

**SERIES 3: THE REYNOLDS QUESTION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
QUENTIN CLARK FOOTNOTE**

In the narrative of Poe’s death recently discovered among the papers of Baltimore attorney Quentin Hobson Clark, there is an interpretative problem that has plagued the serious reader and scholar. Late in the papers (chapter 35 in the published edition), Clark notes that Auguste Duponte has alluded to another possible meaning of Poe’s famous last call for “Reynolds.” Auguste Duponte, speaking of this name, remarks, “It might have been the last name he heard. . . or it might have been the name of a man whose part in a deadly affair of several years past renders it far too dangerous for either for either of us to speak about.” Clark glosses this with the following footnote, which has become nearly notorious in scholarship for its joint promise and unhelpfulness:

I implored Duponte to expand on this ill-omened statement in full; he relented only under the condition that I never write of it publicly. If I am at a future date able to relate Duponte’s revelations touching the point, it must be at a site far more private.

Most have dismissed this as a whim of Clark’s or Duponte’s. Further investigation shows that Clark may be referring to a meaning of the Reynolds call that, until now, has been obscured.

Our first clues come in the content of several passages left out of *The Poe Shadow*,<sup>1</sup> the compilation of Clark’s papers recently published by Random House. Some of these lost passages at the Mifflin Library archives record a visit made by Clark and Duponte to New York City in the midst of their Poe-related queries, a trip not included in *The Poe Shadow*’s selected narrative. Included are these reminiscences by Clark:

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<sup>1</sup> The totality of which have been labeled the “secret chapters.”

I had the occasion of meeting, at our hotel restaurant, the young New York writer William Ross Wallace who, upon my mentioning an interest in Poe, told a story of supping with Poe at the same hotel years earlier with John Anderson, the store owner who employed Mary Rogers, the murdered girl who formed the topic of Poe's tale, "The Mystery of Marie Roget."

"It was soon after the infamous murder of that girl," Wallace told me. "I was commenting that I believed the case had been wrongly viewed, and mistreated by the public press, and that as a consequence there would be no justice for the poor girl. Well, Edgar Poe leapt to his feet with a knife from the supper table in hand, swearing loudly that I was wrong. Imagine it!"

"Why would he react in this way?" I asked.

"Anderson, the store owner, was a wealthy man. Being the employer of the girl, he had naturally been the subject of scrutiny by the police and the press at first. I have heard – and I believe – that Anderson paid a fair sum to Poe, who was in desperate need of money to feed his wife and mother [sic], to write his tale on the subject of the murder. Perhaps this is why Poe was agitated that night. He resented the situation."

"'The Mystery of Marie Roget'? Why would Anderson pay him to write it?"

"To direct attention away from himself as a leading suspect in the public eye! In the tale, Poe points a finger at an unknown sailor. To read the tale, is to believe its conclusions. But hear me: Anderson had been close with the girl. I believe she found herself in trouble, and Anderson had an associate aid her. She was never seen alive again. Edgar Poe had become too selfish in his writing, too desperate for some reward for it."

"Poe would not write a Dupin tale to appease a man in trouble with a young girl, sir," I said indignantly. "When he wrote, he wrote for truth." After speaking with Wallace, I could see precisely what Poe had meant: Those who were jealous would never have idly watched him prosper in the literary world. No longer wishing to discuss the subject, I excused myself, leaving Duponte, who had just arrived from another errand, alone with Wallace.

There is little doubt that it was in the unrecorded private conversation between Dupont and Wallace that followed that Dupont gained additional information that later contributed to his insinuation regarding the “Reynolds” cry.

More background must be provided on some reception history of Poe.

Perhaps no aspect of the Poe death narrative excites more interest than the alleged fact that the writer cried out “Reynolds!” before dying. Who or what is Reynolds? The curiosity is understandable. It is romantic, mysterious, weird – it is, in short, Poesque.

The detail originated in a letter of Dr. John Moran, the physician who attended to the dying Poe, from November 15, 1849 to Maria Clemm, Poe’s aunt and former mother-in-law, 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.

There have been three significant theories about Reynolds since 1849. The first suggests Reynolds was Jeremiah Reynolds, the explorer and travel writer. The second explanation claims Reynolds was Henry Reynolds, a Baltimore carpenter. The third and most recent explanation of note, coming in 1987 and embraced by one of our best modern Poe biographers, argued that Poe never called for Reynolds at all. Let us take one at a time, and then move to the implication found in Quentin’s papers.

The first theory places Poe’s literary psyche at its center. Poe mentioned Jeremiah Reynolds a few times in his writings and seems to have respected and admired Reynolds. The related notion for Poe death biographers is that Reynolds’s exploration of the very edges of the known world entered Poe’s mind at the moment he approached his end. A good example is this description from Robert Almy in 1938: “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? It seems to me that the inference – and it must remain

an inference – has considerable plausibility.”<sup>2</sup> Some have speculated Poe may have known Jeremiah Reynolds personally, but there is no good evidence for this.

Poe certainly *could* have been thinking about Jeremiah Reynolds, but 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, an end to Poe’s own novel, the travel adventure *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*), seems farfetched. This is obviously my opinion, but for better or worse opinion is the basis for most of all discussion about the Reynolds call.

The second significant theory emerged on the centennial anniversary of Poe’s death. James Bready on October 7, 1949 and Phillip Van Doren Stern in the October 15, 1949, both in the *Baltimore Sun*, pointed out that one of the election judges at the polling place being held at Ryan’s on October 3, 1849, the day Poe was discovered in Baltimore, was named Henry Reynolds. The name was actually printed the very day of Poe’s discovery in 1849, also in the *Sun*.

Henry Reynolds was the “H” in H & J Reynolds construction company. Reynolds had a hand in building some important structures in Baltimore, including the Maryland Institute on Athenaeum, Carroll Hall and the first iron building in Baltimore, built for the *Sun*. One could easily imagine that Reynolds was one of the last names Poe heard at Ryan’s, and the name recurred to him at the hospital. Again, the most and least that can be said is that Poe *could* have been calling for Henry Reynolds.

The last significant theory on record about Reynolds comes from W. T. Bandy in a 1987 essay called “Dr. Moran and the Poe-Reynolds Myth.”<sup>3</sup> Bandy argues that Moran’s account was mistaken and that, in fact, Poe did not call Reynolds at all but called for “Herring,” that is, Henry Herring, his former cousin by marriage. “Reynolds was only a figment of Moran’s imagination,” Bandy concludes. This theory is appealing, and particularly tempting in light of the newly revealed discoveries of Auguste Duponte that unveil George and Henry Herring’s deeper roles as actors in Poe’s time at Ryan’s. A call to “Herring” might be a call of anger toward Henry (or George, or both), or a delayed call to them for help. A biographer as astute as Kenneth Silverman finds Bandy’s article

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Almy, “J. N. Reynolds: A Brief Biography,” *Colophon* 2 Winter 1932, p. 238-239.

<sup>3</sup> *Myths and Reality*, Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 1987.

“convincing.” Moreover, we need not imagine anything grandiose in a call for Herring. It is a call for a relative – something routine for a sick or dying person to do.

However, the reasoning in Bandy’s article is at times odd. Bandy finds it significant that Moran fails to mention the Reynolds call in later accounts of Poe’s final days. These later accounts are notoriously flawed and calling attention to missing or, for that matter, added material in Moran’s late accounts does nothing at all to establish that the 1849 document is defective. Moran waited approximately twenty-five years after Poe’s death to begin retelling (and revising) his narrative. It is possible that Moran would not even remember the Reynolds call or his mention of it in his letter to Clemm. Just because we have attached importance to the Reynolds call does not mean Moran did (indeed, he gives no gloss on the Reynolds call in his original letter, rendering it if anything with an aura of bland fact rather than dramatic figment). In addition, Moran’s later texts poeticize Poe’s last speeches, which could have led Moran to jettison the apparently unintelligible (to him and to us) repetition of the name of an unknown person.

Bandy’s strongest argument is that Moran’s 1875 version speaks of local relatives of Poe’s in Baltimore as the “Reynolds family.” In his 1885 book, Moran corrects it as the Herring family. Bandy argues that because Moran substituted the word Herring for the word Reynolds between his 1875 and 1885 texts, Moran must have inadvertently substituted the word Reynolds for Herring in 1849. It seems far more likely that in 1875 Moran simply confused the two names and remembered, or was corrected, before writing his 1885 text. Moreover, if someone was calling “Herring” for hours, it seems unlikely any observer would confuse the word for “Reynolds” or remember it incorrectly one week later.

This brings us back to the Quentin Clark footnote, and the references made by William Ross Wallace regarding “The Mystery of Marie Roget.”

A bit of context first. In 1842, Poe published his short story “The Mystery of Marie Roget.” In this sequel to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Poe’s detective character, C. Auguste Dupin, tackles the question of what happened to a young and beautiful girl named Marie Roget found dead in Paris. The story was a self-conscious re-

imagining of a real mystery in New York the summer before, when the body of shopgirl Mary Rogers was discovered floating in the Hudson River.<sup>4</sup>

A strange reverberation of the Mary Rogers case deals with the man named John Anderson. He was the owner of the cigar store where Mary worked. When Anderson died many years later in the 1880s, his estate was contested in the New York courts by one of his children. Unfortunately for the historical record, the case was settled during the trial – meaning there are no transcripts. We do have news reports, though, and as fragmented as they are, they provide interesting tidbits. At one point, as reported by *The New York Times*, one of the attorneys questions 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.” The insinuation is fascinating: Anderson, who had been an early suspect in the death of his shopgirl, paying Poe to influence public opinion in another direction. (Poe’s story ultimately points the finger at a naval figure who some believe was a man named Spencer.) Indeed, the corresponding storeowner character in “The Mystery of Marie Roget” based on Anderson is quite blameless, even down to Poe’s choice of this character’s name, “Le Blanc.” Quentin Clark remarks on this in one of the passages in his unpublished papers:

I now thought about what William Wallace had said to me about “The Mystery of Marie Roget” – that Poe had been paid by John Anderson, the store owner, so he would appear guiltless to the public. Reading the tale again, I found that the character of the shop owner was innocent in the whole affair, almost peculiarly so. Could Poe have used the character of Dupin for such a low and unjust purpose? To help cover the actions that led to a dead girl’s death? Could Edgar Poe have had so little respect for Dupin?

Of course, none of this proves that Poe crafted the story on Anderson’s behalf. Still, there are indications that Poe did know Anderson, and that the two discussed the

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this and the other Dupin tales see Matthew Pearl’s introduction to *The Murders in the Rue Morgue: The Dupin Tales* (New York: Modern Library, 2006).

Mary Rogers case in relation to Poe's story. This newspaper article, apparently from the 19<sup>th</sup> century but of an unknown date, is signed only "J. P. M." finds William Ross Wallace repeating the information he had years before given to Quentin Clark and Duponte.

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 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 ever mouthful of the ample feast he partook of appeared to aggravate him. What made it worse was that there was a too apparent inclination of the part of the shopkeeper to get himself and his business advertised by the Mary Rogers affair, and Poe resented this in the true Southern style.<sup>5</sup>

This is all rather difficult to follow up on, but to whatever extent we believe it, and believe that Poe may have covered up for Anderson for money, friendship or other motives, it is worth connecting the dots (circumstantial and otherwise) to another

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

newspaper article, this one from the *Detroit Free Press* in 1885 about the Anderson will trial. It includes a name that should jump out at us:

On Monday noon a suit was begun in the Supreme Court here to break the will of the late John Anderson, the rich tobacconist... [of Poe's solution to Mary Rogers] 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. ... [at cigar store] During these years John Anderson and his wife lived over the store. Here two children were born. The pretty cigar girl [Mary Rogers] 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 o'clock 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 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.<sup>6</sup>

This article by W. A. Croffut, a well-established writer of the time, was published two years before the suggestion was made publicly that Anderson paid Poe to divert attention from him. In the scenario in which Poe is concealing Anderson’s role through the choices in his tale, and if Croffut’s information from a person he claimed was an Anderson relative is accurate, Poe could also have known or suspected the role of Anderson’s alleged cohort, Reynolds (whether or not this Reynolds was actually involved in Rogers’ death, a separate issue).<sup>7</sup> Dupont, no doubt, gained this additional information about the name of Anderson’s colleague through Wallace (after Clark, typically immature in his defense of Poe, walked away at a perceived insult of Poe). Since the mystery of Rogers’ death was never solved, we can imagine Edgar Allan Poe feeling a sense of guilt over the intervening six years and that, in his own last days feeling close to death (“My best friend would be the man who would blow out my brains,” he is reported to have said), 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!”

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<sup>6</sup> William Augustus Croffut, “Who Murdered Mary Rogers?”, *Detroit Free Press*, June 13, 1885.

<sup>7</sup> There are some instant critiques of this to make, as well. Poe’s cry of “Reynolds” had become public by this point, so it’s possible, though rather bizarre to think, Croffut or his source planted this to make Anderson look bad. But if Croffut wanted to make any but the most esoteric connection between Poe’s cry for Reynolds and this Reynolds, presumably he would have mentioned it directly.

This scenario fits nicely with the mystery of Poe's death, in that it gestures toward solving another long unresolved (and still unsolved) mystery – in fact, leaves us a dangling clue to revisit Mary Rogers's fate.

Unfortunately, the specific analysis Auguste Duponte shared with Quentin Clark appears to have been lost, and the "site... more private" mentioned by Clark in his footnote to tell us more remains unknown. We have a scrawled note by Clark with the following:

I sent an anonymous letter to the family of Mary Rogers informing them of new possibilities about her death, in the event that those details might bring them closer to giving peace to her ashes.

The referenced letter to the Rogers family, though, has not been found, and it presumably contained Duponte's conclusions. Though it cannot be reconstructed precisely, I have used careful study of Auguste Duponte's style of reasoning to imagine what he might have said, and how Clark might have recorded it. I envision Clark pressing Duponte on the point during their last meeting together, and narrating the encounter in full. The reader may judge for himself or herself how close I have come to Duponte, and to the truth of "Reynolds":

"In truth, he could have been calling for anybody," Duponte said. "It might have been the last name he had heard, perhaps belonging to that same carpenter who visited us in your parlor, or it might have been the name of a man whose part in a deadly affair of some years past renders it far too dangerous for either of us to speak about."

I implored Duponte to expand on this ill-omened statement.

Duponte replied. "You have told me before what the poet Wallace implied about Poe's story, 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' – that it was written with the express purpose of diverting attention away from John Anderson, the proprietor of the cigar store that employed the murdered girl in New York. Wallace said that Anderson sent an associate with Mary to cross the Hudson and resolve her

problem – at the time rumors dictated that Mary had been pregnant – and after that she was never heard from again.”

“Poe, in his tale, suggests this was a sailor who has led Mary to trouble, and caused her death,” I said. “The sailor had been at fault in Poe’s earlier tale, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ and relying on another sailor is uncharacteristically *lethargic* on Poe’s part. Wallace believed the shop owner Anderson himself had been the villain and Poe abetted him by distracting the public from Anderson’s role in the matter, and the role of any associate of his that might have acted as his agent. I have since come to fear that perhaps Wallace was right. In ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget,’ perhaps the mystery was Poe’s own weakness in being tempted by money to alter his work.”

Duponte continued. “A cursory examination of some press in New York reveals that Anderson did have a close associate, and one who it seems disappeared around the same time as Mary. Mary, we know, was murdered. But the associate, we assume, *fled*. Never to be seen again in the environs of New York. This associate’s name, newspapers reveal to us, was Reynolds.”

“Reynolds! But could it be this Reynolds whom Poe invokes at his death?”

“It is possible.”

“Could Poe have been trying to tell us something? That this fiend named Reynolds had emerged from his years of hiding and, aware that Poe knew confidential information relating to his part in the Mary Rogers affair, assaulted Poe? That this led to his death?”

“Poe may be trying to tell us something, but I do not imagine it is anything quite so *theatrical*. We know Poe may have heard the name ‘Reynolds’ at Ryan’s while the poet was on the verge of insensibility, in reference to our harmless friend Henry Reynolds, the carpenter and election judge. Now, Monsieur Reynolds the carpenter is a man who did not know Poe and whom Poe might only have glimpsed briefly, hardly a fitting subject to be shouted at the hospital, even in a state of complete delirium. All the same, upon the name entering his mind, Poe remembers this *other* Reynolds who had been the proximate cause of harm to poor Mary Rogers. Monsieur Poe, lying in the hospital, sensing the time of death

was near to him, and knowing his death would be *misunderstood*, remembers this other long misunderstood and ignoble death, that of Mary Rogers. Poe laments his own part in concealing the truth behind that mystery, by ignoring the role of this possible culprit Reynolds. Therefore, in what amounts to his last breath, he imparts a clue onto the rest of the world. Knowing his own death will soon be a mystery, Poe helps resolve another mystery that has been left incomplete all these years. In death, he knows what is most crucial to reveal, and what still must be secret. He was thinking of a place and time where he could still make a difference. This *may* have been the Reynolds whose name he called out. Or perhaps not. But it was by no means merely that carpenter with whom at most he brushed shoulders who filled his mind with thoughts both fearful and exhilarating.”

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