

Echoic Effects in Poe's Poetic Double Economy—of Memory: A Response to Hannes Bergthaller and Dennis Pahl*

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The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily borne away in memory. I was, perhaps, the more forcibly impressed with it, as he gave it, because, in the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher, of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne. The verses, which were entitled "The Haunted Palace," ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus [...].
E. A. Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (148)¹

This epigraph contains a subtle echo of a theme at the heart of Poe's aesthetic practice, mentioned among other places in "The Philosophy of Composition," regarding how melodic verse can elevate the soul through "the under or mystic current of its meaning." We do well to recall that Poe defines "the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*" ("The Poetic Principle" 185; Poe's original emphasis). Alert to the importance of this theme, Dennis Pahl refers to it in the first note of his response to Hannes Bergthaller's essay on the putative tension between Poe's "two distinct inflections of the notion of poetic economy" (Bergthaller 15). Pahl counters that, "[d]espite Poe's concern with aesthetic unity, we find in his writing irruptive ironies and 'under-current[s] of meaning' ("Philosophy" 70), which, inasmuch as they cannot be contained or 'kept down,' result in enriching while at the same time making problematic and unstable his otherwise unified narrative structures" (Pahl 24n1). These under-currents of meaning,

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which in the lines leading up to “The Haunted Palace” are qualified further as being “mystic,” deserve closer scrutiny. For, as Pahl argues, “‘Poe’s economies,’ despite Bergthaller’s attempt to define them as coherent identities, are less unified and less stable than one might imagine” (Pahl 24n1). Less stable indeed because Poe maintained, as will be argued in what follows, that his experiments in verse moved his project beyond the sentimental and moral-infused poetry of his day which, as Bergthaller correctly observes, he regularly derided in print even going so far as to take on New England luminaries such as Emerson and Longfellow. Less stable still because on several occasions Poe inserted a previously published lyric into a new story, and not simply to assure that his poems reached a wider audience. After all he made the choice to remove the poem originally called “Catholic Hymn” (and later simply “Hymn”) from “Morella” (1839), a textual decision that even Rufus Griswold honored in his 1850 edition of *Poe’s Works*.²

“The Haunted Palace” is a suitable place to launch my investigation, building on Bergthaller’s apt focus on “The Fall of the House of Usher,” because of what it can tell us about Poe’s poetic economy by virtue of its having been resituated within the tale, as well as for what it has to reveal about the “under or mystic current of its meaning” as regards the dynamics of loss and memory. My critical engagement with Poe’s work seeks to clarify how Poe, as a self-conscious *litterateur*, at once literally and emblematically went about “house management,” as the etymology of the word “economy” historically denotes. Economy concerns the management of expenditure, and so I shall be discussing how this applies to Poe’s special cache of treasured up linguistic resources and emblematic associations in a special House or Palace of Memory from which he drew his carefully stored and fastidiously husbanded materials as time and opportunity permitted. He did this, I will argue, to achieve a very particular end with respect to his thrifty use of key terms and images; namely, to depict and set in place a mirror world of ideas focused on drawing out and projecting his special understanding of “the contemplation of the Beautiful”

which “alone” makes it “possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment” (“The Poetic Principle” 185; Poe’s original emphasis).

Therefore, taking as a point of departure Bergthaller’s suggestive reading of “The Fall of the House of Usher” and guided by Pahl’s judicious sense of Poe’s work as being never quite as settled and orderly as might at first glance appear, my response concerns unpacking the contents of the poetic economy to catch a glimpse of his larger aesthetic aims. For, as will be shown in what follows, Poe traded in tropes of doubling, especially echoic conceits (ranging from depictions of the figure of Echo to aural representations of echoes) and metaphors that carried implications of their own mimetic duplication but always with a signifying difference. His poetic economy thus is an economy that always is doubled, where memory itself is what initiates and guides Poe’s management of his carefully managed resources—including (and especially) those of his favorite emblematic associations to which he returned time and again in his oeuvre. The operations of this poetic economy are put on display exemplarily through the image and also the idea of the *doppelgänger*, and can be traced through the mirroring figure of chiasmus, where the representation is understood to be an imperfect reflection—indeed a refraction or even distortion—of the original. It is here that melancholy takes center stage in Poe’s poetic economy insofar as the resulting double obviates but does not cancel out the original for which one can only mourn its having passed from the world—but not from memory.

This is the economy then, the management of the “household” and its resources in every sense of the term, with which my response to Bergthaller and Pahl is concerned. It is offered in the interest of showing the extent to which Poe’s poetic economy is always doubled as an economy of memory consistent with his declaration that the Raven in his celebrated poem is “emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*” (“Philosophy” 70; Poe’s original emphasis). Emblems by their very definition call other values to mind and, in this case and elsewhere in Poe’s oeuvre, what is being called back to mind is the

relentless operation of memory itself. Insofar as echoic effects are the trademark of this poetic double economy, putting specific poems into select stories was one of the ways Poe incited his readers to approach and appreciate his innovative literary practice. “The Haunted Palace,” first printed in *American Museum* (April 1839), almost immediately found a renewed life in what was to become one of Poe’s most often reprinted stories, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (September 1839). And so my contribution to the on-going *Connotations* discussion focused on “The Fall of the House of Usher” begins with further consideration of the aesthetic determinations underlying Poe’s insertion of a previously published poem into a prose work. Closer scrutiny of “The Haunted Palace” affords the careful reader more subtle insight into the character of the narrator (who self-consciously comments on why he is able to recite it from memory); and also, by virtue of “the under or mystic current of its meaning,” into the mind of Roderick Usher. Moreover, the poem’s very title evokes a classical-turned-Gothic Memory Palace in which, instead of finding images situated in an orderly fashion for easy recognition and apprehension,³ we discover in the final stanza indistinct and unsettling traces—perhaps spirits—of the departed whose presence is a reminder of what now is irreparably gone and beyond recovery:

And travelers now within that valley
 Through the red-litten windows, see
 Vast forms that move fantastically
 To a discordant melody;
 While, like a rapid ghastly river,
 Through the pale door,
 A hideous throng rush out forever,
 And laugh—but smile no more. (149)⁴

And what is it that brought about this change that assailed the monarch’s high estate? We are told simply if vaguely: “evil things, in robes of sorrow.” During the heyday of the “stately palace,” which incidentally is anthropomorphized much as is the House of Usher (“Once a [...] snow white palace—reared its head”), there could be found “a

troop of Echoes whose sole duty / Was but to sing, / In voices of surpassing beauty, / The wit and wisdom of their king." And the king, "the sovereign of the realm," the lord of the dominion "in the greenest of our valleys" was, of course, "Thought," now overthrown; "the glory" gone "that blushed and bloomed," now "but a dim-remembered story." Remember this word "glory" for, as outlined at the outset as regards Poe's thrifty and effective management of his emblematical resources, it will be integral to the conclusion of my treatment of his poetic double economy of memory, especially as pertains to the key terms he kept in circulation within it.

Something clearly still resides inside what might be thought of as a Haunted Memory Palace, even as it does within the House of Usher. What remains now and ever after will dwell in that structure following its decline and fall ("Vast forms that move fantastically / To a discordant melody") weirdly embodies the opposite of that which animates or brings renewed life as initially and previously had been described ("Spirits moving musically / To a lute's well-tuned law"). Like a *doppelgänger* of what once was "by good angels tenanted," we now find some sort of indistinct dark double; the voices of surpassing beauty, the "troop of Echoes whose sole duty was but to sing," now a "hideous throng" cackling with hollow laughter. This "hideous throng," by virtue of Poe's deft poetic sleight of hand, paradoxically takes on a renewed life of its own within the world of the poem; and, moreover, is re-animated in a still more encompassing way by virtue of its being breathed back into life within the larger narrative; namely, through the voicing, through the recitation, of the poem both with respect to Usher's utterances and also, more significantly and with redouble vigor, through the narrator's calling it back to mind and having written it down—from memory.

In every sense then, this situation (the incantatory double recitation of the poem described in the story and reproduced on the page) echoes both the back-story and the dénouement of "The Fall of the House of Usher." For, whatever indistinct thing it is that "like a ghastly river" now abides there, it has been biding its time, waiting for the

moment when the House at last, inevitably, will fall—out of memory. In this respect “The Haunted Palace,” consistent with what I have been calling Poe’s double poetic economy, is a mirror in miniature of the tale, emblematically echoing the world of the story from within, while at the same time projecting a self-contained if melancholy (because doomed) world of fragile beauty. And “the contemplation of Beauty,” we will recall, is fundamental to Poe’s sense of the “elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment” (“The Poetic Principle” 185). The references to music in “The Haunted Palace” thus take on added resonance with respect to Poe’s declaration that “[i]t is in Music” that “the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty” (“The Poetic Principle” 184). Such lyrical irruptions in Poe’s prose therefore clearly betoken a larger aesthetic plan and purpose. “The Haunted Palace” thus refracts (I would say reflects, but there is no simple symmetry at work here, for Poe is far too clever for that kind of facile one-to-one correspondence), from within the world of the story, the larger aesthetic implications of the tale, while at the same time projecting a kind of literary *doppelgänger*, a self-contained mirror-world redolent with the disorienting beauty associated with the sublimity of the sadness of loss. Such are the terms of the double economy of Poe’s echoic effects with which my response to Bergthaller is concerned. And, in this regard, I concur with Pahl that: “If the Usher mansion ‘fails to rise above the material world,’ it does so not because its ‘composition’ (Bergthaller 26) conflicts with Poe’s supposed moral or spiritual aims, but because, exactly in line with Poe’s materialist poetics, the house as verbal artifact is grounded in a sensory language designed to create intense, disturbing, and disorienting effects” (Pahl 22).

A brief glance at a parallel example of another poem within a tale will help to clarify what is at stake in Poe’s subtle, echoic, and affective approach to aesthetics, and which will serve further to illustrate the operations of his poetic double economy of memory. “The Conqueror Worm” can be read as a typical *memento mori* poem gro-

tesquely elaborating the theme of *contemptus mundi*; however, upon closer examination we see that it mimics and recalls and puts to new uses the metaphysical tropes and poetic contortions characteristic of the seventeenth-century emblemist Francis Quarles (see Engel, *Early Modern Poetics* 87). What Poe admired about this poet is made evident in his review of an anthology of English verse in which Quarles is mentioned twice and singled out among those poets worthy of special consideration and commendation (see Poe's review of C. S. Hall). Poe projects a hypothetical reader who, if called upon to give an account of what was worthwhile and pleasing in such a poem, "would be apt to speak of the quaint in phraseology and the grotesque in rhythm. And this quaintness and grotesqueness are, as we have elsewhere endeavored to show, very powerful, and if well managed, very admissible adjuncts to Ideality" ("Review" 585). Poe further indicates his affinity for Quarles's emblematic method by using this name as his pseudonym in the first printing of "The Raven" (see Engel, "Poe's Resonances" 1-2). Keeping in mind these attributes of "the quaint in phraseology and the grotesque in rhythm" that are characteristic of Quarles's poetry, let us turn to "The Conqueror Worm," published in *Graham's Magazine* (1843) but later associated almost exclusively with the macabre *doppelgänger* story entitled "Ligeia" (1845) in which it figures prominently. Its appearance in the narrative takes on a very special set of additional associations because it is reported to have been composed by the mystically-oriented Ligeia who, in her fading away toward death, recites it to instruct her opium-addled husband who then reproduces the poem in the context of telling his own story. The poem thereby takes on an ironic subtext that it does not have when standing on its own in an anthology; indeed, in "Ligeia," it is made to parody the poetic conventions of the day by desacrilizing the notion of death in favor of reincarnation, specifically Pythagorean metempsychosis. Moreover this poem uses the word "evermore," even as "The Haunted Palace" ends with the words "no more," which in hind-sight we can see anticipates Poe's now-immemorial echoic refrain of "Nevermore" in "The Raven" (1845). This is precisely the

sort of thought-image, through its several though closely related articulations, that finds a special niche in the Palace of Memory of Poe's emblematically charged inventions and which found expression through his poetic double economy.

But what is the constitutive nature of this "under or mystic current of its meaning" that runs through Poe's echoically oriented aesthetic practice? While there is clearly a double register of thought set in motion by the lyrical irruptions within select tales, and Poe of course had recourse to other ways of achieving the same end, it is not the result of a dialectical tension along the lines projected by Bergthaller between the anticipated demands on a reader's leisure time and the demiurge creator of a poetic order. Rather, Poe's operative poetic double economy builds decisively on the sense of order apt to collapse at any moment that is evoked by and which partakes of what Dennis Pahl, both in his response to Hannes Bergthaller and elsewhere, astutely has identified as a version of Burke's notion of the sublime.⁵ It is a double economy in that it takes account of and accounts for a work of art and its unlooked-for shadow. The surprise, even the shock of recognition as discussed by Burke in his treatment of the beautiful and the sublime, of discovering that shadow, that reflection of the self in and as the abyss, is fundamental to Poe's creating the conditions making possible the "elevation, or excitement, of the soul" ("The Poetic Principle" 185).⁶ Another way to think of this unlooked-for shadow is as what one expected least to find and, upon finding, cannot help but see it over and against, indeed over-shadowing, the original. From within Poe's double economy it takes form and materializes just outside one's field of normative perception by virtue of the affective poetic order itself having called it into being. Poe therefore is adamant that passion, duty, and truth need not have anything to do with the composition or content of a proper poem, whose sole aim is to elevate or excite the soul of the reader so as to achieve that special mode of pleasure derived from the contemplation of the Beautiful which encompasses the sublime:

That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful.

In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem [...]. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work. (“The Poetic Principle” 185; Poe’s original emphasis)

What we can take away from this initial response to Bergthaller’s singling out “The Fall of the House of Usher” as a focal point for exploring Poe’s poetic economy, and from Pahl’s apt pointing to Burke’s notion of the sublime as the groundwork of Poe’s understanding of his own aesthetic practice, is that the house itself is emblematic of the decline, decay, and dissolution implicit in all mortal artifice—a theme that both Poe and Quarles returned to with some frequency. Usher’s House, like the story itself, collapses in on itself. In much the same way Poe looked back to and used for his ends an earlier baroque approach to emblematic designs and images, so too he reached back farther still to the classical world. There he recovered two extremes and, although seemingly appositive, both converge in his poetic double economy of memory. On the one hand he found an ideal of absolute beauty unsullied by the taint of mortality; and, on the other, dilapidated monuments and colossal ruin. As for the latter, he sought to revive them (reminiscent of his re-animation of bodies such as Valdemar, and spirits such as Morella) in what I will discuss as being a sublime and terrifying and hence Beautiful way. For these inarticulate and seemingly inanimate fragments of the past become for Poe emblems of an attitude about life and art that is essentially melancholy and which, typical of baroque artifice (with its quaint phraseology and grotesqueness of rhythm), tends to fold in on itself.⁷ Before addressing the more sublime versions of this practice (with its quick shifts in perspective and point of view), it is fitting first to look at the seemingly more benign expression of this recuperation of

classical codes of beauty and wonder that mark Poe's lyrical irruptions in a benighted world of weariness and wandering. Reviewing his allusion to "the grandeur of old Rome" is an ideal place to continue this formal inquiry into his echoic—and entropic—art:

Helen, thy beauty is to me
 Like those Nicean barks of yore,
 That gently, o'er a perfum'd sea,
 The weary way-worn wanderer bore
 To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
 Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
 Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
 To the beauty of fair Greece,
 And the grandeur of old Rome.

Lo! In that little window-niche
 How statue-like I see thee stand!
 The folded scroll within thy hand—
 A Psyche from the regions which
 Are Holy land! ("To Helen," *Poems* 39)⁸

Helen's beauty is linked to a series of easily recognized classical features that collectively constitute the catalyzing agency that brings the poet, as it were, home—where home is understood not as house to be managed but as the "beauty of fair Greece, / And the grandeur of old Rome." Her features, "hyacinth hair" and "classic face," both reflect and instigate a nostalgia, literally a "home-coming," tinged with melancholy and suffused by remembrance. It is this nostalgic mode directed toward Ideality that we will find similarly energized in Poe's "The Coliseum" with which this essay will conclude. But before we can arrive at that understanding, we must first attend to what Helen signals in Poe's aesthetic economy, as a thought-image securely stored among his other favored resources which he manages so thriftily and handily in his effort to bring about the contemplation of the Beautiful and hence the excitement of the soul.

Helen here, at once alluding to the paragon of beauty in mortal form, the ancient Greeks' *casus belli*, also draws upon the etymological underpinnings of the name itself, meaning "light" or "bright."⁹ In fact in the revised version for *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845), "in that little window-niche," becomes "in that brilliant window-niche," thus reinforcing the sense of beauty as a shining that cuts through the drabness of things of this world. The other key aspect of Helen's beauty, which is the most relevant here in the present context and which provokes further analysis, involves memory—in a double sense. First, she is described (in the first printed version of the poem) as the allegorical figure of Memory, easily identified as such owing to her iconographic attribute of the scroll signaling her role as recorder. Mnemosyne was the mother of the muses and thus of the arts.¹⁰ And second, within the context of the three-stanza poem, Helen stands as the focal mnemonic marker in a larger Memory Palace along the lines discussed in classical rhetoric for grounding one's composition: "an idea which is to lead by association to some other idea requires to be fixed in the mind with more than ordinary certitude" (Quintilian 221). Poe was extremely familiar with such schemes. For example, Roderick Usher's library contains volumes by esoteric writers who used and commented explicitly on place-mnemonics (where items are arranged in a predetermined structure and retrieved as required), such as Tomasso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* and Robert Flud's *Chiro-mancy* ("Usher" 409). Moreover Poe published a lengthy and glowing review of Francis Fauvel-Gouraud's *Phreno-Mnemotechny; or The Art of Memory*.¹¹ With uncharacteristic geniality he lauded this book as being "beyond doubt, one of the most important and altogether extraordinary works which have been published within the last fifty years" ("Notices of New Works" 326). The Art of Memory, for many reasons, appealed to Poe.

"Statue-like" Helen, like the bust of Pallas in "The Raven," draws on the principles of the classical Art of Memory where one is instructed to be mindful "even to the care of statues" (Quintilian 223). And further, quoting Fauvel-Gouraud, Poe clarifies succinctly that "by

Artificial Memory we understand, simply the power of recollecting facts and events, by means of *conditional associations*, which must first be called for, in order, by their assistance, to get at the facts associated with them" ("Notices of New Works" 326; original emphasis). There is a remarkable sympathy between what Poe claims about the use of stirring imagery "to produce continuously novel effects" ("Philosophy" 64), and Fauvel-Gouraud's emphasis on the systematic, rigorous, and rational use of fanciful inventions and grotesque images in the service of some greater purpose:

In order to remember a series of words, they are put in the several squares or places, and the recollection of them is assisted by associating some idea of relation between the objects and their situation; and as we find by experience that whatever is ludicrous is calculated to make a strong impression upon the mind, the more ridiculous the association the better. (Fauvel-Gouraud, *Phreno-Mnemotechny* 76)

Statues in niches then, like other images set within a mnemonic framework and calculated to make a strong impression, are essential elements in the internal decorum of the Memory Palace. And "The Haunted Palace" functions in much the same way in "The Fall of the House of Usher," namely as a special kind of Memory Palace (after all, the sovereign of the realm is named "Thought"), one that invokes the implied former presence of a House (in all senses of the term: architectural, mnemonic, domestic, and dynastic) which now is a shadow of its former self. This jarring play of memory and fixed imagery, of absence and presence, provokes the contemplation of the Beautiful, which Poe characterizes as being "prognostic of *death*" ("Arnheim" 1274; Poe's original emphasis). He explains this in greater detail in his rhetorically self-conscious reconstruction of how he came to pick the tone and subject of "The Raven":

Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones. [...] "Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?" Death—was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here

also, is obvious—"When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." ("Philosophy" 64-65; Poe's original emphasis)

With this in mind Walter Benjamin's study of baroque aesthetics can help advance our inquiry into how the beauty of the sadness of loss fits in with Poe's poetic double economy because allegories of ruined structures are central to Benjamin's thesis. Specifically he takes allegory itself to be an emblem of ruin: "History does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (Benjamin 178). As regards Poe's aesthetics, however, architectural ruins are, in the realm of things, what the death of a beautiful woman is in the realm of thoughts.

Poe frequently alludes to the way ruin—whether the decay and collapse of a house or the decline and death of a beautiful woman—can function to excite the soul, by virtue of the melancholy remembrance of the Beautiful. But as Poe is quick to clarify: "It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us—but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above" ("The Poetic Principle" 184). And so, beyond the melancholy sentiment evoked by the death of a beautiful woman, "unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" ("Philosophy" 65), there are still other kinds of melancholy to be considered in Poe's larger aesthetic project that likewise hinge on loss and the effort to recuperate—through art—something of what is recognized as being past and gone. And part of what is remembered as having been lost is caught up in the experience of our remembering that something, we cannot quite say what exactly, has slipped away from memory (as with the "Vast forms that move fantastically / To a discordant melody" in "The Haunted Palace"); hence our "impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys of which *through* the poem, or *through* the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses" ("The Poetic Principle" 184; Poe's original emphasis).

Moving on then from Poe's treatment of the beauty of the sadness of loss with respect to the physical body, we can find a parallel expression in his treatment of what can be redeemed through reflection on monumental loss in the world, especially as regards all that architectural ruins came to stand for in Poe's poetic double economy of memory. This can be seen—and, as it were, heard—in "The Coliseum," a poem that showcases Poe's sly method of tapping into and transforming the themes and tropes typical of baroque conceits, most notably negative attributes and antithetical parallels. As such this brings us back to what was mentioned earlier about "The Conqueror Worm" as well as to the whole context of Poe's resonance with the emblematic conceits of Francis Quarles, especially as pertains to seeing the world as ruin and thus all human endeavors as subject to decay and inevitable oblivescence.

Monuments reduced to ruins unmistakably are emblematic mirrors of our mortality. As such they achieve a similar effect as would a *memento mori* emblem. Thus the stones scattered about the derelict coliseum are tinged with melancholy because, through such tokens of transience, we are put in mind of our own future passing. Consistent with the echoic practice associated with Poe's poetic double economy, the gray stones of the coliseum are made to shimmer with a secret and hidden life brought back to presence from oblivescence by virtue of being made to speak in a way that reverses the usual rhetorical decorum of the apostrophe (an address to some object or entity that motivated the poet's lyrical expostulation). The spirit underlying these gray stones, these ruins with which the poem is concerned and from which the other-worldly dialogue emerges, finds other echoes in Poe's work (carefully selected from his private Memory Palace of stored images and sounds linked one to the other), which likewise emphasize imagistic resonance and sonic repetition. For example, the episode in "Berenicë," when Egæus enunciates his beloved cousin's name conjuring her back to presence through incantatory repetition, sets off a chain of mnemonically linked associations: "she, roaming carelessly through life, with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent

flight of raven-winged hours. Berenicë!—I call upon her name—Bericë—and from the gray ruins of memory a thousand tumultuous recollections are startled at the sound! Ah, vividly is her image before me now” (*Collected Works* 1: 210).¹² It is as if Egæus has stumbled into an internally resonant Memory Palace and accidentally activated the mnemonic cues that revive and bring back to presence the previously deposited memory image. Ever one to return to and use an evocative phrase taken from his reading as well as from his own work (especially those emblematically resonant images and key words stowed away and ready to yield their contents for his compositions), Poe mentions Berenicë’s “raven-winged hours.” This image of time’s rapid and ominous passage unmistakably echoes the epithet used to describe Ligeia’s quasi-mystical beauty in terms of her “raven-black” tresses, which in its own turn calls to mind Helen’s “hyacinth hair,” an attribute of extreme classical beauty: “the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, ‘hyacinthine!’” (“Ligeia” 312). All three of these idealized women thus are bound up in the same field of evocative language appertaining to Poe’s cache of thought-images designed to cue the Poetic Sentiment. While the word “raven” is used adjectivally here, Poe elsewhere explains its broader implications as a noun imbued with special undercurrents of meaning—it is “emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*” (“Philosophy” 70). As such, what the Raven is said to emblemize functions in its own right as a proper memory image in Poe’s own literary storehouse, his private Memory Palace. Moreover Egæus’s “gray ruins of memory” amplify and call attention to the ways words can take on a life of their own, going so far as to say they have a material presence along the lines Poe explores in his mock-Socratic dialogs like “The Power of Words” and “The Colloquy of Monas and Una.”¹³ Many of the other terms that came to signal “Never-ending Remembrance” for Poe can be found piled up in “The Coliseum” (1833).

Poe’s emphatic use of “not all” functions as an echoic refrain in his unrhymed but steadily rhythmical meditation on the fall of empires

and the vanity of all human striving. But what keeps “The Coliseum” from being merely an expostulation on the futility of mortal artifice is the sense of something having been redeemed by art—or, more correctly, by the Art of Memory. Like “the pallid bust of Pallas” in “The Raven,” and like “the ramparts plumed and pallid” in “The Haunted Palace,” the gray stones in “The Coliseum” are described as being “pallid,” a term often associated with allegorical figurations of death (for example, *pallida Mors* is the Latin phrase used in Hans Holbein’s celebrated *Dance of Death*). Pallid means pale, wan, shade-like; and, like the raven that perches upon the pallid bust of Pallas, the stones in “The Coliseum” are not silent. Playing off many of the same tropes and themes that characterize the baroque approach to colossal ruin and inevitable mortality (reminiscent of, for example, John Donne’s “self-consuming” metaphysical conceits), Poe takes the next step, namely to use artifice to overturn the terms of the very thesis that the poem ostensibly set out to prove.¹⁴ In the last stanza the “pallid stones” speak, in blank verse no less—a form that was new to Poe.¹⁵ But they do not speak as might be expected in a traditional echo poem, where the carefully arranged repetition of terminal sounds is a reflection of the poet’s supple wit (such as Sir Philip Sidney’s celebrated lament of the melancholy shepherd, Philisides—a playful reconfiguring of the author’s name and thus a clever doubling of himself echoed back to the knowing reader).¹⁶ Instead the anaphoric refrain of “Not all,” echoed and re-echoed at the beginning of the key lines of the final stanza, functions as an aural *doppelgänger* of the poet’s assertion of his will in the world through art. Listen—the stones get to have the last word:

But stay!—these walls, these ivy-clad arcades,
 These mouldering plinths, these sad and blackened shafts,
 These vague entablatures, this crumbling frieze,
 These shattered cornices, this wreck, this ruin,
 These stones—alas, these grey stones—are they all—
 All of the grand and the colossal left
 By the corrosive hours to Fate and me?

"Not all"—the echoes answer me—"not all.
 "Prophetic sounds, and loud, arise forever
 "From us, and from all ruin, unto the wise,
 "As melody from Memnon to the sun.
 "We rule the hearts of mightiest men—we rule
 "With a despotic sway all giant minds.
 "We are not impotent—we pallid stones.
 "Not all our power is gone—not all our fame—
 "Not all the magic of our high renown—
 "Not all the wonder that encircles us—
 "Not all the mysteries that in us lie—
 "Not all the memories that hang upon
 "And cling around about us like a garment,
 "Clothing us in a robe of more than glory."
 ("The Coliseum—A Prize Poem")¹⁷

Recalling the nature of a backdrop in an artificial memory system, this poem establishes designated places, but whose content long ago has been depleted of its original meaning. And yet "not all the wonder" is gone; something further is said to remain of "the memories that hang upon / And cling around about us as a garment." These memories are access points which permit something to be recovered and, in some measure, redeemed: "a robe of more than glory."

In the final line, indeed the final word of the poem, there is an uncanny echo among these echoic and echoing stones that calls back to mind a key phrase in "The Haunted Palace" and one which is said to be conditioned by hazy recall at best: "the glory / That blushed and bloomed / Is but a dim-remembered story / Of the old time entombed." As "The Coliseum" was published in 1833 and "The Haunted Palace" in 1839, it would seem that this earlier poem served Poe as a kind of repository—or quarry—to which he might return, borrow, and reanimate what previously he had deposited there for safe keeping, in that poem. "The Coliseum" becomes for Poe a pre-designed place in his own private Memory Palace from which he might retrieve what was needed to outfit a self-contained and differently conceived poetic rendition of his strangely evocative theme involving sublime evanescence. More specifically, Poe seeks here to evoke a yet

still prevailing sense of glory despite its ruin which, like the House of Usher, has fallen in on itself under its own colossal weight. For the ideational components of "The Haunted Palace," Poe returns to "The Coliseum" and retrieves what amounts to the building blocks of something from the past that now is ruined and gone, and yet which in some measure can be recuperated through poetry—poetry made all the more sublime owing to how it thereby evokes the beauty of the sadness of loss.

A key to understanding how these echoes work within the poem as well as how they inform Poe's mnemonically oriented craft and thus his poetic double economy is contained in the phrase "*Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*." This telling tag-line from "The Philosophy of Composition," as a kind of poetic axiom, must serve in lieu of any specific event or once notable deeds that the Coliseum site otherwise would have conjured up from an earlier time. As with "The Haunted Palace," vagueness, not specificity, is part and parcel of the poetic order, because what matters most in Poe's poetic double economy is the overall tone and affect, the Ideality, evoked through "*the Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*" ("The Poetic Principle" 185). The narrator of "The Coliseum" encounters, as if by supernal aid activated by the beauty attending the sadness of loss, the essence of the thing, though not the thing itself, which is recalled back into being but only as an impression of something now substantially lost.

And so, consistent with Poe's philosophy of composition, never-ending remembrance always needs must be mournful. Indeed although Poe's meditations on loss, decay, and the slipping of things into oblivescence show up in a wide range of his works, most notably as discussed initially in "The Fall of the House of Usher," something eerie is afoot in his treatment of abandoned classical ruins, similar in kind but different in degree from the classical features of Helen, whose beauty revives in the poet the elevation of the soul associated with recovering, at least through the Poetic Sentiment, "the grandeur of old Rome." Many of the key words and images that came to signal "never-ending remembrance" for Poe (words such as "echoes," "pal-

lid," and "glory," all of which appear in "The Haunted Palace") are integral to shoring up the mnemonic architecture of "The Coliseum."

Playing off many of the expected tropes and themes associated with transmogrification and ruin, Poe moves on to use artifice itself to overturn and, in so doing, to recuperate the illusion of authorial control over the words of the "gray stones" and all that they are charged with signifying (the very phrase being evocative of Egæus's "gray ruins of memory"). As already mentioned, the stones have the last word, thus activating a chiasmic turn-about with something left over to be considered. In effect, the anaphoric refrain of "Not all" strangely mirrors and puts in place a poetically engineered *mise en abîme* (another kind of doubling to be sure) characteristic of Poe's own aesthetic practice concerned with the emblematic redemption of the beauty of the sadness of loss through art—but most especially through the Art of Memory. And so, in the end, it is within Poe's carefully crafted if haunted Memory Palace that poetry's terrifyingly beautiful *doppelgänger* has taken up residence.

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NOTES

¹This and other quotations from first editions of Poe's works follow the remarkable online resource provided by the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore (<http://www.eapoe.org/index.htm>) thanks, in large measure, to the meticulous efforts and indefatigable labor of Jeffrey Savoy.

²The last time "Morella" appears *in situ* within the tale is *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* 5 (November 1839): 264-66. For a critical assessment of the probable reasons Poe excised the poem from printings after 1842, see Amy Branam: "'Morella' demonstrates the unlikelihood of Poe's endorsement of any type of Mary worship, even though he includes a prayer to her in the first version of the tale" (30).

³See for example Quintilian's, *Institutio Oratoria* XI.ii.18: "Some place is chosen of the largest possible extent and characterized by the utmost variety, such as a spacious house divided into a number of rooms. Everything of note therein is

carefully committed to the memory, in order that the thought may be enabled to run through all the details without let or hindrance" (221).

⁴Owing to some slight changes in the wording in later editions, I have elected to follow the printing of the poem as it appeared in the tale for the first time (1839), rather than the copy text prepared by Mabbott from the 1845 version (most notably the later version substitutes "sweet duty" for "sole duty" in stanza IV); cf. *Collected Works* 407.

⁵See, e. g., Pahl, "Sounding the Sublime".

⁶For a critical treatment of Poe's conception of the sublime as combining "wondrous attraction with overwhelming terror," and with special relevance to its place in "The Fall of the House of Usher," see Moreland esp. 53 and 59-60.

⁷On this seventeenth-century understanding of the world as being a place not of surface and content but as "pure events on a line or point," in which time and space are generated by folding, expanding and refolding, where bending and inflection are the ideal basic elements, see Deleuze.

⁸As will become clear in what follows, this version contains special imagery pertinent to Poe's conception of Helen as a metonymy for Memory personified that drops out of later versions.

⁹See Poe, *Complete Poems*, 331. Poe wrote several poems "To Helen" directed to and intended for different addressees—and there were more than a few.

¹⁰Elsewhere Poe likewise will invoke "man's sense of perfection in the beautiful, the sublime, or the picturesque" in which resides "the soul of Art" (Poe, "The Domain of Arnheim" 1274).

¹¹See Edgar Allan Poe, "Notices of New Works."

¹²Given Poe's insistence on retaining the diacritical marker above the terminal letter of Berenicë, it is probable he was inviting his more informed readers to hear echoed in their mind's ear the name of Dante's divinely poetic and supremely beautiful (and dead) beloved, Beatrice, which in Italian bears the same cadence and vowel sounds. Such an aural link, which thereby evokes the beatific vision of Dante's Mystic Rose, serves to make more poignant the irony and pathos of the denouement of the tale—exquisitely beautiful in its steady and quickening first-person narrative movement toward *anagnorisis*, or fatal recognition, worthy of a Greek tragedy to match the antagonist's own name.

¹³Cantalupo argues convincingly that the character of Oinois, used first as the narrator in "Shadow" (1835) and later as the student-angel in "The Power of Words" (1845), prepares the foundation for the philosophical constructs found in *Eureka* (1848).

¹⁴See for example, Donne's Holy Sonnet which begins by personifying Death as a tyrant, "Death be not proud, though some have called thee / Mighty and dreadful," and ends with the deflating turn-about, "One short sleep past, wee wake eternally, / and death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die" (Donne 342). This typical display of wit associated with baroque artifice has been discussed critically in terms of "self-consuming artifacts"; by Fish. More specifically the logically

controlling use of “not” in one of Donne’s sermons (and this has special relevance for Poe’s insistent use of “not all” in “The Coliseum” and “nevermore” in “The Raven” among other works turning on the evocation of a negative directive) “is subverted by the very construction in which it is embedded; for that construction, unobtrusively, but nonetheless effectively, pressures the reader to perform exactly those mental operations whose propriety the statement of the sentence—what it is saying—is challenging” (Fish 396).

¹⁵See Mabbott’s commentary on this poem, which he considers “atypical of Poe’s work,” among other reasons because it is “extremely rhetorical” (*Complete Poems* 226).

¹⁶The opening lines make clear the expected decorum of an echo poem (Sidney 427):

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Fair rocks, goodly rivers, sweet woods, when shall I see peace? | <i>Peace.</i> |
| Peace? What bars me my tongue? Who is it that comes me so nigh? | <i>I.</i> |
| Oh! I do know what guest I haue met; it is Echo. | <i>'Is Echo.</i> |
| Well met echo, approach; then tell me thy will too. | <i>I will too.</i> |
| Echo, what do I get yielding my sprite to my griefs? | <i>Griefs.</i> |
| What medicine may I find for a grief that draws me to death? | <i>Death.</i> |

¹⁷I have used this version of the poem because it the first time Poe edited it since its original appearance in 1833. In addition to alerting the reader to its status as a prize winning poem, this version includes quotation marks at the left margin of each line of the stones’ speech, thus emphasizing doubly that it is the stones who speak (an editorial decision incidentally that Griswold respected in his 1850 *Works* even though there were other extant versions of the poem without the additional quotation marks).

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