

An Aesthetic Defense of Imagination:

A Formal Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's "Colloquy of Monos and Ura"

by

Sharene N. Duncombe

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in the English Department


April 2016

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Dr. Rosemary Guruswamy
Thesis Advisor

4-18-16
Date



Dr. Jolanta Wawrzyniak
Committee Member

4-18-16
Date



Dr. Louis Gallo
Committee Member

4-18-16
Date

Abstract

This thesis discusses two main topics. Firstly, it explains the value of aesthetic literary criticism as opposed to ideological critical methods. Secondly, this thesis contains a formal, aesthetic analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's "Colloquy of Monos and Una." This analysis exemplifies the value of aesthetic criticism by deconstructing the colloquy's form and content and considering how the relationship between form and content affects an interpretation of Poe's work.

Sharene N. Duncombe

English Department, 2016

Radford University

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to three parties:

To the rare student pursuing truth: find it everywhere you can.

To those rare professors who still believe in ideals: keep fostering them in your students.

And most of all, to my family: your love is the most beautiful gift.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people who have helped and supported me as I completed this research project. Dr. Rosemary Guruswamy, thank you for valuing, clarifying, and guiding my ideas. I will never forget your patient attention and kind encouragement! Dr. Jolanta Wawrzyka, thank you for accepting my request to study aesthetic criticism under your guidance. Your calm, beautiful office, kind words, and intellectual integrity are an oasis! I also would like to thank Dr. Louis Gallo for generously serving on this thesis committee.

I am very grateful for the innumerable contributions which my family has made to my work. My husband, David Duncombe, is a fellow pilgrim in the vast land of academia, the one who most reflects my intellectual, moral, and aesthetic values, and my incredibly valuable, God-given sounding board. He has given me the courage and clarity to complete the project. My sweet children are beauty incarnate, and I am thankful for their daily inspiration. Several dear friends have also contributed to this effort. In particular, Alice Peverall, Kim Ferrell, and Liz Bower have contributed to the success of my academic work in numerous ways.

Many thanks to these kind, wise, and lovely people who have given me the gift of time to seek out the eternal.

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Chapter 1: Aesthetic Literary Criticism: A Defense of a Tradition

Not too long ago, on one ordinary Sunday afternoon, I was given the greatest compliment of my life. On that day, while sitting on my wrinkled bed, surrounded by laundry begging for attention, I ignored the reality before me to unnecessarily check my email, when I skipped my youngest child. That little, 5-year-old lap-lover stood before me and bestowed a priceless gift by saying, “Mommy, you are art to me because art is beautiful.”

Now, as much as I treasure her words, the point of that short narrative certainly is not to publicly commend my own beauty, convey confidence in my own parental expertise, or indulge in some gratuitous gushing over my daughter. Instead, the longer I consider her remark and the more I feel the sweet profundity of her perspective, the more pathetic becomes the comparison I inevitably make with those who make it their life’s work to critique art. These days, it isn’t too hard to imagine deconstructionists tearing apart my daughter’s words by focusing on its subjectivity. After all, she did say, “...you are art *to me*” (emphasis mine). Then, of course, in response to her statement, some could offer high-minded questions like, “Art is beautiful? In whose opinion?” or, for that matter, “What is art? What is beauty?” My experiences in academia make me think that the simple joy of reveling in the beauty of art would be, for many academics, considered rather shallow. Although it hasn’t always been so, many in the academy would consider the idea that “art is beautiful” hopelessly naïve, philosophically suspect, and politically uninformed.

A point-of-view that questions a connection between beauty and art certainly would not be rare within the study of literature. Although literature is, in fact, art, scholars who approach it as such have become increasingly rare, and in this postmodern age, even those who claim to treat literature as art often either cannot or will not judge literature’s aesthetics. Philosopher Roger

Scruton, who specializes in the study of aesthetics, explains a common approach to critiquing art by saying, “That familiar relativism has led some people to dismiss judgements of beauty as merely ‘subjective’. No tastes can be criticized...” (xi-xii). Is it true that beauty can only be judged subjectively? Is art beautiful or is it not?

The widespread, academic question of beauty’s existence is, taking history into account, a rather new phenomenon, but it is one which many modern scholars vigorously ask. For much of human history, beauty was considered a central quality of the good life. Scruton elaborates on the importance of beauty by referring to the ancient Greeks: “There is an appealing idea about beauty which goes back to Plato...According to this idea, beauty is an ultimate value—something that we pursue for its own sake, and the pursuit of which no further reason need be given, one member of a trio of ultimate values which justify our rational inclinations” (2). Indeed, much of Plato’s philosophy centers on and elevates the pursuit of beauty; Plato’s long conversation with Hippias does just that. The Greek philosopher is not alone in that pursuit. History shows that he shares company with a host of others who likewise regarded beauty as possessing a senior position in the hierarchy of human values. Aquinas, for instance, “...regarded truth, goodness, and unity as ‘transcendentals’—features of reality possessed by all things, since there are aspects of being, ways in which the supreme gift of being is made manifest to the understanding” (Scruton 3). This classical understanding of aesthetics is one shared by not only Scruton, Plato, or Aquinas, but one which has permeated the fabric of academic life for much of history.

A very brief overview of critical methods may shed some light on how aesthetics has come in and out of fashion for those studying literature. What are some major factors that lead scholars to embrace or discard aesthetics? M. H. Abrams’s *The Mirror and the Lamp* includes a

helpful chart (6) for understanding the various ingredients in any recipe concocted by literary critics (see Figure 1).

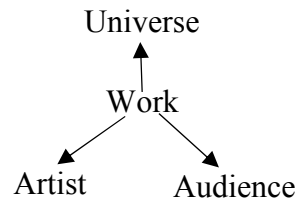


Figure 1

The work itself, the artist, the audience, and the universe: these are what Abrams describes as “the four co-ordinates in a convenient pattern” (6). His idea is that, although literary criticism includes a wide variety of theories, one may categorize these theories based on which element out of the four it emphasizes. I would add that, unlike Abrams’s diagram, not every critical theory places the work in the central position and that many scholars would see the arrows as double-ended rather than emanating *only* from the work and moving outward. Some, like reader-response theorists, “feel that readers have been ignored in discussions of the reading process, when they should have been the central concern” (Guerin, et. al 80). The English Romantics, though, had a very different perspective that regards the artist as the central figure. To them, “a work of art is essentially the internal made external” (Abrams 22). The artist becomes a hero whose creative genius mimics God’s creative powers.

Although categorizing every critical theory according to Abrams’s “four co-ordinates” might be an interesting exercise, I would like to shift the discussion by focusing specifically on one particular critical category: those which focus on “universe.” Today, a dominant category within literary criticism consists of a wide variety of interrelated ideological criticisms. Marxism, feminism, gender studies, cultural studies, race studies, and post-colonialism are all essentially mimetic theories that explain literature as “an imitation of aspects of the universe” (Abrams 8).

The critic's role, therefore, is that of a forensic scientist who dissects the ways in which literature reflects the social and political. Rather than judge the quality of a work, this school questions the concept of a canon. Instead, to them, "'Literature' was a creation of history, not of absolute standards of taste, and the aesthetic was a product of ideology of a hegemonic group" (Misson & Morgan 7). Is beauty fiction written by cultural expectations, or is beauty integral to well-executed artistry? By and large, ideological criticism would answer that question with the former option.

Because critics focused on ideology understand art as a reflection of its culture, many do not delineate between good and bad art; 'good' and 'bad' are simply relative constructs that reflect a certain bias. Rather than supporting a division between "high" and "low" art, relativistic critics throw the door wide open and welcome everyone into the cultural area: "Teaching that Shakespeare is good while reality television is bad imposes on school students the values of one culture rather than embracing the diversity of different cultures" (as qtd. in Misson & Morgan 1). This "open door policy" can challenge art critics whose essential work involves explaining the quality of a work. How are they to do this when relativist standards ignore or even deny the existence of quality?

Although an exhaustive explanation of the factors leading to the rise of ideological criticism is beyond the scope of this discussion, we may first note that the difficulty involved in defining aesthetics certainly does not help those wishing to defend its value. Even Abrams, whose diagram positions the work centrally, admits that, "The field of aesthetics presents an especially difficult problem to the historian. Recent theorists of art have been quick to profess that much, if not all, that has been said by their predecessors is wavering, chaotic, phantasmal" (3). How does one define the aesthetic? If it exists at all, may we define it as is a fixed entity or a

flexible concept which we may manipulate according to culturally-prescribed whims? Or, to quote Scruton, we may ask, "...since it is in the nature of tastes to differ, how can a standard erected by one person's taste be used to cast judgment on another's?" (xi)

In addition to struggling to precisely define aesthetics, the fact that all human activity reflects some degree of bias means that even if ideological critics have made too much of art's political aspects, ideological criticisms are, at least, telling a degree of truth. Plato himself saw art as inherently political: "The Socratic dialogues, then, contain no aesthetics proper, for neither the structure of Plato's cosmos nor the pattern of his dialectic permits us to consider poetry as poetry...In the dialogues there is only...one issue...the perfecting of the social state and the state of man..." (Abrams 9). When ideological critics make politics the central concern in literary criticism, they seem to emulate Plato who likewise viewed art according to its relation to society. Abrams continues his explanation of platonic critical theory by saying, "In Plato, the poet is considered from the point of view of politics, not of art" (11). So, when critics place ideology above art, we should not regard their approach as completely novel; they are actually, like aestheticians, following a long tradition.

A fair evaluation of ideological criticism should also include a discussion on the method's possible shortcomings. The relationship between mimetic and pragmatic art is an important consideration: when art primarily becomes a reflection of ideology, and critics want to promote a certain ideology, art becomes propaganda. One problem, for example, occurs when literary critics become so invested in an ideology that they become activists who force their personal politics on their audiences. For example, ideologically-motivated professors who teach literary criticism may employ their classrooms as platforms to promote their political perspectives: "Too often, classrooms are being used to advance a political agenda, and for

students to resist such efforts in teaching often means to risk ostracism by both their classmates and professors” (Cheney 1). In this way, students may come to associate literary criticism as a sort of policing that gauges the degree to which a work concurs with an ideology. Sadly, some say that the prevalence of biased professors has reduced the ideal of free intellectual inquiry on college campuses to a rarity.

We should note, however, that the danger of employing literature to further ideological ends is not limited to any particular side of the political spectrum. For instance, liberals, who are more apt to affiliate themselves with many of the ideologies previously listed (Marxism, feminism, etc.), especially dominate the humanities, so within that sphere we may find some activist professors embracing the idea that “the purpose of education is to induce correct opinion rather than search for wisdom and liberate the mind” (Cheney 5). Recent statistics report that liberal professors overwhelm their conservative counterparts by a margin of 3 to 1 (Tobin & Weinburg 10). These numbers suggest that today’s liberal college professors are the current establishment and that therefore, students exposed to politically-minded professors are more likely to hear liberal perspectives represented.

On the other hand, though, conservatives are also guilty of a pragmatic critical perspective which judges art based on the way in which it affects its audience rather than its actual quality. Instead of employing art to convince an audience to ascribe to liberal political agendas, conservatives desire art that will serve their own ends. For instance, conservative Christians have the tendency to make art into a tool for imposing their moral perspective. C.S. Lewis, by the way, took issue with Christians who viewed art as a pragmatic tool: “...Lewis did not see the purpose of art to be the production of sermon tropes, the mass marketing of Christian propaganda, or a philosophical search for an ideal, Platonic, heavenly realm...” (Starr

359). On the contrary, Lewis said, “the first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way” (as qtd. in Starr 359). The fact that Lewis had to point out that art is not, at its most fundamental level, propaganda, means that in his day, like today, many did not understand that basic concept. Those on the conservative side of the political spectrum should also realize the issues involved with propagandizing art.

As a sidebar, one might wonder if modern incarnations of an ideological perspective would consequentially render the same result as occurred in Plato’s *Republic*. In an effort to create a perfect state, Plato excluded artists from his ideal society. Today, the fact that certain critics decentralize art or promote art that only agrees with a certain ideology suggests that the value of art is dependent on the level to which it concurs with ideology. Perhaps, though, only artists who reject the ideals of the politicized elite would suffer that fate. Conservative Christian theocracies could allow for their own religious propaganda, and left-leaning governments could permit only “art” that promotes Marxist, feminist, eco-friendly values. But then again, that would be a strange interpretation of the word “liberal,” would it not?

Not only does an emphasis on ideology potentially turn critics into activist ideologues and art into propaganda, but perhaps a more serious concern to consider is how a relativistic critical method impacts the Humanities. In 1947, when Cleanth Brooks published his essay, “Criticism, History, and Critical Relativism,” he explained that, when it comes to protecting the Humanities from the effects of relativism, “The issue is nothing less than the defense of the Humanities in the hard days that lie ahead” (Brooks 235). The very serious concern which Brooks expressed nearly 70 years ago has grown immensely more serious as more within the Humanities embrace postmodernism. We must yet ask ourselves, if the only standard is a particular critic’s ideology, what is the purpose of literary criticism? Under relativism’s control,

criticism has no real function; in short, postmodernism effectively destroys literary criticism. Brooks expresses that idea, too, by saying, “I am convinced that, once we are committed to critical relativism, there can be no stopping short of a *complete* relativism in which critical judgments will disappear altogether” (Brooks 234). Or, to be more exact, rather than judgments disappearing completely, for those “committed to critical relativism” the only standard is one’s own personal judgment calls.

In contrast to ideological criticism that focuses on mimetic and pragmatic critical perspectives, aesthetic criticism attempts to take a more objective approach and to make art itself the focus of critical inquiry. Formalism, for example, inspects the internal structure of a work to reveal meaning. Abrams explains that an objective critical theory “regards the work of art in isolation from all...external points of reference, analyzes it as a self-sufficient entity constituted by its many parts in their internal relations, and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being” (26). Formalist or Objective Theory allows each literary genre its own qualities, and the critic may then analyze a work according to those elements.

Furthermore, rather than favoring the content of a work—its message, politics, or social implications—aesthetic criticism values both form and content. Brooks builds on that concept when he says, “...it [relativistic criticism] conceives of the ‘form’ as the transparent pane of glass through which the stuff of poetry is reflected, directly and immediately. To state it in its crudest form, it conceives of form as a kind of box, neat and capacious...into which the valuable and essentially poetic ‘content’ of the poem is packed” (223). His explanation serves to compare a lack of concern for form within relativistic criticism to aesthetic criticism’s idea that form and content are unavoidably enmeshed each within the other. In a well-conceived and well-wrought work, form and content reinforce each other. For example, Coleridge’s vision of poetry is that it

must “embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one—and what is organization but the connection of parts to a whole, so that each part is at once end and means” (as qtd. in Dobie 34). The aesthetic critic’s role is to examine a work’s various rhetorical devices, to explain the interplay between form and content, and to conclude whether the artist created a unified whole. Finally, the extent to which a work expresses unity between form and content determines the quality of the work.

Although formalism is “one of the most influential methods of literary analysis that twentieth-century readers encountered” (Dobie 33), in reality, analyzing a work’s internal structure extends far back into human history. Abrams, for example, explains that Aristotle critiqued literature from an objective stance. Aristotle defines a species of literature in relation to its counterparts, but he then internalizes his critique: “his method becomes centripetal, and assimilates these external elements into attributes of the work proper” (Abrams 27). Aristotle examines the genre of tragedy for “plot, character, and thought...diction, melody, and spectacle” (Abrams 27), and those internal characteristics distinguish tragedy from other genres. As previously noted, though, the twentieth century saw many more scholars take a similar, objective approach. This critical method has a long history that still has immense value for literary critics despite the fact that fewer scholars employ it than in the mid-1900s.

To consider objective, aesthetic criticism valid, we should consider the method’s possible shortcomings. Earlier, for instance, we noted the difficulty in precisely defining the concept of aesthetics. Because “We resent the arrogance implied in judgments which seem to have any tinge of absoluteness about them...” (Brooks 216), why would modern critics wish to employ a method that attempts to provide conclusive answers but which apparently has no definitive beginning? To this question, we might again refer to Plato’s conversation with Hippias wherein

the attempt to define beauty proves unsuccessful. Author Drew Hyland explains the significance of that ancient dialogue to modern critics:

There is an important lesson to be learned from this, one taught to us by the drama of the dialogue. If “to know” is reduced to something like “to be able to present and defend an unimpeachable definition,” then we know very little indeed and next to nothing of enduring human importance. But the very movement of the dialogue demonstrates that, in a less extreme sense, Socrates and Hippias already “know” what the term beauty means...we should realize that we already “know” more than we can define. (12)

The progressive dialogue between Socrates and Hippias reveals this powerful truth: rejecting aesthetic criticism because we lack a perfectly clear definition of beauty is beside the point. Beauty is not necessarily something to define; it is something we experience. Roger Scruton says, “Beauty...is a real and universal value, one anchored in our rational nature, and the sense of beauty has an indispensable part to play in shaping the human world” (Scruton xii). We live with the reality of beauty, of aesthetics, in our everyday lives, despite the fact that millennia of philosophers have not definitively pinned down its exact nature. The responsible critic understands that shortcoming (if it actually is one), and continues to work with what he *knows* rather than what he does *not*.

In addition to questioning the validity of using a method without clear definition, those who criticize objective, internal literary criticism also do so because they consider the method myopic. Excluding a work’s historical, political, economic, or religious influences and limiting one’s analysis to the work itself strikes many as unduly narrow-minded. How can a critic correctly interpret a work apart from the external forces surrounding a work?

In response to this, aesthetic critics may note that *art* should be first approached as *art* rather than any other thing. Brooks encourages a perspective that first judges art on its artistic properties by saying, “To ask more than this...is to ask that poetry be something that it does not pretend to be...” (Brooks 246). Is art part of history or philosophy? Does literature reflect economic or political values? Is studying art also studying culture? The answer to each of the questions is a resounding “Yes!” However, prior to art being any of those things, it is, most essentially, itself.

Author Charlie W. Starr considers C.S. Lewis’s opinion of those who fail to see art for its true purpose: “...if the only thing we look for in examining an art form is a series of abstract, philosophical truth in statements, we are missing both the power and purpose of art...worldview analysis tends to look for philosophical thought systems and nothing else. Students taught this approach to art end up with a myopic critical vision...they end up spending their time ‘using’ art instead of ‘receiving’” (368). With these words, Lewis turns the accusation of myopia on its head. Who is more narrow-minded: the close reader who deeply contemplates the multi-layered, creative expression of ideas that require him to travel beyond his own perspective, or the critic who forces art to take on his own point-of-view? Relativistic criticisms, and in particular the pragmatic expressions of that method, are the true sufferers of myopathy.

Furthermore, because art has content and implications that extend beyond the boundaries of a particular work, the practice of thoroughly examining a work’s internal elements has even more value. Abrams’s diagram shows arrows emanating from the work and moving outward. The arrows, however, may more appropriately be double-sided. In other words, the more deeply we understand a work, the more deeply we understand the audience, the author, and the universe.

To read only for content and to bypass rhetorical structure means that we are also ignoring a valuable method of comprehending the various elements surrounding a work.

In conclusion, I wish to submit that formal, aesthetic criticism is particularly appropriate for students of literature and that those unschooled in its methods are not, in fact, true students of literature. If the study of literature is one's aim, then by all means, *study* it. Examine art as art: how do form and content create a unified whole? What does the artist say *through* the form? Edgar Allan Poe explained the role of the critic as "The aim is to consider a poem...as a 'poem per se...written solely for the poem's sake...' (as qtd. in Abrams 27). So, in the following chapters, I will do just that by analyzing Poe's *The Colloquy of Monos and Una* for its internal structure to ascertain the work's meaning. Admittedly, the work is not a poem, but it does read rather like one, and at any rate, Poe's advice applies to art in general. Rather than subjectively deconstructing his work to *destroy* its meaning (as some would have done to my daughter's sweet words), we shall see what Poe *constructed* with the form and content of the work, and finally, decide if the work inspires the careful reader to revel in its beauty.

Chapter 2: Man: A Being in Search of Meaning

For the formal critic, the question of beauty is a question of unity between form and content. Does the author create harmony between a work's message and the various literary devices employed by the author? Does the author successfully merge what he says with how he says it? In their textbook introducing students to the principles of formal criticism, authors Brooks, Purser, and Warren explain,

we must begin by emphasizing that every successful example of fiction is an expressive unity, that the structural elements that can be distinguished and analyzed are, in actuality, parts of an organic unity...we are...concerned with the elements of fictional structure *only insofar as they function in the vital unity of an individual story or novel.* (5)

Therefore, to ascertain the formal beauty of Poe's "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" is to examine the relationship between the literary devices which Poe employs, and to thereby discern the work's meaning and purpose. While Poe's colloquy employs a variety of literary devices, paradox and repetition play a prominent role in the work because these two rhetorical tools most centrally embody the work's meaning. Within "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," Poe employs paradox and repetition to defend the power and importance of imagination and intuition, and an appreciation for the many ways in which Poe embeds these devices within the work leads to a greater understanding of the work's message.

Poe's "Colloquy" may be divided into three sections, with the first section serving as an introduction to the work. Importantly, however, its purpose does not imply that it stands separately. Instead, this first passage harmonizes with the work as whole. Indeed, one may note that imaginative unity is not only the primary concern of formal critics, but that "The Colloquy

of Monos and Una” is particularly suited to this critical model because it, too, concerns itself with the same subject. While the tone is detached, elevated, and philosophical, it is also very personal, for very quickly the reader realizes that the colloquy involves two dead lovers now in the afterlife. They converse about the state of the world which they left, the experience of dying, and their present experiences, and analysis will show that the work’s literary devices support the conversation shared by its characters.

Tracing the unity within Poe’s “Colloquy” begins by analyzing the most important character in the work: Death. If the proverb holds true, then death places second (right behind public speaking) as that which people most fear, but as attitudes toward death, in actuality, vary tremendously, one might examine death’s relevance to this work by comparing it to Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus contends, “. . . death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, we do not exist. It does not then either concern the living or the dead, since the former is not, and the latter is no more” (as qtd. in Green 99). In *The Colloquy of Monos and Una*, however, nothing could be further from the truth. The setting of the work—the afterlife—embraces the Platonic concept of the immaterial soul, and opens the door so that death may, in various and important ways, impact both the living and the dead. In contrast to Epicurus’s perspective, comprehending this particular work requires that Poe’s readers think deeply about death.

To elaborate, although Monos and Una inhabit the position of titular characters, Death is the foundation on which the work stands, the air which the characters breathe, and the teacher from whom Monos and Una learn. One may see, for example, that Monos and Una mention “Death” four times in the work’s brief first section, and that each time Poe capitalizes the word. The simple act of employing a capital letter signifies much because doing so is one way in which

Poe personifies Death. Through the use of a capital letter the word “Death” becomes a proper noun and a name. In addition, Poe’s descriptions bring Death to life. Death is an active character: Una says of Death, “How mysteriously did it *act* [emphasis mine] as a check to human bliss...” Furthermore, Monos says, “Death himself resolved for the secret,” and Una describes this third character as “...Death, the spectre which sate at all feasts!” Traditionally, many consider death a tragic loss and an evil occurrence. However, in Poe’s “Colloquy,” one may understand Death most primarily not as an event to avoid or a force to withstand, but rather as a *person* to engage.

Of course, Poe’s imaginative emphasis on personification aligns him with other Romantic authors. Abrams points out that, for Romantics, “...in literary criticism the valid animation of natural objects, traditionally treated as one form of the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, or personification, now came to be a major index to the sovereign faculty of imagination, and almost in itself a sufficient criterion of the highest poetry” (Abrams 55). However, Poe sets himself apart when, as a Dark Romantic, instead of personifying mountains, a ruin, or a meadow, he animates Death, the thing which humanity, perhaps, finds most fearful. So, while Abrams explains that “The habitual reading of passion, life, and physiognomy into the landscape is one of the few salient attributes common to most of the major romantic poets” (55), Poe, in fact, employs prosopopoeia to enliven not what humans most typically define as beautiful or attractive, but that which many consider the very darkest of the dark. While John Donne passionately declared, “Death thou shalt die!”, Poe’s use of personification effectively and contradictorily says, “Death, you now live!”

Although Poe’s use of prosopopoeia is far from unique within the realm of romantic writers, the most pertinent fact about Poe’s use of this particular literary device is the way in which it synthesizes with the work’s other elements. For example, Poe’s personification of Death

and Death's relationship with Monos and Una infuse a great deal of meaning into this work. So, while responses to death perhaps include understandable fear or even Epicurus's choice to deny death's power, in this colloquy, we find a much more nuanced understanding of Death. Most importantly, paradox surrounds Death. In life, for example, Una says that she considered Death "the spectre which sate at all feasts" and "a check to human bliss." However, in the afterlife, she says "...past sorrow—is it not present joy?" In other words, the fear which she had of Death no longer holds. Monos expresses a similar perspective when, in his first line, he says, "...Death himself resolved for me the secret." Death is neither a force to fear nor to ignore; he is one who answers questions, who resolves concerns. Death reveals truth hidden in life and teaches Monos and Una lessons which those living cannot know.

The paradox of Death necessarily involves comparing the perspectives held by the work's characters concerning Death's counterpart: life. We may observe, for example, that while Death brought Monos and Una "present joy," Una expresses that, in life, she and Monos found it "painful to love." Those things normally associated with happiness—life and love—are paradoxically associated with fear and pain, and that usually associated with misery—Death—Monos and Una come to see as the very relief from pain. Life—especially when lived with one's beloved—precipitates an intense fear of death, and love—especially requited love—triggers a fear of loss. They find life sullied by the threat of an unavoidable and impending misery. Una intensifies this idea when she explains, "Hate would have been mercy then" to express her fear that the love between her and Monos would end upon death. Again, the paradox continues: contrary to the usual expectation, Una states that, although she and Monos deeply love each other, in life, hate would have been preferable to love.

The colloquy opens with another striking example of a paradox related to Death. Monos says that he contemplated the meaning of “born again” and, while doing so, he “[rejected] the explanations of the priesthood, until Death himself resolved for me the secret.” In other words, Monos rejected traditional answers to the meaning of life and what lies after one’s bodily functions cease. The words “born again” exist within an important biblical passage in John 3 wherein Jesus says, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (King James Bible John 3:3) and again, later in the chapter, where Jesus says, “Marvel not what I said unto thee, ye must be born again” (King James Bible John 3:7). Although a Christian understanding of “born again” refers to the metaphorical new life given to those who make the choice to shun sin and seek God, Monos says that he rejects “the explanations of the priesthood.” He does not accept an orthodox understanding of the afterlife, whether that be the explanation given by Christianity, or that of another religion. The earthly forces which most turn to for the purpose of understanding these matters prove inadequate, and instead, Monos trusts Death himself. Death, in effect, is the High Priest who replaces all others. The One Most Feared contradicts normal human understanding by becoming the Great Teacher.

The paradoxes of Death open the door for other ways in which paradox infuses this first passage of the colloquy. The relationship shared by Monos and Una, for example, is one full of seeming contradictions; paradox continues in the very names of the work’s titular characters. One must notice that although those holding the colloquy possess different names—Monos and Una—those names possess the same definition: *one*. Despite being separate individuals, the shared meaning of their names signal that they are, in actuality, *one*. Furthermore, even though their opposite genders and the fact that each character takes on a different role within the colloquy exemplify their separation, in a second sense, Monos and Una represent unity.

Importantly, both hold irreplaceable positions within the work because colloquy is impossible without each of its participants. The obvious fact that Monos is male and the most vocal member of the duo and that Una is female and less verbose than her partner becomes truly significant when one realizes that, without each character, the colloquy could not occur. Although individual, through dialogue, they come to create an integrated whole. Indeed, we might represent their relationship with the simple and seemingly-impossible mathematical formula of $1+1=1$. Although that formula contradicts what every kindergarten student knows as truth, it nonetheless describes Monos' and Una's relationship because, through paradox, they point to a higher truth.

Moreover, their names and roles within the conversation are not the only ways in which Monos and Una embody a paradoxical unity. The repetitious dialogue also provides a striking example of the connection between these characters; each character's word choice exhibits a remarkable degree of cohesion, with each partner mirroring the speech of the other. For example, Una opens the work by asking, "Born again?" and Monos replies, "Yes...born again." The multiple instances in which both characters mention "Death" exhibits the same tendency. Monos says, "...Death resolved for me the secret," Una exclaims, "Death!" and then Monos confirms, "Yes, it was of Death that I spoke." As the passage closes, we again find an instance of repetitious dialogue; Monos asks, "...at what point shall the weird narrative begin?" and Una questions, "At what point?" The verbal mirroring shared by this couple is specifically mentioned by Monos himself when he says, "...sweet Una, you echo my words!" However, the vocal echoes which Monos notices emanate actually from two directions. Not only does Una mirror Monos's words, but Monos also reflects Una's vocabulary (as evidenced by his response of "...it was of Death that I spoke"). Monos and Una, while being two, are even still, *one*.

As telling as repetitious phrasing is to these characters, they also share another verbal connection that stands apart but related to the above examples. That is, on several instances, although their phrasing may not match exactly, Monos and Una mirror each other's sentiments. Una, for example, calls her beloved "my own Monos," while Monos calls her, "...dear Una—mine, mine forever, now!" The phrasing each character employs emphasizes the nature of their relationship: they belong each to the other, and without the other, each stands incomplete. They concur on this idea when Una calls their emotional attachment a "mutual love" and then describes their fear of an impending separation precipitated by death as "the dread of that evil hour." Monos, likewise, mirrors that "dread" by calling their death-necessitated separation a "grief." Their shared emotional perspective enforces their unity.

In addition to the strange preference for hate and death that Monos and Una seem to inexplicably prefer within this section of the work, we might also note another unusual, somewhat-subtler comparison. Monos's notable remark on Una's oxymoronic "joyous inquietude" presents another seemingly contradictory emotional combination. If we understand "inquietude" to mean "a state of uneasiness," we might wonder how one might concurrently feel joy and disquiet? Or, more specifically, how might one come to define an uneasy state as full of joy? This verbal pairing also exhibits the contradictory qualities of this passage.

The first section of Poe's colloquy exhibits a remarkable recurrence of paradox: the nature of Death, the union of Monos and Una, and how Death affects their relationship are all full of seeming contradiction. In addition to an analysis of content, however, a formal critique requires an understanding of form. While the colloquy's content certainly reflects paradox, does the work's form also do so? In other words, do the form and content of this first passage exhibit

imaginative unity which formalist critics emphasize as the hallmark quality of aesthetic excellence?

The title “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” introduces a key idea that emphasizes the way in which the form embodies the concept of unity. Although the work seems to focus on its two speaking characters, in reality, the way in which Poe phrased the title points to the work’s true focus: the colloquy itself. In fact, the work’s two titular characters are tucked away within a prepositional phrase while the colloquy metaphorically stands front and center. With that in mind, one might consider the qualities of a colloquy to ascertain how the form impacts an interpretation of the work.

To begin with, one may note that “colloquy” describes much more than a particular style of conversation. Importantly, the word fundamentally and paradoxically refers to multiple perspectives synthesized into one. Abrams explains that “...the neo-classic theorist was apt to pose the standard of aesthetic excellence, like that of moral excellence, in terms of a mean between extremes, or else in terms of a conjunction of opposite qualities” (39-40), and so, in this sense, colloquy transcends its designation as a means of philosophical discourse; it also metaphorically represents aesthetic beauty. Consider, for example, that a definition based on the Latin roots of “colloquy,” might be translated as “speak together,” and therefore implies a plurality of participants. However, a “colloquy” is singular; it is *one*. With “colloquy,” Poe’s work begins to embody aesthetic unity through a dialectic synthesis of opposites.

The divergent ideas regarding the nature of Plato’s dialogues also demonstrate colloquy’s paradoxical nature. For example, some see the presence of multiple characters in Plato’s dialogues as a sort of façade because, rather than a synthesis of ideas occurring within his works (such as one would expect from the representation of varied points of view), these critics

consider Plato's dialogues monological rather than dialectical. Jacques describes Plato's dialogues as "reduced in its effects to monologic activity...reduced to a unilateral supremacy" (as qtd. in Cassuta 50). In opposition to that line of thought, however, Cassutta believes that Plato's dialogues "possess a fluidity capable of integrating the aleatory and the heterogeneous" (50) and that "The Platonic dialogues do not arise out of a homogeneous framework" (50). This perspective considers Plato's dialogues truly dialectic and the various members of those dialogues integrated into the form and content of those conversations. Although some might see the disagreement between Jacques and Cassuta to be a simple example of differing academic opinion, one might also interpret their disagreement to reflect the paradoxical nature of the dialectic. Colloquy is, in one sense, singular, but it is also a function of multiple participants. Those who disagree on the nature of Plato's dialogues simply may be looking at opposite sides of the same proverbial coin, and the colloquy shared by Monos and Una reflects the paradox inherent in these conflicting perspectives concerning the nature of dialogue.

The fact that paradox fills the form of colloquy and paradox defines both the work's characters and relationships does not explain the meaning of these observations. Form and content, on this level, mirror each other through their embrace of contradictory elements, but how do those contradictions contribute to the meaning of "The Colloquy of Monos and Una"? To answer this question, one might consider another paradox within the work: Una's delightfully contradictory "In Death we have both learned the propensity of man to define the indefinable." In their afterlife, Una describes the state which she and Monos share as "In Death," a phrase which implies, like the unity shared by her and her partner, that these two have actually assimilated with the person of Death. The preposition "in" points to a sort of baptism—an immersion and a transformation. Furthermore, the contradiction continues as that transformation

which they undergo is one which both Monos and Una describe at the passage's opening as "Born again." This relationship between death and birth is further emphasized by the placing of these phrases: Una's questioning "Born again?" marks the work's opening line, and her statement "In Death we have both learned..." occurs as the section closes. The positioning of these phrases symbolizes their paradoxical meaning. So, although asking, "Born again?" means that Una has recently died, her death actually marks the beginning of the colloquy. And similarly, her closing remark concerning Death has symbolic significance because that comment, while it marks the end of one section, means that Poe's work may further progress. When Una says, "I will not say...commence with the moment of life's cessation but commence with that sad, sad instant when...I pressed down your pallid eyelids," she similarly refuses to acknowledge that life ceases upon Death and again reinforces the contradictions of dialogism. The patterns of paradox continue through both form and content.

By coming to understand life as death, and embracing death as life, Monos and Una also come to "define the indefinable." The mystery of the afterlife and a knowledge of platonic ideals—both examples of what the living find "indefinable"—are within reach for Monos and Una. In other words, the impossible things of life become possible when acquainted with Death. Paradoxically and in opposition to Epicurus's postulations, Death presents new possibilities, and these possibilities are exactly what Monos and Una aim to "define." Within the colloquy, it is as if Monos, being the first character acquainted with Death, shares the wonders of his newfound relationship to the newly-dead Una, and they both, in turn, introduce Death to their readers. Through that newfound relationship, the veil is lifted; the mystery is solved. The introductory quote from Sophocles' *Antigone*—"These things are in the future"—signals that, although

readers have yet to know Death, we may, by reading the colloquy, come to know the impossible: what lies beyond what Poe called “breathless and motionless torpor” that is death.

So, as this section closes, what one finds is a foundation on which the work as a whole rests. The structural framework which colloquy provides and the inherent paradoxes are far from a “kind of box, neat and capacious...into which the valuable and essentially poetic ‘content’ of the poem is packed” (Brooks 223). Instead, the dialectic form, when combined with the paradoxical elements in Monos’ and Una’s relationship, the repetitious wording between Monos and Una, and the personification of Death, create an “imaginative unity” (Brooks 245) through an aesthetically-pleasing coherence of form and content. As the dialogue continues, therefore, one may judge the work’s aesthetics by gauging the extent to which the work’s content continues to express the qualities inherent in colloquy.

Chapter 3: “At the Last Be Swallowed Up in Death”

Although formal critique of the three divisions of Poe’s “Colloquy” could occur sequentially, progressing in a straight line from first to third, a good reason exists for an alternate organizational pattern: namely, the first and third sections resemble each other. The first section of Poe’s “Colloquy of Monos and Una,” opens with Monos introducing the newly-dead Una to Death and ends as Una asks Monos to tell of his “own passage through the dark Valley and Shadow.” Curiously, Monos requires nearly two pages before directly answering Una’s request, and that passage comprises the work’s second section. However, when Monos eventually answers Una within section three, the reader will find the themes and devices within section one repeated and amplified within the work’s final passage. If Poe’s “Colloquy” were an Oreo, section two would be the crème filling, and sections one and three, via their similarities, would be the crispy black cookies. The unity of Poe’s “Colloquy” extends throughout section three by building on the underlying foundation set by section one. A magnification of the subject matter and a continuation of the dialectic form harmonize these passages.

The use of repetition is one striking link between the work’s first and third sections. Not only do both sections employ repetition, but the same *types* of repetition occur within them. When Monos eventually describes his “passage through the dark Valley and Shadow,” for instance, the reader significantly finds the phrase “breathless and motionless torpor” repeated; the phrase closes section one and opens section three. That repetition connects the work’s first and third passages, and it also connects Monos and Una. Una utters the phrase first, and Monos repeats it. The recurrence of repetition rhetorically represents the bond between these two characters, and furthermore, the work expresses that bond with other examples of *ploce*. For example, in section one Monos and Una refer to each other with affectionate terms such as “my

own Monos” and “dear Una—mine, mine forever,” and in the final passage one finds a recurrence of that sentiment. When Una begins the work’s final passage by describing herself as “your constant Una” and her beloved as “my Monos,” she continues a theme originating from earlier in the colloquy. These phrases function as *expolitio* by restating and reinforcing the deep union shared by Monos and Una.

The most important topic shared between sections one and three, however, is the character of Death. When we talk of death, we talk in metaphor. Abrams notes, “Metaphor...is an inseparable element of all discourse...Metaphysical systems in particular are intrinsically metaphorical systems” (31). When we die, we expire, pass away, go to an eternal rest, or earn our wings. So, while Una says, “In Death we have learned the propensity of man to define the indefinable,” for the living, the indefinable—death—remains a mystery. The prevalence of metaphor when discussing death is a *de facto* acknowledgment of our inability to understand death and dying. As Freud noted, “Whenever we make the attempt to imagine our death...we really survive as spectators” (as qtd. in Johnstone 218), and for this reason, try as we might, the living cannot pierce the veil beyond which death abides.

Likening death to sleep is one popular metaphor which people employ in the attempt to understand the incomprehensible. Within Greek mythology, for example, Thanatos, the personification of Death, has a twin, and that twin is Hypnos—Sleep. Monos’s explanation builds on this concept by saying, “...by sleep and its world alone is *Death* imagined.” Classicist Marbury B. Ogle elaborates on this metaphor by discussing the relationship between sleep and death in the ancient world. In Hellenistic Greece, for example, Ogle says, “A new motive is introduced into sepulcher art, that of the human figure stretched out at full length upon the cover of a sarcophagus as if sunk into a calm and dreamless sleep” (87). Greece did not alone align

death and sleep, however: Ogle also cites Sidon, the Phoenicians, and Egyptians as following this trend. Moreover, within modern times, the metaphor continues its hold.

Although the living employ many metaphors to make sense of death, what if those metaphors actually obscure or misconstrue death's true nature? If one interprets section one, at least in part, as Monos introducing Una to Death, then section three may be regarded as a deepening of that introduction. By personifying Death, Poe creates an interesting point: Death is not a passive entity whom the living may define as they wish. Instead, Death is a person whom one comes to know as one comes to know any other personality—through experience. As Monos explains his experience to Una, he also unravels the mysteries of death to Poe's readers; the reader comes to know Death, too. Through de-familiarization—by portraying Death from Monos's new, unusual perspective—Poe allows the living to see Death in a new light. Monos, as one on intimate terms with Death, enlightens the less-informed. One way in which Monos illuminates Death to the living is by challenging the concept that death is related to sleep. Although the poet refers to "Death and his brother Sleep" ("*Sleep*" 267), Monos, having experienced Death, takes issue with that relationship.

Interestingly, Monos defines Death's identity by pointing out who, in fact, Death is *not*. The text indicates that Death suffers some serious misunderstandings. Although "by sleep and its world alone is Death imagined," Monos paradoxically portrays Death as quite the opposite of sleep. After all, when Monos welcomes Una after she joins him in Death, they both use the phrase "*born* again [emphasis mine]" to explain the experience. Monos builds on this paradox by relating, "My condition [Death]... appeared to me not greatly dissimilar to the extreme quiescence of him, who, having slumbered long and profoundly, lying motionless... begins to

steal slowly back into consciousness...” In other words, rather than an eternal sleep, Death is surprisingly an awakening, a revival, a rebirth.

The above quote introduces the dichotomy of life and death, and that comparison signifies much within the colloquy as a whole. Strikingly, within the colloquy’s third passage, an exploration into that dichotomy most prominently takes the form of Monos’s explanation of Death’s identity. When, for example, one reads, “...you still sat by my side. All others had departed from the chamber of Death,” the device of personification implies that Death actually *possesses* the room in which Monos lies. Death is not the visitor; life is. Una’s focus on her confined beloved means that she, the only living one within the room, inhabits a space wherein Death reigns. Monos is a citizen of a new kingdom, and Una sits hushed within the throne room of that kingdom’s ruler. Furthermore, the reader, by extension, sits with Una; the reader, like Una, also visits with Death.

Just as within section one of the work, although the third passage within “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” mostly explores Death, the paradox of Death also finds expression through the way in which Poe describes *life*. Despite Epicurus postulating that life is the end-all and be-all, or the traditional view that life is a place of vibrancy and activity, Monos continues to paint life as an inferior, undesirable experience. For example, Monos says, “...it was in the Earth’s dotage that I died. Wearied at heart with anxieties which had their origin in the general turmoil and decay, I succumbed to the fierce fever.” Similarly, Una offers a bleak portrait of life by referring to “the fiery overthrow [that] was not so near at hand as we believed, and as the corruption you indicate did surely warrant us in believing.” This vision of Earth in a near-apocalyptic state, degraded and depraved, as a place of suffering and misery, seems to align life with a sort of hell to escape rather than an experience to embrace or enjoy.

In contrast, Monos's description of his newfound relationship with Death enthusiastically portrays his own awakening as primarily positive. Furthermore, Monos contradicts a common perspective on Death. Consider, for example, how the picture Monos paints of Death offers a different viewpoint than these ancient words:

Sleep and Death, awful gods. The glowing Sun never looks upon them with his beams, neither as he goes up into heaven, nor as he comes down from heaven. And the former of them roams peacefully over the earth and the sea's broad back and is kindly to men; but the other has a heart of iron, and his spirit within him is pitiless as bronze: whomsoever of men he has once seized he holds fast: and he is hateful even to the deathless gods. (Hesiod 758-756, location 290, para. 1)

Rather than depicting a "hateful" or "pitiless" entity, Monos relates that "After some few days of pain, and many of dreamy delirium filled with ecstasy...there came upon me...a breathless and motionless torpor..." In other words, Death's approaching arrival induces an avalanche of joy; like a subject overwhelmed by his returning monarch, Monos thrills to soon see the Death. Rather than fear—an emotion often associated with dying—Death's imminent arrival fills Monos with *rapture*.

The theme of Death's paradoxical beneficial effects continues throughout the colloquy's third passage. As the colloquy opens, we find Death revealed as High Priest and a Great Teacher who challenges a more traditional understanding of Death. Rather than portraying Death as a destroyer, Poe posits Death as one who unravels mysteries which "the priesthood" cannot. A similar vein runs through the work's closing portion. For example, Monos relates that, in Death, "The senses were unusually active" and that, while dead, he saw "fantastic flowers, far more lovely than any of the old Earth..." That is to say that Death, the High Priest whom Monos

chooses to trust (as opposed to accepting “the explanations of the priesthood”), brings “life...more abundantly” (King James Bible, John 10:10). This fundamental paradox undergirds every mention of Death throughout the work, and the consistent qualities to which Poe attributes Death build imaginative unity into the colloquy.

How does Death affect these changes? Why does Monos paradoxically indicate that Death offers the ecstasy of rebirth rather than the despair of demise? Although the text answers these questions in multiple ways, those ways share a similarity which may be understood by comparing two important statements from the colloquy. The first occurs early in section three when Una says, “Men lived; and died individually.” The second occurs as section three closes: Monos, immersed in the Death experience, says, “The consciousness of *being* had grown hourly more indistinct.” In life, individuality unavoidably reigns. Even lovers as devout as Monos and Una “dread...that evil hour which was hurrying to separate [them] forever.” In life, unity is a momentary façade threatened by impending separation and decay. In Death, however, the individual merges with the universal; selfhood and its attendant sense of isolation lose their hold.

Although Death’s overriding character within section three is that of one who enables the fusion of individual and the universal, Poe expresses that synthesis in multiple ways within the work’s third section. Furthermore, that synthesis further illuminates the work’s message. Within section three, Monos describes his personal immersion into Death and the consequential union with the universe by explaining the paradoxes through several dichotomies: the material and the spiritual, the eternal and the temporal, and the moral and the immoral.

A comparison between the physical and the metaphysical is a key method by which Monos indicates the transformation which Death affects. However, what Monos experiences is far from the way in which many understand Death. Rather than Monos experiencing a protracted

sleep or a numbing of his sensibilities, Monos repeatedly and paradoxically indicates that Death greatly elevates his sensual perceptions. For example, Monos says that, despite having died, “The senses were unusually active,” and that, despite losing “volition,” he saw things with “a more vivid effect.” In addition, he portrays his after-death sensations as “a purely sensual pleasure” and “sensual delight.” In other words, contrary to much thought, Monos offers a vision of Death that attributes sensation to the spiritual rather than the corporeal. Not only does the paradox of Death continue because Monos is more alive in Death than in life, but perhaps more significantly, by giving attributes to Death which often are given to life, Poe dismantles the material/spiritual dichotomy. Rather than portraying Death as life’s opposite, Poe presents a vision of dying wherein Death is life transfigured.

Another important element to Poe’s portrayal of metaphysical sensation involves a *merger* of the senses, and the picture which Poe paints does much to illuminate the work’s message. Importantly, rather than five distinct senses with individualized functions, Monos relates, “The senses were unusually active...assuming often each other’s functions at random. The taste and the smell were inextricably confounded, and become one sentiment...” In addition, he explains that he appreciated sight “only as sound.” In other words, the synthesis of the individual with the universal begins *within* Monos and progressively moves *without*. The “confounding” of Monos’s senses is, in fact, a metaphor that explains Death’s overall effect. By crediting Death with the sensual and characterizing Death’s realm as a place where the senses coalesce, the senses become a metaphor for Poe’s vision of the metaphysical. Just as the individual senses progressively meld together, Poe presents the afterlife as a place where the self is coalesced into the universe. Death removes dichotomies and boundaries; in eternity, the sense of being completely ebbs.

In addition to comparing the material and the spiritual, Monos explains dying by analyzing the temporal and the eternal. For example, one might consider what Monos describes as “the irregularities of the clock.” The tool by which the living measure time—the material, temporal clock—proves inadequate. Instead, Death allows Monos to experience time without relation to the material: “the moral embodiment of man’s abstract idea of Time.” This metaphysical, “moral embodiment” contrasts with the way in which Monos remembers how the “deviations” of the material clock “were omni-prevalent” and “affected [him] just as violations of abstract truth.” Significantly, the themes which appear within an exploration of the material/spiritual dichotomy reappear when Monos compares the temporal and eternal. Just as sensation, which humanity attributes to physicality, transcends the material, time, a measurement for which mankind employs a manufactured instrument, transcends the physical. Again, Poe deconstructs a dichotomy.

Poe’s discussion of morality will reward astute readers with a third example of the same philosophical point. Although morality is often considered a function of religious belief, Monos does not sense morality in the same way the living do. Instead of understanding morality in relation to good and evil, he experiences no moral sense whatsoever—even in relation to what the living term evil. So, although Una’s “wild sobs floated into [his] ear,” he does not sense her grief as an evil. In fact, Monos says that, in Death, he experiences “no moral pain or pleasure...at all.” Instead, as Monos’s individuality progressively dissolves into the perfection of the universal, he experiences pleasure in connection with the eternal values of truth and beauty—not in relation to his own submission to a moral or religious code. By rejecting “the explanations of the priesthood” in section one of the colloquy and divorcing pleasure from adherence to a man-made moral or religious code in the work’s final section, Poe again transcends a common

dichotomy. In this instance, he questions the underlying assumptions regarding morality by portraying pleasure as a function of an existence in harmony with the universe.

Notably, the pleasure which Monos receives from music and the way in which he associates Una with music are two examples of Monos receiving pleasure from truth and beauty rather than from a moral code. For example, to Monos, Una's tears made "soft musical sounds," and he says that those sounds "thrilled every fiber of my frame with ecstasy alone." Moreover, Monos tells of Una "habited in a white robe, passing in a white robe, musically about me." Music has special significance because, classically speaking, it is the art most associated with beauty. Because "Music...shows us all the movements of our spirit, disembodied" (as qtd. in Abrams 50), when Monos likens Una to music, he is saying something significant about her soul. Even her tears—the expression of her inmost self—are beautiful and therefore bring Monos pleasure; music is a metaphor for Una's beauty.

Furthermore, Una's beauty is what connects her to Monos. Within the colloquy, the love shared by Monos and Una is strictly immaterial (since they have died). This immaterial love is a form of Platonic love, for although Platonic love is often interpreted as existing between males, on a more general level, "To really love a person Platonically is to seek jointly for Beauty; it is to work together as co-practitioners in the art of love" (Lopez 10). Monos takes pleasure in beauty, and his metaphorical use of music to describe Una means that these two characters are linked by much more than mere physical attraction: they are united by a mutual pursuit of the eternal values of truth and beauty. As a result, the oneness shared by Monos and Una exemplifies another dichotomy dismantled.

Understanding Poe's discussion of the universal and the various dichotomies he deconstructs would be incomplete without seeing this content in relation to the work's form.

Author T.J. Reiss explains, “The search to find the ideal...can find its accomplishment only in death...” (19), and within Poe’s “Colloquy,” Death indeed opens the door for Monos to experience perfection. However, this content is housed within a very particular form: dialogue. The colloquy shared by Monos and Una is a form suited to the destruction of dichotomies and specifically for the purpose of reaching higher, eternal truths. Monique Dixsaut explains that “dialogue is the primary means of understanding the dialectical nature of the ONE” (as qtd. in Cossutta 52). The work of two individual voices merging into one cohesive whole perfectly represents the content of this work. Like the dialogue shared by Socrates and Hippias which leads from individual perspectives to a shared understanding, Monos loses his individuality as his solitary body joins the universal corpus. And furthermore, while dialogue’s power to reveal truth occurs only by leaving behind the personal, Monos’s entrance into the eternal occurs only when he loses himself to Death. Clearly, the dialectic expresses itself through *what* Poe’s colloquy says and also *how* it says it.

Section three of “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” offers a great deal of rhetorical cohesion. The section not only expresses imaginative unity within itself, but it also builds on the foundation set by the work’s earlier content. One scholar observed,

...rhetoricians divided form and content not to place content above form, but to highlight the interdependence of language and meaning, argument and ornament, thought and its expression. It means that linguistic forms are not merely instrumental, but fundamental—not only to persuasion, but to thought itself.

(Burton)

The dialectic form is, indeed, indivisible from the work’s meaning for just as dialogue transcends the personal, Monos, through his relationship with Death, transcends the particular.

Chapter 4: “Death is Not the Worst that Can Happen to Men”

When, in section one, Una asks Monos to tell of his death, he answers in an unexpected way: paradoxically, Monos speaks to Una of life. Frankly, this response, approximately a one-page monologue, makes little sense when reading the work sequentially. In fact, although the passage’s language shines brilliantly, it feels rather abrupt and confusing coming after section one. The monologue does not answer Una’s question, and it does not have the same subject matter or form as the work’s first section. However, in light of the work as a whole, section two appropriately has the central, starring role. In fact, this second section is the proverbial glue that holds the colloquy together. It stands out because it not only contrasts vividly with the rest of the work, but also because it reaches beyond itself by connecting the first and latter passages of Poe’s colloquy. In short, discerning the work’s meaning demands that one consider the relationship between section two’s form and content and how section two relates to the colloquy as a whole.

Importantly, the subject matter of section two differs from the rest of Poe’s colloquy. Within section one, the reader finds Monos and Una’s introduction to Death, and section three deepens that bond. Section two, however, differs by describing Death’s opposite: Life. Instead of describing his introduction to Death, Monos chooses to review what he calls “man’s general condition at this epoch.” Within the work’s introductory passage, Poe begins building a paradoxical theme of life filled with dread and pain, and section two takes that theme and builds it into a rousing, eloquent crescendo.

What then does the melody of section two convey, and how does Poe develop the theme of life as misery? To answer these questions, one might observe, first of all, if section two were music, it would be in a minor key. The overall tone spirals downward; the bad replaces the good,

the ugly overwhelms the beautiful, and the evil suffocates the moral. Whereas section one briefly mentions life's attributes, in this passage, the subject of life dominates, and what we see is no proverbial portrait of loveliness.

In contrast to Epicurus's materialist philosophy, which valued life and postulated "death is nothing to us" (as qtd. in Glannon 222), it is life which Poe portrays as devoid of real value. The paradox begun in section one continues and develops in multiple directions. Consider, for example, Poe's personification of Death; he mentions Death's name a total of five times within the one page comprising section one; the passage virtually pulsates with Death's presence. Significantly, however, section two contrasts with its predecessor in that its subject matter is strangely absent: there is nearly no mention of Life within this middle excerpt. The one time Poe mentions Life occurs near the section's close, and even then, the wording indicates Life's absence. After all, among other things, "...taste alone could have led us gently back to Beauty, to Nature, and to Life," indicates that Beauty, Nature, and Life stand afar. The word, though on the page, is *absent* from reality. Consequentially, although this middle passage discusses "man's general condition," while living, in contrast to Death, Life is an *inactive* force. Monos and Una have a relationship with Death for it "resolve[s]...the secret" and "define[s] the indefinable." Life, however, is a thing which the living must pursue. The combination of personifying Death as present and active while portraying Life as absent and passive exemplifies one artistic method for expressing the paradox evident throughout the work: Life is *lifeless*, and Death possesses a vibrancy which only the dead discover.

Furthermore, the ways in which Poe develops the paradoxical theme of life as lifeless occurs within both content and form. Significantly, "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" employs "a certain way of thinking proper to the philosopher—one that Plato without exception called

dialectic [that] is derived from the impossibility of separating matter and form” (as qtd. in Cossutta 52), and the intertwining of “matter and form” is exactly what one finds in this work. The dialectic form primarily associated with Plato and philosophical study exists for one primary purpose: to pursue truth. Dialogue progressively clarifies and reveals reality. Monique Dixsaut explains, “dialogue is the primary means of understanding the dialectical nature of the ONE” (as qtd. in Cossutta 52), and this dedication to “the ONE”—Truth— is exactly what life lacks within Poe’s colloquy.

To elaborate, dialogue’s emphasis on the interplay of form and content and the ways in which the colloquy reflects that relationship reveals two striking aspects of the second section. First of all, the passage is a *monologue*. Una’s request that Monos “commence with the moment of life’s cessation” ends the opening passage, and her response “Well do I remember these conversations” opens the work’s final portion, but within section two, Una, like Life, is absent. Una, the one associated with music and a symbol of beauty, is conspicuously removed from this middle passage. The fact that Monos’s monologue does not meet Una’s request also symbolizes her absence in this passage: she lacks both a voice and a listening ear. These two missing elements express that dialogue, for all intents and purposes, ceases, and consequentially, so does the pursuit of truth. Without both participants, the journey upwards to “the ONE” comes to a stand-still, and this is signified by the passage’s focus on dreary, temporally-focused *life* rather than the eternally-minded *Death*.

The dialectic form impacts this passage in a second compelling way, and again, Una’s absence provides a clue to that relationship. In this instance, to understand the interplay of form and content requires one to consider dialogue’s association with Platonic philosophy and Platonism’s emphasis on truth, beauty, and goodness. Roger Scruton explains, “There is an

appealing idea about beauty which goes back to Plato...According to this idea, beauty is an ultimate value...one member of a trio of ultimate values which justify our rational inclinations” (2). With this in mind, Una’s silence becomes tremendously symbolic in a second sense. As discussed in chapter three, pairing Una with music makes her a symbol of beauty. Classically speaking, music is the art most aligned with beauty, and employing it as a metaphor for Una means that her absence also indicates a dearth of beauty. Una’s silence is what transforms the work’s form from dialogue to monologue, representing a rejection of Truth, but that is not all one finds: her absence also indicates a loss of Beauty. In fact, the section’s form and content portray life’s wholesale disregard for the classical ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness; the rejection of Platonic ideals is exactly what “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” explores in this middle passage.

The rejection of truth symbolized by Una’s absence offers an important way that section two exhibits internal unity between form and content. Cossutta describes dialogue as “the dialogue of the logos with itself” (2). In a classical sense, “logos” is fundamentally associated with Truth. In other words, in dialogue, wisdom refines itself until it reaches Truth: the very pinnacle of wisdom. Logos and dialogue are unavoidably interconnected, and therefore, the monologic form of section two indicates that life—the subject of this passage—lacks truth. In fact, life not only *lacks* truth: life fails to even *recognize* it. Poe expresses these ideas in many ways. He says, for instance, that “...one or two of the wise among our forefathers—wise in fact, although not in the world’s esteem—had ventured to doubt the word ‘improvement’ as applied to the progress of our civilization.” This quote makes several facts clear about the life Monos portrays: truth is rare (only “two or three of the wise” realized the truth about life), truth stands separate from opinion (notice the comparison between “wise in *fact* [emphasis mine]” and

“world’s esteem”), and finally, most did not recognize the truth for what it was (even among the wise, only “two or three” knew the truth). Paradoxically, while Truth is typically associated with objectivity and reason, those who embrace objectivity and reason to the extent that they reject intuition (which is usually associated with subjectivity) lose the ability to sense objective Truth. In section two, Truth’s scarcity, its objectivity, and the inability of most to identify it are all ways that Poe’s colloquy expresses life as devoid of truth.

In addition to pointing out life’s deficit of this particular platonic ideal, the work explains that scarcity’s paradoxical source: “the leading evil, knowledge.” Despite the common misconception that logic and truth are one and the same, Poe repeatedly identifies an over-reliance on rationality as contributing to truth’s absence. What Aronowitz calls “conflation of knowledge and truth” (vii) seems to be a too-common trait in this portrayal of life. As mankind reveled in “childish exultation” over its “still-increasing dominion over [Nature’s] elements,” mankind forgot that “the unaided reason bears no weight.” The paradox continues in that while humanity came to rely on rationality and logic as means of improving human life, in reality, the “unaided reason” actually robs mankind of true meaning.

Importantly, one must clarify that Poe’s discussion of “the leading evil, Knowledge” has a very specific application in this work, and that application mirrors the way in which Poe describes life within parts one and three of the colloquy. The world is a place filled with “huge smoking cities...innumerable,” where “Green leaves shrank before the hot breath of furnaces.” The hellish imagery found in part one—where life is filled with terror, pain, mildew, and terror—and part three—where life leads to sickness, fever, and pain—is reflected within the central passage with “smoking cities” and “hot breath of furnaces.” Although the imagery remains consistent throughout the colloquy, associating life with hell has a much more precise

meaning than the paradox of portraying life as hell. Poe points to this meaning when, after describing the “huge smoking cities” and “the hot breath of furnaces,” he says, “The fair face of Nature was deformed as with the ravages of some loathsome disease.” In other words, life is hell when it wars with Nature: the “cities” and “furnaces” mar the natural world and degrade it until its beauty is no longer recognizable. As a result, the knowledge Monos attributes to mankind is not one which creates beauty but one which destroys it through exploitation.

Of course, historically speaking, Poe and other Romantics reacted to and challenged the philosophies driving the Industrial Revolution; “Nature...deformed” specifically references the immense and unprecedented changes wrought by the Age of Industry. The time period popularized the ideas that mankind could harness Nature’s power for mankind’s benefit and that mankind, through reason, could exceed his natural limitations; however, Romantics like Poe dispute those perspectives. Instead, Poe’s phrase “unaided reason” questions how the logocentric perspective motivating Industrialism actually affects the world. Is the logic motivating industrialism a positive force that elevates man or debases him?

Poe answers this question quite clearly in section two. He not only describes “Knowledge” as “the leading evil,” but he also explains the source of knowledge’s detrimental effects by saying “knowledge was not meet for man in the infant condition of his soul” and by referring to “the tree of knowledge, and its forbidden fruit, death-producing.” Like the biblical account of mankind’s fall in the Garden of Eden, where God warns, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (*King James Version Bible* Gen. 2:17), in “The Colloquy of Monos and Una,” mankind continues to live *physically* despite his understanding of good and evil, but that loss of innocence causes mankind to die *spiritually*.

The paradox central to this perspective is that the thing intended to elevate mankind—reason—becomes, in Mono’s monologue, the very source of mankind’s downfall. To elaborate, “reason unaided” not only debases man; it also undermines reason itself! Aronowitz describes, “...the Enlightenment, which created a new science and technology that could dominate nature in order to promote the flowering of reason, but that led instead to its eclipse” (7), and that is the exact irony that Monos finds most problematic to “man’s general condition.” An over-reliance on logic thwarts the pursuit of truth, knowledge of the truth, the availability of the truth because *reason is not the sole arbiter of truth*. Reason, when unattended by the two other platonic ideals—beauty and goodness—may only lead to mankind’s enslavement, not his freedom. This is why Poe says, “Art—the Arts—arose supreme, and, once enthroned, cast chains upon the intellect which had elevated them to power.” Contextually speaking, with the words “the Arts” Poe refers not to “art” in the sense of aesthetic objects, but an older meaning that refers more to pursuits such as industry and science—fields of study requiring a reliance on reason. After all, attributing negative connotations to “the Arts” does not make sense in light of the section’s elevation of poets. According to Monos, an over-adherence to logic and science does not allow mankind to live in harmony with nature. Rather than placing Nature in its rightful role as a transcendent entity to whom mankind yields, “The end of reason was rooted in the belief, current even today, that nature could be reduced to pure object...” (Aronowitz 7). Poe points to this objectification of Nature by saying that mankind “fell into childish exultation at his acquired and still-increasing dominion over her [Nature’s] elements.” As a consequence of this objectification of Nature, mankind itself paradoxically became enslaved and therefore, objectified as well.

As previously mentioned, Una’s absence indicates another way in which form and function intertwine within the second passage of Poe’s colloquy. Roger Scruton describes beauty

as “real and universal value, one anchored in our rational nature” (xii), but the life which Monos describes does not recognize beauty because “mankind’s general condition” is one which perversely clings to reason as the only “real and universal value” (Scruton xiii). This is why Monos relates mankind’s failure to value those who promote aesthetic beauty: “the poets—living and perishing amid the scorn of the ‘utilitarians,’” “one or two wise among our forefathers—wise in fact, although not in the world’s esteem,” and the “poetic intellect” are each at odds with a world that relies on reason and disdains aesthetics. Aronowitz elaborates on this perspective by saying that although “Disciplines outside the boundaries of science, consigned since the eighteenth century to the margins of intellectual life, are permitted to explore truth in the traditional, prescientific sense of the term. ...” (Aronowitz vii), those explorations take a back seat to rational inquiry. From Monos’s perspective, “...modern scientific rationality is the privileged discourse, and all others are relegated to the margins. (Aronowitz 9). The paradox grows, for by privileging reason to the exclusion of other paths to truth, blind, ignorant, and enslaved mankind cannot identify *any* classical ideal.

Furthermore, beauty’s absence from section two exemplifies a wider area of concern: ignorance of natural law itself. After all, while some see “beauty as merely ‘subjective’” (Scruton xii), in a very real sense, beauty is a function of objective, natural order. The inability to pin down a precise philosophical definition for beauty is beside the point, for while “It is fairly obvious that there is no ‘rule-following’... in nature...there are symmetries, harmonies, proportions, and also the aesthetically challenging lack of those things” (Scruton 122). However, mankind, in his blind devotion to reason, fails to sense the omnipresent natural law about him. In this sense Poe builds the paradox surrounding Life and Death, for while Una relates, “In Death

we have learned the propensity of man to define the indefinable,” Life, in contrast, obscures the obvious.

Monos describes multiple ways in which the living ignore natural law, and those ways further clarify Life’s rejection of platonic ideals. Mankind’s drive to harness nature rather than “submit to the guidance of natural laws” means that the living exist as unnatural, diseased creatures, out of sync with the universe. The dark tone of Poe’s wording juxtaposed with Nature’s positive attributes makes this clear; the living suffer from a “diseased commotion,” “infantine imbecility,” and “disorder” while Nature stands virginal with “hills unhewn...forest solitudes, primeaval, odorous, and unexplored.” Accordingly, corrupted Life has no part of Nature’s purity.

If an inability to “submit to natural laws” is the disease, then an inability to sense the “the laws of gradation” within Nature is one of the more prominent symptoms of that illness. Poe describes “an omni-present Democracy,” and by this term, Poe refers to an inability to discern quality. The living reject natural law by holding a philosophy of “universal equality” without regard to a hierarchical reality. In other words, mankind considers the power of reason a sufficient tool for overcoming any obstacle; accordingly, this philosophy postulates that there are no insurmountable natural barriers to mankind’s progress. However, because “In the judgement of beauty the search for objectivity is for valid and heightened forms of human experience...” (Scurton 120), the ability to perceive quality is an integral ingredient to the good life. Although the living possess the physical sense of sight, their ironic enslavement to reason has incapacitated their ability to perceive objective aesthetics. They are unable, therefore, to obtain “heightened forms of human experience” about which Scruton speaks. Epicurus’s materialist philosophy,

rather than freeing the living to truly live, means that the living, through their rejection of platonic ideals, are, for all intents and purposes, dead.

In addition to describing the rejection of the platonic ideals of truth and beauty, this central section of Poe's colloquy also addresses the place of the third classical idea within that paradigm: goodness. Within section one we see Monos "rejecting the explanations of the priesthood" and in this second section, Monos continues that rejection by associating goodness not with religion, but with beauty. Along these same lines, Roger Scruton connects these two ideals by saying, "Beauty is therefore as firmly rooted in the scheme of things as goodness. It speaks to us, as virtue speaks to us, of human fulfilment; not of things that we want, but of things that we ought to want, because human nature requires them" (Scruton 123). Scruton's concept of beauty matches Monos's because both eschew attributing goodness to manmade factors. Instead, they both define goodness as a transcendental rooted in the very design of the universe. Scruton, for example, significantly ascribes beauty and goodness as inherent needs of "human *nature* [emphasis mine]" With this in mind, in Poe's colloquy, goodness refers not to one's adherence to a particular moral code but rather to one's association with the ultimate source of beauty: Nature. For this reason, Poe writes in the colloquy that

the poets, pondered piningly, yet not unwisely, upon the ancient days when our wants were not more simple than our enjoyments were keen—days when *mirth* was a word unknown, so solemnly deep-toned was happiness—holy, august and blissful days, when blue rivers ran undammed, between hills unhewn, into far forest solitudes...

In this passage, Poe connects goodness with beauty in several ways. The poets, the wisest among the living and the ones devoted to ideals, "pondered piningly." The consonance of this

phrase emphasizes their longing for “the ancient days,” and the adverb “piningly” is a subtle reference to nature. Furthermore, the adjective “holy” holds immense connotative meaning, for while it usually refers to devotedness to God, in this instance, “holy” applies to Nature in its unspoiled glory. It is just this, however, which mankind, in his zeal for the rational, systematized, and controlled, manipulates to perversely and ironically form “the most evil of all our evil days.”

Such is the bleak portrait of life which Poe paints. Life, to which most attribute vibrancy and freedom, is paradoxically devoid of both. Reason, which should lead man to Truth, obscures it. Beauty, which surrounds man, is invisible to him, and Goodness, an expression of Nature’s beauty, becomes perversely associated with humanity’s contrivances. In these ways this middle portion of “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” builds on the paradox introduced in the work’s first section.

If one considers how Poe paradoxically portrays life as lifeless to be a diagnosis of sorts—“man’s general condition” while living—then one might consider this latter part of the section to be Poe’s prescriptive cure. Poe points out a path towards redemption, and that path is marked by ideals which would counteract the detrimental materialism and rationalism debilitating mankind. Of all the redemptive forces Monos mentions, the most significant is taste—the ability to perceive beauty. Monos says:

in truth, it was at this crisis that taste alone—that faculty which, holding a middle position between the pure intellect and the moral sense, could never have safely been disregarded—it was now that taste alone could have led us gently back to Beauty, to Nature, and to Life.

Mankind’s salvation, rather than an accomplishment of some man-made process, depends on his appreciation for the transcendent ideal of beauty.

Indeed, a return to platonic ideals is the key to rescuing mankind from the slavery and denigration of a life dominated by reason and “the utilitarians.” A resurgence of what Monos calls “the pure contemplative spirit and majesty of Plato” would heal man’s disease, and Monos refers to many ingredients that would spark such a renewal. For instance, Poe significantly personifies Nature: “The fair face of Nature was deformed...” With this literary device, Poe aligns Nature with Death, for both are personified and presented as positive, redemptive forces. Furthermore, in contrast to reason and its strangle-hold on life, Poe repeatedly praises “the poets” who, by “imagination,” are able to discern “those truths which...were of most enduring importance.” To elaborate, the *creative* connect to *creation* in ways which the rational do not, and consequentially, those with such a relationship offer hope for humanity. Poe, furthermore, offers intuition as a third way to break reason’s stronghold. In contrast to the “harsh mathematical reason,” Monos considers intuition “the sentiment of the natural,” and therefore a thought process which facilitates mankind’s connection with the transcendent.

In addition to naming Nature, the imaginative, and intuition as elements offering the living a path to the transcendent, Monos postulates on the redemptive power of music, and understanding the role of music reveals much about the work as a whole. Monos says, “Alas for [music] which he [Plato] justly regarded as an all-sufficient education for the soul!” As stated earlier, the story connects Una to music within section three: her sobs are heard as “soft musical sounds,” and her passing is perceived “musically.” Therefore, Una connects to both Beauty and Music; like Una, music points to the classical ideal of Beauty. Music, the most immaterial of the arts, possesses a transcendent quality making it more representative of the platonic ideals in ways which more material artistic expressions do not. In addition, music symbolizes the perfect synthesis of the platonic ideals: its mathematical qualities make it partially rational, its aesthetic

qualities make it beautiful, and under Monos's paradigm, the fact that music so perfectly melds the rational and the beautiful makes it good. For these reasons, music is, as Monos says, "an all-sufficient education for the soul!"

Notably, the many references to music within "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" play out not only within the work's content, but also within its form. The tripartite form of the work mirrors the common 3-part organization of many musical genres. Like a sonata, Poe's colloquy follows the exposition/development/recapitulation pattern. Section one introduces the characters, the setting, and the conflict, section two further expounds on that conflict, and the work's final portion further describes what began in the first passage (namely, Monos's relationship with Death). Furthermore, like a musical work, the tempo and tone of the sections vary, so while the work, like a musical composition, stands as a complete whole, each passage also functions similarly to a distinct movement. In this way overall unity of the colloquy mirrors music, wherein diverse elements integrate to form a transcendent whole.

In these ways the middle passage of Poe's colloquy creates unity within the work. Through the devices of paradox, metaphor, irony, and personification, Poe points to the deficiencies of an over-emphasis on the material and rational. Pascal, the philosopher whom Monos and Una "both love," said, "Reason's last step is the recognition that there are infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to recognize that" (as qtd. in Muggeridge 3). This idea of the "infinite...beyond" is that which Monos's monologue and the entire work support. Poe's imaginative exploration beyond temporal life and into eternal Death enables readers to actually do what the philosophical message of the work urges: see beyond the material present, into the transcendent world of truth, beauty, and goodness, where man, freed from his limitations, loses himself in the eternal.

Chapter 5: A Renewed Pursuit of the Aesthetic

W.W. Norton, founder of W.W. Norton & Company (publisher of the much-celebrated Norton Anthologies) had this to say about his publishing criteria: "Let us make all the necessary vows that we will stick to the business of publishing the best books we can lay our hands on and then keep our hands on them for as long as may be" ("Norton History"). The assumed concept of quality—that some literature is inherently better than others—undergirds this statement. However, what are the "best books?" What literature deserves that we "keep our hands on [it]?" What literature shall we pass onto our posterity?

Without embracing the concept of quality or aesthetic excellence, the answers to these questions matter little, for such answers will be arbitrary at best. Perhaps literary choices have no qualitative criteria whatsoever, or perhaps only literature that promotes certain politically correct ideologies—whatever political stance happens to be in vogue—should find its way into our children's precious hands. The perspective which denies qualitative difference is not one which frankly deserves a great deal of attention, for despite its philosophical attractions, qualitative difference is imbedded in reality. However, another Norton, Charles Eliot Norton, offers a critique of the ideology-driven literary studies, and his words, although penned nearly a century ago, hold particular relevance even today: "The whole country is now excited by the political campaign, and in a condition of irrational emotion. The best of the prospect is that a reorganization of parties seems not unlikely...But any radical change is not to be hoped for" (as qtd. in Eliot 3). In other words, placing one's hope in politics most likely leads to disappointment. So, when considering the qualities defining "good" literature, one should reach beyond the transience of human opinion, even opinions as passionately held as ideological ones tend to be.

The pursuit of the eternal rather than the temporal takes many forms, but engaging in that pursuit first requires the ability to differentiate between the two. Eliot goes on to describe how Norton, in the midst of a turbulent and contradictory political and social environment, ascribed to “the permanent importance of literature [which was] a fixed point.” This sense of permanence and fixedness transcends the mutability inherent in human endeavors, and discerning the qualities which make literature of enduring importance is that which aesthetic criticism attempts to do. Furthermore, formalism—what Cleanth Brooks called, “...[asking] whether or not the devices in question—be they sequence of ideas, development of metaphors, selection of words—function to develop a coherent and powerful structure of attitudes” (251)—offers lovers of literature a meaningful path to discerning between the temporal and eternal. The more “imaginative unity” (Brooks 245) expressed between a work’s form and content, the more that work resembles a “coherent and powerful structure”—a form constructed to *last*—rather than a proverbial house of sand, destined for imminent collapse.

This search for permanence and embrace of eternity constitutes what Poe’s “Colloquy of Monos and Una” both explores and attempts. Poe matches his content—two souls embracing the eternal and transcending the temporal, the elevation of the metaphysical over the material, and the superiority of imagination to reason—to the dialectic form. Like the colloquy’s content, dialogue transcends the temporal, for this work’s form extends beyond the normal boundaries of the dialectic. For instance, while most associate dialogue with reasoned philosophical discourse, Poe employs the form for the purpose of imaginative exploration; the author will not accept the segmentation between reason and imagination. So, while philosophers commonly “present their doctrines in the form of dialogues for the purposes of polemic, refutation, or instruction” (Cossutta 48), for Poe, like Plato, dialogue serves a more significant purpose: the pursuit of truth.

The dialectic—the progressive refining and synthesis of opposing perspectives—leads to a *greater* truth than either perspective attains on its own effort. The value of Poe’s colloquy rests in Poe’s skill at expressing the infinite value of the eternal through a form which exists to ascertain the transcendent.

Even more strikingly, Poe’s work deserves recognition because it not only expresses imaginative unity between *what* it says and *how* it says it, but also because, through the vehicle of this work, Poe attempts to do exactly what the work suggests: pursue the transcendent.

Theodor Adorno suggests, “Artworks were always meant to endure; it is related to their concept, that of objectification. Through duration art protests against death... Art is the semblance of what is beyond death’s reach” (27). In one sense, Adorno’s words hold true, for Poe’s works, unfortunately, only reached their current popularity after the artist’s death. On the other hand, however, art is, in fact *not* “the semblance of what is beyond death’s reach.” If one views death as possessing the negative attributes typically associated with it, then Adorno’s perspective makes sense. But if, in contrast, Death is rather a friend to embrace and a door to eternity, art is no longer “beyond death’s reach” but instead is, as the embodiment of aesthetic, one of the primary residents within Truth’s transcendent realm.

As a consequence, through his art, Poe makes himself into “the poetic intellect” which pursues and comprehends “those truths...of the most enduring importance” in section two of his colloquy. The unity which Poe describes as “that vital requisite of all works...its totality of effect or impression” (“The Poetic Principle”) extends beyond the actual boundaries of the work *into reality*. Regarding Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Harold Bloom has said, “Dante will not acknowledge that the *Comedy* must be a fiction...Rather, the poem is the truth, universal and not temporal” (73). In his own way, Poe expresses the same certainty, for the lasting impression is that the

afterlife which Poe presents actually awaits those who step from life into everlasting Death. Although the colloquy is, in reality, one man's imaginative work of fiction, the unity reflected in the work's form and content and the very real ways in which Poe expresses the work's message within his own life give this work a rare depth and profundity. Astoundingly, this six page creation becomes much more than literature: "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" becomes an authoritative, Romantic scripture. The work's masterful continuity gives the impression that it, too, is "universal and not temporal." The attentive audience—those alive to the interplay of form and content—finds itself baptized into the eternal, and through this immersion, the true power of imagination reveals itself as that which ushers its disciples beyond reason's limitations, into the realm of the transcendent.

As satisfyingly rich as feasting on a well-executed literary meal can be, one may find ample reason to think that too many of today's English scholars no longer stomach this sort of prolonged, in-depth analysis. The easy pickings of temporal political concerns are often overwhelmingly tempting, especially for new critics. Thankfully, some have realized aestheticism's centrality to literary studies and have consequentially urged its return. Misson and Morgan, for example, more recently related, "Any version of literacy that fails to acknowledge the aesthetic fully is an impoverished one, both in its sense of language and its sense of human beings" (Misson & Morgan 226). This sense of cultural poverty—the inability to assess and value one's literary heritage—Eliot actually labels "barbarism" (5). May we, through a renewed pursuit of the aesthetic, avoid such a sad rejection of our western heritage and rather come to regain the imaginative riches which Poe's colloquy so aptly offers

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