

Edgar Allan Poe, His Tomb

by [Peter Dreyer](#) (August 2023)



Stéphane Mallarmé as Pan, published in *Les hommes d'aujourd'hui*, 1887

Imitation apropos of Stéphane Mallarmé's "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe"

The poet's bare blade bestirring a century
mortified never to have grasped that death
triumphed in his strange, inimitable voice
eternity at last made him himself.

An angel purifying our tribal speech,
back in the day, critics swaggered out loud,
vaunting the ebullient potion swallowed
with their unworthy draft of bitter swill.

If admiration sculpt no bas-relief
to adorn his confirming monument,
why, earth and heaven are, alas, at odds,

but this calm slab, placed by fatality
here, constitutes henceforth a stony hinge
on sacrilege's future sallies' disdain.

Tel, qu'en Lui même enfin l'éternité le change,
died in Bawlmer—"congestion of the brain." *

*Poe, who died in 1849 at the age of forty, probably of rabies, is buried in Westminster Cemetery, 519 West Fayette Street (at North Greene Street), Baltimore. In the 1957 University of California Press bilingual edition of Stéphane Mallarmé's selected poems, C. F. MacIntyre translates the original line I reproduce here as: "Such as into Himself Eternity at last changes / him." Mallarmé gushed that Poe was like "un aérolithe [meteorite]; stellaire ... très loin de nous contemporanement" ("Edgar Poe," *Divagations* [1897]). Embracing a myth they themselves had helped create, he and

Baudelaire failed to notice that Poe was actually a truly godawful poet, something that had not escaped American writers like Emerson (who dismissed him as a “jingle man”) and Henry James. Rather similarly, Jerry Lewis is regarded by some French film critics as a revolutionary cinematic genius. Here, however, we are deep into sacred cow territory.—P.D.

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Peter Richard Dreyer is a South African American writer. He is the author of *A Beast in View* (London: André Deutsch), *The Future of Treason* (New York: Ballantine), *A Gardener Touched with Genius: The Life of Luther Burbank* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan; rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California Press; new, expanded ed., Santa Rosa, CA: Luther Burbank Home & Gardens), *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Secker & Warburg), and most recently the novel *Isacq* (Charlottesville, VA: Hardware River Press, 2017).

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