

The Hunting of the Slan

I have sometimes amused myself by endeavoring to fancy what would be the fate of any individual gifted, or rather accursed, with an intellect far superior to that of his race. Of course, he would be conscious of his superiority nor could he (if otherwise constituted as man is) help manifesting his consciousness. Thus he would make himself enemies at all points. And since his opinions and speculations would likely differ from those of all mankind—that he would be considered a madman, is evident. How horribly painful such a condition! Hell could invent no greater torture than that of being charged with abnormal weakness on account of being abnormally strong.

In like the manner, nothing can be clearer than that a very generous spirit—truly feeling what all merely profess—must inevitably find itself misconceived on every direction—its motives misinterpreted. Just as extremeness of intelligence would be thought fatuity, so excess of chivalry could not fail of being looked upon as meanness in its last degree—and so with other virtues. This subject is a painful one indeed. That individuals have so soared above the plane of their race is scarcely to be questioned; but, in looking back through history for traces of their existence, we should pass over all biographies of “the good and the great,” while we search carefully the slight records of wretches who died in prison, in Bedlam, or upon the gallows.

Edgar Allen Poe: Marginella
(Southern Literary Messenger, June, 1849)