

Edgar Allan Poe, a fore-runner of Pandeism

Edgar Allan Poe denied that he was a pantheist and he would not of course have heard the word "pandeism", but some of the ideas he expressed in his 79-page prose poem Eureka were astounding for the 19th century. Poe (1809-1849) was an American writer best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. These are extracts from his prose poem Eureka:

"There was an epoch in the Night of Time, when a still-existent Being existed—one of an absolutely infinite number of similar Beings that people the absolutely infinite domains of the absolutely infinite space. **It was not and is not in the power of this Being—any more than it is in your own—to extend, by actual increase, the joy of his Existence;** but just as it is in your power to expand or to concentrate your pleasures (the absolute amount of happiness remaining always the same) so did and does a similar capability appertain to this Divine Being, who thus passes his Eternity in perpetual variation of Concentrated Self and almost Infinite Self-Diffusion. **What you call The Universe is but his present expansive existence. He now feels his life through an infinity of imperfect pleasures—the partial and pain-intertangled pleasures of those inconceivably numerous things which you designate as his creatures, but which are really but infinite individualizations of Himself.** All these creatures—all—those which you term animate, as well as those to whom you deny life for no better reason than that you do not behold it in operation—all these creatures have, in a greater or less degree, a capacity for pleasure and for pain:—but the general sum of their sensations is precisely that amount of Happiness which appertains by right to the Divine Being when concentrated within Himself. **These creatures are all, too,**

more or less conscious Intelligences; conscious, first, of a proper identity; conscious, secondly and by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with the Divine Being of whom we speak—of an identity with God. Of the two classes of consciousness, fancy that the former will grow weaker, the latter stronger, during the long succession of ages which must elapse before these myriads of individual Intelligences become blended—when the bright stars become blended—into One. Think that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness—that Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. **In the meantime bear in mind that all is Life—Life—Life within Life—the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine.**” (from “Eureka: A Prose Poem” by Edgar Allan Poe)

From the Kindle version of the book: <http://amzn.eu/bSaKj3h>

This previous paragraph further clarifies Poe’s train of thought:

“The willing into being the primordial particle, has completed the act, or more properly the conception, of Creation. We now proceed to the ultimate purpose for which we are to suppose the Particle created—that is to say, the ultimate purpose so far as our considerations yet enable us to see it—the constitution of the Universe from it, the Particle. **This constitution has been effected by forcing the originally and therefore normally One into the abnormal condition of Many.....** The assumption of absolute Unity in the primordial Particle includes that of infinite divisibility. Let us conceive the Particle, then, to be only not totally exhausted by diffusion into Space. From the one Particle, as a centre, let us suppose to be irradiated spherically—in all directions—to immeasurable but still to definite distances in the previously vacant space—a certain inexpressibly great yet limited number of unimaginally yet not infinitely minute atoms.” (from “Eureka:

A Prose Poem" by Edgar Allan Poe)

No less astonishing are the cosmological insights in the prose poem Eureka. The Italian astronomers Paolo Molaro and Alberto Cappi have written:

"Eureka is a unique book. It does not only incorporate astronomy, but is an astronomical book written by a poet with deep scientific insights. Putting aside the metaphysical introduction and the lyric conclusion, in its central part Eureka is nearly a textbook of theoretical Newtonian cosmology, but without mathematics. As a matter of fact, E.A. Poe has been the first man to imagine an evolving Universe in a Newtonian frame, which is not much different from modern views, thus introducing a sort of inverse Big Bang model: what God originally [...] created nothing but Matter in its utmost conceivable state of Simplicity. [...] the primordial Particle. We do not know of any scientist who openly found inspiration from Poe's book. However, George Lemaître (1931), who did the first step towards the Big Bang theory, wrote something very similar: If we go back in the course of time we must find fewer and fewer quanta, until we find all the energy of the universe packed in a few or even in a unique quantum, which he called the Primeval Atom...."

<https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1506/1506.05218.pdf>

Helge Kragh, a Danish historian of science, wrote:

"When Poe's essay merits attention it is not only because his universe was of finite age, **but especially because it evolved in a way that resembles the much later big-bang universe.** He imagined that the universe arose from the explosion of a singular state of matter in "one instantaneous flash." From the explosion of the undifferentiated primordial atom followed the entire history of the universe: First the fragments would be diffused by means of radiation in such a way as to fill space homogeneously, and eventually they would form the

celestial bodies by gravitational attraction.”

*(Matter and Spirit in the Universe: Scientific and Religious
Preludes to Modern Cosmology, by Helge Kragh)*