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### Living Out the Romantic Heroic Ideal: An Interpretive Study of the Life and Work of Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Schumann

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# Senior Thesis Approval

This Honors thesis entitled

## **“Living Out the Romantic Heroic Ideal: An Interpretive Study of the Life and Work of Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Schumann”**

written by

**John Alexander Dribus**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for completion of the  
Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

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honors program director

November 15, 1999

In 1849, a man was found destitute on the streets of Baltimore and died neglected, a few days later. Likewise in Germany, only seven years later, another great man died in an insane asylum after starving himself to death. Both men were under the age of fifty when they died, and both men had had a profound effect on the artistic world of which they were a part. Yet they met fates that were anything but glamorous. Destitute and abandoned, both died in obscurity. One was a poet and the other a composer. They lived on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean and never had contact with each other. Yet Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Schumann lived incredibly parallel lives. Were their lives similar only by coincidence, or was there something within each man that allowed him to reach the highest standards of his craft while also dooming him to an early grave?

Both Poe and Schumann led traumatic lives. Both had devastating losses of loved ones that influenced their development and the course of their adult lives. Both dabbled with addictive, mind-altering substances to alleviate the pain and discontentment in their lives. And both questioned their own sanity at one time or another, not to mention others who raised the question as well. However, despite these difficulties and hindrances, each achieved lasting fame. They were both part of a movement, and they both attained its highest ideals.

The nineteenth-century art world to which Poe and Schumann belonged was obsessed with the concept of the Romantic hero. Goethe outlined many of the characteristics of the Romantic hero when he wrote *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in 1774. This work reflected the departure from the rationalism that was so prevalent during

the time of the Enlightenment and during the Classical period of art in the middle to late eighteenth-century. Goethe's hero rejects reason in favor of the feelings of his heart. Desperately in love with the lady Lotte, Werther can find transcendence and fulfillment only through art while he is in her presence. But Werther is plagued by the Romantic challenge that he is unable to achieve permanent transcendence and satisfaction. This is because Lotte is already committed to another man. So although Werther is devoted to a love that he feels is noble, he sets himself up for disappointment and ultimate failure. In his pursuit of this unattainable prize, Werther considers himself diseased. He longs for death to let him escape his mortal situation and eventually takes the situation into his own hands by ending his life. Ironically, Werther's desperate condition stems mainly from the fact that he cannot deal with his life's problems. By failing to deal with the challenges that life throws at him, he, in effect, alienates himself from the world.

Ultimately *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* is the tragic portrayal of the acutely sensitive individual who is unable to escape the devouring prison of solipsism save on those rare occasions when through the medium of art he ascends to the conditions of immortality.... Goethe described Werther as an individual possessing a deep and pure sensibility and genuine lucidity of mind before losing himself in speculation.... Werther is ill at ease in any institutional structure; he cannot find satisfactory employment, he has only contempt for the governmental system, and he insists on a private religious experience (Wilson, 46-47).

As pathetic and ludicrous as this situation may seem, many readers were touched by fictional Werther's life, and a rash of suicides among young men resulted from the publication of this volume. The ideas found in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* are repeated in numerous books from this era. In fact, "Werther is a prototype of a series of melancholy, solipsistic, romantic heroes ranging from Chateaubriand's René in France,

Shelley's Visionary in *Alastor*, Keat's *Endymion*, and Byron's *Harold--in England--to Melville's Ishmael and Mark Twain's Huck Finn in America*" (Wilson, 29).

Clearly it must have been difficult to be an artist in a time when such ideas were prevalent. The Romantic movement presented its members with a nearly impossible challenge (Buranelli, 21) because the movement required almost total reliance upon one's self (Wilson, 189). As Poe wrote in *Eureka*, "No thinking being lives, who at some luminous point of his life of thought has not felt himself lost amid the surges of futile efforts at understanding or believing, that anything exists greater than his own soul" (Buranelli, 21). By requiring such independence and self-reliance, the Romantic movement caused its heroes to be victims of the world (Hoffman, 16). In a sense, the Romantic hero's attempt to rediscover the individual self's relationship to both his society and his universe (Hoffman, 8) alienated him from the world (Hoffman, 26). But this separation also allowed him to express his most inward feelings and desires in a unique way. For this reason, often dark and frightening aspects of an artist's character come through in his work. In this light, Poe and Schumann emerge as true Romantic heroes, because it was the intense personal and psychological conflicts within each artist that allowed him to express the deepest human emotion in his work, thereby attaining the highest ideals of the nineteenth-century Romantic style. Along similar lines, it can be argued that the Romantic ideals of negativism and irrationalism in which each artist was immersed rendered him unable to carry on a normal life.

While Werther and the other models of the Romantic hero were fictional characters, the Romantic hero was often a real person. In fact, even *The Sorrows of Young Werther* "is in large part autobiographical...inspired by Goethe's own frustrated

love for Charlotte Buff” (Wilson, 48). Whether Schumann or Poe actually strove to live the futile life of the Romantic hero is questionable, but both men certainly fit the Romantic mold, not only by the work they produced, but also by the lives they led. It is dangerous to assume that any particular work of an artist is autobiographical (unless as in the case of Schumann with *Carnaval* and *Davidsbündler*, the artist makes such a fact clear in writing.) Some biographers, such as Vincent Buranelli, do make the bold claim that Poe “is declared to have only one endlessly repeated male character--himself. He is pictured as appearing and reappearing under the guises of his melancholic, neurasthenic, hallucinated, mad, and half-mad protagonists: Roderick Usher, Egaeus, William Wilson, Cornelius Wyatt, Montresor, Hop Frog, Metzengerstein...” (18). Although such a conclusion is convenient and intriguing, it is impossible to substantiate, especially after Poe makes it clear in “The Poetic Principle” that a poem (or art in general) must not be true to be beautiful. Therefore, while exploring the Romantic characteristics in the lives and works of Schumann and Poe, I do not claim that specific examples must be autobiographical, but I do accept the possibility that they may be. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the major issues and conflicts in the works of both artists were also the major issues and conflicts in their lives. These issues, which fit perfectly into the model of the Romantic hero, are 1) the obsession with an unattainable female and the devastation of bereavement; 2) a deluded state of mind brought on by depression, lack of fulfillment, and substance abuse; and 3) a preoccupation with and fear of death, punctuated by suicidal tendencies, which ultimately led to the artist’s demise.

There are parallels between the tragic elements in Poe’s and Schumann’s lives and also between the tragic elements in their work. In fact, each man’s life and his art are

parallel in almost every way. After examining the similarities between the lives of both men and their artistic outputs, it will become clear how the ideals of Romanticism affected each man and, in turn, how each expressed Romantic ideals in his work.

The Romantic movement assigned specific, contrasting roles to male and female genders. The Romantic hero was a male figure. However, the female was an integral part of each hero's existence. As was true with many concepts of the Romantic hero, concepts about females were often idealized. Therefore, to many of the heroes of Romantic fiction, the female figure became a compilation of female characteristics created by the hero, rather than a real woman. "Typically in Romantic literature the woman to whom the hero commits himself appears as the 'earthly analogue' of a transcendental ideal; however, in line with Romantic epistemology, this ideal is self-generated, taking its identity from the artist's intuitive conception of Truth and Beauty" (Wilson, 96). Love, to the Romantic hero, was often narcissistic-- it was used to enable the hero to transcend self-consciousness (Wilson, 194) rather than to gratify the needs of his female partner. This concept is useful in fiction, but it created some serious problems for the Romantic who attempted to live out these principles in real life.

A Romantic artist who attempted to fulfil the Romantic ideals in full, then, encountered frustration when dealing with the opposite sex. Many Romantic artists used their art as an outlet for this frustration. By the time of Schumann and Poe, the Romantic artists preceding them had created a mold for the ideal female lover, or heroine, which most gratified their artistic aims.

The ideal Romantic heroine is a reflection of the Romantic hero's most treasured and desired traits, or an "objectification of his own hidden perfection, a means of defining



his own loveliness to himself” (Wilson, 96). In other words, the love object of the hero must be similar to him in every possible way, and must, in fact, depend “entirely for her identity upon the narcissistic male” (Wilson, 97). By trying to attribute to his beloved the traits that he most desires, the romantic hero creates, at least in his own mind, a female figure who is superhuman. She becomes “an earthly analogue of divine truth. The Romantic heroine often and appropriately assumes the qualities of a goddess; she transcends mortality, becoming inaccessible to her would-be lover and demanding from him saint-like adoration and ultimately self-annihilation” (Wilson, 99). In effect, the very female who was intended to bring the artist to transcendence at times becomes a frustrating hindrance to his creative abilities. In the case of Poe, his wife’s continued illness plunged him into despair so that he could not write. And Schumann suffered deep depression when he was separated from his lover or wife, causing him to be less productive as well. Both men suffered in real life the plight of Werther: frustration due to conflicts concerning his beloved.

Although emotional problems concerning his wife (and other women) did hinder his creativity at times, each artist managed to create a large body of work concerning loved ones, allowing us to interpret what experiences each artist was having. And in fact, in keeping with the ideal of the female figure bringing her hero to transcendence through art, some of each man’s most significant works were influenced by or even dedicated to his lovers. Schumann understood at least some of the Romantic concepts concerning love even as an adolescent. He expressed in his diary his concern over his first love, “whether it might damage a young man to love his ideal, especially a young man who is a student” (Ostwald, 27). Schumann’s relationship with this girl, Nanni Petsch, was short-lived, but



his comments about her demonstrate an important fact. Even as a teenager, the artist was aware of the connection between his love life and his art, and he was concerned about the effects that his involvement in romance might have on his artistic production. Before his first romance, Schumann had encountered emotional distress concerning women in his life. When he was fifteen, his sister Emilie killed herself. His loss of this sibling as well as his concern as a child that his sickly mother was incapable of caring for him likely made Schumann fearful of losing female relationships. To compensate for this fear, it is likely that the young man began searching for the ideal wife who would permanently end this insecurity. Whether he immediately found this security in the young daughter of his piano teacher Freidrich Weick is debatable, but as he became involved with the woman who would become his wife, she became inseparable from his art. If it were a requirement that the romantic hero be hopelessly infatuated with an inaccessible woman, then Clara's father insured that Schumann could become a hero. When Schumann was twenty-four, even before he had expressed his passion for his adolescent friend, Clara's father began "a secret censorship of their correspondence" (Schauffler, 58). In reference to this, Schumann's biographer Schauffler points out how typical according to Romantic principles the relationship between Schumann and Clara had become. "Until then the pedagogue had been blindly oblivious to what so often happens when a young artistic and temperamental man walks daily in the country hand in hand with a precocious adolescent girl of similar tastes and temperament" (58). As this relationship developed, Clara became the classic Romantic heroine, because Robert saw in her characteristics and personality very similar to his own. It was at this point that Schumann's art began to show reflections of his young lover.

Of his first nineteen published works only one, op. 11, is dedicated to Clara; however, her signature is seen in much of the music itself. Even before the two became romantically involved with each other, Clara began playing Schumann's works on her concerts. For example, Schumann writes in his 1832 diaries about the quality of Clara's performance of his op. 2 "Papillons." The first true musical union between Schumann and Clara is seen in his op. 5 Impromptus, which contain a theme written and suggested to him by Clara. At this time Clara was only twelve, but she was already influencing his work. While working on his next major composition, *Davidbündler* op. 6, Schumann expressed his frustration in creating: "When I fantasize at the piano, only chorales come forth, and when I write there are no thoughts--all I want is to paint C L A R A all over the place in big letters and chords" (Ostwald, 131).

A work that deserves particular attention is *Carnaval*, Op. 9. In this collection of short character pieces, Schumann characterizes various people, including himself (twice), Chopin, and the two women in his life at the time, Clara and Ernestine von Fricken. Robert had not yet declared his love for Clara when Ernestine moved into Weick's house to study. Schumann was also living there at the time, and before too long Ernestine fell in love with him. For a while, Schumann seemed to prefer her to the inaccessible Clara. *Carnaval* was inspired by "the many different mental states stimulated by his betrothal to Ernestine" (Ostwald, 115). Whether or not Schumann was actually totally devoted to Ernestine is doubtful, considering he later left her, partly because he discovered that she had no inheritance. His musical description of her in *Carnaval* sheds further doubt on his sentiments about her. In the Mitsuko Uchida recording of *Carnaval* on Philips Records, the piece describing her, "Estrella," is only twenty-six seconds long, making it the second

shortest work in the set. It is in a very short ABA form in thirty-six measures at a presto tempo. This is not the tender, passionate melody with which one might expect a composer to serenade his beloved. Rather, this piece opens at a fortissimo dynamic level with a first theme that is more brash than loving. Chromatic notes and strong accents complement a driving rhythm to create a dramatic but unlovely theme. The second theme is slightly more lyric but, at least to this listener, still less than lovely. And any compliment Schumann may have paid to Estrella by changing to this more lyric line is quickly erased by the return of the first theme. In contrast to the sketches of Clara and Chopin directly preceding this piece, it is even less complimentary. Schumann describes Chopin with a soaring, lyric melody accompanied by a flowing arpeggiated pattern in the left hand. This piece is marked by all the pathos and emotion that Chopin typically incorporated into his own works.

One minute and a second longer than “Estrella,” Schumann’s description of Clara in “Chiarina” is more typical of how one would expect an artist to describe his lover. The movement is marked “appassionato,” the same marking that he provided “Florestan,” the second sketch of himself. Whether this marking is simply a tempo indication or a statement of the composer’s feelings toward the girl is impossible to tell. At any rate, the effect Schumann achieved in the piece is clearly passionate. Although similar to “Estrella” in the sense that it is full of strong accents, “Chiarina” has a thinner texture and slower tempo. The melody is not as flowing or lyric as the one found in “Chopin,” but this is not surprising considering the fact that Schumann wrote “Chopin” in imitation of that man’s style. In “Chiarina,” the best of Schumann’s own style shines through--that restless, capricious and slightly melancholy sound so prevalent in his works. The melody

is marked by a strong, dotted rhythm, large melodic leaps and strong climaxes, all within the context of well-rounded and balanced phrases. The melody is almost pleading and mournful. Schumann makes good use of the minor mode to create this mood, while maintaining a clear sound by avoiding chromatic notes. When he finally does use some chromatic notes in measure twenty-two, the effect is moving. To determine exactly what Schumann is saying about Clara is difficult (if not impossible), but the mood evoked here seems appropriate to reflect what we know of Schumann's willful yet devoted young admirer. Appropriately, this work could easily describe the personality of Schumann as well, with its mournful and passionate tone. One can only wonder whether the sadness unmistakably portrayed in the work comes from the separation of Robert and Clara during his betrothal to another woman.

Schumann did not stay attached to Ernestine for long, and soon, despite her father's renewed disapproval, he returned to Clara. Schumann's biographer Peter Ostwald addresses an interesting issue concerning this situation.

That Schumann could woo one adolescent in the home of her disapproving father while he was simultaneously jilting his fiancée and disappointing her father raises an important question. Was his quickness to change one love-object for another evidence of a high level of adaptability, or does it suggest that Schumann's psychological resources were again in precarious balance? Quickly shifting and highly ambivalent behavior towards love-objects may indicate a potential for inner splitting, which can foster disintegration in a vulnerable personality. However, for someone as talented and hard working as Schumann, pathological splitting may also call forth a renewed effort to heal oneself through creative activity (Ostwald, 116).

Looking at this situation from the perspective of the Romantic hero, the answer to this question becomes quite clear. Schumann had long been concerned about his mental state, including the negative effect it had on his art. In 1833 (before the affair with Ernestine)

Schumann saw a doctor about the issue and was given this advice. "Medicine is of no use here. Seek yourself out a woman. She will cure you at once," (Schauffler, 69). If Schumann were following his doctor's advice to cure his insanity and become artistically productive again, it follows that he would chase after Ernestine and leave Clara at least for the time being, because at that time Clara was inaccessible to him due to her father's restraints and thus unable to cure his mental condition. However, once Schumann was temporarily over his mental trauma, the situation looked different. Ernestine's personality did not match his as Clara's did, and Clara was clearly the better musician. In terms of the Romantic heroine, Clara simply fit the mold better than Ernestine did, and he determined to make her his own, despite her father's disapproval.

This was only the beginning of Clara's effects on Schumann's music. He continued using her material in his works, such as her "Witches' Dance" that he used as the opening of the Allegro for the Sonata in F-sharp Major, op 11. Concerning the piece "he told her that it was 'a solitary outcry for you from my heart... in which your theme appears in every possible shape'" (Ostwald, 125). Of the *Fantasia in C*, opus 17, the composer wrote "The first movement may well be the most passionate I have ever composed--a deep lament for you" (Ostwald, 126). These are just a few early examples of the musical union between the Schumanns which began long before the marriage vows were said, and lasted a lifetime.

If there were one area in which Clara did not perfectly fit the mold of the Romantic heroine, it was that she was never taken from Schumann by death or infidelity. But Schumann still had gone through temporary bereavement when Weick kept her from him, and he suffered separation also when he was hospitalized at the end of his life. In



keeping with Romantic themes, the relationship that fostered his greatest works was not without turmoil. At times, Clara, dynamic performer that she was, overshadowed her husband's work. She also pressured him to travel, an activity that led him to mental breakdowns. However, regardless of the joys and sorrows of their marriage, Clara provided Robert Schumann with one thing that was indispensable for a Romantic hero: she was the female love object for him to idolize and toward which he could focus his art.

Like Schumann, Edgar Allan Poe suffered significant losses of female role models in his formative years. His young mother, Eliza, died when he was three years old, leaving him an orphan. His father had already abandoned them. So Poe grew up in the house of Fanny and John Allen. Fanny had been one of his mother's caretakers during her last long illness. Poe and John Allen did not get along well for various reasons, causing an alienation between Poe and both Allans. Although Poe lost touch with Fanny, he always kept fond memories of her. When she died in 1829, it was a strong blow to the young man. It is possible that the two losses of mother figures that he experienced contributed to the stark view of women seen in many of his tales and poems.

The woman that Poe portrays in his works is the typical, if Gothic, Romantic heroine. Poe's heroines are normally inaccessible in his poems and his short stories. It is here that Poe introduces a Gothic twist. The heroines in Goethe's *Werther* and many other works by earlier Romantic artists were inaccessible to the hero, because they were a non-existent spiritual ideal. Poe's heroines are mainly inaccessible, because they are dead or dying. This is true of Lenore in the "Raven," Madeline in "The Fall of the House of Usher," Berenice and many others. Poe's fascination with death is an essential element in much of his writing and will be discussed in detail later.

Poe's complex view of the female ideal, which was created in part by the losses of Eliza and Fanny, was complicated by a number of failed romances and by his eventual marriage to his child cousin, Virginia Clemm. One of Poe's first serious romances was with Elmira Royster. Interestingly, this relationship was damaged, because the girl's father disapproved of her dating an older man and accordingly censored their correspondence, just as Weick had done to Robert Schumann in regard to his daughter Clara. And as Schumann did with Clara, Poe eventually returned to Royster, but not until another devastating bereavement from which he never fully recovered. This was the loss of his wife, Virginia.

Virginia's influence on the work of Poe is a little more difficult to analyze than Clara's influence on the work of Schumann, principally because Poe never states directly that it is Virginia whom he is describing in his art. But there are themes, all in agreement with the Romantic ideals, which are clearly seen in both his romance with Virginia and in his fiction.

First, Poe often wrote about incestuous relationships. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" Roderick Usher is ill and fears the death of his sister Madeline, who is his only living relative and with whom he has spent the last years of his life. Interestingly, this relationship is not sexual, however the union between them is strong enough to bear consideration here. Usher seems to depend on her for his very existence. Whatever the strange arrangements are between Usher and his sister, one fact is important. James Wilson writes in *The Romantic Heroic Ideal*, "as is the tradition in Romantic literature, Roderick is drawn to his sister because she is his mirror image, or at least she represents a portion of himself" (157). In keeping with the Romantic concept of the woman as a



reflection of the hero's most desired traits, Poe uses this and other more clearly incestuous relationships in his stories to make the hero and the heroine as identical as possible. Indeed, in the case of Usher, when Madeline finally collapses dead, he falls down a corpse also. The two are so closely drawn to each other that they actually become one in death. Roderick cannot survive without Madeline (his heroine) just as in the Romantic tradition the hero was doomed to frustration, self-destruction, and death in the absence of his lady.

Another short story worth considering is "Berenice." The narrator marries his cousin Berenice. In the opening paragraphs Poe describes the differences between Berenice and the narrator. While the narrator is "ill of health, buried in gloom," she is "agile, graceful, full of energy" (Allen, 494). Already he has portrayed her as an ideal--an object to be sought after and emulated. The terms of engagement deserve attention, because he claims "I had never loved her.... Feelings within me had never been of the heart, and my passions were always of the mind" (Allen, 498). Here again, the sexual aspects of the relationship are downplayed, and the hero is more interested in her intangible qualities.

"Eleonora" is another story of incestuous love with a cousin. As in Poe's own relationship with Virginia, Eleonora is significantly younger than the lover. In this story it is clear that the heroine brings the hero to transcendence. Most of the pages are spent describing the "Valley of the Many Colored Grasses." Before the death of Eleonora, the valley is portrayed as a paradise, but after her death begins losing its appeal until the hero can live there no longer.

How much these stories relate to Poe's marriage with Virginia is debatable. However, all were written during his acquaintance with her ("Berenice" one year before his marriage and the others after marriage.) Much of the ideal that Poe perpetuated in his writing he lived out in real life. He was married to his cousin. This was not as taboo in 1836 as it is today, but it was not typical. As in the story of Eleonora, Poe's wife was much younger than he was. In fact, Virginia was only thirteen years old at the time of the marriage. The fact that Virginia was so young strengthens the argument that Poe was looking for an ideal narcissistic love object, not a sexual one. Kenneth Silverman describes Poe's general attitude toward sexuality, "His moral primness and complex aversion to at least undomesticated sexual feeling led him to deny passion a place in poetry and to most often depict women as far off statues, fearful revenants or pimply hags" (289). In the case of Virginia, her age and his views of sex may have caused him to abstain from sex completely for a time after their marriage. This may be reflected in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and other asexual love relationships seen in some of his stories. One report indicates that for two years after marriage, Poe had a separate bed "and did not assume the position of a husband" (Silverman, 124). This is not surprising in light of a comment Poe made after Virginia's death to Sarah Helen Whitman, whom he was courting. He told her that he would "Cast from me, forever, all merely human desire, and clothe myself in the glory of a pure, calm, and unexacting affection" (Silverman, 365). The fact that Poe was willing to have an asexual marriage clearly indicates that he adhered to the Romantic notions about women not only in art, but in life as well.

Aside from being asexual, the typical woman in Poe's writing was somewhat intangible and inaccessible. In Poe, women became inaccessible when they died, just as

Virginia did to him at the tender age of twenty-four. But even before death, the women he portrayed were not realistic. For example, Poe describes Eleonora as a seraph, and the narrator in "Berenice" claims "I had seen her--not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream" (Allen, 498).

If Poe saw Virginia as an angelic being, he still certainly adored her as a wife. But like many of the heroes in his stories, Poe was forced to face the loss of his beloved to a dread disease; for Virginia this was tuberculosis. At the onset of the disease, he became fearful for her and "hovered watchfully" about her (Silverman, 180). Silverman attributes this in part to the life she had brought him. "Poe's marriage to Sissy [Virginia] had brought him enough tranquility to feed himself, stay for the most part sober, and come close to acquiring the name he wanted" (180). Virginia, as his ideal, was bringing him (the romantic hero) to transcendence through his art. Her loss would be a debilitating blow to Poe the artist. Poe's distress over Virginia's illness, Silverman points out, comes through in two tales written at this time, "Life in Death," and "The Masque of the Red Death" (180).

Over time, Virginia's debilitating condition progressed to the point of death. As Usher did in the presence of his ill sister Madeline, Poe began to show symptoms of illness himself. Possibly these symptoms were brought on by his psychological trauma over her condition and his fear of losing her. In the summer of 1846, a few months before her death, Poe felt so ill he was not even able to write a letter (Silverman, 303). Poe's situation may actually have been more desperate than it appeared. Only after Virginia's death did the writer finally admit the effects that her illness had had on his wellbeing. "I became insane with long intervals of horrible sanity" (Silverman, 334), he

wrote. And, although accused of drinking himself to insanity, he was actually drinking to alleviate the anxiety of Virginia's illness, which was driving him crazy (Silverman, 334). After Virginia's death, Poe attempted to put his life back together and published his last few works. He attempted new romance, but never again did he marry. It is likely that he never completely recovered from the loss of his beloved and that his interest in other women stemmed from his morbid fear of being alone. One of his last works, the poem "Annabel Lee" most likely talks about Virginia. In the poem, the persona talks of "a love that was more than love" (Mabbott, 477). Annabel Lee dies during the course of the poem, but even so "Neither the angels in heaven above/ nor the demons down under the sea/ can ever dissever my soul from the soul/ of the beautiful Annabel Lee" (Mabbott, 478).

It is almost as though Poe attempted to keep the ideals he found in Virginia alive in his mind and work after her death. Of course, the Romantic model of love forbids this from working and, like all romantic heroes, Poe met the frustration that comes from the inaccessibility of his heroine. Poor, forgotten, and arguably insane, Poe died two and a half years after Virginia, himself only forty years old. Whatever transcendence he may have obtained in her presence passed its way with her when she died. The small amount of artistic work he completed after her death and his general failure in human relationships as well, indicates that, just as Madeline was to Usher, Sissy (as Poe affectionately called his wife) was a necessary part of his existence. Without her, he was doomed to death, which he met not long after hers.

If the Romantic story were a happy one, then history would have no place for Goethe, no need for Poe, and little understanding of Schumann. But there was little

optimism left for the true Romantic except the possibility of reaching brief transcendence. Since the Romantic was striving for inaccessible, ideal goals, his quest was doomed to be futile. The emotional strain on an individual who is knowingly facing an impossible challenge is tremendous. No wonder many Romantics, Poe and Schumann included, have been labeled as manic-depressive or just insane. No wonder so many Romantics considered suicide as an escape from futility. For, without both one's art and one's heroine, there was no chance for fulfillment. And both the art and the lady could slip away at any time. Such was a terrifying prospect for the artist, and if there was one thing to be feared over losing one's maiden, it must have been the loss of one's mind.

It is unfortunate that creativity and pathology are so often linked in our minds. If a man writes something apparently senseless, is it because he is insane, or is it because he is an artist with a creative insight so deep that the reader cannot fathom it? It is impossible to judge the state of a man's mind solely by the art it produces. Perhaps the author was talented enough to put himself in the shoes of an insane protagonist so skillfully that we are convinced the bluff is real. At any rate, it is probably more useful to consider an artist's biography before considering his work when examining the delusions of his mind. Then it can be shown whether or not his art supports the theory that he was insane.

In both cases of Schumann and Poe, there is rather strong biographical evidence that each man experienced, at one time or another, severe psychological distress. It is my impression, especially in the case of Schumann, that many implications of mental disease in his art are fabricated or exaggerated by his biographers. However, there is enough evidence of pathology in both men's work to warrant study, especially considering the

fact that such problems were common for the Romantic hero. Also interesting is the fact that Schumann and Poe dealt with similar themes in this area. Both were fascinated with the idea of double personalities, which may or may not indicate a pathological condition. Both did show symptoms of chronic depression. Both were involved in the use of addictive, mind-altering substances, an area that Poe examines extensively in his fiction. And both were preoccupied with death and dying. This preoccupation may be attributable to the fact that both had significant losses of loved ones in childhood, but such losses were not uncommon, and certainly not every one who had had similar experiences displayed similar outlooks on life and death. At any rate, the preoccupation with death led each man to attempt suicide at least once. This fact is so significant that it will be treated in a separate section, but it is so interwoven into each man's psychology that it also merits mention here.

Schumann had a sensitive personality. He was the youngest child of a sickly mother and an invalid father. As mentioned before, he had a sister who committed suicide after prolonged mental illness. These examples indicate that there may have been a genetic tendency toward any number of conditions, including mental problems, in Schumann's family. Also, his exposure to illness in his childhood may explain why he was so fearful of becoming sick himself.

Schumann's mental problems began early in life. At the age of seventeen he wrote in his diary, "It seems to me that I'll go mad one day. My heart pounds sickeningly and I turn pale...often I feel as though I were dead" (Ostwald, 36). Two days later he recalled, "I seemed to be losing my mind: I did have my mind yet I thought I had lost it. I had actually gone mad" (Ostwald, 36). This is Schumann's first instance of mental



breakdown, brought on by reading a novel by one of the greatest influences in Schumann's early years, the novelist Jean Paul. His books dealt with typical Romantic issues and Schumann allowed his ideas to influence his own work (as well as his mind). One important idea that Schumann borrowed from the novelist, which is also found extensively in Poe, is that of the double personality.

Schumann created two sides of himself, and he named them Eusebius and Florestan. Fanciful as they may have been, the existence of these two characters says a great deal about their creator. Prone to violent mood swings as many bipolar individuals are, Schumann used Eusebius and Florestan to describe the extremes of his personality. Schumann incorporated his imaginary friends into his work. The two contrasting characters of Eusebius and Florestan were useful in longer musical compositions where contrast was needed. Occasionally the composer even initialed a work "E" or "F" depending on what side of his personality came through in that work. Also in his articles for *New Journal for Music*, Schumann wrote his musical criticism as a dialogue between the two. Often the results of using Eusebius and Florestan were as odd as effective, and psychologists and biographers alike have used this as evidence that Schumann was mentally ill. Indeed, Schumann created the two when he was in a mentally disturbed state. But his disturbance seems to have stemmed from alcohol abuse and sexual tension, not from the existence of Eusebius and Florestan. The fact that the double personality was a common theme in those days removes some of the frightfulness from the idea. It is likely that Eusebius and Florestan were a highly creative (although borrowed) way to unify his personality with his art.



Since Schumann clearly identified both Eusebius and Florestan as sides of himself, it is safe to consider the musical styles used to describe each as indicators of the moods that Schumann experienced. Conveniently, Schumann included in *Carnaval* along with “Chiarina and “Estrella” two musical sketches of himself, appropriately dubbed “Eusebius” and “Florestan.”

“Eusebius” represents the pensive, melancholy side of Schumann. Beginning at an adagio tempo, the piece stays slow and grows even slower towards its end. Schumann marked the work *sotto voce*, implying a soft dynamic. The rhythmic figure in the first bars is uncommon for the day; Schumann grouped his melodic notes into sets of seven eighth notes. In contrast with the even quarter notes in the accompaniment, this figure creates a sense of rhythmic ambiguity. The use of some chromatic notes in the melody also temporarily obscures the sense of melodic direction. This is the quiet side of Schumann. Notoriously shy, the man would sit silent in the company of his guests. He was nervous on stage and had trouble asserting himself even when he was conducting his own music. Eusebius was often aloof, lost in thought, and not always in touch with the realities of the external world. There is little drama in this piece. Schumann introduces a new rhythmic figure further on--sets of quintuplet sixteenth notes followed by tuplet eighth notes--but it does nothing to accelerate the motion of the piece, which is fairly static and consistent throughout.

In contrast, “Florestan” is full of motion. Rapid eighth-note passages full of leaps and chromatic tones move to longer notes punctuated by strong accents. The piece is full of forward drive. This is the side of Schumann that was strong willed and impulsive. This was the motivated Romantic willing to overcome all the challenges of life for the

sake of his art and his lady. Florestan was the man who challenged Weick in court for his daughter's hand in marriage. He was the one who ruthlessly criticized his enemies in his journal. And it was Florestan who, on the fateful day in 1854, led Eusebius down the road to the Rhine, and after strolling out to the middle of the bridge, threw himself into the water. Unlike Eusebius, the musical moods and textures are not uniform or consistent. In measure nine, an adagio melody emerges for two bars, but quickly returns to the opening figure. Perhaps this is an indication that Florestan himself had multiple personalities, or perhaps it is an example of Florestan's stomping out any sense of peace and order that tried to enter his life. Schumann concludes "Florestan" by accelerating the tempo and, amidst faster accompanying notes and a long crescendo, allows the music to end suddenly on a short, non-harmonic note. This piece is a sketch of an impulsive personality. Schumann was probably being very honest about himself when he wrote "Florestan," because he could scarcely have meant the sketch to be complimentary to himself.

These two personalities of Schumann worked together for over thirty years to create a body of Romantic musical literature that had a real impact on the art. But these were two sides of a troubled man, and the early warning signs of mental problems grew into serious issues later in life.

Whether the reader should conclude that Schumann was sane or crazy, he continued to suffer mental distress throughout his life. Although this problem was sometimes in the form of a breakdown such as the one he experienced at age seventeen, it more often came as depression brought on by anxiety. This was not at all odd for the Romantic hero. Unable to cope fully with life's circumstances due to the futility of the

Romantic artist's quest, the hero could easily become disturbed. There are many concerns that could burden the Romantic hero and artist alike. One stemmed from the art itself. Could the hero successfully bring himself to transcendence through art? Closely related to this issue was the practical question of whether or not he could support himself monetarily while doing so. Equally important was the distress over the inaccessible heroine he was pursuing. Schumann had concerns in all these areas as well as having ill family members and an injured hand. Though not uncommon, these problems were nonetheless distressing. To alleviate his fear over all these issues as well as his possible ensuing madness, Schumann did the worst thing he possible could have done; he turned to alcohol.

Alcohol abuse is not uncommon in artistic circles, partly because it is thought by some to enhance creative ability by stimulating the imagination. At the age of eighteen, Schumann wrote to his friend Wilhelm Götte that alcohol allowed him to fantasize more freely (Ostwald, 37). Of course alcohol has not been proved to stimulate any useful creative work, and Schumann may have been rationalizing his drinking. At any rate, he was involved in drinking at a fairly young age. When he was around the age of nineteen, he moved to Heidelberg to study and there indulged in much alcohol. Ostwald writes that Schumann "relied on alcohol to alleviate anxiety and depression. But usually his drinking had the opposite effect: after a binge, Schumann often felt more restless and depressed than before" (Ostwald, 51). Even at his young age, Schumann was facing the Romantic artist's dilemma. How was he to cope with life's difficulties and still create his art? It should have been clear to Schumann that he had difficulties dealing with the effects of drinking. His diaries indicate that he became disoriented and sick after

drinking. Alcohol abuse, in fact, was enough of a problem that Clara's father used it against him in court to prove that Schumann was unable to be a suitable husband. The charge of alcoholism was the only charge among several others that the court did not readily drop. However, the charge was also never substantiated. If Schumann were a true alcoholic, the court probably would have found it to be so. Instead it is more likely that Schumann easily became drunk when he occasionally drank to relieve stress. Like the true Romantic hero, Schumann was discovering that he was unable to deal with his mental conditions and his general circumstances. But alcohol was not the answer to his difficulties; rather it added to the problem that was probably the most troublesome of all, deep depression.

Schumann struggled with depression for most of his life. It was brought on by any number of circumstances: drinking, his injured hand, and travel, to name just a few. It ranged in severity from making the composer irritable to making him suicidal. Often his depression made him unable to write and interact with others. It also led to his final breakdown that caused him to leap into the Rhine. Schumann's musical output most often reflects his depression in that, while depressed, he wrote nothing. Another indirect effect of his moods on his music was that, when he was not feeling poorly, he would often write compulsively, turning out large bodies of work in the same genre in a very short amount of time. Examples of this include his art songs and his string quartets. There is also evidence that his depression may have affected the music he wrote while in melancholy states. For example, he wrote to Clara in 1839, "All week I've been sitting at the piano composing and writing and laughing and crying all at the same time. You will find this beautifully illustrated in my opus 20, the great Humoreske" (Ostwald, 146). For

the most part, all of Schumann's music is marked by the type of passionate writing found in op. 20, and thus it is difficult to deduce whether or not other works were composed while he was in similar mental states.

Another effect that Schumann's depression had on his musical output was that his career ended early. How many opus numbers he could have added to his existing 133 had he not finally been overcome with sadness to the point of suicide, we will never know. What we do know is that sometime in 1854, Schumann, Romantic hero that he was, finally succumbed to the harsh demands of the world. He had spent years devoted to his art, and the stress of his profession had worn him down to the point of breaking. On February 27, 1854, he attempted to kill himself, effectively ending his career. The last two and a half years of his life following this incident were spent in an asylum, and no publishable work was created during this time.

Poe, like Schumann, suffered a life of depression; unlike Schumann, he never achieved financial security, and he lost his young beloved. In spite of these obstacles that he had to overcome, Poe contributed greatly to the Romantic literature. Poe certainly fits the model of the Romantic hero, because he was unable to cope with the outside world, and he let his frustration show through powerfully in his work. And every area of life he struggled with, his heroes in his fiction struggled with as well. A few examples from his writing shed light on his mental state.

Poe was concerned over the issue of the double personality just as Schumann was. It is not surprising that Poe borrowed this popular German concept of the *doppelgänger*, as his work was in many ways similar to Gothic German Romanticism rather than French or English styles. Poe's treatment of the double personality differs in an important way

from Schumann's. With Eusebius and Florestan, the composer dealt with contrasting emotional states. Poe took more of a moralist approach in both "The Imp of the Perverse" and in "William Wilson," where he addresses the conflict between the will and the conscience.

Poe uses examples to illustrate his concept of the imp of the perverse. He considers the imp to be the part of the psyche that causes one consciously to do harm to one's self. For example, the imp is the still, small voice that tells someone to throw himself off a cliff, although he has no will to die. It seems as though Poe struggled with an imp in his own life. Could it have been this imp that caused him to engage in pointless squabbles with John Allan? Perhaps it was the perverse that caused him to gamble his way into debt while studying at the university of Virginia, or which caused him intentionally to fail out of West Point. Of course Poe blamed each of these problems on a lack of money, but it seems as though there were better ways to deal with his difficulties. Not always rational and level-headed, it is possible that in writing about the imp of the perverse, he was thinking back to some of the impulsive or senseless things he had done in his past that caused him financial trouble, lost opportunities, and lost fame.

Poe more thoroughly develops the idea of conflicts between the conscience and the will in his story "William Wilson." In it Poe begins by describing the childhood of his protagonist named William Wilson. Many biographers of Poe believe that Wilson was actually a representation of Poe himself, given the fact that he had the same birthday as Poe and shared similar characteristics. For example, the school that Wilson attends is identical in description to the one that Poe was known to have attended. It is during his stay at this school that William Wilson meets his double. Admitted the same day as



Wilson, the other student also shares his name and his date of birth. William Wilson excels in all he does and is challenged only by his double. What is more, only William seems to notice that the other boy is competing with him. And most striking of all, the second Wilson never speaks above a barely audible whisper. After his departure from the school, Wilson's double follows him and shows up at inopportune times. First he shows up at the end of a drunken binge and then at a gambling party where Wilson was cheating and stealing money from his opponent. Each time the second Wilson appears, he confronts William for whatever activity he is engaging in. Importantly the questionable activities mentioned in the story, including the final act of trying to steal another man's wife, were all sins of which Poe was guilty. It seems as though Poe may have used this story as an admission of guilt for these activities.

Finally, after the last interference by the whispering Wilson, the protagonist corners his double and fatally wounds him in a duel. After he turns away to latch a door, he returns to his dying enemy and finds him to have the same identity as himself. Only then does his double speak in full voice, saying, "You have conquered and I yield. Yet henceforth art thou also dead--dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me thou didst exist--and in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (Allen, 469). There is much of a Romantic nature to be found in this statement. First, the idea of being dead to the world, heaven, and hope closely resembles the concept of alienation from the world that we see in Werther and other Romantic heroes. Secondly, the idea of suicide found here is very Romantic. By trying to free himself of the figure who was tormenting him, he actually ended his own life. Perhaps



Poe was implying that the only way to escape the isolation from the world with which all Romantics struggled was to murder oneself.

Just as in the case of Schumann, Poe's interest in the double person does not indicate insanity. But Poe did have other traits that did indicate he had severe mental problems. Like Schumann, he struggled with depression. A brief paragraph from one of his letters demonstrates this is true:

My feelings at this moment are pitiable indeed. I am suffering under a depression of spirits such as I have never felt before. I have struggled in vain against the influence of this melancholy--you will believe me when I say that I am still miserable in spite of the great improvement in my circumstances....Console for you can. But let it be quickly, or it will be too late (Buranelli, 30).

A suicidal undertone is heard even here in the midst of an improving financial situation. But no true Romantic hero would be comforted by a little money. Poe seemed to understand that no worldly good could account for the frustration of not being able to reach the highest ideal standards. And under this dark cloud, Poe marched down the road toward losing his mind. Whether he ever went insane is a matter of dispute. Buranelli cites the quality of his work in *Eureka* and a lecture, both completed shortly before his death, to indicate that he did not ever lose his sanity (44). But he does freely admit that Poe "suffered from intermittent eruptions of melancholia, alcoholism, shock, and hysteria" (45). Three of these are symptoms of depression; the other, alcoholism, may have been one of its leading causes.

Poe was no better at holding his liquor than Schumann. Similarly, he tended to partake socially or while under a great deal of stress. He probably was not an alcoholic, but a small amount of liquor would make him very drunk. He was accused of being an

alcoholic by his enemies, but as in Schumann's case, the reports were never agreed on or confirmed. In addition to alcohol, Poe also dabbled with laudanum, a solution of opium in alcohol. His use of the drug seems to have been minor and infrequent, as there is not much mention of it in his letters or his biographies. Excepting one instance in which he took a nearly fatal dose, Poe leaves little record of excesses. However, the idea of opium use is found in some of his stories. That Poe could write effectively about the effects of the drug is a moot point; we already know he was personally familiar with its effects. To say he was obsessed with it and that many of the fantastic elements in his stories came from opium's effect on the writer is a different matter altogether. It is impossible to conclude from any work of Poe that I have read that he was under the influence of any drug while he wrote it. Many characteristics of his stories that some biographers have attributed to drug influence, such as the "sense of endless drag of time" (Marks, 60), preoccupation with disease, and acute sense of sound (Marks, 21), fit perfectly into the Gothic Romantic style to which he devoted his life's work. He does indeed incorporate drug use into his writing. In "Ligeia" the protagonist becomes "a bounden slave in the trammels of opium" (Allen, 346). However, this incident and other accounts of opium dreams or trances indicate only that the author had experienced the drug enough to write about it not that he was addicted to it. A far more appropriate accounting for Poe's fascination with opium in his stories comes from an assessment of Romantic ideals. Imagination and creativity were two highly coveted qualities for the Romantic idealist, and in the day, opium, like alcohol, was thought to stimulate these traits. Also, opium and drugs in general were useful for temporarily escaping the inevitable futility of trying

to live out an ideal in an imperfect world. These were probably the reasons that Poe used the drug, and also the reasons that the drug was mentioned in his work.

Another concern plagued Poe's life; he was (like Schumann) afraid of losing his mind. Insanity was a morbid fascination of his which is reflected in his work. Roderick Usher is a prime example. Insanity was a common theme of Romantic literature and it often was the result of frustration over one's problems. If Silverman is correct in his conclusion that Poe's work is actually a reflection of his past (210), then Poe's frustration over past losses may have contributed to his mental condition. But until his final illness, it seems unlikely that he was ever overcome by insanity. Often upset over professional problems and the sickness of Virginia, Poe acted irrationally. For example, in reply to some rude statements toward Bostonians in a lecture, one periodical referred to the "war" Poe had started with New England, "Which it would be more charitable to impute to insanity..." (Silverman, 270). And although following the incident Poe admitted "I really believe that I have been mad" (Silverman, 276), this does not convince us of a clinical condition, but only of intense frustration and emotional distress over a difficult situation. Even if Poe remained sane through all those ordeals, he could not escape the final plight of the Romantic hero. In 1849, after decades of writing morbid stories about death, he finally became depressed enough to desire death for himself.

Suicide had a strange appeal to the Romantic hero. According to Romantic ideals, any hero would eventually be overcome by the demands of the world. No longer able to reach transcendence through his work and his lady, the hero would now search for a new escape. Never able to bow to anything or admit defeat, the hero often would take the situation into his own hands. Suicide is the ultimate act of control. To the Romantic at

least, it was certainly not an act of cowardice. Death was inevitable anyway, and when an artist ended his own life, this was seen as a sacrifice to his art.

Neither Schumann nor Poe, despite much talk of suicide, committed the act directly by putting a bullet through his head. Schumann survived his plunge into the Rhine, and Poe recovered from his deadly dose of laudanum. Perhaps each chose suicide attempts with indefinite results because he was not yet prepared to die. Although their real deaths were not as dramatic as these earlier attempts, both could be considered suicidal. Poe was found in a gutter, chilled and overcome by alcohol. When he became coherent, he emphatically “said the best thing a friend could do would be to blow his brains out with a pistol” (Silverman, 435). The French poet Baudelaire, a staunch admirer of Poe, believed his “death was almost a suicide, a suicide prepared for a long time” (Silverman, 436). Baudelaire seemed to believe that Poe’s personal abuse set him up for an inevitable early death, one that he gladly welcomed. This death came to Poe shortly after his request for a bullet in his head. Apparently overcome by cold and drink, he died after fits of delirium left him exhausted. Schumann died in similar circumstances. Confined to a mental hospital after his dive into the Rhine, he lived two and a half years in isolation from his wife and most of the outside world. Eventually he quit eating, an action, which, according to his symptoms, was probably voluntary (Ostwald, 293). He died of self-starvation.

To any outsider, the death of Schumann or Poe would appear unnecessary and tragic. That a man with such great talent would willfully end his own life is unfortunate. However, death was not unfortunate for the Romantic hero. In fact, death was a glorious culmination of a lifelong quest for the artistic ideal. In many ways, the Romantic ideal

quest is suicidal in its very origins, because it reaches for impossible attainment that leads to frustration only solvable through death. In other words, the deaths of Schumann and Poe were sacrifices to their art! By reaching for ideals, they knowingly made attainment impossible and death inevitable. But if either man had not sought the highest ideal just so he could spare his life, he could never have (at least theoretically) attained the level he reached. All of the self-abuse--the drinking, smoking, lack of sleep, worrying, etc., that drove each man to the brink of insanity and eventually to death were necessary means or by-products of the Romantic quest. Wilson describes the outcome of the Romantic quest:

To achieve the heroic ideal, therefore, the Romantic protagonist must sustain his transcendent vision within human community and thereby occasion regeneration of a decadent culture. But in his attempts to do so, the Romantic hero either perverts the ideal so drastically that it becomes hideous or destructive or he discovers that his quest is futile and retreats into the solipsistic world of the imagination. In either case, the tragic fact is that the heroic quest that the Romantic protagonist finds irresistible proves impossible. His fascination with the ideal ensures his demise in the mortal realm to which he is inextricably bound (196).

Indeed, death showed itself as the only escape from a life which, though artistically productive, was plagued with unfulfilled obsession with lovers and debilitating delusions caused by substance abuse and by the frustration of pursuing an impossible goal. However, despite his shortcomings and ultimate failure to achieve the ideal on earth, and in the midst of all his struggles, each artist created a body of work that did reach the highest artistic ideals. By sacrificing their lives to their art, Robert Schumann and Edgar Allan Poe became Romantic heroes; and, though they failed to reach the transcendent ideal in life, they actually fulfilled it more completely in death. By allowing their work to reflect the tragic lives they led, they left us a model of what the Romantic hero was

supposed to be. This account of the Romantic hero left by both of these men is credible, because they lived out in their own lives the ideal that they presented in their work.

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