

Three Variants Of To One In Paradise

By Melissa Ann Wood

The task of deciphering variants of meaning in different textual editions is arduous. The footnoted changes are difficult to keep sorted, particularly in a case like "The Assigination" where there are five variants. In the case of the embedded poem, there are fifteen footnoted variants. The presentation of these variants in strings of coded footnotes is daunting to the novice. We have chosen to examine three versions of the poem here in hopes that the examination of specific textual alterations will illuminate further our proposition that the character qualities of the readership directly influenced Poe's editorial choices.

The first and most remarkable difference is the lack of a title, which is the case in seven of the fifteen variants. The titles that Poe assigned the poem (To One In Paradise, To Ianthe in Heaven, To One Departed) make explicit reference to the death of the beloved female in the poem. The *Lady's Book* version skirts the direct reference to her death. The name Ianthe, included in the *Burton Gentleman's Magazine* version of the poem, is a reference to the pseudonym of Byron's lover, Contessa Guiccioli. Poe's use of this pseudonym is a reference to the fact that the story and its' embedded poem were loosely based on the love affair of Byron and Contessa Guiccioli.

Poe's poetry was known for its' romantic, sonorous and mystical qualities. The changes in line five offer the reader an opportunity to examine his concern

with the musicality of the lines. Poe's exclusion of "fairy fruits" in the *Lady's Book* could have been motivated by his concern to eliminate any content that may have been overly pagan for the readership of the *Lady's Book*. However, the primary quality of these editorial alterations is their effects on the metrical movement and sonorous quality of the lines. In the *Lady's Book* version, line five is in iambic tetrameter, lines four and six remain the same in all three versions, iambic trimeter. Line five in the *J. Lorimer Graham* version is also in iambic tetrameter, but two syllables are elided for *wreathed* and *flowers*. The *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* also presents the line in iambic tetrameter with the final syllables of *wreath'd* and *flowers* elided. While the elided syllables add a rhythmic richness, the word choice, *around about*, seems awkwardly redundant. The meaning of this line does not change in any significant way from version to version. This suggests that Poe in his editorial process was concerned, not only with the conveyed meaning, but also with the cantabile nature of the verse. The *Lady's Book* version sounds overly simple. The *Lorimer Graham* version seems to strike a balance, avoiding the simple sing song quality of the *Lady's Book* version and the redundancy of the *B.G. M.* version. The sonorous qualities of Poe's poetry were a concern that Poe deemed worthy of multiple revisions.

The *Lady's Book* version includes an additional stanza following line 20 of the poem that was not present in any version of the poem as it was presented outside of the context of the story. The story as a whole included some thirty odd lines or more in the *Lady's Book* edition. One wonders if the *Lady's Book* paid by

the line. In this stanza, the object of the speaker's love is born "o'er the billow." The billow is a swell of a wave. His love was born across the sea. She was born across the billow away from the speaker to "titled age and crime, and unholy pillow." This indicates that his love did betroth another, a man that could give her the status of a "title." To the speaker this was a "crime" and a pillow that cradles loveless heads could hold no claim to sanctity. Is it possible that Poe was making an effort to change the emphasis of the plot to make it more palatable for the ladies? The *Lady's Book* version avoids direct and forceful language concerning her death. *Lady's Book* readers could have conveniently avoided focusing on the death of the female protagonist, preferring instead to interpret her absence from his life as a pragmatic decision on the part of the woman to honor the appropriate social protocol. The poem's location within the story necessarily provides information about the love affair that is central to the story plot. However, the poem, when presented outside of the context of the story, does not require this additional stanza, the purpose of which is to illuminate the problematic elements of the relationship before the death of the female protagonist.

Poe altered line fifteen. The *Lady's Book* version states "Ambition - all - is o'er!" while the Lorimer Graham version says "The light of life is o'er!" Ambition is a fundamental character trait of the prototypical romantic character. The "light of life" implies all that is worth living for, while "ambition" in comparison seems less bleak. The changes in line seventeen have a similar effect. The sea is

“breaking” in the *Lady's Book* version, while it is “solemn” in the *Lorimer Graham* version. The sea is always breaking on the shore. To embody the sea with a human sentiment of dark and mournful intent adds a heightened sense of unconquerable depression.

The J. Lorimer Graham Version¹
1849

To One In Paradise

Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine –
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed with fairy fruits and
flowers,
And all the flowers were mine.

Ah, dream too bright to last!
Ah, starry Hope! That didst arise
But to be overcast!
A voice from out the Future cries,
“On! On! – but o’er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast!

For, alas! Alas! With me
The light of Life is o’er!
No more – no more – no more –
(Such language holds the solemn sea
To the sands upon the shore)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar!

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams –
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams

¹ All three versions of the poem offered here are
excerpted from:

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Collected Works of Edgar*

Allan Poe. Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Cambridge:

Harvard UP, 1978.

Burton’s Gentlemen’s Magazine
Version
July 1839

To Ianthe in Heaven

Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine –
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreath’d around about with flowers,
The flowers – they all were mine.

But the dream – it could not last!
And the star of Hope did rise
But to be overcast!
A voice from out the Future cries,
“Onward! – while o’er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast!

For, alas! Alas! With me
Ambition – all – is o’er
No more – no more – no more –
(Such language holds the solemn sea
To the sands upon the shore)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar!

And all my *hours* are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams –
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams

The Lady's Book Version
1834

Thou wast *all* to me, love,
For which my soul did pine -
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed *round with wild* flowers,
And all the flowers were mine.

But the dream - it could not last!
Young Hope! Thou did'st arise
But to be overcast!
A voice from out the Future cries,
"*Onward!*" while o'er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies
Mute, motionless, aghast!

For, alas! Alas! With me
Ambition - all - is o'er!
No more - no more - no more -
(Such language holds the *breaking* sea
To the sands upon the shore)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar!

Alas! For that accursed time
They bore thee o'er the billow
From me - to titled age and crime,
And unholy pillow -
From Love, and from our misty clime
Where weeps the silver willow!

And all my *hours* are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams -
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams