Spring 2007
Volume VIII, Number 1

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ESSAYS, AN INTERVIEW, AND A POEM

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Letters from the Editors

From Peter Norberg:

Serving as coeditor of the *Poe Review* has been a rewarding experience both professionally and personally. I am grateful for the support we have received from Saint Joseph's University and would like to thank Timothy R. Lannon, President, Brice Wachterhauser, Provost, and William Madges, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, for their financial support and their commitment to scholarship in the humanities.

I would also like to thank the officers of the Poe Studies Association, especially Paul C. Jones, Secretary-Treasurer, for his competent oversight of our budget and subscriptions, and Scott Peeples, President, for his thoughtful management of the transition of the *Review* back to the editorial stewardship of Barbara Cantalupo and Penn State University. Let me also congratulate Scott on his appointment as coeditor of our sister publication, *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism*. Under his and Jana Argersinger's direction, I am confident that *Poe Studies* will continue to complement the *Poe Review* in sustaining a productive and collegial relationship among scholars dedicated to the literary and critical writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

Finally, let me express my profound gratitude for the support and friendship of my colleague Richard Fusco. His patient, reasoned approach to matters editorial and otherwise has set a standard of professionalism I will strive to meet in the years to come.

Peter Norberg

From Richard Fusco:

I never wanted to be an editor.

As they are wont to do, however, circumstances have dictated a strange three scholarly years for me. In 2004, I was serving the first of a three-year term as Vice-President of the Poe Studies Association, when President Scott Peeples and I were presented with a minor crisis. Penn State had unexpectedly and precipitously withdrawn its financial and administrative support from *The Poe Review*, leaving its editor and founder, Barbara Cantalupo, in a professionally

awkward situation. That event plus other matters forced Barbara to resign as editor.

Scott and I then embarked on a frantic search for a new editor and institutional home for the journal, only to discover that because it was so late in the budget year for most institutions, no college or university was then willing to take on *The Poe Review*—that is, all save one. Brice Wachterhauser, then Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for Saint Joseph's University (now its Provost) generously agreed to support the publication out of his discretionary budget, a promise subsequently honored by his successors, John McCall and William Madges. Prior to that commitment, Scott and I had seriously discussed folding the journal and reviving in its place the newsletter. Thus, on behalf of the Poe Studies Association, I fervently thank these three men, as well as Fr. Timothy Lannon, S.J., (President of Saint Joseph's) and Dr. Jo Alyson Parker (Chair of the English Department), for helping the journal stave off scholarly extinction.

Thus, in 2004, I had to resign with reluctance my Vice-Presidency because the PSA's by-laws prevent individuals from holding more than one executive post. (My sense of professional ethics demands of me that I fulfill the tasks to which I was elected.) Luckily, Peter Norberg, my colleague from Saint Joseph's, joined me as coeditor as we tried to sustain the journal's quality despite its reduced budget. In some ways, these new restrictions proved fortunate. It forced us to eliminate expensive and indulgent aspects leftover from the journal's predecessor (the newsletter) and thus served to continue Barbara's previous accomplishments to give *The Poe Review* a more scholarly and streamline appearance. Saint Joseph's University Press—particularly Tom Malone, Carol McLaughlin, Anthony Symes, Joe Passio, and Tom Lydon—proved extraordinary helpful in allowing us to sustain quality despite our limited means. One of the decisions Peter and I made was to eliminate works of a creative nature, such as stories and poems with Poe connections. We felt that neither we nor the editorial board were professionally qualified to judge such efforts. But when the great Daniel Hoffman gave us permission to reprint a 2006 poem, we gladly suspended our restriction for the one and only time.

Throughout my tenure as editor, the Executive Board of the Poe Studies Association has proved an invaluable resource. Scott's leadership as President has been exemplary, demonstrating the highest democratic principles of academia. Barbara, who replaced me as Vice-President, relieved me of my

duties involving coordinating the PSA's MLA panels and participating in the planning process for the 2006 and 2009 conferences. I hope that she finds the journal in reasonable shape and wish her all the best as she resumes its editorial reins. The members-at-large—Mary De Jong, Noelle Baker, Marcy Dinius, and Steve Rachman—have been amazingly helpful in directing quality scholarship my way. Several of the essays I am most proud of publishing have come from their ALA sessions. Of course, the secretaries-treasurers Carole Shaffer-Koros and Paul Jones have handled the journal's financial affairs with skill and insight. Heyward Ehrlich provided what every editor yearns for—reliability in delivering a quality column for every issue.

Whatever quality you may have found in these pages during the last three years I attribute wholly to the superb efforts of the editorial board of *The Poe Review*. Early on, several prominent colleagues in the world of Poe criticism urged me to adopt their critical agendas for the journal. Nevertheless, Peter and I decided that we would not exercise a prejudice against any critical camp. We were fortunate to have editorial readers who advocated the highest standards for scholarship but who simultaneously refrained from imposing their theoretical preferences on the material they evaluated. Collectively, we rejected a great many submissions over these last three years. What we published proved to be an intellectually healthy array of eclectic approaches. This issue continues this sensibility, starting with the second part of novelist Matthew Pearl's fascinating archival research on Poe's death, continuing with Amy Branam's brilliant reassessment through textual analysis of the place of *Politian* in antebellum drama, through Brett Zimmerman's insights on the intellectual antecedents for "The Fall of the House of Usher," and ending with Jeffrey Savoye's note on the architectural origins of Usher's house in the poems of Sir Walter Scott. (I also would like to thank Jeffrey for his moving tribute to the late Richard Hart.) As Ben Fisher wisely notes in his interview with Barbara Cantalupo in this issue, the study of Poe facilitates all sorts of individualized readings. In effect, many of us use his writings essentially to reveal who we ourselves are and how we think and see the world. This capacity of his texts will inevitably find room in schools of thought yet unimagined, thus ensuring the "currency" of Poe for future generations of scholars and writers.

Speaking of Ben's engaging interview, I wish to offer one little correction to his memory. During my days as his student, I never wrote a paper for him suggesting that the narrator of the Dupin tales was a woman. What did occur was that

during casual conversation I happened to mention my observation that seldom in all three Dupin texts did Poe provide a concrete confirmation regarding the gender of the narrator, even to the point of refusing to have another character in the tale refer to the narrator using a masculine pronoun. I think what I wanted to indicate at the time was that Poe often stripped his first-person narrators of enough idiosyncrasies to allow readers of both sexes to immerse themselves fully into the narrative point of view. Somehow or other, this exchange led to a correspondence with a very indulgent and slightly bemused Richard Benton. In the thirty years since, I have never been motivated to put this curiosity into a formal argument, nor do I foresee the urge arising any time soon. One advantage editors do have is the power to have the last word. In my Navy days, a commanding officer once commented, "If you can't be capricious and arbitrary in your use of power, then what is the sense in having it?"

Again, I wish Barbara well in resuming control of what she has created. Her promise to edit *The Poe Review* for the next tens years is daunting but necessary to maintain the continuity the members of the Poe Studies Association deserve. I loudly applaud the extraordinary impact Alex Hammond has had upon decades of Poe scholarship as he ends his long and fruitful editorship of *Poe Studies/ Dark Romanticism*, and I congratulate Scott Peeples as he joins Jana Argersinger as its coeditor. And I end this letter with my immeasurable indebtedness to my coeditor, Peter Norberg, who helped me to cope with what became an intolerable professional situation.

Richard Fusco

A Poe Taster

by

Daniel Hoffman

Didn't you know that Edgar Allan Poe
Sought grief counseling, took Lexapro?
—By endless mourning then no longer smitten,
Could leave all lachrymose laments to diverse
Obsequies by Thomas Holly Chivers.
But we've not seen the poems he must have written:
Like Nathaniel Parker Willis's, say?
No, no, much wittier, his *vers de société*;
Surely, his *jeux d'esprit* deserve a *tranche*
Of the renown of Christopher Pearse Cranch.
Were he but free of personal disaster
He might well be our minor light verse master—
Poe's *doppelgänger*—and his abiding dream,
Thwarted, for aye, by that one relentless theme.

First published in *Per Contra Poetry* (Fall 2006)

A Poe Death Dossier:
Discoveries and Queries in the Death of Edgar Allan Poe

Matthew Pearl

Part II

(Part I of this essay appeared
in the fall 2006 issue of the *Poe Review*.)

VII. NEILSON POE: A LOST "COMMUNICATION"

In this section, I identify a late account by Neilson Poe of his cousin's death.

On Thursday, October 11, 1849, Neilson Poe recorded the basic facts of his cousin Edgar's recent death: "He died on Sunday morning, about 5 o'clock, at the Washington Medical College, where he had been since the Wednesday preceding. At what time he arrived in this City, where he spent the time he was here, or under what circumstances, I have been unable to ascertain. It appears that, on Wednesday, he was seen & recognized at one of the places of election in old town, and that his condition was such as to render it necessary to send him to the college, where he was tenderly nursed until the time of his death."[1] Addressed to Maria Clemm, this letter enlightens both by what it reveals and what it cannot.

By November 1, 1849, Neilson seemed to have filled some gaps in his knowledge, to judge from a letter sent to Poe's literary executor, Rufus Griswold: "The history of the last few days of his life is known to no one so well as to myself, and is of touching & melancholy interest, as well of the most admonitory import. I think I can demonstrate that he passed, by *a single indulgence*, from a condition of perfect sobriety to one bordering upon the madness usually occasioned only by long continued intoxication, and that he is entitled to a far more favorable judgment upon his last hours than he has received—All this I will make the subject of a deliberate communication" (emphasis in original).[2] Here was a bold ambition to change public sentiment about Poe's death, considering the callous obituaries at the time—most infamously by Griswold, the recipient of Neilson's letter.

Like Henry Herring (see part 1 of this essay), Neilson had a complicated relationship with Edgar, one that was characterized by outward politeness and sublimated hostility. Despite this tension, Neilson has solid credentials as an investigator into Poe's last days. At the time, Neilson was a defense attorney, accustomed to gathering facts, and had well-informed contacts in Baltimore that included two eyewitnesses to Poe's condition, Herring and Joseph Snodgrass. Importantly, Neilson seemed quick to admit when he could not find information. Unlike Dr. John J. Moran, Neilson never used the death narrative for the purposes of self-promotion or profit once Poe's fame grew.[3]

Neilson's daughter Amelia actually wished her father had devoted more time to the subject of Edgar Allan Poe. "My Father ought to have written a life of Poe," she commented, "but he was always too busy, or had other excuses."[4] Most frustrating for scholars, the "deliberate communication" Neilson promised would demystify Poe's final days was never found. Although he did not publish anything of the sort before his death in 1884, Neilson communicated his knowledge to someone else. His account has been obliquely available since the early 1870s but has not been identified.

In 1871, a Baltimore photographer named George B. Coale interviewed Neilson on behalf of New York writer R. H. Stoddard. A prolific magazine contributor, Stoddard was then composing an article on Poe for *Harper's Monthly*. Coale's letter relating his conversation with Neilson is at points illegible and often choppy. But this letter may be the only further surviving document of Neilson's understanding of Poe's death. Coale writes the following to Stoddard (illegible words are marked with bracketed question marks):

> I have just had an interview with my friend Neilson Poe, Edgar's cousin—and send you at once an installment of all the information I can obtain for you. Neilson found Edgar in a state of insensibility on Thursday the 4th of October 1849 (the day after a hotly contested election). He carried him to a Hospital now the "Church Home" on Broadway north of the City. Here he was attended by Dr. Moran. He was insensible from intoxication or probable drugging. (There was a horrible suspicion that some political 'ward managers' had voted him over the city the day before—he was found in a backroom of a

> 'Headquarters' and had probably been 'cooped'—it is not necessary to say this)—and he remained insensible until Tuesday morning Oct. 7th. The Doctor and a nurse here with him when he [?][?] consciousness—He asked 'Where am I?'—Dr. Moran answered 'You are cared for by your friends'—Poe replied after a pause in which he appeared to [?] [?] events and [?] his situation—'My best friend would be the man who would blow out my brains.' Within ten minutes he was dead. The 'Baltimore Sun' [?] mentioned that Edgar A. Poe died in this city on Sunday of 'congestion of the brain'—This may, no doubt, be literally and scientifically true. The real cause of this 'congestion' was doubtful. The mental anguish caused by the conditions in which he found himself at that time—He was really on his way North to bring on Mrs. Clemm, his mother-in-law and also his Aunt—(by 1st mr. with his cousin) to his impending marriage in Richmond—he had been engaged to a widow lady in Richmond who had been an attachment of his youth. Both had married since and had been widowed (or-ered). The lady was wealthy and had purchased a charming country seat to which Poe looked as his [?] haven. He had unfortunately taken a single drink with a friend, between trains, and in consequence was brought back by the conductor on the Phil. train from Havre de Grace in a state of delirium—All after [?] followed [?]—and this contrast of 'what I be & what I was' most probably killed him in the moment of realizing it. (Now, my dear Stoddard. I pray you use such facts as these gingerly and sensibly – I don't mean to question your [?] even by implication)[5]

We are faced with some factual errors and some commonplace material about how Poe reached the hospital and what happened there.[6] The crux and the novelty of Coale's debriefing of Neilson is in this sentence: "He had unfortunately taken a single drink with a friend, between trains, and in consequence was brought back by the conductor on the Phil. train from Havre de Grace in a state of delirium." Twenty years later, the "single indulgence" mentioned by Neilson was at last described in more detail.

A friend of Neilson's, N. H. Morison of the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, corroborated three years after Coale's letter that "Nelson [sic] says a single glass of wine would set [Poe's] brain on fire, and that his only safety was in total abstinence."[7] Stoddard critiqued the notion that Poe was easily affected by alcohol as an excuse invented by Maria Clemm to protect Poe's legacy.[8] However, claims that Poe tended to become instantly intoxicated, or easily incapacitated, did not originate with Clemm. We must turn to Poe himself, who explained to Dr. Snodgrass on April 1, 1841: "My sensitive temperament could not stand an excitement which was an everyday matter to my companions."[9]

The provocative element of Neilson's 1871 account is not the alleged single drink (which repeats the 1849 claim to Griswold) but where the drink took place—the train or train depot—and when—during an attempted journey from Baltimore to Philadelphia. We should recall Poe's well-known determination to go north, indicated clearly in letters to Maria Clemm and Mrs. Loud.[10] There is no reliable evidence that Poe ever reached Philadelphia, yet there is also very little evidence of how his time would have been filled had he remained in Baltimore from September 28 to October 3, 1849. Considering the scarcity of information about Poe's whereabouts during that "lost" week, and the lingering questions about what would have changed Poe's plan to visit Philadelphia, the Coale letter provides intriguing details. Neilson's report supports the scenario laid out in part I of this essay (sections V and VI) that Poe tried and failed to reach Philadelphia and provides a reason why he would have returned to Baltimore.

How Neilson's tale is incorporated by R. H. Stoddard into his 1872 *Harper*'s article proves interesting and transformative. Stoddard remarks that Poe left Richmond with an aim to go to Philadelphia and then to New York:

> He started from Richmond on the 2d or 3d of October. What happened during the next four or five days is involved in considerable obscurity, but the facts, as far as they can be ascertained, appear to be these: He arrived at Baltimore safely, but between trains unfortunately took a drink with a friend, the consequence of which was that he was brought back from Havre de Grace, by the conductor of the Philadelphia train, in a state of delirium. It was the eve of an exciting municipal election, and as he wandered up and

> down the streets of Baltimore he was seized by the lawless agents of some political club, and shut up all night in a cellar. The next morning he was taken out in a state of frenzy, drugged, and made to vote in eleven different wards. The following day he was found in the back-room of a 'head-quarters' and removed to a hospital in Broadway, north of Baltimore street. He was insensible when found, and remained so until Sunday morning, October 7. A doctor and nurse were with him when he first showed consciousness. 'Where am I?' he asked. The doctor answered, 'You are cared for by your best friends.' After a pause, in which he appeared to recall what had occurred, and to realize his situation, Poe replied, 'My best friend would be the man who would blow out my brains.' Within ten minutes he was dead![11]

Stoddard's reliance on the Coale-Neilson account is evident, repeating the story of the drink with a friend on the train, the conductor's ordering Poe back to Baltimore, the hospital admission and the exchange between Poe and his doctor. But unlike the account in the Coale source letter, the events as rewritten by Stoddard hinge on Poe falling victim to political violence or "cooping."[12] Poe acquaintance John R. Thompson introduced the cooping story during a series of lectures on Poe in the 1860s. In his letter, Coale mentions "a backroom of a 'Headquarters,'" which Stoddard picks up verbatim. Coale's "horrible suspicion" was thus one ready source for Stoddard's three influential sentences about the possible cooping, the rest of which almost certainly comes from J. R. Thompson's lectures.[13]

However, Coale's marginalizing treatment of the cooping—his phrase "there *was* a horrible suspicion," his placement of the sentence in parentheses, and his admonition that "it is not necessary to say this"—suggests disbelief on the part of Neilson or Coale or both. (The expression "not necessary to say" is a more dismissive caveat than the plea for sensitivity that comes later in Coale's letter: "I pray you use such facts as these gingerly and sensibly.") Coale appears to have included the suspicion as a throwaway that was not truly part of Neilson's account.

This was lost in the transition to Stoddard's article. As a result of Stoddard's lack of sourcing and his chosen presentation in *Harper*'s *Monthly*, the provenance of the train narrative merged with that of the cooping narrative. Because the train narrative therefore has never been clearly attributed to Neilson Poe, it has not been possible to weigh his relative dependability as a commentator on Poe's death in scholarly treatment of it.[14] James A. Harrison's linkage is typical of the way biographers carried over Stoddard's blending of the train and cooping threads, writing, "one report is that Poe started for Philadelphia by rail and got as far as Havre de Grace, when, failing into a stupor, he was brought back to Baltimore and fell into the hands of political toughs at Ryan's Fourth Ward Polls, was drugged, and carried round from polls to polls in the interests of the Whig party."[15] It is clear the two pieces of Poe death lore should instead stand or fall on very different grounds. The train narrative comes from a Poe relative who investigated immediately after Poe's death. The cooping story, by contrast, has not been sourced further back than J. R. Thompson's lecture series that began more than ten years after Poe's death. The emergence of the Coale letter allows a fair separation between the accounts and finally conveys Neilson Poe's elusive "deliberate communication."

VIII. REYNOLDS, REYNOLDS, REYNOLDS: A NEW CANDIDATE

In this section, I turn to the reception history of the claim that Poe cried "Reynolds" and suggest a dark horse candidate for Reynolds.

One aspect of the Poe death narrative that has excited popular interest is the report that the writer cried out "Reynolds!" before dying. Who was Reynolds? I personally agree with W. T. Bandy that too much attention has been lavished on this question. On the other hand, the curiosity is understandable. It is romantic, mysterious, elusive—in short, Poesque.

The detail originated in Dr. Moran's November 15, 1849, letter to Maria Clemm describing Poe's condition in the hospital:

> When I returned I found him in a violent delirium, resisting the efforts of two nurses to keep him in bed. This state continued until Saturday evening (he was admitted on Wednesday) when he commenced calling for one 'Reynolds,'

> which he did through the night up to *three* on Sunday morning.[16]

Three significant theories about Reynolds have surfaced since 1849. The first suggests Reynolds was Jeremiah Reynolds, an explorer and travel writer. The second explanation names Henry Reynolds, a Baltimore carpenter and election official. The third and most recent (articulated first in 1987) argues that Poe did not call out for "Reynolds" at all.

The first theory relies upon Poe's interest in the famous travel narratives of explorer Jeremiah Reynolds. A few biographers suggest that Reynolds's exploration of the far reaches of the known world inspired Poe's deathbed call. In 1938, Robert Almy wrote: "Is it not likely, therefore, that in his last illness, when Poe called to Reynolds, he was calling from the verge of that polar chasm whose shadow was as the shadow of death and whose concentric circles led downward to the incommunicable?"[17] The idea that Poe romanticized his own death in this fashion in real time, playing it out as though an end to a novel (or, specifically, as an end analogous to his own, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*) is speculative, at best.

The second theory emerged on the centennial anniversary of Poe's death in 1949. In articles in the Baltimore *Sun*, James Bready and Phillip Van Doren Stern pointed out for the first time that Henry Reynolds was the name of an election judge in the polling place where Poe was discovered on October 3, 1849.[18] Henry Reynolds was the "H" in the H & J Reynolds construction company and had a hand in building some important structures in Baltimore, including the Maryland Institute, Carroll Hall, and the first iron building in Baltimore (which was constructed for the *Sun*).[19]

If Poe's call did refer to this Reynolds, it would fit into the known death narrative because Poe and Henry Reynolds were likely in the same building together on October 3, 1849. It also lends circumstantial support for the "cooping" theory. If Poe were a victim of violence at the hand of political thugs, in his delirium at the hospital he may still have believed he was crying for help—logically enough, in this version, calling out to the election judge presumably charged with preventing such violations.

The latest significant theory regarding Reynolds comes from W. T. Bandy in his "Dr. Moran and the Poe-Reynolds Myth" (1987).[20] Bandy argues that Moran's account was mistaken and that, in fact, Poe instead called for "Herring," Henry Herring, his former relative by marriage. "Reynolds was only a figment of Moran's imagination," Bandy concludes.[21] A Poe biographer as astute as Kenneth Silverman finds Bandy's article convincing.[22] This theory is appealing, especially given George and Henry Herring's possible involvement with Poe during his time at Ryan's (see part I of this essay). A call to "Herring" might represent an expression of anger toward Henry or George, a delayed appeal to them for help, or a simple request for family consolation.

Bandy's strongest argument is that Moran's 1875 article speaks of local relatives of Poe's in Baltimore as the "Reynolds family." In his 1885 book, Moran corrects the statement to read the "Herring" family. Bandy argues that because Moran substituted "Herring" for "Reynolds" between his 1875 and 1885 texts, Moran may have inadvertently substituted the name "Reynolds" for "Herring" in 1849. It seems far more likely to me that Moran simply confused the names in 1875 and corrected himself when writing his 1885 text.[23]

Discussion about the identity of Reynolds rests largely on opinion. Based on the evidence, I believe that Poe did call for Reynolds but also that we will never ascertain its meaning with assuredness. That is not to say the subject is not worth discussing. I have run across another Reynolds who might have inhabited Poe's psychic landscape.

In his sequel to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin, unravels what happened to a young woman found dead in Paris. The 1842 tale, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," was a self-conscious reimagining of a real mystery in New York the summer before, when the body of shop girl Mary Rogers was discovered floating in the Hudson River. A strange footnote to the Mary Rogers case involved a man named John Anderson, the owner of the cigar store where Mary worked. After Anderson died in the 1880s, his daughter contested his will in New York. The case was settled during the trial; thus, there were no transcripts. Although fragmented, the news reports provide tidbits of great interest.

As reported by *The New York Times*, at one point an attorney questioned a witness about Poe: "Ex-Judge Curtis asked him if he did not know that John

Anderson gave Poe $5,000 to write the story of Marie Roget in order to draw people's attention from himself, who, many believed, was the murderer."[24] The insinuation is fascinating: Anderson, who had been an early suspect in the death of his shop girl, pays Poe to influence public opinion in another direction. Poe's story points the finger at an unknown naval figure while the storeowner character in "Marie Roget" based on Anderson is impressively innocent, even down to Poe's choice to name him "Le Blanc." Such scant evidence, however, does not prove that Poe crafted the story on Anderson's behalf or through Anderson's intercession.

Still, there are indications that Poe knew Anderson personally and even that the two discussed the Mary Rogers case. I found an undated newspaper clipping, published sometime after 1868, signed only with "J. P. M.":

> It was somewhere about the time that ___, the late tobacconist, invited Poe to dinner at the old Holt Hotel in Fulton Street. Poe had called on him at his store on Centre Street with reference to the story of 'Marie Roget,' published a year or two before, and founded on the tragic affair of Mary Rogers, who had been employed in the tobacco store. The result of the interview was an invitation to dinner, and William Ross Wallace was also invited. In narrating the incident of the dinner, in 1868, ___ appeared to have a very clear recollection of it, but it had left upon his mind a most unfavorable impression of Poe. It appears that Poe and Wallace got into a discussion about the Mary Rogers case, and almost came to blows while at the table, Poe seizing a carving-knife to defend himself. In telling of the occurrence, the tobacconist attributed Poe's excitement to the champagne, and spoke of him as a most hotheaded and reckless young man. It was not till several years later when, happening to meet Wallace, I asked him if he remembered the incident, and he said that he did very distinctly. The fact is, he remarked, that ____ utterly mistook vehemence for violence. Poe had come down from Fordham, leaving his sick wife without the means to get a dinner, and every mouthful of the ample feast he partook of appeared to aggravate him. *What made it worse was*

> *that there was a too apparent inclination on the part of the shop-keeper to get himself and his business advertised by the Mary Rogers affair, and Poe resented this in the true Southern style.* (emphasis added)[25]

While difficult to verify, this scenario bears interesting circumstantial connections to an article about the Anderson will trial published in an 1885 issue of the *Detroit Free Press*. It includes Poe's name in passing but also records another name that should jump out:

> On Monday noon a suit was begun in the Supreme Court here to break the will of the late John Anderson, the rich tobacconist […] I have found out this week that Poe was mistaken. The present suit is responsible for the disclosure. Had not the vast estate been involved in the throes of a great legal contest the investigation would not have been stimulated, and the facts would not have been forthcoming. The truth of the statements made in the letter will appear in the pending trial if the counsel shall secure and adduce the oral and documentary evidence to which I have had access […] During these years John Anderson and his wife lived over the store. Here two children were born. The pretty cigar girl was intimate up stairs and down, and John Anderson became far more intimate with her than he ought to have been. Mrs. Anderson saw, with growing fear, his increasing infatuation. Mary suddenly left the store and returned to her mother's boarding-house, 126 Nassau Street, giving no reason for the step save that somebody persecuted her with undesired attentions. It is also alleged by those who were in a position to know, and from whom my information is obtained, that she was about to become a mother. At the discovery (on the testimony of a relative that is now heard for the first time, but is unimpeachable) John Anderson and a man named Reynolds conspired together how to get rid of the girl, who was likely to make trouble. It was agreed that Reynolds should take her over to Hoboken. This was done, Reynolds starting with her from near the house about 6'oclock in the evening and

> being afterwards met by Anderson. Here the clew breaks; but the girl was never seen again alive. Her mother supposed her to be visiting at the house of a friend, but next morning, on finding that she was not there, nor at Anderson's, she spread the alarm, and the cry went out that she had been murdered. Search was everywhere made. In two days her lifeless body, less than half clad, and with a lace fichu drawn tightly around the neck as if she had been strangled, was found floating in the North River, and in the woods of Hackensack near a public house where cries for help had been heard on the night in question, in a sort of natural arbor where the grass was trampled down, there were found footprints, scattered bits of clothing and many evidences of a struggle. Gen. James Watson Webb told me his recollection of this just before he died, and said that it was he, in his paper, who started the agitation to find the murderer. Anderson fled towards Canada, but was overtaken and arrested at Saratoga. He came back, presented testimony which was deemed to prove an alibi and was released. Suspicion fell on others – on the young men who were the neighbors, companions or avowed lovers of the deceased. The murderer was never identified. Indeed, the man 'Reynolds,' mentioned above, has never before been named in all the investigations into the history of the crime.[26]

This article by W. A. Croffut was published two years before the suggestion was made public in court that Anderson paid Poe to divert attention from Anderson's relationship with Rogers. In a scenario that accepts that Anderson paid him to divert suspicion, Poe also could have learned about Anderson's alleged cohort, Reynolds.[27] Since the mystery of Rogers's death was never solved, we can imagine Poe feeling a sense of guilt over the intervening years and that, in his own last days feeling close to death, his mind turns to an unresolved and misunderstood death of the past, that of Mary Rogers, and thinks of the man who got away: "Reynolds!"

This modest speculation shares the appeal of the Jeremiah Reynolds theory in that it connects back to Poe's literary work. Nevertheless, it demands as much

uneasy projection about what was on Poe's mind in those final hours as other theories.

IX. BEATING POE: A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

This section evaluates the sources of a popular theory that Poe died by violence and suggests that the origin of the story may, in fact, reside with Poe himself.

Some believe that physical violence led to Poe's death. The most popular of such explanations has been the aforementioned "cooping" theory. John Evangelist Walsh resurrected a different nineteenth century theory of fatal violence in *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe* (1998), the only book-length examination of Poe's death to be published in recent decades. Walsh claimed that the greedy brothers of Elmira Shelton (née Royster), Poe's love interest of his youth and his final days, assaulted Poe in order to prevent Poe from marrying their sister.

Elizabeth Oakes Smith first proposed Poe's death by beating in an 1857 article, and in 1867 added that the instigation for the beating came from an aggrieved woman; in 1876, Smith specified incriminating letters addressed to Poe from the woman as the reason.[28] In 1907, Poe admirer Susan Talley Weiss, Walsh's stated starting point, recalled of Smith's theory that "there was even a sensational story published in a Northern magazine to the effect that Poe had been followed to Baltimore by two of Mrs. Shelton's brothers, and there, after having certain letters taken from him, beaten so severely that he was found dying in an obscure alley. This story was first started by Mrs. Elizabeth Oakes Smith in one of the New York Journals, though it does not appear from what source she derived her information. No denial was made or notice taken of it by Mrs. Shelton's friends, and the story gradually died out."[29]

In looking through archival material, I found a document with a far less dismissive opinion from Weiss. At one point, Weiss had been a strong advocate of the beating theory. She expressed this in an 1885 letter to biographer George Woodberry, now held at Harvard's Houghton Library:

> I have mentioned the quarrel between himself & Mrs. Shelton in regard to certain letters of hers which he refused to give up until his own had been returned to him. On her

> part the feeling was most bitter & vindictive, she having been told of some unflattering remarks he had made in regard to her and his sending an open and verbal reply in answer to her note demanding the return of the letters. *We all heard* on that occasion that she said "she would have him chastised within an inch of his life, if she had to wait seven years for it," or words to that effect, if not *verbatim*. I did not at the time believe that she could so have expressed herself—but have since heard from more than one source that Poe died from the effects of a severe beating, administered by Mrs. Shelton's order. In the N. Y. Herald appeared some 6 or 8 years ago an article from the pen of Mrs. Eliz. Oakes Smith, asserting that his death was caused by personal chastisement thus inflicted upon him *in Richmond*, the night of his leaving for Balt. I wrote a denial, in the Herald—but it now strikes me as being *more* than probable that he was followed on board the boat to Balt. & Phil. and thence back to Balt. – assailed in the latter place, beaten & the letters (which it is certain he had in either his baggage or on his person) taken from him, & he himself left to die, after having perhaps been so disguised *in shabby clothes* as to ensure his not being recognized, or much inquiry made in regard to his identity.[30] (emphasis in original)

The basic elements of this Smith-Weiss beating narrative—an insulted woman, incriminating letters, brothers threatening Poe—have a provenance that dates back several years before Poe's death in Baltimore. In 1846, poet Elizabeth Ellet apparently pressed her friend Fanny Osgood to retrieve several letters that implied a romance, or at least an inappropriate relationship, between Poe and Osgood. Faced with this message (reportedly delivered by none other than Margaret Fuller), Poe angrily announced that he also possessed incriminating letters from Ellet. Poe wrote to Sarah Helen Whitman that Ellet subsequently sent "her brothers & brother in law" to intimidate him to return the letters (which he claimed he had already returned).[31] This incident appears to be the embryo of the conspicuously similar tale about the Royster brothers' supposed fatal attack on Poe to retrieve Elmira Shelton's letters. Here are a few frantic

passages from Poe's letter to Whitman on November 24, 1848, about Ellet's scheme:

> I will give you here but one instance of [Ellet's] baseness & I feel that it will suffice. When, in the heat of passion—stung to madness by her inconceivable perfidy & by the grossness of the injury which her jealousy prompted her to inflict upon *all of us*—upon both families—I permitted myself to say what I should not have said—I had no sooner uttered the words, than I *felt* their dishonor. I felt, too, that, although *she* must be damningly conscious of her own baseness, she would still have a right to reproach me for having betrayed, under *any* circumstances, her confidence.
>
> Full of these thoughts, and terrified almost to death lest I should again, in a moment of madness, be similarly tempted, I went immediately to my secretary—(when these two ladies went away —) made a package of her letters, addressed them to her, and with my own hands left them at her door. Now, Helen, you *can*not be prepared for the diabolical malignity which followed. Instead of feeling that I had done all I could to repair an unpremeditated wrong—instead of feeling that almost any other person would have retained the letters to make good (if occasion required) the assertion that I possessed them—instead of this, she urged her brothers & brother in law to *demand of me the letters*. The position in which she thus placed me you may imagine.[32] (emphasis in original)

Ellet acknowledged some responsibility for starting trouble (although also castigating Poe) in a letter of apology to Fanny Osgood.[33] Poe apparently confessed the story to Thomas Dunn English, who subsequently repeated it with malicious intent in a letter in the June 23, 1846, issues of the New York *Morning Telegraph* and the *Evening Mirror*. English's version of the 1846 incident even more closely mirrors the later rumors tied to Poe's death:

> He told me that he had vilified a certain well known and esteemed authoress, of the South, then on a visit to New

> York; that he had accused her of having written letters to him which compromised her reputation; and that her brother (her husband being absent) had threatened his life unless he produced the letters he named […] the next day Mr. Poe hastily fled from town.[34]

Could Poe have fled an almost identical threat a few years later that led to his death? How many times in a man's life—or more incredibly in a three year stretch—could one reasonably have a woman's brother stalk him, beat him and run him out of town to get back some incriminating letters?

Even if one were inclined to believe in this as an unfortunate pattern in Poe's later life (after all, Poe was prone to unfortunate patterns), closer inspection shows that the original anecdote printed by Smith "in one of the New York Journals" that captured Weiss's imagination was almost certainly about Elizabeth Ellet, not Elmira Shelton. In 1857, Smith introduces the subject:

> Not long before his death he was cruelly beaten, blow upon blow, by a ruffian who knew of no better mode of avenging supposed injuries. It is well known that a brain fever followed—that he left New York precipitately—that he reached Baltimore, the city of his nativity, and there died on the fourth of October, 1849.[35]

In *Beadle's* magazine in February 1867, Smith adds motive:

> It is asserted in the American Cyclopedia, that Edgar Poe died in consequence of a drunken debauch in his native city. This is not true. At the instigation of a woman, who considered herself injured by him, he was cruelly beaten, blow upon blow, by a ruffian who knew of no better mode of avenging supposed injuries. It is well known that a brain fever followed; his friends hurried him away, and he reached his native city only to breathe his last.[36]

Then in the *Home Journal* of March 15, 1876, Smith elaborates again:

> The whole sad story will probably never be known, but he had corresponded with a woman whose name I withhold,

> and they having subsequently quarreled, he refused to return her letters, nor did she receive them till Dr. Griswold gave them back after Poe's death. This retention not only alarmed but exasperated the woman, and she sent an emissary of her own to force the delivery, and who, failing of success, beat the unhappy man in a most ruffianly manner. A brain fever supervened, and a few friends went with him to Baltimore, his native city, which he barely reached when he died.[37]

If one took Smith's articles at face value and had no corroborating evidence other than Poe's known biography, then one would assume that the unnamed woman was Elmira Shelton since she and Poe were involved in the days leading up to his death. Weiss assumes exactly that. In her 1885 letter and her 1907 book, Weiss inserts Shelton into Smith's skeletal narratives, which actually never mentioned her at all.

I can now show with suggestive documentary evidence that Smith had in all likelihood been referring to Ellet. In her 1876 *Home Journal* essay, Smith mentions that Griswold returned the letter to the unnamed aggrieved woman after Poe's death. I found in the Ingram-Poe collection at UVA a letter from Smith to John Henry Ingram, dated a year before her *Home Journal* piece, in which she privately reveals the identity of the woman she would not name publicly (she also privately chides Poe):

> Griswold told me that Poe left a bushel basket full of letters, nicely tied up and the names endorsed upon them, even women who had written him anonymously. If true, it was most dishonorable. The Dr. said he identified a bundle by *Mrs. Ellet*, which she would have rather anybody but himself should have seen, and carefully enclosed them to her.[38] (emphasis added)

Thus, Smith meant the mystery woman to be Elizabeth Ellet, not Elmira Shelton.[39] Smith mixed up the dates of the Ellet incident (believing it was closer to Poe's death) and Weiss, willfully or carelessly, got the identity of the unnamed woman wrong (and Walsh later followed these errors). The substitution of Shelton for Ellet is not the only example of Weiss naming names without

supporting evidence for the sake of connecting disparate elements in the Poe death drama. In her 1907 book on Poe, she presents a detailed quote about Poe's cooping as a long-delayed personal confession by Joseph Snodgrass![40]

It is worth remembering that parts of the story of the 1846 Ellet-induced beating might not be any less fantastic than the story of an 1849 Shelton-induced attack. It is likely Poe exaggerated his altercation with Ellet's brothers—for instance, other accounts of the incident include one brother, while Poe pits himself against a veritable gang of "brothers & brother in law." Its degree of authenticity, however, has little bearing on identifying its gradual transmutation into the recently revived story about Elmira's brothers beating Poe to death. Poe, in his histrionic complaints about Ellet's brothers, may have inadvertently become the co-author of one of his own most sensational and—for the Royster family, at least—inflammatory death narratives.[41]

X. CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF POE'S DEATH

I hope this essay has suggested how information about Edgar Allan Poe's death can be enlarged and clarified by future researchers:

(1) We must understand Poe's death narrative as a series of disjointed facts that can be evaluated and researched, not in terms of one particular unified theory of disease or incident—"beating," "rabies," "cooping"—into which all the facts can be forced. The search for theories to superimpose over the events rather than information from within the events has been a principal obstacle to literature on Poe's death since the nineteenth century.

(2) We must look at the sources and raw materials for the earliest biographers rather than dismissing their facts because their published texts are undersourced as per the practice of that era. To dismiss them based on our current practices of citation is anachronistic and risks losing information that came from documents and firsthand witnesses that over time disappeared. We can compensate for the loss of source documents by studying the papers of these biographers when available instead of relying on only what they published. This strategy pertains to biographers

like George Woodberry, whose published acknowledgment of the Brooks account becomes enriched when supplemented by an examination of his papers. A biographer can also have sources that are entirely divorced from his or her particular agenda, as in the case of Richard Henry Stoddard's correspondent's interview with Neilson Poe.

(3) We must always keep in mind the context of Poe's entire biography and the history of his times when looking at the circumstances of his death. Poe's death does not exist in a vacuum separate from the rest of his biography. This applies to general matters such as his drinking as well as specific episodes, like that of the alleged Elizabeth Ellet letter-beating episode, which almost certainly evolved later into a death theory that skipped off the factual track.

(4) We should not restrict our reading of nineteenth century newspapers and periodicals only to articles directly about Poe. We must uncover the details of the world surrounding Poe in his final months and weeks. Small details about individuals such as Snodgrass and Herring or about the fate of Poe's last letter from Maria Clemm in a Philadelphia post office can add to our knowledge of Poe's final days.

(5) Too many death theories about Poe concentrate on what we cannot know. We must look more at what we can know, even in the margins. We will then see our knowledge of Poe's death for what it can be—growing and improving.[42]

Notes

1. Arthur Hobson Quinn and Richard Hart, *Letters and Documents in the Enoch Pratt Free Library* (New York: 1941), 29-31. Quinn and Hart remarked the following on Neilson's October 11 letter: "it indicates the difficulty of finding out the actual circumstances of Poe's last days in Baltimore. If Neilson Poe, with his legal training, could not obtain the details, which would have been fresh in the memory of those who had seen Poe, it is not hard to understand the difficulty at the present time of distinguishing fact from fiction" (39). This pessimism ignores the fact that the letter only reported results of Neilson's initial search for information.

2. Neilson Poe to Rufus Griswold, November 1, 1849, New York Public Library, Berg Collection. Reprinted in part in Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, *The Poe Log* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987), 844.

3. Neilson navigated family egos in a controversy over Poe's trunk. See Jeffrey A. Savoye, "Two Biographical Digressions: Poe's Wandering Trunk and Dr. Carter's Mysterious Sword Cane," *Edgar Allan Poe Review* (Fall 2005), 5:15-42. At a dedication ceremony in 1875 for a Poe memorial in Baltimore, Neilson Poe did offer a brief acknowledgement before the public, lamenting that "malevolence and envy had invented or exaggerated" Poe's "faults and foibles." S. S. Rice, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Memorial Volume* (Baltimore: Turnball Brothers, 1877), 62.

4. Amelia F. Poe to Ingram, Jan 30, 1909, UVA, Ingram Collection, Box 8 item 418. John Parker in a February 8, 1875 letter to John Ingram may have been referring to Neilson's knowledge of Poe's death when he wrote, "It is said that Nelson [sic] Poe, Sr. has important documents in his possession relating to Edgar Poe, which he has always kept hidden and will allow no one to have access to them. Whether this is true or not I am unable to say, but I think it is a fiction." UVA, Ingram Collection, Box 4 item 200.

5. Letter from Baltimore, George B. Coale to R. H. Stoddard, Apr 26, 1871, NYPL Manuscript Division, Anthony Collection.

6. Neilson's date of October 4 is incorrect, Poe was actually found the day before. Neilson did not "find" Edgar or "carry" him to the hospital since his own October 11, 1849, letter to Maria Clemm indictes he was called for after Poe was hospitalized. The description of Poe's interaction with Dr. Moran seems to come directly from Moran's letter of November 15, 1849, to Maria Clemm. After Clemm died in February 1871, Neilson would have had possession of Moran's letter (if he did not have it already). Moran's letter is reprinted in Quinn and Hart, 31-34.

7. N. H. Morison, Peabody Institute to John Ingram, Nov 27, 1874, reprinted in Miller, *Building Poe Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 45-46.

8. Richard Henry Stoddard, "Edgar Allan Poe," *Harper's Monthly* 45 (September 1872), 557-569.

9. Stoddard, 156. It is advisable to seek out the historical context of this "everyday matter," rather than apply our own standards. A weakened capacity for alcohol would have been far more pronounced in Poe's time given the mid-nineteenth century's more potent alcohol and less flexible social practices. See W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) and Ian R. Tyrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

10. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by John Ward Ostrom (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948), 2: 461, 727-728 (hereafter cited as *Letters*).

11. Stoddard, 567-568.

12. One can muster evidence for the existence of cooping, if not for Poe as one of its victims. James Buckingham in 1841, eight years before Poe's death, observed the election practice in Baltimore of using "emigrants" to vote as citizens "in several wards in succession, the very circumstance of their being entire strangers rendering it impossible for any resident to detect them." Buckingham, *America* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1841), vol. 1, 310. In addition, Doug Boulter has unearthed contemporary evidence of cooping fears on the days leading up to Poe's discovery in the Baltimore *Republican and Argus* and the *Sun*. See Jeffrey Savoye, "The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe," The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore at <http://www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poedeath.htm> June 2, 2007.

13. Thompson writes in his lecture: "On his way through Baltimore to fulfill a literary engagement with a Northern publisher he either, as some say, gave way to his besetting sin, or he was drugged. Adrift upon the streets of that large city, on the eve of an exciting municipal election, he was seized by the lawless agents of a political club, imprisoned in a cellar for the night, and taken out the next day in a state bordering on frenzy and made to vote in eleven different wards, as if in a half-pitiable, half-ludicrous, compensation for never having exercised the right of suffrage before. Cast off at the close of the polls by his vulgar and brutal tyrants of a day, he was humanely taken by strangers to the

hospital." John R. Thompson, *The Genius and Character of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by James H. Whitty and James H. Rindfleisch (Richmond, Va.: Garrett & Massie, 1929), 42. Though the lecture was published posthumously, scholar Jeffrey Savoye has kindly informed me of evidence he uncovered that Thompson included the cooping portion of the lecture significantly before Stoddard's article. Stoddard was Thompson's literary executor upon Thompson's death in 1873, so the fact that Stoddard would already have had Thompson's lecture notes should not be surprising.

14. George Woodberry recapped the train narrative in his 1885 book on Poe, but lamented that "on what foundation this story rests cannot now be determined." Woodberry 1885, 342. Sixteen years after his article in *Harper's*, Stoddard remembers Neilson Poe as a "chief authority" for his 1872 account of Poe's death, along with Sarah Helen Whitman and an "elderly lady of Richmond," but does not specify which facts Neilson provided, thus keeping his sources blurry. "Edgar Allan Poe," *Lippincott's* 43 (1887), 114.

15. James A. Harrison, *Life and Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. 1 (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1903), 328. The same conflation appeared in William Fearing Gill, *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: C. T. Dillingham, 1877), 238.

16. Thomas and Jackson, 846.

17. Robert Almy, "J. N. Reynolds: A Brief Biography," *Colophon* 2 (Winter 1932), 238-239. Aubrey Starke believed Poe had met Jeremiah Reynolds. Starke, "Poe's Friend Reynolds," *American Literature* 11 (1939), 152.

18. Reynolds' name was printed in the *Sun* the same day as Poe's discovery at Ryan's in 1849. Bready's article appeared on October 7, 1949, and Stern's on October 15, 1949.

19. See J. Thomas Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore* (Baltimore, Turnbull Bros., 1874), 514 and the Enoch Pratt Free Library's biographical catalog of Baltimore citizens.

20. W. T. Bandy, "Dr. Moran and the Poe-Reynolds Myth," *Myths and Reality,* ed. B F. Fisher (Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 1987), 26-36.

21. Bandy, 31.

22. Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 518.

23. I remain skeptical of Bandy's conclusion, although I thank Professor John Stauffer of Harvard for lending more weight to Bandy's argument by pointing out to me that, "according to psychologists, when people confuse names, they often do so consistently and over time."

24. "An Old Tragedy Recalled: The Mary Rogers Murder Comes up in the Anderson Will Case," *New York Times*, May 27, 1887, p. 9.

25. Newspaper clipping from an unidentified publication, undated, signed "J. P. M." and titled "The Bones of Annabel Lee," part of Houghton Library collection at Harvard University, Woodberry collection, folder bMS Am 790.5 (92). A different version of this anecdote attributes Poe's irritability only to his anxiety about Virginia Poe's health. "Reminiscences of Poe: brought out through a movement to preserve his old house," *Indianapolis Journal*, June 10, 1900.

26. William Augustus Croffut, "Who Murdered Mary Rogers?", *Detroit Free Press*, June 13, 1885.

27. There are some instant critiques of this to make. Poe's cry of "Reynolds" had become public by this point, so it's possible Croffut or his source planted this hoping readers would think of Poe's dying cry of "Reynolds" to make Anderson look bad. But if Croffut wanted to make any but the faintest connection between Poe's cry for Reynolds and this Reynolds, presumably he would have articulated that directly. We needn't seek to prove that this mysterious Reynolds was actually involved in Mary Rogers' death in order to imagine Poe having heard the same story of Reynolds's guilt as Croffut heard.

28. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, "Edgar Allan Poe," *United State Magazine* (March 1857), 262-269. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, "Autobiographical Notes: Edgar Allan Poe," *Beadle's Monthly* (February 1867), 147-156. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, "Recollections of Poe," *Home Journal* (March 15, 1876). Reprinted in part in Sarah Helen Whitman, *Poe's Helen Remembers*, edited by John Carl Miller (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 414.

29. Susan Talley Weiss, *The Home Life of Poe* (New York: Broadway, 1907), 204-205.

30. Susan Talley Weiss to George W. Woodberry, May 26, 1885, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 790.5 (68). Another letter from Weiss to Woodberry in the same archive folder, dated September 3, 1885, concludes that "a rather clear case is made out in favor of Mrs. E. O. Smith's statement." The letters also claim Dr. William Gibbon Carter and Dr. Thomas Mackenzie witnessed Shelton's surrogates demanding letters from Poe.

31. For background to the incident, see summaries in Sidney Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1963), 211-221 and Joy Bayless, *Rufus Wilmot Griswold: Poe's Literary Executor* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1943), 140-143. Ellet's brother who confronted Poe has been identified as Colonel William Lummis. He was listed as a witness in the Poe libel suit against Thomas Dunn English, although it is unclear whether he testified. See Sidney Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1970), 172, 174. Rufus Griswold includes a version of the Poe-Ellet incident in his "Memoir of the Author," with a variation in *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1850), vol. 3, xxiii-xxiv, reprinted at Bayless, 183-184. Griswold's version claims the dispute of the letters began over a debt Poe would not pay rather than over Poe's correspondence with Fanny Osgood. Griswold, Osgood's close friend, knew about Ellet's instigation of Osgood in the matter, so he probably made the adjustment to protect Osgood's reputation.

32. *Letters,* 2: 407-408.

33. Ellet's letter was reprinted for the first time in Joy Bayless's biography of Griswold. Bayless, 141-142.

34. Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 37.

35. Smith "Edgar Allan Poe," 269.

36. Smith "Autobiographical Notes," 156.

37. Smith, *Poe's Helen Remembers*, 414.

38. E. O. Smith to Ingram, April 7, 1875, Ingram Collection MSS 38-135, Box 4 item 214. In 1853, Ellet complained of Griswold telling people she wrote letters to Poe. Bayless, 279-280 n. 19.

39. In fact, it is very possible Smith *hoped* her readers would think specifically of Ellet, and think poorly of her. Griswold, a close friend of Smith's, reported that Smith had quarreled with the belligerent Ellet in the past (Bayless, 152). Griswold also tangled with Ellet over literary matters and over her treatment of his close friend Fanny Osgood. As late as 1849, Griswold threatened Ellet that he would publish Ellet's letter of apology to Osgood about the Poe-Osgood-Ellet controversy. If Smith did hope some readers would blame Ellet indirectly for Poe's death, it would echo Virginia Poe's death-bed declarations about Ellet as her "murderer" as reported by Poe: "My poor Virginia was continually tortured (although not deceived) by her anonymous letters, and on her death-bed declared that Mrs. E. had been her murderer" (*Letters* 2: 408).

40. Weiss, *The Home Life of Poe*, 205-206.

41. Ironically for Poe's reputation, the confused beating theory presented by Smith as a rejoinder to the "drunken debauch" narrative, may well have prompted Joseph Snodgrass to be that much more insistent on Poe's "*mania a potu*" in his 1867 article (printed a month after Smith's second article and in the same journal). Snodgrass remarked that he wrote with the specific hope that a "hypothesis of a beating were dropped." Snodgrass, "The Facts of Poe's Death and Burial," *Beadle's Monthly* (March 1867), 285.

42. For an inspired take on the nature of scholarship on Poe's death, see Scott Peeples, "Life Writing/Death Writing: Biographical Versions of Poe's Final Hours," *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 18 (1995): 328-38, and the chapter on Poe's death in Scott Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004).

Politian's Significance for Early American Drama

Amy Branam

In an 1836 correspondence between Edgar Allan Poe and John Pendleton Kennedy, Kennedy writes: "Some of your *bizarries* have been mistaken for satire—and admired too in that character. *They* deserved it, but *you* did not, for you did not intend them so." Poe readily replies: "You are nearly, but not altogether right in relation to the satire of some of my Tales. Most of them were *intended* for half banter, half satire—although I might not have fully acknowledged this to be their aim even to myself."[1]

Similar to his tales, Poe's intentions regarding his play, *Politian*, have recently been questioned. Until the 1990s, scholars have focused almost exclusively on the play's source materials.[2] In 1993, however, Steven T. Ryan finally moved beyond these originary concerns to the play's place in the evolution of American drama. Ryan argues that Poe's tragic treatment of the Beauchamp-Sharp tragedy highly influenced Robert Penn Warren's work on the same subject entitled *World Enough and Time*.[3] In 2002, Jeffrey H. Richards also viewed the play as part of a dramatic continuum: "*Politian* is a play written to fail on the nineteenth-century stage of Knowles and his contemporaries; and perhaps, in that almost deliberate failure, is an insight into Poe's own view of drama and the theater."[4] Richards's study makes the significant move to place the work in relation to its historical moment. However, his assessment of the work as a burlesque is not entirely convincing chiefly because his assumption that "Poe both drags the tired carcass of imitative, Europeanized verse drama across the putative stage of literary display and satirizes it" is problematic.[5] The most compelling reason to question this assessment is the failure of Poe's contemporary critics to detect this element of parody. According to Lawrence Levine, American culture was inundated with burlesques; however, Poe never refers to his work as a satire, and his contemporary critics do not identify it as such in reviews.[6]

In this article, my aims are to provide a brief overview of how I reframe Poe's play according to its historical moment and to discuss this play as a serious attempt at writing a successful drama for the early nineteenth-century stage. I believe that Poe's play and its revisions demonstrate what Meredith McGill has noted as Poe's participation in a culture of reprinting.[7] The play's genuine participation in early nineteenth-century theater and its revision for a sentimentalized audience are apparent in the manuscript and in Poe's subtle

changes when he published portions of it in *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845). In particular, I will focus on the characterizations of Politian and Castiglione in the 1835 manuscript, as well as on the 1845 printed scenes and how these versions align with the expectations for antebellum American theater and culture. Although there are multiple publications of Poe's play, it appears in only three distinct forms: his nearly completed manuscript of 1835; the 1835-6 serialization; and the 1845 selections included in *The Raven and Other Poems*. Because the manuscript did not appear in print during his lifetime and the first version was serialized in the *SLM*, the only contemporary reviews address the selections that Poe included in his collection *The Raven and Other Poems*.[8]

Poe received lukewarm reviews when some of his play's scenes were printed in *The Southern Literary Messenger*. *The New Yorker* notes: "[it] contains one or two stirring and many beautiful passages—but we are not partial to dramatic poetry."[9] Moreover, in a review, Robert G. Moore of the *Newbern Spectator* mocked the work by "italicizing freely the incongruities in sense and sound, and the unprecedented instances of tautology."[10] Even worse, when dramatists attempted to employ verse, many critics searched for the places where the meter failed. For example, Poe's friend, Beverly Tucker attempted to advise Poe on this matter in an 1835 letter: "[t]here are lines that cannot by any reading be forced into time."[11] The critical comments by contemporary critics and playwrights indicate a confusion between how to assess a dramatic poem, or closet drama, versus a staged drama. In the case of *Politian,* Poe's lack of desire to see the play staged has led some scholars to believe he may have intended the work as a closet drama.[12] Unfortunately, closet drama has received greater esteem as a literary genre because it facilitates the use of lyric poetry and an effluence of eloquent passages, which do not work in plays that are staged because these techniques stall action. The closet drama has come to be considered as the canonical writers' means to participate in a dramatic tradition without degrading themselves through involvement with popular theater. However, most poet-playwrights did not intend to write closet drama but were forced into the genre by an inability to find producers for their plays. Notable examples include Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and William Wordsworth. Coleridge was the most successful in that his play, *Remorse*, realized a relatively long run in London—over 40 performances.[13] Even though he was encouraged to compose another play by such men as Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Walter Scott, Coleridge did not repeat his success. Some scholars believe that the failures of the Romantics in playwriting can be traced to their

feeble attempts at writing like Shakespeare.[14] In general, the plays were lambasted for their stagnation: too much talk and not enough action. These same assessments mirror the critics' dissatisfactions with Poe's dramatic poetry in contemporary reviews.

Like his British counterparts, Poe attempted a verse drama. As a young poet, Poe learned the difficulty of realizing success through poetry in his attempts to publish "Al Aaraaf."[15] However, poetry was his "first love."[16] Therefore, his attempt to maintain a semblance of his craft through verse drama should not be a surprise. Although Poe's play did not realize performance during his lifetime, there is little reason to believe that Poe intended the work for the closet as he originally composed it. As an American, however, Poe faced an even greater challenge to staging his play. In general, American theaters were not receptive to American dramatists. In light of the theater's historical context, the oft-invoked letter from J.P. Kennedy to Poe needs to be reviewed. When alluding to Kennedy's advice to Poe to stop working on this drama, some construe this to mean that Kennedy may have believed that Poe would not be adept at writing drama. On the contrary, the letter does not offer any reason to assume that Kennedy ever even saw a draft of the work. On 13 April 1835, Kennedy wrote to Thomas White, the founder of the *Southern Literary Messenger*:

> [Poe] is *very* poor. I told him to write something for every number of your magazine, and that you might find it to your advantage to give him some permanent employ. He has a volume of bizarre tales in the hands of ——, in Philadelphia, who of a year past has been promising to publish them. He is at work upon a tragedy, but I have turned him to drudging upon whatever may make money.[17]

This letter should not be read as a sign that Poe's dramatic talent was wanting or that he did not intend his work for the stage. The idea that writing drama would not "make money" often had little correlation to the playwright's talent. Indeed, many other constraints barred Poe's and others' successes as dramatists, including obtaining remuneration from a house manager.

Knowing that Poe already confronted pecuniary distress, Kennedy's advice did not refer to Poe's potential talent in this arena but to the precariousness of spending time on work that tended not to realize monetary gain. In fact, in

another letter to Poe a few months later, Kennedy addresses Poe's persistent desire to write for the stage. Nevertheless, in this instance, his alternative is quite telling: "Can't you write some farces after the manner of the French Vaudevilles? if you can —(and I think you can —) you may turn them to excellent account by selling them to the managers in NY. —I wish you would give your thoughts to this suggestion."[18] Contrary to an indication that Poe cannot write drama, he asserts a faith in Poe's talents. Similar to his earlier letter, however, he couches his proposal within speculation about how this type of work can make a profit.

Politian unequivocally fits into the tradition of Romantic drama. Moving beyond a simplistic definition that merely fixes literary works in time, Alan Richardson observes in *A Mental Theater* that Romantic drama returned to the "tragedy of consciousness" found in Shakespearean works.[19] Unlike Shakespearean tragedy, however, George Steiner specifies that "[Romantic drama] sought tragedy not in the fall of great personages but in the private troubles of inward-turned individuals."[20] Poe's manuscript is subtitled "A Tragedy," and, indeed, the work delves into the demise of its protagonist. Politian is an incarnation of the Romantic Byronic hero—a man destined to reveal a highly personal flaw.

Romantic drama not only encompasses Gothic conventions, such as the appropriation of the Byronic hero, but also elements of the sentimental and the melodramatic. This mix is characteristic of the period. According to Jeffrey N. Cox, Romantic drama showcases "the period's restless eclecticism, turning now to a classicizing tradition, now to domestic comedy, now to the Gothic, and now to new popular forms like melodrama and spectacle."[21] Moreover, the plays often presented "issues of empire and history" and were "historically-minded plays set in Italy, Germany, and Spain."[22] Although Cox focuses on the English Romantic stage, these works were exported to America. Similar to other literary forms, Americans tended to pursue a European tradition even as they attempted to create a distinctly American tradition. Poe already demonstrated this impulse in his early tales. For example, "Metzengerstein" is an imitation of the German. Therefore, when turning to drama, he also looked to the dominant European tradition for ideas.

Many scholars, including N. Bryllion Fagin and Katrina Bachinger, have noted and explored Poe's attraction to Byron and his embrace of the Byronic hero.[23] The reason the Byronic hero is designated a "hero" is complex. Robert Heilman's

discussion of "impulse" and "imperative" in *Tragedy and Melodrama* helps elucidate how a protagonist who isolates himself, kills others, or commits suicide can still be dubbed a "hero." In short, this character is considered a hero because his intentions are noble and his unheroic behavior is justified in the play. For Heilman, "impulse" refers to an internal drive that is part of an individual's personality. Conversely, an "imperative" originates from an external source, similar to a cultural norm. The outside influence one feels about how to act properly—i.e., what others consider an appropriate response to an event—constitutes the imperative. It manifests itself as "law," "duty," "honor," or "a voice of conscience."[24] Because cultural forces condition the makeup of individual personalities, "imperative" and "impulse" can overlap.

How this relates to the Romantic protagonist is significant in terms of how he can be regarded as a hero. In the case of Politian, he is attracted to Lalage's plight, which is captured in the song he hears her singing at their initial encounter. Her song interrogates a male lover who abandons his lover after she has proven her love through "wealth and wo."[25] Later in the play, when Politian and Lalage rendezvous in the gardens of the palazzo, Politian's conflation of impulse with imperative becomes apparent. In his declaration of love for Lalage, he refuses to consider her as lesser than he is because of her "woes" (*P* 272). He feels that Castiglione is to blame for the fate of his beloved. Consequently, Politian rejects Lalage's argument that she will taint the "honours" of his house, which, ironically, is the very justification that Castiglione uses to make peace with the fact that he discards her. In an approach that reflects Joanna Baillie's philosophy outlined in her "Introductory Discourse," Politian distinguishes between the passion and the woman; however, he does not extend the same courtesy to Castiglione.[26] Instead, he feels an imperative to rectify her situation. According to James Wilson in *The Romantic Heroic Ideal*, the essence of a traditional hero is to be a champion for the community. The fact that he initially feels compelled to assume a cause for someone else endears him to the audience.[27] In the case of Politian specifically and the Romantic hero generally, his initial motives appear altruistic.

Yet, as the play proceeds, the hero gradually reveals that his course of action is not quite oriented toward the community's interests. Instead, his course becomes a monomania. The zeal with which Politian pursues the person he has identified as the offender resembles a spirit of vengeance rather than of justice. According to Jack Zipes, the Romantic hero "perseveres to fulfill [his mission], and nothing

can sway him from his task except death."[28] As a result of this phenomenon, the Romantic protagonist wavers in his heroic role as soon as he becomes obsessed with the cause he wishes to defend. In effect, he hears the imperative and becomes immersed in the mission to the point that it becomes an impulse; it becomes a defining characteristic of his personality. The result of this fixation is that the hero begins, as Wilson puts it, to "distort, pervert, or simply fail to measure up to a heroic ideal."[29] In Politian's case, the shift from imperative to impulse is apparent in his conversation with Lalage. He asserts that he loves her despite the fact that "[he knows] it all" (*P* 272), and, as a testament to his allegiance, he promises to kill her seducer. With this pledge, the selfless cause of justice is subordinated to Politian's personal desire to win Lalage's favor through the murder of her betrayer. This shift in the hero's focus leads to his tragedy.

Whereas Politian is modeled on the Romantic hero, Castiglione resembles a Gothic villain. Although early in the play he momentarily reflects upon his vile behavior, Castiglione ultimately chooses to stay the course. Moreover, he stresses his amorality: "'tis but the headach —/ The consequence of yestereve's debauch —/ Give me these qualms of conscience" (*P* 255). In opposition to Politian as the Byronic hero, Castiglione represents masculinity as that which does not fall into bouts of reflective melancholy. Whenever he begins to feel the tug of remorse, his friend, San Ozzo, mocks Castiglione's worry over Lalage. He also mocks Castiglione's potential repentance, blasphemously deriding him as a "cardinal" in the making. The second scene continues the sacrilege in its parody of the donning of ashes for atonement. During this scene, Castiglione conclusively decides to forsake Lalage altogether and to continue his debaucheries, including "crack[ing] a bottle" and fraternizing with the buffo-singer (*P* 257). Notwithstanding these uncouth behaviors, Castiglione and the other aristocratic characters emphasize appearances above all else, highlighting the discrepancy between sincerity and show. For instance, Castiglione mentions the importance of honor, yet the context of the play demonstrates that he clearly intends the word to mean avoiding debasement of his line rather than being virtuous or noble in his treatment of "lowly born" women such as Lalage.

Castiglione's sensibility is clearly inherited from his father, the Duke Di Broglio. The audience learns in the very first scene that the Duke has not treated his orphan ward properly. The father originally had orchestrated an alliance between his son and Lalage, but now Lalage is a "plighted wife." Her former "bosom

friend," Alessandra, will now be married to Castiglione. We also learn that this transfer has taken nearly a year to accomplish. During this eleven-month period, the Duke has kept Lalage confined to her apartment, or, as San Ozzo expresses it, "secluded from society" (*P* 254). The primary motive for the Duke's breach of promise is his perception that Lalage is destitute of wealth and titles, whereas Alessandra is Castiglione's cousin. Alessandra's relationship assures an honorable marriage—in other words, one in which an heir of noble birth for the house of Di Broglio will most likely result.

This plot line resonates with the Gothic tradition. Lalage represents the threat to the villain's legitimacy to property and titles. Because he sees her as possessing this power, the villain takes measures that are contrary to society's codes of conduct. Whether blood relatives or guardians perpetrate these transgressions, distinctions between these relationships are not recognized because both roles signify a protective status. When the female body is desecrated through physical violation accommodated by the guardian-ward relationship, the breach evokes repulsion in the observer because the action is deemed unnatural. If father or brother figures can prey on their children and wards, then no one is safe. Even when these attacks are not sexual, the imprisonment of the female's physical body always contains the potential for this type of violation. The tyranny exercised over Lalage corresponds to real-world anxieties about individual power or lack thereof.

Although Poe's *Politian* presents the quasi-medieval world of late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century Rome, it also obliquely alludes to issues confronting the American South. In particular, Castiglione and his father correspond to American fears pertaining to the Southern plantation owner. More accurately, as Teresa Goddu argues in *Gothic America*, rather than characterize these as "fears," we should consider them as "conventions."[30] While England possessed castles and Italy its palazzos, the American South paralleled these magnificent structures with its plantation houses. For all intents and purposes, the Southern gentleman, like the English and Italian aristocrat, was expected to live according to certain moral codes. One of these codes directed citizens on how to dispense with a dead relation's child. According to Catherine Clinton, the Southern gentleman did not hesitate to offer his home and raise an orphan child with (and as) his own.[31]

As part of her female education, a daughter was taught to be respectable. For

instance, in a letter to his niece, a Southern patriarch instructs: "'Propriety is to a woman what the great Roman critic says action is to an Orator: it is the first, the second and the third requisite. A woman may be knowing, active, witty and amusing; but without propriety she cannot be amiable. Propriety is the center in which all the lines of duty and of agreeableness meet."[32] The word "propriety" included chastity, and Southern culture placed the onus on women to protect this quality. Yet, although there are countless instances where young women either desired or were duped into sexual liaisons, even more disturbing are the instances in which guardians seduced their female wards. In these cases only, the seducer was held accountable for the woman's fall. As a Southerner, Poe's portrayal of a woman preyed upon by the son of her "protector" and that protector's subsequent mistreatment of her would naturally lead to a need for a hero who could step in to defend Lalage's honor.

The presence of the villain in Gothic drama carries over into the newer form of melodrama, and he continues to be used to address social issues. Whereas Poe's play contains a strain of the Gothic in the jilting and imprisonment of Lalage, the issue between Castiglione and Lalage is not so much of inheritance and rank as one of class anxieties in relation to morality. Poe's play taps into class relationships as code for revealing virtue, or, in this case, exposing its absence. When Castiglione attempts to justify his transgression against Lalage, he focuses on their disparities in rank and reputation in order to support his decision to abandon her. Although he appears to be plagued with some guilt, he easily is swayed from taking responsibility for his treatment of this orphan. As mentioned earlier, when Castiglione begins to repent his misuse of Lalage in the second scene, San Ozzo mocks his regret, which leads Castiglione to reconsider his accountability. As a result, he justifies:

> After all I don't see why
> I should so grieve about this little matter
> This every-day occurrence. Marry her—no!
> Castiglione wed him with a wanton!
> Never! - oh never! - what would they say at the club?
> What would San Ozzo think? I have no right
> Had I the will, to bring such foul disgrace
> Upon my family—Di Broglio's line
> Di Broglio's haughty and time-honoured line! (*P* 255)

Despite this renunciation, Castiglione exhibits some signs of remorse. Emitting sighs in Alessandra's presence and refusing to fight Politian may signify his knowledge of his guilt; however, these instances exacerbate rather than remedy Lalage's predicament. Castiglione appears to admit he is wrong in isolated circumstances, but he never apologizes to Lalage nor attempts to persuade his father from maligning her. Therefore, his attempt at evoking his superior rank as a justification ultimately fails to elicit sympathy because he demonstrates that he is not superior in terms of morality. In America, especially in the aristocratic, antebellum South, these disparate class distinctions would have captivated the audience's attention because the ideal gentleman would not only be a gentleman in name but also behavior. According to William Goldhurst, Americans during the 1830s believed that men who seduced women "deserved to die for offending against morality and violating the integrity of the social structure."[33] Poe's recapitulation of this code in the duel scene stems from the belief that the trespass against a woman's virtue warrants such a response. This final act of vindication represented by the duel fulfills the melodramatic impulse to realize justice.

Although the manuscript supports these readings of Castiglione and Politian, the 1845 version presents a much more sympathetic Castiglione. During Poe's lifetime, the only versions to appear in print consisted of 5 of the 11 scenes drafted in the manuscript. These selections focused on the upper-class conflict, leaving out those that included lower-class interactions with upper-class characters and scenes of revelry and banter. The scenes first appeared for a limited audience in the December 1835 and January 1836 issues of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. However, Poe elected to rearrange the order of these scenes ten years later in his collection, *The Raven and Other Poems*.[34] The 1845 text demonstrates that, by merely removing and rearranging scenes, Castiglione is transformed from a villain to a misguided yet potentially remorseful sentimental character. Instead of beginning the 1845 version with Lalage in her apartment, Poe uses the exchange between Alessandra and Castiglione as the first scene. Therefore, the audience formulates a more favorable opinion of Castiglione. By placing this scene first, the audience is predisposed to view Castiglione as a repentant rake rather than a callous libertine. Indeed, all three versions of the play differ in terms of which character is given the first opportunity to explain the situation between Lalage and Castiglione. The effect of these different accounts is to prejudice the audience in favor of a different character. The 1845 sequence is the only version that permits a

sympathetic view of Castiglione from the very opening of the play. The first line is spoken by Castiglione's new fiancée, Alessandra: "Thou art sad, Castiglione" (*R* 31). By beginning with the depiction of Castiglione's apparent guilt, the audience is less likely to view him as a villain than in the other two versions where he is painted as such by Lalage and by the servants. Moreover, by omitting altogether the second scene of the manuscript, this version eschews Castiglione's blatant renunciation of Lalage and the insults he alleges against her character.

The two scenes between Politian and Lalage remain together in the 1845 text, and they are followed by the last scene in which Politian is discovered awaiting Baldazzar's message concerning whether Castiglione will meet him in a duel. The 1845 version ends in the same manner as the serial. Castiglione and Politian meet. During the fight, Politian discloses that he is defending Lalage's honor. Castiglione recoils and refuses to continue the fight. The scene closes with Politian's promise to publicize Castiglione's shame and his cowardice. Castiglione utters these final lines: "Now this indeed is just! / Most righteous, and most just, avenging Heaven!" (*R* 51). Castiglione's repentance, Politian's role as God's avenger, and Lalage's embodiment of virtue in distress underscore Poe's skills as a sentimental writer. The 1845 text raises some interesting points about rearrangement as revision. Through merely reordering the scenes, the characterizations are affected significantly, which in turn affects reader response.

The differences that appear due to this slight alteration effectively transform Castiglione from a villain to a more sentimental character, which, as Ann Douglas suggests, was much more popular in the culture of sentiment and its female readers at this time.[35] Castiglione's portrayal in the 1845 version provides a male for women to pity. Once he exhibits horror at his own behavior, he becomes an active agent of his own punishment (i.e., self-victimization) and, by extension, an object to be pitied rather than loathed. As Eliza Richards details in *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle*, this sympathy extended beyond Poe's characters to Poe himself. For instance, Richards cites an excerpt written by Elizabeth Oakes Smith which records her impressions of Poe. She connects with him through, as Richards puts it, "their mutual capacity for dreaming" and Poe's ability to be "both a conduit for feminine desire and its object."[36] He accomplished the latter by portraying "self-victimization."[37] Many of his female associates found Poe to be caught between his desire to

exhibit masculine firmness of character yet revealing a feminine susceptibility of mind in his works and social interaction.[38] This internal conflict became a point of pity that these writing women could identify with and appreciate.

Like many British Romantics have accomplished for British drama, Poe can open the door to a more serious study of early American drama due to his status as a well-known literary figure. Indeed, the American tradition may be even more fertile ground for study as scholars not only delve into the questions of socio-political significance but also trace the evolution from British and Continental traditions to one more distinctly American. Contrary to scholars, such as Harold Bloom, who continue to deny the existence of a "vital American drama before O'Neill," Americanists are called to challenge this designation.[39] Poe is just one of numerous antebellum playwrights attempting to master and then depart from previous dramatic traditions. *Politian* must be considered not as a mockery of Romantic theater but as a provocative demonstration of one writer among many who tried to create a successful play for a highly eclectic, rapidly changing, play-going audience. As Poe's unfinished manuscript indicates, even though he ultimately decided to pursue this goal from the critic's corner rather than the stage itself, his manuscript and its variants illustrate the evolution of play writing and the less satisfactory solutions provided by the American culture of reprinting—the closet drama and the dramatic poem.

Notes

1. Edgar Allan Poe to John Pendleton Kennedy, 11 February 1836. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, 2 vols. , ed. John Ostrom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1948), 1: 83-84.

2. For literary inspirations, see Karl Arndt, "Poe's Politian and Goethe's Mignon," *Modern Language Notes* 49.2 (1934): 101-104; William Bryan Gates, "Poe's Politian Again," Modern Language Notes 49.8 (1934): 561; Thomas O. Mabbott, "Another Source of Poe's Play, 'Politian,'" *Notes and Queries* 194.13 (1949): 279; Palmer Holt, "Poe and H. N. Coleridge's Greek Classic Poets 'Pinakidia,' 'Politian,' and 'Morella' Source," *American Literature* 34.1 (1962): 8-30. For articles that link the play to the Kentucky Beauchamp-Sharp tragedy see William Goldhurst, "The New Revenge Tragedy: Comparative Treatments of the Beauchamp Case," *Southern Literary Journal*

22.1 (1989): 117-127; William Kimball, "Poe's Politian and the Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy," *Poe Studies* 4.1 (1971): 24-27.

3. Steven T. Ryan, "World Enough and Time: A Refutation of Poe's History as Tragedy," *Southern Quarterly* 31.4 (1993): 86-93. This article explains that Warren deliberately refused to approach these real life events as a romantic tragedy. Instead, Warren exposes the love connection between Jereboam Beauchamp and Ann Cook as superficial. In Warren's play, these people become the characters Jeremiah and Rachel, which correspond to Poe's Politian and Lalage.

4. Jeffrey H. Richards, "Poe, *Politian*, and the Drama of Critique." *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 3.2 (2002): 17.

5. Richards, 22.

6. Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988), 15-17.

7. Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2003), 158-160.

8. Edgar Allan Poe, *Politian: a tragedy: autograph manuscript of an unfinished play* (NY: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1835); "Scenes from an Unpublished Drama," *Southern Literary Messenger* 2.1 (1835): 13-6; "Scenes from an Unpublished Drama," *Southern Literary Messenger* 2.2 (1836): 106-108; "Scenes from 'Politian,'" in *Tales and The Raven and Other Poems*, rpt. *The Raven and Other Poems* (NY: Wiley and Putnam, 1845. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969), 31-51. All further references to the latter edition are designated *R*.

9. Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, eds., *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 1809-1849* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1987), 188.

10. Thomas and Jackson, 189.

11. Beverly Tucker to Poe, 5 December 1835. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Vol. 17: *Letters,* ed. James A. Harrison (NY: Sproul, 1902), 22-23.

12. Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1941), 233.

13. Lawrence Wynn, "Coleridge's *Remorse*: Poetic Drama on the Romantic Stage," *Interpretations* 15.1 (1983): 13.

14. W.D. Howarth, "Assimilation and Adaptation of Existing Forms in Drama of the Romantic Period," in *Romantic Drama*, ed. Gerald Gillespie (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 1994), 89.

15. Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* (NY: Harper Perennial, 1992), 53-59.

16. "Poe as a Poet," *E.A. Poe Society of Baltimore*, 20 September 2000, <http://www.eapoe.org/GENINFO/poepoet.htm> (30 March 2007).

17. Thomas and Jackson, 149.

18. John Pendleton Kennedy to Poe, 19 September 1835. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Vol. 17: *Letters*, ed. James A. Harrison (NY: Sproul, 1902), 19.

19. Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theater* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988), 3.

20. Quoted in Jeffrey N. Cox, "Romantic Redefinitions of the Tragic" in *Romantic Drama*, ed. Gerald Gillespie (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing Co., 1994): 154.

21. Jeffrey N. Cox, introduction to *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*, eds. Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview P, 2003), xvii.

22. Cox, xvii.

23. N Bryllion Fagin, *The Histrionic Mr. Poe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), 85-86; Katrina Bachinger, *The Multi-Man Genre* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1987), 117-137. His tale "The Visionary" and his poems "To The River —" and "To One in Paradise" are instances in which Byron's influence is evident. Katrina Bachinger's interest in the Poe-Byron connection led her to Poe's unfinished drama. She devotes an entire chapter of *The Multi-Man Genre* to the delineation of how *Politian* manifests Poe's desire to construct a Byronic hero, specifically one in the line of Manfred. Politian's mysterious melancholic affliction, his unexplained presence in a foreign land, his quest for Beauty, and his desperate attraction to Lalage mirror the Byronic hero's experience. Also, "The Visionary" has been viewed as a veiled story about Byron and Mary Chaworth. See Silverman, 93. McGill makes a case for reading "To the River —" in connection with Byron's "To the River Po" (159-60). Basler traces similarities between Byron's works and elements of Poe's "To One in Paradise," concluding that this has to be considered as "more than an accidental parallel." See Roy P. Basler, "Byronism in Poe's 'To One in Paradise,'" *American Literature* 9.2 (1937): 236.

24. Robert Bechtold Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1968), 13.

25. Edgar Allan Poe, *Politian*, in *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Vol. 1: *Poems*, ed. Thomas O. Mabbott (Cambridge: Belknap P, 1969): 270. All further references to this edition will be cited in the text as *P*.

26. Joanna Baillie, "Introductory Discourse" in *Women's Writing, 1778-1838,* ed. Fiona Robertson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 204-8.

27. James D. Wilson, *The Romantic Heroic Ideal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1982), 196.

28. Jack D. Zipes, *The Great Refusal: Studies of the Romantic Hero in German and American Literature* (Bad Homburg: Athenaum, 1970), 23.

29. Wilson, 191.

30. Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (NY: Columbia UP, 1997), 23.

31. Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1982), 39.

32. David Campbell to Maria Campbell, 11 October 1800, Campbell Collection, DU, quoted in Clinton, 102.

33. Goldhurst, 120.

34. According to the E. A. Poe Society of Baltimore, "The Raven and Other Poems," <http://www.eapoe.org/WORKS/editions/raop.htm>: "This volume was issued on November 19, 1845, about four months after his *Tales* (1845) by the same publisher. The number of copies printed is uncertain. Apparently, only 750 copies were planned, but this number was perhaps raised to about 1,500 in anticipation of demand based on the success of Poe's *Tales*. The volume was initially issued separately with pink paper wraps. Beginning sometime early in 1846, it was issued in hard covers, bound together with the earlier *Tales*. The original sale price was 31 cents for the separate volume, and $1.00 for the double volume."

35. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

36. Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 34-35.

37. Richards, 34.

38. Richards, 35.

39. Harold Bloom, introduction to *The Iceman Cometh* by Eugene O'Neill, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), vi; See also Robert Hewison, "Theatre: A Touch of the Poet." *The London Times* February 7, 1988, <http://www.eoneill.com/artifacts/reviews/top1_times2.htm.> .

Sensibility, Phrenology, and "The Fall of the House of Usher"

Brett Zimmerman

My approach to "The Fall of the House of Usher" draws upon the history of ideas while placing Edgar Allan Poe firmly within his *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of his time and place. This interpretation depends on an understanding of the "cult of sensibility" central to the Gothic tradition that began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and reached its height in the works of Ann Radcliffe. Poe synthesized this phenomenon with phrenology, which he believed to be a respectable science. He favorably reviewed Mrs. L. Miles's *Phrenology, and the Moral Influence of Phrenology* in 1836, three years before "Usher" was first published. A holdover from the eighteenth century, the cult of sensibility was a scheme of codified responses to art, nature, and society. In phrenology and sensibility, we have what Dieter Freundlieb calls "knowledge frames"—"culturally shared knowledge that allows the reader to give an everyday explanation of a state of affairs explicitly mentioned, but left unexplained, in the text."[1] In "Usher," Poe reconciles those two knowledge frames while simultaneously presenting a chilling Gothic tale for popular consumption. To understand Poe's use of and response to sensibility, I shall examine his familiarity with Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—which he makes readily apparent in "The Oval Portrait" (1842, 1845)—and her critique of extreme emotionalism.

In "Usher," Poe alters the formula of highly emotional Gothic heroines by presenting two male characters who suffer from overwrought sensibilities, the more extreme instance being the dandified Roderick Usher. As a man of sensibility himself, Poe appreciates the artist in Roderick but follows Radcliffe in portraying the dangers of excessive emotionalism. Poe is aware of two "cures" for the illness—one from the eighteenth century, which prescribes manly discourse for the suffering dandy, the other from contemporary phrenology, which involves the extrication of the dandy from his overstimulating environment. Poe deviates from the eighteenth-century cure by demonstrating that masculine company is insufficient, implying that the phrenological regimen is the true solution. Tragically, however, the narrator in "Usher," who has been summoned to save Roderick from himself, fails to apply that regimen.

* * *

The narrator bases his description of Roderick Usher largely on physiognomy,

but his reference to "an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple" clearly alludes to phrenology (*CW* 402).[2] As David Sloane comments, Roderick "has an unusually large ideality bump. It is Usher's chief character trait. [. . .] Ideality was the organ of poetry and music, both prominent in Usher's life, and was a faculty of the most powerful intellect."[3] As the phrenological clues suggest, Roderick Usher is an artist, a man of sensibility. That term refers to people of good breeding who have an intense appreciation of the beautiful both in nature and in art. E. Arthur Robinson clarifies that "Poe presents in Usher a rarely matured sensibility which has descended in 'undeviating transmission' through an 'ancient family'; their nurturing of personality dates, quite possibly, from the Renaissance."[4] Roderick is a musician, a painter, a poet, a lover of esoteric literature, and perhaps even a Renaissance Man. He represents the aesthetic component of the cult of sensibility. That "The Fall of the House of Usher" is largely about aesthetics is clear from the very first paragraph, where the narrator echoes Burke's theory of the sublime in contrasting the emotion of "insufferable gloom' he espouses as he approaches the Usher mansion with that "half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible" (*CW* 397). Whether the narrator's self-appointed task is to recover for Roderick and the readers a more healthy aesthetic, however, remains an open question.

The cult of sensibility also promoted a moral and civic sympathy for human suffering. As Robinson has suggested, the entire Usher clan was composed of people of sensibility, for one benevolent sign of that trait is philanthropy. As the narrator confirms, "[Roderick's] very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament [. . .] manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity" (*CW* 398-99). Critics ignore that little detail; but Poe, ever the conscientious craftsman, inserts that clue to draw our attention to the thematic importance of sensibility in "Usher."[5] Clearly, the Ushers possess both components of sensibility: the aesthetic and the civic.

By presenting such characters in a work of terror fiction, Poe places himself very much in the literary sub-tradition of Ann Radcliffe, whose good characters—such as her Gothic heroine Emily St. Aubert, her father, and the Gothic hero Valancourt, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—are all people of refinement. By contrast, the unlikable people in her romances are vulgar and boorish. As Radcliffe teaches us, however, the positive ethics of the cult of

sensibility can actually be a danger if not practiced in moderation. In examining *Udolpho*, Mary Poovey states, "In order to be effective, sensibility needs [. . .] external governance, for, as Radcliffe is quick to note, sensibility is itself inherently unstable: it is susceptible to 'excess.' And 'all excess is vicious,' as St. Aubert warns Emily."[6] That adage, Poovey goes on to say, was common in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Although we probably do not think of *Udolpho* as a satire, Radcliffe does present Emily St. Aubert as a figure worthy of gentle scorn because she allows her sensibilities to become excessive. A list of the negative manifestations of excessive feelings would include an overactive imagination, superstitiousness, an unhealthy overindulgence in grief, loss of reason and judgment, and unhealthy passions. Those are precisely the traits that characterize Roderick Usher. Humans can become victims of their own feelings if they do not consciously work to keep emotions under control.[7]

Several times in *Udolpho* Emily is chastised for being too sensitive to her surroundings—rebuked not only by her father but even by the Gothic villain Montoni: "I recommend it to you [. . .] to endeavour to adopt a more rational conduct, than that of yielding to fancies, and to a sensibility, which, to call it by the gentlest name, is only a weakness."[8] He says something similar when Emily complains about the mysterious door of her room, hinting at her fears and vulnerability: "Conquer such whims, and endeavour to strengthen your mind. No existence is more contemptible than that, which is embittered by fear" (Radcliffe 244). Doubtless, Montoni would have the same contempt for Roderick Usher: what he fears (a subject of considerable critical speculation) is irrelevant—that he fears is the important point. Although St. Aubert appreciates Emily's sensibilities, a woman must not go too far in indulging emotional responses to her environment; she must retain reason over fear: "St. Aubert had too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue; and had penetration enough to see, that this charm was too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing. He endeavoured, therefore, to strengthen her mind; to enure her to habits of self-command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings [. . .] to resist first impressions" (Radcliffe 5). Roderick similarly needs such a guardian of good sense, but the narrator's companionship ultimately fails.

Although Poe certainly understood sensibility and its dangers through its manifestations in American culture, he was more familiar with the concept through certain literary works that simultaneously celebrated and critiqued it.

In "The Oval Portrait," the narrator mentions "those piles of commingled gloom and grandeur which have so long frowned among the Apennines, not less in fact than in the fancy of Mrs. Radcliffe."[9] Poe's familiarity with Radcliffe enables me to use Poovey's comments regarding *Udolpho* to comprehend Roderick Usher:

> Radcliffe's first critique of sensibility focuses squarely on the imagination itself. [. . .] Udolpho's gloom completely baffles perception. In such complete obscurity the imagination is cut loose from all governing images, moral or otherwise. Aroused yet guided, its innate susceptibility becomes an aggressive force, rushing to fill the void with its own projected images, creating, in effect, an external "reality."[10]

Although he goes beyond Radcliffe by briefly providing a phrenological explanation for Roderick Usher, and although he faults one recommended cure for the disorder, Poe offers us in "Usher" his version of the Radcliffean theme of excessive sensibility. Of all people, artists are most susceptible to that failing. While Radcliffe's novel presents common-sense rationality as a cure for the "disease," however, Poe's tale is much more ambivalent in its denouement.

One sign of Roderick's excessive sensibilities is overindulgence in grief. In this context, the figure of Madeline becomes significant, for the griever must have an object of bereavement. In *Udolpho*, Emily's mother dies, but even while the family mourns, her father teaches Emily that one must not indulge in emotional sentiments too freely: "even that sorrow, which is amiable in its origin, becomes a selfish and unjust passion, if indulged at the expense of our duties. [. . .] The indulgence of excessive grief enervates the mind, and almost incapacitates it" (Radcliffe 20). Likewise, Madeline's illness has already affected Roderick deeply and dangerously, but after Madeline seemingly dies, her brother's mental faculties lapse into dormancy: "His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step" (*CW* 410).

Eventually, the brother becomes convinced that Madeline still lives, and his paralyzed volition arises out of his loss of reason and judgment, another manifestation of excessive feelings. This loss of rational judgment not only

explains his inability to rescue Madeline from her entombed condition but also accounts for his puzzling behaviour on the day of her entombment—screwing down the lid of her coffin when he knows she suffers from catalepsy. Craig Howes believes that yet another component of Usher's insanity is shown in the way he projects his feelings onto his surroundings, into his art, and even into his favorite romance, the "Mad Trist." He entertains what Howes calls a "theory of correspondence"[11]: Roderick equates his own mental state with his environment—the house, the surrounding atmosphere, and the tarn—and insists on a connection between Madeline's activities in the vault and the events of the medieval romance as the narrator reads it to him. His narcissism is psychotically extreme.

Further illustrating Roderick's excessive sensibilities is his superstitiousness, especially the belief that his house is alive. The narrator suggests that other men have believed in the sentience of vegetable matter, so Poe does not intend this belief in itself to be taken for a sign of madness.[12] What is a sign of mental unbalance is Roderick's insertion of the idea of sentience into the stone and mortar of his house. An additional manifestation of his psychic illness is Roderick's agoraphobia: "He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth—in regard to an influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated" (*CW* 403). The doctrine of sentience highlights Roderick's insanity as well as advances a widely accepted allegorical reading of the tale—that the house and Roderick are essentially the same.

The ultimate sign of extreme sensibilities is "unhealthy passions." Here, the theme of incest becomes relevant. Critics have not ignored this textual clue, and Poe's narrator hints at it immediately: "I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (*CW* 399). That is to say, the history of this inbred race is rife with incest. Several readers have noted the medical impossibility of twins being identical when one is male and the other female, yet the narrator asserts that Roderick and Madeline look alike. Robinson refers to the unlikely similitude between the Usher siblings as "a biological hypothesis more tenable in Poe's day than in our own." Thompson suggests that Roderick

and Madeline look alike because they are the products of incest.[13] I would add that a possible reason why the brother seals the lid of his sister's coffin is that he is desperately attempting to resist further temptation of incest. Interestingly, the narrator tells us that "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them" (*CW* 410). "Intelligible" could simply mean "clear or understandable"; but Poe may be punning, so that "scarcely intelligible" equates to "not tell-able"—a taboo never to be confessed. Poovey's interpretation of *Udolpho* becomes relevant in the context of "Usher," too: "This, then, is at the heart of Radcliffe's critique of sensibility's affinity to 'excess': the amoral energy beyond responsiveness is the 'fiend' of sexual desire, whose crimes neither prayers nor regrets can undo. [. . .] Sensibility *is* dangerous, as Emily's hysteria shows, because it encourages imaginative and libidinal excesses." [14] The tabooed libidinal excesses that an out-of-control sensibility can produce have been the scourge of the entire Usher clan and not just its final representatives.

Clearly, Roderick understands how dangerous the combination of isolation and deep feelings can become, and he has a possible remedy in mind. As Leland E. Warren tells us, "Conversation was often prescribed as a guard against or prescription for the dangers of isolation, one of which came to be identified as an excess of sensibility." Citing Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Warren stresses how the importance of conversation to offset the effects of seclusion and emotionalism was considered a "virtual truism" by Smith's contemporaries. However, it was especially important for domestic young ladies to seek out social intercourse "in order to escape the personal fantasies to which their situations could make them prey." [15] But "The Fall of the House of Usher" is androcentric, so Roderick, as a socially and geographically isolated "true feeler," is the one falling prey to his personal fantasies. Thus, he calls upon his male friend to provide the society and conversation he needs. Sensibility, says Todd, "was especially associated with the selfish, effeminate side of the personality which, in men, needed proper and manly curbs."[16] Once the narrator arrives, Roderick believes that his malady will "undoubtedly soon pass" (*CW* 402).

Roderick's therapy is perhaps sound, but his choice of companions is poor. He fails not only to bring Roderick back from the abyss of insanity but also to retain his own because the narrator is similarly a man of keen sensibilities. Harriet Hustis refers to his "propensity for affective impression."[17] As B. F.

Fisher points out, the unreliable narrator is the male version of the Gothic heroine, the Catherine Morlands and Emily St. Auberts of British terror fiction. He possesses an "overstrained sensibility" and remains to the end "a creature of feeling" (Radcliffe 369).[18] As Thompson notices, what is true of Roderick in the tale's motto—"His heart is a lute hung up; as soon as it is touched it resounds"—is also true of the narrator. (Consider, for example, how deeply affected he is by his first glimpse of Usher's Gothic edifice).[19] Granted, he does not possess Roderick's artistic genius, but he does respond to art by being the audience for his host's painting, reciting, and musical composing. Like Roderick, however, the narrator is finally overstimulated too, and his organ of Ideality becomes "distempered." In the end, he becomes, like Roderick, a madman for parallel reasons.

As a proponent of phrenology, Poe knew how phrenologists diagnosed insanity and what therapies they recommended to cure it. Dividing the brain into separate organs, they asserted that only individual faculties, not the entire brain, were diseased. The excessive stimulation of a particular faculty could create an unhealthy condition in it. That Roderick's organ of Ideality is diseased becomes clear from his bizarre artistic compositions. The narrator confirms that "[a]n excited and highly *distempered ideality* threw a sulphureous lustre over all" their shared studies and occupations (*CW* 405, my italics). The phrenologists believed that someone with a diseased cranial organ should be removed from the environment that excites it to a quiet and secluded one. Without anything to stimulate it, the now dormant faculty would return to manageable proportions.[20]

Poe, then, would have understood two possible remedies for Roderick's malady: (1) the cure for excessive sensibilities in healthy social discourse, and (2) the phrenological cure of extracting the sufferer from his unhealthy environment. The narrator clearly knows something about the pseudo-science's faculty psychology and its cranial mapping. Nevertheless, he knows nothing about what is in the best interest of his friend's psychic health because he allows him to remain in his damaging environment instead of getting him away from the House of Usher. On the contrary, rather than adhere to the phrenological regimen, the narrator mistakenly encourages Roderick's already diseased organ of Ideality by allowing him to indulge himself with artistic activities. In reading him the "Mad Trist," for example, the narrator commits "one of the worst blunders on literary record," as Howes puts it.[21] So much for the remedial effects of society and conversation recommended by Adam Smith. Poe, then,

appears to prefer the nineteenth-century phrenological solution to distempered Ideality over the eighteenth-century cure of manly company. What is the point of manly discourse, if the attendant does not get the sufferer away from treacherous surroundings? Poe's well-intentioned but naïve narrator actually helps to construct an overstimulating environment, which is the exact opposite of the surroundings recommended by the phrenologists. Instead of dragging him to a carriage and placing him in a quiet and soothing phrenological asylum, the narrator humors Roderick—who is unwilling to leave the Usher mansion.

* * *

Knowledgeable as they must have been about the ethic of sensibility and aware of the controversial claims of phrenology, Poe's readers would have immediately recognized the central significance of these themes in "The Fall of the House of Usher." For modern scholars, some skepticism exists as to the claims Poe made pertaining to his reading and formal education, yet his understanding of contemporary psychological theories, as well as of aesthetic trends and their relation to terror fiction, cannot be doubted. He was a student of Edmund Burke's theories of the sublime and beautiful; he thoroughly understood the cult of sensibility; he was well-versed in Radcliffean Gothic and its ideological underpinnings. "The Fall of the House of Usher," however, is a repudiation of the eighteenth-century proscription for excessive sensibility as recommended by Radcliffe but it is also a tragedy because of the narrator's inability to apply the more "modern," the more "scientific" nineteenth-century phrenological regimen. This is not to say that Poe accepted unreservedly the insights of the phrenologists; in "The Imp of the Perverse" he finds fault with their system of classification. In other words, very much part of his *Zeitgeist*, Poe accepted and made literary use of various knowledge frames available to him, but his ever-critical mind often insisted upon the further refinement of those systems and ideologies, certainly as they related to the fragilities of the human psyche.

Notes

1. Dieter Freundlieb, "Understanding Poe's Tales: A Schema-Theoretic View," *Poetics* 11.1 (1982), 34.

2. All quotations from "The Fall of the House of Usher" are taken from the *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1969-1978) 2: 397-417, hereafter cited as *CW* in the

text.

3. David Sloane, "Usher's Nervous Fever: The Meaning of Medicine in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher'," in *Poe and His Times: The Artist and His Milieu*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore, MD: Edgar Allan Poe Soc., 1990), 147.

4. E. Arthur Robinson, "Order and Sentience in 'The Fall of the House of Usher'," *PMLA* 76 (1961), 81.

5. One critic who did comment on it missed the point: "The narrator's statement that the Usher family's sensitivity [*sensibility*] manifested itself further in [charity] has pertinence, also, I believe, for who *gives* more than the artist?" See Joseph Patrick Roppolo, "Undercurrents in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" *Tulane Studies in English* 23 (1978), 11 n41. Roppolo seems to be treating the detail as little more than incidental whereas the theme of sensibility at once enables Poe to "locate" the tale within a literary tradition as well as to critique that tradition's recommended solutions to the problem of the overwrought temperament.

6. Mary Poovey, "Ideology and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 21 (1979), 318.

7. Consider what Janet Todd says about the characters of sensibility in Sarah Fielding's *Adventures of David Simple*: "People are hobbyhorsical and monomaniac; they are blinkered by simple experience in their perceptions and caught in fixed associations of ideas, such as Locke likened to madness." That sounds like a description equally applicable to Roderick Usher. See *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 105.

8. Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (London: Oxford UP, 1966), 230, hereafter cited as Radcliffe in the text.

9. "The Oval Portrait." In *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe,* 2: 662.

10. Poovey, 319-20.

11. Craig Howes, "Teaching 'Usher' and Genre: Poe and the Introductory

Literature Class," *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* 97, ed. Juliet Byington (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2001), 194.

12. For instance, see G. R. Thompson ,editor, *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Norton, 2004), 208 n2.

13. Robinson, 75; Thompson, *Selected Writings*, 211 n9.

14. Poovey, 322. Stephen Cox would support Poovey's observation: "Sexuality and sensibility are so closely allied that the eighteenth century often considered the former as a subset of the latter." See "Sensibility as Argument," in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. Syndy McMillen Conger (Toronto: Associated UP, 1990), 67.

15. Leland E. Warren, "The Conscious Speakers: Sensibility and the Art of Conversation Considered," in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. Syndy McMillen Conger (Toronto: Associated UP, 1990), 27.

16. Todd, 140.

17. Harriet Hustis, "'Reading Encrypted but Persistent': The Gothic of Reading and Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher'," in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* 97, ed. Juliet Byington. (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2001), 241.

18. B. F. Fisher, "Playful 'Germanism' in 'The Fall of the House of Usher': The Storyteller's Art," in *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe*, eds. G. R. Thompson and Virgil L. Lokke (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 1981), 362.

19. G. R. Thompson, "Poe and the Paradox of Terror: Structures of Heightened Consciousness in 'The Fall of the House of Usher'," in *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe*, eds. G. R. Thompson and Virgil L. Lokke (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 1981), 331.

20. John D. Davies, *Phrenology Fad and Science: A 19th-Century American Crusade* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), 92.

21. Howe, 193.

Interview with Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV
March 2007

Barbara Cantalupo: I'd like to begin our interview with a somewhat formal question, if that's okay. In your 1977 lecture, "The Very Spirit of Cordiality," delivered at the 55th annual commemoration program of the Baltimore Poe Society, you make the following assertion about the tales that were meant to become *The Tales of the Folio Club*:

> I believe that much of the hilarity in this comic collection would have resulted not merely from the critiques, which, Poe stated, would burlesque criticism, but also from drunken storytellers reading tales about drunken characters. This tactic at times consisted of obvious presentations of sodden cavortings, at others of less obtrusive, slyly insinuated wordplay [….] Poe's literary employment of alcohol and alcoholics is, then, part of his straddling of classic and romantic tradition, as is clear from his own artistic handling of some age-old materials. His amalgams of the humorous with horrifying, or potentially horrifying, situations and characters produce a genuinely grotesque art.

How was this thesis taken thirty years ago? Do you still agree with its implications for Poe's art?

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV: Yes, I do, and I probably feel more strongly about it with the passage of time. When I did that book with the Baltimore Poe Society, I stuck mainly with Poe's early stories, and I think he continued, on one hand, let's say, to use alcohol-related or induced circumstances in later works like "The Angel of the Odd." It may be like some of those early stories, but we're not sure that we're dealing with a drunkard's dream until we reach the hilarious ending. Then you get something like "The Cask of Amontillado" where Poe doesn't seem to be writing parody or satire, but is using the alcoholism—because I think Montresor is likewise alchohol-influenced and that accounts for the repetitious language in that story and, perhaps, for his own distortion of mind where he, of course, tries to argue for his own rationality, and yet slips every now and then, and we see that he may not be quite as

rational as he supposed. The story ends with that kind of flip side: fifty years have passed, and nobody has discovered this matter. No. Fifty years have passed, and yet he can remember everything in detail as if his conscience is gnawing at him.

I also think, for that matter, that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, might be, mind you, just might be read as one long drunkard's dream, and, therefore, all the hallucinatory or sensational experiences would make perfect sense within the framework of intoxication. I would imagine, by the way, that one might—but, again, only might—look at some of the poems in the same way, but the business of alcohol and alcoholism is much more pertinent to the fiction.

BC: Can you give me a sense of what you mean by "genuinely grotesque art" in that passage I quoted from your talk in 1977?

BF: It's the meeting point of horror with humor.

BC: I know that you're attracted to detective stories, and I wondered if that grew out of your reading of Poe.

BF: There I can't give you a clear-cut answer. I could give you a much better answer as to how my interest in Poe began, but, as I recall, that had nothing to do with the detective story.

BC: Okay; that's fine. We can switch the question. And, that's probably a more interesting question, in any case.

BF: Well, my big brother brought home a classic comic book, oh, sixty plus years ago, and I can't remember, now, which Poe works were included, but the one I do recall is "The Adventures of Hans Phall" and all the creepy graphics, sort of bioge-green ghastly, bloody stuff that captured my imagination. I do know that there was, I believe, a slightly later classic comic that did have a rendering of "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" in it; I have a copy of it, as a matter of fact. I must admit, from my perspective, "Hans Phall" is much better in the classic comics, but "Hans Phall" has never been one of my super favorite tales.

BC: Did you follow up that initial fascination with gory graphics by reading more Poe?

BF: In a sophomore survey course at Ursinus, our professor assigned us all of the Poe selections that were in the old Norman Foerster anthology and had on reserve collections of Poe's (and Hawthorne's) stories—we must have read thirty or forty stories by Poe in that class. In graduate school, we used Edward Davidson's old Riverside edition, and, actually, Davidson's remarks and his notes concerning "Metzengerstein" and "The Assignation" seemed to me, at that time, to be slightly off base. I didn't think that those tales were nothing but hoaxes, mere frivolities. And, of course, the very first article I published on Poe was on "Metzengerstein" as not a hoax. I dealt with Poe's revisions of that story, arguing that as the years went by, Poe revised that story—even if he had originally intended it as a comic piece—he gave it a more serious turn. And, actually, I'm not sure whether, in the first version, he intended it as comedy. If you look at the prologue to the Folio Club that survives, presumably "Metzengerstein" would have been the sixth story read and discussed. Now, thinking of it, for a moment, as a piece of straight "German" (what we today call "Gothic") fiction to that bunch of drunks, it would have appeared a great work, even if it were absolutely straight, maybe one could say, pastiche, not necessarily comic. In other words, the comedy would have resided in the club members' interpretations of the story, not the story itself.

Interestingly, my piece appeared in the January 1971 issue of *American Literature*, and given the way he published things, Dick Thompson had an article arguing for "Metzengerstein" as comedy in the issue of *ESQ* that was published as a book called *New Approaches to Poe* edited by Richard Benton, which appeared almost at the same time as my article. The issue of ESQ and the book were dated 1970, but probably didn't actually appear till after January 1971, when my "Metzengerstein"was in print. I didn't know that Thompson was working on that story, and, actually, we met shortly after that, and he joked around, saying, "of course, your interpretation is dead wrong." My counter was, of course, "my interpretation isn't dead wrong, yours is."

BC: Well, to change the subject a bit, have you found that your teaching Poe over the years has contributed to your understanding of his work in ways that you hadn't expected?

BF: Indeed, it has. I'll give you an example. Many years ago, Richard Fusco, who was a student of mine, wrote a paper arguing that the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was female. I countered at the time, now this was thirty years ago—or maybe more! I countered that this hypothesis was unlikely because in Victorian society no woman would have gone unchaperoned with a man at night if she weren't married. Subsequently, somebody published an article on "The Tell-Tale Heart," arguing that most previous interpretations had seen this story as an Oedipal thing, that, indeed, the narrator there might have been female. So I had to change my perspective. And interacting with students, reading their work, I've many of my impressions changed. I had a student several years ago here at the University of Mississippi… now think of this: this man was an ex-Marine who was a Spanish major and English minor, and he wrote an explication of Poe's poem simply called "Song" ("I saw thee on thy bridal day—") from the *Tamberlane* volume, about an on-looker at a wedding of someone who had obviously been a lover of his. This student went to etymological dictionaries and discovered all sorts of relationships between "warmth" and "heat" in the slang sense and wrote a marvelous explication of text of that poem.

BC: Were you convinced that the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" was a female?

BF: Let's put it this way: As you know, there are "thirteen ways of looking at a black bird" I have told my students in classes on Poe many times that there are at least forty-nine ways of looking at an individual work by Poe, each one being equally valid. And, I think I found that argument convincing though I wouldn't ever suggest that all previous interpretations otherwise were wrong. I happen to think that same, what shall I call it, latitudinarianism, applies to many of Poe's works. You can read a work and find it an absolutely serious piece, and you can read the same work again and find it hilarious or think that Poe may have had a parodic impulse.

Look at *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which for so many years was dismissed as a kind of trashy hoax, it certainly may be subject to interpretation as hoax, but it can also be a most serious kind of work that has ramifications for all sorts of directions that you would want to find. I have also said to students, on occasion, "here is *Pym* that has become a kind of darling among critics of Poe; if you look at it as absolute prose fiction, it is one of the most

repetitious, boring things you would want to read. Except, of course, the repetitiousness, the boringness, could be indicators of a drunken narrator or a drunken situation going on." You know that Alex Hammond, years ago, argued that *Pym* was an outgrowth of the tales of the Folio Club.

BC: Thinking of articles and our interest in Poe criticism. You have edited five books related to Poe studies from 1978 to 2006. What keeps you committed to this kind of scholarship?

BF: I find all kinds of critiques of Poe fascinating. They are testimonies to Poe's perennial appeal, and that perennial appeal is not strictly a plea for "mere horror." After all, in the preface to *The Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, he said that terror isn't from Germany—in other words, he didn't get his ideas from Gothic fiction—it's from the soul. And he was right. I think that's why Poe continues to fascinate people. He never took a course in psychology, but he certainly knew how to press the right buttons for people's anxieties, paranoia, you name it.

BC: In fact, I was going to ask you a question similar to that. In your introduction to *Poe and His Times,* you cite a passage from a 1909 issue of *Harper's Weekly* that asserts that Poe "is eminently debatable, and that may be one source for his fame." Do you agree that that may be one of the reasons people are still fascinated with Poe?

BF: Well, as you know, some people have dismissed Poe, saying he never achieved worthwhile, sustained work. That depends on your definition of sustenance, I guess. Short works hit hard. They don't bore you by going on for a thousand pages like a lot of nineteenth-century novels did.

BC: When you were putting together the edited editions of articles on Poe, did you have a theme in mind, or did you simply find certain essays particularly engaging?

BF: I think it's the latter, although that first book I did for the Baltimore Poe Society on textual studies led Al Rose, who was then the president, to ask if I couldn't do something more, and then these others books began to emerge. One about Poe and the moderns, if you want to use that term, and then that led me to think, what about Poe in his own times? The last book, granted, has been

more of a miscellany, but I don't think that diminishes Poe at all. One could say, and not in derogatory terms, that the Poe canon is a miscellany.

BC: What do you think of all of the trajectories that Poe scholarship has taken over the past thirty years? Do you see any patterns or any sense of debate?

BF: Oh, I see plenty of debate. As one of my graduate school professors said to me, many years ago, if you want to follow trends in scholarship, pick an author, and just keep reading the critical work that comes out about that author, and you'll get as much sense of criticism as you do of the author. I think that Poe is a perfect exemplar of those shifts and changes…

BC: …because you can do so much to his work; it's open to all ways of reading. What do you see as the current emphasis in Poe studies aside from Poe and race, or maybe that's something you still think is important?

BF: Well, I'm not sure the issue is closed. I think that that's a good thing because many of the people who have argued along the lines of Poe as a racist have made their point. They have very willfully ignored, for example, that Poe was not the author of the Paulding-Drayton review, and that just because he was acting as editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, he wouldn't interfere with what White, the owner, wanted to be published or not published. But to answer your question, I guess I don't see any one trend, exactly, and I don't think this is a bad situation. There continue to be, for example, source studies, many of which go far beyond what you could call the "deadly parallel." People also bring the latest theories to bear on Poe's writing, and that circumstance contributes to the idea of a miscellany, which is a plus for the causes of Poe.

BC: Okay. How about switching the focus now to the PSA, okay?

BF: Sure.

BC: How long have you been a member of the PSA?

BF: Since it started.

BC: So, were you there at the original meeting at the MLA?

BF: Well, it depends on what you mean when you say "original meeting." As I recall, the meeting that founded the PSA was in New York City in 1972, but there had been a number of sessions at MLA preceding that. The PSA, according to Jim Gargano, was the brainchild of Lasley Dameron, who suggested an organization. When it started, Eric Carlson acted as president, and Dameron was the first vice-president. But the person I remember most at the 1972 meeting is Alice Moser Claudel. She published two articles, one (on the 1831 "To Helen") in Benton's *New Approaches to Poe* and the other (on "Silence—A Fable") in Richard Veler's edited *Papers on Poe*, dedicated to John Ward Ostrom. One of the essays was called "What has Poe's 'Silence' to Say" and the other was an explication of one of Poe's poems. She seemed, at the time, to be a person who was going to make a mark in Poe studies, and there were a number of persons in the 1970s, as well, who might have made important contributions to Poe studies, but who, for whatever reason, found other areas of interest.

BC: Well, that's interesting for me to hear because when I became involved with Poe studies, I found few females who were also active members of the PSA

BF: I'll name you another one—Patricia Smith who did a dissertation on Poe's arabesques. She read a paper at the 1973 MLA in Chicago on this topic, and it was published in *Poe Studies* that year or the next. And then, no more work on Poe from her.

I remember that New York meeting, of course, Eric Carlson presided, Jim Gargano and his former student, Joe Defalco. Hennig Cohen spoke at that meeting, giving information from the perspective of the Melville Society, and Richard Hart and Al Rose also came to that meeting, and, of course, Lasley Dameron, Burton Pollin and John Reilly.

BC: So the organization began with the newsletter and regular meetings. And you have also been involved in the Baltimore Poe Society. Did that occur concurrently?

BF: I went to a meeting in Baltimore in 1973 or 74. Now, this is one of those events that is vague in my memory. I think that Burton Pollin was there and gave a talk on Poe's illustrators. I can't remember whether that was a side-talk, because his Baltimore Poe publication was on word coinages. But I had

met Burton previously. In 1977 I was asked to give the annual lecture, and at that same meeting, Al Rose asked me to chair the speakers' series. Now, this bit of historical information may be superfluous, but for many years those lectures were given in Westminster Presbyterian Church where Poe is buried, and I was the last person to give the lecture there.

BC: It was right in the church?

BF: Yes. And, then, the University of Maryland took over, and either the church was closed or the fees became too high, and in 1978, the lecture series moved to the Enoch Pratt Free Library where they occurred until, as you may know, two years ago, we all went over to the library and discovered it was all locked up because there was work going on involving water and sewer pipes, and, fortunately, somebody knew of an establishment about three or four blocks away that either was either a restaurant or a store, and we all trooped in there to hear Terry Whalen give his talk.

I can give you another bit of, perhaps, useful information. I remarked the day I gave that lecture in 1977 that I considered the real demon, if you want to use such terms, that pursued Poe, was poverty. And, you know, of course, that Poe tried to recover some financial support for his grandmother Poe because his grandfather Poe had spent his personal fortune in support of the American Revolution. And the last person to whom Poe applied was James H. Causten. That's in the published letters of Poe, the original found in the Ransom Center. James H. Causten was my paternal great-great grandfather, and his father, Isaac Causten, is buried in that very churchyard with Poe. His grave is in the east end facing Poe's grave. So I've always felt like one of Poe's own characters, and I've felt compelled to confess and support the cause of Poe.

BC: That's a great story! And how did you discover this connection?

BF: I discovered it by looking at the published letters of Poe. And, then, I knew that Isaac Causten was buried in the same graveyard. A lot of irony, you might say.

BC: So you've kept your relationship with both Poe societies all these years. Were you ever in elected office in the PSA?

BF: Well, as I recall, I was the second vice-president and held that office for three terms, and then was elected president for two terms. Dennis Eddings and I served longest in elected offices in the PSA than anyone else.

BC: Are you looking forward to the 2009 Poe conference?

BF: Why, yes; if I live that long.

BC: Of course you will. Poe scholars do seem to live long! Richard Hart, who recently died, was 99.

BF: Yes. I knew Richard Hart through the Baltimore Poe Society. When I became involved in the late 1970s, he was still very active, although he had retired from his post as head of Humanities at the Pratt Library, which he held for years and ran several long-continuing series featuring poets, other writers, and was Mr. Man About Town. You couldn't go into a restaurant thirty miles around Baltimore that everybody didn't know Mr. Hart. He was quite a social being in those years. He was a delightful person, a mine of information about literary Baltimore. Of course, I knew both of the Mabbotts and Floyd Stovall and Jay Hubbell. In fact, I spent a long afternoon with Jay Hubbell about three weeks, as it turned out, before his death, and he was writing to the end. In fact, he was going out that night that I visited with an Australian poetess.

BC: And the Mabbotts?

BF: Oh, yes. My letters from Tom Mabbott are at Iowa now, and, of course, I knew Mrs. Mabbott supremely well. She always said she was no Poe scholar, but she was.

BC: Is there a Poe repository at your university?

BF: Well, as you know, our focus is Faulkner, but did you know that James A. Harrison was a Mississippian?

BC: To ask another content-oriented question about Poe since I know that your scholarship involves British literature as well. Do you view Poe's work as "trans-Atlantic"?

BF: I was in England in 1991 to work on a project on late-Victorian British fiction, and I began to find all these comments about Poe from the 1880s on to the first decade of the twentieth century, which indicated to me that the Brits certainly read Poe. There are some people who would argue that Poe went into eclipse after he died despite Griswold's edition, and that he only got revived much later. But that isn't true. It seems to me that not only did British readers know about Poe, but they went beyond the standard stories. I found, for example, reviews of two sequels to *Pym*. I've never located these sequels, but I thought they might make interesting reading.

BC: Well, thank you very much for this interview, Ben.

BF: It's been a pleasure.

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Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

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Sinking Under Iniquity

Jeffrey A. Savoye

At the end of Poe's great tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," we are given a dramatic description of the once imposing edifice crumbling and sinking into "the deep and dank tarn." The cause of this dreadful occurrence is never directly addressed, although there is an ominous sense of history and oppressive legacy in the house, both the physical structure and the familial line of descent of "the ancient race of the Ushers." Thomas Ollive Mabbott notes several possible sources for the narrative elements of "The Fall of the House of Usher," including the likely models for the ill-fated Roderick and Madeline.[1] Unnoticed, I believe, has been what may be a more direct inspiration for Poe's house of Usher itself, a blending of Poe's own imagination with history and folklore from his youthful years in England, as embodied in a celebrated collection of poems edited by Sir Walter Scott.[2]

Like so many of Poe's tales, "The Fall of the House of Usher" takes place at no certain time and in no certain geographical location. As has long been recognized, however, there are clues which strongly support the conjecture of a European rather than an American setting. The house has an ancient legacy ("a long lapse of centuries") and a local "peasantry," suggesting a medieval arrangement of landowner and tenant farmers. More tellingly, it has a "donjon-keep" used "in remote feudal times for the worst purposes" (Mabbott 2: 410). Having moved away from American soil, can we place it more specifically elsewhere? The unusual word "tarn" appears numerous times in Poe's tale, and was occasionally used by him in other works. Of Icelandic origin, the word can be used appropriately merely to designate a mountain lake, as it does in "The Island of the Fay" and "Morning on the Wissahiccon." The "dismal tarns and pools" of "Dream-land" and "the dank tarn of Auber" in "Ulalume" have a less idyllic mood about them, but might still be within the realm of "the wild lake, with black rock bound" of "The Lake." The tarn in "Usher," however, is "black and lurid" and produces "inelastic vapor or gas" and "rank miasma," and is surrounded by "ghastly tree-stems," "decaying trees," and "gray sedge." Sedge is a grassy weed common to marshes and swamps. In "Usher," therefore, Poe uses "tarn" in the distinctly British sense of a bog or moor. The suggestion of a British setting is particularly intriguing since Poe spent the years 1815-1820 in the area, when John Allan took his family on an extended stay in England.[3]

The house of Usher is clearly a castle, and there are many castles, some grand and some little more than decaying shells, that litter the landscape of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. In the border regions of Scotland, between Poe's school in Stoke Newington (now part of London) and John Allan's relatives in Kilmarnock, may be found a particularly interesting example, the imposing ruins of Hermitage castle. Conveniently, we have an account of the castle from about the time of Poe's arrival in England. In *The Border Antiquities of England & Scotland*, Sir Walter Scott describes it is as follows:

> The appearance of the castle of Hermitage, so extensive a ruin situated in such a desolate spot, on the brink of a furious torrent, and surrounded by a morass and lofty hills, its walls grey with age, and stained with all the varieties of colour with which so many rolling centuries have chequered them, is rather solemn and grand than picturesque or romantic. The traveller who first sees it from the Nine-Stone-rig, with the long and narrow vale of Hermitage in prospective, and the mountains of Westmoreland and Cumberland in the back-ground, is struck with the sublimity of the scene. [. . .] After fighting his way through morasses, along the brink of precipices, and amidst pathless moors, in passing into Liddisdale from Teviotdale, the first work of men by which a traveller was greeted were these grim towers, distinguished by many a legend, and still haunted, as the common people believe, by the perturbed spirits of those who had done or suffered evil within their precincts. [. . .] The outward windows are few and narrow, and the whole building obviously calculated for resistance rather than magnificence or accommodation. But the broken roof and shattered walls have given picturesque effect to what if entire must have been heavy and massive. (*The Border Antiquities of England & Scotland*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814, 2: 167-168)

Visually, any resemblance between the house of Usher and Hermitage Castle is at best superficial, but I am not necessarily proposing it as a model for the description of the home of the Ushers. Another reference by Scott gives a detail

of much greater significance: "The castle of Hermitage, unable to support the load of iniquity which had long been accumulating within its walls, is supposed to have partly sunk beneath the ground; and its ruins are still regarded by the peasants with peculiar aversion and horror" (*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Edinburgh: Longman and Rees, 1803, 2: 359-360). This comment is from Scott's introductory note to a poem by John Leyden. The poem, "in imitation of ancient ballads," is titled "Lord Soulis," and the story it tells touches on history, treason, sorcery, and the supernatural—indeed, the "hero" of the tale ends by being boiled to death. Scott continues:

> The door to the chamber, where lord Soulis is said to have held his conferences with the evil spirits, is supposed to be opened once in seven years, by that demon, to which, when he left the castle, never to return, he committed the keys, by throwing them over his left shoulder, and desiring it to keep them till his return. Into this chamber, which is really the dungeon of the castle, the peasant is afraid to look; for such is the active malignity of its inmate, that a willow, inserted at the chinks of the door, is found peeled, or stripped of its bark, when drawn back. (*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 2: 360).

Scott notes it as "a popular tale of the Scottish borders," and it certainly has elements which could hardly have failed to attract the attention and hold the imagination of a young boy seeking exciting material to read in the early nineteenth century. The castle is in a sufficiently remote location that it is impractical to presume an actual visit by Poe, but the nationalistic interest in the material, conveniently collected by Scott, would surely have appealed to a young mind with a romantic inclination. Poe certainly was taught the classics at the Reverend John Bransby's school, but what else he might have been exposed to during those years must be left to speculation.

Of additional interest may be the fact that Usher is the name of a very old and prominent family in Scotland. The first of the Ushers is said to have come over with William the Conqueror and to have settled in the border regions. Sir Walter Scott purchased property for his estate of Abottsford from John Usher in 1816. Indeed, also present in Scott's collection is the song "The Wife at Usher's Well," first published in *The Minstrelry* and widely reprinted thereafter.[4]

There is no indication that "The Fall of the House of Usher" could have been one of the *Tales of the Folio Club*, and a date of composition close to the date of publication of the story is most likely. What might have triggered this memory from childhood in Poe? In the April 1839 issue of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* (4: 250) appears a brief review of the *Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, then just published by Carey and Hart.[5] The very large book includes all three volumes of *The Minstrelry of the Scottish Border*, which the notice from *Burton's* specifies as the only edition of this series available in an American edition. Poe, at this time, was just about to join Burton to assist with editorial duties at the magazine (although the notice is probably by Burton). Poe's story "The Fall of the House of Usher" appears in *Burton's* for September 1839, and it is perhaps more than coincidence that another tale written about the same time as "The Fall of the House of Usher" was "William Wilson," a story with more definite references to his childhood in England.

Notes

1. See *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1969-1978) 2: 392-396 (hereafter cited as Mabbott in the text).

2. Mythological and other traditions often associate sin and structural collapse. The most famous is the biblical tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, but there are other examples, both in fiction and history. Port Royal, Jamaica, for example, was a fabulously decadent haven for pirates; it experienced a dreadful earthquake in 1692, resulting in nearly 2/3 of the town sinking beneath the ocean. Poe's own "City Under the Sea" must also come to mind.

3. Allan, a business man and merchant, was hoping to reestablish trading contacts after the War of 1812. Poe was 6 years old when the Allan family left Richmond, and 11 when they returned.

4. Mabbott attributes Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* as the possible source of the name Ethelred (see Mabbott 2: 422 n31), but one must take care not to get carried away in seeking out such ephemeral influences. For example, in the Carey and Hart collection of Scott's poetical works appears the lengthy "The Vision of Don Roderick," and Sir Roderick Dhu is a principle character in "The Lady of

the Lake." Launcelot, the knight of Arthurian fame, appears in Scott's poem "The Bridal of Triermain." Sir Launcelot is also mentioned in several of the extensive footnotes to Scott's reconstruction of the poem "Sir Tristrem" (subtitled "A Metrical Romance of the Thirteenth Century" and attributed to Thomas of Erceldoune, called the Rhymer), and in the equally extensive footnotes to "Marmion." Sadly, there appears to be no Lady Madeline in the book. One can only wonder if Poe might also have been drawn to Scott's long essay of 1830 titled "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry and the Various Collections of Ballads of Britain," which begins the first section of *The Minstrelsy*.

5. *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott. Comprising Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, Lay of the Last Minstrel, Marmion, Rokeby, Lady of the Lake, Bridal of Triermain, Vision of Don Roderick, Lord of the Isles, Etc. Etc. Etc.*; Philadelphia: E. L. Carey and A. Hart, 1839. (Carey and Hart reprinted *The Poetical Works* in 1842.) Although the *Burton's* review notes that it is the only available American edition of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, it was not the first, having previously been printed in volume I of the seven-volume *Complete Works of Sir Walter Scott*, New York: Conner and Cooke, 1833. Indeed, there is a connection between the two editions. The Carey and Hart book reproduces an engraved title page of *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, New York: Conner and Cooke, 1835, featuring a small depiction of Abbotsford, and the medallion bust of Scott used as the frontispiece is also credited to earlier publisher.

The Carey and Hart volume is very large, measuring 10 1/2 inches tall by nearly 7 inches deep, with the spine spanning a full 3 inches across. It contains 699 numbered pages, with the text printed in small type, set in double columns. The size of the volume may remind one of a rather unkind witticism from an English periodical of the era: "It was Addison, we believe, who observed of the schoolmen, that they had not genius enough to write a small book, and therefore took refuge in folios of the largest magnitude. . . . Tacitus may be carried about in one's pocket, while it will very shortly require a wagon to remove Sir Walter Scott's labours from place to place." J. A. St. John, "Anatomy of Society," *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* April 9, 1831 (17: 250).

Lynda Walsh. *Sins Against Science: The Scientific Media Hoaxes of Poe, Twain, and Others.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. 296 pp. $80.00.

On August 25, 1835, the *New York Sun* published an article announcing that English astronomer Sir John Hershel had discovered evidence of moon bison, man bats, and other lunar fauna by means of a powerful new telescope situated in South Africa. The story was an instant sensation, dramatically boosting the paper's circulation and prompting reprints and commentary (both skeptical and enthusiastic) in several rival newspapers. It was also a hoax, one of many nineteenth-century media fabrications that played upon the American public's thirst for news of the latest scientific marvels. In *Sins Against Science* Lynda Walsh presents these hoaxes—specifically those created by Edgar Allan Poe, Richard Adams Locke (the author of The Moon Hoax), Mark Twain, and Dan DeQuille—as hitherto unexamined cultural phenomena, "a response by the American literary community to the ascendance of science as a social epistemology in the mid-nineteenth century" (1-2).

Walsh's methods and tools are chiefly those of a linguist and rhetorician. Her domain is a period in the history of science. For these reasons, perhaps, the Library of Congress has catalogued the book with the Q's, companion to studies of scientific literature and science news. Students of Poe and Twain should not be put off, however. The book's real orientation is practical and its findings defy easy classification. What drives the project, Walsh claims, are three basic questions: How did the hoaxes fool their readers? What were the hoaxers trying to accomplish? And what exactly is a hoax? (3, 213-25). With these goals in view, Walsh journeys through the now-obscure world of nineteenth-century popular science and the media hoaxes engendered by it.

In "A Brief Natural History of Hoaxing," Walsh reviews the genre of the "hoax" as compared with satires, parodies, and tall tales. What distinguishes hoaxes from these other genres, she claims, are not specific textual features; it is the reader's willingness to find the document trustworthy, an attitude which depends greatly on contextual factors such as the print medium (e.g. reputable newspaper? book of short stories?) through which the hoaxing text is first encountered. Cultural contexts for the practice of hoaxing—the *Kairos* in which the hoax could be enacted—are important to Walsh as well. The chapter also surveys circumstances in nineteenth-century America that favored the

proliferation of scientific media hoaxes. Of particular significance was the increasing professionalization of science, which prompted the development of popular science journalism to help the nonspecialist public keep abreast of science news. This emergence of a popular news form to translate specialized science to a general reading public was part of an enormous print industry boom, which both responded to and further fueled the public's reliance on newspapers and magazines for information, rather than direct experience. In this reading climate, hoaxing became a powerful way for a clever writer to manipulate and expose the reader's unexamined assumptions, thus perhaps allowing the writer to step forward as a rival authority regarding what constitutes genuine knowledge of the world.

After this introductory overview, Walsh proceeds to spell out and implement a method to analyze individual readers' reactions to specific hoax documents. Walsh employs Optimality Theory[1] to model how various cultural expectations interact with one another in the interpretive experience of individual readers. She identifies these expectations by dissecting the language of (1) the hoaxes themselves, (2) the popular science articles they mimicked, and (3) the extant responses of readers who had to decide whether to believe the phony accounts or not. For each reader response she creates a chart indicating which expectations were fulfilled by the hoax document, which were violated, and which among these operated most powerfully on the reader, determining him or her to accept or reject the hoax's claim to truth. A particular merit of this approach, she says, is that it "provides a portrait of common reading codes in practice at a historical moment while still remaining capable of modeling one reader's reaction to a text," in effect combining reader-response and new-historicist techniques with rhetorical analysis to produce "local histories of specific acts of reading"(41, 50).

The chapter on Edgar Allan Poe focuses on four published hoaxes: "Hans Phaal—A Tale," The Balloon-Hoax, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," and "Von Kempelen and His Discovery." Walsh calls Poe's hoaxes "public acts meant to call attention" to "tensions between the arts and sciences in the Jacksonian era" (51). Although Poe is sometimes cast as a Romantic who championed imagination over the "dull realities" of science, Walsh points out that he was well read in the sciences, and clearly fascinated, albeit troubled, by their power to make and remake the world. His thorough account of the technical details of balloon construction and navigation in The Balloon Hoax and of

mesmerism in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" show his grasp of popular science/pseudoscience subjects, even as his hoaxing practices register his discomfort with (or disdain for) the public faith in such matters.

At the heart of the Poe chapter is Walsh's analysis of Richard Adams Locke's Moon Hoax and reader reactions to it, including Poe's own. Like "Hans Phaal," Locke's Moon Hoax toyed with a popular willingness to believe in fanciful creatures inhabiting the moon. But whereas Poe's first hoaxing story remained in relative obscurity, Locke's was widely read, reprinted and debated. In 1840, Poe appended a harsh critical analysis of Locke's story to a reprint of "Hans Phaal" in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. When viewed together with other extant reactions to Locke's story, including prefaces by editors who chose to republish it, Poe's essay offers insight into the assumptions of the public who eagerly devoured The Moon Hoax, as well as his own dissenting values.

As Walsh's careful survey shows, the nineteenth-century American newspaper-reading public rated novelty and sensationalism in science news higher than the plausibility or internal coherence of the narrative, especially when the sensational news was packaged as a serious news article, with a problem/solution format, for instance, and detailed technical descriptions (84-85, 88). Poe exclaims against these readerly values in his critique of Locke, but he exploits them himself in his own subsequent hoaxes. Whereas "Hans Phaal" at times employs a coy, "literary" language, The Balloon Hoax sticks to the type of diction and rhetorical structure readers had come to expect in popular science news articles: it promises scientific marvels, it cites famous European authorities, it delivers plentiful mechanical details. And it seems to have worked, at least for a while. As with the edition carrying The Moon Hoax, the *New York Sun* containing Poe's piece sold a record number of copies, though Poe himself may have dampened the effect by drunkenly proclaiming his authorship of the deceit from the steps of the *Sun* building that afternoon. For Poe, it seems, reveling in his own superiority over the gullible masses was more important than allowing the hoax to work its own mischief.

As Walsh often points out, hoaxes are designed to humiliate the reader who falls for them; the relationship they enact between author and audience is antagonistic. Walsh sees Poe's hoaxes as more than just a temporary revenge upon a readership that valued science news over his own artistic productions, however. Linking his hoaxing practices to the philosophy spelled out in *Eureka*,

Walsh suggests that Poe's hoaxes served to enlighten readers about their own naïve assumptions regarding science's ability to deliver truth about the world, thus clearing the way for Poe's own worldview, one that looked to intuition and imagination rather than empirical science as a guide to reality. The problem with this hypothesis, however, is that the popular science accounts Poe debunks in favor of his own more exalted engagement with reality were hardly the groveling or pedestrian forms of inquiry criticized in *Eureka* or "Sonnet—To Science." As Walsh's own research shows, it was the exotic sensationalism of a given science story's claims that made it acceptable to mid-nineteenth-century readers. In addition, Walsh can offer no proof that readers initially duped by Poe's hoaxes did indeed alter their view of science once the deceit was revealed to them. Ultimately, the Poe chapter of *Sins Against Science* accounts more effectively for the hoaxes' power to deceive the nineteenth-century reading public than it does for their significance to Poe.

The chapter entitled "Mark Twain and the Social Mechanics of Laughter" examines two hoaxes published in the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*: (1) The Petrified Man and (2) The Empire City Massacre. Though only The Petrified Man deals with a scientific subject, Walsh uses both to show how news articles and media hoaxes had changed between the 1840's and the 1860's. Like Poe and Locke, Twain trades upon his readers' ongoing fascination with marvels, but the language of the articles themselves has become more matter-of-fact, as popular science articles of the day evolved "to conform to an event-oriented journalistic style" (150). Extant responses to Twain's hoaxes (including his own) also lay bare another facet of the newsreading culture in which these hoaxes first appeared: the reader's tendency to skim the article to pick up the main points, rather than read carefully. Both of Twain's hoaxes contain clues for the careful reader that the account is not to be taken literally. (The petrified man, for instance, is portrayed as winking and thumbing his nose.) Enough readers overlooked the clues, however, to make the articles operate as hoaxes rather than as the satires Twain sometimes claimed them to be. Walsh points out that the readership for the *Territorial Enterprise* consisted largely of miners, who had compelling reason to read their newspapers quickly and indiscriminately, ever hoping to get a jump on the next big dig. In this way Walsh reveals once again the complex interplay between the hoaxing texts and multiple strands of reader habit and belief.

Walsh concludes the Twain chapter by arguing that The Petrified Man contains the seeds of much of Twain's later social criticism. Specifically, it evinces a mistrust of the power and authority amassed by scientists and uses the news media to expose their pretensions—positions later spelled out in works such as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *The American Claimant.* Pointing to Twain's lifelong championing of individual self-determination, Walsh depicts his early media hoaxes as his first public attempts to help readers "stand apart from their old preconceptions and choose a new path" (172).

Twain's *Territorial Enterprise* colleague Dan DeQuille was the most prolific hoaxer among the authors Walsh examines. The ulterior motive behind his hoaxing practices was, according to Walsh, "to create and defend his ideal West and westerners from eastern commercial exploitation" (173). DeQuille printed a number of hoaxes in the *Territorial Enterprise* between 1865 and 1880, some of which grew to have a life of their own, with reprints and follow-up reports extending over a period of years. As in earlier chapters, Walsh carefully examines the language of the hoaxes themselves and printed reactions to them in order to pinpoint how they worked and identify key features of the newsreading/writing culture in which they took shape.

In each of DeQuille's hoaxes, the "target" Walsh identifies is not science or technology itself, as it seemed to be for Poe and Twain, but rather easterners who wished to appropriate the products of the West for their own benefit. DeQuille was delighted, for instance, that P.T. Barnum actually asked to buy some of his "traveling stones"—supposed magnetic stones that huddled together again whenever they were separated. He also carefully preserved a letter he received from a famous paleontologist asking for more information about his fossilized "mountain alligator"; he annotated the envelope, "A Professor who was sold on the 'Highland Alligator" (203). DeQuille's hoaxes usually contained local geological detail and "eyewitness" corroboration, making it a relatively simple matter for his Nevada readers to weigh his story against their own experience. For those not on the scene, however, determining the truth of his claims was more difficult. As Walsh puts it, his hoaxes work to create an insider/outsider dichotomy in which the western "scrappy folk hero triumph[s] over the silk-vested eastern fat cat" (207).

In "The Mechanics of Hoaxing," Walsh revisits the three pragmatic questions she poses at the outset of the study. In answer to the first two questions—how

do hoaxes work and what were the authors trying to do?—Walsh concludes that successful hoaxes "perform… reader expectations about ethnoscience and science news" in order to "surface readers' strongest assumptions" about science so as to make the assumptions "available for criticism or revision" (214-15). After reviewing the individual revisionist social projects she sees each author's hoaxes as serving, Walsh goes on to address her final question: What is a hoax? A hoax, she argues, is a "machine"—"a special rhetorical mechanism for exploiting public trust in form and facsimile in order to display its instability" (220-21). Media hoaxes were first made possible by the conditions of news production that arose in the early industrial era. They both took advantage of and called into question public reliance upon mass-produced printed texts for knowledge of the world. Walsh calls the authors of the hoaxes "engineers" who "gauged their readers' expectations and then constructed—via word choice, format, and argumentation—a mechanism that satisfied these expectations and produced belief as an outcome" (223).

Walsh makes it clear that her specific conclusions and definitions are grounded in a uniquely nineteenth-century set of circumstances. To show that a study of media hoaxes has ramifications beyond this historical context, she includes a brief discussion of Alan Sokal's hoaxing article published in a 1996 issue of *Social Text*. Walsh finds, fittingly, that the best metaphor for Sokal's hoax is not the "gears and girders" device that she proposes for the nineteenth-century hoaxes, but rather the computer virus (236). Sokal's goal, however, was similar to that of his predecessors: to trap unwary readers by parading some of the readers' high-ranked beliefs about the world in order to expose their instability. "The basic function of the hoax," Walsh says, "is to call into question assumptions about the real world"(240). This ultimately is what makes Walsh's study of nineteenth-century media hoaxes interesting and important.

Many readers will find Walsh's Optimality Theory tables a distraction, especially when compared to her admirably lucid prose accounts of her findings. For those interested in employing her method, however, Walsh has included an appendix on how to read the tables and a glossary of technical terms, as well as created an online tutorial available through her website. Walsh's claim that each author's hoaxing should be seen as a central component of his overall social project is also unconvincing, relying as it does on (1) a rather cursory review of the author's work and various critical interpretations of it and (2) an undemonstrated assertion that readers who fell victim to one or more of the

author's hoaxes were indeed thereby prepared to reevaluate their own prior assumptions, instead of, for instance, deciding never to read anything by Poe again.

This last point merely underscores what the book does exceptionally well, however. Its careful examination of contemporary reader reactions to the hoaxes provides concrete evidence for what people actually believed—thus attesting very specifically to the nineteenth-century "assumptions about the real world" that were being "called into question" by the hoaxes. An impressively wide range of historical and theoretical resources are brought to bear on these "acts of reading." Modern studies of the reading process, historical data on news periodical production and dissemination, reader demographics and other information about the reading culture, representative nineteenth-century science articles, and biographical information about the authors themselves are just some of the contextual materials Walsh considers. All of this is woven into a rich and nuanced account of what we stand to gain—in terms of understanding the past—by taking seriously a handful of little known jests.

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Notes

1. Optimality Theory, Walsh explains, "is not actually a theory. It is a model for constraint satisfaction process in general (like workflow and decision problems, some cognitive process, and biological processes such as adaptation)" (43). It provides a way of charting the interplay of factors that lead a group or organism to one option instead of another available one. A pair of linguists "brought optimality theory from economics into linguistics in 1993, where it proved useful for handling complex phonological problems previously inexplicable or oversimplified" (43).

Bruce Mills. *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006). 232 pp. $39.95.

This careful and thorough study of what Bruce Mills calls "the mesmeric turn" in U.S. writing and thinking of the first half of the nineteenth-century appears to be motivated by a very particular teaching problem, one that is probably familiar to many of us who teach introductory courses in American literature. How do you situate Poe in relation to the major American Renaissance writers who can all be placed, with more or less adequate fit, under the umbrella of Emerson's transcendentalist writings? As the preface puts it, Poe disrupts the kind of coherence that this umbrella offers (xvii). Mills's book aims to unfold a broad context for understanding the notions of consciousness and imagination that Poe and Emerson, along with most other mid-century U.S. writers, shared.

As Mills convincingly and interestingly points to throughout this book, these understandings are to be found in the many writings on mesmerism of the period, a "mesmeric literature" that took up the practices that Franz Anton Mesmer gave his name to and theorized in the 1770s and '80s in Vienna and Paris. Where other books on mesmerism have tracked the British and European uptakes of mesmerism (see especially Alison Winter's book on Victorian Britain), Mills tracks the "theoretical or philosophical models behind antebellum notions of the writing and reading process" in the context of democratic U.S. culture (x): "The Western democratic impulse and the enlightenment ideals that served as its foundation, in fact, predisposed writers to emphasize the centrality of fluid, not fixed, identities or concepts, that is, to imagine transition states, not static ones" (3). Mills proposes that the mesmeric literature offered an ontology for these fluid identities. Perhaps it would be better to describe this as a number of competing and complementary ontologies, as Robert Darnton explains in *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (1968), a proliferation of fluid theories that sought to explain any number of fundamental physical and socio-affective phenomena. Mills offers a capacious "mesmeric interpretive paradigm" that unifies these, permitting him, in his concluding chapter, to think of the fluid dynamics of Whitman's writing on the "body electric" as exemplary of the coordination of mesmeric consciousness and idealizing democratic impulse (170).

For readers of this journal, the book's first three chapters will likely prove most relevant. The first chapter, "Charting the Mesmeric Turn," surveys the physiologizing and psychologizing of an eighteenth-century discourse of sympathy in writings on animal magnetism, both by Mesmer and those who followed him. Mills argues that, in the context of these transformations, the notion of imagination and the role of the writer alter as well: the writer becomes "a student of states of mind, of language and sensation," with the mesmeric literature providing "'scientific' principles for the Romantic sensibility" (41-42). Chapter two takes up this point in specific relation to Poe's compositional theory, his stated efforts to produce a single psychological effect in his tales. I found this chapter the most useful as it locates Poe in detailed relation first to Coleridge's theories of imagination, and then to Chauncey Hare Townshend's influential *Facts In Mesmerism* (1841). Mills convincingly shows how Poe "builds his short-story aesthetic on the foundation of human psychology" and outlines his "debts" to the mesmeric literature (53): the concentration on a single object (the notion of idée fixe) and the mesmeric theories of the communication of sensation through gesture and sign. The third chapter turns to *Eureka* and the mesmeric discourse on celestial motion and divine consciousness; here Mills brings Emerson and Poe together in shared notions of intuition, higher states of consciousness, and large-scale unifying forces.

Mills's book itself tends toward a somewhat idealizing and unifying understanding of mesmerism that does not take into account explicit questions of political subjectivity and control that come with the democratic territory. This tendency shows up in his decision to cast the mesmeric turn as only an inward one. While this permits him to reread fundamental Romantic poetics and psychology such as Coleridge's in mesmeric terms (see Nigel Leask's essay on a similar subject with respect to Shelley), these poetics remain undeconstructed: reading Mills, one would never guess how mesmerism was at once idealizing and weirdly materializing, at once a turn toward inner psychological states and a way of thinking of material relations between people, or between words and their physiological effects on readers. Mills does pursue these ideas, but his interest in how the mesmeric literature defined the mental—"'Mind' literally and figuratively signifies the site of a vital fluid and its harmonizing potential" (173)—deemphasizes Poe's considerable interest in the disharmonies of mind. Poe's mesmeric poetics of effect are at least as interested in moments of de-individuation as in moments of an individual's intuitive access to some universal or divine Truth. This interest in de-individuation is an interest

in the many ways that one may be alien to oneself (what Poe calls "the perverse"), an interest that can be cast as the seedy underbelly of Emerson's notion of individual sovereignty. Poe's selves tend to be neither particularly individual nor sovereign, and the more they try to be, the more trouble they cause for themselves and others (including readers).

To put this another way, in attempting to make the mesmeric literature the broader context for both Poe and Emerson, Mills does not take into account the trajectory in which mesmerism, by the end of the century, transmutes into Freud's approach to the unconscious or an American psychological approach to multiple personality and dissociation (as in William James and Morton Prince). Perhaps this is to nitpick about the particular historical trajectory of this book, which looks no further than the Civil War. In fact, I agree with the book's critical goal of generating a historical framework in which Poe and Emerson can be understood as more continuous, and am convinced that mesmerism offers us an excellent way to approach these continuities. As a contribution to the scholarship on mesmerism and its specific relation to Poe's poetics this book offers many useful insights and engaging grounds for further critical discussion.

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Benjamin F. Fisher, Editor. *Masques, Mysteries, and Mastodons: A Poe Miscellany.* Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society, 2006. 232pp. $50.00

In his introduction to this volume of essays on Poe and his writings, Benjamin F. Fisher notes, "Overall, there is something here for anyone interested in Poe's life and literary career," an observation that aptly describes this *Miscellany*. As one "scrolls down" the table of contents, its fourteen essays reveal a range of subject and treatment as well as a combination of authors from veteran scholars of Poe to those somewhat new to the author and his writings.

"The Masque of the Red Death" draws the attention of Joseph Rosenblum, M. Denise Magnuson, and Jerry A. Herndon. Responding to Fisher's suggestion about "something here for anyone" in this collection, I begin with these essays because my Poe mentor, the late Joseph Patrick Roppolo, had a major interest in this story in both his classes at Tulane University and his criticism. The story, furthermore, has garnered much attention from many scholars over the years, and it appears regularly in all manner of anthologies to achieve a popular following as well.

Herndon reflects on the connection of the story to writings by the other major symbolic romanticists, especially Nathaniel Hawthorne. The discussion of "borrowing" from others is interesting because of implications of plagiarism when in other arts like music and painting, the "borrowing" is often seen as a compliment or as in this case a literary "jest" (39). In a similar vein, Rosenblum indicates that "'Masque' is not meant to be read straight" and is not supportive of readings indicating that it has a clear moral or functions as a parable (as Roppolo has written) (29). Magnuson, accordingly, sees the narrator as contributing to the story's irony as part of a "critique of Hawthorne" (36). Often in the tales, Poe's language and images have a heavy, almost ponderous, quality that are frequently expressions of an intensely dry humor, escaping even the best readers.

Similarly, Edward J. Piacimento examines "Ligeia" as a burlesque of Petrarchanism, that he notes was "a paradigm in love poetry of the nineteenth century" (112). Aside from the obvious allusion through the name of Laura to Petrarch, Piacimento offers a convincing comparison of language and images in the sonnets. Continuing what seems to be a pattern representing a trend in

recent Poe studies like the ones we have been reviewing here, Leonard Cassuto focuses on the grotesque as "the boundary between the accepted and the dangerous" in a closely argued, theoretically based essay with attention to "Berenice" and the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* among other fiction (48). Roberta Sharp's examination of the detective Dupin echoes this kind of duality by seeing him as "diabolic as well as godlike" and contributes to a Lacanian function of the character as a trickster (63).

Narrative technique is a persistent area of inquiry in Poe's fiction, as the previous essay and the one on "The Cask of Amontillado" by the late Richard P. Benton suggest. He looks at the unidentified or as he puts it "phantom" listener as a determiner of how and under what conditions Montresor speaks. Acknowledging previous approaches like the "narratee" being a priest (still the most convincing speculation), Benton suggests that the narratee is Montresor's mistress. In his elaborate argument, Benton sees this "confessional" approach involving a woman of high social standing as a parody of Catholicism. He offers us much to think about here, including the influence of Freemasonry.

Another tale of revenge, "Hop-Frog," receives broad treatment in Ronald Gottesman's essay as he establishes (1) Poe's writing from a more international perspective than a Southern one, (2) his use of double sources, and (3) implications of fear and victimhood that encompass Poe himself. In the dualism that seems to mark so many of these collected studies, Gottesman writes "of Poe's endorsement of slavery *and* of his half-conscious sense of a fate shared with these slaves" (142, his italics). In her essay, Ruth Clements sees the story as more psychological and social, "a demonstration of Poe's alcoholic 'stinking-thinking,'" "every alcoholic's fairy tale" (153). These sound bites aside, she does make a reasoned case for this reading of the story.

The essays on poetry touch on the psychological and the mythical. Patrick J. White explores "Ulalume" as a psychological journey to despair through an interior dialogue with mythical contexts, including Psyche's role. He takes us helpfully through the "dichotomous landscape" of the poem, connecting it to its downward movement (9). Dennis W. Eddings reads "Eldorado" as a quest depicting the "material universe" and "a spiritual journey into the self" (22). Eddings' observation on the importance of the poem's last line as pointing the way forward is critical to his approach.

The marketplace for Poe was a scene of struggle, comparable to the conflicts within the self that he developed in his fiction and poetry. Kent P. Ljungquist examines the mammoth weeklies that were so popular early in the nineteenth century with focus on *The Saturday Emporium*, about which Evert A. Duyckinck and Poe commented negatively in *The Broadway Journal*. The *Emporium*, of course, had little good to write about Poe with some exceptions. This essay is an interesting contribution to the study of conflicts between the high and low cultures of literary publishing.

Of special note is Fisher's inclusion of an early and subsequently inaccessible biography of Poe, which included a selection of his verse that appeared in the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum* in March 1845. In addition to providing an accurate text, Fisher provides helpful corrections with explanations and comments that one value of this work is the revelation that some contemporaries of Poe recognized the humor in his writing. The final essay in the volume by Christopher Scharpf examines controversies surrounding Poe's initial burial in 1849 to his exhumations and reburial in 1875. Scharpf believes that despite the many conflicting legends that the tombstone in the Baltimore cemetery is Poe's "final resting place" (244).

This collection of studies is a credit to the scholars who have studied Poe over the years, especially those since mid twentieth century. The discussions and notes suggest the intense continuity of Poe scholarship and the mutual respect that scholars of Poe have had for each other even amid disagreements.

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Harold Schechter. *The Tell-Tale Corpse: An Edgar Allan Poe Mystery*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2006. 322 pp. $24.95.

The Tell-Tale Corpse is the fourth in Harold Schechter's series of mysteries featuring Edgar Allan Poe as narrator and sleuth. Each of the previous volumes in the series, *Nevermore* (1999), *The Humbug* (2001), and *The Mask of Red Death* (2004), paired Poe with a famous contemporary—Davy Crockett, P. T. Barnum, and Kit Carson, respectively—to catch a serial killer. Schechter uses the dynamics that emerge out of these odd juxtapositions both for great laughs and for compelling tension over the course of the series. His latest effort is no exception, as this time he sends Poe into enemy territory—Boston and Concord—and teams him with a twelve-year-old Louisa May Alcott. The result is a pleasurable diversion that should amuse both Poe scholars and mystery aficionados alike.

Set in 1845, the beginning of the book finds Poe suffering from a growing depression over the declining health of his beloved wife, Virginia, which no doctor seems to have any idea how to improve. His friend, P. T. Barnum, offers to pay to send Poe and Virginia to consult with a popular Concord medical man, Dr. Farragut, a practitioner of botanical cures known as Thomsonian medicine. In exchange for his generosity, Barnum only asks that, on the journey up to Concord, Poe run an errand for him in Boston, picking up some artifacts from a notorious murderer, which Barnum hopes to display in his museum of curiosities. For the sake of Virginia's health, Poe puts aside his negative feelings about Boston and accepts Barnum's offer.

Much of the humor of the book derives from Poe's uneasiness about entering the realm of his literary antagonists. Early on, he notes his dislike for the "insufferable air of cultural superiority assumed by the city's leading literary figures" and reveals "an intense distain for the mystical maunderings of the so-called 'New England Transcendentalists.'" He labels Bronson Alcott "the most egregious member of this supremely bombastic tribe," yet, ironically, he will soon end up in the care of Alcott's wife and daughters, enjoying the domestic bliss of the Alcott home, Hillside.

While in Boston, Poe and Virginia visit Kimball's Museum, where he attends to Barnum's business and they both enjoy the exhibits, similar in nature to those at the Barnum museum, including a show where nitrous oxide is used on

audience members to amusing consequences. It is at this performance where Poe encounters Louisa May Alcott (nicknamed "Louy") and her three sisters. As depicted by Schechter, Louy is an outgoing, sharp-tongued tomboy, who confesses to being an avid reader of everything Poe has published. She tells Poe that she has to do this reading in secret because it seems "dreadfully disloyal to Poppa." Even at a young age, Louy is a budding writer, enthusiastically working on her play, "The Witch's Curse: an Operatic Tragedy." As a tribute to her later career, Schechter uses the titles of Alcott's adult work as the titles for the four parts of *The Tell-Tale Corpse.* Schechter's intriguing pairing of Poe and Alcott posits an influence of the older male writer upon the future work of the younger female one, and Louy does seem to devour Poe's work. In one amusing scene, Poe "entertains" the Alcott sisters with a story (a variation on "The Black Cat") in which a man gruesomely kills his cat and then his wife. Three of the Alcott sisters are horrified by the tale, and Virginia informs her husband that it is unsuitable for "juvenile sensibilities." However, Louy pronounces it, along with Poe's other "deliciously creepy stories," to be "first rate."

Alcott proves a useful assistant to Poe as he is enlisted into the investigation of the first of a series of ghastly murders; a servant of the Alcott sisters' uncle is found drowned in a bathtub. This investigation has Poe traveling back and forth between Boston and Concord as the body count increases over the course of the novel. Poe's quest for information leads him to look into, among other things, the selling of corpses for anatomical use, the fashion of postmortem daguerreotyping, and an assortment of dubious medical practices. In Concord, sidekick Louy employs the assistance of village eccentric, Henry David Thoreau. The mystery winds up in a climactic sequence in which both Poe and Alcott find themselves at the mercy of a killer with little hope of escape.

As Schechter has fashioned him, Poe is an amiable hero-detective. A lover of puzzles and puns, he teaches Louy how to construct a rebus, a skill that she uses in one of the novel's suspenseful moments. Attracted to the grim and grotesque, he reads about Aztec sacrificial rituals and becomes intrigued by a South Sea necklace made of human teeth. Impressed with his own vocabulary, he cannot avoid using technical or even Latin terms in his narration (*Felis domestica* rather than house cat). In his grisly discoveries, Poe frequently comes across scenes that seem lifted straight from his own *oevre*. Schechter uses these allusions to works like "Berenice," "Ligeia," "The Tell-Tale Heart,"

and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as a treat for those who know Poe's work. At the novel's close, for example, he brilliantly alludes to "The Cask of Amontillado" in a way sure to please fans of Poe.

I feel compelled to emphasize further the grisliness of what Schechter's Poe finds as he encounters one corpse after another. Schechter has also authored several "true crime" books about serial killers, with titles like *Deranged: The Shocking True Story of America's Most Fiendish Killer* and *Bestial: The Savage Trail of a True American Monster*. It seems that he has brought the expertise that he gained from his research on these books to his Poe mysteries, and he seems to relish the descriptions of the bloody crime scenes that Poe is forced to examine. If a reader has a strong stomach (and I'm sure most readers of Poe do), however, Schechter's Poe will prove an appealing protagonist, whose dark adventures in the Concord world of his Transcendental rivals provide a compelling ride for the reader.

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Poe in Cyberspace

Populating Cyberspace

"Poe is a web diva." This improbable blurb, quoted from *USA Today,* appears on the *RealPoe* web site, owned by that other Poe—Annie Decatur Danielewski. She acquired "Poe" as her nickname in childhood when she wore a Poe-inspired "Red Death" Halloween costume. As a composer-singer in the1990s, she took it as her stage name. Encouraging Poe-puns, she once described her struggle to recover rights from a former music album publisher as a "re-*po*-session," [*repo*, legal repossession], and somewhere her entire project is dubbed "*po-mo*" [post-modern]. She earns the "web diva" epithet by having her own *poe.org* and *RealPoe* web sites and by enjoying at the same time eleven other fan websites: see <*http://web.simmons.edu/~johnsol2/poelinks.html*>. These fan web sites suggest the rise of social networking in cyberspace.

The roots of our current media-mad Information Revolution clearly go back to *our* Poe's life and career. He was keenly aware of the extent to which the fate of literature depended on the printing press, the steam engine, the post office, railroads, photography, and the telegraph. In 1829, President Andrew Jackson elevated the U. S. Postmaster General to Cabinet status, and by 1840 there were 13,468 American post offices, one for every 1,087 persons. The early postal system depended on stagecoaches until supplanted by the railroad system after the1840s.

At times Poe himself depended on trains, writing to Chivers in 1846, "I am living out of town about 13 miles, at a village called Fordham, on the railroad leading north." Poe realized that the relatively new railroad technology could affect the human understanding of physical reality and social relations. In 1845 in "The American Drama," Poe lamented the lack of progress in the relatively stationary craft of the theater while other contemporary arts "flitted [by] so rapidly" that they put viewers—already conditioned to constant change—in the position of "the traveller by railroad [who] can imagine that the trees by the wayside are retrograding." It was probably Poe who in June 1842 complained in *Graham's Magazine* of Bulwer's mechanical use of moral tags in *Zanoni:* "Every personage [. . .] is thus ticketed for a particular vice or virtue, like passengers in a railroad car."

The coming of the railroad, as Poe was aware, altered the common sense notion of a connection between time and distance. The spread of the telegraph system, however, obliterated any sense of such a connection. The 1790s optical telegraph ("distance writing") was slow, using flags, arms, or blinds to communicate a visual signal that operators had to observe and relay physically from tower to tower. The optical telegraph flourished for half a century, giving rise to such local names as "Telegraph Hill," and by 1820 the word "telegraph" had been incorporated in the names of 40 American newspapers. When the electric telegraph finally arrived in the 1840s—the first information medium to use electricity—it created the illusion that any two points could now exist simultaneously in one time frame no matter how distant in space. This conquest of space by information was a science fiction-like phenomenon in itself—producing what Poe, who loved to coin words, might well have called "electrospace" as a predecessor of Gibson's "cyberspace." "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" describes a potentate who "had cultivated his voice to so great an extent that he could have made himself heard from one end of the earth to the other. Another had so long an arm that he could sit down in Damascus and indite a letter at Bagdad — or indeed at any distance whatsoever." Poe's footnotes were necessary for technology-challenged readers in 1845: first, "The Electro Telegraph transmits intelligence instantaneously—at least so far as regards any distance upon the earth," and second, such a writing device already existed as "The Electro Telegraph Printing Apparatus."

After having demonstrated it could produce writing, could electricity also produce sound? Poe wrote in the *Weekly Mirror* in 1844 that the Swiss Bell Ringers might follow "the principle of Maelzel's Automaton Trumpeter and Piano-forte player" by employing "the same power which operates in the *Electro-Magnetic* Telegraph, but which should here be called *Electro-tintinnabulic*." First writing by electricity and then music by electricity—would there ever be a limit? Evidently not, since spiritualism, or communication with the dead, seemed one step ahead, as Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman wrote in the year after Poe's death:

> It is a strange and mysterious thing to believe, nay to *know*, that we can at any moment hold communication with the Spirits of those who love us and who are ever hovering about us, but for the last six weeks I have been daily in the habit of communing with these invisible guardians by a

> mode of intercourse as *sure* though not yet so *swift* as the communications by the magnetic Telegraph.

During Poe's career the growth of information technologies, such as the postal system, the railroad, and the telegraph, greatly stimulated the growth of magazines. Speaking for an earlier generation, Noah Webster had written in the *American Magazine* in 1788, "The expectation of failure is connected with the very name of a Magazine." But by the mid-nineteenth century, magazines had become central to American literary publishing, and Poe famously remarked in the *Broadway Journal* in 1845, "the whole tendency of the age is magazine-ward." Although detractors might claim that magazines represented "a downward tendency in American taste or in American letters," Poe replied in *Godey's* in 1845—incidentally defending the characteristics of his own work—that only magazines captured the positive contemporary preference for "the curt, the condensed, the well-digested in place of the voluminous—in a word, upon journalism in lieu of dissertation."

Poe's posthumous fame depended not only on translators in other languages but also on artists and adapters working in other media in the late nineteenth century. The tradition continued in the twentieth century as noted film and radio actors such as Basil Rathbone, John Carradine, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, James Mason, Vincent Price, and Paul Scofield made audio recordings or performed Poe roles in films, sometimes in decidedly liberal adaptations. Many of these performances, rereleased on CD and DVD, are now available for purchase on the Internet. In addition, several audio recordings of Poe are now available gratis on the Internet:

> • <*http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/9511*>**:** "The Raven."
>
> • <*http://www.aruffo.com/poe/*>**:** Christopher Aruffo's readings of "The Imp of the Perverse," "William Wilson," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Black Cat," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "The Masque of the Red Death."
>
> • <*http://www.librivox.org*>: "Morella," "The Oval Portrait," "The Bells," "The Black Cat," "The Cask of Amontillado," "A Dream Within a Dream," "Eldorado,"

> "An Enigma," "For Annie," "Ligeia," "The Masque of the Red Death," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Raven," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "To Marie Louise."

Narratives of Poe's life and works—sometimes popularly adapted to explain one another—became a staple of educational television documentaries. The *American Masters* program on PBS in 1995, "Terror of the Soul," featured appearances by Philip Glass, Alfred Kazin, Patrick Quinn, Kenneth Silverman, and Richard Wilbur. The A&E Poe program for the Biography Channel contained commentaries on Poe's life and works by Paul Clemens, Jeff Gerome, John T. Irwin, and J. Gerald Kennedy. Maryland Public Television aired another Poe video biography. The World Wide Web is now host to tens of thousands of Poe images: a Google Image search produces 73,800 hits. One of the oldest Poe web sites, Peter Forrest's <*http:*//www.*houseofusher.net/library.html*>, has a rich collection of links to Poe media: animation, artwork, clothing, comics, humor, home pages, images, film, documentaries, CD-ROMs, games, music and musicals, personalities, podcasts, restaurants, references to Poe in media, RSS, search, video, wine, and worldwide sites.

In the 1990s the new recording and transmission media (HDTV, broadband internet, satellite dishes, optical cables, and high density DVD) went well beyond the traditional capabilities of telephone, film, and television to make up what are called the "New Media." Today camera cell phones, personal information devices, wireless Internet receivers, and MP-3 players contribute to "digital convergence"—the unprecedented merger of text, image, sound, video, animation, and any anything else that can be represented, reproduced, or transmitted through binary coding.

But that is not all. Although some social networks, such as MySpace, are purely personal, other social networks actively contribute both to the collective authorship of information and its interactive distribution. For example, Wikipedia, using collaborative Wiki software, is constantly being written and rewritten by its own readers and has become the most popular online general encyclopedia. (The first item listed in a Google search of Poe is the Wikipedia entry on him.) Recently Wikipedia added videos in Wikimedia Commons <*http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Literature*>, reporting that 1,000,000 media files had been uploaded to its web site within two years of its launching

in 2004. (Incidentally, Poe aficionados are needed to contribute to Wikipedia's companion projects, WikiMedia, WikiQuote, and WikiSource—the last being only partially filled thus far as a proposed complete repository of Poe e-texts.)

The cooperative video exchange site YouTube was purchased late in 2006 by Google for the remarkable price of $1.65 billion. At the time of writing, YouTube listed 827 Poe video items already uploaded by volunteers: the user can sort them by duration, relevance, ratings, views, date, and title. (*Tip*: start your search not with individual Poe titles but with someone's YouTube playlists). Since anyone can upload or download a YouTube video, the collection is untidy. The Poe videos have been sorted into several categories: entertainment (204), film and animation (155), music (67), comedy (63), people and blogs (34, including some school presentations), news and politics (13, mostly Poe gravesite observances), games (8), pets and animals 6 (chiefly ravens and black cats, naturally), "how to" or do it yourself (4), and travel and places (4, chiefly Baltimore). Among the education features are a Web English Teacher "webquest" for students working with "William Wilson" and a lesson plan to create a local production of "The Tell-Tale Heart." In the category embracing live performance, animation, stop motion, and music videos, I found a mixed bag of Poe-related material: Snoopy the Musical, Vincent Price, The Beatles, UPA animation (James Mason), Christopher Walken, John Astin, Basil Rathbone, a setting of Spiderman, Skippy the puppet, Peter Lorre, and a concert performance of Rachmaninoff's "The Bells."

While I was editing this column, Google announced that it was initiating its "Universal Search" so that a single search will result in cross-media results from its regular search engine, books, local data, images, news, and videos all at once. Amazon already offers a similar integrated approach in its customizable A9 Open Search at <*http://www.a9.com*>, combining Amazon books, *answers.com,* Wikipedia, and other entertainment and reference services.

I must mention that my favorite discovery while browsing Poe titles on YouTube was "The Raven" as performed by *The Simpsons*. Unfortunately, you can enjoy this only in Spanish or in German, since the English language version has been withdrawn in response to 20th Century Fox's claim of a copyright violation. There already are several major copyright suits against Google because of uploads to YouTube. There were serious disputes in recent years between music and film producers and the fans who were accused of illegal

sharing and downloading. Yet video phones and Internet blogs are producing a potentially larger media revolution, having already redefined both the serious and popular news media. Will the potential energy in these new social networks equal the potential energy of electricity in Poe's day?

Thirty years ago in *Neuromancer* (1984), Gibson described *cyberspace* as a "consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions [. . .] a graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system." A few years later he broadened the notion, admitting that it was only a "suggestive buzzword." In the 1990s the word cyberspace came to signify not the original visual representation of data on a network but rather the digital telecommunications network itself, typically the Internet or the World Wide Web. Big computer hardware dominated the1960s; a generation later, personal computer software dominated the 1980s. Will social networks such as Wikipedia and YouTube become the next dominant element in the Information Revolution in the 2000-decade?

A final note. It is curious that for copyright reasons 20th Century Fox interfered with the original production on *The Simpsons* of "The Raven" on YouTube but spared its version (or should we say subversion?) of *Hamlet*. Is that because Poe lends himself to the short, participatory representations characteristic of the "New Media" more readily than Shakespeare does? If so, then the blurb may prove true again: "Poe is a web diva."

Heyward Ehrlich
Rutgers University—Newark

Note: "Poe in Cyberspace" columns are available at <*http://eapoe.info*>**,** well beyond the traditional capabilities of telephone, film, and television.

Abstracts for PSA Sessions
at the 18th Annual Convention
of the American Literature Association
The Westin Copley Place, Boston
24-27 May 2007

Session 3-A "Edgar Allan Poe and the Juke Box": Poe and Twentieth-Century Poetry
24 May 2007, 11:30am-12:50pm, Essex North West
Presiding: Stephen Rachman, Michigan State University

(1) "Coronation Verse: Poetry Devoted to Poe Early in the Twentieth Century," *John E. Reilly, College of the Holy Cross*

Poe was the subject of a poem at least as early as 1838, when Lambert A. Wilmer addressed a fifty-nine-line "Ode" to his twenty-nine year-old friend welcoming him to the literary community of Philadelphia following his brief residence in New York. This was only the beginning. Over what is now almost a century and three-quarters since *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post* carried Wilmer's tribute, Poe has provoked or inspired literally hundreds of poems, the work of friends, enemies, lovers, admirers, critics, and an occasional wag. Almost all of those written during his lifetime date from the prominence he enjoyed following the publication of "The Raven." His death occasioned a flurry of poems, largely tributes, though some bear the stain of Rufus Griswold's defamation. By far, however, the greatest number of poems appeared during the early years of the twentieth century, marking the culmination of a series of celebratory events signaling a new and sympathetic attitude toward Poe, events beginning with the erection of a monument over his grave in the autumn of 1875, followed by the dedication of the Actors' Monument to Poe in New York in 1885, the unveiling of the Zolnay bust of Poe at the University of Virginia in 1899, the uproar prompted by each of two failures of Poe to be elected to the Hall of Fame (1903 and 1905), and a veritable crescendo of feeling leading up to the centenary of his birth in 1909.

The number of poems prompted by this crescendo early in the century surpassed seventy. Most of them are the work of poets little known or long forgotten. Among them, however, are the work of poets of note, including Edwin Arlington Robinson, Edwin Markham, Clifford Lanier, William Winter, Lizette Woodward

Reese, Orrin Chalfant Painter, Folger McKinsey, Vachel Lindsay, John Banister Tabb, Clinton Scollard, and Louis Untermeyer, as well as two men better known not as poets but as biographers of Poe: John A. Joyce and George E. Woodberry. Although none of their poems played a role in the shaping of Poe's reputation, each in its own way records the impact of Poe, rather the impact of the image of Poe prevailing in an era that the Poe scholar Charles Alphonso Smith aptly labeled his "coronation."

(2) "The Circular Portrait: Examining Jack Kerouac's Juxtaposition of the Poetic and the Popular Poes," *Gregory Specter, University of Delaware*

The works of some of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' most canonical authors occupy an exalted place in Jack Kerouac's literary universe. The writings of Walt Whitman, Thomas Wolfe, and Herman Melville infuse the work of Kerouac, while these authors' popular images as individual persons remain separate and isolated from their literary works that influenced Kerouac. In regard to Edgar Allan Poe, however, both Poe's poetry and the popular culture view of Poe in America as described by Baudelaire are discernable in Kerouac's writings. These divergent influences can be seen in operation most clearly in Kerouac's novel *Dr. Sax*; for the purposes of this panel, my proposed paper will focus on a poetic interlude in the novel that is particularly in tune with Poe's ideas of mood, form, and sound. My paper also will explore the popular culture view of Poe that can be seen in Kerouac's poem "An imaginary portrait of Ulysses S. Grant/Edgar Allen [*sic*] Poe." These divergent views demonstrate how the poetics of Poe and the popular image of Poe interact to inform the development of Kerouac's own aesthetics and image in his writings.

(3) "Juke Box Heroes: Poe and 'Outis' Discuss Dylan and Timrod," *Scott Peeples, College of Charleston*

Last September's revelation that Bob Dylan had incorporated lines from the poetry of "the Poet Laureate of the Confederacy" Henry Timrod got Dylan fans everywhere talking about the continuing problem of the voice of a generation acting suspiciously like a crazy uncle who, in his sixties, takes up shoplifting. But Dylan's use of Timrod is also an intriguing borderline case that raises questions about the meanings of originality and plagiarism. The issues are

strikingly similar to those debated by Poe and "Outis" amidst the Longfellow War of 1845; particularly, the defense of Dylan on the grounds that his genius transforms (and thus owns) whatever he appropriates echoes Poe's claim, late in the debate with Outis, that "what the poet intensely admires, becomes [. . .] a portion of his own intellect," that he is more likely than others to inadvertently plagiarize. The purpose of this paper, however, is not simply to plug the Dylan-Timrod affair into the terms of the Longfellow War, but to use both controversies to discuss the festishization—in Poe's time and Dylan's—of "originality" on one hand and "plagiarism" on the other. The "Juke Box Heroes" of the title refers not only to Elizabeth Bishop's title but to my contention that both Poe and Dylan became heroes less by virtue of their originality than as a result of their choices of what to appropriate and repeat.

Session 4-C Poe and Periodical Culture
24 May 2007, 1:00pm- 2:20pm, Essex North East
Presiding: Marcy J. Dinius, University of Delaware

(1) "The Sentimental Trend in Periodicals and Poe's Poetry,"
Mónica Peláez, College of New Jersey

This paper proposes that Poe's poetic experimentation was contingent on the sentimental movement as it evolved in the pages of American periodicals. Although Poe's poetry has more often than not been considered anomalous in the context of the nineteenth-century canon, it is representative of its time insofar as it adopts and adapts the preoccupations with faith and community that pervaded much of the era's popular literature. In particular, Poe engaged with the trope I call the "sentimental death," which formulated a response to the threats posed by secularization and consumerism by turning death, the ultimate symbol of loss, into a desirable occasion that reversed faithlessness and social alienation. I provide an overview of the sentimental death as represented in the poetry of such contemporaries as Longfellow, Bryant, and Willis. I then demonstrate how Poe both drew on and experimented with this convention in poems that appeared in numerous periodicals, including "Israfel," "For Annie," and "Al Aaraaf." I also consider Poe's responses to the sentimental trend in editorials and reviews for *Graham's Magazine*, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the *Broadway Journal*, and *Godey's Lady's Book*. I propose that it is in such publications that we find evidence of Poe's indebtedness to sentimentalism and of his contribution to the movement's popularity. This paper

suggests that his poetry, which has consistently received less critical attention than his fiction, was informed by the literary tastes of his age and is therefore integral to our understanding of the periodical culture that shaped Poe's work.

(2) "'A Mere Junto of Dunderheadism': Poe and the Anglophone Print Establishment," *Brian Wall, Brigham Young University*

Edgar Allan Poe's antebellum popularity in the United States was so dim that Charles Baudelaire declared "Edgar Poe, who isn't much in America, *must* become a great man in France." I argue that the primary reason for Poe's poor reception in America was heavily influenced by the cool response toward him in England. His inability to break into the rigidly fixed literary circles of an Anglophone print culture frustrated him as a writer, and his harsh criticisms of other authors within the system only alienated him further.

My research centers on literary periodicals from the Victorian section of Brigham Young University's Special Collections archive. I compare the treatment and publication of Poe to his American contemporaries in order to examine the causes and effects of the rift between Poe and the literary community. Ironically, the writing that results from this rift makes Poe distinctly American in an emblematic sense. He clearly deviates from normative British writing in favor of French and Eastern settings and themes. This only serves to deepen the rift between Poe and the British-dictated American establishment: where he earlier was merely a peripheral figure trying to break in, he is now clearly a rebel and enemy. This also has implications concerning the current state of the "American" literary canon. Many of those works considered to be "American" are, in fact, products of an imperialist Anglophone print culture. Poe's lack of acceptance into this culture may thus make him more emblematic of a truly American literature.

(3) "Reading Poe in a Time of Media Expansion," *Jonathan Hartmann, John Jay College of Criminal Justice*

Since, as Meredith McGill asserts, the anonymity enjoyed by internet web "bloggers" bears a striking resemblance to the situation of antebellum periodical players, scholarship on Poe may benefit from a closer attention to reading contexts. In both cases, readers cannot know exactly who and what has delivered the texts they behold. This paper interrogates Poe's "Loss of Breath" (1832)

and "The Psyche Zenobia" (1838) as media constructing shifting sets of readers. The tales, written in anticipation of the projected "Tales of the Folio Club" and *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, show an increasing ambivalence toward authorship and publishing in general. I offer a view of reader-writer relations by presenting Poe's choice of targets for the two tales' satirical jibes through a lens provided by Jacksonian conduct literature, sermons, and editorials.

Crucial to this project is social authorship (Ronald Zboray) or manuscript publishing, the premise for "Tales of the Folio Club": men gather to read and critique one another's writings. By the time of "The Psyche Zenobia," however, social authorship is a lost object for Poe: he has edited the *Southern Literary Messenger* for a long year and a half, and journalists are used to writing for pay. It is women, represented by *Zenobia*'s social author Suky Snobbs, who now challenge the status quo in their Civil Rights agitation and literary efforts. Hence, the pressure Poe feels to write for casual readers is compounded by his resentment for the "scribbling women" (Nathaniel Hawthorne's term), a significant group of readers.

(4) "Reading Antebellum Reprint Culture into Poe's Fiction,"

Carl Ostrowski, Middle Tennessee State University

As a magazine contributor and editor, Edgar Allan Poe occupied an ideal position to think through the implications of unauthorized republication of literary works in both periodical and book form. Yet his writings on the subject of copyright law are disappointingly commonplace; in letters and brief magazine articles, Poe expressed the usual complaints about the suppression of American letters. In this paper, therefore, after reviewing Poe's explicit writings on the subject of copyright, I interpret certain short stories as Poe's running commentary on the vagaries of republication.

The period's discourse on unauthorized republication featured two recurring sets of tropes: one involving theft, the second involving mutilation and revivification. Two patterns of imagery more central to Poe's fiction can hardly be imagined. With the first of these patterns in mind, I offer a reading of "The Purloined Letter" that draws on Meredith McGill's recent analysis of the *Wheaton vs. Peters* copyright case; as long as Minister D___ retains a manuscript in handwritten form, it preserves a value that it would instantly lose upon "publication." The Prefect, Minister D____, and Dupin, moreover,

all turn a profit from the stolen work of a virtually anonymous "poor-devil author" (Duke S____), whose fate mirrors that of British and American writers who stood on the sidelines watching editors and publishers profit from the unauthorized recirculation of their work.

Poe's fascination with human bodies that exist in a state between the dead and living has lately been read as his oblique commentary on slavery, but copyright law was probably a more immediate concern for him. Revivified human bodies in tales such as "Ligeia," "Morella," and "The Fall of the House of Usher" might be read as texts that, having lived a "natural" life in their original form of publication, are reanimated to circulate in mutilated and altered form. Stories, poems, novels, and quarterly reviews were all subject to alteration in the periodical culture of the day, undergoing (like Poe's characters) a significant and often disfiguring change in physical appearance. In this regard, my reading diverges from McGill's. Whereas she posits that Poe authored works specifically to accommodate such recirculation, in this reading Poe instead figures the unauthorized and altered circulation of previously published texts as something monstrous.

PSA Matters

From Scott Peeples, President: First of all, I'd like to thank everyone who voted recently on the future of the PSA journal and the by-laws amendment to permit electronic balloting. I look forward to Barbara Cantalupo's return to the editor's desk and I thank her for agreeing to serve the PSA again in that capacity. Electronic balloting will certainly make future votes easier, cheaper, and faster—and most importantly, I hope the convenience of voting by email will lead to higher "voter turnout."

We'll soon find out if it does, as elections for the offices of president, vice-president, and two at-large executive board members will take place in the coming weeks. The nominations committee —Richard Kopley, Kent Ljungquist, and Carole Shaffer-Koros—has just begun its work (as of this writing) preparing a slate of candidates.

As you may know, Barbara Cantalupo and Steve Rachman are heading up the committee organizing our 2009 bicentennial conference in Philadelphia. We hope to commemorate this auspicious anniversary with an exciting program and the involvement of various "Poe communities." So keep the second weekend of October 2009 open, and start brainstorming presentation topics.

Finally, I'd like to express my deepest appreciation to Richard Fusco and Peter Norberg, who have done an admirable job editing *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* over the last three years, maintaining high editorial standards, publishing a wide range of new scholarship on Poe, and keeping the PSA membership informed. With generous support from St. Joseph's University, Rich and Peter have done the PSA a great service, and it's been a pleasure working with them, although I give myself too much credit with that phrase—*they've* done all the work. So congratulations and many thanks for a job well-done.

From Barbara Cantalupo, Vice-President: Below are the PSA's panels for the 2007 Convention of the Modern Language Association, which will be held in Chicago, 27-30 December 2007.

Panel I: "Poe and Ideology"
Chair: Gerald McGowan, United States Military Academy, West Point
(1) "Poe and Ideological Anamorphosis: Sentimentalism and Masculine Violence in 'The Black Cat.'" Sean Kelly, SUNY Buffalo.
(2) "Ravel and 'The Raven': The Realization of an Inherited Aesthetic in *Bolero*." Michael Lanford, Western Carolina University.
(3) "Unwinnable Wars, Unspeakable Fears: Why Poe Wrote 'The Man That Was Used Up.'" J. Gerald Kennedy, Louisiana State University.

Panel II: "Poe and Translation"
Chair: Susan Amper, Bronx Community College, CUNY
(1) "The Detective as Reader: Poe's Translation of the 'Urban Mysteries' Novel." Sara Hackenberg, San Francisco State University.
(2) "Poe in Exile: Transpo(e)sitions in 1930s Hollywood." Lauren Curtright, University of Minnesota.
(3) "From Piano to Pen: Poe's Aesthetic Translation and its Impact on the American Short Story." Aaron McClendon, Saint Louis University.

From Marcy Dinius and Stephen Rachman, Members-at-large: Abstracts for the two PSA panels for the 2006 ALA convention in Boston, MA, can be found elsewhere in this issue.

From Paul Jones, Secretary/Treasurer: As of April 20, 2007, there are 213 members in the association. The balance on the association's checking account is $19,594.84. Additionally, the association has $3,982.85 in our Money Market account and $5,710.50 in CDs. Therefore, the current cumulative value of the association's treasury is $29,288.19.

Richard Hart

Richard Hart was an ambassador from another era, a time of gentlemen scholars and the heyday of the Baltimore literary scene, which was populated by the likes of Zora Neale Hurston, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and especially H. L. Mencken, whom Richard knew personally. A raconteur who could charm a whole room, the breadth and depth of his interests were all the more remarkable for having been the result of his own scholarly tendencies and avid reading. Even in retirement, Richard was the revered king of the Humanities Department at the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and the mere mention of his name could open locked doors and cabinets better than any key. He seemed to know everyone in Baltimore, and his lunch schedule was filled months in advance.

Richard Harry Hart was born in Baltimore on January 5, 1908. He attended City College (a preparatory school), graduating in 1925. Instead of moving on to college or university, he heard the song of Arthur Gordon Pym and became a merchant mariner, surviving a violent hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. In 1931, he joined the staff of the Enoch Pratt Free Library when the central branch still occupied its historic nineteenth-century building (which was torn down in 1933 to make way for its successor). In 1940, he assumed the duties of the Humanities Department Chief, a position he retained until his retirement in 1973. In 1946, he married Evelyn Linthicum, known to all her friends as Lynn. She became the head librarian at the George Peabody Library until her death in 1985, after a long bout with cancer. Together, Richard and Lynn held court over a large swath of cultural activities in Baltimore. In addition to the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, he was active in the Maryland Poetry Council, the Baltimore Bibliophiles, and a dozen other organizations, including the 1980 Mencken Centennial Committee. A recognized poet in local circles, his 1963 *Papers of Identity* includes a translation of Mallarmé's "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe." After several years of declining health, Richard died on Tuesday, March 13, 2007, having recently turned 99.

In the community of Poe scholarship, Richard was chiefly active as a force behind the scenes, encouraging researchers and generously providing access to rare material. The newsletter of the Poe Studies Association for May 1973 notes that he was present at the formative meeting for the PSA, representing the Poe Society of Baltimore, and lists his name among the charter members of the new organization. He was made an honorary member in 1975. (The citation, submitted by Ben Fisher, appears in the newsletter for May 1976.) Richard had become the vice-president of the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore in 1935, serving in that capacity for over 50 years, and he delivered the annual commemorative lecture in 1936. (The full text of his address, "The Supernatural on Poe," is on the Poe Society website.) He oversaw the acquisition of the Amelia F. Poe collection, which includes several of Poe's most important letters, and expanded the library's holdings of Poe material at every opportunity.

In 1941, he coedited, with Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe Letters and Documents in the Enoch Pratt Free Library* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints). In my copy of this book, Richard inscribed the following note in 1983: "We need the young and talented — casualties among the old guard are very heavy." Sadly, with the passing of years, they have grown very heavy indeed.

Jeffrey A. Savoye
Secretary/Treasurer
The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore

Notes on Contributors

Thomas Bonner, Jr., is W.K. Kellogg Professor and Chair of English at Xavier University of Louisiana, and has written "The Epistolary Poe" for the series of annual lectures published by the Poe Society of Baltimore. He also has books on Kate Chopin, William Faulkner, and Southern poetry and fiction.

Amy Branam is assistant professor of English at Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland. She has presented many papers on transatlantic drama with a specific focus on contextualizing early nineteenth-century American plays within transatlantic theater history.

Barbara Cantalupo is Associate Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, Lehigh Valley, and Vice-President of the Poe Studies Association. She is the founding editor of this journal and will resume editorial control with the fall 2007 issue. Her interview in this issue is the thirteenth she has conducted with noted Poe scholars for *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*.

Heyward Ehrlich is Associate Professor of English at Rutgers University, Newark. His feature "Poe in Cyberspace" has appeared regularly since the first issue of *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*. His edition of Poe's reviews and notices in Philadelphia magazines is in preparation for the Collected Writings.

Adam Frank is Assistant Professor of English at the University of British Columbia. He has previously published on Poe in *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism* and *ELH*. The latter essay, "Valdemar's Tongue, Poe's Telegraphy," was the winner of the 2005 James A. Gargano Award.

Daniel Hoffman is the highly acclaimed poet and author of *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (1972), and is an honorary member of the Poe Studies Association.

Paul Jones is Assistant Professor of English at Ohio University and the secretary/treasurer of the Poe Studies Association. Among other works, he is the author of *Unwelcome Voices: Subversive Fiction in the Antebellum South* (U of Tennessee P, 2005).

Matthew Pearl is the bestselling author of *The Dante Club: A Novel* (Random House, 2003) and *The Poe Shadow: A Novel* (Random House, 2006).

Jeffrey A. Savoye is the secretary/treasurer of the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore and a member of the editorial board for this journal. Author of articles on Poe's life and works and an honorary member of the Poe Studies Association, he is currently preparing [with Burton Pollin] a new edition of Poe's letters.

Martha A. Turner is president of the Richmond Historical Society (VT). She is the author of *Mechanism and the Novel: Science in the Narrative Process* (Cambridge UP, 1993).

Brett Zimmerman is Assistant Professor of English at York University, in Toronto. He has published many articles in magazines and scholarly journals, as well as *Herman Melville: Stargazer* (1998) and, more recently, *Edgar Allan Poe: Rhetoric and Style* (2005), both by McGill-Queen's UP.