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MORE than most writers, Edgar Allan Poe has been many things to many people. To Joseph Wood Krutch he was a neurotic whose stories are comprehensible only in the light of their author's presumed sexual impotence. To N. Bryllion Fagin the tales were merely the harmless sublimations of a would-be actor, Poe having been thwarted in his desire for the stage by his foster father's bourgeois moralism. Poe's works are, in fact, eminently actable—Boris Karloff even made a movie of "The Raven" in 1935.

To D. H. Lawrence, Poe was primarily a writer of macabre love stories which Lawrence considered fearsome excursions into "the horrible underground passages of the human soul." To Baudelaire, Poe was a beloved fellow dabbler in Satanism, a lonely American nurturing his own flowers of evil with admirable mockery of the philistine moral code during those great heydays of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. To any number of general readers, moreover, Edgar Allan Poe stands out as the Alfred Hitchcock of his day, a master Gothicist with no serious purpose beyond the entertainer's desire to weave a perfect spell.

Perhaps Poe was all of these things and more, depending upon which of his works one is reading, but I believe the most pertinent assessment to date has been Allen Tate's "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," in which Mr. Tate argues that Poe's work is peculiarly modern (making him our cousin) because of his lack of a moral center and because of his fear of "inevitable annihilation," implicit in the tales and explicit in his last philosophical essay, Eureka. What Mr. Tate's essay implies, in fact, is what I should like to establish more definitely in this paper—that Edgar Allan Poe was America's first full-fledged hollow man.

I chose T. S. Eliot's phrase quite deliberately, because the parallels between Poe's and Eliot's thought are surprisingly precise and extensive. As we remember, the reasons why Eliot's men are hollow are twofold: moral depravity and metaphysical despair, as evidenced in the animal sexuality or "the profit and the loss" in The Waste Land and the atheism of The Hollow Men. With the Christian past extant only in Eliot's sense of damnation and with a classical antiquity useful only to provide mock-heroic satire on Prufrock and Sweeney, the two traditional sources of spiritual strength had, for Eliot, come to ruin. The same is true of Poe.

Thanatos alone was Poe's true God. At the end of "The Masque of the Red Death," it is not Christ but Death whose coming is compared to that of a thief in the night, and not God but Death who is the final sovereign lord of all: "And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night . . . And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all." In case we should think these Biblical echoes unintended, a look at one of Poe's poems "The Coliseum" confirms more explicitly the relative prominence of Christ and Nada in Poe's thinking:
Silence! and Desolation! and dim Night!
I feel ye now—I feel ye in your strength—
O spells more sure than e'er Judaean king
Taught in the gardens of Gethsemane!

The possible Shakespearean echoes in "The Masque of the Red Death" are, like the Biblical, ironic. The Prince's name, Prospero, and his flight to a pleasure dome away from the pestilence may evoke memories of *The Tempest*, but quite clearly Poe's imagination of what it is like to be dead involves more of the grisly underground than the magic undersea, the fattening worm taking precedence in his mind's eye over any pearls that once were eyes. Thus, in a romantic elegy called "The Sleeper," Poe jars one with an unromantic realism:

My love, she sleeps! Oh, may her sleep,  
As it is lasting, so be deep!  
Soft may the worms about her creep!

The Conqueror Worm makes God his food in a more famous poem, wherein "Mimes, in the form of God on high," (Stanza 2) succumb to the worm as quickly as human flesh does:

But see, amid the mimic rout,  
A crawling shape intrude!  
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs  
The mimes become its food . . . (Stanza 4, "The Conqueror Worm")

If the form of God on high must suffer such indignity, little wonder that human life, "that motley drama" which ends when "the curtain, a funeral pall, / Comes down with the rush of a storm," is at best "the tragedy, 'Man,' " at worst a source of food for worms.

The few times when the human will does undertake what Hemingway was to call a rebellion against death, the results are so grotesque as to suggest mockery of either the Christian hope of resurrection or the Transcendental belief in the infinite magnitude of the human will. *Ligeia* probably ridicules the latter notion, since it begins with a typically Emersonian affirmation as its headnote: "Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man does not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

The dying Ligeia decides to put this Transcendental doctrine into practice after her husband quotes "The Conqueror Worm" to her—"O God! O Divine Father! [perhaps Poe mocks Christianity as well as Transcendentalism here]—shall these things be undeviatingly so?—shall this Conqueror be not once conquered?" The resurrection, when it comes, is so ghastly that even her pining husband calls it "a hideous drama of revivication," a demon vampirism by which Ligeia's spirit returns to occupy the cadaver of another woman. And in Madeline Usher's case the return from the tomb serves only to widen death's embrace to brother, house, and all. Rather than reawaken to such a dubious afterlife, one might think better of resigning one's will to the Conqueror Worm after all, as Poe's prayer in "The Sleeper" supplicates:

I pray to God that she may lie  
Forever with unopened eye,  
While the pale sheeted ghosts go by!

Like Eliot after him, Poe found Christianity a source not of strength, but of damnation. Poe's various narrators, nearly all of them criminals and sinners, seem to share the unease of the criminal hero of "The Black Cat," who
states that he hanged the cat "because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it... even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God." So the "tragedy, 'Man,'" as Poe called it in "The Conqueror Worm," having "Much of Madness, and More of Sin, / And Horror the soul of the plot," is not ended when the funeral pall rings down the curtain after all; an unpleasant surprise may yet be in store for the puppets acting out the "motley drama." Hence, in Poe's version of death's kingdom, the City in the Sea, the dead are awakened from their funeral sleep to receive a fuller and final damnation:

But lo! a stir is in the air!  
The wave—there is a movement there!  

The waves have now a redder glow—  
The hours are breathing faint and low—  
And when, amid no earthly moans,  
Down, down that town shall settle hence,  
Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,  
Shall do it reverence. ("The City in the Sea")

Probably "The City in the Sea" shows Poe—if he was not merely mocking Christianity here—in a more dour mood than usual. Normally he looked to death not with the fear of Hell, but with the atheist's hope of eternal oblivion at last; like Eliot's Phlebas, enviably dead and out of the waste land in "Death by Water," Poe's speaker—a corpse—in the following poem welcomed death as the only deliverer, the best physician after all:

Thank Heaven! the crisis—  
The danger is past,  
And the lingering illness  
Is over at last—  
And the fever called "Living" is conquered at last.

And no muscle I move  
As I lie at full length—  
But no matter!—I feel  
I am better at length. ("For Annie")

If Poe's hollow men are truly better "at length," suggesting parallels with Eliot's metaphysical despair, another reason for despair might be Poe's sense of internal depravity, his fear of an overwhelming beast within the self. If even Thoreau, who proclaimed the human will to have godlike infinitude, could admit to "an animal in us, which is... reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled" (Walden, Chapter XI, "Higher Laws"), we should not be surprised that Poe would see this animal self looming more largely—an animal self that, battling against the recoil of the conscience, delivers Poe's characters to self-betrayal and destruction in tale after tale of the Poe canon. Perhaps Poe's most succinct description of this divided self appears amid the sarcastic advice of "How to Write a Blackwood Article": "[Maintain] the tone transcendental... Put in something about the Supernal Oneness. Don't say a syllable about the Infernal Twoness."

This "Infernal Twoness," which explains much of Poe's ridicule of his Transcendental contemporaries, was fundamental to Poe's conception of human nature. Again, it makes Poe our cousin, paralleling Eliot's various modes of internal schism—animal fornication as against "an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing," "dung and death" as against epiphanies in the rose garden. Poe's Infernal Twoness is evidenced above all in his striking series of criminal heroes who, against their own will, succumb helplessly to a blind,
irrational evil rising from within the self, almost as if to provide case studies for Sigmund Freud’s conclusion that “the primitive, savage, and evil impulses of mankind have not vanished in any individual, but continue their existence, although in a repressed state, and . . . wait for opportunities to display their activity,” or for Carl Gustav Jung’s assertion that “we are always, thanks to our human nature, potential criminals.”

Many of Poe’s best tales take the form of confessional in which a criminal speaker admits his crime—itsel a perverse act against his own interests—and tries to justify himself by ascribing his own criminal potentiality (as Freud and Jung do above) to all humanity. At first Poe’s criminal hero is likely to be incredulous and baffled concerning his misdeed. The speaker in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” for example, cannot understand why he murdered the old man—“Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire.”

But the speaker in “The Black Cat” offers vicarious explanation applicable to all of Poe’s bewildered criminals. This speaker—“noted for docility and humanity . . . of disposition,” for “tenderness of heart,” and for being “especially fond of animals”—suddenly grasps the cat and cuts an eye from its socket because “the fury of a demon instantly possessed me.” This demon he named the “Spirit of Perverseness.”


2Some of my comments on the “Spirit of Perverseness” in Poe were stimulated by Mr. Joseph M. Garrison Jr.’s fine article, “The Function of Terror in the Work of Edgar Allan Poe,” American Quarterly (Summer, 1966), pp. 136-150.
bosom as I reflected upon my absolute security," says the speaker in describing the years that passed before his abrupt conversion into a Raskolnikov: "One day, while sauntering along the streets, I arrested myself in the act of murmuring . . . 'I am safe—I am safe—yes—if I be not fool enough to make open confession!'

Given the power of the Imp of Perversity, this bit of autosuggestion is enough to send the speaker to the gallows, as, surrounded by a curious and puzzled crowd of passers-by, he suffers an irresistible compulsion to confess: "Could I have torn out my tongue, I would have done it, but . . . then, some invisible fiend, I thought, struck me with his broad palm upon the back. The long-imprisoned secret burst forth from my soul." Confession, traditionally thought good for the soul, sends Poe's sinners not only to death but also to damnation. "Consigned . . . to the hangman and to hell," Poe's speaker ends his tale with a look into the abyss: "Today I wear these chains, and am here! Tomorrow I shall be fetterless!—but where?"

In "The Cask of Amontillado" and "Hop-Frog," the spirit of perverseness is more generous to its agent, in that it allows both Montresor and Hop-Frog to gain revenge with impunity. But to the victims of such revenge, the spirit of perverseness is even less charitable than usual, causing both the offending king and seven innocent counselors to be roasted alive by Hop-Frog's grand jest, and condemning Fortunato to a hideous death by starvation. The irony is compounded by Fortunato's probable innocence, Montresor's real motive being not justifiable revenge so much as jealousy: "You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was," the murderer tells his prospective victim. In thus showing forth the spirit of sadistic revenge triumphant, perhaps Poe himself was being perverse with respect to conventional morality, for these tales do clearly thumb their nose at the Christian ethic of forgiveness as well as proffer a caricature of poetic justice. Baudelaire would have enjoyed this.

Far and away the most hollow of Poe's characters are the main figures in "William Wilson" and "The Man of the Crowd," two of his most serious and most craftsmanlike studies in perverse psychology. The Man of the Crowd stands apart from Poe's other criminal heroes in that his crime—we are never told what it is—is so unspeakably foul that he cannot even seek the meager comfort of confession. "Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burden so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave," Poe says at the outset of this tale. "And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged."

The figure who embodies this essence of all crime, like one of Hawthorne's morality play villains, manifests his depraved nature in a face expressive of Satanic evil—"Retsch, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictoral incarnations of the fiend. . . . [It evoked] ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness. . . . of intense—of extreme despair." Like one of Hawthorne's lost souls whose secret sin leads to total isolation, the Man of the Crowd cannot communicate his ghastly secret; thus, his vain longing for human communion becomes an incessant compulsion to be with crowds, no matter how execrable in character. Proceeding
into viler and viler company with the deepening of the night—from clerks and businessmen in the evening to gamblers, whores, and pickpockets in the night hours—the man of the crowd prefers any fellowship in any setting to the horror of solitude, to the sleuth-narrator’s wonderment:

It was the most noisome quarter of London, where everything wore the worst impress of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime. By the dim light of an accidental lamp, tall, antique, worm-eaten, wooden tenements were seen tottering to their fall, in directions so many and capricious that scarce the semblance of a passage was discernible between them. Horrible filth festered in the dammed-up gutters. The whole atmosphere teemed with desolation. Yet, as we proceeded, the sounds of human life revived by sure degrees, and at length large bands of the most abandoned of a London populace were seen reeling to and fro. The spirits of the old man flickered up. . . . Once more he strode onward with elastic tread.

In a soul so lost and damned as this, so utterly alienated, we can readily see why Poe admired Hawthorne—especially the dark side of Hawthorne that could create a Chillingworth or Ethan Brand; we might also see in such a portrait the shape of things to come, such as the alienated, solitary wretches of Kafka or the speaker in The Waste Land who feels locked in solitary confinement: “I have heard the key/Turn in the door once and turn once only/We think of the key, each in his prison.” To Eliot the missing key that could set the self free from its cell was sympathy; but Poe would not have been interested.

It is typical of Poe’s own perversity that, unlike Eliot or Hawthorne, he was interested only in the psychological, not the moral situation of his protagonist. In “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe’s narrator is very much the clinical analyst, disappointed only that the criminal king whom he follows—this “type and genius of deep crime”—cannot yield up his secret to the dissector’s scalpel. Whether the man of the crowd’s perversity or the narrator’s is greater is hard to tell. But in any case, we have here a portrait of two hollow men, the one a lonely figure flitting from crowd to crowd in vain search for human contact and the other, Poe’s narrator, in somewhat the same role as Hawthorne’s seekers after the unpardonable sin.

“William Wilson” is the culminating portrait of a hollow man, and one that is especially interesting for its autobiographical overtones. To a striking extent, Poe’s own psychology seems manifest in this study in schizophrenia, in which a beastly id (the narrator) battles the superego-conscience (the other William Wilson) for mastery of the self. In his lengthy confessional, the narrator reveals a set of values not by any means remote from Poe’s own personality. He displays a ludicrous snobbery, for example, in expressing an “aversion to my uncourtly patronymic, and its very common, praenomen” (Poe also affected to be a high-born gentleman), and an authorial fantasy of wish-fulfillment may well be present in Wilson’s privilege of enrolling at Eton and Oxford, two of the finest sanctuaries of aristocratic breeding in the world.

Wilson confesses, moreover, an utterly amoral self-indulgence (“rooted

3Poe scholars do not agree as to whether his was really a life of dissipation. But even if Poe’s alleged vices—drug addiction, gambling, drunkenness, and the like—are viewed more as Byronic myth than as biographical reality, it still seems fair to say that some part of his personality was sympathetically represented in certain of his criminal heroes. The evidence I have advanced toward such a reading of “William Wilson” is, I believe, mostly beyond dispute.
habits of vice,” “soulless dissipation,” “delirious extravagance”) which leads to his expulsion from Oxford for cheating at gambling. (Poe himself had been dismissed from the University of Virginia in December, 1826, for not paying gambling debts.) Then, too, there is Wilson’s supreme arrogance and willfulness: “As I advanced in years... I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions... Thenceforward my voice was a household law.” (This state of bliss was in actuality accorded Poe only within the privileged sanctuary of his life with the two Clemms, his wife and mother-in-law, whose idolizing devotion greatly salved the injustices of his public experience.)

Poe’s literary enemies knew very well the kind of caprice and ungovernable passions which Poe attributed to William Wilson. Poe further gave William Wilson the life of romantic odyssey—in Paris, Rome, Vienna, Moscow, Egypt—that he sometimes claimed as the truth of his own experience, perhaps in his fervent imagination really believing that he had, as he stated, fought in Greece and been jailed in Russia. Finally Poe even saw fit to bestow on the two William Wilsons his own birthday, January 19, and a birth year, 1813, that in later years he claimed as his own, apparently unwilling to admit the truth of advancing age. Poe was actually born in 1809.

What makes “William Wilson” particularly absorbing as a story is its interior point of view; no longer is a master in evil—like the Man of the Crowd or Prince Prospero in “The Masque of the Red Death”—viewed and described by an outside observer. Here, through a sympathetic act of imagination, Poe has occupied the inner mind of the criminal hero, and so can report on the war within the self in a most convincing way.

The imp of the perverse clearly holds the upper hand in this persona, as witnessed in his confession of “my ambition at Rome, my revenge at Paris, my passionate love at Naples, [and]... my avarice in Egypt,” but yet the imp must work against the power of some mysterious opposition, as Poe’s headnote admonishes—“What say [of] CONSCIENCE grim,/That spectre in my path?” Although the other William Wilson may have initially been an actually separate character, quite clearly the double becomes an emanation of the narrator’s self as the tale winds on, and realism gives way to surrealism, the realm of psychic hallucinations. Reverent at “his frequent officious interference with my will” back in boarding school, coupled with the awareness that “his moral sense... was far keener than my own,” was the first identification of the other William Wilson with the speaker’s own conscience, and the other’s voice, congenitally reduced to a “very low whisper,” sufficed to approximate the still small voice of conscience.

By the time the double arrives on the scene to interrupt first the narrator’s drinking orgy, then his cheating at cards, and ultimately his cuckolding of the Duke DiBroglio, it is clear that the other William Wilson is a product of the narrator’s diseased mind, a figment of his tortured conscience perversely conspiring to divulge his machinations. Realistically, there can be no such stranger as the narrator describes, having super powers of divination; surrealistically, however, the intruding stranger could be any chance passer-by upon whom the narrator—usually “wildly ex-
cited with wine" at this point—might project his own ungovernable compulsion to confess his secret guilt.

The outcome of this war within the self is self-destruction. Looking into "a large mirror"—a traditional gesture of introspection—the narrator sees that in his frenzied effort to plunge his sword repeatedly into the breast of the hated double, he has actually bloodied his own features, and he hears his adversary say, no longer in a whisper but in the narrator's own voice, "how utterly thou hast murdered thyself." Here Poe implies what Freud would later state, that the true way to heal a split personality like William Wilson's is not through suppression or destruction of either of the warring elements, for neither the id on one side nor the conscience on the other can be simply renounced out of existence; the claims of each will be pressed and heard. The only adequate resolution of the split is through compromise, the precarious tension and balance between contending parts of the self by which a day to day survival of both may continue.

This seems a modern psychology indeed, especially for an American swelling with Transcendental pride in what Emerson called "the infinitude of the private man." But it is quite clear that Poe, with his psychotics and criminal heroes, his maddened and fear-ridden cripples of the soul, had little intercourse with the popular thinking of his own time. Though rooted technically in the Gothic tradition, his work looked ahead to the bleak and bleary world of Kafka and Beckett and the early Eliot. Hagridden by metaphysical despair concerning the outer universe and driven to depravity by the spirit of perverseness within the inner sanctuary of self, Poe's characters were the true hollow men of their time, bespeaking, it seems reasonable to say, a parallel spiritual condition in their creator.4

If anything, Poe was more of a hollow man than Eliot, since he never experienced the development toward Christianity detectable even in Eliot's earliest poems. The pining for "an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing" that is wiped away with a scornful laugh in Eliot's "Preludes"; the mixed scorn and envy that Gerontion feels towards Christians taking communion in various countries ("to be eaten...to be drunk...Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero/With caressing hands, at Limoges...By Hakagawa...by Fraulein von Kulp"); the Christian commandment to give, sympathize, and control which Eliot smuggled into the Waste Land via the back route of Buddhism; the lips that "Trembling with tenderness...would kiss/Form prayers" in "The Hollow Men"—all these foreshadowings of "Ash-Wednesday" have no parallel in Poe's world of unrelieved madness and anxiety.

Probably for this reason Poe shows the two directions Eliot's work would have taken if Christianity had not entered the picture. Without Christian moral and metaphysical order, Eliot would (like Poe) have evinced an increasing sense of mental breakdown, such as we see in the form and substance of "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men," and likewise he would (like Poe) have turned inward to the

4The narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (a name whose sound and rhythm suspiciously resembles that of Edgar Allan Poe) provides a novel-length study of Poe's hollow man. As James W. Cox points out in "Edgar Poe: Style as Pose" (Virginia Quarterly Review, Winter, 1968), the name "Pym" is an anagram for "Imp"—the Imp of the Perverse, who motivates Pym's mutiny, treachery, murder, and cannibalism.
relatively modest consolations afforded by the palace of art and the pretensions of snobbery.

Because Poe never had access to Eliot's genuinely first-rate education, he could not, like Eliot, demonstrate true erudition in esoteric languages and cultures, but Poe staunchly faked a brilliant education all the same, quoting (or inventing) obscure Arabic writers of antiquity or instructing us in the latest astrophysical breakthrough as the occasion demanded. Similarly, Poe was too poor to enjoy the life of the well born gentry, as Eliot the Boston blue blood, in his ancestors could and did, but Poe nonetheless despised the great American rabble of Andrew Jackson's ascendancy with as lordly a contempt as Eliot ever mustered against the Sweeney's and Bleisteins passing by his bank's window. In short, Eliot and Poe had much in common—at least with respect to psychology and theme—up to the time that Christianity reached out to pluck Eliot from the burning.

Not believing in Christianity, the best Poe could do to parallel Eliot's escape from the waste land was to invoke, in his final work *Eureka*, a personal endorsement of that Transcendental philosophy which he had spent much of his literary life attacking and mocking. "Bear in mind that all is Life—Life—Life within Life," says the concluding statement of *Eureka*, which seems a strange affirmation indeed from the man who gave us such studies in morbidity as "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The City in the Sea."

It could be, of course, that Poe actually did get religion at the last moment; or it could be, as some authorities have maintained, that Poe's last work was the product of a mind seriously deraigned by the despair and dissipation that followed the death of Virginia Clemm in 1847. *Eureka* seems in any case a curiously contradictory document, insisting on the fact of "inevitable annihilation" (as Allen Tate observed) while yet maintaining that "all is Life" in the end.

Whatever *Eureka* may mean, the Poe that has lived and endured, so as to grip the imagination of men like D. H. Lawrence, Baudelaire, and Allen Tate, is not the Poe of a belated Transcendental affirmation. Rather, it is the Poe who, during the great flush of the Transcendental era, gave America a literature structured upon the Infernal Twoness, its tone set by the Imp's sardonic grin, its mood by Death looking gigantically down. Eight decades later T. S. Eliot was to launch a similar attack upon the genteel Victorianism that held sway in his formative years, and his revolution would succeed partly because the times would prove Poe to be our cousin, his pessimism justified by what our science and history would divulge.

In his essay "From Poe to Valéry," Eliot said "one cannot be sure that one's own writing has not been influenced by Poe," and it is true that through Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry, who all spoke of Poe as a literary ancestor and who did influence Eliot considerably, some influence of Poe may have descended to Eliot himself, especially in the way of deploying mood and metrics.

But Eliot did not seem to recognize the true intellectual affinity that makes Poe his spiritual ancestor; his most revealing paragraph dismisses Poe's intellect as a case of arrested development: "That Poe had a powerful intellect is undeniable: but it seems to me the intellect of a highly gifted young
person before puberty. The forms which his lively curiosity takes are those in which a pre-adolescent mentality delights: wonders of nature and of mechanics and of the supernatural, cryptograms and cyphers, puzzles and labyrinths, mechanical chess-players and wild flights of speculation . . . . There is just that lacking which gives dignity to the mature man: a consistent view of life. An attitude can be mature and consistent, and yet be highly sceptical: but Poe was no sceptic.”

Written when Eliot was sixty, this paragraph focuses on the fun and games element of Poe’s work, ignoring the serious ideas of the sort evidenced in this paper. It is as though we were to judge Eliot’s intellect by the Possum mask of his cat poetry. Certainly Eliot’s own well-known penchant for doing crossword puzzles illustrates the fact that it is not only the preadolescent mentality which delights in cryptograms and cyphers, puzzles, and labyrinths, and Eliot’s sober dignity as church warden and literary elder statesman did not prevent the Tom Sawyer in him from embarrassing his guests with cushions that farted when sat upon.

In short, the infernal twoness in both men posed a brighter side: as against the spiritual vacuum within, Poe and Eliot each found strength in a sense of humor—something Eliot thought sadly lacking in D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy. But it is not just or useful to evaluate Poe’s intellect or his beliefs on the basis of the merely playful or commercial pieces, especially since Poe’s poverty forced him to do a good deal of hack work.

In his core of serious writing, Poe’s intellect was no less developed than Eliot’s own, no less mature, consistent, and sceptical (to use Eliot’s terms) concerning the large and permanent issues of human nature and man’s fate. Neither a Boris Karloff nor an Alfred Hitchcock, Poe was quite seriously, as Mr. Tate said, “our cousin.” His hollow men, consigned in their ultimate destiny to the Conqueror Worm and precariously fending off the Imp of Perversity in the here and now, have good reason and excellent credentials for joining voices with damned souls in the works of Eliot, Kafka, and other such apostles of a modern inferno.