in the gratification of absolute truth. (294)

Poe's familiarity with the Channing family is also evidenced in a review of the younger William Ellery Channing's poetry written in August of 1843 for *Graham's Magazine*. This review, which Quinn cites as Poe "at his worst in criticism" (399), is not only an example of the sometimes arbitrary quality of Poe's pen-and-dagger criticism, but also indicates Poe's confusion when he mistakenly identifies the nephew for the uncle. However, in spite of this error, there is ample evidence to suggest that Poe found in the elder Channing's writing admirable qualities of clarity and precision of thought, absent in the writings of other Transcendentalists of his day.

<sup>4</sup>There is little doubt that Thomas Cole saw his career as an artist as a sacred calling: a man poised between this world and the next. Testimony to this fact is found in both Cole's words and on his canvasses. In a description of his career written for William Dunlap's *History* Cole writes in 1836:

My ambition grew and in my imagination I pictured the glory of being a great painter. The names of Stuart and Sully came to my ears like the titles of great conquerors, and the great masters were hallowed above all earthly things.(2.352)

Howard Mumford Jones in his book *O Strange New World* notes that besides Allston, Cole "was the most philosophical" of the American Romantic painters (361). Like Allston, Cole was both a painter and a poet,

each striving to blend the two arts in their works. To all accounts, Cole was the more successful in achieving this fusion both on his canvasses and in his verse. Cole's chief biographer, Louis Noble also notes the romantic painter's propensity in his work to blend the material with the spiritual.

From the visible forms and spaces, qualities and forces of nature, her motions also, and her rest, Cole went on to the audible and invisible. With him there was no pause inside the bounds of the material and sensible. His tracks were plain and manifold up to the line where sense ends and the spiritual and imaginative begins. He inquired after the expression of the viewless winds and sounds. His ear delicately attuned to the preciousness of music, caught the far-off harping of silence and the whisper melodies that glide under the heavier voices and mightier harmonies. (55f.)

Cole's desire to fuse the real with the ideal on canvass can be seen in the sublimity of his landscapes of the rugged Catskill country and in his historical allegories that chronicle the rise and fall of man and his civilization (*The Course of Empire*, 1836; *The Voyage of Life*, 1840; *The Cross and the World*, 1846). Other critics have also noted the religious nature of Cole's work. Art historian Milton Brown sees "a grandeur of conception, imaginative, fantasy, moral passion—even an obsessive religiosity" in Cole's landscapes (193). While Eugen Neuhaus notes that "Cole had a very deep religious nature which stirred him to reflect upon the problem of life" (69).

It was this religious nature, Neuhaus believes, that led the painter to some of his most sublime and successful creations.

<sup>5</sup>George Winston in his unpublished dissertation (157) and in his article in the *Bucknell Review* titled "Washington Allston and the Objective Correlative" (107) cites that Allston was throughout his life a devoted reader of Bunyan. This statement is made to help support his argument regarding the probability of Puritan influence on the painter. However, no major biographer of the nineteenth century, Jared Flagg, William Ware, or Moses Sweetser or any of the more recent examinations of the twentieth century by Joy Kasson, David Bjelajac, or William Gerdtz offers substantiation on this point of biography. Furthermore, Elizabeth Johns in her article "Washington Allston's Library" makes no mention of Allston as a reader of Bunyan, nor does she cite Allston as the owner of any book by Bunyan in his library or personal belongings. In neither instance does Winston cite any source for this information. However, not to discount Winston's statement completely, there is testimony given by both Moses Sweetser and Richard Dana, Jr. regarding the fact that Allston did throughout his life constantly read works of religious speculation and meditation. Sweetser writes that Allston was "fond of reading the Bible and the works of the old Anglican divines, and once wrote a long and able essay on Christianity as

supplying an inherent want of human nature" (134). And Richard Dana, Jr. in his *Preface* to his edition of Allston's *Lectures* writes of the painter's reading habits.

His general reading he continued to the last with the earnestness of youth. As he retired from society, his taste inclined more to metaphysical studies, the more, perhaps, from their contrast with the usual occupations of his mind. He took particular pleasure in works of devout Christian speculation, without, however, neglecting a due portion of strictly devotional literature. These he varied by a constant recurrence to the great epic and dramatic masters, and occasional reading of the earlier and living novelists, tales of wild romance and lighter fiction, voyages and travels, biographies and letters. (vii)

Given this information it would be plausible that Allston had not only read Bunyan but was most probably an admirer of the Puritan allegorist.

<sup>6</sup>Historian Carl N. Degler in his book *Out of our Past: The Forces That Shaped Modern America* explains that the Puritan antipathy for art was more an objection to the removal of more important activities like work and prayer than it was to actual time spent on art. He points out that there is essentially little evidence that the Puritans had any real objection to art *per se*. He notes that it was Oliver Cromwell and other English Puritans who purchased pieces of the art collection of King Charles I when it was dispersed during the Commonwealth Interregnum. Moreover, Cromwell's garden at Hampton Court was adorned with nude statuary. Degler states

that it was also possible to now say that it was more an objection to the “degenerate lewdness” of the theatre in 1640 that led to its closing than it was any objection to drama. As for the American Puritans, Degler makes the very important, but often overlooked, point that in seventeenth and eighteenth century America there was very little native art to warrant any kind of strenuous objection, and at “least it can be said that the Puritans, unlike the Quakers, had no objection to portrait painting” (11).

<sup>7</sup>The exodus of American artists was no doubt a contributing factor to the poor quality of native American art in the first half of the nineteenth century. With only a few exceptions (Allston and Gilbert Stuart among them), American artists who chose to study in Europe did not return to their native country. The reasons for this exodus are numerous: with the most powerful ones naturally involving money and fame. The circumstances of the American artist in the first quarter of the century were evaluated and addressed in an essay written for *The North American Review* in 1816 by Walter Channing, Allston's Harvard classmate, friend and founder of the *Monthly Anthology*. In this essay Channing writes a common sense defense of America's ability to fashion independently her own art and literature. He writes that

it is merely because the particular circumstances under which we exist, have prevented great literary enterprise; men of genius have not been able to command foreign efforts of art, but have labored to supply themselves by their own industry and talent. . . . Our artists have gone abroad to contemplate and study the master works of their favourite art, which were not, and could not be afforded them at home. They have gone abroad, to live under the inspection, the discipline, the influence of men who have devoted their lives to the study of the best specimens of art, and who have been eminent patrons of the arts themselves, in their own works. Some have said we could not support the genius we were vigorous enough to produce. I grant that the cry of poverty may have deterred individuals from hazarding a support, for the uncertain immunities of fame; but if we were possessed of the means of intellectual support, our artists would have run the chances of patronage. (195)

Channing argues that America was "rich in our treasure of natural genius but somewhat deficient in taste" (200), and he cites reason for the exodus of talented artists as due to a lack of cultivation: in Europe these talented American artists would only prosper. Channing's is a practical assessment of the dilemma the American artist faced: that the only course open for those who wished to both remain in America and make a living was to paint portraits.

At the turn of the century America seemingly had a love \hate relationship with the portrait as an art form. For a number of artists—West, Allston, Morse, Vanderlyn and Inness painting portraits was, at the very best, a compromise of their artistic ideals, at the worst, a damnation by

virtue of their stomachs to paint in order to live. On the other hand for painters like Stuart, Sully, Copley, Smibert and Feke, painting the portrait was more than their salvation from poverty, it was the way to fame and plenty. David Ragan reports that for Allston and other painters "they were not satisfied with portraiture as the highest expression of artistic talent" (DR-2), and Allston's statement in a letter written to Charles Fraser, 25 August 1801, underscores the near animosity that Allston held for the portraitist. (This letter represents the only recorded occasion that Allston used profanity.) Attacking the British artists by name, the painter writes:

The first two are Lawrence and Sir Beechly, but even Lawrence cannot paint so well as Stuart; and as for the rest they are the damnedest stupid wretches that ever disgraced a profession. (qtd. in Flagg 45)

On this particular occasion Allston's words translated into practice. Allston was, as Gerdtz and Stebbins point out, "the first American painter not dependent upon portraiture for his livelihood" (15). Albert Gardner also writes of Allston's independence from the public expectation to produce portraits. Allston, in Gardner's judgment,

mark[ed] the beginning of a new era in American art. . . . Though he lived in the heyday of American portraiture, when marble busts, miniatures and life-sized portraits in oil formed the principle occupation of most artists . . . this field was not

his chief concern. His interests were in the ideal, the anecdotal, and the high style of historical painting. (56)

Indeed, other painters were quick to follow Allston's lead; however, their success was limited. Frederick Sweet in his book *The Hudson River School and the Early American Landscape Tradition* notes that even though "America welcomed her new-found poets, novelists and philosophers, it was not long before she began to accept the work of landscape painters." He continues to explain that at first the public acceptance of both landscape and historical works was "difficult," especially in the first quarter of the nineteenth century; moreover, these works were most often the product of portrait painters, who if given a choice—"would have preferred not to do portraits." However, no painter at this time could insure a livelihood on historical or landscape canvasses alone, because, according to Sweet, "Our newly rich had little interest in painting beyond the portrayal of their own physiognomies" (11).

But in spite of efforts by men like Allston, the "rage for portraits" dominated the American art market. Gerdtz and Stebbins note that Allston's earlier companions, Vanderlyn and Morse, were "unsuccess[ful in] attempting to develop American taste and perception toward history while they unhappily fell back upon portraiture to make a livelihood" (115).

However, in spite of circumstances, Allston only a few times in his career, had to "fall back" to portrait painting in order to make a living, and even when he did so, he did not compromise more of his ideals than necessary.

Edgar Richardson writes that

portraits were for Allston a form of expression, not a means of earning a living. All his portraits are records of lives which meant something to him. . . . He was the first major artist to live in America and support himself by a purely imaginative activity instead of by the trade of painting portraits or by some other activity still more extraneous to his art. (WA 117)

Allston most certainly viewed most of the portrait painting of his day as a "trade" rather than a legitimate art form. However, it is true that portrait painting offered the American artist a valid means of support, and this is noted by Thomas Flexner when he writes that "business was good for the portraitist at every level of skill" (*Light* 200). Also John Neal, writer, artist, and friend of Poe, in his book *Observations on America Art* writes that portraits had become a "necessary" part of American life and that they abounded

in every village in our country. You can hardly open the door of a best room anywhere without surprising, or being surprised by, a picture of somebody plastered to the wall and staring at you with both eyes and a bunch of flowers. (42)

Even Washington Irving in his first book of *Salmungundi* remarks on both the comedy and the vanity of American's desire to have their portraits painted when he writes that "everyone is anxious to see his phiz on canvas, however stupid and ugly it may be" (*Works* 6.67).

Even though the "rage for portraits" invited a great deal of satire on the part of America's early social critics and some scorn from those like Allston, who saw it as a "lesser art," portrait painting did serve a very necessary function in American art history. Clara Endicott Sears in her book *Some American Primitives* reports:

owe a debt of gratitude to these obscure wandering portrait painters, for how otherwise could we know what the people looked like who were forming the country in those days? (2)

8Wendell Garrett in his book *The Arts in America: The Nineteenth Century* chronicles how art not only gained in popularity in America in the decades before the Civil War, but how it infused American life in a number of related areas.

By the mid 1840's, the new cultural maturity and aesthetic attitudes promoted by the Hudson River painters and their patrons were being manifested on an ever-broader scale. Not only did the number of serious artists and knowledgeable patrons increase rapidly, but even the popular arts showed more and more evidence of civilized sophistication and a rising level of taste. Now the full tide of Victorian aesthetic attitudes

had set in, "picturesqueness" was the quality sought above all in every aspect of cultural life. (215)

Garrett's discussion illustrates how this desire for "picturesqueness" was manifested in the Italianate manner of the architecture of the 1850s, in the literature as manifested in the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne "whose themes were wrapped in long wreathes of words like the vines climbing over an Italianate villa," and in the oratory of the period which exchanged the "old precision of the eighteenth century classical phrasing" for the eloquence of an "Italianate manner of speaking" as witnessed in the oratory of Henry Clay (215). Most importantly, however, were the transformations that took place among painters, their patrons and the public. It was this "flood of picturesqueness" that eventually eliminated both the noble and sublime canvasses of the Hudson River School and those historical works of Trumbull, West, Allston and Vanderlyn from public patronage. In their place the genre scenes of Bingham, Inness, Mount, and Quidor and the straightforward landscapes of the Luminist school, were now in the public eye.

Garrett also argues that even with the attention given to westward expansion and the Mexican War, interest in American art steadily increased. He observes: "the level of popular taste rose steadily higher as

if to fulfill a democratic promise" (227). Garrett also points to the fact that never before in American history had the levels of art, both fine art and popular art, been so available to the American public as they were in the decades before the Civil War. Photographer Matthew Brady, whose studio became legend not only for its photographs of the Civil War but for the outstanding quality of its portraits, Currier and Ives, whose widely distributed prints satisfied America's penchant for the picturesque, and *Harper's* and *Leslie's* illustrated magazines, that maintained an extremely high standard of quality in their artistic presentations, all contributed to the American public's increasing education in both art and taste. Garrett further reflects that

To many critics looking back on the 1840's and 1850's they seemed a "Golden Day" in American civilization, a time when there was no particular gulf between artists and their public, when Americans of means were proud to buy American art as the expression and creation of a democratic culture they believed superior to any in the world. (228)

<sup>9</sup>Lawrence Buell in his book *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* chronicles the changes in the American public's vision of the arts as a direct result of the near fusion of art and religion in the early nineteenth century. He notes that for the most part the

Unitarians were "people of sophistication and refinement." As a result, Buell states

their theological liberalism led them to draw a closer analogy between religious and aesthetic experience than orthodoxy would allow. The main impetus behind the Unitarian departure from Orthodoxy—the shift from a Calvinist view of human nature as depraved to an Armenian view of man as improvable—also helped to produce a climate of opinion more favorable to the arts. (26)

Because the Unitarians believed that the purpose of religion was to develop the growth of moral character, Buell notes they "tended to differentiate less sharply between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' pursuits and to view the arts as a means of evangelism rather than as a threat to religion" (26). Thus, for the Unitarians ideas of beauty and moral concepts such as truth and goodness were inexorably linked. As a result of this Unitarian belief, religion found in art a vehicle for both giving visual form to otherwise abstract theological concepts and finally removing the Calvinist's association of religion with deprivation to a more liberal one that included beauty and pleasure. Although a Congregationalist, Henry Ward Beecher held many of the ideas that later became part of Unitarian belief. In his essay "Christian Liberty in the Use of the Beautiful," included in a series of essays titled *The Star Papers* published in 1855, Beecher's

argument testifies not only to the transformation in American religion, but to the transformation in how American religion viewed art. In his defense of art and beauty, he writes:

Many earnest men, therefore, have associated embellishments with selfishness, and forswear them as part of their fealty to Benevolence. It seems to me that God has ordained usefulness of the beautiful, as much as of knowledge, of skill, of labor, and of benevolence. It was meant to be not alone a cause of enjoyment, but a positive means of education. (293f.)

Beecher argues further that not only is the enjoyment of the beautiful a process of education, but that it is a Christian's duty to experience and share the pleasure connected with it.

I can not but think that Christian men have not only a right of enjoyment in the beautiful, but a duty, in some measure, of producing it, propagating it, or diffusing it abroad through the community. (299)

Beecher's sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, shared her brother's liberal beliefs, in spite of a strident Calvinist upbringing and her marriage to a Calvinist theology professor. She eventually deserted the religion, however, as her writing career and her travels increased. Evidence of her belief in the link between religion and beauty is expressed in her journals kept while on

tour in Europe in 1854, and published under the title *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*.

One thing is evident; He who made the world is no utilitarian, no despiser of the fine arts, and no condemner of ornament; and those religionists who seek to restrain everything within the limits of cold, bare, utility, do not imitate our Father in heaven. (249)

Stowe's observation is essentially one step away from the Transcendentalist's view of art. Indeed it was the Congregationalists and the Unitarians who laid the foundation for what became an almost indivisible bond between art and religion forged by the Transcendentalists. Buell writes:

Though individual Transcendentalists differed considerably on particular issues, they shared in common a lofty view of the relationship between religion and art: art (with a capital "A" always understood) is the product of the religious sentiment, by its very nature demands an imaginative expression. (22)

It was the Transcendentalists who completed the connection between the artist and the divine. However, for them it was not so much the idea of *art* as a vehicle for religious purposes, as it was the artist himself who best served the aims of divinity. Neil Harris writes that it was the Transcendentalists who

saw art not as an instrument of corporate improvement or a device to make society over, but as a means of individual fulfillment and as a symbol of a people living in harmony with nature, united with the Over-Soul. . . . The Transcendentalists most valued art energy, not art achievement, the artist's life rather than the artist's works. Not all of them were prepared to appreciate, study or even experience great art, but all saw the artist's role in society as meaningful and inspirational. (179)

Evidence of the importance of the life of the artist, as opposed to his work, to the Transcendentalists can be seen in Elizabeth Peabody's observation about Allston made in her essay "Life and Genius of Allston." Writing of Allston, she states:

"He who would make a true poet," said Milton, "must be in himself a heroic poem." Allston verifies this sentence. He is tested as a true artist in other ways than by those works which, though irradiated from spirit, are wrought from clay. (*Last Evening* 26)

In his *Journals* Emerson echoed this belief in the importance of the life of the artist, as indeed a work of art in itself.

The analogy is always perfect between virtue & genius. One is ethical the other intellectual creation. To create, to create is the proof of a Divine presence. Whoever creates is God, and whatever talents are, < exhibited > if the man create not, the pure efflux of Deity is not his. (5.341)

<sup>10</sup>E. P. Richardson notes that Allston seemingly had more influence on American life and thought outside his profession than he did among fellow artists (WA 179). Evidence for Richardson's assertion can be seen in the influence the painter had on members of the Transcendental Club and their apparent adulation of him. For many of these members, Allston served as the premier representative of the American artist, and his exhibitions brought to the forefront their awareness of art and provided their first real introduction to American painting.

Emerson's ambivalence about Allston's art aside (see note 11), the keen interest showed by other members of the Transcendentalist's group began around the time of Allston's Boston Athenaeum Exhibition in 1839. This exhibition received a great deal of careful attention by this group, indicative of the importance of the event. The exhibit received a ten page review by Margaret Fuller in the July 1840 edition of *The Dial*. In the same publication, James Freeman Clarke published two poems on Allston's paintings: "To Allston's Picture 'The Bride' " (July 1840) and "Allston's Italian Landscape" (October 1840). Elizabeth Peabody wrote a pamphlet on the exhibition (Richardson WA 180) and Oliver Wendell Holmes, using the bit of knowledge on art he gained while a medical student in Paris, wrote a review of the exhibition published in April 1840 in the *North American*

*Review.* But more than the Transcendentalist's interest in his painting—Allston captured their imaginations in the role he fashioned for himself as artist. Margaret Fuller appeared enchanted by him, as was Holmes. On Fuller's first meeting with the painter she recorded in her journal 7 January 1839, during a trip to Boston, the following:

There was at last an interview with Mr. Allston. He is as beautiful as the town-criers have said, and deserves to be Mr. Dana's Olympus, Lares, and Penates, as he is. He got engaged upon his Art and flamed up into a galaxy of Platonism. Yet what he said was not as beautiful as his smile of genius in saying it. Unfortunately, I was so fascinated, that I forgot to make myself interesting, and shall not dare to go see him. (qtd. in Higginson 95)

Oliver Wendell Holmes had much the same reaction on first seeing Allston.

In a conversation with Jared Flagg, Holmes relates:

Some fifty years ago a question of public interest in Cambridgeport brought together a large assemblage in one of the churches of the place. I was standing in one of the galleries, and looking over the other I saw among the people assembled a man who looked so "like an angel of light" that I knew it must be Allston. (qtd. in Flagg 395)

There is no doubt, that Allston's life and appearance were of as much interest to those who followed him, as was his painting. Especially after Allston's death, other prominent writers followed the lead set by Fuller,

Holmes, and other Transcendentalists who showed their reverence for Allston in print. James Russell Lowell in his essay from *Fireside Travels*, "Cambridge Thirty Years Ago" (1864), Julia Ward Howe in her *Reminiscences* (1899), and Henry James in his biography of William Wetmore Story (1903), all paid posthumous tribute to the gentleman Allston.

<sup>11</sup>Even though Emerson had obvious deficiencies in his knowledge of art and art history, eyes that responded slowly to color (Rusk 111f.), and a moral sense that often got in the way of any objective assessment of some art works, the poet, nevertheless, managed in the short course of his career as an art critic to become one of Allston's most ambivalent critics. Fortunately for Allston, Emerson never formally reviewed his work; moreover, most of the poet's writing about individual artists and specific works of art is confined to his letters and journals. However, Emerson did on a number of occasions write journal entries about Allston's work that ranged from open hostility toward the painter's inability to rise to the calling of Emerson's conception of the American artist, to near adulation after the painter's death.

The reasons for Emerson's critical ambivalence are not difficult to trace. Donald MacRae in his article "Emerson and the Arts" writes that the poet's experience with art began in 1832; that his study of the subject was

"haphazard," never "intense," and that his formal writing about art and consequently, "his most persistent thinking about it" occurred between 1832-1841, and thereafter "his concern with the arts was completely casual" (89).

Emerson's lack of preparation for his role as art critic is no doubt a major reason why he was so ambivalent about Allston's work. MacRae writing of Emerson's first trip to Europe in 1833 notes

the aesthetic conceptions he carried with him must have been meager and very much of domestic vintage: that is to say, the Renaissance tradition, journalistically interpreted, slightly vitalized, perhaps, in this case, by the Coleridgean psychology. He possessed only the simplest facts in the history of Italian painting, and it was several years before he was to read Winckelmann on the old sculpture. He was poorly enough equipped for the American obligation to visit the Italian galleries and churches. (80)

It is perhaps because of the notably heavy influence of Italian art on Allston's work, that Emerson had no real capacity to appreciate it or the tradition that Allston worked to preserve. However, more than a lack of knowledge contributed to Emerson's feelings about Allston's art. To Emerson's account Allston's art did not adhere to his conception of what American art should be: Allston failed to capture the geographically rugged, grand and gigantic features of America's landscape in his work, features

that according to Emerson would make her art as great as her men. Moreover, there was a direct conflict between the religious ideology that imparted specific meaning to some of Allston's works and the Transcendental notion of divinity. In short, there was much for Emerson not to like about Allston's art.

In Emerson's estimation Allston's failure as an artist focused essentially on the lack of "nerve and dagger" in the painter's work. In his *Journal* entry for 26 May 1839 Emerson describes Allston's canvasses as "fair, serene, but unreal," (7.199f.), an obvious contradiction to Emerson's grand conceptions. Emerson awareness of this "unreal" quality of Allston's work is discussed further in his *Journal* 20 September 1836 when he writes

So A. was a beautiful draughtsman but the soul of his picture is *imputed* by the spectator. His merit is like that of Kean's recitation merely outlinear, strictly emptied of all obtrusive individuality, but a vase to receive & not a fountain to impart character. (5.195)

Emerson goes on to find this same passive quality of Allston's art manifested in Bryant's poems, Greenough's sculpture and Channing's sermons: "They are all *feminine* or receptive & not masculine and creative" (5.195).

Needless to say Emerson consistently found Allston's work falling short of his mark. After Allston's Boston Athenaeum Exhibition in 1839, Emerson writes on 3 July 1839:

The landscapes pleased me well. I like them all: he is a fine pastoral poet and invites us to come again & again. The drawing also of the figures is always pleasing, but they lack fire & the impression of the gallery though bland is faint in the memory. Nothing haunts the memory, from it. It never quickens a pulse of virtue. It never causes an emulous throb. Herein perhaps it resembles the genius of Spenser; is, as I have said Elysian. (*Journals* 7.222)

At the same exhibition, Emerson found Allston's St. Peter "not yet human enough for me. It is too picturesque, like a bronzed cast of the Socrates or Venus" (*Journals* 7.223).

Besides the fact that Allston's art essentially lacked the vitality and scope that Emerson desired for American art, Emerson also had a great deal of trouble dealing with Allston's religious work. At the 1839 exhibition Emerson was especially upset by a display of three pencil sketches of the heads of Polish Jews, intended to serve the artist later as preliminary sketches for *Belshazzar's Feast*. Reacting in his *Journal*, 3 July 1839 Emerson writes

In the Allston gallery the Polish Jews are an offense to me; they degrade & animalize. As soon as a beard becomes anything but

an accident, we have not a man but a Turk, a Jew, a satyr, a dandy, a goat. So we paint angels & Jesus & Apollo [with] beardless; & the Greek & the Mowhawk leave them to Muftis & Monks. (7.222)

In spite of Emerson's obvious prejudices and preference for the clean shaven, it seems clear that the religious symbols these sketches represented were more likely the true cause of Emerson's disturbance on viewing the portraits. Evidence for his objection is found in his *Journal* entry 24 October 1836:

Never need we ask Calvin or Swedenborg, never need we ask Moses or the prophets, if we are in danger of what God will do. There is God in you. (5.230)

David Bjelajac writes that Allston's exhibition and indeed Emerson's reaction to the Old Testament representations provided the occasion for "Boston writers [to] assess the nature of the Hebraic character and decide whether it was worthy of national emulation." He states further that there were a large number of Americans at this time who disagreed with Allston's "idealized vision of Jewry" (158). Emerson was among them, most notably for the reason, according to Bjelajac, that these symbols were "external to the soul of man"; they were time-worn relics of a tradition that placed divinity beyond man's reach. In Bjelajac's estimation for Emerson, "[i]t was

meaningless to continue painting scenes from the Old Testament if God did, in fact, live completely within the soul of every man" (182).

However, regardless of Emerson's theological differences with Allston, at the time of the painter's death Emerson expressed in a letter, 3 July 1843 to Margaret Fuller, his regret at America's loss. Fuller, the person with whom Emerson would often debate Allston's merit as an artist (Welsh 500), received the following:

And now you have already learned that Allston is dead, the solitary link as it seemed between America and Italy. not [sic] strange that he should die, but that he should have lived for 64 years. I have never heard of his being young, or a beginner, and suppose that his first strokes were masterly. . . . A little sunshine of his own has this man of beauty made in the American forest. (*Letters* 3. 182)

<sup>12</sup>Allston's painting technique was, as was his art theory, a blend of the traditional and the original. His method was developed from information gathered from time spent in England and Italy. Both of his early biographers, Moses Sweetser and William Ware, comment on the powerful influence Italian painting had on Allston's work. Sweetser remarks that

[t]he effects of this long communication with such sources of inspiration appeared in his subsequent pictures and writings. . . . He was profoundly moved by the contemplation of the great masterpieces of art at Rome. (41)

Ware, however, offers a more focused evaluation of the Italian influence on Allston. He writes that Allston

was seduced from his own manner, into a mere imitation of the manner of the old masters, in the forms, and especially, in the tone of color and the handling; it is, as if his aim had been mainly, not to follow the manner of any particular artist, and much less his own, but to copy the manner of all of them, if one may say so, to paint a picture of today, so as in its thought and color and general style, to seem like one painter three hundred years ago. (80)

Jared Flagg's biography also testifies to the predominance of Italian influence on Allston's work. Flagg recounts a conversation between Allston and his pupil Henry Greenough where the painter describes his own long and elaborate process of painting and glazing, a process carried through a number of distinctive phases before work was complete (190-201). While another student, Sarah Freeman Clarke, sister to the poet James Freeman Clarke and close friend to Margaret Fuller, noted the Italian influence on Allston's work and the painter's own diligence as a mark of his genius. In her article on her teacher titled "Our First Great Painter and His Works, " she writes that

[a]ny eye that looks can see that it was a most laborious and difficult process by which he secured his results. . . . By [his] method of working he was able to secure solidity of appear-

ance, richness of color, unity of effect, and atmospheric repose and tenderness enveloping all objects in the picture. (134)

Considering the concentrated study of the old masters' technique and the intensity and the hard work that Allston invested in developing his method, the results of his labors are best seen in his effective use of color and light. Moses Sweetser records that Allston preferred blending colors on his canvass rather than using solid blocks of colors to indicate mass and form. Sweetser recalls a conversation between Allston and a painter friend in 1840 where

Allston told him that Correggio was the master on whose works he had modelled his style. He extolled the "mottled" manner, and explained his own custom of painting with blue, red and yellow mingled, . . . He repeatedly advised [the painter] "to paint in the family of ishes," that is, to avoid the sharp and pronounced colors, and to prefer reddish to red, bluish to blue, etc. (144)

It was this "mottling" of colors that also helped the painter create atmosphere in his works. With the blending of colors in addition to the use of color glazing, a technique art historian John Wilmerding describes as

a method [Allston] had developed from successive examinations of Venetian painting. By means of under-painting and layers of varnish he was able to create a luminous transparency through his colors that often suggest a light glowing from within. (66)

The results of this technique are best seen in Allston's work *Moonlit Landscape* (1819) (see figure 3.1) and *The Flight of Flormell* (1819) (see figure 3.2). On *Moonlit Landscape* Wilmerding writes

reverie on experience, recollection, and imagination [are] fused completely [in] the outlines of an Italian town with an animating presence of moonlight. Light, both poetic and tangible, from its dominant position pervades the composition. (66)

However, the importance of the influence that Allston's technique had on literature is best seen in this adaptation of *The Flight of Flormell*. E. P. Richardson in his survey *The World of the Romantic Artist*, points out that

Spenser's long diffuse epic *The Faerie Queen* with its archaic beauty of imagery and moonlight quality was a favorite poem of the two artists who best expressed this aspect of American romanticism, Allston the painter and Hawthorne the writer. (19f.)

In his biography of Allston, Richardson further explores the possible connection that Allston's method of capturing mood may have influenced the writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Thus, just as the Renaissance painters influenced Allston's conception of his work, Hawthorne was influenced by

the same conception, creating to some degree a literary analogue for Allston's work. Richardson notes

Hawthorne in one of his early tales "The Toll-gather's Day," speaks of those who, wherever they go, "still journey through a mist of brooding thought." The notion lingered in his mind, and in *The Mosses from the Old Manse* he rephrased the idea: "a man," he said, "not estranged from human life yet enveloped in the midst of it with a veil of intermingled gloom and brightness." It is the description of a type of mind, or rather of an attitude toward life, that had a special appeal to an age which felt an urge toward quietism and toward the inner life that was no longer satisfied by the old Calvinist framework of New England thought but that had not yet discovered a new outlet. This was first offered in the arts by Allston's small, quiet pictures, images of reverie filled with a mood of repose and with love of solitude and contemplation. (137)

<sup>13</sup>Allston's admiration for Sir Joshua Reynolds began early in his career. According to Elizabeth Johns, Allston "studied assiduously" the *Discourses* of Reynolds before leaving for his first trip to Europe in 1801. From this early introduction to the British painter and throughout his life, Allston's admiration of Reynolds grew and manifested itself in both his thinking and his practice. Jared Flagg writes of Allston's connection with Reynolds:

Sir Joshua Reynolds died before Allston reached London. Allston used to deplore his loss at not having known him personally, for his admiration for Reynolds was unbounded. He had read the lectures, delivered at the Royal Academy, and

from that fountain of pure English had drunk with wondering delight. . . . Contemporaneous and subsequent criticism has sustained this high estimate of Sir Joshua's literary merit. . . . And when to Sir Joshua's literary attractiveness is added his fascinating power as a painter, it is not surprising that Allston should have said: "Had it been my happiness to have known him, I would, by all means possible to me, have endeavored to ingratiate myself with him. (40)

However, it was more than Reynolds' *Discourses* and his life and practice as President of the Royal Academy that influenced Allston. No doubt Allston admired the role Reynolds assumed for his country as "official arbiter of public taste" (Kidson 702). Also Allston shared with Reynolds an open admiration for the old masters. Moreover, where both painters lacked a certain degree of proficiency in their technical skills (Kidson 701, Gerdtz and Stebbins 219), they both used color and light to compensate masterfully for this deficiency.

In contrast, however, Allston's allegiance to Reynolds' "Grand Manner" of portrait painting, an ideology that sought to generalize and typify its subjects, was severely tested against the American tendency in portraiture to emphasize detail and individuality. Also Allston departed from Reynolds's concept of "selective borrowing" or imitation. As Elizabeth Johns writes:

[r]ather than prescribing, as did Reynolds, that the artist *emulate* models in evolving his own conception, Allston advocated that the artist define the originality of his own conception *against* that of the models. (32)

In addition, Reynolds's life-long campaign to elevate the genre of portrait painting to the intellectual and imaginative level of history painting would have been difficult for Allston to support given his feelings about portraits and portrait painters (see note 7).

However, because it was so important for Allston to view himself as part of a tradition, the American followed as best he could, the principles outlined in Reynolds's *Discourses*. Wayne Craven in his article "The Grand Manner in nineteenth Century American Painting" writes that on questions of technique and composition

Allston followed these principles scrupulously, for to have one of his figures make an unwarranted gesture or inappropriate facial response would have been a grievous error. Similar protocol of the Grand Manner demanded the proper use of colors, of light and shadow, and of compositional arrangements. Although Allston was developing, in such works as *The Dead Man restored* [sic], a Romantic strain that had never existed in the Grand Manner, he nevertheless assiduously worked within that tradition and thought of himself and his art as continuing it. (34)

<sup>14</sup>Reynolds attests to his admiration of Michaelangelo in the fifth lecture of his *Discourses* in an ongoing discussion comparing the virtues of Raffaele and Michaelangelo. Reynolds points to those excellences of the Tuscan that made him an important subject for study for the art student—only after first studying Raffaele.

Reynolds writes that Michaelangelo “considered the art as consisting of little more than what may be attained by sculpture; correctness of form, and energy of character” (75). After acknowledging the notable decline in interest in Michaelangelo and his works in the eighteenth century (no doubt due to the visceral energy and the imagination of his work), Reynolds further justifies his feelings about the painter/sculptor.

It is to Michael Angelo that we owe even the existence of Raffaele; it is to him that Raffaele owes his grandeur of style. He was taught by him to elevate his thoughts and to conceive his subjects with dignity. . . . Michael Angelo has more of the poetical Inspiration [than Raffaele]; his ideas are vast and sublime; his people are a superior order of beings; there is nothing about them, nothing in the air of their actions, or their attitudes, or the style and cast of their limbs and features, that reminds us of their belonging to our own species. (77)

Allston echoed Reynolds's admiration for the Tuscan, however, with one exception. Always the independent thinker, Allston views the virtues and talents above those of Raffaele. In a conversation with William Dunlap, printed in his *History*, Allston relates:

Of Michaelangelo, I know not how to speak in adequate terms of reverence. With all his faults (but who is without them) even Raffaele bows before him. As I stood beneath his colossal prophets and sybils, still more colossal in spirit—I felt as if in the presence of messengers from the other world, with the destiny of man in their breath, in repose even terrible. (2.313)

<sup>15</sup>Allston published his only volume of verse, *Sylphs of the Seasons* in 1831. Even though this volume met with praise from early reviewers, one review written by William Gilmore Sims in the October 1843 *Southern Quarterly Review* offers the most accurate assessment of Allston's work. Sims observes:

Mr. Allston was not a poet in the high, perhaps the only sense of the term. He was not an original thinker inverse,—not a seer,—not inspired. His writings are rather those of an accomplished and educated gentleman,—the man of taste and purity, of grace and sentiment, than the poet. They are not the overflow of a swelling imagination,—a brain bursting with big conceptions. They rather declare the gently contemplative mood, stirred into utterance by the emotions which are equally passing and agreeable. Most of his effusions can be classed under the head of fugitive. They are the elegant trifles of a well-drilled, well-ordered mind, turned aside from other but not uncongenial pursuits, to an occasional dalliance with an admired and not unappreciated object. (381)

Not surprisingly, time has not altered the critic's opinion of Allston's work. Doreen Hunter in her biography of Richard Dana Sr. writes that "Allston was a better painter than a poet. Allston's poems gave stronger

evidence of his eye for color than of his imaginative or dramatic powers." Hunter goes further to state that in spite of their friendship, Dana viewed Allston's poetic efforts as weak, and it was the painter's affability in his verse "that took the bite out of his social observations and the profundity and passion out of his poetry" (33).

Allston's poetry was closely linked to his role as painter in both subject and form. Just as Allston sought the old masters for instruction, he looked to established forms of poetry. Flagg writes that for the painter the

singleness of theme and condensation required in sonnets have made them a favorite form of poetic composition. Allston's style was epigrammatic, yet flowing and perspicuous. In poetry he seemed strongest when most circumscribed—he smaller the compass for its expression, the richer his thought. (406)

The epigrammatic style that Flagg alludes to most probably had its origin in Allston's reading of Pope. Not only was he a devoted reader of the eighteenth century poet, but he owned four large volumes of Pope's *Poetical Works* published in 1778 (Johns 36). The likely influence of Pope also led to the production of Allston's most successful poetical work in *Sylphs* titled "The Paint King." This work is a satire reminiscent of "The Rape of the Lock." It employs much of the tone, characterization and tongue-in-cheek moralizing used by Pope.

Indeed much of Allston's verse reflects the influence of the eighteenth century, just as does much of his painting. Moreover, much of Allston's effort at poetry was written as a complement to its sister art, painting: a number of his poetical compositions were written as companion pieces to some of his portraits. Verse compositions accompany his portraits of *The Paint King* (1813), *The Spanish Girl* (1831), *A Tuscan Girl* (1831), *The Young Troubadour* (1833) and *Rosalie* (1835).

<sup>16</sup>Raysor in the introduction to his edition of *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism* notes that the English poet "from the writers of Germany in the great age of German literature . . . gathered ideas which gave philosophical scope and dignity to his criticism" (xvii). However, in his discussion of Coleridge's debt to A. W. von Schlegel, Raysor appears ambivalent as to exactly how great a debt Coleridge owed the German philosopher. On the one hand, Raysor believes that Coleridge in developing his method of analyzing Shakespeare's characters, was only "confirmed in his method by Schlegel," that the original conception owed nothing to the philosopher. Moreover, Raysor notes that it was only on "three or four occasions he may have taken from Schlegel's lectures: but these suggestions are so few and dubious that they may be neglected" (xxv). However, Raysor's notes in the text testify otherwise.

Raysor does however, admit to the "powerful influence" Schlegel had on Coleridge, "an influence more direct than any of the other influences . . . and greater than all the others combined" (xxx). Moreover, in apparent contradiction Raysor states that in a

rough count of pages Schlegel might be given credit for forty odd pages of Shakespearean criticism, not mentioning criticism merely suggested by the ideas of Schlegel. Such an estimate may be too liberal and would include many doubtful passages. . . . [however] internal evidence includes long parallel passages so similar in phrasing as to give reason to the charges of plagiarism . . . . No one who has studied the evidence page by page can deny that Coleridge borrowed long passages almost verbatim from Schlegel and was largely influenced outside his direct borrowings. (xxx)

E. K. Chambers in his biography of Coleridge notes the fact that "[t]he precise extent of Coleridge's debt to Schlegel as a dramatic critic has always been a matter of controversy" (246). There is little doubt that Raysor's edition is testimony to this matter.

CHAPTER IV  
ROLE OF THE ARTIST: POE'S MANDATE

When Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful" first appeared in the *Democratic Review* of 1844 a year after Allston's death, Hawthorne's allusion to Allston in the story could have easily been replaced with one to Poe, with little lost in the translation. Hawthorne's use of Allston, as an example of the romantic artist moving alone in the world of the spirit and seeking to produce the beautiful in spite of man's inability to recognize its worth or nature's ability to sustain it, has a reading in the life of Poe also. Moreover, in his story, Hawthorne leaves unresolved the value question of Owen Warland's achievement. He writes, "When the artist rose high enough to achieve the Beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes, while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of Reality" (*Works* 10.475).

Throughout this story the question of the artist's sacrifice in the creation to the beautiful looms almost as large as the allegory of the practical versus the beautiful in art. For Hawthorne's Owen Warland is more than the romantic artist ready to sacrifice, as Quinn writes of Poe "all things upon the altar of his art" (695); he is a man doomed to failure by worldly standards and by the very nature of his quest. So through the

vehicle of this story, Hawthorne poses these questions to his reader: Is the sacrifice made by the romantic artist for the sake of his art too great? And in the balance are a few brief glimpses of beauty too little payment for the work of a life time? There is no doubt that for Allston and Poe the response would be the negative.

Indeed, for Poe and his mandate for the artist, the only quest worth pursuing has beauty as its grail. Where the elevating force of spirituality served as Allston's "grail," Poe found his aesthetic quest fulfilled by knowing the beauty that exists above, rather than before him. In *The Poetic Principle* he writes that the "Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty," that "struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness" defines the artist's mandate: to seek and capture beauty. Moreover, it is the manifestation of this principle in a work of art that results in "an elevating excitement of the Soul" for those who experience it. For Poe, then, it is in part the ability of the artist's imagination to reach beyond itself that defines the *effect* of art.

But this desire for beauty is not the lone quality that defines the artist's mandate. Poe's theory holds that every person by nature is endowed with a "Poetic Sentiment," or a "Sentiment of Beauty," the cause, as Poe sees it of man's insatiable desire to experience that "Supernal Beauty." This beauty, best understood in Platonic terms, is beyond the power of man to possess. Rather, man must satisfy himself with those "brief indeterminate glimpses" of Supernal Beauty that may come to him. Beauty, then becomes

for the poet an *effect*, not an attribute, and it is the artist's mandate, through his art, to become capable of evoking the *effect* of the Sentiment of Beauty, thus furthering the soul's progression toward Supernal Beauty.

Because beauty, in Poe's poetic theory, is an effect, not a quality, in order to achieve his end, the poet must then become a technician. To capture the order, proportion and measure that is beauty as Poe perceived it, only an ordered, proportioned and well-balanced mind could compose its forms. The artist's works then, are the attempts, necessarily imperfect to some degree, to capture or closely approximate this "Supernal Beauty" through "novel combinations" of the forms of natural beauty before him so as to communicate an effect to his audience.

In these forms which are "the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments amid which he exists," the artist recognizes these as imitations of Supernal Beauty. The reality of these forms stimulate the artist's aspiration for the ideal, and they become the material which he fashions in order to grasp it. However, Poe cautions in *The Poetic Principle*, it is not the mere repetition of these forms that constitutes poetry, rather

He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odors, and colors, and sentiments, which greet *him* in common with all mankind--he, I say, has yet failed to move his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at

once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. (*Works* 6.12)

Consequently, then in Poe's mandate for the artist, the artist should not aim for truthfulness, or even verisimilitude, rather he should aim for the ideal. Neither should the artist aim to excite "passions of the heart" in his work because passions are "homely" and of this world, while the Poetic Sentiment in man cannot be satisfied by any earthly object. For Poe, it was for the artist to carefully decide what elements of poetic composition can best achieve this end, just as it was for Allston's artist to employ the use of his will and the rules of convention to fashion his best work.

Careful to state methodically his aims, Poe writes in *The Poetic Principle* that poetry should be defined as "The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty"<sup>1</sup> and in "Letter to B"<sup>2</sup> published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* July 1836 that:

A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having for its object at *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained: romance/presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *indefinite* sensations, to which end music is an essential, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most *indefinite* conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea is poetry; music without the idea is simply music; the idea without the music is prose from its very definitiveness. (503f)<sup>2</sup>

Thus for Poe, the artist's mandate also demands that the artist exercise exclusive concentration on the *effect*, the result that the sensory quality of the work will produce on the reader. Moreover, since this effect is at least in part a matter of the artist's technical capability and skill in producing this proper effect, the artist's mandate exists to large degree in adapting natural forms to the aesthetic requirements and emotional needs of the audience.

As with Allston's, Poe's mandate is also nourished by contradictions. Like Allston, Poe at once views his artist as a careful mix of technician *and* visionary, a man, to repeat Thomas Cole, "in this world but not of it." Furthermore, for Allston and Poe, their art is best understood as a combination of the traditional and the original, a curious mix that allows both men a link to the decorum and stability of the past while allowing them an opportunity for imaginative exploration for the sake of both personal expression and American art.

Even in his role as the first important American literary critic, Poe's aesthetic ideas and theories were clearly antithetical to the prevailing critical thought of his day. William Charvat in the early chapters of his book *The Origins of American Critical Thought*, notes that in the early decades of the nineteenth century the following critical ideas dominated the American literary scene: (1) it was believed that literature should be optimistic; (2) it should not condone pessimism or skepticism; (3) it should

be social in its point of view, and (4) it should not be egocentric (7f). In almost checklist fashion Poe, as a writer of fiction and poetry, violates these critical tenets of his day. Moreover, whereas most criticism had simply assumed the instrumental nature of art and used it as a tool for the debate of social, political or ethical issues, Poe takes the bold view that poetry and fiction have inherent value only, and therefore, are to be judged only by aesthetic criteria. In effect, Poe meets the challenge Plato sets forth in Book X of *The Republic* by denying that the function of poetry is to teach, rather than to delight.

However, Poe's sole interest in the aesthetic effect a work of art could produce does not necessarily group him with those writers and poets, past and present, who hold to a belief in the dictum "art for art's sake." Rather Poe's mandate evidences finer distinctions in theory and a complexity in thought, than could at anytime comfortably fit under the umbrella of any aesthetic catchphrase. In his book *Forces in American Criticism*, Bernard Smith discusses the fact that American criticism has been little affected by the doctrine "art for art's sake." He claims that our literature has been more of a "sustained polemic for and against various social and moral philosophies as expressed in art" (185). However, he does not claim complete critical immunity for America from this influence. He does acknowledge that there has indeed been an aesthetic tradition in American literature, with Poe being the first artist of importance. He is, however,

quick to qualify this acknowledgement with the explanation that true understanding and practice of "the art for art's sake" doctrine is rooted in "moral anarchism": it is contingent on the belief that truth is wholly subjective (186).

In truth, Poe can neither claim the role of moral subversive nor can he be viewed as a philosophical pragmatist. In spite of the statements of earlier critics like Joseph Wood Krutch and F. O. Matthiessen, who view the poet's apparent divorce of mortality from art as more than a protest against didacticism<sup>3</sup>, Poe does not, according to Allan G. Halline, completely erase concepts of religion and morality from his works. In his article "Moral and Religious Concepts in Poe" Halline writes that

while it must be granted that Poe was not religious and moralistic in the sense that his New England contemporaries were, it seems reasonable to suggest that the conventional view of Poe as aesthete hostile to religion, truth and goodness ought to be modified. (150)

To substantiate his argument Halline points to the more than less orthodox conception of God and immortality in *Eureka*<sup>4</sup>, and to the fact that Poe more often links poetry theoretically to truth than he divorces the two (140f).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Halline admits that "Poe's *characteristic* position is, not to exclude morality and religion from art, but to admit them as 'background materials'." Even though Poe does seem to fluctuate in his theory from a desire to erase moral concepts and religion from art, to, in some instances,

a preoccupation with them, they are nevertheless, by their presence or absence part of his theoretical construction. For example in *The Philosophy of Composition*, perhaps the most important statement of Poe's critical theory, Poe relegates a position, albeit a small one, to the role of truth in poetry. He writes that truth is a "satisfaction of the Intellect" that is indeed attainable in both poetry and prose. And although truth, along with passion, is in Poe's estimation "antagonistic to that Beauty," it does not follow that truth cannot be "introduced and even profitably introduced" into a poem, and that it may serve in "elucidation, or aid the general effects, as do discords in music—by contrast" (*Works* 6.42f).

It is on this question of truth and its relationship to art that Poe and Allston diverge. Where Poe views truth as at best an auxiliary to art, no more than a "contrast," Allston not only embraces truth as a necessary end to art, but links art, by virtue of its didactic nature, inexorably to truth. In further defense of Poe against charges of aestheticism, Smith points to the fact that Poe, like his successor Henry James, was preoccupied with forms and theoretically opposed to didacticism. However, neither man, Smith notes, "claim[ed] to be above the compulsions, problems, and conflicts of society unlike many aesthetic critics of a later time." Moreover, Smith argues that aestheticism, in his estimation, is more a state of mind than a philosophy: "it is one of ultrasophistication, the product of a ripe, we may say a decaying, culture. It is inconceivable in the kind of culture we

possessed in the 1840's—even in the aristocratic South" (186). Indeed, much of Poe's criticism and even to a certain degree his poetry and prose are concerned with the preservation of traditions engendered by the South and its culture: traditions of the gentleman, of the idealization of the female and of an aversion to progress (see Chapter 1). Moreover, Smith and Halline's observation about Poe and his relationship to aestheticism and religion remove him from a position where he can be viewed in his relationship to American letters as serving in the role of isolate or Bohemian, a post-Romantic perspective. Rather, their observations put Poe in the position that most evidence convincingly places him: as a writer who desires to establish definite links to the past through an established tradition.

Clearly Poe's mandate includes the preservation of tradition; however it is a tradition that is carefully selected and self-serving. Reasons for Poe's desire to fashion his own tradition for both himself as an artist and what he desired for American art can best be seen in the role he played in the production of his own tradition.

Indeed, just as Van Wyck Brooks in *The Flowering of New England*<sup>6</sup> and Henry James in his biography of the sculptor William Wetmore Story (see Chapter 2, note 8) attribute the failure of Allston as a romantic artist to the demands of an insensitive environment, Poe's failure to achieve recognition or even the necessary encouragement as an artist and his

consequent status as a displaced person among his contemporaries, can also be seen, at least in part, as a result of indifferent surroundings. Charles Baudelaire in his *Poe: His Life and Works* (1852), a writer who is not always cited for his critical objectivity in dealing with the poet, chooses to view Poe as a victim of a combination of American materialism and fate. He writes that:

The life of Edgar Poe was a painful tragedy with an ending whose horror was increased by trivial circumstances. The various documents which I have just read have convinced me that for Poe the United States was a vast cage, a great counting-house, and that throughout his life he made grim efforts to escape the influence of that antipathetic atmosphere. (39)

In retrospect and with a more objective perception than Baudelaire's, it is not difficult to see how Poe's antipathy for the environment and the environment's antipathy for Poe helped him define his relationship to tradition and his mandate for the artist.

Like Allston's, Poe's mandate developed from a knowledge of a need for a more definitive and prominent role for the American artist. This knowledge, attributed no doubt to the artist's position of importance in other societies and cultures, past and present, was for both Allston and Poe reason enough to validate their profession and establish a tradition for the American artist: new to the environment but old in its conception. Where Allston sought to influence young artists in the tradition of the Old Masters

through his role as mentor, Poe sought his link to the past in a much modified and self-fashioned role as Man of Letters.

Even for a largely self-determined man like Poe, there is evidence early in his career that he saw himself as part of a brotherhood of poets and writers. In a letter to friend and fellow artist John Neal dated October 1829, Poe defines with youthful exuberance his conception of the artist.

I am young—not yet twenty—am a poet—deep worship to be so in the common meaning of the word. I would give the world to embody one half of the ideas afloat in my imagination. . . . I appeal to you as a man that loves the same beauty which I adore—the beauty of the natural blue sky and the sun shiny earth—there can be no tie more strong than that of brother for brother—it is not so much that they love one another as they both love the same parent—their affections are always running in the same direction—the same channel and cannot help mingling. (*Letters* 1.32)

Here Poe sees himself not only as a "deep worship[per] of beauty" but one who is united to other poets by virtue of their shared *religion*. However, even beyond this brotherhood Poe tells Neal he feels with his kindred, Poe also had practical plans for creating for America her own community of writers.

Lewis P. Simpson in a number of articles on Poe has explored Poe's vision of establishing an American literary hierarchy and his desire to realize himself, as Allston desires also, as a part of an ongoing tradition is his role as artist. Simpson holds that Poe's two conceived, but unrealized

publications, *The Penn* and its successor *The Stylus*, were an "attempt to realize a vision of establishing a literary order in the United States" (*Touching* 35). Simpson explains

Poe knew the literary situation of his day not as a dispassionate observer but as a desperately involved participant; and the aspirations which prompted his literary adventures were always intensely personal. In fact, the story of the *Stylus* can be read simply as the history of a frustrated private ambition that persisted beyond possibility of realization into illusion and finally into hallucination. But Poe's fruitless endeavors to publish the *Stylus* should be viewed in a broader context than that of his individual literary ambition. When this context is developed, Poe's motives, we realize, were more than personal. . . . In its broadest context Poe's dream of the *Stylus* is properly not less than what may well be regarded as the major phenomenon of the literary history of the western world during the past century of sensibility . . . the sensibility of literary community. (35)

The type of literary community Poe hoped to establish in America is, in its conception, much the same as the one that Allston hoped to establish for the art community. For both Allston and Poe it was important to continue in the shadow of the long-standing tradition of communities of artists and writers, rather than to adapt, as did most of America's romantic artists, to the short-lived tradition of English Romanticism with its focus on the individual. The type of literary community Poe hoped to establish is cited by Simpson (*Touching* 35f.) and Phillips (482f.) as one with its roots in the cultures of the historical periods of the Old Testament and classical antiquity. This same literary tradition was revitalized during the Renais-

sance by Petrarch, and later thrived in the persons of writers like Voltaire and Samuel Johnson. William Phillips in his article on "The Intellectual Tradition" gives some insight into the link that Poe sought to establish with the past. Phillips notes that even though

the complexion of the intelligentsia has undergone many changes—their extremities of belief being a fairly late development—but throughout their history, and despite their growing tendencies toward atomization, they have maintained the kind of institutional stability vital to the production of art. Obviously, it was through such a unified and self-perpetuating group that our cultural continuity has been preserved, and the individual artist has been provided with a sustaining tradition of convention and experiment, without which he could never hope to be more than a gifted eccentric. (483)

Furthermore, Phillips believes that with the dissolution of a unity of belief evident in modern society, that the "more or less homogeneous outlook" this tradition provides results in a "philosophic mooring" for the modern artist. In the stability of their "tightly knit traditions" the artist can find both a point of origin and a sense of unity. Consequently, it would be more than conjecture to assume that Poe as an artist, moreover as a man who as Joseph Wood Krutch views was constantly "insecure in [his] position" (28), would find the stability offered by this literary tradition most attractive. Evidence of this attraction is witnessed not only in Poe's attempt to establish the magazine as a valid literary form, with himself at its helm, but also in the prospectus he wrote outlining the goals of his own

publication. Poe's desire for public recognition of the magazine as an art form surfaces a number of places in his writing. In his *Marginalia* of September 1845, he validates society's need for the magazine and its function as a literary tool. He writes

The increase, within a few years, of the magazine literature, is by no means to be regarded as indicating what some critics would suppose it to indicate—a downward tendency in American taste or in American letters. It is but a sign of the times, and indication of an era in which men are forced upon the curt, the condensed, the well-digested in place of the voluminous—in a word, upon journalism in lieu of dissertation. (*Works* 7.264)

However, in his critical essay "Peter Snook" he appears more concerned with the negligence regarding quality on the part of American "magazinis ts" to their art. Moreover, he views American productions as "lamentably deficient not only in invention proper, but in that which is, more strictly, Art." And in comparison to the French and British publications, America is "behind the age in a *very* important branch of literature—a branch which, in the end (not far distant), will be the most influential of all the departments of letters" (*Works* 7.127).

Evidence also exists in his letters that Poe viewed the magazine, and most specifically his own magazine, as essential to his literary life. To Phillip Cooke, a fellow critic, Poe writes on 9 August 1846 that "[t]ouching 'The Stylus:'—this is the one great purpose of my literary life. Undoubtedly

(unless I die) I will accomplish it —" (*Letters* 2.330), and to George W. Eveleth on 15 December 1846 he reiterates the personal importance of the publication: "[a]s regards the `Stylus'—that is the grand purpose of my life, from which I have never swerved for a moment" (*Letters* 2.333).

Indeed, the personal investment in Poe's design to fashion a magazine, becomes manifest in two prospecti he wrote for *The Penn Magazine* published in the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* 13 June 1840, and then *The Stylus* published in *Saturday Museum* 4 March 1843. In the first prospectus Poe writes in "founding a magazine of my own lies the sole chance of carrying out to completion whatever peculiar intentions I may have entertained" (2). However, as Simpson indicated in an earlier passage and as Poe's prospecti reveal, the purpose and intention of *The Penn* and *The Stylus* have implications broader than Poe's own self-fulfillment. In an effort to link his work to his literary forbearers, Poe writes in *The Penn* prospectus:

It shall be the first and chief purpose of the magazine now proposed to become known as one where may be found at all times, and upon all subjects, an honest and fearless opinion. It shall be a leading object to assert in precept, and to maintain in practice the rights, while in effect it demonstrates the advantages of an absolutely independent criticism—a criticism self-sustained; guiding itself only by the purist rules of Art; analyzing and urging these rules as it applies to them; holding itself aloof from all personal bias; acknowledging no fear save that of outraging the right; yielding no point either to the vanity of the author, or to the assumptions of antique prejudices, or to the involute and anonymous cant of the Quarterlies,

or to the annoyance of those organized *cliques* which, hanging like nightmare upon American literature, manufacture at the nod of our principal booksellers, a pseudo-public-opinion by wholesale. . . . It will endeavor to support the general interests of the republic of letters, [a phrase repeated almost verbatim in the prospectus to *The Stylus*] without reference to particular regions; regarding the world at large as the true audience of the authors. (2)

Clearly Poe had lofty aspirations for his magazine, nor were these aspirations lost when, two years later he composed his prospectus for *The Stylus*, a prospectus that by his own admission contains no significant changes from the first<sup>7</sup>. However, Poe's desire to establish a periodical that will serve both the ends of "an independent criticism," one that "guid[es] itself only by the purest rules of Art" seemingly offers an ideological contrast to one that will simultaneously "support the general interest of the republic of letters" and acknowledge the "world at large as its audience." Lewis Simpson in his article "Poe and the Literary Vocation in America" discusses the ramifications of what he views as Poe's divided literary purposes stated in his prospecti. Simpson notes that in Poe's vision

of bringing literary order to the incoherent, corrupt American Grub Street, does not Poe create an almost complete split between alienation and community? Essentially he posits two symbolic realms, without realizing that there is no easy, or necessary, relation between the two. The distance between his absolutely autonomous, depersonalized realm of Pure Art and the traditional public dominion of letters is greater than the distance between Bohemia and the Republic of Letters. Are not the two realms virtually discontinuous? (13f)

Ironically, what Simpson sees as Poe's inconsistency, is indeed Simpson's inconsistency in his conception of Poe. Clearly Simpson recognizes the importance of tradition to Poe's mandate, but he fails to view it in anything but a post-Romantic context. It has unquestionably become a hallmark of Poe criticism to view the poet as much in contention with himself as he was with his environment. In truth, however, both Poe and Allston's inability to combat the forces of an environment which failed to recognize the importance of tradition, is not due to the fact that each practiced and proposed a mandate that sought to reconcile the ideal with the real. Rather, they failed due to an environment that chose the individual over the community: the lone man Adam over generations of artists. With the acknowledgment of Emerson and the Transcendentalists as the dominant American literary voice of the early 19th century, it was indeed Poe and Allston who waged a losing battle in their attempt to make the past an essential part of the present. This battle was motivated, no doubt, by their particular Southern elitist experience and the values it entailed, as well as their conception of the artist's mandate. Given this, Poe and Allston work to the same end: they both see the need for a truly American mandate for the artist, but one that must be founded on a tradition, one with "philosophical moorings" that reached beyond a generation of English Romantics. Poe and Allston both saw their mandate as embracing community and continuity and not the individual and alienation.

To further state this case, William Phillips notes that it was, once again, the American environment that discouraged the kind of literary tradition Poe hoped to perpetuate. Phillips believes that

in the case of American Literature, unlike that of the old world, we have a kind of negative illustration of the relation of the intelligentsia to art. For the outstanding features—not to speak of the failures—of our national culture can be largely explained by the inability of our native intelligentsia to achieve a detached and self-sufficient group existence that would permit it to sustain its traditions through succeeding epochs, and to keep abreast of European intellectual production. One need hardly stress such symptoms in American writings as shallowness, paucity of values, a statistical approach to reality, and the compensatory qualities of forthrightness, plebianism, and a kind of matter of fact humanism: they have been noted in a number of historical studies; and to be sure, our cultural innocence has been practically a standing complaint of American criticism.(485)

Thus the failure of Poe's attempt to establish a literary order in America was more than just a question of the apparent divisiveness of his ideas: it was also the absence of those professional and social resources provided by an established and organized literary order.

This is not to say, however, that America of the early nineteenth century was completely void of any literary organization; on the contrary, one existed, but one that Poe would never participate in. The exclusivity of the groups formed by the writers and poets of the Boston, Cambridge, and Concord areas provided America's first acquaintance with the kind of literary "intelligentsia" that Phillips discussed. Numerous critics among

them Phillips (486), Simpson (*Vocation* 13), Brooks (3-20) and Parrington (2.275f), all cite the Boston area as the center of all intellectual activity in Poe's day, and indeed, Kermit Vanderbilt in his book *American Literature and the Academy* writes that "[t]he oracle of Concord did express the common national aspirations of an entire literary epoch" (60). Phillips augments Vanderbilt's observation when he observes that

The Concord school may be said to mark the first appearance in full intellectual dress, of an American intelligentsia. Revolting against the all absorbing commercialism of the day and against the bleakness of the Puritan heritage, they set out quite consciously to form, as Emerson put it, 'a learned class,' and to assimilate the culture of Europe into a native tradition. (486)

Seemingly what Poe alone could not accomplish, Emerson and his friends could; however, Emerson's achievement was no consolation to Poe. Indeed, Ottavio M. Casale in his article "Poe on Transcendentalism" writes that "[b]etween Poe and Boston there lay an unbridgeable chasm. He ached for Boston but Boston was not to be had" (85).

That Poe had no hopes of ever being accepted into the Boston literati can be seen as one of many plausible explanations for his often vitriolic comments about Emerson and other members of the Transcendental Club and about their literary publication *The Dial*. Evidence of this appears in Poe's letter to George W. Eveleth that "[they] have badgered me so much that I fear I am apt to fall into prejudices about them" (*Letters* 2.333). In

truth, the fall was indeed a short one. Poe's relationship to "the city of Smug" where a "sky-rocketing" brand of literary criticism was made by "people who live (upon beans) about Boston" (*Works* 7.387f), proved to be constantly spoiling the air of Poe's literary environment. He opposed not only the Transcendentalist's critical ideals, but also their ways of stating them. In an essay published posthumously in the January 1850 edition of *Graham's Magazine*, "About Critics and Criticism," Poe writes that in his judgment the Transcendental style is

affectation—that is, an assumption of airs or tricks which have no basis in reason or common sense. The quips, the quirks, and curt oracularities of the Emersons, Alcotts and Fullers are simply Lyly's Euphemisms revived. (49)

However, Poe was not content to aim his verbal arrows at only a group of people, he sought individual targets with Emerson being the biggest mark. In his work on *Autography* (1842) Poe writes that

Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson belongs to a class of gentlemen with whom we have no patience whatever—the mystics for mysticism sake. Quintilian mentions a pedant who taught obscurity, and who once said to a pupil "this is excellent, for I do not understand it myself." How the good man would have chuckled over Mr. E! His present *role* seems to be the our-Carlyling Carlyle. The best answer to this twaddle is *cui bono?* . . . to whom is it a benefit? If not to Mr. Emerson individually, then surely to no man living. (*Works* 9.310)

In all fairness to Poe, however, and in Poe's fairness to Emerson, all Poe's comments on Emerson were not negative. In the same *Autography* sketch, Poe notes that Emerson's poetry evidences that "beauty is apparent by flashes" and he cites Emerson's poems "The Sphynx," the "Problem," and the "Snow Storm" as examples of Emerson's best work (*Works* 9.310). However, Poe's most pronounced praise of Emerson came with the publication of the *Transcendentalist's* first volume of verse in 1846. At this time in his *Marginalia* Poe writes

When I consider the true talent—the real force of Mr. Emerson, I am lost in amazement at finding in him little more than a respectful imitation of Carlyle. Is it impossible that Mr. E. has ever seen a copy of Seneca? [Poe here takes the opportunity to compare Emerson to Aruntius, who had copied his friend Sallust, according to Seneca.] If there is any difference between Aruntius and Emerson, this difference is clearly in favor of the former, who was in some measure excusable, on the ground that he was as great a fool as the latter is not. (*Works* 7.303f)

For whatever blame and begrudging praise Poe offered Emerson, he was no kinder to other members of the Boston group. What begins in 1846 as praise for Margaret Fuller's "high genius" and her manner of writing that is "infinitely varied" and "forcible" (*Works* 8.95,98), has by 1849 turned into her dismissal as a "silly and conceited piece of Transcendentalism" (*Works* 6.301). Of Ellery Channing, the nephew, Poe writes in a review printed in *Graham's Magazine* August 1843 that "in his obscurity its is scarcely necessary to say that he is wrong. Either a man intends to be

understood or he does not"(113). Channing's propensity for the obscure Poe feels developed with the influence of Thomas Carlyle who had an "opinion of the sublimity of everything odd, and of the profundity of everything meaningless" (114). Poe argues further against the Transcendentalist's characteristic obscurity in his review of Horne's *Orton* (1844). In this review his eye is obviously turned towards Bronson Alcott's earlier publication "Orphic Sayings" (1840); however, Poe voices what may be considered a generic criticism aimed at the whole of the Transcendentalists, rather than Alcott specifically. "Language" Poe states

is in the promulgation of thought. If a man—if an Orphicist—or a SEER—or whatever else he may choose to call himself, while the rest of the world calls him an ass—if this gentleman have an idea which he does not understand himself, the best thing he can do is to say nothing about it. . . ." (*Works* 6.325f)

Moreover, Poe did not limit his critical remarks on the Transcendentalists to his reviews or essays. Seizing the opportunity, Poe used the Transcendentalist's propensity towards obscurity for comic purposes. In "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1845), Poe lampoons the group and its publication. Psyche Zenobia is told by Mr. Blackwood

A little reading of the "Dial" will carry you a great way. . . . Put in something about the Supernal Oneness. Don't say a syllable about the Infernal Twoness. Above all, study innuendo. Hint everything—assert nothing; If you feel inclined to say 'bread and butter,' do not by any means say it outright. You may say anything and everything *approaching* to 'bread and butter.' You may hint at

buckwheat cake, or you may eve go so far as to insinuate oatmeal porridge, but if bread and butter be your real meaning, be cautious, my *dear* Miss Psyche, not on any account to say `bread and butter!' (*Works* 4.249)

Indeed, much of Poe's own mandate for the artist can be seen in relation to his feelings about the Transcendentalists. Casale points to some of the prominent reasons for Poe's animosity towards this group: reasons that manifest themselves clearly in his theories of poetry and fiction. Casale notes that it was not so much the *substance* of transcendental ideas that included the "immanence of God and the primacy of the intuition" that Poe objected to, but Poe, in fact, distrusted their "metaphysics," their obscurity of language and thought, and their discourse aimed at capturing the sublime that most often ended by falling into obscurity. Casale also points out that in Poe's fight to establish originality in American literature, the poet took issue with the Transcendentalists' "stylistic excess, the didactic, oracular stance, and the imitative quality of the movement." In Poe's estimation this imitative quality of the Transcendentalists had its roots in English Romanticism, a movement that for Poe had roots too close to the surface. English Romanticism and the German philosophy of Transcendental thought, failed, in Poe's eyes, to offer the stability, indeed "the moorings," that older traditions of literature and philosophy provided. Moreover, Casale asserts that the democratic liberalism of the group "functioned as a red flag for Poe." In his role as a southern conservative who, at least in

print, defended slavery, opposed technological progress and distrusted democracy, "Poe held no belief for the progressive abolitionist thought of the day" that served as the political bread and butter of most of the Transcendentalists (95f).

As with Allston, some of the most salient features, and also some of the nuances of Poe's mandate for the artist are best viewed in relation to Emerson and the Transcendentalists. These comparisons, in no way intend to imply any cause/effect relationship between Poe, Allston, and Emerson. Rather these comparisons seem to indicate that in their unified quest to fashion a mandate for the artist that was uniquely American, there was an ideological fork in the road. Where Poe and Allston held more firmly to the past, sought and idealized beauty, emphasized tone and style in poetry, and viewed the artist as part of an elite tradition, all manifestations of their southern beginnings, Emerson was looking forward, sought and idealized nature, understood poetry as an organic process and viewed the artist as a man among men, distinguished in his role by no more than his "divine" vision. Certainly Poe, and to a certain degree Allston, felt the necessity to keep a significant distance not only physically, but philosophically and aesthetically from Emerson and the Transcendental movement. This desire for distance was not so much a fear of possible influence, as it was a tenacity to remain unchallenged in their beliefs.

However, this is not to exaggerate the presence of Emerson in Poe's career. In fact, Poe's verbal punches at Emerson and the others of his group account for only a small percentage of Poe's literary effort, and seem especially insignificant given the overall menu of targets for Poe's pen. Indeed L. W. Payne in his article on "Poe and Emerson" notes that at the height of each man's career in 1844, "[n]either of them seemed to pay any attention to the other" (65). Payne's statement appears true, especially in Emerson's case where the only significant comment on Poe was made in 1860, well after Poe's death, in a private conversation with William Dean Howells (Rusk 405). Even though Emerson's label for Poe, "the jingle man" has endured longer than any of the myriad epithets Poe hung on Emerson, Emerson appears to have reserved judgement both in word and in print on his fellow poet during Poe's lifetime. However, the possibility also exists that Emerson did not feel Poe justified any response, that he was not to be taken seriously. Whatever the circumstances, to juxtapose the mandates these two men fashioned for the American artist will provide, at the very least, an example of rich contrasts, and at the most, a clearer marking of the common ground that Poe shares with Allston.

For all that can be said about the contrasting theories of Emerson and Poe, it is necessary to note one important similarity: Emerson and Poe are both *idealists* whose aesthetic is rooted in a system of *ontology*. James E. Mulqueen in his article "The Poetics of Emerson and Poe" notes that both

poets saw "an eternal spiritual verity underlying the material universe," and it is in the presence of this "spiritual verity" that Emerson and Poe are seemingly in accord on the capacity of the artist to "transcend" the natural world. Both men grant the poet the ability to see into the plan of this "spiritual verity" or God, and they both concede that it is even within the poet's ability to perceive analogies between the natural and ideal worlds (5). However, Robert Jacobs in his book *Poe: Journalist and Critic* points out that for

Emerson the poet's insight into the universal as manifested in the particular was ground for the hope that man would be able to attune himself to the higher laws and come out from under the dominion of the law of things. Pessimistically viewing the history of mankind, Poe had no confidence that the world would ever be guided by the poet's vision. (407)

Mulqueen is then correct in noting that the similarities between Emerson and Poe are short-lived; however, in his understanding, it is the difference in their ontological systems that parallel differences in the poetic theories.

Mulqueen explains:

For the Transcendentalist, all Being is phenomenon, not substance, and is pre-ved by one Spirit; through intuition man can attain a subjective apprehension of the Spirit in and behind the visible world, for there is a direct relationship between the thoughts in the human mind, the phenomena of material reality, and the eternal and absolute ideas which are the Spirit; all are elements of a cosmic unity. . . . For Poe, also the ideal is unity a concentrated unity in which God and matter are One; the present constitution of the universe,

however, is a dispersion of this ideal effected by "forcing the originally and therefore normally *One* into the abnormal condition of the *Many*." When matter returns to unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all Finite Perception, unity must be—into that material nihility from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked. . . God will remain all in all." (5)

Not only did this difference in philosophical theory in Mulqueen's estimation, generate contrasting poetic theories, but these poetic theories in turn direct two distinct conceptions of originality. It is on this point of defining the original, a concept important to any idealist, and most definitely to Emerson and Poe, that their artist's mandates should be examined.

Anyone familiar with Poe is certainly familiar with the importance he places on originality in his theories of poetry and fiction and in his critical evaluation of other writers. Charles Sanford in his article "Edgar Allan Poe: A Blight Upon the Landscape" notes that Poe's "lonely pursuit of originality" was indebted to a literary nationalism that sought to curb national vanity by "refusing to applaud inferior works merely because they were American." However, in spite of this apparent attitude, Sanford notes Poe reserved his "highest critical praise for 'native invention, novelty and originality'" (56), the kind he observed in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*. In this review Poe praises Hawthorne's peculiarity as a measure of originality, and in "the true originality there is no higher literary virtue" (*Works* 7.24). As a critic Poe also seized the occasion to promote his belief

in the importance of originality to those who failed the mark. In his review of Longfellow's "Ballads" he writes that Longfellow's "aims of poesy [are] erroneous" and that he has done "violent wrong to his own high powers" by not making originality his aim in poetry rather than the didactic (*Works* 6.151). But writing in his *Marginalia* published in *Godey's Lady's Book* August 1845 Poe sounds a note of optimism for his cause. He writes:

All true men must rejoice to perceive the decline of the miserable rant and cant against originality, which was so much in vogue a few years ago among a class of microscopical critics, and which at one period threatened to degrade all American literature to the level of Flemish art. (*Works* 7.275)

However, even with the vigor that Poe promoted his campaign for the original in American art, he nevertheless managed to reconcile his dependency on tradition and his need for a link to the past in his conception of the artist's role. Like Allston, Poe holds the belief that the artist should learn from his predecessors; however, this knowledge should not be manifested in *imitation*, rather it should be used<sup>4</sup> for study, the starting point for the development of one's own originality. Evidence of this belief is seen in the April 1846 entry in his *Marginalia*, Poe writes:

Imitations are not, necessarily, unoriginal—except at the exact points of the imitation. Mr. Longfellow, decidedly the most audacious imitator in America, is markedly original, or, in other words, imaginative, upon the whole; and many persons have, from the latter branch of the fact, been at a loss to comprehend, and therefore, to believe, the former. Keen

sensibility of appreciation—that is to say, the poetic *sentiment* . . . leads almost inevitably to imitation. Thus all great poets have been gross imitators. It is, however, a mere *non distributio medii* hence to infer, that all great imitators are poets. (*Works* 7)

For Poe, then there is a real distinction between those who just imitate poetry and those poets who both imitate and originate. Originality, then for Poe is the defining mark of the poet.

For Emerson however, tradition offers no link to the development of the original, even though he does, like Allston and Poe, want to view himself as part of an ongoing tradition of artists. Rather in Emerson's perception tradition has been democratized; he does not view those artists who have preceded him as ones to imitate. He appreciates them as the "hardy pioneers" who cleared paths for those artists who follow—and therein lies his debt to the past (see Chapter 3). Indeed, in the opening of his essay "Nature," Emerson in fact poses these questions to his audience:

Why should not we also enjoy an *original* [emphasis mine] relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? . . . why should we grope among the dry bones of the past. . . ? (*Works* 1.1)

Further evidence that Emerson sees himself as part of a tradition but does not hold the proper "reverence" for the "old masters" of his profession, is also witnessed in the third chapter of "Nature." In his discussion of

"Beauty" he states only a Homer or Shakespeare could "re-form" for him the landscape before him. However, with a certain degree of audacity he proceeds to perform the task, by his own admission, equal to the talents of a Shakespeare or Homer.

The western clouds divided and subdivided themselves into pink flakes modulated with tints of unspeakable softness; and the air had so much life and sweetness, that it was a pain to come within doors. What was it that nature would say? Was there no meaning in the live repose of the valley behind the mill, and which Homer or Shakespeare could not re-form for me in words? The leafless trees become spires of flame in the sunset, with the blue east for their background, and the stars of the dead calices of flowers, and every withered stem and stubble rimed with frost, contributed something to the mute music. (*Works* 1.17f)

In Emerson's conception of tradition and in his mandate on the artist, there is no place for a hierarchy. In a philosophy where all men are indeed poets, even death does not grant privilege or instill value. However, for Poe and Allston it was not only Emerson's artistic democracy that upset their elitist values, it was also Emerson's failure to distinguish individual talents, in his conception of the artist as "divine instrument." In Emerson's belief all artistic power emanated from one source. Writing in his *Journals* he states:

I feel also how rich the world is when I read Ben Jonson's *Masques* or *Beaumont and Fletcher*; or when I go to the *Athenaeum Gallery* & see traits of grandeur & beauty which I

am yet assured are not by the Masters & were done by I know not who: They were done by the Master. (*Journals* 7.22)

For Poe, then, Emerson's mandate failed to distinguish what for Poe and Allston is essential to their conception of the artist: his ability to exercise his own power over *his* construction—hence *his* capacity to develop the original. Even though Emerson shared with Poe and Allston and a chorus of voices a belief that America should critically and aesthetically break new ground, Emerson's conception of originality and creation denied the artist control over his work. This control was, however, for both Poe and Allston essential to both their understanding of art and to their understanding of themselves as artists. In an entry in his *Marginalia*, Poe not only defines art, but testifies to the importance of the artist's role as technician. The following passage is Poe's response to a quote from Novalis: "The artist belongs to his work, not the work to the artist."

If, in the sentence above quoted, the intention is to assert that the artist is the slave of his theme and must conform it to his thoughts, I have no faith in the idea, which appears to me that of an essentially prosaic intellect. In the hands of the true artist the theme, or "work," is but a mass of clay, of which anything (within the compass of the mass and quality of the clay) maybe fashioned at will, or according to the skill of the workman. The clay is, in fact, the slave of the artist. It belongs to him. His genius, to be sure, is manifested, very distinctively, in the choice of the clay. It should be neither fine nor coarse, abstractedly, but just so coarse, just so plastic or so rigid, as may best serve the thing to be wrought, of the idea to be made out, or, more exactly, of the impression to be conveyed. (*Works* 7.275)

Thus for Poe, the artist decides what his work is to become, and in the process of consciously making choices, he controls his production. As both an artist and a critic Poe emphasizes the quality of these choices and sets high standards for both himself and others. As a corollary to the pursuit of these standards it also follows that, for Poe a desired end in art—the production of the original—would be an inherent result of this pursuit. Thus, originality in Poe's estimation becomes a product of the artist's knowledge, skill and vision, not a product of inspiration as Emerson would have it. Unlike the English Romantics or Emerson, Poe feels that originality is not a mere matter of "passive reception," instead as he writes in "Peter Snook": "[t]here is no greater mistake [for the artist] that the supposition that a true originality is a mere matter of impulse or inspiration. To originate, is carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine"(Works 7.126f).

This same belief is later echoed in Poe's documentation of his own poetic method "The Philosophy of Composition." Poe very matter-of-factly prefaces his discussion of scansion with the statement that "[m]y first object (as usual) was originality." He then proceeds in his discussion to state that to the

extent to which this [originality] has been neglected, in versification, is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. "Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere *rhythm*, varieties of meter and stanza are absolutely

infinite—and yet, *for centuries, no man in verse has ever done, or seemed to think of doing, an original thing.* The fact is, that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation. (*Works* 6.48f)

What Poe shares with Allston in his desire for American art is a mandate that gives the artist both the freedom to construct "the novel conception, the unusual combination," while simultaneously allowing the artist to renew old ideas, to maintain traditions, tempering one with the other, all under the control of the artist. Like Allston, Poe was not ready to surrender his power over himself or over his work to any Emersonian version of Plato's "divine afflatus,"<sup>8</sup> or any truly transcendental conception of artistic inspiration such as Emerson describes in the following passage from his Essay "The Over-Soul."

When I watch that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me, I see that I am a pensioner; not a cause but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come. (*Works* 2.268)

In truth, it is doubtful that Poe would ever be caught poised as a "surprised spectator," indeed in his relationship to his audience the reverse was often the case. Moreover, it is even more difficult to envision Poe as the recipient of "alien energy" (and moreover admitting to it), given his desire

for power and his marked egotism. In light of these essential differences in their conceptions of the original and the artist's ability to construct it, Poe and Emerson represent, not only two different ontological positions, as Mulqueen stated earlier, but in their diversity they manifest some of the essential paradoxes of the creative process.

Jacques Barzun in his article "The Paradoxes of Creativity" published in *American Scholar* (1989) discusses some of the philosophical questions posed by the creative process in an attempted to define what, by his own admission defies definition. His observations, however, serve as a revealing gloss on the conceptual nature of Emerson's and Poe's beliefs concerning the original and concerning the role of the artist. Barzun notes that the idea of creation in itself implies paradox. Is it possible to indeed make something out of nothing? Or is all creation "only the transformation of some pre-existing thing," evidence of the Law of Conservation? These two apparently opposing theories Barzun cites not only have roots in *Genesis* in the two stories of the earth's creation<sup>9</sup> and in numerous succeeding theories of artistic and scientific creation, but they manifest themselves in such things as the dualism of evolutionists and creationists theories. Barzun points out that this dualism does, in spite of the heat it sometimes generates, satisfy a human need—one for "our love of miracles" and "the other reassures our common sense" (337f).

In further discussion, Barzun points out that inherent in this dualism is the juxtaposition of the conscious and unconscious production, indicative of what may, in broad terms be seen as Emerson's inspiration and Poe's inspiration *and* perspiration. However, by way of what would serve as a solution to the definition of creativity, and hence the original, Barzun points to William James as a source for what is "if not an explanation of genius and creation at least a right conception of their workings" (35). Barzun writes:

The genius, according to James, has an enormous capacity for perceiving similarities among disparate things; his mind jumps across grooves by common experience. He is also a sensitive mind; every stimulus starts multiple trains of thought. . . . And James, in *his* characteristic genius, draws a comparison which is at once comic and illuminating. He says that the profusion of possible ideas in the creative mind resembles the confusion of the muddle-headed person; hence the *eminently* muddle-headed are in a sense close to genius. (349)

Whatever comfort this theory might have provided James's audience, there remains the need for a finer distinction between the two minds which Barzun provides in the form of the following statement:

The genius's goal rivets his attention and puts order among his ideas. In fact, his concentration upon the activity required—writing, painting, composing; and in the sciences, observing, calculating, conceptualizing—becomes an obsession. In his effort, not merely the mind and the will but the whole organism—muscles, blood, nerves, and glands—are involved. This mad passion or passionate madness is the reason why psychopathic personalities are often creators and why their

productions are perfectly sane; the disturbance makes for the obsession, while the contents of the work are formed by the fertile, subtle and vigilant intellect. This conception of genius would account for the paradox that it consists both of sudden inspiration and patient, painstaking work. Hence also the versatility and often superhuman bulk of its output. (350)

Clearly in the preceding passage Barzun and James validate what Poe views essentially as the artist's relation to his work: total commitment, a fertile intellect and a combination of both inspiration and careful craftsmanship. This is not necessarily to imply that Poe should be equated with a genius (although there is little doubt he would have welcomed the comparison) rather it is to link his artistic practice in the quest of the original with the practice of those capable of producing it. It is then in this same sense that Barzun views the "paradox" of the creative production, and that Poe views the paradox of the original production. In each case, what is marked as truly original is that which seeks to reconcile the paradox of "miracle" with "common sense" or the visionary with the technician.

What is even more interesting to note, in this perspective of Poe's mandate as the reconciliation of paradox, is the relative modernity, and consequently the originality of his conception, an originality that left his plan for the artist stillborn in nineteenth century American minds. William Carlos Williams in his essay on Poe in his collection titled *In The American Grain* views the reason for Poe's "greatness" as his ability to turn "inland," to seek the original and to take account of the psychological landscape of

man while others were looking outward to the physical world. Williams then cites what he views as the reason for Poe's incongruency with his environment: America's inability to recognize herself. Williams writes:

Thus Poe must suffer by his originality. Invent that which is new, even if it be made of pine from you own yard, and there's none to know what you have done. It is because there's no *name*. This is the cause of Poe's lack of recognition. He was American. He was the astonishing, inconceivable growth of his own locality. Gape at him as they did, and he at them in amazement. Afterward with mutual hatred; he in disgust, they in mistrust . . . Here Poe emerges—in no sense the bizarre, isolate writer, the curious literary figure. On the contrary, in him American literature is anchored in him alone, on solid ground. (226)

What Poe offered to American literature was indeed an "anchor." In his mandate for the American artist, Poe shares with Allston a belief that no "new" tradition can be established that does not recognize and grow from its inexorable link to the past. Moreover, it is the past and the sense of community generated by these traditions, that in the view of Poe and Allston, offer both America as a nation and her artists as a "brotherhood" the best opportunity to produce art and the best environment for its acceptance.

Clearly implied in the importance that Poe and Allston place on tradition in their mandate is the manifestation of a social hierarchy of artists, a group of "Old Masters" or "Men of Letters" who are able to serve as both mentors and leaders to young artists and to educate and guide

public taste. Even though this role clearly emanates from their own elitism and youth spent in the South, Allston and Poe, nevertheless, hold to this belief, and essentially fight a losing battle against a Transcendental ideology that looks to English Romanticism for its roots, and a burgeoning democracy that grows on energy supplied by technology and materialism.

However, inherent in their defeat, Allston and Poe make a major contribution to the American artist's quest to define the original. In their refusal to completely accept the principles of an organic theory of art, Poe and Allston find themselves, once again, removed from the mainstream of Romantic thought and left with the task of fashioning into a mandate what they do believe about the relationship of the artist to his work. Poe holds that to be original, art must be a product of the reconciliation of the artist's dual roles. The artist must be the visionary whose "brief indeterminate glimpses" allow him insight into the relationship between the natural and ideal worlds, and at the same time an opportunity to, for a fleeting moment, know that "Supernal Beauty" that answers all human aspirations. Concurrently, the artist must be the technician, the careful craftsman, who transforms these visions by shaping the natural forms before him into art, a process that is in Poe's understanding, both painstaking and meticulous. Thus, in order for the artist to achieve the original, he must be ready to take on the task of reconciling paradox: he must be able to marry miracle to common sense and the ideal to the real. Like Allston, Poe's paradox-

cal mandate also includes the challenge of merging the past with the present, the traditional with the original. Where Poe and Allston both failed in realizing their mandate for the American artist, they succeeded in being true to their convictions about themselves and about their art. Both men failed also to be understood on their own terms, in their own country and by their fellow countrymen; this misunderstanding was as much a matter of choice as it was circumstance. However, in their careers as artists and in their relationship to society, Poe and Allston practiced their ideals, ideals which were both inimical to the democratic and pragmatic values of nineteenth-century America, and to the aesthetic values held by both English and American Romantics. In this practice both men thus fashioned themselves through paradox, as originals.

## CHAPTER IV CONTENT NOTES

<sup>1(110)</sup>There is an interesting controversy surrounding Poe's definition of poetry. In a letter to the editor of *The Nation* (1909), F. C. Prescott introduces the possibility that Poe perhaps "borrowed" his definition of poetry: "The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty" from a condensation of a sentence appearing in Griswold's Preface to the 1842 edition of *The Poets and Poetry of America*.

According to Prescott, Griswold writes in his Preface that "[t]he creation of beauty, the manifestation of the real by the ideal in works that move in metrical array' is poetry." Prescott then argues that

This preface is dated "Philadelphia, March, 1842." In the same month, if not earlier, Poe was writing the review of Longfellow's "Ballads" in which his famous definition first occurs--since this review appeared in *Graham's Magazine* for April 1842, Griswold, then, may have slight priority; but considering the dates it is safe to assert that Poe was indebted to Griswold?

Prescott points to other circumstances that validate his argument. He notes that Poe wrote three or more reviews and also delivered numerous lectures on Griswold's edition. Moreover, of Poe's second lecture which was published in the *Boston Miscellany* November 1842, Prescott writes that Poe appears to be giving credit to Griswold in the following statement: "It [Griswold's edition] embodies the sole true definition of what has been a

thousand times erroneously defined." However, in a third review, appearing in the Philadelphia *Saturday Museum* 1843 (published anonymously but Prescott attributes it to Poe) was written the following:

Now what is this but a direct amplification by our poet [Griswold] of the definition of poetry--"the rhythmical creation of beauty"--which appeared in Poe's *Critique* of Professor Longfellow's ballads, from which *we* know and *he* knows he stole it?

Prescott then asks the readers of *The Nation* for information they may have in helping to solve this dilemma. With all Poe's attention to the possible plagiarism of others, it would be ironic if Prescott's initial assumption, that Poe borrowed from Griswold, were true.

<sup>2</sup>One of the few points of contact Poe had with the Transcendentalists was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This essay "Letter to B" was Poe's first critical work and in it he managed to praise Coleridge, ridicule Wordsworth and call for an American literature independent from foreign influences. However, in this particular passage quoted, Coleridge's influence is manifest. Ottavio Casale notes that Poe was so influenced by "[t]he definition of poetry which appeared in the *Biographia Literaria*. . . that while a cadet at West Point he proffered [it] as his own in 'Letter to B--' " (87).

Indeed the definition of poetry that Coleridge cites in the *Biographia Literaria* provides almost a verbatim source for Poe's definition, and for

much of Poe's poetic theory that is presented in *The Poetic Principle* and *The Philosophy of Composition*. Coleridge's passage reads as follows:

But the communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, as in novels and romances. Would then the mere superaddition of meter, with or without rhyme entitle *these* to the name of poems? The answer is, that nothing can permanently please, which does not contain within itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre but superadds, all other parts must be made constant with it. They must be such as to justify the perpetual and distinct attention to each part, which an exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound are calculated to excite. The final definition then, so deduces, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part. (*Works* 7.2 12f)

Floyd Stovall in his article "Poe's Debt to Coleridge" makes several interesting observations about Poe and his relationship to Coleridge in a comment on "Letter to B--."

It is fairly obvious that Poe composed the "Letter to B--," with enthusiasm. He had been reading Coleridge and Wordsworth. His enthusiasm arose, therefore, as I surmise, in part from real pleasure in what he read, and in part from a vain and boyish delight in refuting persons of respect and authority. He belittles their poetry in order to persuade the reader that is has not influenced his own. . . . He is much impressed with the erudition of the *Biographia Literaria*. His praise of its author, therefore, is spontaneous and genuine; his occasional strictures on the other hand, which seem mild enough when

compared with the flippant ridicule of Wordsworth, may be changed to the conceit of youth. His references to Coleridge are most favorable around 1836; after that they are mostly noncommittal or derogatory. Corresponding to this change there is perceptible in his work an increasing reluctance to acknowledge his obligations to Coleridge. His passion for originality made him suspicious of others and inordinately apprehensive lest unwittingly he should lay himself open to the charge of imitation. (73)

<sup>3</sup>At the beginning of his article Halline offers a brief survey of those critics who have viewed Poe as either "neglectful or even hostile toward moral and religious consideration," a conception, Halline points out, "nourished" by Rufus Griswold's "Memoir" and his "Ludwig Article."

This misconception, Halline notes, has been perpetuated by a number of prominent critics of American literature, among them E. C. Stedman, Walter C. Bronson, W. P. Rent, Augustus H. Strong, and Edward Markham. However, Halline notes that two of the most recent (and most knowledgeable) men in the field of American letters, Joseph Wood Krutch and F. O. Matthiessen have also been exponents of this critical belief about Poe.

Halline quotes Krutch from his biography of the poet: "Poe's banishment of morality from art is not merely a protest against didacticism but implies that even as *themes*, moral ideas must be excluded. . . ." Halline also cites Matthiessen's remarks that Poe "was so determined to root out

the 'didactic heresy' that he barred truth from poetry, and confined it to science and prose."

Halline continues by stating that against the "formidable array" of critics who chose to view Poe's ideas of beauty and his opposition to didacticism as indications of a lack of religious faith or moral corruptness, only a few of these critics, Allen Tate, William Forrest and C. Alphonso Smith, have chosen to take the opposite perspective.

However, what appears to be the important issue raised, but not addressed by Halline, is one of Poe's critical reputation. It appears that *critical opinion about Poe has been too easily fashioned by men too willing to accept both Poe at face value and the critical opinion of their predecessors.* Griswold's shadow still looms large. Perhaps it would have demonstrated greater fairness if some of these literary critics had manifested in their judgement the critical independence of their subject.

<sup>4</sup>((130f) Halline in his article points out that according to Poe writing in *Eureka*, God is not matter, but spirit. Halline goes further to state that in *Eureka* Poe attributes several other characteristics of God which give the appearance of orthodoxy in a Judeo-Christian conception. Quoting from *Eureka* throughout, Halline writes:

In addition to the foregoing attributes of God, i.e., his spirituality, several other characteristics are given. The volition of God is omnipotent and proportioned; it created the "absolute irrelative particle," and "every exercise of the Divine Will will be

proportioned to that which demands the exertion . . . the means of Omnipotence, or of Omniscience, will be exactly adapted to its purposes." This concept of adaptation is indicated again in a later part of *Eureka*: "the Divine designs in constituting the stars advance *mathematically* to their fulfillment." God also for sees perfectly the future: "It is not that the Deity *cannot* modify his laws, but that we insult him in imagining a possible necessity in modification. In their origin these laws were fashioned to embrace *all* contingencies which *could* lie in the future. With God all is now." Another aspect of God, rationalistic like the foregoing, is his perfection: "The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a plot of God."

<sup>5</sup>(140f) Halline cites the following evidence in his article to support his argument that Poe's linking truth to poetry in his writing is both frequent and "serious."

In his review of the poetry of Joseph Drake and Fritz Green Halleck, Poe makes the following statement: Poesy is the sentiment of Intellectual Happiness here, and the Hope of a higher Intellectual Happiness hereafter."

In his "Prospectus to The Penn Magazine" Poe writes that he is not "convinced that the interests of letters are not unallied with the interests of truth."

In his review of Longfellow's "Ballads" Poe writes of himself in response to Longfellow's didacticism.

Now with as deep a reverence for "the true" as ever inspired the bosom of mortal man, we would limit, in many respects, its mode of inculcation. We would limit to enforce them. We would not render them impotent by dissipation. The demands of truth are severe.

And in *Eureka*:

Now, symmetry and consistency are convertible terms; thus Poetry and Truth are one.

From his evidence Halline then draws the following conclusions about Poe's poetic theory: the present writer has come to the conclusion that Poe's characteristic position, simply stated, is as follows:

it is proper to incorporate truth (which would include religious and moral concepts) into poetry, provided that truth forms an unobtrusive background or undercurrent to the immediate poetic sentiment. In eight or ten important passages, extending through the last decade of his life, Poe definitely stated this attitude. (142)

<sup>6</sup>Both Van Wyck Brooks and Henry James use Allston as an example to illustrate the negative impact the American environment had on its artists in the 1830s and 1840s. In *The Flowering of New England*, Brooks discusses America's art-exiles, young men like William Wetmore Story and Horatio Greenough who "in taking flight had been warned by the example of Washington Allston, whose mind had withered away in Cambridgeport" (469).

<sup>7</sup>In the opening paragraph of the "Prospectus to *The Stylus*" Poe writes:

To the Public:—The Prospectus of a Monthly Journal to have been called "The Penn Magazine," has already been partially circulated. Circumstances, in which the public have no interest, induced or suspension of the project, which is now, under the best auspices, resumed with no other modification than that of the title. "The Penn Magazine," it has been thought, was a name some what too local in its suggestions, and the STYLUS has been finally adopted. (3)

On the similarity between the prospecti of the two publications, Quinn writes in his biography of the poet:

The Prospectus of the *Stylus* resembles closely in some of its paragraphs the announcement of the *Penn Magazine* and so these need not be repeated. (375)

<sup>8</sup>(24f) The term "divine afflatus" has its origins in Plato's *Ion* when it was used as a synonym for inspiration. This "afflatus" or inspiration was seen to be an elevating force for both the mind and the spirit of the poet. This force usually preceded the composition or creation of a work and was seen as emanating from a "divine" source. However, in Plato's conception the poet experiencing this state of "afflatus" was considered "divinely mad," thus unable to function rationally. Consequently, this was the reason for Plato's initial distrust of poets, and his relegation of them to a low social position in his work *The Republic*.

Emerson, however, did not totally adopt the idea that "divine afflatus" or this state of inspiration completely explained poetic creation. Vivian C. Hopkins in her book on Emerson's aesthetic theory *Spires of Form*, writes that Emerson's

view of inspiration may in fact be highlighted by comparison with Plato's statement in the *Ion*. "A poet," Socrates explains, "is a thing light, and volatile, and sacred; nor is he able to write poetry, will the Muse entering into him, he is transported out of himself, and has no longer the command of his intellect. Plato explains the poetic gift as a Divine Madness, during which the poet creates without consciousness either of his matter or his form, acting as a scribe to write down God's winds. After the experience is over and the poem is written, the poet cannot say how it has been done. Here is the same emphasis which Emerson has placed upon the source of power beyond the control of the creative artist.

Even though Hopkins cites the similarity between Emerson and Plato's understanding of the poet's inspiration, she is quick to point out that one of the major differences lies in their perception of the poet's relation to truth. Where Plato distrusts the "kind of Divine Seizure as a method of knowledge" Emerson, on the other hand, believes that the artist as well as the philosopher has access to the truth through direct intuition. Hopkins states:

When, on occasion, Emerson denies the value of the arts, he does so not because he shares Plato's distrust of their ability to reveal truth, but rather because he finds the movement of union between the individual soul and the Divine so satisfying that outward artistic expression becomes unnecessary.

<sup>9</sup>(338) Early in his article Barzun cites the two creation stories as the genesis of his argument that creativity does essentially evolve from paradox. He cites that those who believe in the initial truth of the Bible will adhere to the belief in God's omnipotence in producing a creation that no man is capable of producing. However, he quickly notes that there are essentially two stories of creation in the first book of the Bible: one that the world emanates from nothing—it is created out of chaos; the second that Adam and Eve are fashioned from clay—a substance already present in the world. This latter theory does not involve the creation of matter as does the first, but the conversion of matter. Barzun goes further to state that

Biblical scholars tell us that the more majestic creation-from-the-void was in fact a later, sophisticated version that got put ahead of the other, older one. The vast majority of the church fathers and Catholic believers, as well as all good Protestants, have believed in creation out of nothing. This conception is so strong that it influenced the King James translators, who in strict grammar should have said that God *gave form* to the earlier chaos.

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