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Panoramas as Projections of the Unconscious in Nineteenth-Century Fiction

Abstract: This essay explores a theory of panoramas put forward by the experimental postwar German novelist and translator Arno Schmidt. Schmidt claims that panoramas were so pervasive in the visual culture of the nineteenth century that writers of the period were unconsciously influenced by them to such an extent that they unthinkingly framed their descriptions by drawing on experience with specific panoramas. He primarily expounds the theory in his longest work of fiction, *Zettel's Traum* (1970), translated as *Bottom's Dream* (2016), where he supports it with evidence from Edgar Allan Poe and Jules Verne. He also promoted the theory in later interviews and regarded it not only as part of his fiction but as a significant discovery in its own right. This essay extracts Schmidt's theory from its fictional context and illustrates how he thought it could be used hermeneutically to uncover submerged panoramas in the works of nineteenth-century authors. We conclude by locating the theory as part of the contemporary reception history of panoramas.

Keywords: Arno Schmidt, Edgar Allan Poe, Zettel's Traum, Bottom's Dream, Optical Unconscious

Panoramas are widely studied in the history of art and visual culture, but their appearances in literature are less well explored. In this essay we will introduce examples of panoramic imagery in the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Jules Verne, but we won't only be looking at the influence of actual panoramas on fiction.[1] Instead we will

1 There is very interesting literature on the subject of nineteenth-century European novels and the panorama. While relevant, this material is beyond the scope of this paper. However, interested readers may find further context of this intersection in the following work. Molly Brunson (2008; 2017) has written extensively on the history of the panorama and Russian literature, notably her essay "Panorama P'era: Opticheskaia illiuziia i illiuziia romana v Voine i mire" ["Pierre's Panorama: Optical and Novelistic Illusion in War and Peace"] as well as her "Gogol Country: Russia and Russian Literature in Perspective." Byrd's (2017) work, "A Pedagogy of Observation: Nineteenth-Century Panoramas, German Literature, and Reading Culture," studies the interdependent relationship between text, reading, and panoramas in nineteenth-century Germany. Samuels (2004) discusses the role of optical devices in shaping France's understanding of its historical past, thereby influencing cultural outlets including

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be exploring an unusual interpretation of panoramic imagery in literature presented by the German novelist Arno Schmidt (1914–1979), one of the most important experimental writers of the postwar period. Schmidt's novel *Zettel's Traum* (1970), translated into English as *Bottom's Dream* (2016), is a 1,330-page conversation about Edgar Allan Poe.[2] It is presented as a discussion among several people who are working on a new translation of Poe into German, but it is also a comprehensive survey of the period that one of the narrators calls "POE=Zeit" [the time of Poe] (Schmidt 1970, 11), which is understood as roughly 1750–1850. Schmidt brings an encyclopedic knowledge to bear on his subject; in the course of the book his characters mention approximately 2,000 writers, naturalists, and other authors, and develop several theories about the literary project and imagination of the period.

One of the central theories advanced in the book concerns panoramas, and it is an unusual theory. The principal character Dän Pagenstecher proposes that certain texts by Poe, Verne, and others reproduce the spatial characteristics and typical details of panoramas, and to that extent the theory is unremarkable. But there is the further claim that panoramas were so pervasive in the visual culture of the POE=Zeit that writers were *unconsciously* influenced by them, so much so that when they wanted to describe vast landscapes they automatically or unthinkingly imported not only the typical depth, breadth, and height of the large panoramas but also their details, including even the spiral staircases that sometimes led to the observation platforms. In effect, panoramas were the "optical unconscious" of the POE=Zeit.[3]

This theory would mainly be of interest to readers of Schmidt if it weren't for the fact that the author himself believed the theory and thought of it as one of his principal discoveries. For that reason the reading we propose here has three levels, two of which are new in the panorama literature. First there is the fictional setting of the novel *Bottom's Dream* in which several German translators attempt to understand—more ambitiously, to *master*—Poe. Second is the novel's claim that the influence of panoramas was actually unconscious and is therefore not explicit in the nineteenth-century texts. And third is the phenomenon of a postwar German author proposing to rewrite our understanding of the influence of panoramas by setting his theory as a fictional dialogue.

First we will introduce Schmidt and his book to readers who may not be familiar with them; then we will survey some of the principal examples of his argument in the

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the novel. Maxwell (1992) examines the nineteenth-century mystery stories of Paris and London, exploring the role of such narratives to reflect the modern city.

2 Our references throughout are primarily to the English translation, *Bottom's Dream*. In a few cases we refer to *Zettel's Traum* to discuss the physical properties and layout of the German original.

3 Rosalind Krauss (1994) develops this from an idea proposed by Walter Benjamin.

book; and finally we will consider his statements in interviews, which show that he believed he possessed a viable historical theory of panoramas outside of fiction.

1 Introduction to Schmidt and *Bottom's Dream*

Among German-language readers, Schmidt is one of the foremost postwar writers and a bridge to later postmodern developments. He is far less known in Anglophone circles, even though much of his work exists in English translation. His book, *Zettel's Traum* is physically unusual because it was typed on large sheets of paper, using the European A3 standard sheets (approximately 13 by 17 inches) and printed in facsimile. At 1,330 pages it is too large to comfortably hold, and it demands that the reader stand or bend over it. The English translation, *Bottom's Dream,* is smaller, but still unwieldy, and there are also typeset German editions.

Each page of the book is also unusual because Schmidt divided his pages into columns of justified text that oscillate among the left, right, and middle of each leaf (Fig. 1). While the system is not entirely consistent, Schmidt rationalizes the movement in a temporal and spatial framework. As explained in the *Vorläufiges zu Zettel's Traum* (1977) [“Prefatory Notes for *Bottom's Dream*”], the middle column represents the book's present tense, "one day in July, from 3:30 in the morning until 3:30 the next morning," in the German district of Celle, what Schmidt describes as "the real."[4] The left column is ascribed to Edgar Allan Poe and it takes place around 1830–1840 in the United States. The right column takes on a miscellaneous role—it is timeless, and its locale constantly shifts. On either side there are marginal annotations that follow this system, which generally represent things that are thought by the principal character, Dän Pagenstecher.

The sheer size of the pages and the weight and scale of the book create an immersive experience that challenges the reader's ability to grasp the entire spread while still deciphering the text. This means a reader is continuously in movement, scanning left and right, up and down, even connecting the left and right edges of the folio. Paralleling the shape of panoramas, Schmidt (1977) imagined each page in *Bottom's Dream* as “a cylinder that has been written on all around and which has then been cut open from top to bottom in a straight line and laid flat; That means the right edge can definitely explain the left one—and vice versa.” That imaginary 3-D version of the pages prompts a reading experience that enacts panoramic references even aside from the arguments about panoramas that develop in its pages.

4 English language quotations from the *Vorläufiges zu Zettel's Traum* are our own translation.

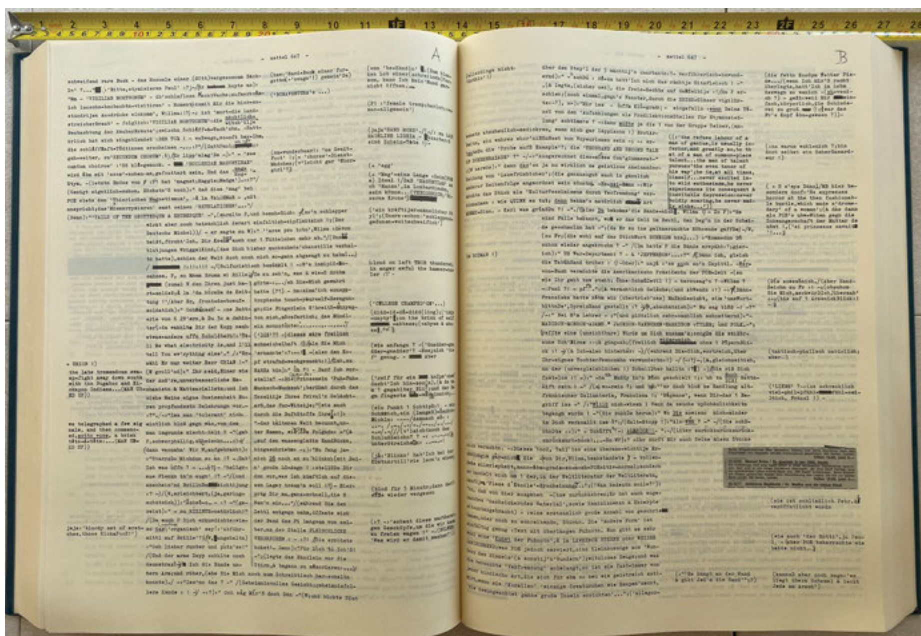

Fig. 1: A two-page spread from the “typoscript” facsimile edition of Schmidt’s *Zettel’s Traum* (1970). 13 inches × 17 inches × 3 inches. Image, Arthur Kolat. Used with kind permission of the Arno Schmidt Stiftung.

2 The Panorama Theory in *Bottom’s Dream*

Schmidt presents the theory of panoramic influence through the voice of Dän, who is both the book’s main character and its principal narrator. While in this section we ascribe the theory to Dän, we will see that Schmidt himself advanced these ideas in his own voice in several interviews. Because *Bottom’s Dream* is largely a reported conversation, theory and evidence are freely interwoven and are often disrupted by objections and digressions from other characters. Our presentation rearranges the material to make the structure of the argument more perspicuous.

The argument begins with a sketch of the rapid spread of panoramas following their first display in London in 1792. Dän is prone to encyclopedic lecturing, but his discussion here is notable for its length and coherence, as if he is presenting thoughts he has worked out extensively ahead of time.[5] He reminds us that by the early 1800s

5 The evidence of how *Bottom’s Dream* was composed indicates that this was Schmidt’s own working method. In preparation to write the book he assembled boxes of *Zettel* [notecards] each containing references to other texts, bits of argument, scraps of dialogue and description, etc. These were filed under labeled subheadings roughly in the order he planned to use them, then removed, typed up, and

it was possible to view panoramas throughout Europe and that by the 1830s variants such as the neorama, pleorama, cyclorama, and diorama had proliferated. Of particular relevance to the interpretation of Poe, he comments that "after 1830 (saith BAPST, 20) the USA was flooded with pano= & dioramas!" (Schmidt 2016, 163).[6] This historical development is separated into two periods: one ca. 1800–1850, the other 1860–1890. This "*two*=-fold beginning" (BD, 154) is topically motivated. Early panoramas depicted famous cityscapes, ("the world's metropoli of interest to Everyone" (BD, 154)), mountaintop views and other spectacular inaccessible vistas, Biblical scenes (e.g., the flood), and naval encounters such as the Battle of Navarino. Late panoramas, driven by "the rapid blossoming of the natural sciences" (BD, 154) centered on natural historical themes and "*primeval*" landscapes (BD, 155). These aimed both to educate viewers and to evoke the wonders of nature.[7] In the context of the novel, the force of this periodization is to show that panoramas were rich enough in content to underpin a wide range of literary production.

Dän's opening remarks, then, lay down the historical record for the other participants in the dialogue as well as for readers. They also begin to conjure the effects that panoramas had on their contemporary viewers. The paradigm of this "new optical Grand=Experience" (BD, 152) is described as unfolding in stages. Having paid their fare, the viewers would have entered through a darkened booth and descended stairs into a lightless corridor that they traversed long enough for their eyes to acclimate. After ascending via spiral staircase they emerged onto a viewing platform typically dressed like a stage set to resemble a rooftop, terrace, or kiosk. The open roof of the panorama permitted light to flood in, "allowing the most incredible ›illumination from above‹ to be shed on the surrounding paintings, all carefully=prepared by good masters of second rank) – the effect=then was *at least* as great as today's ›television‹ has been for (today's) authors" (BD, 153).[8] Following the journey through darkness,

assembled into the book's text on the fly. For more on Schmidt's working method see *Julia, laß das!* (Fischer 2021, 5–12).

6 Inline citations to the English translation, *Bottom's Dream*, will hereafter follow the format (BD, page#); The parenthetical reference here ("BAPST, 20") is to Germaine Bapst's 1891 work *Essai sur l'histoire des panoramas et des dioramas*. *Bottom's Dream* is thick with such references, which can be as narrow as individual pages of particular works or as wide as authors' entire undifferentiated corpuses. Encyclopedias, lexicons, and dictionaries from the POE=Zeit are freely invoked for the light they shed on the shared knowledge of the time.

7 Alexander von Humboldt, well known to both Poe and Schmidt, emphasized the capacity of highly immersive panoramas to produce long-lasting unconscious effects: "Panoramas are more productive of effect than scenic decorations, since the spectator, inclosed, as it were, within a magical circle, and wholly removed from all the disturbing influences of reality, may the more easily fancy that he is actually surrounded by a foreign scene. These compositions may give rise to impressions which, after many years, often become wonderfully interwoven with the feelings awakened by the aspect of the scenes when actually beheld." Cited in Werner (2004, 61).

8 We will retain the English-language translator's versions of Schmidt's idiosyncratic spelling and typography throughout, even though our account is mainly aimed at the root sense of Schmidt's words. In practice, a full reading needs to take notice of all his alterations from normative orthography. Here

the sudden profusion of color, lifelike terrain, and various technologically contrived illusions of motion produced an effect that, "for an unsophisticated age," was "simply incalculable" (BD, 154).

Dän comments in passing on several other forms panoramas took such as Carl Wilhelm Gropius's pleorama, which replaces the immobile central platform with a bobbing boat for the viewer to sit in. Daguerre's diorama also receives special attention for its presentation of movable translucent images displayed within a frame under variable illumination, an arrangement that permitted changes in time and weather to be realistically depicted (BD, 153–54). He even hints, in a half-jesting marginal comment, at the possibility of panoramas that incorporate smells: "Odor (with genuine=hierodullic nuditettes in the foreground) a pen=aroma" (BD, 154). What unites all of these is the shared quality of experience that they provide. This experience is characterized by sensory vividness as well as lifelikeness or realism that seems to suddenly transport the viewer directly into the presence of the scene. Dän's favorite encyclopedic sources are marshaled in support of these reception claims: the Brockhaus of 1830 comments that "one truly believes one is transported to the region depicted," and Pierer's *Universal-Lexikon* (2nd ed.) says that they provide the "illusion of truly beholding the object" (BD, 153). In addition, as we have seen, the scenes depicted are often exotic ones ("thrillers," "up-to-dately exciting ›*fields of slaughter*‹," and other "fresh=unexpected *topix,*" (BD, 154)) that are highly arousing and affectively charged: "Just try'n'*imagine* what a thrill it must've been," urges Dän at one point (BD, 154). A subsidiary claim is that this arousal can take on a specifically erotic character through its resemblance to the pleasures of voyeurism. This is most relevant to his claims about Poe, but also contributes to the generally heightened bundles of sensation that panoramas can evoke.

Once Dän has established to his satisfaction that there is a general type of experience that panoramas made widely available, the central claim of his theory then turns on the mechanism by which it infiltrates the unconscious of certain writers. His proposal is that "for a mentality fulla fantasy – (a DON QUIXOTic one at that, if possible) – the powerful impression left by such a panorama, became the *unconscious,* ›*cryptomnetic*‹ basis for far-ranging fictions, indeed for *entire books*" (BD, 155). The "›literary effects‹ of panoramas" go beyond their surfacing as explicit subject matter in books of the period: instead, "the entire=technical apparatus" shapes the form and content of these works, as we can see once we have in hand "the key of ›panoramism‹" (BD, 156).[9]

This infiltration is possible because, in Dän's eyes, many writers are not only "fulla fantasy" but inherently prone to subconscious falsification. This is particularly

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the neologism "carefully=prepared," linked with an equal sign, is a typical Schmidt invention, suggesting a single word. The single carets ‹ and › stand for the German style single-quotation marks, themselves translations of the Anglophone inverted-comma quotes Schmidt uses in the original German.

9 Werner (2004, 56–61) surveys the many overt discussions of panoramas in Poe's work.

true of those that he calls “Dichter Priester,” i.e., “poet-priests” or “DPs” for short. These DPs are the “DON QUIXOTic” personalities mentioned above. Dän is coy concerning just how many writers might suffer from being DPs, but he intimates that it is a widespread disorder and Poe is, for him, the prime specimen. Fully describing his notion of DPs would take us far afield, since much of *Bottom’s Dream* is a catalog of their pathologies. Their main characteristic for our purposes is that they habitually project unconscious fantasies onto their perceptions, coating and concealing reality with a distorting gloss. This gives rise to “*the* constraint of being unable to describe a factual state of affairs” (BD, 160). In particular, the more these fantasies are “richer, more affect=laden & complicated . . . the more they tend to squeeze inbetween him & his perception of reality, like some poorly=fitting & yet pied=colorfull setta spectacles” (BD, 161). DPs are particularly vulnerable to these distortions when intoxicated: “for even *small* dosages of alcohole: *& then, once in a twilit state, it’s into the panorama!*” (BD, 164). As the character Wilma puts it, summarizing Dän’s proposal: “You mean then that ‘nfact such stimuli can be *subconly* ex=panded, and ultimately provide the foundation for an artist’s own work: *without* the artist himself being clearly=aware of the real reason?” (BD, 155). To which Dän replies, parenthetically: “(Oh, nothing more common)” (BD, 155).

Drawing these threads together, Dän’s argument invokes (1) the *historical* claim that panoramas were pervasive within the visual culture of the nineteenth century; (2) the *phenomenological* claim that panoramas provided a similar general type of experience to their viewers; and (3) the *psychodynamic* claim that for a common type of writer this experience was calibrated to infiltrate their unconscious and project itself into their works without their awareness. In this way, highly immersive new technologies of vision disperse and submerge themselves, becoming formations in the literary-optical unconscious. Given these premises it is plausible that elements of panoramic experience will inevitably surface, perhaps in cloudy or disguised forms, throughout the writing of the time.

The argument clearly is not one restricted in principle to panoramas, and Dän notes several parallels with other contemporaneous visual technologies such as the camera obscura, wax museums, and the magic lanterns shows that enchanted Dickens.[10] He also suggests that the influence of panoramism as a visual mode “continues to have its effects into our own time” (BD, 155). Examples of this include the Futurama of the 1939 World’s Fair and several televised panoramas from the 1960s, as well as more sedate educational apparatuses like the planetarium. In a reply to Wilma’s barbed skepticism he offers a sweeping rebuttal:

> You fail to recognize=Wilma, that the influence of paintings & painting=like images, can be *proved* dia=positively . . . *How=often* ‘ve poets (including painters, too, if y’ like) not been stimulated by fu-

10 See Marsh (2009) for discussion of the inspiring effect of magic lanterns on Dickens.

> tografs . . . by the phlix, by theater, ›art books‹, windo-shopping: nowadays *tele=fission*!: modern artists should *be required by law* to keep notes on the broadcasts they watch day=in, day=out (BD, 159).

This theory of unconscious infiltration would be of little use without some way of confirming its claims. Fortunately, Dän also advances such a hermeneutic proposal that develops from the Quixote references seeded earlier in his discussion. He recounts a short episode from Chapter XVI of *Don Quixote* in which the deluded knight arrives at an inn, taking it for a castle, and encounters a servant girl whom he remakes into a princess in his imagination. Her smock becomes silken garb, her cheap glass beads become pearls, her "horse's mane" hair shimmers into brightest gold, and her stale breath sweetens (BD, 162). The contrast between the Don's fantasy and the crude reality is, as always, noted throughout by Sancho. And this is the interpretive approach that Dän recommends we take to confirm his theory of panoramism:

> You are obliged to take the statements of these one=sidedly=enchanted witnesses, and reconstruct both their=selves & their true appearance; their deeds, t'gether with the world that actually surrounded them during their earthly pilgrimitch. – That means«, (I sym=pathetic'ly relented): »recognizing, fr'instance, how FOUQUE's ›Fata Morgana‹ was based on the corresponding GROPIUS diorama. Or the ›magic mirror‹ in the castle of his witch Minnetrost . . . (BD, 162–163).

In the *Quixote*, the interpreter (Sancho) is correlating elements of the real world (i.e., the world presented as real within the text) with those of the Don's fantasy. In panoramism, the terms of the analogy shift subtly. Because of the interposed fantasy element, real-world panoramas do not appear *as* panoramas either in the imagination of authors or in their texts. We interpreters, like savvier Sancho Panzas, must correlate elements of the panoramic experiences that they underwent in reality with elements of their fictions. However, these fictional creations may not flaunt their origins, so we also need to correct for distortions imposed by their authors' "pied=colorfull setta spectacles" (BD, 161). To see how this Quixotean hermeneutics works in practice, we now turn to several examples worked out in the novel.

Submerged Panoramas in Nineteenth-Century Fiction

Dän's initial case study draws from Chapter 30 of Jules Verne's *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1864, rev. ed. 1867), one of many "Hollow Earth" novels discussed in *Bottom's Dream*. We are slowly instructed in how to read the text along with Dän's interlocutors, who offer their own glosses along the way. The chapter describes Verne's narrator awakening after being trapped in darkened tunnels for days. He climbs a set of rocky steps and finds himself suddenly on the shores of a brightly lit subterranean sea. This is the first correspondence, mapping onto the entrance to the panorama via a spiral staircase. Verne's narrator describes the foreground containing sand, shells, and "the bones of antediluvian animals," which Wilma conjectures were in reality

whale bones arranged as a kind of set dressing (BD, 157). The "line of huge cliffs . . . curved upward to incredible heights" corresponds to the cupolaed building in which the panorama is staged (BD, 156). The vegetation is strangely motionless despite the wind, implying its artificial nature. The quality of the light in the cavern also betrays its artificial origin: it is "not the light of the sun . . . nor was it the pale, vague glow of the moon . . . no! The power of this light . . . clearly indicated *something of purely electric origin*" (BD, 156). Similar hints that the scene is illusory appear in the narrator's description of the horizon, which is described as a misty curtain or backcloth against which the scenery is "*depicted,*" which Dän glosses as "the involuntary message to tell us the whole thing is ›drawn‹" (BD, 156). Even the sky hints at its own artificiality: "instead of a sky shining with stars, *I knew* . . . that above those clouds there was *a vault*" (BD, 156).

Within this description, then, we find a structure of correspondences that tightly maps onto the paradigmatic experience of the panorama-viewer. But it is a structure that is fitfully concealed from the reader and, surprisingly, from the author as well. The fantasy of an underground sea is not a free invention of Verne's fantasy, but something tacitly governed by dominant aspects of nineteenth-century visual culture. Quixotean hermeneutics brings these submerged references fully to the surface.

Dän goes on to demonstrate the application of his theory of panoramic influence by reference to specific texts of Poe's, including what he calls Poe's "panorama=stories" (BD, 163). Dän argues that one dead giveaway of Poe's panoramic opticality is the appearance in the text of a character turning or whirling on their heel. This is anchored by the explicit connection Poe makes in *Eureka* (1848) between whirling on one's heel and fully comprehending the 360 degrees of the panoramic view on top of Mount Etna. Poe writes:

> He who from the top of Ætna casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the extent and diversity of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its oneness. But as, on the summit of Ætna, no man has thought of whirling on his heel, so no man has ever taken into his brain the full uniqueness of the prospect; and so, again, whatever considerations lie involved in this uniqueness, have as yet no practical existence for mankind (Poe 1848, 8).

Poe returns to the theme of a mountaintop panorama later in *Eureka* by way of calculating how much of the globe such a panorama might represent and how many successive panoramas might then be surveyed in order to see the entire globe. Whirling around on one's heel manifests this impulse to see more comprehensively the 360-degree picture in which one is immersed.

Dän suggests that Poe did not actually stand on top of Mount Etna and whirl, but that he visited a panorama of Etna instead. "And what=if, between those well=documented dates –: *by QUINN!* – there could [be] *no room* for a be=pirouetting of Ætna, even aboard a jet plane: *what then!?*" (BD, 151). The answer comes some pages later: "On Sicily, He, POE, was=*not*: but as the profut didn't go to the mount, this time the

mount made its way to the profut" (BD, 163). Paul, the good disciple, completes Dän's thought: "And, if the panorama happened to be devoid of people: He could've whirld on his heel with no difficulty!" (BD, 163).

Dän's claim about *Eureka* is that the quality of the experience of having seen a panorama manifested itself in Poe's work as an interchangeable substitution for seeing the real vista. "What we have here is a *triumpf* of perspective & illusion," lectures Dän (BD, 152). The triumph of perspective is that the view is all-around, 360 degrees; its triumph of illusion is the vividness and verisimilitude of depiction. Contemporaneous accounts, Dän tells us, even proclaimed panoramic depictions identical to their objects: "›Qui a vu le panorama de Londre: est allé à Londre!‹ MIEL" (BD, 154).

Poe's supposed substitution of the panorama for the actual view of Etna in *Eureka* may be more of a conscious manifestation than an unconscious one. In this case, Poe may have been consciously using his memory of a panorama to describe the visual phenomenon of looking all around from a mountaintop. Dän argues further that the panoramic details of Poe's stories often appear unconsciously, beyond the control of the author, as happens in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1844).

The short story is ostensibly about an ailing man named Augustus Bedloe who goes on regular walks in the Ragged Mountains near Charlottesville, Virginia. One day he stays out longer than usual and has a strange dreamlike expedition, whereupon he returns home and recounts the events to his doctor. It is determined that the details Bedloe describes are actually the revolt of Chait Singh in the Kingdom of Benaras which took place in 1781. The story ends with Bedloe's adventure explained by the participation of his historical double, Mr. Oldeb, in the original battles.

Dän proposes that this tale of a man stumbling upon an historical battle in a foreign land during a walk in the mountains is really Poe's experience of the panorama of Benares manifesting itself unconsciously in the landscape and events of his fiction. From the beginning of Bedloe's retelling of his adventure, Dän sees disguised panorama allusions everywhere. For example, Bedloe begins his tale by saying that he "bent his steps immediately to the mountains, and, about ten, entered a gorge which was entirely new to me" (Poe 1983, 898). Dän claims that the gorge in question comes from Poe's experience of being intoxicated in the Benaras panorama and therefore mistaking "a mighty cupolaed=edifice for a ›hill‹" (BD, 164). Poe visited panoramas while under the influence, Dän says, and in Poe's text Beldoe indeed uses morphine "in great quantity" with his morning coffee, before setting off on his rambles (Poe 1983, 898).

Dän dissects the story, explaining particular elements and their connection to Poe's experience in the Benares panorama. Bedloe describes a drum beating, a "wild rattling or jingling sound," and a half naked man with hot breath rushing past him followed by a hyena (Poe 1983, 899). Dän explains the panorama's setup: "An (aboriginal=)drum, (as acoustic backdrop), was surely easy to provide? 1 man with a massive bundla keys, & above all ›hot breath‹ even more easily" (BD, 165). "»The hyena?« – (can be done with any costumed dog! (Didn't I talk about the HAGENBECK=Panorama,

with Eskimos & whale ribs? Well=then.))" (BD, 165).[11] After the hyena passes, Beldoe is astonished to find himself basking in a beam of sunshine underneath a palm tree. Paul chimes in with his application of Dän's theory: The palm tree in Ragged Mountains could, "'cording to Dän's drawing; illustrate the ›stepping out‹; and this time the ›écran‹ above the observer is cleverly=shaped as a ›crown o' palm‹" (BD, 165).

The drawing in question is one that Dän has sketched on a notepad, for which Schmidt provides an illustration in the right margin of the page (Fig. 2). The stepping-out refers to emerging from the "increasing=gloom" of the panorama's entryway, then climbing a "steep spiral staircase upward: thru a trap doorlet. And one found oneself on a ›terrace‹; above a ›toile de fond‹ or ›écran‹ – very cleverly ›camouflaged‹; whether as ›pavilion=roof‹ or as ›heavy cloudcover‹" (BD, 152). The illustration Schmidt provides is a cross section of a panorama from the *Nouveau Larousse illustré: dictionnaire universel encyclopédique* (1898). In it one can faintly see a figure emerging from shadows into sunlight on the terrace after having come through a dark access corridor and up a spiral staircase.

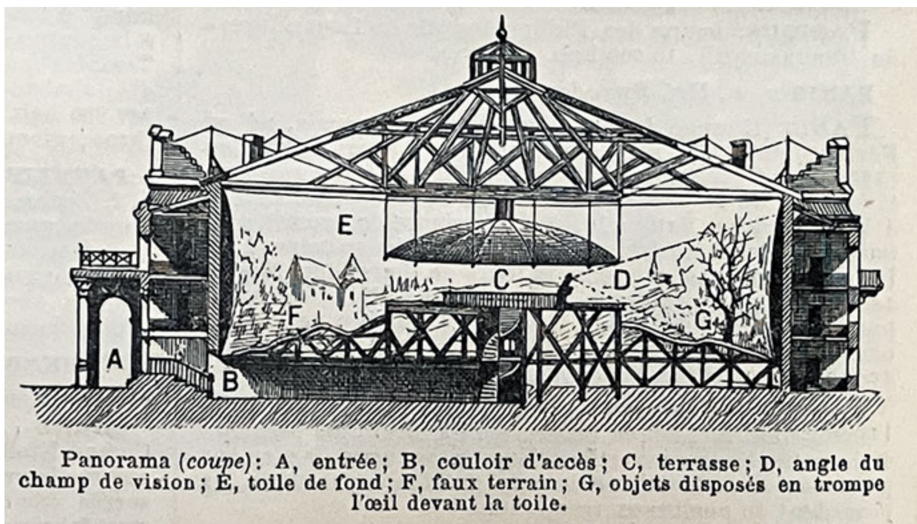

Fig. 2: Cross section of a panorama from the *Nouveau Larousse Illustré: Dictionnaire Universel Encyclopédique* (Paris: Larousse, 1898), volume 6, page 644. Image, Melissa Wolfe. *Bottom's Dream* reproduces the diagram without the legend.

11 The "panorama" referenced by Dän was in fact a portable diorama, highlighting inconsistency in Dän's accuracy. It is worth noting that the specifics of panoramic periodization may not align with current scholarship. Furthermore, certain historical details may be irrelevant and will be addressed upon the introduction of Schmidt's theory.

Continuing the inventory of panoramic details, Dän says that the kiosk in which Bedloe seeks refuge is "how the ›exit‹ mite've been stylishly camouflaged" (BD, 166). Finally, when Poe writes, "The crowd had departed. The tumult had ceased. The city was in comparative repose," (Poe 1983, 903) it means, "In plain German: the spectators have left; He's standing all alone in the panorama" (BD, 166). In the last paragraph of the story, when the narrator realizes that the historical figure, Oldeb, is Bedloe's double, he turns on his heel in apparent astonishment. If the panoramic experience is one of "all=round in=spection" (BD, 168) then turning on one's heel is the panoramic gesture par excellence.

Poe's 1835 story "Hans Phaall—A Tale" also contains descriptions of all-round inspection and a character at the end who turns on his heel. "Hans Phaall" is not analyzed by Dän in *Bottom's Dream* for its specific panoramic undertones, however, the story contains suggestions of panoramic influence that are strong enough to support such an analysis. The tale is about Hans Phaall who journeys to the moon in a hot air balloon of his own design. Throughout the story, Phaall is constantly describing the view of earth from the balloon, which directions he is able to view it from, and what part of the earth's area he is able to survey as the balloon rises higher and higher. At the end of the story, the burgomaster, after having read Phaall's account of his journey, turns around "three times upon his heel in the quintessence of astonishment and admiration" (Poe 1983, 212). At one point Phaall describes the view of earth in terms of the cardinal directions: "To the westward, the northward, and the southward, as far as I could see, lay a boundless sheet of apparently unruffled ocean . . . At a vast distance to the eastward, although perfectly discernible extended the islands of Great Britain . . ." (Poe 1983, 194). A few pages later, Phaall writes, "In the sides of the covering thus adjusted round the car, had been inserted three circular panes of thick but clear glass, through which I could see without difficulty around me in every horizontal direction" (Poe 1983, 197). Later still, Phaall's journal records, "At all events I undoubtedly beheld the whole of the earth's major diameter; the entire northern hemisphere lay beneath me like a chart orthographically projected; and the great circle of the equator itself formed the boundary line of my horizon" (Poe 1983, 204). In this case, there is no actual panorama of the earth from space that Dän explicitly claims Poe saw. Nevertheless, "Hans Phaall" contains descriptions of panoramic viewing and of swiveling through the cardinal directions, which fit Dän's theory that the pervasiveness of panoramas in Poe's visual imaginary may have unwittingly supplied him with descriptive details.

Among Poe's other panorama stories, Dän mentions "The Domain of Arnheim" (1842), about a man who creates a landscape garden that spectators tour by boat. Dän connects this to the experience of a cyclorama, "In 1 kind of which spectators sat in a little boat" (BD, 167). He continues adding examples: "And 'n case You should demand a *dio*rama=example): »Then that would be – (at least there exists a considerable possibility of it) – LANDOR'S COTTAGE;" in which "another ›impossible sun‹ makes its appearance, beyond all doubt a bundled spotlite=effect" (BD, 167). Dän acknowledges that Poe describes the sun in "Landor's Cottage" in terms of the final scene of a theat-

rical presentation, which Dän thinks Poe may have seen as a schoolboy in London. The narrator of "Landor's Cottage" describes the landscape scene coming "fully into view . . . piece by piece, here a tree, there a glimpse of water, and here again the summit of a chimney, I could scarcely help fancying that the whole was one of the ingenious illusions sometimes exhibited under the name of 'vanishing pictures'" (Poe 1983, 1138). Dän is quick to remind his friends that "in 1811 CHILDE had also already introduced ›dissolving views‹ to London; where the pictures of two projecting=apparatuses were placed=atop & blended into one another" (BD, 167).

3 Schmidt's Claims About Panoramas Outside of Fiction

This theory, strange as it is, is presented in a setting that is nominally fictional. A reader of Schmidt's work is always alert to the thin divide between actual events and the fictional setting, and in *Bottom's Dream* that membrane is especially thin because the thousands of authors and texts referred to throughout the book are all real. Nevertheless we are not proposing that a study of panoramas needs to consider their appearances in fiction: there is evidence that Schmidt took his theory seriously outside of the context of his novel, and that means the theory takes its place in the history of reception of panoramas—in this case, it belongs to the specific moment in the late 1960s when Schmidt was "discovering" his theory and writing his book.

In several interviews Schmidt speaks of his theory in the course of discussing *Bottom's Dream,* but when he does, he presents the theory independently of the fiction. There is a "hitherto-unseen educational principle in the works of nineteenth-century writers," he announces in the *Vorläufiges zu Zettel's Traum* (Schmidt 1977)*,* a recording he made based on typewritten notes. That "principle" is the panorama, a word he identifies as specifically modern, dating from its use by Robert Barker in 1792—a word, therefore, "similar to 'mansard' or 'gas'." He then gives a step-by-step description of the panorama, interrupting his exposition of his novel in a sort of short historical essay. ("This circular painting was illuminated by a one-meter-wide edge of glass in the roof that ran all the way around the building. And the visitor, once he had paid his money at the cash register, was guided through a tangle of long, increasingly dark corridors . . ." and so on.) As proof of the veracity the panorama seemed to possess he cites Chateaubriand's experience in the panorama of Jerusalem. In Schmidt's account, Chateaubriand pointed to a place he said was the Saint-Sauveur convent and said "*there* is the window where I used to sit and write."

Schmidt's historical lecture on the panorama occupies an unusually large space in the recording of his remarks, as if it is the centerpiece of his project, rather than the book's more obvious and pervasive claim, that he has discovered the truth about Edgar Allan Poe. He conjures the nineteenth-century experience for the listener:

> Or how would it be if you had entered such a panorama, and you had been received as a guide by a Hindu in a turban and loincloth, who looked at you through glazed eyes, next to him a shee . . . a big shepherd dog made up as a hyena. And this man guided you through the aisles and you stepped out into a kiosk and saw the holy city of Benares lying around you – winding with countless alleys [and] balconies, [and] the Ganges flowed through – and projected onto [the entire scene] from behind – (in some panoramas *both* sides of the canvas were painted) was the rebellion of Cheyte Sing, one of those eternal Indian rebellions. This is EDGAR POE'S story of the RAGGED MOUNTAINS. – It is based on this panorama of Benares and he used it all – unconsciously – in fact (Schmidt 1977).

Schmidt then goes on to note that Poe quotes Johann Adam Breysig's panorama of Mount Etna. He notes, as he does in *Bottom's Dream,* that Poe is said to have traveled widely, and seen St. Petersburg and Paris, but that he actually imagined them after having seen Breysig's panorama in New York City.

The thesis is extended to other authors. Schmidt says Theodor Storm described a similar panorama in *Regentrude,* and so, as we have seen, did Verne in *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*. "*There,*" he says, "when you stepped out of the rock grotto – led by the guide (in mountaineering costume with an ice pick and rope hanging around your neck) you saw a primeval landscape lying around you, with the giant dinosaurs, and everyone can read about that in VERNE." Even painters like Jacques-Louis David were impressed, Schmidt claims, and he quotes David as saying "whoever wants to study nature must go to a panorama. And even in MARCEL PROUST you will still find the expression: 'Venice in the panorama looked more beautiful than the original. It had more tones'." He says that people haven't noticed this pervasive influence because panoramas were "devoured" by those who weren't "snobbish" and "completely overlooked" by scholars.

The significance of his discovery, then, is that Poe's "grandiose inventions" aren't just poetic fantasies. They "have their very real foundations." He alludes to a critical line that is also developed in the novel: that "intuition in itself is a pathetic thing and yields so few works of art that it is really only one of the 'conditions' for works of art." Poe was a fascinating but deeply problematic writer in Schmidt's estimation, because he worked so hard on fantasy and invention, and so little on careful observation—but the panorama is a signal example of how authors who are susceptible to flights of fantasy can actually be dependent, without their conscious knowledge, on verifiable facts about their experience.

The whole of the romantic nineteenth century, and particularly the POE=Zeit, imagined itself to be freed from the constraints of patient, scientifically informed, meticulously researched attention to the real world, but it was actually demonstrably dependent on one of the period's greatest popular inventions, which was itself nothing more than a projected fantasy.

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