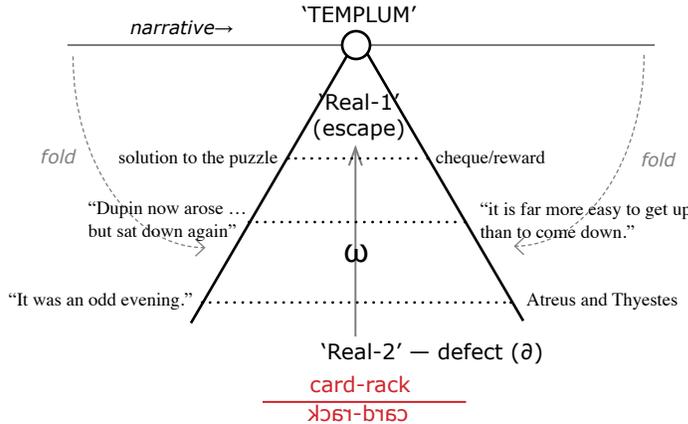


# ENUNCIATING / ÉNONCÉ<sup>1</sup> : E. A. POE'S CIPHER TECHNIQUE

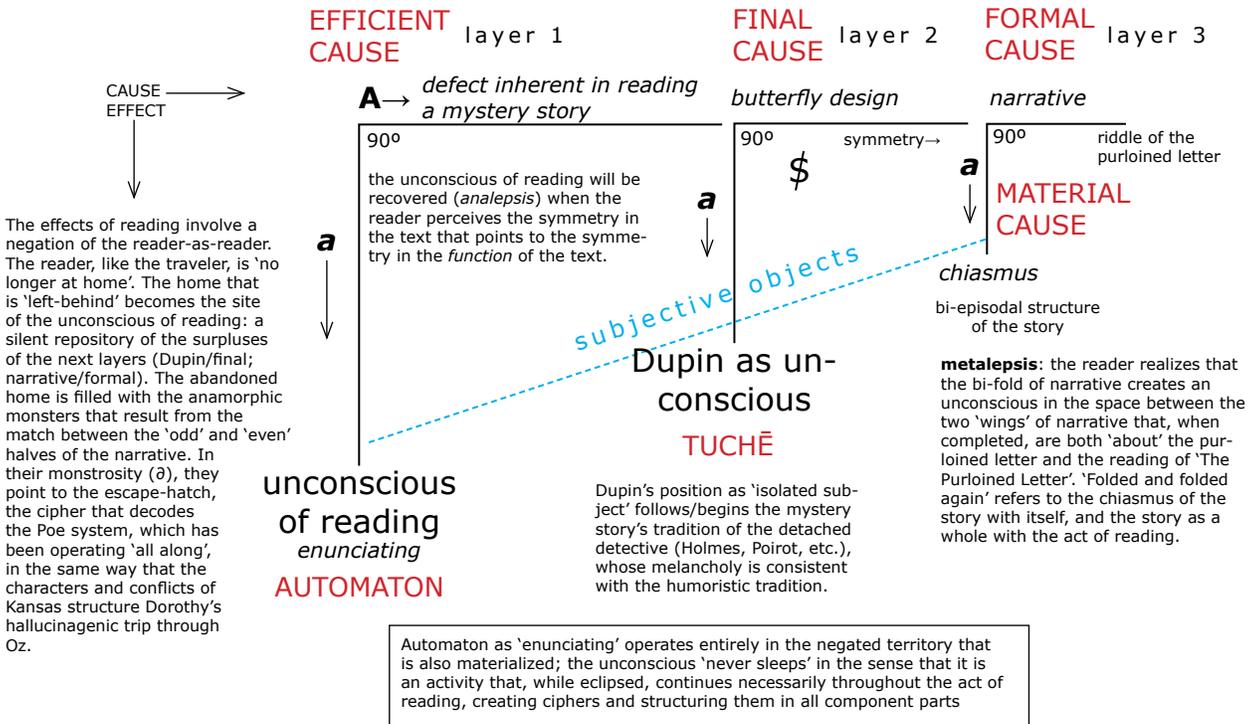
In his original study of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin mysteries, Richard Kopley advanced the theory, that Poe frequently employed a chiasmic design, butterflying the text so that the second half could be folded on to the first half, creating symmetrical matches of subjects, ideas, and, often, literal words. In some cases, matches could serve as indices to "calibrate" the alignment of the two sides of the text. In other cases, the halves were bridged by an "anamorphic" connection that specified a silent, concealed meaning — a crossing that re-interpreted the two "spring points." The midpoint of "The Purloined Letter" is defined by the exchange of the reward money for Dupin's solution of where the letter is hidden. The letter is invisible by being left "in plain sight," and this is the key to Poe's use of symmetry, which hides by displaying itself clearly in the expressions paired by folding the text, just as the purloined letter had been "folded and re-folded."

<sup>1</sup> 'Enunciating/énoncé' refers to Lacan's distinction between the speech act and the literal contents of words, meanings, and grammatical/syntactical relationships (*énoncé*). The extimate affects this distinction directly. Just as the shout Fire!, an effect or enunciating act, has direct effects without requiring a real fire to serve as the *énoncé*, effect become cause and is associated with the 'unconscious' of the partial objects that form the basis of Aristotle's two 'chance' causes, automaton and *tuchē*.



Using the game of Morra ("odds and evens") as his ancient precedent, Poe matches such expressions as "Dupin now arose ... but sat down again" with "it is far more easy to get up than to come down." This indexical use calibrates the fold, so that the Minister's theft of the letter from the table in the King's chamber is echoed by Dupin's theft of it from the Minister's letter-box. The letter-box is described as a "card-rack," whose sounds when pronounced backwards show that it is a palindrome, a chiasmus in miniature. The prize match, however, is the connection of a reference to the banquet of Atreus for his twin Thyestes (Atreus fed Thyestes his own children, butchered and cooked, in revenge for Thyestes' seduction of his wife). This gruesome event is matched to the most subtle of Poe's references to Morra, at the beginning of the tale: "It was an odd evening."

The three 'layers' of efficient, final, and formal/material cause correspond, in Poe's cipher-style of writing, to the main narrative consumed in a page-by-page manner ('formal/material'), the folding of the text into a  $\Lambda$ -shaped design (the final cause, the intention of the author to use an odds-evens design), and the final layer where the narrative's subject (the purloined letter) becomes identical to the technique that has 'hidden something in plain view' to create an 'unconscious' out of the act of reading, as automaton.



# ENUNCIATING POE : NOTES

- §1 The extimacy of Poe is, of course, his re-deployment of a model of reading, where the reader is informed by an 'unconscious of the work', into the form of the literal details of a story about a detective (Dupin) who discovers the whereabouts of a letter that has been hidden precisely by being left out in the open. Just as the letter eludes discovery by *not* being concealed, literature itself maintains its cipher-code status by not concealing it: by making its method evident in use of words that are, in Poe's case, symmetrically paired. 'The Purloined Letter' is about itself, as an act of reading. In turn, it is about how an external object can serve as a subjective unconscious by being "read," as something with a hollow interior filled with anamorphic ciphers/defects that point to a higher-order reality, an 'escape route' to recognition.
- §2 The most neglected and potentially controversial component of the Aristotelian linked-matheme model is that of efficient cause. Like the case of the traveler, the most obvious fact is often forgotten: that the traveler has left home. The reader has left behind a vacant place as well, the ordinary world mentality that encloses our various acts of reading but which will, in the logic of the extimate, come to be enclosed by them. The book is like the extremely heavy object described by Borges — heavy because its boundary is obverse; it contains not the object but the world around the object, the Elsewhere. Its gravitational attraction, and hence its creation of a 'curvature' in the space-time net, would be infinite did not the curvature it creates also make space-time finite though unbounded. The efficient cause of reading has been recognized in other forms. In theology it is the reference to the world as created through an act of speech (hence, the *énoncé*, or suspended/hidden component of this enunciating makes sense of the secret names and mystical Truths that are a part of every religion's traditions). In science, this is the issue of the observer's unattainable objectivity, made extreme by the Quantum Physics conjecture known as 'Schrödinger's Cat', which is neither dead nor alive until observed. The ultimate components of reality in the most objective sciences are entirely dependent on POV. Reading, thus, is one of the best models of this 'unconsciousness of the world'.
- §3 Poe's two frames are: (1) the initiation of the story, with its customary 'willing suspension of disbelief'; and (2) the inside frame, the *templum*, the inner defect that reverses the gaze by which the reader thought to employ as a surveillance of the text's particulars. The pivot or hinge of the *templum* creates a retroaction, a negation of the act of reading. The text itself begins to 'read the reader'. The elements encountered echo what is in the reader's mind to create hybrid beings, anamorphic composites ( $\omega$ ) that are entirely surplus to the literally present words. They are created out of the movement of the reader, and the *unintended memories* of the reading's past. Between the two frames, *encadrement* (double framing) suspends the subject not just in the puzzle represented in the story but an existential puzzle about the first frame and the space of 'home' that can now be recovered only through an 'analepsis' that connects the three mathemes. As with the enunciation of travel, this recovery can be triggered by a *metalepsis* — a metonymy of a metonymy — that, like Poe's phonic palindrome, 'card-rack', creates an unguarded exit through which the reader may escape home. The card-rack in the Minster's apartment 'turned space around' by being a partial object: invisible though in plain sight, 'rotating' reality just as its name rotates itself.
- §4 The automaton of reading itself, the 'home space' that is remaindered in the act of picking up the illusion of the story, gives way to the opportunism — the contingencies of the text — that will actualize this. The reader is asleep as these contingencies unfold. They are not the 'forking paths' of the plot, the 'one thing after another' that steers the story one way and another. They are the web formation that, when fully assembled, will create an internal mirror between the 'odd' and 'even' sides of the text. As Poe says about the game of odds and evens (known as Morra in Europe), the key is in correctly guessing the intelligence of one's opponent. In a sense, this is Turing test, where the (concealed) opponent demonstrates intelligence and thereby becomes a 'thinking machine' by virtue of the inability we have of distinguishing him from known examples of intelligence.
- §5 Poe connects the reader's mania for order and the exposure to chaos that comes with every text and its contingent situations. Though randomness is the risk, the risk is hedged by the status of the work as a work of art — its commitment to ultimate order and meaningfulness. Yet, this is a tricky commitment, since ordinary meaningfulness would result in a the work's susceptibility to captioning — a re-packaging as 'a book about \_\_\_\_'. The partial object in general, and the book (of fiction) in particular, offer the reader a balm which, to follow the medical metaphor, does not become a *treatment of* symptoms that itself creates new diseases. Rather, it is a conversion of not just the work of art but the left-behind world of the reader into pure symptom. The reader's vacated space of the non-book is contaminated by the dream of the work. The reversed-direction logic of the work's inside frame pushes past F1, the first frame enclosing the work as experience, through the *metalepsis/analepsis* that spins space around. This is the literary version of *extimité*.
- §6 The Lacanian image of signifiers, S2, as 'sliding past each other' is inverted by the reader who creates the sliding by his/her own physical act of reading. The traveler's POV, in other words, creates sliding, just as the landscape is made to 'slide by' the car or train window. In this sense, S1, the master signifier, is able to quilt the signifiers in a rather literal and direct way in Poe: by creating a web of anamorphic monster-bridges that encode one side of the text through mirror images in the other.