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NEITHER GENIUS NOR FUDGE: EDGAR ALLAN POE AND *EUREKA*

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Abstract || *Eureka* (1848) has been taken at face value as an expanded version of a lecture on cosmology that Poe gave earlier the same year. However, its seriousness as a work of science should be questioned. Its treatment of themes found in other works by Poe shows the author's unconcern for consistency, and the text unlikely to have resulted from a serious engagement with scientific argument. Instead it should be approached as a hoax: an attempt to reveal the gullibility of its readers. Poe's hoaxes relied for their effect on the trust created in readers by their recognition of generic conventions, and *Eureka* exploited and ridiculed public trust in cosmological lecturers such as John Bovee Dods.

Keywords || Poe | *Eureka* | Ether | Mesmerism | Hoax.

0. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe's *Eureka* (published in 1848) has been read as a serious work of cosmology, and as a hoax¹; as an essay demonstrating "virtuosity in the use of logic, [...] philosophical profundity, [and] currency in scientific theory" (Schaeffer, 1971: 353), and as a work where the science and the philosophy is bad, and nothing is profound (Holman, 1972). Such opinions seem irreconcilable—as Harold Fromm wryly observes (echoing an early review), "One man's genius is another's fudge" (1989: 201)—and to make matters worse, even if it is granted that the latter reaction is possibly extreme, in that much of the work's science was sound for the time in which it was written², it is hard to be certain whether Poe was presenting it with a straight face. After all, we would expect there to be convincing details in a hoax. As Poe would explain, in the appendix added to "Hans Phaall" (1835) when the work was republished in 1839³, the success of a hoax depends on "verisimilitude [...] in the application of scientific principles" (1983: 1001). Or, as Christopher Norris has observed (2000: 94), a hoax needs to be laced with "just enough" generally-accepted science for readers to discount any possibility of irony on the author's part. In the present instance, it could be argued, we have just enough Laplace, Newton and other luminaries to fool the unwary—and if there is not enough to demonstrate scientific genius, demonstrating that was never Poe's intention. (The same ambiguity can be seen in Poe's marginal revisions to copies of the printed text: it is clear that he thought he could improve his argument, but it is far from clear why he wanted to do so).

A similar caution might also be thought appropriate when faced with Poe's insistence that the work was "*not [...] literary* at all"—and his rather melodramatically telling his mother-in-law that he had no desire to live since he had done with *Eureka* (Ostrom, 1948: 2, 359, 452). This is not just because Poe "had fallen into a routine of easy lies and half truths since at least his adolescence" (Silverman, 1991: 146); even if there were no such grounds for suspicion, so that we could generally take Poe at his word, we might still suspect his claims were it the case that *Eureka* was a hoax. Poe would have learned from the effect of premature disclosure—as when he admitted writing a report of the crossing of the Atlantic by balloon (Goodman, 2008: 244)—, that too much honesty in such cases could be a mistake if one wished for financial success, and in 1848 Poe certainly did. As with Poe's science, although one might credit his protestations of seriousness, one does not have to do so.

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1 | The first suggestion that *Eureka* was a hoax came from Epes Sargent, who suggested in a review for the *Boston Transcript* that 'The mocking smile of the hoaxter is seen behind [the author's] grave mask' (Walker, 1986: 292, 281; cf. Beaver, 1976).

2 | Poe attempted to have his tales "conform to current scientific ideas, as he understood them" (Mabbott, 2000: 94); for nineteenth-century criticism of Bacon (Poe's controlling concern) (Hesse, 1964: 149).

3 | The story tells how a burgher of Rotterdam (Hans Phaall) constructs a balloon and sails to the moon in order to escape his creditors.

1. Contexts

One way to escape uncertainty as to the script Poe was following (cosmological lecture or hoax), is to read *Eureka* alongside other works of his that treat similar themes⁴—most particularly the 1844 tale of mesmerism, “Mesmeric Revelation”—. This tale has frequently been thought of as a rehearsal for the later work, in that (as Matthew A. Taylor notes) both make “‘our’ death—the death of the individual, the death of the human—a precondition of full transcendence” (Taylor, 2007: 204; cf. O’Donnell, 1962: 87; Falk, 1969: 546), and the seriousness (or lack of it) in one would necessarily affect a reading of the other.

1.1. Mesmerism

Poe published three tales of mesmerism in 1844-45: “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”, “Mesmeric Revelation”, and most famously “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”; tales which offer increasingly adventurous claims for the power of mesmerism to cross the borderline between life and death. In the first, Templeton’s mesmeric control of Bedloe leads the latter—in a mesmeric trance—to seem to die in just the same way that Templeton’s friend Oldeb had died in Benares fifty years before; in the second, the dialogue between the narrator and Vankirk climaxes with the latter’s death; and in the third, P.’s mesmeric control extends the physical life of Valdemar. The subject’s imaginative (mesmeric) experience of another’s death becomes the subject’s understanding of his own death, and then the experimenter’s power to inhibit death itself. However, this increasing seriousness on the part of Poe’s magnetizers should not be seen as the elaboration (or development) of a consistent philosophy, but something less intentional—as explorations of the nova suggested by his reading.

In 1844 Poe had read Chauncy Hare Townshend’s *Facts of Mesmerism* with interest, and seen story ideas in what it reported. For authors like Townshend, it was a demonstrated fact that that “the magnetizer may act upon [the one magnetized] at a distance”, and a matter of concern that doing so may “give rise to mischievous results” (Townshend, 1840: 365; cf. Deleuze, 1884: 208; Lind, 1947: 1082)—and as Lind pointed out some sixty years ago this was the situation of “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”. Also in Townshend, and indeed in most contemporary texts on mesmerism, was the discovery, first made by the Marquis de Puységur, that those mesmerized could converse with others and speak with authority on subjects on which when awake they thought themselves ignorant⁵. This is what we find in “Mesmeric Revelation”—along with a working out of the suggestion that mesmerism could hasten death in cases of tuberculosis.

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4 | Levine and Levine note this in their introduction to their edition of *Eureka* (2004).

5 | See Walmsley, 1967: 144; Laurens, 2008. Contemporary interest is shown by the 1844 controversy aroused by Harriet Martineau’s “Letters on Mesmerism” in the *Athenaeum*, in which she claimed that her maid, Jane Arrowsmith, was clairvoyant (Pichanick, 1980: 129-37).

—“In pulmonary phthisis in the last stages”, J. F. Deleuze had reflected, rather than effecting a cure, “it is [...] to be feared that [...] it accelerates the final crisis” (1884:183, 333). And as for “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”: not only does it draw on reports of the effect of galvanic action on a corpse⁶, it exploits contemporary speculation “that mesmerism could redraw the line between life and death” (Winter, 1998: 121). Justinus Kerner had told, in his *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829; an English translation was published in the summer of 1845) of a woman’s life being unnaturally preserved by mesmerism (Lind, 1947: 1092; Taves, 1999: 393-94, n60), and a similar story was being told by Andrew Jackson Davis at the time (Smith, 1845: 25). Poe added little to these accounts except literary control.

The unsystematic nature of Poe’s borrowings in these stories should not surprise. He was, after all, a working journalist. (In 1844 he was living hand to mouth in New York). “In my ‘Valdemar Case’”, he would protest, somewhat disingenuously, “[...] I had not the slightest idea that any person should credit it as anything more than a ‘magazine-paper’” (Ostrom, 1948: 2-433), and although we might doubt that he did not suspect that the tale would be taken seriously by readers, there are no reasons to believe that Poe himself ever thought of it as anything more than a clever piece of magazine fiction.⁷ The same should be said for the other tales, clever enough as far as they went, but not going very far; and that being the case we might wonder why *Eureka* should be thought any different. Certainly we should not put much trust in the similarities between it and “Mesmeric Revelation” (if the one is a *jeu d’esprit*, or even a hoax, why not the other?)—and, besides, the differences between the works are more significant than the similarities. In “Mesmeric Revelation” individual personality survives death, in *Eureka* it does not; and there is no reason to think that Poe was especially committed to one scenario rather than the other, or, for that matter, that he believed the suggestion in “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” (1841) that, though consciousness does survive death, it just consists of an awareness of time and place.

1.2. The Luminiferous Ether

No less telling as a guide to the reading of *Eureka* is Poe’s unconcern for consistency concerning the interstellar ether. Some inconsistency might have been expected, given the way the word was used in contemporary science. Those working on the wave theory of light had long taken it for granted that there was a medium for the propagation of light waves, and that this medium—the luminiferous (“light carrying”) ether—pervaded the universe. In the words of the scientific popularizer Thomas Thomson, the ether was “a peculiar matter, extremely subtile, capable of penetrating the

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6 | An experimental subject might “make violent gesticulations with his hands, move his head, roll his eyes, and chatter his teeth”, and not surprisingly—as in Poe’s tale—those unfamiliar with the phenomena had been known to run from the scene or faint away (Dods, 1847: 23-24; Poe, 1983: 840).

7 | Poe had described “Hans Phaar” in similarly ambiguous terms, as both a “hoax” and a “jeu d’esprit” that could hardly fool its readers given its tone.

densest bodies, astonishingly elastic, and the cause of heat, light, magnetism, electricity, and even of gravitation" (Thomson, 1830: 4).

However, there was no general agreement as what the ether was, and, indeed, by the mid nineteenth-century the failure to detect any effect of an ether upon planetary motion had led many to question its existence. Thomas William Webb's explanation that the existence of the ether was "only assumed for the sake of the theory" and it therefore "need not be further noticed", though only offered in 1883 (5n; cf. Campbell and Garnett, 1882: 394), expressed reservations that could easily have been given earlier. Even by mid-century "ether" functioned as a portmanteau word—a term that could be given any meaning that a theory required.

What might not have been expected, however, is the degree of inconsistency we find in Poe. In "Mesmeric Revelation," Vankirk announces that "God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter". And: "The ultimate or unparticled matter not only permeates all things but impels all things—and thus is all things within itself. This matter is God" (Poe, 1983: 722, 720). We should not see this as an idea that Poe took seriously. Despite the drama inherent in Vankirk's promulgating these ideas in a mesmeric trance, they offered little more than the theological commonplace of the day. In mid-century America it was commonly accepted that, in Thomas Dick's words, God "pervades, actuates, and supports the whole frame of universal nature" (1846, 1: 65), and while some would identify God's omnipresence with that of the ether⁸, others, foreshadowing Poe's terminology, would associate it with that of electricity (or see the ether as electricity). "I am fully sensible", wrote one advocate of mesmerism, "that electricity is a fluid most inconceivably subtle, purified, and fine. [...] It is almost unparticled matter [...]" (Dods, 1853: 107; cf. Milutis, 2006: xi). Borrowing this talk of "unparticled matter" allowed Poe to make the ideas of "Mesmeric Revelation" sound up to date, yet his doing so was hardly a sign that he took them seriously. Two months earlier, in "The Power of Words" (1845), the ether had been defined differently—as a substance which "pervades, and alone pervades all space" and is the "medium of creation" (Poe, 1983: 1825)⁹, and in *Eureka* it would be defined differently yet again¹⁰. In the later work Poe introduces the ether in order to play with the idea that "substance" is only another name of God, or "God" another name of "substance". Once again the idea is interesting. A plenist view of the universe had encouraged a Christian materialism for over two centuries¹¹. But it can hardly be thought to be any more an expression of Poe's beliefs than what we find in the earlier tales.

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8 | God's influence, Edward Hitchcock would argue in 1851, is "transmitted by means of the luminiferous ether to the limits of the universe" (1854: 433). Similar arguments could be found across the religious spectrum from Methodism to Mormonism: see, for example, Porterfield, 2005: 164; Whittaker, 1991: 199; and for general studies, Cantor, 1981; Mills, 2006: 67-93.

9 | If God really spoke—or thought—the universe into being at beginning of time, then there had to be a medium for the transmission of his words; and if there was such a medium, divine creativity might have a parallel in human self-expression. In Bruce Mills' summary (2006: 71), "the thoughts of God permeate and impel all things, and similarly human words and thoughts pulse outward from the self".

10 | I thus disagree with those who argue for *Eureka*'s thematic, aesthetic, and theoretical consistency with the rest of Poe's work: for this see, for example, Jacobs, 1969.

11 | Equally unoriginal was the idea that nebular condensation could explain the origin of the universe. "Space and duration exist of necessity, and that space was eternally filled with primal matter which I contend is electricity", John Bovee Dods explained. Everything in the universe has condensed from electricity, "not instantly but gradually", he added (1847: 36, 40). Mary Somerville, introducing Laplace's ideas to an English-speaking public, had been less dogmatic. It was generally granted, she noted, that there is "a self-luminous, phosphorescent material substance, in a highly dilated or gaseous state," a substance that subsided "by the mutual gravitation of its particles" into stars and galaxies, but better

2. Targets

Why, then, was Poe writing? If he was not coming before his public as a scientist, or as a popularizer of science (his ideas change too much for us to suppose that he was), then presumably we should take him seriously when he claimed to be offering *Eureka* as a poem—and recognize that, as Sir Phillip Sidney (and Aristotle) had warned, poetry is unconcerned with the actual. We should, I suggest, read Poe's cosmological poem as a kind of “lie” with which he intended to capture “the attention (and ideally the imagination) of the public” (Boese, 2002: 2; Poe, 1983: 608)—either for poetic effect, or (what is more likely given its richness of scientific detail) as a hoax.

We could, of course, talk of irony rather than deception. Almost everything that Poe wrote was (as G. R. Thomson noted) “qualified by, indeed controlled by, a prevailing duplicity or irony in which the artist presents us with slyly insinuated mockery of both ourselves as readers and himself as writer”, and such a stance would explain much of *Eureka*, without requiring us to see it as an attempt to deceive (1973: 9; cf. Dayan, 1987: 23; Jar'ab, 2003). Yet Poe was a *hoaxter*: one who took pleasure in mocking the public as “believers in every thing Odd”, whose “Credulity:—let us call it Insanity at once”, marks them as “ignorant people” (“Fifty Suggestions”, 1849, no. 28, in Poe, 1984: 1303). Burton R. Pollin charitably suggested that underlying Poe's hoaxes was “the sheer exuberant humour of his inventiveness” (1970: 174), but, given Poe's words, Constance Rourke's earlier observation that Poe's purpose in the hoaxes “was to render his readers absurd, to reduce them to an involuntary imbecility” seems more persuasive (1959: 181-84; cf. Walsh, 2006: 116; Elmor, 1995: 187).

2.1. Genre Expectations

What is significant in the present context is that Poe's hoaxes used existing genres in order to exploit readers' expectations (Burgoyne, 2001). Poe's hoaxing use of the journalistic scoop is well-known. “*The Atlantic has been actually crossed in a Balloon!*” he had announced in breathless journalese in an extra to the New York *Sun* of April 13, 1844, “and this too without difficulty—without any great apparent danger—with thorough control of the machine—and in the inconceivably brief period of seventy-five hours from shore to shore” (Poe, 1983: 743; Goodman, 2008: 238-45). His doing so, we should notice, did not just require his readers to be uninformed about contemporary technology (and therefore suppose that the Atlantic could be crossed by balloon)¹²; it also relied on their presuming that newspapers could be trusted. They should have known better. There was no need to recall the Moon hoax of a decade before to

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telescopes were needed for the nebular thesis to be considered certain (1831: lxvi). Nevertheless, seventeen years after the publication of *Eureka*, Jules Verne uses the idea of nebular condensation in his *De la Terre à la Lune* (1978: 74-75). Poe's version of this scenario offered little suggesting that he wrote out of a sense of discovery or personal conviction.

12 | The optimism was premature: the first crossing of the Atlantic by airship would not be until 1919.

recognize that not everything that made the first page was to be believed. The American popular press was driven by sensational reporting and an “unlimited promotion of merchandise” (Lehuu, 2000: 37), and it is this appetite for sensation—rather than scientific ignorance—that made the hoax possible—Harriet Martineau had noted a decade before that, when it came to general education, Americans were “travelling far faster than any other people beyond the reach of [a hoax’s] deception” (1838: 3-24).

Poe’s piece for the *Sun* was not his only exploitation of genre to make his readers feel ridiculous. As we have seen, just a few months after publishing the balloon hoax, he would offer his readers a somnambulist’s oracle. Conservative students of mesmerism warned that “God has revealed what it behoves us to know”—“if we make [somnambulists] reason about mysteries, their imagination will be exalted, and they will give in to all sorts of errors” (Deleuze, 1884: 249). As long as the “soul is still attached to the body”, the German Universalist Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling wrote, “the connection [between the soul and the spiritual world] is not perfect” (“The Nature of Man”, *The Magnet*, 1, December 1842, 158-59, qtd. Taves, 1999: 140n61). Nevertheless, people hoped that truth could come from those who were sleepwakers, and with deliberate irony Poe pretends to offer a mesmeric revelation, yet gives us a text that reveals nothing.

Again: four years before fooling the world with Vankirk’s revelation, Poe had shown his willingness to subvert reader expectations with stories like “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), in which he leads us to believe that the tale will offer a local colour walk through the city –Whitman would do exactly this with his 1842 “Life in a New York Market” (Rubin and Brown, 1950: 20-22)–, and then disabuse us. As Walter Benjamin noted with quiet understatement, “The Man of the Crowd is no *flâneur*” (1968: 174). And then there is *Eureka*, where Poe takes on and mocks the pretensions of the cosmological lecture (The work, it will be remembered, had first been presented as a lecture titled “On The Cosmography of the Universe”, in New York on February 3, 1848)¹³.

2.2. John Bovee Dods

Mid-century Americans had a great appetite for popular cosmology, but of all the lectures I might cite as possible targets I would point to those of John Bovee Dods. Although there is no evidence linking the two men, Dods can easily serve as the kind of “diddler” Poe enjoyed exposing. For six consecutive evenings in 1843, Dods had held the attention of an audience over two thousand Bostonians with his explanation of the cosmos, and according to contemporary reports, “multitudes” were turned away. Not everyone was impressed,

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13 | The use of cosmogony for fraudulent purposes was a theme of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766).

however. The *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* felt that their city was “disgraced” by Dods’ showmanship (Whorton, 2004: 112); and I suggest that Poe agreed. The public’s gullibility faced with Dods’ rhetoric would, I suggest, have made the cosmological lecture a tempting target for Poe’s irony.

Dods was not the only person taking to the lecture circuit to explain his intuitions about the universe. Poe was certainly aware of the success of Andrew Jackson Davis (the “Ploughkeepsie Seer”), whose lectures, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind* (1847), had been dictated in a trance state (Tatar, 1978: 194). Poe was interested enough in Davis to call on him in January 1846 (Davis, 1871: 317), and would no doubt have found him an easy target. “IN THE BEGINNING [Davis had explained] the Univercoelum was one boundless, undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of LIQUID FIRE! [...] It was without parts; for it was a Whole. Particles did not exist; but the Whole was as one Particle” (1852: 121). It could be that *Eureka* was written to ridicule such pretensions; and certainly, intentionally or not, Poe outdid them with his intuitions (“altogether irresistible, although inexpressible”), “that what God originally created—that that Matter which, by dint of His Volition, He first made from His Spirit, or from Nihility, could have been nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of—what?—of Simplicity” (Levine and Levine, 2004: 22; cf. 102-03). Nevertheless, Dods is the more obvious target for Poe’s cosmological irony¹⁴. There are similar rhetorical flights; there is belief (adopted in *Eureka*) that electricity—or something like it—is the spiritual principle of the universe (Levine and Levine, 2004: 27; Dods, 1847: 78). And most importantly, although matching the former clergyman for poetry, Poe demolishes the view of man we find in his lectures. Rather than affirming human immortality, as Dods had done, Poe emphasized human transience—its meaningless in the divine plot.

Dods was conservative in his view of the hereafter. “[W]hen we lie down upon the bed of death, and the embers of life feebly glimmer in the socket of existence,” he explained, “then the Gospel of Christ points us to brighter scenes—scenes beyond the tomb.”

We could look forward to a general resurrection when God’s “dread voice shall speak with a living energy, that the very heavens shall hear, and the dead shall rise to die no more, and turn their eyes from the dark, ruinable tomb on the scenes of eternity!” (Dods, 1847: 64, 76). Poe’s focus was different. Ignoring the individual, he focussed on the race, and anticipated a future when “Man [...] ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah” (Levine and Levine, 2004: 106). Of course,

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14 | Possibly Poe was aware that Dods had sold three thousand copies of his lectures within a month.

to recognize oneself as Jehovah is to cease to recognize oneself as an individual (as E. A. Poe, for example). Challenging the optimism and anthropocentrism of his contemporaries in this way, Poe strips the transcendent of meaning (Taylor, 2007: 204).

Poe's action here was, I suggest, fully deliberate. Some, like Patrick F. Quinn, have seen *Eureka* as an "unintentional poem of death" (1963: 4-7), but I would see its focus on annihilation as in no way accidental and read it as a deliberately provocative work. The work's view of humanity no doubt seemed a cruel joke to those who hoped to find their dignity and significance reaffirmed by the lecture's rhetoric, as it was in those of Dods and Davis; but that is just part of Poe's humour. The ultimate joke was on those who believed such speculations could even be trusted in an age of increasing disciplinary specialization; that the answers to questions about the origins of the universe could come from a clairvoyant, a former Universalist clergyman, or a journalist, even if we suppose them to be familiar with current scientific thinking. Popular science, it has been suggested, was a response to the increasingly arcane nature of nineteenth-century scientific thought (Daniels, 1968: 40-41); with rare exceptions popularizers were not innovators¹⁵. That being the case, *Eureka*'s dedication to Humboldt has importance as a reminder of the hubris involved in a layman's offering such a work. Although an account of existing knowledge could be given by a Humboldt (someone whose genius was generally recognized in nineteenth-century America), a new theory of the universe was not to be found in the efforts of fudges competing for the dollars of the American public. That being the case, although there is no reason to doubt that Poe followed accounts of scientific discovery with interest, *Eureka* should be read as hoax rather than a serious essay in cosmology. Poe's genius was engaged in demonstrating that cosmological lectures, such as those of Dods, were nothing but fudge.

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15 | In *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne would ridicule an amateur's capacity to intuitively interpret astronomical phenomena.

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#01

NI GENI NI FARSANT: EDGAR ALLAN POE

|

EUREKA

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Resum || *Eureka* (1848) ha estat considerat superficialment com una versió expandida d'una conferència sobre cosmologia que Poe va donar aquell mateix any. Tot i així, la serietat d'aquest text com a treball científic hauria d'ésser qüestionada. El tractament d'alguns temes, que es poden trobar a d'altres escrits de Poe, mostra que l'autor no cerca d'ésser consistent. Aleshores, el text no sembla el resultat d'un interès seriós per l'argumentació científica sinó que hauria de ser considerat un engany: un intent de revelar la credulitat dels lectors. Els enganys de Poe es basen en el fet que el reconeixement de les convencions genèriques impliquen confiança, i *Eureka* aprofita i ridiculitza aquesta confiança publica en conferenciants cosmològics com John Bovee Dods.

Paraules clau || Poe | *Eureka* | Éter | Mermerisme | Engany.

Abstract || *Eureka* (1848) has been taken at face value as an expanded version of a lecture on cosmology that Poe gave earlier the same year. However, its seriousness as a work of science should be questioned. Its treatment of themes found in other works by Poe shows the author's unconcern for consistency, and the text unlikely to have resulted from a serious engagement with scientific argument. Instead it should be approached as a hoax: an attempt to reveal the gullibility of its readers. Poe's hoaxes relied for their effect on the trust created in readers by their recognition of generic conventions, and *Eureka* exploited and ridiculed public trust in cosmological lecturers such as John Bovee Dods.

Keywords || Poe | *Eureka* | Ether | Mesmerism | Hoax.

0. Introducció

L'*Eureka* d'Edgar Allan Poe (publicat el 1848) ha estat llegit com un treball de cosmologia seriós i com una broma¹; com un assaig mostra de “virtuosity in the use of logic, [...] philosophical profundity, [and] currency in scientific theory” (Schaeffer, 1971: 353), i com un treball on la ciència i la filosofia son dolentes, i res no és profund (Holman, 1972). Aquestes opinions semblen irreconciliables –com Harold Fromm irònicament assenyala (recuperant una referència anterior), “One man’s genius is another’s fudge” (1989: 201)– i per fer les coses encara pitjor, inclús si es dóna per bo que la anterior reacció sigui una mica extrema, ja que gran part de la ciència en aquell treball era confiable pel temps en què es va escriure², és difícil de dir si Poe el va presentar de forma seriosa. Després de tot, esperaríem que hi hagués detalls convincents en una presa de pèl. Tal i com Poe explicaria a l’apèndix afegit a “Hans Phaall” (1835) quan el treball es va tornar a publicar el 1839³, l’èxit d’una broma depèn de la “verisimilitude [...] in the application of scientific principles” (1983: 1001). O, com Christopher Norris ha observat (2000: 94), una broma necesita estar embolicada amb “just la suficient” ciència comunament acceptada per què els lectors puguin deixar de banda qualsevol possibilitat de ironia per part de l’autor. En el cas present, es podria argumentar, tenim just suficient Laplace, Newton i d’altres llumeneres per rifar-se a l’inaut –i si no és suficient per demostrar geni científic, de fet aixó tampoc no era la intenció de Poe–. (La mateixa ambigüïtat es pot veure a les notes marginals de còpies del text imprés: clarament, ell pensava que podria millorar el seu argument, però no està gens clar perquè volia fer això).

Una precaució semblant s’hauria de prendre davant de la insistència de Poe en que el treball “no era literari en absolut” –i amb la seva manera bastant melodramàtica de dir-li a la seva sogra que no desitjava viure més d’encà que havia escrit *Eureka* (Ostrom, 1948: 2, 359, 452). Aixó no és només pel fet que Poe “had fallen into a routine of easy lies and half truths since at least his adolescence” (Silverman, 1991: 146); fins i tot si no hi hagués motiu per sospitar, de manera que generalment ens poguéssim prendre Poe de forma seriosa, encara no podríem estar segurs de que *Eureka* no fos una presa de pèl. Poe hauria après de l’efecte d’una experiència anterior –com quan va reconèixer haver escrit un informe de una travessia de l’Atlàntic en globus (Goodman, 2008: 244)–, que un excés d’honestitat en aquests casos pot ser un error si un va darrera de l’èxit financer, i el 1848 Poe realment hi anava. I pel que fa a la ciència d’en Poe, encara que hom podria donar crèdit a les seves pretensions de serietat, no és convenient.

NOTES

1 | El primer que va suggerir que *Eureka* era una broma va ser Epes Sargent, qui va dir en una ressenya al Boston Transcript que ‘The mocking smile of the hoaxter is seen behind [the author’s] grave mask’ (Walker, 1986: 292, 281; cf. Beaver, 1976).

2 | Poe va probar de tenir les seves històries “conform to current scientific ideas, as he understood them” (Mabbott, 2000: 94); per una crítica de Bacon del segle XIX (la preocupació de control de Poe) veure Hesse, 1964: 149.

3 | La història narra com un burgués de Ròterdam (Hans Phaall) construeix un globus i vola fins la lluna per tal d’escapar del seus acreedors.

1. Contextes

Una forma de fugir de la incertesa de quin guió estava seguint Poe (lectura cosmològica o broma), és comparar-lo amb altres treballs seus que tractin temes similars⁴ –en concret el relat de 1844 “Mesmeric revelation”–. Aquest conte s’ha interpretat habitualment com un assaig per un treball posterior, en el fet que –com Matthew A. Taylor senyala– tots dos fan “our’ death –the death of the individual, the death of the human– a precondition of full transcendence” (Taylor, 2007: 204; cf. O’Donnell, 1962: 87; Falk, 1969: 546), i la serietat (o l’absència d’aquesta) en un necessàriament ha d’afectar una lectura de l’altre.

1.1. Hipnotisme

Poe va publicar tres contes d’hipnotisme el 1844-45: “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”, “Mesmeric Revelation”, i el més famós “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”; contes que ofereixen al·legats cada vegada més aventurats del poder de l’hipnotisme per creuar la frontera entre la vida i la mort. Al primer, el control hipnòtic de Templeton sobre Bedloe porta aquest –en trànsit hipnòtic– a creure’s que mor d’exactament la mateixa manera que l’amic de Templeton, Oldeb, havia mort cinquanta anys abans; en el segon, el diàleg entre el narrador i Vankirk arriba al seu punt àlgid quan aquest mor; i en el tercer, el control hipnòtic de P prolonga la vida física d’en Valdemar. La experiència imaginada (hipnòtica) que sofreix el subjecte de la mort d’un altre, es torna la comprensió de la seva propia mort, i llavors el poder de l’experimentador d’inhibir la mort mateixa. No obstant això, la serietat creixent per part dels hipnotitzadors de Poe no hauria de ser vist com una elaboració (o desenvolupament) d’una filosofia consistent, sinó alguna cosa amb menys intenció –com les exploracions de la nova sugerien per la seva lectura–.

El 1844 Poe havia llegit amb interès *Facts of Mesmerism*, de Chauncy Hare Townshend, i n’havia tret idees per històries. Per autors com Townshend era un fet demostrat que “the magnetizer may act upon [the one magnetized] at a distance”, i una preocupació que en fer això “give rise to mischievous results” (Townshend, 1840: 365; cf. Deleuze, 1884: 208; Lind, 1947: 1082) –i com Lind va senyalar fa uns seixanta anys, aquesta era la situació en “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”–. També en Townshend, i certament en la majoria de textos sobre hipnotisme, estava el descobriment, fet per primer cop pel Marquís de Puységur, que aquells hipnotitzats podien conversar amb altres i xerrar amb autoritat de temes dels quals durant la vigília es creien ignorant⁵. Això és el que ens trobem a “Mesmeric Revelation” –al mateix temps que amb el suggeriment de que l’hipnotisme pot accelerar la mort en casos de tuberculosi–.

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4 | Levine i Levine assenyalen això en la seva introducció a *Eureka* (2004).

5 | Vegis Walmesley, 1967: 144; Laurens, 2008. L’interés contemporani es mostra en la controversia de 1844 causada per les “Cartes d’Hipnotisme” de Harriet Martineau a l’Athenaeum, a on proclamava que la seva doncella era clarivident.(Pichanick, 1980: 129-37).

–“In pulmonary phthisis in the last stages”, J. F. Deleuze havia deduït, més que guarir, “it is [...] to be feared that [...] it accelerates the final crisis” (1884:183, 333)–. I pel que fa a “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”: no només fa servir informes sobre l’efecte de l’acció galvànica en un cadàver⁶, sinó que explota la especulació contemporània “that mesmerism could redraw the line between life and death” (Winter, 1998: 121). Justinus Kerner havia contat, en el seu *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829; una traducció anglesa es publicà el 1845) el cas d’una dona la vida de la qual havia estat artificialment preservada mitjançant l’hipnotisme (Lind, 1947: 1092; Taves, 1999: 393-94, n60), i Andrew Jackson Davis contava una història similar a la mateixa època (Smith, 1845: 25). Poe va afegir poc més que control literari en aquestes històries.

La natura aleatòria dels préstecs de Poe en aquestes històries no hauria de sorprendre. Ell era, després de tot, un periodista. “In my ‘Valdemar Case’”, protestaria, “[...] I had not the slightest idea that any person should credit it as anything more than a ‘magazine-paper’” (Ostrom, 1948: 2-433), i encara que podríem dubtar que no sospites que el conte es podria prendre seriosament, no hi ha raons per creure que Poe el considerés mai res més que una enginyosa peça de revista de ficció⁷. El mateix s’hauria de dir d’altres relats, enginyosos fins a on arribaven, que no era massa lluny; i essent aquest el cas, ens podríem demanar per què *Eureka* hauria de ser considerat diferent. És cert que no hauríem de confiar massa en les semblances entre aquest i “Mesmeric Revelation” (si un és un *jeu d’esprit*, o inclús una broma, per qué no l’altre?) –i, a més a més, les diferències entre ells son més significatives que no pas les semblances–. A “Mesmeric Revelation”, la personalitat individual sobreviu a la mort, a *Eureka*, no; i no hi ha raó per creure que Poe estigués especialment compromés amb un escenari més que amb l’altre, o, ja que hi sóm, que creia la afirmació en “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” (1841) de que, tot i que la consciència sobreviu a la mort, consisteix només en una consciència de temps i lloc.

1.2. L’èter luminífer

No menys indicativa com a guia de lectura per *Eureka* és la despreocupació de Poe per l’ús coherent del concepte d’èter interestelar. Es podria esperar alguna incoherència donada la manera en que la paraula es feia servir dins la ciència contemporània. Aquells que treballaben en la teoria de les ones de llum havien donat per fet que feia temps que existia un mitjà per la propagació de aquestes ones, i que aquest mitjà –l’èter luminífer (“portador de llum”)– omplia l’univers. En paraules del divulgador científic Thomas Thomson, l’èter era “a peculiar matter, extremely subtle, capable of penetrating the

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6 | Un subjecte experimental podia “make violent gesticulations with his hands, move his head, roll his eyes, and chatter his teeth”, i no de forma sorprenent –com en el relat de Poe– es sabia que aquells no acostumats al fenòmen fugien corrent o es desmaien (Dods, 1847: 23-24; Poe, 1983: 840).

7 | Poe s’havia referit a “Hans Phaal” en termes igualment ambigüs, com una broma i un “jeu d’esprit” que difícilment enganyaria els lectors donat el seu to.

densest bodies, astonishingly elastic, and the cause of heat, light, magnetism, electricity, and even of gravitation" (Thomson, 1830: 4).

No obstant això, no hi havia cap consens general sobre què era l'èter i, de fet, a mitjan del segle XIX el fracàs en detectar alguna mena d'efecte de l'èter sobre el moviment planetari havia arribat a qüestionar la seva existència. L'explicació de Thomas William Webb de que l'existència de l'èter era "only assumed for the sake of the theory" i per tant "need not be further noticed", encara que no va ser exposada fins el 1883 (5n; cf. Campbell and Garnett, 1882: 394), expresava reserves que perfectament podrien haver sorgit abans. Fins i tot a la meitat del segle "èter" servia com un terme jòquer per qualsevol teoria.

Allò que no podria ser esperat és el grau d'incoherència que trobem en Poe. A "Mesmeric Revelation", Vankirk anuncia que "God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter". I: "The ultimate or unparticled matter not only permeates all things but impels all things –and thus is all things within itself. This matter is God" (Poe, 1983: 722, 720). No hauríem de prendre això com una idea que Poe s'agafés seriosament. Tot i el drama inherent a les idees proclamades per Vankirk durant el trànsit hipnòtic, aquestes no ofereixen res més que la visió teològica del moment. A l'Amèrica de mitjan de segle era comú acceptar que, en paraules de Thomas Dick, Deu "pervades, actuates, and supports the whole frame of universal nature" (1846, 1: 65), i mentre que alguns identificarien la omnipresència divina amb la de l'èter⁸, d'altres, presagiant la terminologia de Poe, ho farien amb la de la electricitat (o veurien l'èter com electricitat). "I am fully sensible", va escriure un defensor de l'hipnotisme "that electricity is a fluid most inconceivably subtle, purified, and fine. [...] It is almost unparticled matter [...]" (Dods, 1853: 107; cf. Milutis, 2006: xi). Agafar en préstec aquest discurs va permetre a Poe que les idees de "Mesmeric Revelation" sonesin posades al dia, i, no obstant això, difícilment podem afirmar que sigui una evidència de que se les prengués seriosament. Dos mesos abans, a "The power of words" (1845), l'èter havia estat definit de forma diferent –com una substància que "pervades, and alone pervades all space" i el "medium of creation" (Poe, 1983: 1825)⁹, i a *Eureka* ho definiria encara d'una altra manera diferent¹⁰. Al darrer treball, Poe introduceix l'èter amb la finalitat de jugar amb la idea de que "substància" és només un altre nom de Déu, o "Déu" un nom alternatiu de "substància". Una vegada més, la idea és interessant. Una visió plenària de l'univers havia estimulat un materialisme cristian durant dos segles¹¹. Però difícilment es pot considerar una expressió de les creences de res més que aquelles que trobem als seus primers relats.

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8 | La influència de Deu, argumentaria Edward Hitchcock al 1851, és "transmitted by means of the luminiferous ether to the limits of the universe" (1854: 433). Arguments similars es podien trobar al llarg de tot l'espectre religiós des d'el metodisme al mormonisme; vegis Porterfield, 2005: 164; Whittaker, 1991: 199; Cantor, 1981; Mills, 2006: 67-93.

9 | Si Deu realment va crear de paraula –o pensament– l'univers al principi dels temps, llavors debia haver un mitjà per la transmissió de les Seves paraules; i si allò era així, la creació divina podria tenir l'equivalent en la auto expressió humana. Al resum de Bruce Mill(2006: 71), "the thoughts of God permeate and impel all things, and similarly human words and thoughts pulse outward from the self".

10 | No estic per tant d'acord amb aquells que arguem a favor de la coherència temàtica, estètica i teòrica d'*Eureka* amb la resta del treball de Poe: per exemple, Jacobs, 1969.

11 | Igualment poc original era la idea que la condensació nebulosa podia explicar l'origen de l'univers. "Space and duration exist of necessity, and that space was eternally filled with primal matter which I contend is electricity", explicava John Bovee Dods. Tot a l'univers s'havia condensat des de l'electricitat, "not instantly but gradually", afegia (1847: 36, 40). Mary Somerville, introduint les idees de Laplace a un públic anglòfon, havia estat menys dogmàtica. S'acceptava de forma general, senyalava, que hi havia "a self-luminous, phosphorescent material substance, in a highly dilated or gaseous state," una substància que es tornava "by the mutual gravitation of its particles" en

2. Objectius

Per qué, doncs, escrivia Poe? Si no s'estava presentant davant del seu públic ni com un científic, ni com un divulgador de la ciència (les seves idees canviaven massa per suposar que ho era), llavors presumiblement ens l'hauríem de creure quan diu que oferia *Eureka* com un poema –i reconèixer que, com Sir Philip Sidney (i Aristòtil) havia avisat, la poesia poc té a veure amb el real. Suggereixo que hauríem de llegir el poema cosmològic de Poe com una mena de “mentida” amb la qual va provar de capturar “the attention (and ideally the imagination) of the public” (Boese, 2002: 2; Poe, 1983: 608) –o bé per l'efecte poètic, o bé (allò que és més probable donada la riquesa de detall científic) com una broma.

Per descomptat, podríem parlar d'ironia abans que d'engany. Quasi tot el que Poe va escriure va ser (com senyalava G. R. Thomson) “qualified by, indeed controlled by, a prevailing duplicity or irony in which the artist presents us with slyly insinuated mockery of both ourselves as readers and himself as writer”, i aquesta actitud explicaria molt d'*Eureka*, sense exigir-nos veure-ho com un intent d'engany (1973: 9; cf. Dayan, 1987: 23; Jar'ab, 2003). Tot i així, Poe era un *bromista*: un d'aquells que gaudia tot burlant-se del públic com “believers in every thing Odd”, dels quals la “Credulity: –let us call it Insanity at once”, els marcava com “ignorant people” –“Fifty Suggestions” (1849), no. 28, in Poe, 1984: 1303–. Burton R. Pollin suggeria certament que subratllar les bromes de Poe era “the sheer exuberant humour of his inventiveness” (1970: 174), però donades les paraules de Poe, la anterior observació de Constance Rourke de que el propòsit de Poe en aquestes bromes “was to render his readers absurd, to reduce them to an involuntary imbecility” sembla més convincent (1959: 181-84; cf. Walsh, 2006: 116; Elmor, 1995: 187).

2.1. Expectatives de gènere

Allò que és significatiu en el context present és que les bromes de Poe feien servir géneres existents amb la finalitat d'explotar les expectatives dels lectors (Burgoyne, 2001). És ben conegut l'ús còmic que Poe feia de la primícia periodística. “The Atlantic has been actually crossed in a Balloon!” va ser anunciat profusament, i en argot periòdistic, com a extra del New York Sun del 13 d'Abril del 1844, “and this too without difficulty –without any great apparent danger– with thorough control of the machine –and in the inconceivably brief period of seventy-five hours from shore to shore” (Poe, 1983: 743; Goodman, 2008: 238-45). Hauríem de tenir en compte que, amb això, Poe no només requeria que els seus lectors estiguessin desinformats sobre la tecnologia contemporània (i per tant, admetre que l'Atlàntic podia esser creuat en globus)¹²; sinó

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estels i galaxies, pero feian falta millors telescopis per poder confirmar la tesi nebular (1831: lxvi). Tot i així, deset anys després de la publicació d'*Eureka*, Jules Verne fa servir la idea al seu *De la Terre à la Lune* (1978: 74-75). La versió de Poe d'aquest escenari no far pensar que escrivís mogut per convicció personal.

12 | L'optimisme era prematur: la primera vegada en que es creuva l'Atlàntic en una nau aerea no seria fins el 1919.

que també depenia de la seva predisposició a creure allò anunciat als diaris. Ho haurien d'haver sabut. No hi havia necessitat de rememorar la broma de la lluna d'una década abans per reconeixer que no tot allò que sortia a primera plana es podia creure. La prensa popular americana es regia per la informació sensacionalista i per una “unlimited promotion of merchandise” (Lehuu, 2000: 37), i és aquesta afició per la vessant sensacionalista –més que no pas la ignorància científica– allò que va fer possible la broma –Harriet Martineau havia senyalat una década abans que, pel que feia a la educació general, els americans estaven “travelling far faster than any other people beyond the reach of [a hoax's] deception” (1838: 3-24).

L'article de Poe pel *Sun* no va ser el seu únic recurs al gènere per fer sentir ridículs als seus lectors. Com hem vist, només uns mesos després de la publicació de la broma del globus, oferia als seus lectors l'oracle d'un sonàmbul. Estudiosos conservadors de l'hipnotisme van avisar que “God has revealed what it behoves us to know” –“if we make [somnambulists] reason about mysteries, their imagination will be exalted, and they will give in to all sorts of errors” (Deleuze, 1884: 249). Mentre que “soul is still attached to the body”, l'Universalista alemany Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling va escriure, “the connection [between the soul and the spiritual world] is not perfect” –“The Nature of Man”, *The Magnet*, 1 (December 1842), 158-59, qtd. Taves, 1999: 140n61–. No obstant això, la gent tenia la esperança de que la veritat podia provindre dels sonàmbuls, i amb deliberada ironia, Poe pretenia oferir una revelació hipnòtica, però ens donava un text que no revelava res.

Una vegada més, quatre anys abans d'enganyar el món amb la revelació de Vankirk, Poe havia mostrat la seva disposició a subvertir les expectatives del lector amb històries com “The man of the crowd” (1840), on ens porta a creure que el conte oferirà una colorista passejada per la ciutat –Whitman faria exactament això amb el seu “Life in a New York market” de 1842 (Rubin i Brown, 1950: 20-22)–, per desenganyar-nos després. Com molt encertadament va apuntar Walter Benjamin, “The Man of the Crowd is no *flâneur*” (1968: 174). I llavors tenim *Eureka*, on Poe es burla de les pretensions de la lectura cosmològica (el treball, es recordarà, s'havia presentat per primer cop com una conferència titulada “On the cosmography of the universe”, a Nova York el 3 de febrer de 1848)¹³.

2.2. John Bovee Dods

Els americans de mitjan de segle tenien un gran appetit per la cosmologia popular, però de totes les lectures que podria citar com a possibles objectius, apuntaré a les de John Bovee Dods. Encara que

NOTES

13 | L'ús de la cosmogonia per proposits fraudulents era el tema de *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) de l'Oliver Goldsmith.

no hi ha proves que vinculin als dos homes, Dods pot passar fàcilment com el tipus de timidor que a Poe li agradava posar en evidència. Durant sis nits consecutives del 1843, Dods havia captat l'atenció de una audiència de dos mil bostonians amb les seves explicacions del cosmos, i d'acord amb informes de l'època, "multituds" van quedar fascinades. No tothom va estar impresionat, però. El *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* sentia que la seva ciutat havia estat humiliada per l'habilitat per l'espectacle d'en Dods (Whorton, 2004: 112); i jo suggereixo que Poe hi estava d'acord. La credulitat del públic enfrontada a la retòrica de Dods hauria fet de la lectura cosmològica, suggereixo, un tentador objectiu per la ironia de Poe.

Dods no era la única persona que feia servir les conferències per explicar les seves intuïcions de l'univers. Poe era conscient de l'èxit d'Andrew Jackson Davis ("El llaurador vident"), les conferències del qual *The principles of nature, Her divine revelations i A voice to mankind* (1847) havien estat dictades en estat de trànsit (Tatar, 1978: 194). Poe tenia el suficient interès com per cridar-lo al gener del 1846 (Davis, 1871: 317), i sens dubte el considerà un objectiu fàcil. "IN THE BEGINNING [Davis had explained] the Univercoelum was one boundless, undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of LIQUID FIRE! [...] It was without parts; for it was a Whole. Particles did not exist; but the Whole was as one Particle" (1852: 121). Podria ser que *Eureka* fos escrit per ridiculitzar semblants pretensions; i la veritat és que, intencionadament o no, Poe les va desfer amb les seves intuïcions ("completament irresistibles, però inexpresables"), "that what God originally created –that that Matter which, by dint of His Volition, He first made from His Spirit, or from Nihility, could have been nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of – what?— of Simplicity" (Levine and Levine, 2004: 22; cf. 102-03). No obstant això, Dods és l'objectiu més obvi per la ironia cosmològica de Poe¹⁴. Hi ha mecanismes retòrics similars; hi ha la creença (adoptada a *Eureka*) de que la electricitat –o alguna cosa semblant– és el principi espiritual de l'univers (Levine and Levine, 2004: 27; Dods, 1847: 78). I principalment, encara que posant-se a la alçada de l'anteriorment eclesiàstic, Poe demoleix la visió de l'home que trobem a les seves conferències. Més que afirmar la immortalitat humana, com havia fet Dods, Poe emfatitza la transitorietat humana –la seva insignificància dins del pla diví–.

Dods era conservador en la seva visió del més enllà. "[W]hen we lie down upon the bed of death, and the embers of life feebly glimmer in the socket of existence," explicava, "then the Gospel of Christ points us to brighter scenes –scenes beyond the tomb."

Podríem esperar una resurrecció general quan "[God's] dread voice shall speak with a living energy, that the very heavens shall hear,

NOTES

14 | Posiblement Poe era conscient de que Dods havia venut tres mil copies de les seves conferències en un sol mes.

NOTES

15 | A *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne ridiculitzaria la capacitat d'un aficionat per interpretar intuitivament els fenòmens astronòmics.

and the dead shall rise to die no more, and turn their eyes from the dark, ruinable tomb on the scenes of eternity!" (Dods, 1847: 64, 76). L'enfocament de Poe era diferent. Deixant de banda l'individu, es concentrava en la raça, i anticipava el futur quan "Man [...] ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah" (Levine and Levine, 2004: 106). Òbviament, identificar-se com Jehovah és deixar d'identificar-se com a individu (com E. A. Poe, per exemple). Desafiant d'aquesta manera l'optimisme i l'antropocentrisme dels seus contemporànies, Poe li treu el significat a la transcendència.

La acció de Poe va ser, suggereixo, totalment deliberada. Alguns, com Patrick F. Quinn, han vist *Eureka* com un "unintentional poem of death" (1963: 4-7), però jo no veuria el seu interès en l'aniquilació com un fet accidental, sinó que el llegiria com un treball deliberadament provocatiu. Sens dubte, la visió de la humanitat que hi ha al treball va semblar un cruel acudit a aquells que esperaven trobar la seva dignitat i significança reafirmades per la retòrica de la conferència, com era el cas de Dods i Davis; pero això és només part de l'humor de Poe. La presa de pèl definitiva es va produir en aquells que van creure que les especulacions esmentades podien ser cregudes en una època de creixent especialització disciplinària; que les respostes a l'origen de l'univers podien provindre de un clarivident, un antic Universalista, o un periodista, fins i tot si acceptem la possibilitat de que estiguessin familiaritzats amb el pensament científic del moment. La ciència popular, s'ha suggerit, va ser una resposta a la natura creixentment arcana del pensament científic del segle XIX (Daniels, 1968: 40-41); amb poques excepcions, els divulgadors no eran innovadors¹⁵. Essent aquest el cas, la dedicació d'*Eureka* a Humboldt té importància com a recordatori de l'arrogància provenint d'un aficionat oferint un treball semblant. Tot i que se li podria otorgar a Humboldt (algú de qui es va reconixer el geni a l'Amèrica del segle XIX) un registre del coneixement existent, no s'havia de pretendre trobar una nova teoria de l'univers als esforços dels "bunyols" que competien pels dolars del públic americà. D'aquesta manera, encara que no hi cap raó per dubtar que Poe va seguir les notícies dels descobriments científics amb interès, *Eureka* hauria d'ésser ilegit com una broma abans que com un assaig seriós de cosmologia. El geni de Poe estava compromès en demostrar que conferències cosmològiques, com la d'en Dods, no eran res més que "bunyols".

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#01

NI GENIO

NI

FARSANTE:

EDGAR ALLAN POE

Y

EUREKA

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Resumen || *Eureka*, publicado en 1948, se ha considerado literalmente como la versión extendida de una conferencia sobre cosmología que Poe ofreció a principios de dicho año. Sin embargo, su rigor como obra científica debería cuestionarse. El tratamiento de los temas que encontramos en otras obras de Poe revela la falta de consistencia por parte del autor y un texto que difícilmente parece ser el resultado de un razonamiento científico sólido. Más bien, debería plantearse como un relato fantástico: un intento de desvelar la credulidad de sus lectores. Los cuentos de Poe se basaban en el efecto sobre la verdad creada en sus lectores por el reconocimiento de convenciones generales. *Eureka* explotó y ridiculizó la confianza en profesores de cosmología como John Bovee Dods.

Palabras clave || Poe | *Eureka* | Éter | Mesmerismo | Relato fantástico.

Abstract || *Eureka* (1848) has been taken at face value as an expanded version of a lecture on cosmology that Poe gave earlier the same year. However, its seriousness as a work of science should be questioned. Its treatment of themes found in other works by Poe shows the author's unconcern for consistency, and the text unlikely to have resulted from a serious engagement with scientific argument. Instead it should be approached as a hoax: an attempt to reveal the gullibility of its readers. Poe's hoaxes relied for their effect on the trust created in readers by their recognition of generic conventions, and *Eureka* exploited and ridiculed public trust in cosmological lecturers such as John Bovee Dods.

Keywords || Poe | *Eureka* | Ether | Mesmerism | Hoax.

0. Introducción

Eureka, de Edgar Allan Poe (publicado en 1848), se ha leído como una rigurosa obra de comosmología pero también como un cuento fantástico¹; como un ensayo que manifiesta la “virtuosity in the use of logic, [...] philosophical profundity, [and] currency in scientific theory” (Schaeffer, 1971: 353), y como una obra de ciencia y filosofía mediocres y sin profundidad (Holman, 1972). Dichas opiniones parecen irreconciliables –como indica irónicamente Harold Fromm, haciendo referencia a la cita anterior, “One man’s genius is another’s fudge” (1989: 201)– es más, incluso asumiendo que esta observación es probablemente extrema, en tanto que la obra científica era un reflejo del tiempo en el que se escribió², es difícil discernir si Poe la presentó como una obra seria. Después de todo, en un engaño cabe esperar información convincente. Como Poe explicó en el apéndice adjunto a “Hans Phaall” (1835) cuando la obra volvió a publicarse en 1839³, el éxito de un relato depende de la “verisimilitude [...] in the application of scientific principles” (1983: 1001). O, como observó Christopher Norris (2000: 94), una historia engañosa debe entrelazarse con conocimientos científicos generalmente aceptados por el lector para evitar cualquier ápice de ironía por parte del autor. En este caso, podría sostenerse que existe bastante influencia de Laplace, Newton y otros genios como para engañar a los incautos, pero no el suficiente conocimiento científico que demuestre que esa era la intención de Poe. (Esta misma ambigüedad puede apreciarse en los comentarios que Poe escribió en los márgenes de las copias impresas del texto: es evidente que él pensaba que podía mejorar su razonamiento, lo que no está tan claro es por qué quería hacerlo).

Esta línea de pensamiento podría considerarse acertada si se tiene en cuenta la insistencia de Poe en que la obra no era “literary at all”, así como las melodramáticas cartas a su suegra, en las que decía que desde que publicó *Eureka* no tenía deseos de seguir con vida (Ostrom, 1948: 2, 359, 452). Esto no sólo se debe a que Poe “had fallen into a routine of easy lies and half truths since at least his adolescence” (Silverman, 1991: 146); incluso si no hubiera motivos para dudar, si pudiéramos tomar a Poe al pie de la letra, podría sospechar de sus argumentos si *Eureka* hubiera sido escrito como un relato engañoso. Poe habría aprendido del efecto de la revelación prematura –como cuando admitió en una crónica sobre la travesía del Atlántico en globo (Goodman, 2008: 244)–, que un exceso de honestidad en ciertos casos podría ser un error si se deseaba el éxito económico, y así lo hizo en 1848. Por esto, aunque las declaraciones sobre ciencia de Poe pudieran tener un voto de confianza, no hay por qué dárselo.

NOTAS

1 | La primera idea de que *Eureka* era un relato ficticio fue introducida por Epes Sargent, que indicó en una publicación del *Boston Transcript* que ‘The mocking smile of the hoaxter is seen behind [the author’s] grave mask’ (Walker, 1986: 292, 281; cf. Beaver, 1976).

2 | Poe intentó que sus relatos “conform to current scientific ideas, as he understood them” (Mabbott, 2000: 94); para más crítica decimonónica de Bacon (Hesse, 1964: 149).

3 | La historia cuenta como un burgués de Rotterdam (Hans Phaall) construye un globo para volar a la Luna y así huir de sus acreedores.

1. Contextos

Una forma de escapar de la incertidumbre al guión que seguía Poe (tratado de cosmología o relato engañoso), es leer *Eureka* en paralelo a otras obras suyas que tratan temas similares⁴ –en concreto el cuento sobre hipnotismo de 1844, “Mesmeric Revelation”–. Este relato se ha considerado con frecuencia como un ensayo de su obra posterior, en ambas (como indica Matthew A. Taylor) se revela “our’ death –the death of the individual, the death of the human– a precondition of full transcendence” (Taylor, 2007: 204; cf. O’Donnell, 1962: 87; Falk, 1969: 546), y la rigurosidad (o la falta de ésta) en una, afectaría obligatoriamente a la lectura de la otra.

1.1. Hipnotismo

Entre 1844 y 1845 Poe publicó tres cuentos de hipnotismo “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”, “Mesmeric Revelation”, y el más conocido, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”; relatos en los que se encuentran argumentos cada vez más arriesgados a favor del poder del hipnotismo para cruzar la frontera entre la vida y la muerte. En el primero, el control mesmérico de Templeton sobre Bedloe lleva a este último a un trance mesmérico para simular que muere de la misma forma en que un amigo de Templeton, Oldeb, había muerto 50 años antes; en el segundo, el diálogo entre el narrador y Vankirk llega a su culmen con la muerte de éste; y en el tercero, el control mesmérico de P. prolonga la vida física de Valdemar. La experiencia imaginativa (mesmérica) del sujeto sobre la muerte ajena hace que comprenda su propia muerte, y que experimente, así, el poder de evitar la muerte de sí mismo. No obstante, la creciente firmeza de los protagonistas de Poe, no debe interpretarse como la elaboración (o desarrollo) de una filosofía consistente, sino como algo menos intencionado –como la exploración de la nova descubierta a través de su lectura–.

En 1844 Poe había leído con interés *Facts of Mesmerism* de Chauncy Hare Townshend cuyas ideas influyeron en sus relatos. Para autores como Townshend, era un hecho demostrado que “the magnetizer may act upon [the one magnetized] at a distance”, y esto puede “give rise to mischievous results” (Townshend, 1840: 365; cf. Deleuze, 1884: 208; Lind, 1947: 1082) –como Lind apuntaba unos sesenta años antes, ese era el caso en “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”–. También en textos de Townshend y en la mayoría de los textos contemporáneos sobre hipnotismo, se encontraba la idea, planteada por el Marqués de Puységur, de que los mesmerizados podían conversar con los demás y hablar con autoridad sobre temas de los que se consideraban ignorantes⁵ cuando estaban despiertos. Esto es lo que encontramos en “Mesmeric Revelation” –junto con el desarrollo de la teoría de que el hipnotismo podía acelerar la muerte en casos de tuberculosis–.

NOTAS

4 | En la edición de *Eureka* de 2004 de Levine and Levine se apunta esta idea.

5 | Véase Walmesley, 1967: 144; Laurens, 2008. El interés de la época se refleja en la controversia que en 1844 despertaron las “Letters on Mesmerism” de Harriet Martineau cuando anunció en el ateneo que su criada, Jane Arrowsmith, era vidente (Pichanick, 1980: 129-37)

–“In pulmonary phthisis in the last stages”, reflexionó J. F. Deleuze, en lugar de llegar a una cura, “it is [...] to be feared that [...] it accelerates the final crisis” (1884:183, 333)–. Y en “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”: no sólo se recurre a informes sobre la acción galvánica en un cadáver⁶, también se aprovecha de la creencia de la época de “that mesmerism could redraw the line between life and death” (Winter, 1998: 121). Justinus Kerner contaba en *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829; la traducción al inglés se publicó en 1845) como una mujer había conservado su vida de forma antinatural gracias al hipnotismo (Lind, 1947: 1092; Taves, 1999: 393-94, n60), al mismo tiempo, Andrew Jackson Davis relataba una historia similar (Smith, 1845: 25). Aparte de talento literario, Poe añadió poco más a esos planteamientos.

La naturaleza anárquica de los préstamos que Poe tomó de estas historias, no debería sorprendernos, ya que después de todo, era un periodista. (En 1844 estaba viviendo de forma precaria en Nueva York). “In my ‘Valdemar Case’”, se quejaba con cierta falsedad, “[...] I had not the slightest idea that any person should credit it as anything more than a ‘magazine- paper’” (Ostrom, 1948: 2-433), y aunque podría pensarse que él no supusiera que los lectores hubiesen considerado el relato seriamente, no hay razones para creer que el propio Poe lo valorase como algo más que un ingenioso artículo de ficción⁷. Podría decirse lo mismo de otros cuentos, lo suficientemente brillantes como para llegar a donde llegaron, pero sin más; y siguiendo este argumento, cabría preguntarse por qué *Eureka* debe tratarse como algo diferente. Ciertamente, no habría que confiar tanto en las similitudes entre *Eureka* y “Mesmeric Revelation” (si uno de ellos es un *jeu d'esprit*, o un relato de engaño, ¿por qué no el otro?) –y, además, las diferencias entre ambas obras son más significativas que sus semejanzas. En “Mesmeric Revelation” la personalidad individual sobrevive a la muerte, en *Eureka* no; y no hay razón para pensar que Poe estuviese más entregado a un guión que al otro, o que, por ello, creyera en la teoría planteada en “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” (1841) de que aunque la conciencia sobreviva la muerte, sólo se trataría de una conciencia del tiempo y el espacio.

1.2. El éter luminoso

No menos reveladora como guía de lectura de *Eureka* es la falta de coherencia por parte de Poe en lo referente al éter interestelar. Parte de esta inconsistencia podría suponerse por el modo en que esta expresión se usaba en la ciencia contemporánea. En las obras sobre la teoría de ondas de luz se daba por sentado que existía un medio de propagación de las ondas lumínicas y que este medio –el éter luminoso– dominaba el universo. En palabras del científico Thomas Thomson, el éter era “a peculiar matter, extremely subtle, capable of penetrating the densest bodies, astonishingly elastic, and the

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6 | Bajo este experimento el sujeto “make violent gesticulations with his hands, move his head, roll his eyes, and chatter his teeth”, y –como en el relato de Poe– es habitual que los que no estén familiarizados con este tipo de fenómeno traten de huir de la escena o se desmayen (Dods, 1847: 23-24; Poe, 1983: 840).

7 | Poe había descrito “Hans Phaal” con una ambigüedad similar, como un relato engañoso o como un “jeu d'esprit” que podía engañar a sus lectores dependiendo del tono.

cause of heat, light, magnetism, electricity, and even of gravitation" (Thomson, 1830: 4).densest bodies, astonishingly elastic, and the cause of heat, light, magnetism, electricity, and even of gravitation" (Thomson, 1830: 4).

Sin embargo, no había un acuerdo general sobre lo que era el éter, y, de hecho, a mediados del siglo diecinueve el fracaso al detectar los efectos del éter en el movimiento planetario, llevó a muchos a cuestionarse su existencia. En 1883 la explicación de Thomas William Webb de que la existencia del éter era "only assumed for the sake of the theory" y por tanto "need not be further noticed", (5n; cf. Campbell and Garnett, 1882: 394), expresaba salvedades que podrían haberse planteado mucho antes. Ya a mediados del siglo diecinueve "éter" funcionaba como una palabra comodín –un término que podía moldearse según las necesidades de la teoría–.

Sin embargo, lo que podría no esperarse es el grado de incoherencia que encontramos en Poe. En "Mesmeric Revelation," Vankirk anuncia que "God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter". Y: "The ultimate or unparticled matter not only permeates all things but impels all things –and thus is all things within itself. This matter is God" (Poe, 1983: 722, 720). No debería considerarse como una idea que Poe se tomase en serio. A pesar del drama inherente cuando Vankirk promulga en trance hipnótico sus ideas, éstas ofrecen poco más de lo que encontramos en la teología contemporánea. En la América de mediados de siglo se aceptaba que, en palabras de Thomas Dick, Dios "pervades, actuates, and supports the whole frame of universal nature" (1846, 1: 65), y mientras unos indentifican la omnipresencia de Dios con la del éter⁸, otros, siguiendo la terminología de Poe, la asociarían a la electricidad (o consideraron el éter, electricidad). "I am fully sensible", escribió un defensor del hipnotismo, "that electricity is a fluid most inconceivably subtile, purified, and fine. [...] It is almost unparticled matter [...]" (Dods, 1853:107; cf. Milutis, 2006: xi). El hecho de que Poe tomara prestados estos pensamientos sobre la "materia indivisa" que le permitieron desarrollar ideas convincentes en "Mesmeric Revelation" no es un signo claro de que los considerase seriamente. Dos meses antes, en "The Power of Words" (1845), definió el éter de una forma diferente –como una sustancia que "pervades, and alone pervades all space" y es el "medium of creation" (Poe, 1983:1825)⁹, y en *Eureka* volvería a definirlo de un modo diferente¹⁰. En sus últimas obras Poe introduce el éter para jugar con la idea de que "sustancia" es sólo otro nombre de Dios, o "Dios" otro nombre de "sustancia". Una vez más la idea es interesante. Una visión plenista del universo ha alentado el materialismo cristiano durante dos siglos¹¹. Pero es difícilmente concebible como una expresión más creíble de las creencias de Poe que las que encontramos en sus primeros cuentos.

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8 | La influencia de Dios, como argumentó Edward Hitchcock en 1851, "transmitted by means of the luminiferous ether to the limits of the universe" (1854:433). Podemos encontrar pensamientos similares en el amplio espectro religioso desde el Metodismo al Mormonismo: véase, por ejemplo, Porterfield, 2005: 164; Whittaker,1991: 199; y para un estudio general, Cantor, 1981; Mills, 2006: 67-93.

9 | Si Dios dijo realmente –o pensó– que el universo existía al principio de los tiempos, entonces tenía que haber un medio para la transmisión de sus palabras; y si existió dicho medio, la creatividad divina tenía que ser paralela a la expresión humana. En el sumario de Bruce Mills (2006:71), "the thoughts of God permeate and impel all things, and similarly human words and thoughts pulse outward from the self".

10 | Por tanto estoy en desacuerdo con aquellos que defienden la temática, la estética y la consistencia teórica de *Eureka* con otros textos de Poe, por ejemplo, Jacobs, 1969.

11 | También resultaba poco original la idea de que la condensación de las nubes podía explicar el origen del universo. "Space and duration exist of necessity, and that space was eternally filled with primal matter which I contend is electricity", expuso John Bovee Dods. Todo lo existente en el universo se condensa de la electricidad, "not instantly but gradually", añadió (1847:340). Mary Somerville, introduciendo las ideas de Laplace a un público angloparlante, fue menos dogmática: Generalmente se admite la existencia de "a self-luminous, phosphorescent material substance, in a highly

2. Objetivos

Entonces, ¿por qué escribía Poe? Si no quería presentarse ante su público como un científico, o como un divulgador de ciencia (sus ideas cambiaban demasiado para suponer que lo era), quizá habría que tomarlo en serio cuando dice que *Eureka* es un poema –y reconocer, como indicaron Sir Phillip Sidney (y Aristóteles), que la poesía es indiferente a la realidad. En mi opinión, deberíamos leer el poema cosmológico de Poe como una especie de “mentira” con la que pretendía captar “the attention (and ideally the imagination) of the public” (Boese, 2002: 2; Poe, 1983: 608) –ya sea por efecto poético, o (lo que es más probable dada su riqueza en detalles científicos) como relato engañoso, o bulo.

En efecto, deberíamos hablar de ironía más que de mentira. Casi todo lo que Poe escribió fue (como indicó G. R. Thomson) “qualified by, indeed controlled by, a prevailing duplicity or irony in which the artist presents us with slyly insinuated mockery of both ourselves as readers and himself as writer”, y esta postura, explicaría mucho más sobre *Eureka*, sin exigirnos considerar la obra como un intento de engaño (1973: 9; cf. Dayan, 1987: 23; Jar'ab, 2003). Pero Poe era un escritor de cuentos: sentía placer al burlarse de los lectores y concebirlos como “believers in every thing Odd”, cuya “Credulity: –let us call it Insanity at once”, los definía como “ignorant people” –“Fifty Suggestions” (1849), no. 28, in Poe, 1984: 1303–. Burton R. Pollin consideraba que en los poemas de Poe subyacía “the sheer exuberant humour of his inventiveness” (1970: 174), pero, dadas las palabras de Poe, la idea anterior de Constance Rourke de que la finalidad de los relatos de Poe “was to render his readers absurd, to reduce them to an involuntary imbecility” parece más convincente (1959: 181-84; cf. Walsh, 2006: 116; Elmor, 1995:187).

2.1. Expectativas genéricas

Lo significativo en este contexto es que en sus cuentos Poe usaba géneros ya existentes para explotar las expectativas de los lectores (Burgoyne, 2001). Es muy conocido el uso de la primicia periodística en los relatos de Poe. “*The Atlantic has been actually crossed in a Balloon!*” –anunció en un extra del *Sun* de Nueva York del 13 de abril de 1844, “and this too without difficulty –without any great apparent danger– with thorough control of the machine –and in the inconceivably brief period of seventy-five hours from shore to shore” (Poe, 1983: 743; Goodman, 2008: 238-45). Deberíamos señalar que, escribiendo esto no sólo necesitaba que sus lectores estuviesen desinformados sobre la tecnología contemporánea (y por ello supusieran que el Atlántico podía cruzarse en globo)¹²; también necesitaba que asumieran que los periódicos son confiables. Los

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dilated or gaseous state,” una sustancia que se hunde “by the mutual gravitation of its particles” en las estrellas y galaxias, pero se necesitaban mejores telescopios para dar por buena la teoría nebulosa (1831: lxvi). No obstante, diecisiete años después de la publicación de *Eureka*, Jules Verne usó la idea de la condensación nebulosa en su *De la Terre à la Lune* (1978: 74-75). La versión de Poe sobre este escenario extendió una especie de sensación de descubrimiento o convicción personal.

12 | Fue un optimismo prematuro: el Atlántico no se cruzó volando hasta 1919.

lectores deberían saber más. No hacía falta recordar el bulo de la Luna de la década anterior para reconocer que no todas las noticias que eran portada debían creerse. La prensa popular americana estaba conducida por noticias sensacionalistas y por una “unlimited promotion of merchandise” (Lehuu, 2000: 37), y es el apetito de escándalo –más que la ignorancia científica lo que hace posible el bulo –Harriet Martineau indicó diez años antes que, en cuanto a la educación básica, los americanos estaban “travelling far faster than any other people beyond the reach of [a hoax’s] deception” (1838: 3-24).

Este ejemplo de Poe para el periódico *Sun* no fue el único aprovechamiento de este género para ridiculizar a sus lectores. Como hemos visto, unos meses después de publicar el cuento del globo, ofreció a sus lectores un oráculo de sonambulistas. Los estudiantes conservadores del hipnotismo advirtieron que “God has revealed what it behoves us to know” –“if we make [somnambulists] reason about mysteries, their imagination will be exalted, and they will give in to all sorts of errors” (Deleuze, 1884: 249). Dado que “the soul is still attached to the body”, indica el Universalista alemán Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, “the connection [between the soul and the spiritual world] is not perfect” –“The Nature of Man”, *The Magnet*, 1 (December 1842), 158-59, qtd. Taves, 1999: 140n61–. Sin embargo, la gente esperaba obtener la verdad de los sonámbulos, y con una ironía deliberada Poe pretende desvelar una revelación mesmérica pero nos ofrece un texto que no aporta nada.

Una vez más: cuatro años antes de engañar al mundo con la revelación de Vankirk, Poe había manifestado su intención de trastocar las expectativas del lector con historias como “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), en el que nos conduce a pensar que el relato ofrecerá un paseo por la ciudad con sabor local –Whitman haría lo mismo en 1842 con “Life in a New York Market” (Rubin and Brown, 1950: 20-22)–, pero luego nos desengaña. Como observó eufemísticamente Walter Benjamin, “The Man of the Crowd is no *flâneur*” (1968: 174). Y llegamos a *Eureka*, donde Poe adquiere y se mofa de las pretensiones del discurso cosmológico (El trabajo, recordamos, se presentó en principio como una conferencia titulada “On The Cosmography of the Universe”, en New York, el 3 de febrero de 1848)¹³.

2.2. John Bovee Dods

Los americanos de mediados de siglo estaban sedientos de cosmología popular, pero de todas las conferencias que podría citar como posibles blancos, me centraría en las de John Bovee Dods. Aunque no existen pruebas del vínculo entre los dos, Dods podría pasar por esa especie de “timador” al que a Poe le gustaba poner

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13 | El uso de la cosmología con fines fraudulentos fue el tema de *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) de Oliver Goldsmith.

al descubierto. Durante seis tardes consecutivas, en 1843, Dods mantuvo la atención de una audiencia compuesta por unos dos mil ciudadanos de Boston con su explicación del cosmos, y según las noticias de la época, “multitudes” se quedaron fuera. Pero no impresionó a todo el mundo. El *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* reflejó como su ciudad fue “deshonrada” por el espectáculo de Dods (Whorton, 2004: 112); y creo que Poe estaba de acuerdo. En mi opinión, la credulidad del público en contraposición a la retórica de Dods hicieron de la conferencia sobre cosmología un objetivo tentador para la ironía de Poe.

Dods no era el único que transmitía sus impresiones sobre el universo en los circuitos de conferencias. Poe era consciente del éxito de Andrew Jackson Davis (el “Vidente de Ploughkeepsie”), cuyas conferencias *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine revelations* y *A Voice to Mankind* (1847), habían sido pronunciadas en estado de trance (Tatar, 1978: 194). Poe estaba lo suficientemente interesado en Davis como para visitarlo en enero de 1846 (Davis, 1871: 317), y, sin duda, fue un blanco fácil. “IN THE BEGINNING [explica Davis] the Univercoelum was one boundless, undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of LIQUID FIRE! [...] It was without parts; for it was a Whole. Particles did not exist; but the Whole was as one Particle” (1852:121). Es posible que *Eureka* se escribiera para ridiculizar estas pretensiones; y ciertamente, de forma intencionada o no, Poe las mejoró con sus intuiciones (“altogether irresistible, although inexpressible”), “that what God originally created – that that Matter which, by dint of His Volition, He first made from His Spirit, or from Nihility, could have been nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of –what?– of Simplicity” (Levine and Levine, 2004: 22; cf. 102-03). No obstante, Dods es el blanco más claro de la ironía comosmológica¹⁴ de Poe. Siguen caminos retóricos similares, está presente la creencia (adoptada en *Eureka*) de que la electricidad –o algo parecido– es el principio espiritual del universo (Levine and Levine, 2004: 27; Dods, 1847: 78). Y lo que es más importante, aunque se acerca al ex clérigo en poesía, Poe derriba la imagen del ser humano que encontramos en sus conferencias. En lugar de afirmar la inmortalidad, como había hecho Dods, Poe enfatiza la fugacidad humana –su sin sentido en el terreno divino.

Dods era conservador en su concepto del más allá. “[W]hen we lie down upon the bed of death, and the embers of life feebly glimmer in the socket of existence,” explicó, “then the Gospel of Christ points us to brighter scenes –scenes beyond the tomb.”

Podríamos esperar la resurrección cuando [God’s] “dread voice shall speak with a living energy, that the very heavens shall hear, and the dead shall rise to die no more, and turn their eyes from the

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14 | Posiblemente Poe sabía que Dods había vendido tres mil copias de su conferencia en un mes.

dark, ruinable tomb on the scenes of eternity!" (Dods, 1847: 64, 76). El énfasis de Poe era diferente. Ignorando al individuo, se centraba en la humanidad, y anticipaba un futuro cuando "Man [...] ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah" (Levine and Levine, 2004: 106). Por supuesto, reconocerse a uno mismo como Jehovah, conlleva dejar de reconocerse como individuo (como E.A.Poe, por ejemplo). Desafiando el optimismo y el antropocentrismo de la época, Poe desnuda la trascendencia del significado (Taylor, 2007: 204).

En este caso, la actuación de Poe fue, en mi opinión, totalmente deliberada. Algunos autores, como Patrick F. Quinn, han considerado *Eureka* como un "unintentional poem of death" (1963: 4-7), sin embargo, yo analizaría su énfasis en la aniquilación como algo previsto, y la leería como una obra intencionadamente provocativa. La visión de humanidad que ofrece la obra parece, sin duda, una broma cruel para aquellos que esperan encontrar su solemnidad y significado reafirmados por la retórica de la conferencia, como ocurría en las de Dods y Davis; pero esto es parte del humor de Poe. La burla última era para los que pensaban que podía creerse en esas especulaciones en una era de creciente especialización disciplinaria; que un clarividente, un ex clérigo Universalista o un periodista podrían responder a las preguntas sobre los orígenes del universo, incluso aunque se les supusiera familiarizados con el pensamiento científico de la época. Parece ser que la ciencia popular era la respuesta a la naturaleza cada vez más arcana del pensamiento científico del siglo diecinueve (Daniels, 1968: 40-41); salvo raras excepciones, estos divulgadores no eran innovadores¹⁵. En este caso, encontramos en el hecho de *Eureka* estuviese dedicada a Humboldt un recordatorio de la arrogancia que conlleva ofrecer una obra como esta al gran público. Aunque Humboldt era la fuente de buena parte del conocimiento científico de la época (su sabiduría era generalmente reconocida en la América del siglo XIX), no se esperaba encontrar una nueva teoría del universo en los esfuerzos de farsantes compitiendo por los dólares del público americano. Así pues, aunque no hay razón para dudar que Poe siguiera los avances científicos con interés, *Eureka* debería tratarse como un relato de engaño, o como bulo, más que como un ensayo serio sobre cosmología. La brillantez de Poe se fundamentó en demostrar que las conferencias sobre cosmología, como las de Dods, sólo eran una farsa.

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15 | En *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hawthorne ridiculiza la capacidad de un aficionado que interpreta de forma intuitiva fenómenos astronómicos.

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EZ

#01

PAREGABEA

ETA EZTA

ERDIPURDIKOA

ERE:

EDGAR ALLAN POE

ETA EUREKA

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Laburpena || Eureka 1848ko otsailean Poek kosmologiari buruz eman zuen ikastaro baten bertsio luzatutzat onartua izan da. Hala ere, obra testu zientifikoak ote den ez dago hain garbi. Poeren beste obra batzuetan ikusi da gaiak lantzerakoan ez zuela koherentziarekiko arretarik jartzen; ondorioz *Eureka* ezin da hartu pentsamendu zientifikoaren emaitza gisa. Iruzur bat dela pentsatu behar da: irakurleen sinesgarritasuna salatzeko saiakera bat. Irakurleei konbentzio orokorrak aurkitzeak eragiten dien sinesgarritasunean datza, hain zuzen, Poeren txantxa. *Eurekak* John Bovee Dods bezalako irakurleen konfiantza erabili eta irrigarri utzi zuen ikuskera kosmologikoa ematen zela uste izan zutelako.

Hitzak || Poe | Eureka | Eterra | Mesmerismoa | Iruzurra.

Abstract || Eureka (1848) has been taken at face value as an expanded version of a lecture on cosmology that Poe gave earlier the same year. However, its seriousness as a work of science should be questioned. Its treatment of themes found in other works by Poe shows the author's unconcern for consistency, and the text unlikely to have resulted from a serious engagement with scientific argument. Instead it should be approached as a hoax: an attempt to reveal the gullibility of its readers. Poe's hoaxes relied for their effect on the trust created in readers by their recognition of generic conventions, and *Eureka* exploited and ridiculed public trust in cosmological lecturers such as John Bovee Dods.

Keywords || Poe | Eureka | Ether | Mesmerism | Hoax.

0. Sarrera

Edgar Allan Poeren Eurekak (1848an argitaratua) bi interpretazio izan ditu: kosmologiari buruzko liburu seriotzat ikusi izan da baina, baita ere iruzurtzat¹: “virtuosity in the use of logic, . . . philosophical profundity, [and] currency in scientific theory” (Schaeffer, 1971: 353) ezaugarriak dituen saiakera moduan ulertu da alde batetik, baina bestetik, zientzia eta filosofia txarra eta batere sakona egiten ez duen lan gisa (Holman 1972). Iritzi hauek batera ezinak dira—Harold Frommek kritika ironiko batean azpimarratu zuen bezala: “One man’s genius is another’s fudge” (1989: 201)—; gainera, analisia are gehiago zaitzen du Poek zientzia aurkezteko duen moduak² ezin baita ziurtasun osoz jakin egileak gaia seriotasunez azaltzeko asmoa zuen edo ez. Azken batean, iruzur egin nahi badu ere, hartzalea konbentzitzeko asmoa duten detaileak ageri dira. Poek “Hans Phaall”i (1835) 1939ko argitarapenean gehitutako eranskinean azaldu zuen bezala³, iruzur baten arrakasta ondorengoaren araberakoa da: “verisimilitude . . . in the application of scientific principles” (1983: 1001). Christopher Norrisek ordea (2000: 94), aipatu du iruzur batek, irakurleak egileak ironiarako asmorik ez duela uste dezan, behar duena dela orokorrean jendeak errez onartzen duen zientzia dosi egokia. Oraingoan argudiatu zitekeen Laplace eta Newton bezalako nahikoa jeinu bazeudela jada inozoak engainatzeko, eta beharrezkoa dena dela frogatzea Poeren asmoa ez zela inoiz izan bera jenio zientifikoa zela erakustea (Anbiquotasun bera ikusi daiteke Poek lanaren inprimatutako kopietan idatzitako alboetako komentarioetan: argi dago bere argudioak hobetu zitzakeela bazekiela, baina ez dago argi zergatik egin nahi zuen hori.)

Kontu handiz aztertu behar da ere Poek aipatzen duenean lana zela “not . . . literary at all”—eta bere amaginarrebari esaten dionean ez duela bizitzeko gogo gehiagorik *Eureka* egin zuenetik (Ostrom 1948: 2, 359, 452). Hori ez da geratzen soilik Poe eguneroko ohikerian eroria zelako: “had fallen into a routine of easy lies and half truths since at least his adolescence” (Silverman, 1991: 146); nahiz eta susmorako arrazoi handirik ez dagoen eta Poeren hitzak seriotasunez har daitezkeen, uste dezakegu *Eurekaren* kasuan iruzur bat egitea zela asmoa. Poek bazuen jada ikasia garaiz aurretik esanez gero zein ziren benetako asmoak finantzazio arazoak izan zitzakeela—Atlantikoa globoz gurutzatzeari buruz artikulu bat idatzi zuela onartu zuenean bezala (Goodman, 2008: 244)—1848an Poek egin bezala. Poeren zientziari dagokionez, nahiz eta bere lanak seriotasunez har daitezkeen, ez dago zergatik.

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1 | Epes Sargentek iradoki zuen lehengo aldiz *Eureka* iruzurra zela, Boston *Transcrieante* honakoa esan zuenean: ‘The mocking smile of the hoaxter is seen behind [the author’s] grave mask’ (Walker, 1986: 292, 281; cf. Beaver, 1976).

2 | Poek bere ipuinekin zuen asmoa zen istorioek “conform to current scientific ideas, as he understood them” (Mabbott, 2000: 94); XIX mendeko Baconen kritikak ezagutzeko, (Poeren kontrolerako kezka) (Hesse 1964: 149).

3 | Istorioak kontatzen du nola Rotterdameko gizon batek (Hans Phaallek) globo bat eraikitzen duen eta ilargira bidaiatzen duen bere hartzekodunengandik ihes egiteko.

1. Testuinguruak

Poek jarraitu zituen irizpideei buruzko zalantzak ezabatzeko (irakurketa kosmologikoa zein iruzurra), interesgarria da *Eureka* antzeko gaiak lantzen dituzten bere beste obra batzuekin batera irakurtzea⁴—batez ere 1844ko mesmerismoari buruzko istorioa, “Mesmeric Revelation.” Ipuin hau askotan hartua izan da beranduago argitaratuko zuen ipuinaren entsegu gisa (Matthew A. Taylorrek azpimarratzen duen bezala), biek egiten dutelako “our’ death—the death of the individual, the death of the human—a precondition of full transcendence” (Taylor, 2007: 204; cf. O’Donnell 1962: 87; Falk 1969: 546), eta bat irakurri ostean, bere seriotasunak (edo seriotasun ezak) bestearen irakurketan eragina izango lukeelako.

1.1 Mesmerismoa

Poek mesmerismori buruzko hiru ipuin argitaratu zituen 1844-1845ean: “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,” “Mesmeric Revelation,” eta ezagunena den “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”; ipuin hauetan mesmerismoak bizitzaren eta heriotzaren arteko muga gurutzatzeko duen indarra agerian uzten dute. Lehenengoan, Templetonek Bedloerengan duen kontrolak eragiten azkenak muga hori pasatzea trantze mesmeriko batean sartuta dagoela, berrogeita hamar urte lehenago Tepletonen lagun Oldeb Benares hil egin zen modu berean hitzen delarik; bigarrenean, narratzailea eta Vankirken arteko elkarrizketa bigarrenaren heriotzarekin amaitzen du Poek; eta azkenekoan, Poeren kontrol mesmerikoak Valdemarren bizitza luzatzen du. Beste baten heriotzari buruzko norbaiten esperientzia (mesmerikoa) norbait horren heriotza ulertzeko bide bihurtzen da; ez bada heriotzatik aldentzeko modu bat. Hala ere, Poeren seriotasun hau ez genuke ikusi behar filosofia sendo baten garapenaren emaitza bezala, ez baitzen hori bere asmoa—bere irakurketek novari buruz iradokitzen dutena argia da.

1844an Poek Chauncy Hare Townshenden *Facts of Mesmerism* irakurri zuen eta bertan azaltzen ziren kontzeptuetan istorioak kontatzeko ideiak ikusi zituen. Townshend bezalako egileentzat frogatua zegoen: “the magnetizer may act upon [the one magnetized] at a distance”; eta hori egiteak kezka sortzen zuen: “give rise to mischievous results” (Townshend, 1840: 365; cf. Deleuze, 1884: 208; Lind, 1947: 1082). Lindek duela zenbait urte azpimarratu zuen egoera hau “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”eko egoera zela. Bestalde, Townshenden (egia esan, mesmerismoari buruzko garaiko testu gehienetan) ikusi zena izan zen mesmerizatutakoek batak bestearekin hitz egin zezaketela autoritatez esnatzen direnean ezjakin direla uste duten gaiei buruz (lehengo aldiz Marquis de Puységurrek erakutsi zuen hau)⁵. Horixe bera, hain zuzen, aurki dezakegu “Mesmeric

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4 | Levinek eta Levinek diote hau *Eurekari* egindako hitzaurrean (2004).

5 | Ikus Walmesley, 1967: 144; Laurens, 2008. 1844an izan zuen interesa Harriet Martineauen “Letters on Mesmerism”, *Athenæumen*, zabaldutako polemikan ikusi daiteke. Bere neskamea, Jane Arrowsmith, igarlea zela esaten zuen Ian horretan (Pichanick, 1980: 129-37).

Revelation”en —iradokitzten den beste gauza bat da mesmerismoak heriotza azkartu zezakeela tuberkulosi kasuetan.—“In pulmonary phthisis in the last stages”, J. F. Deleuzek agerian utzi zuen sendatu baino, “it is . . . to be feared that . . . it accelerates the final crisis” (1884: 183, 333)— “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”en: ez du bakarrik azaltzen gorpu batean zein den erreakzio elektriko baten eragina⁶, baizik eta baita ere hitz egiten du garaian ardura pizten zuen zerbaiti buruz: “that mesmerism could redraw the line between life and death” (Winter, 1998: 121). Justinus Kernerrek esana da bere *Die Seherin von Prevorsten* (1829) emakume baten bizitza mesmerismoari esker mantendu zela bizirik modu artifizialean (Lind, 1947: 1092; Taves, 1999: 393-94n60). Bestalde, Andrew Jackson Davisek antzeko istorio bat kontatu zuen (Smith 1845, 25). Poek ezer gutxi gehitu zien lan hauei kontrol literarioaz gain.

Poek lan hauetatik ideiak hartzen dituenean ez du modu sistematikoan egiten, eta ez ginateke harritu behar horregatik. Azken batean, kazetaria zen (1844an ahal zuen moduan bizi zen New Yorken). “In my ‘Valdemar Case,’” kexatzen zen, “. . . I had not the slightest idea that any person should credit it as anything more than a ‘magazine-paper’” (Ostrom, 1948: 2-433), eta nahiz eta ez dakigun berak ba ote zekien bere irakurleek ipuina serioski hartuko zuten edo ez, ez dugu arrazoirk pentatzeko Poek aldizkari batean argitaratzeko fikzioa baino askoz hobea zen zerbait bezala ikusten ote zuen bere lana⁷. Beste ipuin batzuei buruz gauza bera esan beharko litzateke, ondo garatu zituztelako ideiak, baina askoz urrunago joan ahal zirelako; horregatik galdetzen diot nire buruari zergatik izan behar ote zen *Eurekak* desberdina. Noski, ez genuke konfiantza gehiegi jarri beharko “Mesmeric Revelation”ekin dituen antzekotasunetan (*jeu d'esprit*, zein iruzurra baldin badago honetan, zergatik ez bestean?)— izan ere, bi lanen arteko desberdintasunak antzekotasunak baino garrantzitsuagoak dira. “Mesmeric Revelation”en norbanakoek egiten diote aurre heriotzari, *Eurekan* ez; eta ez dago arrazoirk uste izateko Poek testuinguru bat nahiago zuela bestea baino, edota sinisten zuela “The Colloquy of Monos and Una”n (1841) iradokitzten duen horretan: kontzientziak heriotzari ihes egiten badio ere, bakarrik denbora eta tokiaz konturatzearen ondorio dela.

1.2 Argi eterra

Eureka irakurtzeko gida lerroak ematean, ezin da aipatu gabe utzi Poek ez zuela jarrera finkoa izan eterriari dagokionez. Zentzu handi batean, espero genezakeen jokabidea da, batez ere kontutan hartuta garaiko zientzian “eter” kontzeptuari ematen zitzaison erabilera. Argiaren teorian lanean ari zirenek luzaroan uste izan zuten argi uhinak garatzeko bitarteko bat bazegoela, eta bitarteko (argi eterra) unibertsoan zegoela. —Thomas Thompson zientzia

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6 | Gai esperimental batek eragin dezake “make violent gesticulations with his hands, move his head, roll his eyes, and chatter his teeth”, eta ez gintuzke harritu behar, Poeren istorioan bezala, fenomenoa ezagutzen ez dutenek eskenatik alde egin edo konortea galdu izan dutela (Dods, 1847: 23-24; Poe, 1983: 840).

7 | Poek “Hans Phaal” deskribatzerakoan antzeko termino anbiguoa erabili zituen, bai “iruzurra” zein irakurleei txantxa egin zezakeen “jeu d'esprit” .

dibulgatzailaren hitzetan, eterra zen “a peculiar matter, extremely subtile, capable of penetrating the densest bodies, astonishingly elastic, and the cause of heat, light, magnetism, electricity, and even of gravitation” (Thomson, 1830: 4). Hala ere, ez zegoen adostasunik eterraren inguruan, eta XIX mendearren erdialderako zalantzat jartzen zen benetakoa zen edo ez, ezin izan baitzuten inolako eterrik aurkitu planeten mugimendua aztertzean. Thomas William Webben azalpena honakoa da: “only assumed for the sake of the theory” eta, beraz, “need not be further noticed”. 1883an (5n; cf. Campbell and Garnett, 1882: 394) esan zuen agian lehenago emana zela. Iza ere, XIX mendearren erdialderako “eter”ek portmanteau hitz bezala funtzionatzen zuen dagoeneko—teoria batek beharrezko zuen definizioa har zezakeen hitz bat.

Espero ez genuena, ordea, da Poek terminoa hain modu zabalean erabiltzea. “Mesmeric Revelation”en Vankirkek iragartzen du “God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter.” Eta: “The ultimate or unparticled matter not only permeates all things but impels all things—and thus *is* all things within itself. This matter is God” (Poe, 1983: 722, 720). Ez genuke pentsatu behar Poek horrelakoak serioski hartzen zituenik. Vankirk mesmerismoaren eraginaren pean zegoen halakoak esatean, eta gainera, kontutan hartu behar da aldarrikapen hauek ez direla garaiko ideia teologikoen isla baino. Mende erdialdeko Estatu Batuetan nahiko onartua zegoen, Thomas Dicken hitzetan, Jainkoak “pervades, actuates, and supports the whole frame of universal nature” (1846, 1: 65), eta batzuek Jainkoaren nonahikotasuna eterrarekin konparatu zezaketen⁸. Beste batzuek ordea, Poeren terminologiaren aurrekari gisa, elektrizitatearekin erlazionatuko lukete (edo eterra elektrizitate gisa ikusiko lukete). “I am fully sensible,” idatzi zuen mesmerismoaren aldeko batek, “that electricity is a fluid most inconceivably subtile, purified, and fine. . . . It is almost unparticled matter. . . .” (Dods, 1853: 107; cf. Milutis, 2006: xi). Eterra “partikularik gabeko gai” moduan ikusten duen ikusmoldetik hartu zituen ideiak Poek “Mesmeric Revelation” egiteko, eta horregatik ematen du obra hain eguneratua dagoela; hala ere, honek ez zuen esan nahi Poek serioski hartzen zituenik bere hitzak. Bi hilabete lehenago, “The Power of Words”en (1845), eterra beste modu batean definitu zuen, sustantzia bezala, zeina “pervades, and alone pervades all space” eta “medium of creation” baiten (Poe, 1983: 1825)⁹, eta Eurekan beste modu batean definitu zuen berriro¹⁰. Beranduagoko lan batean Poek eterra sartzen du adierazteko “sustantzia” Jainkoa izendatzeko beste modu bat dela, edo “Jainko” “sustantziaren” beste izen bat. Beste behin, ideia hau interesgarria da. Iza ere, unibertsoaren ikusmolde zehatz batek izan zuen eragina materialismo kristauan bi mende baino gehiagotan¹¹. Baina ez dago hain argi obra honek aurrekoek baino argiago erakusten dutenik Poeren sinismena zein zen.

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8 | Edward Hitchcock 1851an esan zuen Jainkoaren presentziari buruz “transmitted by means of the luminiferous ether to the limits of the universe” (1854: 433). Antzeko argudioak aurkitu daitezke erlijio desberdinatan, Metodismotik Mormonismora: ikus adibidez, Porterfield, 2005: 164; Whittaker, 1991: 199; eta, ikerketa orokorretarako, Cantor, 1981; Mills, 2006: 67-93.

9 | Jainkoak benetan hitz egingo balio –edo pentsatu–unibertsoari denboraren hasieratik, orduan bere hitza transmititzeko bitarteko bat egon beharko zen; eta bitarteko hau baldin bazegoen, Jainkoaren kreazioak gizakien adierazpenetan ere paralelo bat izan beharko zukeen. Bruce Millen laburpenean (2006: 71), “the thoughts of God permeate and impel all things, and similarly human words and thoughts pulse outward from the self.”

10 | Hala ere, ni ez nago ados Eurekak tematikoki, estetikoki eta teorikoki konsistentzia duela Poeren beste lanekin esaten dutenekin: horretarako, ikus Jacobs, 1969.

11 | Era berean, ez da originala ezta ere esatea hodei kondentsazioak eragin zuela unibertsoaren hasiera. “Space and duration exist of necessity, and that space was eternally filled with primal matter which I contend is electricity”, John Bovee Dodsek azaldu zuen. Unibertsoan dagoen guztia elektrizitatetik kondentsatu da, “not instantly but gradually”, gehitu zuen (1847: 36, 40). Mary Somervillek, Laplaceren ideiei sarrera bat eginez ingeles hiztun batzuentzat, ez zuen hain jarrera dogmatikoa hartu. Orokorean, adierazi zuen, “a self-luminous, phosphorescent material substance, in a highly dilated or gaseous state,” zegoela, aldatzen joaten zen

2. Helburuak

Zergatik idazten zuen, orduan, Poek? Ez bazuen zientzialari edota zientzia dibulgatzailaren irudia eman nahi bere irakurleen aurrean (bere ideiak gehiegi aldatzen dira, eta ondorioz ezin dugu dibulgatzaitzat hartu), orduan serio hartu behar ditugu bere obrak eta sinistu *Eureka* poema bezala aurkeztu nahi zuela—eta onartu, Sir Philip Sidneyk egin bezala (Aristotelesen antzera), poesiak ez du zerikusirik egunero kotasunarekin. Beraz, Poeren poema kosmologikoa “gezur” bat izango balitz bezala irakurtzea da nire iradokizuna, non bere asmoa zen harrapatzea “the attention (and ideally the imagination) of the public” (Boese, 2002: 2; Poe, 1983: 608)—bai eragin poetikoa sortzeko, zein iruzur egiteko (ziurrenik azken hau izan zen arrazoia, kontutan hartuta oso aberatsa dela detaile zientifikoei dagokionez).

Noski, ironiaz hitz egin genezake dezepzioaz baino. Poek idatzi zuen gehienetan, G. R. Thomposonek esandakoaren arabera “qualified by, indeed controlled by, a prevailing duplicity or irony in which the artist presents us with slyly insinuated mockery of both ourselves as readers and himself as writer” zen. Esaldi honek *Eureka* ulertzeko klabe asko ematen ditu, eta gainera, oinarritzat hartuz gero, ez genuke esan beharko dezepzioa zela Poek bilatzen zuena (1973: 9; cf. Dayan, 1987: 23; Jar'ab, 2003). Hala ere, Poe iruzurti bat zen: irakurleei barre egiten zien eta honela definitzen zituen: “believers in every thing Odd”, zeintzuen “Credulity”—let us call it Insanity at once”, eta “ignorant people” gisa ditu (“Fifty Suggestions”, 1849, no. 28, in Poe 1984: 1303). Burton R. Pollinek esan zuen Poeren iruzurren azpian bazegoela “the sheer exuberant humour of his inventiveness” (1970: 174), baina, Poeren hitzak kontutan hartuta, Constance Rourkeren lehenagoko ikuspuntuak gehiago konbentzitzen gaitu. Izan ere, bere ustetan Poeren iruzurren helburua “was to render his readers absurd, to reduce them to an involuntary imbecility” (1959: 181-84; cf. Walsh, 2006: 116; Elmor, 1995: 187).

2.1 Generoari buruzko itxaropenak

Poeren iruzurretan esanguratsuena dena da existitzen ziren generoak erabili zituela irakurleen itxaropenak pizteko (Burgoyne, 2001). Poek iruzurra kazetaritzan ere erabili zuen. “*The Atlantic has been actually crossed in a Balloon!*” aldarrikatu zuen New Yorkeko Sunaren gehigarri batean 1844ko apirilaren 13an, “and this too without difficulty—without any great apparent danger—with thorough control of the machine—and in the inconceivably brief period of seventy-five hours from shore to shore” (Poe, 1983: 743; Goodman, 2008: 238-45). Horrelakoak aurrera eramateko, beharrezkoa zen, alde batetik, bere irakurleek garaiko teknologiaren aurrerapenei buruz gutxi jakitea (eta

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sustantzia bat “by the mutual gravitation of its particles” eta izar eta galaxia bihurtzen zituena, baina teleskopio onagoak beharko ziren hodeien teoria egiazkotzat hartzeko (1831: lxvi). Hala ere, *Eureka* argitaratu eta hamazazpi urtetara, Jules Vernek hodei kondentsazioaren teoria erabili zuen bere *De la Terre à la Lune* (1978: 74-75). Eskenaren Poeren bertsioak iradokitzen du uste personal batek bultzatua idatzi zuela.

beraz sinistea ozeano Atlantikoa globo batek zeharka zezakeela)¹²; bestalde, beharrezkoa zen jendeak konfiantza izatea egunkarietan. Jakitunagoak izan behar izan zuten. Hamarkada bat lehenago ilargiarekin geratutako iruzurra gogoratzea ez zen beharrezkoa izan behar konturatzeko egunkarietan agertzen den guztia ez dela zertan sinistu behar. Estatu Batuetako prentsa erabat sentsazionalista zen eta maiz argitaratzen zituen “an unlimited promotion of merchandise” (Lehuu, 2000: 37). Hala, sentsazionalismoarekiko jendeak zuen gosea izan zen—ezagutza zientifikorik eza baino- iruzurra posible izatea eragin zuen faktorea. —Harriet Martineauk azpimarratu zuen hamarkada bat lehenago, hezkuntza orokorrari dagokionez estatubatuarrak ari zirela “travelling far faster than any other people beyond the reach of [a hoax’s] deception” (1838, 3: 24).

Poek *Sunerako* idatzi zuen artikulua ez zen bakarrik irakurleak irigarri sentiarazteko egin zuen generoaren esplotazio bikain bat. Ikusi dugun bezala, globoari buruzko iruzurra argitaratu eta hilabete batzuetara bere irakurleei sonambulo baten errebelazio bikaina eskaini zien. Mesmerismoaren ikasle kontserbatzaileenek abisatu zuten ezen “God has revealed what it behoves us to know”—“if we make [somnambulists] reason about mysteries, their imagination will be exalted, and they will give in to all sorts of errors” (Deleuze, 1884: 249). “Arima gorputzari lotuta dagoen bitartean”, unibertsalista alemaniar Johann Heinrich Jung-Stillingek idatzi zuen: “the connection [between the soul and the spiritual world] is not perfect” (“The Nature of Man,” *The Magnet* 1, December, 1842: 158-59;qtd. Taves, 1999: 140n61). Hala eta guztiz ere, jendeak uste zuen sonambuloek beti egia esaten zutena, eta Poek, nahita, errebelazio mesmerico bat egin zuen, nahiz eta bere testuak ez zuen ezertxo ere ez errebelatzen.

Beste behin: Vankirken errebelazioarekin jendeari barre egin baino, Poek irakurleen itxaropenetan eragin nahi zuen “The Man of the Crowd” (1840) bezalako istorioekin, non sinistarazten digun ipuinak hirian zehar eramango gaituela (Whitmanek gauza bera egin zuen 1842an “Life in a New York Market”ekin —Rubin and Brown 1950, 20-22), guri begiak irekiaraziz. Walter Benjaminek azpimarratu bezala, “The Man of the Crowd is no *flâneur*” (1968, 174). Eta hori da *Eureka*, Poek irakurketa kosmologikoari barre egiten dion lana. (Gogoratu behar da, lehenengoz aurkeztu zuenean “On The Cosmography of the Universe” izenarekin egin zuela New Yorken 1848ko ostailaren 3an)¹³.

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12 | Positiboegia zen: Atlantikoa hegazkinez lehengo aldiz 1919an gurutzatu zen.

13 | Iruzur egiteko kosmologiarekin gaia erabiltzea Oliver Goldsmithen *The Vicar of Wakefield*en erabili zen (1766).

2.2 John Bovee Dods

Mende erdialde inguruko estatubatuarrek kosmologiaren kimoiresmen handia zuten, baina argitaratutako lan guztietatik, azpimarratu nahiko nituzke John Bovee Dodsenak. Nahiz eta ez dagoen probarik bi gizonen artean loturak egiteko, Dods Poek besteei erakustea gustuko zuen iruzurti horietako bat zen. 1843an, sei arratsaldetan jarraian, Dodsek Bostoneko berrehun bat ikusle baino gehiagoren arreta erakarri zuen kosmosari buruz eman zituen hitzaldietan, eta garaiko kroniken arabera, “jendetza” handi bat entzutera sartzeko tokirik gabe ere geratu zen. Hala ere, ez zuen jende guztia harritu. *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*ek sentitu zuen hiriaren ohorearen aurka egin zuela Dodsen ikuskizunak (Whorton, 2004: 112); eta nire uztez Poe bat zetorren horrekin. Horregatik hartu zuen Poek kosmologia bere iruzurren jomuga zuzen bezala.

Dods ez zen bakarra unibertsoari buruz era honetako ikuskizunak ematen. Poek bazekien Andrew Jackson Davis (“Ploughkeepsie Seer” izenez ezagutua, Ploughkeepsieko igarlea) ere arrakastatsua zela, eta ber irakurraldiak *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and A Voice to Mankind* (1847), trantze egoeran idatziak izan ziren (Tatar 1978, 194). Poek Davisengan interes handia zuen eta 1846ko urtarilean deitu egin zion (Davis, 1871: 317); bazekien biktima on bat zuela bera. “IN THE BEGINNING,” azaldu zuen Davisek, “the Univercoelum was one boundless, undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of LIQUID FIRE! . . . It was without parts; for it was a Whole. Particles did not exist; but the Whole was as one Particle” (1852: 121). Gerta daiteke *Eureka* era horretako nahikeriak irrigarri egiteko idatzia izan izana; gainera, nahita edo ez, gainditu egin zituen (“altogether irresistible, although inexpressible”), “that what God originally created—that that Matter which, by dint of His Volition, He first made from His Spirit, or from Nihility, could have been nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of—what?—of Simplicity” (Levine and Levine, 2004: 22; cf. 102-03). Hala ere, Dods da batez ere Poeren kritiken helburu zuzena kosmologiari buruzko ironia egin zuenean¹⁴. Erretorikan antzekotasunak daude; elektrizitatea—edo antzeko zerbait—unibertsoaren hasierako printzipioa denaren ustea dago (Levine and Levine, 2004: 27; Dods, 1847: 78). Eta, garrantzitsuena dena, poesiari dagokionez antzezoak diren elizgizon ohia eta bera, Poek Dodsen irakurketetan aurkitzen dugun gizona hankaz gora uzten du. Giza hilezkortasuna onartu baino, Dodsek ez bezala, Poek azpimarratzen duena iheskortasuna—Jainkoari buruzko diskurtsoan tokirik ez duena.

Dods kontserbatzailea zen etorkizuna ikusteko moduan. “[W]hen we lie down upon the bed of death, and the embers of life feebly glimmer in the socket of existence,” azaldu zuen, “then the Gospel of Christ

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14 | Ziurrenik Poek bazekin Dodsek hiru mila kopia saldu zituela hilabete batean.

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15 | *The Scarlet Letteren* (1850), Hawthornek fenomeno astronomikoak interpretatzen zituen ezjakin bati egiten dio barre.

points us to brighter scenes—scenes beyond the tomb.” Aurrerago begiratu genezake eta berpizte orokorrago baten esperoan egon, noiz Jainkoaren “dread voice shall speak with a living energy, that the very heavens shall hear, and the dead shall rise to die no more, and turn their eyes from the dark, ruinable tomb on the scenes of eternity!” (Dods, 1847: 64, 76). Poeren ikuspuntua erabat desberdina zen. Ez zuen norbanakoa kontutan hartzen, baizik eta arraza, eta etorkizuna aurrejartzen zuen: “Man . . . ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah” (Levine and Levine, 2004: 106). Noski, nork bere burua Jehovahtzat hartzea norbera norbanako bezala ez ikustea da (E. A. Poe bezala, adibidez). Poek garaiko baikortasun eta antropozentrismoari erronka bota zien modu honetan, eta esanahiari garrantzia kendu zion (Taylor, 2007: 204).

Poek, nire uztez, nahita egin zuen. Askok, Patrick F. Quinnek bezala, *Eureka* “unintentional poem of death” bezala ikusi dute (1963: 4-7); nik, ordea, uste dut deuseztapenari buruz duen ikuspuntua ez duela nahigabe azaltzen modu horretan obran, horregatik, *Eureka* lan probokatzailetzat hartuko nuke. Liburuak gizadiari buruz duen ikuspuntua euren dignitatea eta bizitzaren zentzua lana irakurtzean aurkitzen duten horien aurka egindako broma gogor bat da, hots, Dods eta Davisen bezalako pertsonen aurka; baina, besterik gabe, Poeren umorearen ezaugarri bat da hori. Broma handiena espekulazioak sinesten zituztenen aurkakoa da, espezializazio zientifika gero eta ohikoagoa zen garai batean; unibertssoaren jatorriari buruzko galderrei erantzuna igarle batek, eliz gizon unibertsalista batek edo kazetari batek eman zitzakeela uste zutenentzat, nahiz eta lan hauek garaiko zientziarekin nolabaiteko harremana zuten. Herri zientzia, iradoki izan da, erantzun bat izan zen XIX mendeko pentsamendu zientifikoaren izaera ezkutuari (Daniels, 1968: 40-41); eta salbuespen gutxi batzuk badaude ere, orokorrean dibulgatzaileak ez ziren berritzaleak¹⁵. Hori hala izanik, Humboldt *Eurekak* egiten dion erreferentziaren garrantzitsua da gogorarazten digulako horrelako lan bat eskaintzen digunaren harrokeria. Nahiz Humboldtek jakinduria eman diezaiokeen lanari (Humboldt XIX mendeko Estatu Batuetan miretsia zen bere jakinduriagatik), unibertssoari buruzko teoria bat ezingo zen oinarrituta egon ezjakin batzuek estatubatarren dolarrak biltzeko helburuarekin sortutako teorietan. Gauzak horrela, ez dago arrazoirik zalantzan jartzeko Poek interesez jarraitu zituela zientziaren berrikuntzak, baina, *Eureka* iruzur gisa irakurri behar da eta ez kosmologiari buruzko saiakera serio bezala. Poe paregabeara izan zen argi utzi zuelako Dodseña bezalako irakurketa kosmologikoak erdipurdikoak baino ez zirela.

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