With this issue a new series of reconsiderations of major American figures, texts, and themes is introduced. Readers are invited to submit suggestions for the series.

Poe in Progress: A Reappraisal

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Although neglected or criticized as a decadent or minor writer for at least one hundred years, particularly in his own country, Edgar Allan Poe in fact foreshadowed our twentieth-century reality. We can now see, that one of the most striking qualities of his work is its principal discussion of issues like progress, modernity, mass culture, reification versus freedom, democracy versus truth, i.e. the identity of modem western civilization. When we read Emerson, Thoreau, or Whitman we can see them as a part of the last century and its discussions of organic nature, freedom and spirit; but not so with Poe.

Poe reminds us of the present: he is cold, analytical, fascinated by disaster, and nothing really shocks him. He lives in a world of phantasmagoria and deception. He knows, as we do, the pleasures of reification in the big cities, and not just the fear of the abyss. He had a few admirers in the 19th century who knew him well and recognized their own predicament in his tales: first of all, Baudelaire, who translated his tales and *Eureka* into French; then, of course, Dostoevsky; and, finally, the French symbolists and impressionists, including Debussy, who originally planned to write an opera based on *The Fall of the House of Usher* until he chose the much more gloomy and romantic *Pelleas and Melisande* by Maeterlinck.

In the last century Poe was primarily known as a romantic poet in Europe and as an unpatriotic writer in America: in Europe as well as in America, Poe's criticism of progress and humanity was looked upon as the opinion of an outsider. Poe was a stranger; to Americans he was un-American, and to Europeans he was almost divine. Baudelaire dared not translate his poems because he felt that they could not be translated. Mallarmé did translate them, but only into prose. In the twentieth century this image of the strange Poe has

changed, in Europe as well as in America. Now he is regarded as a reliable interpreter of modernity, meaning shock reality and sudden change in history, loss of ideality. In the present Poe research, Poe expresses the fear and fragmentation of a post-idealistic reality, which his work tries to master. The question is, however, whether to master means to get used to this reality, or to change it, or to reflect upon its limits. This ambiguity seems to be essential to the recent literature on Poe.

Just after his death in October 1849, Poe was regarded in Europe as a founder of modern aesthetics; in America he was "the jingle jangle man," a superficial poet without ideals, a decadent person from the South. His own country simply could not accept his lack of enthusiasm and assertiveness as Perry Miller called it in *Society and Literature in America* in 1949: "The tremendous task of creating ... not only a nation but a culture ... is not something that needs apology. Therefore this assertiveness is a persistent trait in the American character, and the central theme in our literature."[1] In fact the qualities that Baudelaire and Mallarmé found and admired in the work of Poe were at the same time the qualities that condemned him in America.

The purpose of Poe's work, the politically disappointed Baudelaire said, was the beautiful and nothing but the beautiful. But this seeming lack of moral conscience in the work of Poe was the reason why he was so unpopular in America, especially among critics and scholars. According to Perry Miller's *The Raven and the Whale*, many literary critics in Poe's lifetime were still businessmen with literary ambitions, and to them Poe's professionalism as a writer was suspicious and without any connection to everyday life. While Poe talked about imagination and construction of images, the men around the *Knickerbocker Magazine* compared literature to food, for instance, chowder and good French red wine.[2] In fact, Hawthorne expressed the feelings of the major writers of the American Renaissance very precisely when he wrote about his Puritan countrymen: "They will not be convinced that any good thing may consist with what they call idleness; they can anticipate nothing but evil of a young man who neither studies physic, law, nor gospel, nor opens a store, nor takes to farming."[3]

Many critics, even in Poe's lifetime, admitted his skilfulness as a poet, but also felt that he was an enemy of American democracy and of good taste in the Longfellow or Alcott manner. Poe's lack of belief in progress, normality and the respectable way of life was exactly the reason why Baudelaire found Poe so interesting. "Progress," Baudelaire wrote, "that great heresy of decay, likewise could not escape Poe. The reader will see in the different passages

1 Perry Miller, *Society and Literature in America.* (Leiden, 1949), p. 11.
2 Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* (New York, 1956), pp. 60ff.
3 F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York, 1956), p. 225.

what terms he used to characterize it. One could truly say, considering the fervour he expends, that he had to vent his spleen on it, as on a public nuisance or as on a pest in the street."[4]

In the work of Poe, Baudelaire was confirmed of his own doctrine of pure poetry, and of democracy as an illusion, the illusion of humanity during The Second Empire in France. In the eyes of Baudelaire, Poe was another alienated artist in desperate rebellion against nature, Baudelaire's term for a still mythic state of society. In fact, Griswold, Poe's friend and literary executor, also regarded him as alienated from society in the famous Ludwig-article published just after Poe's death: "Edgar Allan Poe is dead: He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was well known personally or by reputation, in all this country; he had readers in England and in several of the states of continental Europe; but he had few or no friends; and the regards for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art lost one of its most brilliant, but erratic stars."[5]

The isolation mentioned by Baudelaire as a sign of the role of the romantic poet in modern society is to Griswold a sign of Poe's cold and hostile attitude towards respectable comniunity. And Poe's quality as a poet and writer of world-famous tales only proves to Griswold that he lacks something more essential than art, namely morality and patriotism. In the Knickerbocker Mag*azine,* Clark, the editor, wrote: "In ladies' magazines he [Poe] is an Aristarchus, but among men of letters his sword is a broken lath."[6]

This opinion that something in Poe or in his work is broken has been able to survive till the 1970s, not only in America,[7] but also in Europe, especially in France. Romantic or unpatriotic, Poe is a stranger, an *Israfel*, the title of Hervey Allen's biography from 1926. Many of the psychoanalytic studies, including Marie Bonaparte's Edgar *Poe—sa* vie et ses oeuvres from 1933, try to explain his gloomy and exalted tales as a result of his personal background. These studies do not condemn Poe from a moralistic point of view, as Griswold does; they simply see Poe isolated from his historical background as a

4 Eric W. Carlson, ed., *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe* (Ann Arbor), p. 48.

5 Henning Goldbæk, "A l'ombre du voyage. Une interprétation du 'Voyage' de Baudelaire," *Revue Romane* 25/1.

6 Miller, *The Raven*, p. *150.*

7 Even Larzer Ziff's *Literary Democracy* from 1981 is still filled with prejudices about the strangeness of Poe, maybe because he focuses on Emerson. When he says that, "society is scarcely depicted by Poe" (p. 70) he simply joins the traditional American Poe research, which had in fact come to an end in 1981. The most interesting passage in Ziffs chapter on Poe says: "He had never recognized the American Revolution as anything but a failure. In so reacting to his America, he preceded the Europeans into the subjective world of modem art" (p. 72). But Poe's isolation and "subjectivity" also reflected the objective historical conditions of modem American literature and society.

case study of the neurotic-necrophiliac who does not belong to the normal world because he is obsessed by motherly love. Today Bonaparte's book is not at all interesting as a case study, but because she happens to be a good reader. In fact many of her observations anticipated the New Criticism.

In our century, especially during the reign of New Criticism, Poe's work has often been rejected as incoherent — as lacking a leading idea and organic structure — particularly when compared to the symbolic prose of Melville and Hawthorne. F. O. Matthiessen, to whom democracy and organic structure were closely connected, excluded Poe from his famous *American Renaissance* from 1941, not because of Poe's background, but because of the inconsistency of his work. In a footnote Poe was isolated from the transcendentalists and from Melville, Hawthorne and Whitman for two reasons: Poe's work was factitious, and his whole attitude was opposed to the collective, common American ideals of freedom and equality.[8] "Great literature" Matthiessen wrote, "must be an organic expression of its age and nation."[9]

To Matthiessen this definition automatically excluded Poe, although the chapter in *American Renaissance* on Emerson and Thoreau showed many examples of disharmony, and although the chapter on Melville labelled the structure of his work "tragic." Many of Matthiessen's interpretations contradict his major thesis about the organic tendency of the American renaissance, and this has often been remarked, for instance by Harry Levin. Matthiessen was a Marxist, his aesthetic and moral ideals seem related to those of Georg Lukács, who in the 1940s wrote his famous book *The Destruction of Reason*, where he labelled all non-realistic tendencies from the 19th to the 20th century decadent, formalistic and factitious. Like *The Destruction of Reason*, Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* was written against the fascist mainstream in Europe at that time. And Poe was regarded as a kind of enemy of American democracy, as a formalistic forerunner of contemporary nihilism, as a person who looked upon history and politics in an aesthetic way.

It is wrong to criticize Matthiessen for neglecting the disharmonic tendencies in the works of Melville and Hawthorne. He was not talking about the organic structure as an already finished form, but as an attempt at, a tendency towards totality, and he could not find this tendency at all in Poe's work. This is very interesting, for the new American, deconstructive Poe research from the last 10 years accepts this theory from Matthiessen, without asking, whether Poe was in fact trying to analyze the American society as a totality.

8 Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, mentions Poe very often in his book, but indeed he only repeats, what he says in the note from the preface: "His stories, less harrowing upon the nerves than they were, seem relatively factitious when contrasted with the moral depth of Hawthorne or Melville" xii.

9 Giles Gunn, F.O. *Matthiessen: The Critical Achievement* (Washington, 1975), p. 69.

This image of Poe as a nihilistic writer was after all not at all surprising in the forties, for the first reception of Poe in France, and especially in Germany, was conservative, idealistic and pre-fascist. The editor of the first major Poe translation in Germany was Moeller van den Bruck, who introduced Dostoevsky to German readers in the same way: as a romantic reactionary, who hated the disgusting mob and the materialism of modem democracy, which his work wanted to destroy. According to Moeller van den Bruck the abyss is the major image in the work of Poe.

Van den Bruck's Poe edition was the one available to Benn, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno, and this connection between conservatism and Poe may explain not only Matthiessen's, but also Adorno's very negative analysis of Poe in *Minima Moralia* where he talks about Poe's longing for the destruction of bourgeois rationality as an illusionary attempt to experience something new.

For Adorno and Benjamin, Poe's work in fact describes and foreshadows the totalitarian tendencies of the 20th century; much in the same way as Baudelaire and Flaubert, Poe is already an early expression of the totalitarian state. This is different from Matthiessen and early Poe research, and it anticipates recent Poe research especially in Germany. On the other hand, the early Adorno still has something in common with Matthiessen when he regards Poe as a bad omen of history, and not as a critic. Adorno also sees Poe as factitious and decadent in a way, but to him organic literature would not be an alternative, but rather the nightmare of social realism, i.e. of the doctrines of Lukács. And maybe, Adorno says already in his book on Wagner from 1938, decadence does not only mean destruction, but the beginning of something new.

Today Poe is part of modem history and is no longer isolated; to post-war research he is not only a storyteller, but a truth-teller. To us Poe is one of the few writers from the last century who foresaw the terrorism of organic systems in art, philosophy and in politics, as well as the fascination of modernity: phantasmagoria, deception, ironic play with aesthetical forms, experiments as well as construction and deconstruction of form and reality. Adorno once called Poe one of the first architects of modernity. In America, Harry Levin's *The Power of Blackness* from 1958 is the first major work that analyzes Poe's work as a description of essential structures in modem history. In Europe, Benjamin and Adorno are the first. The new American Poe research, beginning with Levin, must be seen as a criticism of Matthiessen's indeed very old-fashioned point of view. The post-war Poe research in Germany, on the other hand, must be seen as being indebted to Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie* and *Minima Moralia* and to Benjamin's conception of allegory in his book about *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* and the *Passagenwerk.*

In America as well as in Germany, the new Poe research can be regarded as part of a discovery of the dark sides of the past. Levin's preface to *The Power*

of Blackness talks about the necessity of "self-examination and rediscovery."[10] To Levin, this examination means a criticism of Matthiessen's mythological image of American values. In fact, Matthiessen originally planned to call his book about the American renaissance *Man in the Open Air* until Levin gave him the idea for the final and less mythological title.

It would be wrong to see Levin's book only in opposition to Matthiessen's book, for the category of the tragic, which Matthiessen uses to characterize Melville and Hawthorne, is indeed a beginning recognition of the dark sides of history. "But," Levin says, "it *[American Renaissance]* left out that 'vision of evil' which clouds the hopeful picture from time to time, that note of anguish which foreshadowed the tragedy he himself [Matthiessen] was to enact."[11] Matthiessen committed suicide.

To Levin, Matthiessen stands between the patriotic image of America and the new self-critical notion that was to become typical in Poe research after the last war. Almost as if anticipating the Vietnam war and later military involvements outside America, Levin writes in *The Power of Blackness* about his interpretation of Hawthorne, Melville and Poe:

> Two of them would occupy central and closely adjoining niches in any annex we might erect to the Hall of Fantasy; while the third [Poe], though situated very much by himself, must be conjured with in any discussion of what he characteristically styled the 'management of imagination.' All three have been grouped together by a recent Italian historian of American literature, Luigi Berti, under the expressive epithet, *I Triumviri dell' Inquitudine,* the triumvirs of disquietude. In a republic--or, should we say, an empire?—which presses for assent, conformity, and even quietism, we may seem to have left their disturbing mood behind.... Taking for granted the obvious American thesis, the cheerfully confident trend of a practical and prosperous culture, it is the antithesis that we find in our greatest writers. Visionaries rather than materialists, rather symbolists than realists, the vision they impart is not rose-coloured but sombre, and the symbols through which they impart it are charged with significations that profoundly justify the most searching analysis.[12]

One of the chapters about Poe in Levin's book is called "Journey to the End of the Night" and is about Poe's novel *Arthur Gordon Pym* which Levin regards as a forerunner of Celine's famous novel *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit.* To Levin, Poe foreshadows not only Baudelaire, but Proust and Celine, i.e. the atmosphere of French surrealism. One of Levin's most interesting passages on Poe says that "Poe's cult of blackness is not horripilation for horripilation's sake: it is a bold attempt to face the true darkness in its most tangible manifestations. If life is a dream, then death is an awakening."[13]

10 Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness* (New York, 1958), p. 11.
11 *Ibid.,* p. 13.
12 *Ibid.,* pp. 38f.
13 *Ibid.,* p. 128.

In German criticism Poe is also located in the tradition from Baudelaire to Celine and the surrealists, and to the tradition of Critical Theory this development from Baudelaire to the 20th century is part of a historico-philosophical analysis. To Benjamin and Adomo the 19th century was the period when life was a dream. Consciousness of reification and competition was still sleeping and did not awake until the 20th century, to face the totalitarian state and its self-destructive tendencies that Poe and Baudelaire foreshadowed in their decadent attitude as heroes of modem life.

To Benjamin and Adorno the authors of the 19th century are still protesting against totalitarian development, whereas the writers of our century accept and eternalize to a much higher degree the development, including collective destruction. Poe and Baudelaire have a much more true and conscious image of reality than many authors from the 20th century, like Proust or Celine. Therefore Benjamin and Adorno in fact imply that their books on Baudelaire, Poe and Wagner inherit the truth content of Poe and Baudelaire, whereas the works of Proust and Jiinger betray the ideals of that tradition.

To the Frankfurt School, the abyss and the shock images of Poe thus become part of a historical truth; Poe's work already describes the reality of the 20th century. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno says that the tendencies in Poe and Baudelaire to destroy the existing world and find something new do not become evil (bos) until their integration in the totalitarian structures (Zurichtung) of the 20th century: "Zum bloss Bosen wird das Neue erst durch die totalitare Zurichtung."[14]

To the early Adorno, Poe and Baudelaire first of all predicate these destructive tendencies of history. To Adomo there is no hope or transcendence in them; their work is itself a part of historical destruction, which they express, but do not criticize. Benjamin on the other hand compares Poe to Baudelaire. He emphasizes Poe's much greater ability to express the shocks and contradictions of the modern world, without distance but with a consciousness that is able to show these contradictions clearly. About "The Man of the Crowd" he says in the *Passagenwerk*, "The Man of the Crowd is no flaneur. In him the relaxed attitude has changed into a manical attitude.... Compared to him the Paris of Baudelaire still carries some signs of the good old days."[15] The secret hope for Benjamin was, that Baudelaire and Poe due to their position in the 19th century could destroy the illusions of progress and of the closed society, and thus transcend it into a state of hope and into an alternative way of life.

This image of Poe as a pitiless truth-teller of the contradictions of modernity has influenced the West German Poe research, especially in three books: Carla

14 Theodor W. Adono, *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt a. *M.,* 1979), p. 320.
15 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Werke* ,1.*2* (Frankfurt a. M., 1972), p. 627.

Gregorzewski's *Edgar Allan Poe und die Anfange einer originar amerikanischen Ästhetik* (1982); Karl Heinz Bohrer's *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens* (1978); Armin Staats' *Edgar Allan Poes symbolistische Erzahlkunst* (1972).

If Matthiessen's patriotism during the Second World War sacrificed Poe, one could in a way say the same of Adorno and to a certain degree of the West German Poe research. To Gregorzewski, Poe is a forerunner of Beckett, Adorno's favorite writer. To Bohrer, Poe is a forerunner of the German writer Ernst Jiinger; to both, Poe is a forerunner of destruction, reification and shock-reality and his works are full of visual warnings against modern history, which to Bohrer and Gregorzewski means history without hope.

In fact, it is not this pessimism of Adomo and Benjamin that makes the books interesting, but the sense of the non-identical in Poe, i.e. his ability to show the limits of the existing world. Gregorzewski uses the term of the non-identical from the late Adorno to analyze Poe, not only as a modem writer or a writer of western culture, but as an *American* writer.

To many this may seem a banality, but German Poe research until 1945 regarded Poe (and western culture in general) as German. It saw Poe as a German romantic poet, who had been unhappy enough to be born in capitalist America. The first German book about Poe after the war was Kuno Schuhmann's *Die erzahlende Prosa Edgar Allan Poes* from 1958. Schuhmann was the first to introduce Poe as an American writer. To Gregrozewski, Poe's role as an American poet meant that Poe wrote in the most unmasked capitalist society of the western world. While Adorno says that Poe could express the contradictions of modernity, Gregorzewski adds that he could do so because he was American: "Poe's life reflects ... the social role of the American artist of his time, who besides his working capacity did not have any other resources that could stabilize his social status."[16]

Bohrer maintains that the shock images of Poe have been misunderstood by several generations as effects without any connection to morality or truth. But indeed these effects are, according to Bohrer, Poe's attempt to describe the coming catastrophe of modem civilization. Bohrer suggests that Poe looked for shock effects that had never been used before in order to warn his time against the tendencies of the future. Poe took these images from well-known stories of his own time so that the readers could recognize the context. The most famous, or notorious of these images is the abyss from "MS found in a Bottle" and from "A Descent into the Maelström," first used by Baudelaire and Rimbaud, then by the French surrealists and finally by Celine and by Ernst Jiinger in his war novels. These writers used the image in a mythological way, however, and not with the precise historical consciousness of Poe.

Armin Staats' book is not related to the writings of Benjamin and Adorno

16 Carla Gregorzewski, *Edgar Allan Poe und die Anfange einer originar amerikanischen Asthetik* (Heidelberg, 1982), p. 82.

from the thirties, but to Benjamin's *Trauerspielbook* from 1924, especially the section on allegory. To Benjamin and later to Adorno allegory means the fragmentation of the organic world of the symbol. Sometimes Benjamin relates this process of fragmentation to history and especially to the 19th and to the 20th centuries. But often he does not relate allegory to history at all, but to the possibility of fragmentary experience *per se*.

Staats emphasizes the historical tendency in Benjamin's book. Symbol as well as allegory became subjective categories in the age of enlightenment. They are no longer part of an objective, poetical pattern as in the Renaissance or in classical French literature, but are related to the psychology of the subject, to the free choice of the subject as a rational, reflecting person. Both symbol and allegory are fragmented as two different possibilities of experience for the subject. And this, says Staats, explains the dialectic between them, also in Poe's work: the dialectic between fragmentation of meaning (the analytical Poe) and the experience of organic totality (Poe's unity of effect).

Staats emphasizes the utopian aspects of Poe, and Bohrer and Gregorzewski, his criticism of modernity. They see Poe is a *historical* writer. Their emphasis on history is probably connected with their consciousness of the European catastrophe in the 20th century. To all of them it is essential that Poe does not represent a mythological age or a mythological experience, because this would be identical with the former image of German pre-war history and its mythological-national self-image, which included Poe as one of its representatives, as in the writings of Moeller van den Bruck for example,

In American Poe research from the 1970s, Poe has been introduced as the critic of idealism, of the American dream, and of progress; to some scholars he is a critic of the Western metaphysical tradition, but to others he is a critic of specific historical tendencies in his own time, for example transcendentalism. The question posed is the opposite of the question in Germany after the war. Gregorzewski and Bohrer still think in historical terms. They *criticize* heroic history and emphasize history in the sense of fragmentation and destruction of organic totality when they talk about European history from Bismarck to Hitler. The American Poe research is not interested in history at all, it wants to escape history—what it views as the patriotic and aggressive ideals of American imperialism and of Western civilization.

According to John T. Irwin, Joan Dayan, and J. Gerald Kennedy, history in Matthiessen's sense of the word does not exist except as a phantasmagoria. But their alternative is not critical history, but a new kind of mythology. Instead of the mythology of unity they choose the mythology of pluralism, which they find described in the philosophy of deconstruction. The decay and fragmentation of progress is *freedom from history,* not a state of crisis or disaster that demands a new conception of history. Patriotic history is an illusion.

In American Hieroglyphics John *T*. Irwin says, "The American dream of

'the orgiastic future,' of endless tomorrows in which one can always go back to the beginning, void history's foreclosure of possibilities, and start over, in the same way that Gatsby tried to repeat the past, is 'the last and greatest of all human dreams,' a dream of beginning that grows out of a sense of lateness, a sense that something is happening 'for the last time in history.'" To Irwin history is behind us, there is no utopia, and the last time does not exist; progress and future is a fiction, because: "temporal movement is irrevesible ... What we seek is always behind us." The meaning of the word hieroglyph in Irwin's book is, "a symbol of doubleness."[17]

Although we try to find the origin of progress and identity, we find only the shadow—of essence, of history, of life itself. In Poe's work Irwin finds this hieroglyphic structure in *Arthur Gordon* Pym: "Yet although the final portion of Pym's story takes the form of a journal, the entire narrative, as made clear in the preface, was written only after he had returned from the voyage, a claim so much at odds with the nature of the journey to the abyss that it can only be meant to call attention to the analogical status of writing in pursuit of its own origin."[18] To Irwin, this deconstructive theory is related to the American dream in history and its illusionary reality. In Joan Dayan's *Fables of Mind* from *1987* and J. Gerald Kennedy's *Poe, Death and the Life of Writing* from *1987,* Poe is a "philosophical" writer, that is a writer, "whose fictions are complicated critiques of the law of identity and contradiction, the law of cause and effect, and of any abstract notion of body and soul."[19]

Dayan is of course aware of the fact that Poe's positions are essentially related to his opposition to the transcendentalists; but to her this opposition can only be explained in connection with a general discussion of metaphysics (as Derrida defines it) versus the physical world: "This book," Dayan says, "is about Poe's commitment to and respect for a radically physical world. His attachment to materiality simultaneously deconstructs the romantic sublime and permits him to make the most fantastic fictions of mind."[20] Dayan interprets first of all Poe's hoaxes and grotesques, in which Poe does in fact describe a fragmented and reified world in an optimistic and orgiastic way. Poe only wrote in a philosophical way in order to deconstruct philosophy and thought into the physical world, i.e. the world of body and nature. Dayan sometimes identifies this physical world of sensitive images with the world of woman, without trying to explain why or how the symbol of woman meant so much to Poe and to his time.

One of the most interesting books about Poe in the new deconstructive

17 John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphs in the American Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 114, 119.

18 *Ibid.,* p. 164.

19 Joan Dayan, *Fables of Mind - an Inquiry into Poe's Fiction* (New York, 1987), p. 3.

20 *Ibid.,* p. 15.

movement is J. Gerald Kennedy's *Poe, Death and the Life of Writing*. It deals with the still popular image of Poe as a "fright merchant," and its conclusion is that Poe's work reflects the experience of death in a postmetaphysical world: "This book moves from a contextual study of death in the nineteenth century to a more speculative consideration of language and metaphysics.... Poe's current importance lies precisely in his recognition of the catastrophe figured by annihilation, for he anticipated the enthronement of death in our own century and probed the origins of existential despair."[21]

To Kennedy the image of beautiful death (for instance in the novels of Dickens and Cooper) was a *phnntasmagoria*, an attempt to hide the cruel reality of death, the "harshness of death," as Kennedy puts it.[22] Kennedy also focuses on the specific role of woman in Poe's tales and poems. Only woman can transcend death because she exists on the limit between life and death: "If the death of a beautiful woman 'is the most poetical topic in the world,' its aesthetic value derives neither from female beauty as such nor from death as an ontological event, but from the unstable relation between the two, from the shifting intermediacy of a phenomenon which has no proper place or form or intelligibility." In fact, Kennedy, like Dayan, considers the possibility that the symbol of the woman transcends the world of abstract rationality, but only for a moment and in glimpses: "Yet," Kennedy continues, "the eternality of female beauty could not withstand contamination by reality. Only in poetry, in a work of art—an oval portrait perhaps—could loneliness escape the 'vermin fangs' of the Conqueror Worm."[23] Kennedy's background is Derrida and de Man. Nevertheless he is a more historical concrete writer than Dayan, because he relates the metaphysics of death to a problem in Poe's own time and to Poe's consciousness of that problem, *i.e.* the change in the image of death from Dickens and Cooper to Poe, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

When Dayan and Kennedy talk about metaphysics, they want to criticize the dominating ideology of history, namely history as progress and rationality. Instead they emphasize forgotten aspects of history, for instance, death, the physical world and so forth. In general, recent Poe research points out that Poe's work tell much more about our reality than the old Poe research, rooted as it was in the heroic image of America, wanted to admit. A good example is David Reynolds' *Beneath the American Renaissance* from 1988. Reynolds returns to Matthiessen's book and criticizes it, because it has neglected essential aspects of modem history, especially popular culture, in order to create the heroic democratic image of the five great members of the American Renaissance: Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne and Whitman. Second, it tries to mediate between historical analysis and deconstruction:

21 Gerald J. Kennedy, *Poe, Death and the Life of Writing* (New Haven, 1987), ix.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
23 *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 88.

> This book tries to bring together literary and social analysis by showing that the special richness of major literary works was to a great degree historically determined.... Several generations of close readers, from the New Critics through the post-structuralists, have emphasized the supposedly autonomous nature of literary works, placing them at a distance from a popular culture regarded as tame and simplistic. Psychoanalytic critics have typically argued that major authors projected in their works private fantasies and aggressions in reaction against a banal culture that provided no outlet for the tabooed. More recently, with the rise of new historical methodologies in literary criticism, this notion of the alienation of American authors from their society is beginning to be questioned.[24]

As a consequence of this historical method Reynolds shows the immense influence of popular culture on the major writers of the Renaissance. If Adorno thought that the manuscript in Poe's bottle was a symbol of modernity and alienation, and if Matthiessen tried to understand Melville from the tradition of Shakespeare, Reynolds says, that they have both underestimated the influence from American culture:

> It has not been recognized that one of the main weapons wielded by the American writers against oppressive literary influence was a native idiom learned from their own popular culture. The truly indigenous American literary texts were produced mainly by those who had opened sensitive ears to a large variety of popular cultural voices.... The anecdotal sermon style, the visionary mode, the Oriental dialogue, dark temperance, city-mysteries fiction, sensational yellow novels, grotesque native humor—these are some of the forgotten popular genres that Melville grafts together to forge symbols that possess stylistic plurality as well as broad cultural representativeness.[25]

Even though the title of Reynolds' book indicates its distance from Matthiessen's *American Renaissance,* his theory and the conclusion are indeed still very close to Matthiessen. Like Reynolds, Matthiessen always emphasized that his method should reflect the relationship between a literary work and its historical background. While Matthiessen found that democracy was the common background for all the great writers of the American Renaissance, Reynolds adds, that this background includes popular culture. With this definition of culture Reynolds can include what Matthiessen excluded: Poe, Lippard, Dickinson, Fuller and other woman writers. But in spite of his more adequate analysis of the American Renaissance, Reynolds has inherited much of Matthiessen's intolerance, and as a interpreter, he is less sensible than Matthiessen was. Although Matthiessen related his authors to a common background, one feels their differences. But according to Reynolds, Emerson, Melville, Poe, Lippard and others are almost identical: "The major writers sought in their central texts to incorporate as many different popular images as possible and to reconstruct these images by imbuing them with a depth and control they

24 David Reynolds,, *Beneath the American Renaissance* (New York, 1988), p. 6.
25 Ibid., p. 5.

lacked in their crude native state."[26] Reynolds reflects Matthiessen's intolerance since he too can only accept authors whose criticism is still a part of the popular culture. He dislikes alienated artists whose criticism of popular culture marked a distance to their background.

In his book Reynolds answers the question why the woman plays such a big role in Poe's work. Because this question demands a historical analysis, Reynolds has much more to say than Dayan and Kennedy about the relationship in Poe's work between reflection, the threat of death and woman. To Reynolds, woman means the ideology of utopian socialism, and reflection means to Poe fear of mass culture and mass democracy. To Poe, utopian socialism, mass culture, and woman were all *subversive* manifestations of the new liberalist democracy from the 1830s and later. These popular movements were a threat to members of the Renaissance, Reynolds says. American transcendentalists were closer to the democratic manifestations and experimented with utopian socialism and women's liberation. Poe, however, feared this sort of democracy, and as Reynolds suggests, "Poe's distaste for excesses of popular sensationalism was linked to an underlying dissatisfaction with what he perceived as the turbulence and fluidity of modern American life."[27]

A combination of Reynolds' sociology and Kennedy's idea of death and the life of writing is necessary to explain that Poe's distance to life, his rationality and coolness as a writer, and his *disengagement* indicate his anticipation of a drift towards totalitarian structures. Although Reynolds describes Poe's attitude very accurately, it seems to me, that his definition of history is rather naive. To him the development of American democracy in the 19th century is without dangerous tendencies. He looks upon America in the same patriotic manner as Matthiessen: What happened beneath the American Renaissance only confirms the official ideology of equality and freedom. He never mentions Levin's book about the power of blackness or the negative aspects of reification and progress. Poe is isolated in American society, which in Poe's time (and in Reynolds' book) still belongs to Concord. Because Reynolds, although pluralistic to some degree, is still rooted in the old ideological tradition in America, he does not recognize that Poe's rationality is more than aristocratic moralism: "Despite his own interest in violent crime and perversity, he could actually sound moralistic when lamenting the amorality and repulsiveness of popular sensationel novels. He had little tolerance."[28]

Here the radical criticism of the deconstructionists as well as the attitude of the continental-German tradition becomes important, especially the theory of shock reality and waking up from the dream of history. Although there is a

26 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 229.
28 *Ibid.*

big difference between American deconstruction and the German tradition, the criticism of progress and rationality unite the Poe analysis of the two approaches: To Poe, rationality and analysis mean fear and longing for a sudden change in history, a revolution, because he no longer believes in rationalism. Poe's position is always on the limit between analysis and fantasy, history and mythology, dreaming and awakening. And his images always try to combine the consciousness of history (Reynolds, Adorno, Bohrer) with the consciousness of history as an illusion (Dayan, Kennedy, Irwin), and art as the phantasmagoric/utopian expression of this illusion (Benjamin, Adorno Kennedy, Irwin). Because Poe is not just an alienated modernist, but a writer who is rooted in history and popular culture in a way that is much more critical than other members of the Renaissance, the connection between recent Poe research and the change in ideology in American Studies is worth examining .

The major change in American Studies since the war has been the change from patriotism to pluralism, or from Matthiessen's approach to Reynolds'. But this change is to some degree superficial. The problem is that pluralism—an openness towards formerly neglected tendencies—is still part of the American ideology and mythology of the Renaissance. Even *radical* criticism of rationality and hierarchy in American deconstruction confirms the ideology of democracy, freedom, and self-realization. A discussion of the present tendencies in American Studies should reflect the difference between ideology and history; one possible way to do so, would be to compare the American and the European way of understanding American literature and culture.

Sacvan Bercovitch has discussed these questions in "The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History." To Bercovitch the new radical openness in American Studies is in fact still ideological, not just in the sense that Matthiessen was ideological, but even in the sense that the writers of the American Renaissance were:

> The point is not that our classic writers had no quarrel with America, but that they seem to have nothing but that to quarrel about. Having adopted the culture's controlling metaphor—'America' as synonym for human possibility—and having made this tenet of consensus the ground of radical dissent, they redefined radicalism itself as an affirmation of cultural values. It portrays the American ideology, as all ideology yearns to be portrayed, in the transcendent colors of utopia. In this sense our literary renaissance was truly, as Matthiessen said, both American and 'The age of Emerson and Whitman.'[29]

To Bercovitch the dilemma of American Studies at present between studying American ideology or American history, goes back to the American writers of the 1850s, who were blind to the social limits of their utopian ideology. They could not help connecting American history with a providential development that made American history more than history. For instance, Bercovitch says

29 *Critical Inquiry* (1986), p. 645.

that the utopian aspects of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* foreshadow "the free enterprise republic," and that the radicalism of Harriet Stowe's novel "turns out to be a utopian affirmation of America's actual growth." Bercovitch has an alternative to American ideology—the secular idea of America as, "a certain political system; that in principle no less than in practice the American Way was neither providential nor natural but one of many possible forms of society."[30]

I agree that the deconstruction of mythology and the emphasis on history should be the aim of American Studies; but I agree too, that this is not so today. Even books like Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* or Reynolds' *Beneath the American Renaissance* end up by praising the American ideology of free enterprise. The question is, however, how historical consciousness can be established through a dialogue between European and American scholars.

I find Bercovitch rather naive when he says that, "We need a forum where native Americanists ... scholars trained in the rhetoric and rituals of 'Americaness', can learn from their collegues abroad to re-see American literature in an international perspective.... There are historical precedents from Toqueville through Lawrence. There are contemporary stimuli through the influence of European literary theory."[31] Bercovitch seems to forget that European scholars in the field of American Studies are ideological too, for instance when they talk about American history and democracy in order to forget European/German history and ideology, especially of the 20th century. Bercovitch himself provides a good example, when he says, that it was Matthiessen's book about *American Renaissance* that brought American literature to post-war Europe and gave disillusioned intellectuals a possibility to escape their complicated reality. In fact the Western European tendency to emphasize American democracy as a way out of troubles caused by two wars has lasted until now, when Europeans are finally beginning to talk about Europe again.

Mentioning Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* Bercovitch should not forget that this book is full of European prejudices about mass society and conformity, which Tocqueville feared would be the result of equality in *American* democracy: "Thus I think that the type of oppression which threatens democracies is different from anything there has been in the world before ... I am trying to imagine under what novel features despotism may appear in the world. In the first place, I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls."[32]

A critical comparison should reflect the European as well as the American background; in fact Europeans must re-see European conditions as well as American democracy and history. My own attempts to compare German,

30 *Zbid.,* pp. 648, 646.
31 *Zbid.,* p. 652.
32 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1969), p. 691.

French and American Poe research, made it clear to me that understanding Poe included the following:[33]

1. Criticism of the American ideology, whose very foundations Poe attacks by showing and foreshadowing all consequences of free enterprise. This attack is the reason why American literary research has wanted to make him a stranger, and why only a few scholars, (Dayan, Irwin, Kennedy) have discovered that the strangeness of his images, of woman for instance, is a shelter against American (and Western) ideology.

2. Criticism of the European Poe research that does not want to realize that mass society and alienation, is also a European, and not only an American phenomenon. From Tocqueville to Baudrillard Europeans have tended to look upon America as either the capitalist hell (Tocqueville, Spengler) or as paradise (Baudrillard), instead of realising that not only America, but indeed Europe too, has a history, and that the two cultures have many aspects in common. I agree with Bercovitch when he suggests a dialogue between American and European scholars of American Studies; but I would add that this dialogue can only be a re-seeing, if American Studies includes *comparative* studies of all ideological and utopian developments between Europe and America.

Poe, like Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, seems to reproduce and detect collective tabus simultaneously. The result has been that Poe research often contains ideological reactions for or against Poe (because Poe described essential tendencies of western modernity). In addition, much research on Poe is preoccupied with the utopian aspects of his writings. For instance there is an almost religious *Arthur Gordon Pym* research, discussing endlessly whether the essence of this particular book is decay and nihilism or the resurrection of metaphysics, of progress, or of rationality and the future. Poe described the bourgeois world in images that resist historical interpretation because of their hieroglyphical and gestural structure. If Bercovitch can show that the radical criticism of Stowe, Emerson, Thoreau and others confirms and reproduces the present ideological state, then Poe's images, (together perhaps with the images of Emily Dickinson) resist this pure ideological function. Poe was more aware of the interconnection between utopia and ideology than the most other authors, and therefore his images are hierogryphs (Irwin), images of female landscape (Dayan), phantasmagories (Adorno), dialectical images (Benjamin) and gestures (Adorno, Benjamin).

Because Reynolds' theoretical frame cannot explain the critical potential of these images, which transcend history through history, he has to join the long American tradition of expatriating Poe, who is thus still drifting in his famous balloon somewhere between Europe and America.

33 Henning Goldbak, *Grænsens Filosofi - Om forholdet mellem rationalitet og utopi hos Edgar Allan Poe.* Forthcoming, *1991.*

Joshua Miller. *The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Early America, 1630-1789: The Legacy for Contemporary Politics.* Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 148 pp. Index. £ 18.95.

Among the many books to come out of the celebration of the bicentennial of the American Constitution, the work by Professor of Law and Government at Lafayette College, Joshua Miller, deserves special notice. It is a concise and rich contribution to the current debate about political culture in America. In addition, it contains specific arguments about the nature of Puritan political values and the clash over Constitutional doctrine. Its clarity of exposition, its direct and graceful style, and its concerned engagement with the direction of American political culture in the late twentieth century, makes it one of the few studies written within the field of political science which is likely to have an impact on the discipline of American Studies as currently taught in Europe.

Accordingly, the most useful review of the work may be a sketch of how it may have an influence on course work in American Civilization. *The Rise and Fall of Democracy* may provide students with arguments and background information that will deepen as well as challenge de Tocqueville's discussion of American democracy often taken as a starting point for Puritan political ideas and for the ideas and practices established by the Federalists. Although Edmund Morgan's work on Puritan doctrine may still be useful, Miller's work is more apt to capture the intensity of Calvinist concerns over the issue of membership and civic obligation in terms that will reveal the dilemmas of present day grass-root activists in America—and elsewhere. Especially in the Nordic countries, where post-religious Lutheranism with its wall between politics and religion is deeply ingrained in the patterns of thought, Miller's treatment will be thought provoking.

Most important, however, is Miller's reconstruction of the political world of the losers in the debate over the adoption of the American Constitution. It is a piece of political archeology that will broaden the perception of the issues of power and enlighten the legacy of American federalism in Europe. In the context of the current debate in Europe concerning the terms of membership in the European Economic Community and the development of a European political union, it is almost invariably taken for granted that the American experience is incomparable to the European, because the American Constitution created a federation of "new states" while the European task is to construct a union of "old nations." Miller's work makes this assumption impossible, and, in so doing, stimulates students to face up to the challenge of American political experience, just as the European opposition to monarchical forms of government in the nineteenth century continually had to confront the challenge of an American form of government which claimed to be founded on the consent of the people. Miller, however, shows that the Federalists changed the terms of discourse so that liberalism was able to absorb crucial features of

early American discourse and render its theory indistinct. The Federalists replaced the theory and practice of active citizenship with the concept of "popular sovereignty," and thus, the radical features of American political experience were glossed over and largely lost in Europe. The experiences and practices of local popular government were turned into a "ghostly body politic," denied the access to dominant modes of government but persistently upsetting assumptions about administrative and govermental legitimacy. Miller's notion of "ghostly body politic" is a highly welcome addition to European political discourse which now prides itself on its liberation from Karl Marx' famous specter.

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Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp, eds. Walker Percy: *Novelist* and Philosopher. Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

In May of 1990 the American novelist Walker Percy died of cancer at the age of 73 and was buried not far from his home in Covington, Louisiana. His published fiction amounted to no more than six novels—The Moviegoer, The Last Gentleman, Love in the Ruins, Lancelot, The Second Coming, and The Thanatos Syndrome, in that order. He was recognized, however, as one of the foremost American writers of our time, with The Moviegoer generally acclaimed as a modern classic. Over and over his stories give us characters searching for a way out of the despair that exists in spite of physical comforts and superficial success. He was, by most accounts, an open and generous man, whose views—as expressed in interviews, separate articles, and two collections of non-fiction—were given the same respectful attention as was given to the novels. His recent death gives poignancy to the appearance, only a year later, of this collection of twenty-one essays.

The collection is advertised on the jacket flap as "an essential scholarly handbook for the study of Percy's writing," but it is better described simply as a collection of payers occasioned, as the flap also informs us, by an international conference on Walker Percy held at Arhus in 1989. The editors, who deserve our thanks for assembling these presentations, are Jan Nordby Gretlund and Karl-Heinz Westarp. The contributors, of whom eighteen are from the United States and three from Europe, are an impressive group. Several seem to have established themselves within the field of Southern studies, and many have already published on Percy.

Ultimately discernible are certain themes and organizing principles behind these papers. Focus is not applied evenly to all of the novels, and debating views on single works have been welcomed. Not much mention is made of

Percy's third novel, *Love in the Ruins;* and the implication, quite rightly, is that *The Moviegoer* has for the moment been sufficiently discussed. *Lancelot* receives most attention, generally favorable, though the ending is variously interpreted. In the comments on *The Second Coming* and *The Thanatos Syndrome,* differing degrees of approval are to be seen. As to *The Second Coming,* W. *L.* Godshalk says that Percy succeeded in his two-part story of Will Barrett, with the novel appropriately and effectively balancing the story of the younger man, found in the earlier novel, *The Last Gentleman.* Joseph Schwartz counters with the claim that *The Second Coming,* in suggesting an incompleteness in Percy's first story of Will Barrett, "diminishes the achievement of *The Last Gentleman,* Percy's finest novel" (p. 42). As to *The Thanatos Syndrome,* there is, in this collection of viewpoints, a variety of voices. Francois Pitavy politely calls the novel not Percy's "best," but his "most didactic and also most ambitious piece of fiction" (pp. 177, 178). The "debate" and the entire collection come to a suitable conclusion with Sue Mitchell Crowley's *"The Thanatos Syndrome:* Walker Percy's Tribute to Flannery O'Connor," which is both illuminating and favorable to Percy. For, all in all, this symposium seems to have been reasonably celebratory, and the author and his works have clearly been engaged on his own ground.

For many reasons, this is a good collection to have. As is necessary in Percy scholarship, there is much tracing of relationships—such as those of source, affinity, or contrast—between Percy's novels and the though and writings of others. We can be grateful to these scholars for their helping us to sense—*grasp* would be too bold a term—the philosophies, religious perspectives, and literary traditions that resonate so wonderfully in Walker Percy's work. And, when we are pressed for time, we are especially grateful when those people succeed in their efforts to increase the readability of their presentations. Nearly half of the essays in this collection are, in their clarity and coherence, models of effective communication. But, our concerns for philosophy and readability aside, we, as readers variously committed to American Studies, are left with an important question. Are we not, most particularly at this distance from the United States, most pleased when a scholar helps us toward a better understanding of the specific and abundant American realia in Percy's novels? Ashley Brown makes the relevant observation that "one of Percy's main assets as a writer is his extraordinary observation of the social scene in the South. He seems almost deliberately to locate his fiction in the midst of a postwar consumer society where appearance is everything. Posterity will find his novels a rich source of information about the houses and automobiles, the artifacts and the brand names that constitute the mise-en-scène of American life in the late twentieth century" (pp. 170, 171).

In a general sense, of course, each one of the essays in *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* offers us insights by which we can begin to interpret the realia Professor Brown refers to. And admittedly, a few of the essays do

offer specific help with the images and mannerisms of everyday life, though the realia are not always of a faddish, commercialized world. I was especially pleased by the detailed biographical material provided by Patric Samway, S. J. But many of us, even with this book near by, will probably continue to wish for some sort of Walker Percy "handbook," to help us with the philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and American realia in Percy's work

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Tom Clark. *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991. $27.95. 403pp.

Poet, critic and biographer Tom Clark has written the first biography of Charles Olson (1910-70) and it is an important work for a number of reasons. The student of Olson will find the biography of great help in clarifying much that is obscure in this difficult poet's work. The more general reader will find Clark's book extremely readable, at times amusing, at times, as in the poet's lonely final years and early death at 60, intensely moving. Clark allows us to make up our own minds about Olson. He is clear-sighted about Olson's monumental self-centredness and insecurities, but at the same time sympathetically charts the career of a man whose commitment to poetry was never less than total. In this Clark has done a great service. He provides a much needed counterweight both to the dismissal of Olson in some scholarly quarters as a watered down Pound, and to the uncritical idealization of Olson by those, such as a number of his students, who fell under his guru-like spell.

Clark's biography is straightforwardly chronological and very well illustrated from previously unseen private journals and letters. Olson himself saw patterns in his life and these Clark charts. Olson interpreted certain relationships with his elders in Freudian terms, as the struggle of the son to achieve self-identity by fighting and overcoming the father. His relationship with his own father, Karl Olson, who came to America from Sweden at the age of one, with Edward Dahlberg, and later with Pound, all follow this pattern of a father-son identification followed by an abrupt and conscious rejection of the "father." It was, however, a poet sixteen years his junior, Robert Creeley, with whom he forged his most productive creative relationship, providing what Olson called the "Push" to move American poetry on into the postmodem era.

Olson's relations with women are equally intriguing but not altogether to Olson's credit. Robert Duncan once remarked that Olson was the last authentic voice from the men's room, and certainly there was much about Olson that was blatantly chauvinistic; he had, for example, a tendency to ignore female students and could be outright abusive to them. The three major romantic

relations of his life: Connie, mother of his daughter Katherine; his "Muse" Frances Boldereff; and Betty, mother of his son, Charles Peter, all ended in failure. In Betty's case failure was compounded by the tragedy of her death in a car accident in 1964. The possibility that the accident may have in fact been suicide brought about by his own neglect, obsessed Olson and haunted him for the rest of his life.

What is clear from Clark's work is that despite Olson's rejection by the literary establishment of the time, Olson is a central figure in the cultural history of the latter half of the twentieth century. His poetry directly affected the work of fellow poets such as Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Ed Sanders and John Wieners, and although he was regarded as too cerebral by the Beat poets, the influence of his "Projective Verse" essay has been freely acknowledged by the likes of Allen Ginsberg. One is continually surprised by the sheer range of Olson's contacts and more than passing acquaintances, which embrace, apart from Pound, William Carlos Williams and Edward Dahlberg, LeRoi Jones (who was among the first to publish Olson in such little magazines as *Yugen, Kulchur* and *Floating Bear),* and Buckminster Fuller, Franz Kline, John Cage and Merce Cunningham, who were all with him at Black Mountain College. There is even a riotous and unlikely meeting between Arthur Koestler and Olson in which under the auspices of Timothy Leary's experiments with psilocybin pills at Harvard, Olson proved himself unique in the number of pills he could pop and at the same time succeeded in accidentally frightening Koestler into a bad trip by waving a toy gun in his direction.

Olson comes across as larger than life. A bear-like man of 6´8´´, he possessed a booming voice and colossal energies and appetites. He had a tendency to sleep through the day but would talk indefatigably and eruditely on an encyclopaedic range of interests—Jung and Whitehead, the Hittites and the Sumerians, Algonquin and Norse throughout the night, leaving his auditors bemused and exhausted. It would be wrong, however, to dismiss Olson as a crank, eccentric though he was. His *Gall Me Ishmael* is one of the most original and fascinating studies of Melville and *Moby Dick* to date, the result of years of dedicated research and empathy with Melville. His essays, written in a type of paratactic shorthand, are equally fresh and provocative today. He was the first to use the term *postmodern,* and more than any of his contemporaries he attempted to link the findings of post-Einsteinian science with poetic methodology. His three-volume *Maximus* poems has an enormous sweep and range which synthesizes mythology, history, geography, philosophy, archaeology and economics. Olson the scholar and thinker has been the emphasis in the five full-length critical studies that appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Biographical background is essential for an understanding of Olson. Now with Clark's excellent biography we have Olson the man, warts and all.

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Reply to Helge Kragh's Review of *Electrifying America.*

I have written three books on electrification. *Electrifying America,* the book under review, was the final work in the trilogy. The first, *The Invented Self,* deals with invention, and interrogates the genre of biography focusing on Thomas Edison. The second, *Image Worlds,* examines production, and subverts the traditional form of corporate history by focusing on photography, communication, and social identity at General Electric. The third, concerning consumption, was reviewed by Helge Kragh in Vol 23, No. 1. His review examines only the third book, and while at times laudatory, nevertheless is at times misleading and/or inaccurate. I would like to reply to five of these.

1. He states, "Strangely, telegraph and telephony receives [sic] almost no attention at all." My book defined its topic as electric light, heat, and power, in order to supplement the rich existing literature on the telephone and telegraph. It is not "strange" but intentional that they receive only passing reference, otherwise the book would be 1,000 pages long.

2. "We receive detailed information about the attitudes of Middletown citizens, but none about the importance of geographic, religious, and social differences." Kragh ignores chapter four (pp. 138-184), which does *not* focus on Middletown and which is entirely devoted to the attitudes of five social classes toward electrification, emphasizing the substantial differences between businessmen, intellectuals, the technical elite, the middle and lower classes. I take pains to point out tensions between the technical elite and corporate interests, and to demonstrate that General Electric and Westinghouse coordinated and controlled virtually all the other electrical interests. As to regional differences, to this issue I devote much of the chapter on rural electrification (pp. 287-338), which is presented not only in terms of a spilt between city and country, but also in terms of dry farming versus irrigation, and further analyzed in terms of particular kinds of agriculture, including dairy farming, for example. Finally, I give some attention to religious symbolism connected to light, but little to religious differences. Perhaps Catholics, Protestants, and Jews experienced electricity in substantially different ways, but I find no evidence for this, nor does Kragh suggest any.

3. "There is in Nye's book a tendency to overestimate the importance of the individual consumer's impact on technology and a general inclination towards volutarism." I explicitly state at many points in the book that electrification in America had the effect of concentrating economic and political power. See, for example, all of chapter five (pp. 185-237) on the electrification of the factory, a chapter ignored in the review. Throughout, I explicitly reject models of consumption in which consumers are passive, but I emphasize that their freedom exists only within a restricted set of choices. I hardly present consumers as the dominant agents, as the review suggests. Quite to the contrary, in chapter six I devote considerable space to General Electric's

campaign to create "an electrical consciousness" during the 1920s, and in chapter eight I examine the coordination of corporate advertising and product design.

4. "Nor does Nye systematically compare the electrification of America with that of Europe." The key word here is "systematically." Electrifying America makes comparisons between the United States and Denmark, Russia, France, England, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, Tasmania, and Canada. Contrary to Kragh's claims, the electrication of Europe cannot be taken as a whole, because there are great differences between individual countries. I introduced international comparisons in order to relativize the American experience, and thereby to suggest that there was nothing absolute or technologically determined in the way the United States electrified. Having written almost five hundred pages on that subject, it seems misguided to ask that the book be two or three times as long, in order to make "systematic" comparisons with other countries. Moreover, comparable histories of European systems are only now appearing for the first time, so the study Kragh proposes would not only be over 1,000 pages in length but could not have been written when I was working. Kragh cites an impressionistic book dealing with gas lighting and early electrification which covers 100 years in half as many pages as my book, as an example of the "systematic" comparison of America and Europe. Presumably he read that work no more carefully than mine.

5. Finally, Kragh is unhappy that I have not framed my discussion with a chapter on methodology, and asks "what exactly does it mean that a technology is socially constructed?" There is, of course, a well-known literature on the social construction of reality, to which I refer, but more importantly he might have looked for the basis for my arguments in my earlier book *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric (MIT,* 1985), which is clearly related in both theme and method to the volume he was reviewing. Kragh seems to want a specialized theory for the field of technological studies. In contrast, I reject the possibility (or desirability) of a separate methodology for the history of technology, which I regard as a sub-field of American history. The citations make it abundantly clear that my methodology poses no riddles. I am working in the mainstream of an American studies tradition evidently unknown to the reviewer, a tradition represented by such scholars as John Stilgoe, Cecelia Tichi, David Noble, John Kasson, Roland Marchand, Robert Rydell, and Alan Trachtenberg. What Kragh regards as "methodological weakness" seems to stem from a lack of awareness of previous scholarship in American Studies, and more specifically unfamiliarity with my previous publications.

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