

The Right Brain in Poe's Creative Process
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I would give the world," Edgar Allan Poe wrote at the beginning of his career, "to embody one half the ideas afloat in my imagination" (*Letters* 32). The words, penned to editor John Neal in 1829, mark the beginning of Poe's lifelong fascination with the creative process. Over the next twenty years, even as he embodied one after another of his ideas in poems and tales, Poe returned again and again to the subject of creativity. Ranging from brief passages in letters to an elaborate recreation of his method in "The Philosophy of Composition," these treatments form a remarkably coherent picture of Poe's own creative process. The process began, as he revealed in "Marginalia" and elsewhere, with the cultivation of abstract imagery through various forms of reverie. Finding this material resistant to verbal language, he then incarnated it using a different sort of language, one made up of brilliant and surreal imagery, music, and emotional stimulation. This description of creativity, interesting for the general picture it provides of Poe's artistic process, is all the more fascinating in light of current models of the human brain. In these models, the right hemisphere, which is active during reverie, is a source of visual, musical, and emotional imagery and indeed plays an important role in creativity. Thus considered, then, Poe's descriptions of his creative process suggest that he both collected and incarnated his literary material by tapping the resources of his right brain.

The right brain, some scientists believe, is a kind of active, subterranean region of the human mind. Generally dominated by the left brain, activity of the right hemisphere nevertheless emerges under certain conditions. "In periods of inactivity," researcher David Calin writes, "the right hemisphere might seize the opportunity to express itself, as in daydreams, which occur during pauses in the stream of waking behavior, and in dreams at night" (577). John Curtis Cowan summarizes the connection between the right brain and reverie in this way:

It was once thought that special means were necessary to elicit right hemisphere imagery, but it now appears that this process (like the shining of the stars) goes on all the time. During our waking hours, and under most circumstances, the more cognitive processes of the generally dominant left hemisphere overlay right hemisphere processes Remove these activities from the left hemisphere function through relaxation, meditation, hypnosis, fantasy, daydreaming, sensory deprivation, or some similar state, and the imagery of the right hemisphere is immediately brought into focus. (81)

Cowan points out that drugs also can provide access to the right brain.

In spite of--or, perhaps, because of--its elusiveness, the right brain seems to play a key role in creativity. Some experts, such as researcher Thomas R. Blakeslee, have referred explicitly to the association between the right brain and creative thought. Others--including researcher Frank X Barron, creativity expert Rachel Friedman Ballon, psychologist Rollo May, and poet Denise Levertov--merely link creativity to the unconscious, which some scientists believe is seated in the right brain. The problem for a creative writer such as Poe, however, is that the right hemisphere lacks the major elements of verbal language, which generally is controlled by the left brain. Instead, the right brain uses a "language" of pictures, music, and emotions (Hellige 28; Springer and Deutsch (170-72)). Thus, a writer who could gain access to this remote region

through reverie and then translate its elusive material into words could achieve a unique effect on readers. Poe's descriptions of his cultivation and translation stages reveal that he did exactly this. As his early letter to Neal suggests, Poe was keenly aware of the divided nature of the creative process: first, the writer needs "ideas," and then he must "embody" them. In "Marginalia" he writes: "Whenever, on account of vagueness, I am dissatisfied with a conception of the brain, I resort forthwith to the pen, for the purpose of obtaining, through its aid, the necessary form, consequence and precision" (1382-83). In this description of giving "form" to vague conceptions, as well as later references to his attempts to "set down" and "embody" abstractions (1383-84), Poe alludes to the two stages in his creative process: collection and incarnation.

Poe's numerous descriptions of the process show that his right brain played a crucial role in each of these stages. For example, in the first half--the collection of material--Poe depended heavily on reverie. In a letter to James Russell Lowell in 1844, for example, he says:

I am excessively slothful, and wonderfully industrious-by fits. There are epochs when any kind of mental exercise is torture, and when nothing yields me pleasure but solitary communion with the "mountains & the woods" --the "altars" of Byron. I have thus rambled and dreamed away whole months, and awake, at last, to a sort of mania for composition. Then I scribble all day, and read all night, so long as the disease endures. (*Letters* 256)

The months of rambling and dreaming that give way to a "mania for composition" suggest that Poe found material for his literature in reverie. Apparently such indulgences were common to Poe for he addresses them again in an 1846 letter to Philip Pendleton Cooke:

Were I to be seized by a rambling fit--one of my customary *passions* (nothing less) for vagabondizing through the woods for a week or a month together--I would not--in fact I *could* not be put out of my mood, were it even to answer a letter from the Grand Mogul, informing me that I had fallen heir to his possessions. (*Letters* 327-28)

Similarly, Poe's revelation in the poem "Romance" that he learned his alphabet while lying in the "wild wood" suggests a connection between rambling in nature and the development of poetic language (*Collected Works* 127). The image of the dreaming poet appears also in "Sonnet-To Science," in which the speaker scolds science for depriving him of "The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree" (*Collected Works* 91).

Poe also experimented with another form of reverie. In "Marginalia," he describes peculiar impressions that "arise in the soul (alas, how rarely!) only at its epochs of most intense tranquility--when the bodily and mental health are in perfection--and at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams" (1383). The state Poe depicts here is what has come to be known as hypnagogia, a state between waking and sleep, in which a person is subject to striking sensations. After describing the peculiar nature of the images--"It is as if the five senses were supplanted by five myriad others alien to mortality" (1384)--Poe explains that he has actively cultivated this state of reverie:

Now, so entire is my faith in the *power of words*, that, at times I have believed it possible to embody even the evanescence of fancies such as I have attempted to describe. In experiments with this end in view, I have proceeded so far as, first, to control (when the bodily and mental health are good) the existence of the condition--that is to say, I can now (unless when ill) be sure that the condition will supervene, if I so wish it, at the point of time already described:---of its supervention, until lately, I could never be certain, even under the most favorable circumstances. I mean to say, merely, that

now I can be sure, when all circumstances are favorable, of the supervention of the condition, and feel even the capacity of inducing or compelling it ...

I have proceeded so far, secondly, as to prevent the lapse from *the point* of which I speak--the point of blending between wakefulness and sleep--as to prevent at will, I say, the lapse from this border-ground into the dominion of sleep. Not that I can *continue* the condition--not that I can render the point more than a point--but that I can startle myself from the point into wakefulness--and *thus transfer the point itself into the realm of Memory*--convey its impressions, or more properly their recollections, to a situation where (although still for a very brief period) I can survey them with the eye of analysis. (1384)

There is reason to believe that Poe used the material he gleaned from hypnagogia in his work. In *Hypnagogia: The Unique State of Consciousness Between Wakefulness and Sleep*, Andreas Mavromatis lists several characteristics of images that appear during the state, including "a large 'variety of colours,'" "intense brightness," and "microscopic clarity of detail" (227).

These characteristics go a long way toward explaining the peculiar color and light imagery in "The Masque of the Red Death," as well as the precision in Poe's descriptions of Ligeia's and Roderick Usher's faces. In fact, Richard Wilbur has argued that Usher's paintings represent hypnagogic images and that the entire story is an allegory for the hypnagogic state.

It is also worth noting that Poe's dry periods of literary production sometimes correspond with his inability to indulge in these forms of reverie. In an 1846 letter to Thomas Holley Chivers, he complains that he is "dreadfully ill" and unable to leave his house. He also confesses: "I have not been able to write one line for the Magazines in more than 5 months" (*Letters* 325-26). A year earlier, Poe had stayed in bed for a week and complained to Thomas Dunn English that he could not write a poem he had been scheduled to recite for the Philomathean and Eucleian Societies (Silverman 260-61). Even if Poe was faking illness to avoid writing the poem, as his aunt Maria Clemm told Thomas Holley Chivers he was, his creative block may have resulted from his generally ill health during this period. Poor health not only could have prevented him from "vagabondizing" in the woods, but probably inhibited his hypnagogia, which he indicates in "Marginalia" occurred only "when the bodily and mental health are in perfection" (1383). Cut off from these sources for literary stimulation, Poe naturally would have struggled to compose poems or tales.

While he freely admitted to using daydreaming and hypnagogia to collect material, the peculiarity of the results caused some of his contemporaries to suspect him of using a heightened form of reverie. In a letter to Poe, George Eveleth says: "I ... was afraid, from the wild imaginations manifested in your writings, that you were an opium-eater" (Thomas and Jackson 716). A reviewer for the *Southern Quarterly Review* suspected that Poe wrote "The Raven" "under the influence of opium" (Thomas and Jackson 739), and reviewers of *Tales* likened his stories to the "vagaries" and the "strange outpourings" of an opium eater (Thomas and Jackson 550, 555). Poe does, in fact, often refer to opium in his poetry and fiction. The speaker of "The Sleeper," for example, distinguishes an "opiate vapour" emerging from the moon (*Collected Works* 187), and the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" compares his depression in examining Usher's house to "the after-dream of the reveller upon opium" (397). The narrator of "William Wilson," while not directly referring to particular drugs, says of a night of carousing: "The wine flowed freely, and there were not wanting other and perhaps more dangerous seductions" (438). The question of whether Poe actually used opium to induce reverie, however, is an open one. Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, in their introduction to *The Poe*

Log, point out that there is no evidence that Poe used opium and that the references in his stories likely came from his reading of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. Biographer Kenneth Silverman also discounts the probability of Poe's using opium. He notes that the physician Thomas Dunn English, who knew Poe, not only denied the rumor, but claimed he could have detected the signs of such use had it occurred (481). On the other hand, opium was easy to obtain in the first part of the nineteenth century, and Poe's confession in an 1848 letter to Annie L. Richmond that he took a dose of laudanum in an effort to kill himself shows that he did use opium at least once (Silverman 401-02). Perhaps the final, if inconclusive, word should come from Alethea Hayter, author of *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*. In a chapter on Poe, Hayter writes:

Perhaps all that can be safely said of Poe in this connection is that he **was** almost certainly not an opium addict in the sense that Crabbe, Coleridge, De Quincey, Wilkie Collins and Francis Thompson were ... but that he may have been--like the second James Thomson, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, perhaps like Keats at the end of his life--an occasional opium-taker, sufficiently addicted to experience rather more than the preliminary stages of its effects. Poe had little resistance to any kind of stimulant--he got dead drunk on an amount of alcohol that would hardly have affected many men--and probably a few doses of laudanum would have carried him far into the depths of the opium landscape. (135-36)

Thus, the case for Poe's use of opium to stimulate reverie is only suggestive.

The exact means Poe used to induce reverie, however, is not important. Whether he ingested opium, experimented with hypnagogia, or merely wandered in the woods, the result gave him access to a fabulous source of strange, tantalizing material. While "Marginalia" and his letters provide a glimpse in to this stage in his creative process, Poe's most elaborate description of the means for cultivating literary material appears in his short story "Ligeia." Here a man continually uses reverie to conjure a mysterious lover, who delivers poetry to him and speaks through a nonverbal language of visual imagery, music, and emotions. On one level the story is of a man and the lover he has lost, but "Ligeia" is also an account of a writer and his Muse--and of Poe and his right brain.

As the story begins, the narrator calls to his lover, as if asking her help in the creative endeavor of relating his tale. "Ligeia! Ligeia!" he writes. "Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world, it is by that sweet word alone--by Ligeia--that I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more" (*Collected Works* 310-11). Both his suppression of the outside world and his description of conjuring his wife's image "in fancy" indicate that the narrator is indulging in reverie. In fact, although he goes on to describe Ligeia as a real person, her dying words suggest that she has never been more than a fancy that he controls: "*Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will*" (319-20). In light of these words and their proximity to her disappearance, Ligeia is perhaps purely a conjuration that dissolves when the narrator's "feeble will" gives out. She returns at the end of the story, of course, but only after the narrator has sat thinking of her--conjuring her--for hours. "I fell back with a shudder upon the couch from which I had been so startlingly aroused," he says, "and again gave myself up to passionate waking visions of Ligeia" (275). Later, he writes: "And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia ..." (327). Finally, after admitting to being paralyzed by "unutterable fancies," he reveals that Ligeia returned in the place of the Lady Rowena. The means for inducing the reverie represented by

Ligeia may be simply the narrator's will, or it may be something else. In describing the face of his Muse, the narrator compares it to "the radiance of an opium dream" (311). Other passages suggest that Ligeia indeed is a drug-induced dream brought about by opium. For example, the narrator says:

In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug) I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned--ah, *could* it be forever?--upon the earth. (323)

At least on this occasion, then, the narrator uses opium in an attempt to revive his fancy. Whatever the means, the writer in the story controls the appearance of his Muse through reverie.

The resemblances between Poe's treatment of Ligeia and his descriptions of hypnagogic fancies in "Marginalia," moreover, suggest that she represents a source of literary material. Indeed, he uses the same terms to describe the two entities. In "Marginalia," Poe refers to the fancies of hypnagogia as "shadows of shadows" (1383), while the narrator of "Ligeia" says that his wife "came and departed as a shadow" (*Collected Works* 311). Furthermore, both the fancies Poe encounters in reverie and the figure of Ligeia are resistant to language. Poe writes: "There is, however, a class of fancies, of exquisite delicacy, which are *not* thoughts, and to which, *as yet*, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language" ("Marginalia" 1383). Similarly, Ligeia continually challenges the narrator's powers of expression. "I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead--it was faultless--how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!..." (312). Struggling to describe Ligeia's eyes and finally referring simply to their "*expression*," the narrator complains: "Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitudes of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual" (313). Of his wife's fight against death, he says: "Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow" (317). He goes on to say he has "no power to portray--no utterance capable of expressing" her longing for life (318).

In fact, Ligeia herself is a woman of few words. Instead, like the right brain, she emanates nonverbal kinds of communication. "There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not," the narrator says. "It is the *person* of Ligeia" (311). He describes her appearance in exquisite detail, down to the turn of her lip and the tint of her brows, and writes that Ligeia makes the mysteries of philosophy "vividly luminous" (316). Furthermore, like the images of the right brain, Ligeia's appearance has a surreal quality. The narrator, for example, compares the contour of her chin to that which "the God Apollo revealed but in a dream" (312). The connection between Ligeia and music is made clear when the narrator refers to "her low musical voice" (310), "the dear music of her low sweet voice" (311), "the almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness and placidity of her very low voice" (315), and "a melody more than mortal" (317). Indeed, even the name "Ligeia" may come from the Latin word "elegia," which ultimately derives from the Greek "elegos," or "mournful song." Ligeia has an emotional component, as well, for the narrator indicates she appears to be "exhausted with emotion" (319). Ligeia does, of course, deliver one important piece through verbal expression: the poem she bids the narrator to remember. This poem, however, like Ligeia herself, relies heavily on the nonverbal. Visual images--the "blood-red" worm, the extinguished lights, and the "pallid and wan" angels--play an important role (318-19). So does music, which comes both in the rhythm of

the poem and in the reference to an orchestra that "breathes fitfully / The music of the spheres" (318). The "tragedy" depicted in the poem--man's inevitable death and decay--fulfills the emotional component (319).

In "Ligeia," Poe characterizes a creative process that depends on reverie to provide access to a nonverbal Muse. This portrayal, which matches his treatments of the creative process in "Marginalia" and elsewhere, suggests that he tapped his right brain for his extraordinary material. Having collected it, he then faced a difficult challenge--translating the yield of the nonverbal right brain into words, his chosen medium. Albert Einstein, who also apparently made extensive use of the right brain in his creative work, described the challenge:

The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychal entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be "voluntarily" reproduced and combined.
(Blakeslee 45)

Einstein elaborates on a stage of "rather vague play" with these elements and explains:

The above mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some of muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will. (Blakeslee 46)

Thomas R. Blakeslee attributes the two stages in Einstein's creative process to the workings of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. "The first stage uses the right brain's flexibility and ability to hold and transform complex images in 'visual' and 'muscular' form," Blakeslee explains. "Only after a possible solution is found in this way are words 'laboriously' used to translate the concept into a logical, verbal form." (46).

This characterization of the creative process resembles Poe's own descriptions, particularly in "Marginalia," in which he refers to the challenge of embodying abstractions in words. Many of Poe's narrators, in fact, express frustration with the translation process. The narrator of "William Wilson," for example, speaks of "undefinable delight" (*Collected Works* 428) and "incoherent thoughts" (437) and complains: "But what human language can adequately portray *that* astonishment, *that* horror which possessed one at the spectacle then presented to view?" (447). In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the narrator says that he "should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character" of Usher's studies (405) and that he lacks "words to express the full extent, or the earnest *abandon* of his persuasion" (408). The narrators of both "MS. Found in a Bottle" and "The Pit and the Pendulum" refer to feelings for which they or the world has "no name" (141, 694). Finally, the speaker of the poem "Israfel" admires Israfel's celestial music while deploring his own verbal language, which he characterizes as a "mortal melody" (177)--a phrase that starkly contrasts the narrator's characterization of Ligeia's "melody more than mortal" (317). These passages suggest that Poe, like Einstein, struggled to translate abstraction into verbal language. A close look at the second part of Poe's creative process, the translation stage, shows that he overcame the struggle by turning to the language of the right brain.

Just as "Ligeia" recreates the cultivation stage in Poe's creative process, "The Fall of the House of Usher" depicts the translation stage. In this case, the artist is Roderick Usher, who indeed resembles Poe, particularly in his "inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple" (402). Moreover, Usher's delivery of the poem "The Haunted Palace" makes him, like Poe, a poet.

While poetry is a form of verbal communication, Usher reveals over the course of the story a distinctively nonverbal style of expression. Indeed, he relies heavily on the visual language of the right brain. He recognizes, for example, the powerful effect of impressions on an observer and admits to having been overwhelmed by the impact of those produced by his house. The narrator writes that Usher complained of "an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence" (403). Aware of this potential in visual imagery, Usher makes use of it by producing peculiar paintings:

From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vaguenesses at which I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered knowing not why;-- from these paintings (vivid as their images now are before me) I would in vain endeavor to educe more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention. If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher. (405)

Just as in "Ligeia," the material with which the artist works is vague and beyond words. The artist overcomes the difficulty of translation, however, by using nonverbal language to depict nonverbal fancies. That is, he *paints* his ideas. The practice of employing brilliant, bizarre visual imagery is characterized in another of Poe's artists. In "The Masque of the Red Death," Poe describes Prince Prospero as if he were a painter or a decorator: "The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the *decora* of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre" (673). As a poet, of course, Poe had to use verbal language, but he often employed this language to create pictures. He alludes to this technique in "The Philosophy of Composition." When he describes the evolution of "The Raven," he says that he "made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage" (22). In both fiction and nonfiction Poe circumvented the problem of translating the nonverbal material he collected from his right brain into verbal language in this way. He simply retained much of the material in the form it came to him--in visual imagery. The highly visual quality of some of Poe's work, particularly "Landor's Cottage," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Black Cat," "Ulalume," and "Dream-Land," attests to the effectiveness of this technique.

Both Usher and Poe use another form of nonverbal language, music, to give form to their abstractions. Indeed, the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" describes Usher's musical instrument in terms that suggest language, calling it "his speaking guitar" (404). He also testifies to the power the musician achieved with it: "His long improvised dirges will ring forever in my ears" (405). Usher also writes songs, which the narrator characterizes as "wild fantasias" growing out of "that intense mental collectedness and concentration to which I have previously alluded as observable only in particular moments of the highest artificial excitement" (406). Reacting to an altered state perhaps akin to hypnagogia or another form of reverie, Usher communicates through the medium of music. Poe confesses to having used the same technique. In an 1835 letter to Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, he applies musical principles to poetry:

Your own verses (I remarked this, upon first reading them, to Mr. White) are absolutely faultless, if considered as "pure harmony"--I mean to speak technically--"without the intervention of any discords." I was formerly accustomed to write thus, and it would be an easy thing to convince you of the accuracy of my ear by writing such at present--but imperceptibly the *love of these discords* grew

upon me as my love of music grew stronger, and I at length came to feel all the melody of Pope's later versification, and that of the present T. Moore. (*Letters* 78)

Poe again addresses the poetic uses of music in his 1837 review of William Cullen Bryant's *Poems*:

The excesses of measure are here employed (perhaps without any definite design on the part of the writer, who may have been guided solely by ear) with reference to the proper equalization, of *balancing*, if we may so term it, of time, *throughout an entire sentence*. This, we confess, is a novel idea, but, *we* think, perfectly tenable. Any musician will understand us. Efforts for the relief of monotone will necessarily produce fluctuations in the time of any metre, which fluctuations, if not subsequently counterbalanced, affect the ear like unresolved discords in music. (415)

In "Letter to B--" Poe writes that "music is an *essential* in the creation of indefinite sensations in poetry (II), and his appreciation of music can be seen in many of his poems and tales. The intensive rhythm of poems such as "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee," for example, produces a songlike quality, while references to music emerge throughout "The Masque of the Red Death" and "The Cask of Amontillado."

Finally, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" Poe depicts one other means by which he translated abstractions into literature. Midway through the story, Usher, with the narrator's help, buries his sister, Madeline, in a part of the house directly below the narrator's bedroom. Madeline, who was alive all along, escapes the tomb, shows herself in all her horrific splendor to the narrator and Usher, and collapses on her brother. In Usher's peculiar decision to bury his sister alive, Poe depicts a technique that he himself actively employed--the provoking of an emotional response. Usher's placement of Madeline directly below the narrator's apartment can be read as a deliberate attempt to spook the narrator, who inevitably will hear the "cracking and ripping," the "screaming or grating," and the "muffled reverberation" as the woman struggles to escape her doom (*Collected Works* 414-15). Moreover, the coincidence of Madeline's escaping as the narrator reads a story sets up an obvious parallel between the scenario Usher has constructed and the kind of literature that writers--like Poe--create. Usher uses an emotional stimulus to jolt the narrator, who flees "aghast" (417), just as Poe manipulated emotion to reach readers. In "The Philosophy of Composition," he writes:

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. ... I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" (13)

Although he does not clearly identify this "effect," Poe's later description of his writing of "The Raven" suggests that emotion is at least an important part of it:

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation--and all experience has shown that this tone is one of *sadness*. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. (17)

Poe links emotional stimulation to literature in "Letter to B--," in which he argues that a poem has, "for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth" (11). This type of nonverbal communication is perhaps the most obvious of the forms Poe uses in his literature. "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Black Cat," "Hop-Frog," "Annabel Lee," and dozens of other works speak to readers through the language of emotion, whether of horror, disgust, or sadness.

Poe's use of reverie to collect abstractions and his subsequent translation of this material into a nonverbal language of visual images, music, and emotions suggest that his right brain played an important role in his creative process. These features may also help to explain the extraordinary effect he has had on readers. In an 1846 letter to Poe, the poet Elizabeth Barrett says: "Your 'Raven' has produced a sensation, a 'fit horror,' here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it and some by the music. I hear of persons haunted by the 'Nevermore'..." (229). In the century and a half since his death, Poe's reputation has climbed. His works have provided the bases for numerous films; "The Raven" has been called by the *Encyclopedia Americana* "probably the best-known poem ever written in the Western Hemisphere" (22:275); and children and adults alike regularly recite his poetry from memory. While Poe's creative process shows that he was in his right mind, his unique impact on generations of readers suggests that he has made his way into our right minds as well.

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