“Before the Eye of the World”:
Authorial Self-Construction in Poe’s Creative and Critical Canon

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

Middle Tennessee State University
April 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In one of the first assignments I submitted in this master's program, I described myself as having fallen into "involuntary orbit around the magnetizing figure who was Poe." Now, casting my eye over the six semesters I spent in this program, I see that I remained in orbit around his shadowy figure for its entirety. That orbit was not without external influence, however, and my thesis and I have been indelibly affected by the courses and people I encountered while in transit across Poe's canon. Accordingly, I extend my deepest thanks to the following figures:

Dr. Marion Hollings, whose ardor for bibliography and research inflamed my own love for both and provided me with a theater in which to experiment with pursuing Poe through the intertwining tendrils of primary and secondary sources. Our late-night after-class conversations on every subject under the sun will forever be a highlight of my educational journey.

Dr. Erica Cirillo-McCarthy, whose energetic commitment to reflective, innovative archival work enabled me to pursue my interest in archival research while also challenging me to be intentional in developing both my methods and my methodologies—the how and the why behind the what I do. Your dogged belief in me over the past three years has helped me to believe in me, too.

Dr. Philip Phillips, who has extended every support imaginable to me, shaping my unruly interest in Poe into a polished project, recommending me to a variety of professional opportunities, and modelling academic integrity and a love of scholarship to me at every turn. Meeting with you on a weekly basis for the better part of five semesters has been

both a joy and an honor, and I am forever indebted to you for the untallied hours and unquantifiable care you have invested in me.

The most constant presence during my time at MTSU has, of course, been the University Writing Center, where I tutored all six semesters. I am supremely grateful to the UWC's directors, Erica, Jim, and Keri, for so intentionally developing an atmosphere of kind, creative warmth in the center, and I will forever treasure the camaraderie, collaboration, and conviviality I enjoyed with my fellow tutors both within and without its walls.

Finally, I must thank my Raven statuette for its abiding presence on my desk. While it did not peer down upon me from just above my chamber door, it did oversee the project from beginning to end, watching while I pondered, weak and weary, over many a quaint and curious volume of academic prose. I look forward to embarking on many future projects under its fiery, knowing eye armed with the skills with which my more human mentors have equipped me.

To my many supporters, both animate and inanimate: thank you all.

ABSTRACT

A skilled linguist from an early age, the young Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849) believed himself to be a poet of great genius destined to engage in literary taste-making within the American literary establishment. His earliest attempts at publication, however, reaped little attention from that establishment, which preferred to consolidate its power through an exclusionary clique system that promoted its favorite authors at the expense of superior but lesser-connected artists. In 1831, Poe, recognizing his own disadvantaged position within this system, adapted his strategy for achieving a literary career within his era's establishment and began to focus on reforming that establishment while carving out a place for himself within its ranks as a means of gaining audience for his poetry.

This thesis examines Poe's positioning of himself in relation to his era's literary establishment, focusing particularly on how his professional and personal interactions with that establishment's literati impacted the trajectory of his career and the subject matter of his canon. Pursuant on this theme, the thesis employs a historical-biographical lens to analyze selections from Poe's *Poems* (1831), critical essays, book reviews, New York "Literati" sketches, and late revenge tales as a means of contextualizing Poe's work and author-figure within his own print culture. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Poe employed his creative and critical works not only to carve out a position for himself and his works within the American literary establishment of the 1830s-1840s by placing himself "before the eye of the world," but also to channel and transmute his affective responses to the repeated rejections, resistance, and retaliation he experienced at that establishment's hands.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Proem — Literary Landscapes and Periodical Politics in Poe's Day

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most controversial authors ever to have placed his figure "before the eye of the world."[1] During his own lifetime, his writing received no uniform reception from the magazine editors whose periodicals he alternatively edited or insulted, the authors whose writing he alternatively praised and panned, or the popular readership whose literary taste he alternatively deplored and attempted to elevate. Despite his era's diverging attitudes towards his figure, however, Poe did manage to keep that figure flagrantly in the public view across the majority of the 1830s and 1840s, garnering attention through his bombastic criticism, mesmerizing short stories, and chillingly lyrical verse. In the wake of his death, the very controversy surrounding his authorial figure, which he helped to stoke, ensured his continuation as a presence on the world stage until a time when his writing would be universally recognized for its uncanny genius. A brief glance at today's popular reception of Poe in American literature anthologies and course surveys reveals that that time is unquestionably now.

Poe's lasting presence before the eye of the world was in no way assured him during his own lifetime. Indeed, the literary establishment under whose own watching eye he labored seemed disinclined to sanction his efforts. In the face of this alternatively ambivalent, alternatively malevolent, but almost never benevolent attitude, Poe expended much of his critical and creative energy attempting to define his relationship to that establishment. As those interactions form the setting, characters, and material for much of

[1] Poe himself coined this phrase when outlining his professional plans to his foster father, John Allan in Poe to John Allan, May 29, 1829 in *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by John Ward Ostrom (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), 20.

what I intend to argue, a brief description of the configuration of American literature at the moment of Poe's arrival upon its scene is in order.

Ironically, given the tension that simmered—and often exploded—between Poe and the American literary establishment, American literature of the era shared a fundamental anxiety with Poe: it, too, was extremely cognizant of and sensitive to its placement before the eye of the world. Indeed, as confident as it would appear by the end of the nineteenth century, American literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was in the throes of an identity crisis of its own. This crisis sprang from the newness of the country's emergent nationality; from the fact that, although America as a *people* had been shaping itself for nearly two hundred years, that shaping had occurred in the shadow of a parent figure, England, under whose broadly spanning pinions the thirteen colonies had formed a negligible presence. America as a *nation* was only just emerging as its own force; as the editors of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* explain, "there was a sense during the 1790s and early 1800s… that American nationality was provisional, vulnerable, fragile."[2] Newly emerged from its war against Britain, America felt keenly the extent to which its culture had been catapulted, by its upstart behavior, before the eye of the world. Revolution was rife in the air of this century, and America's success in throwing off the rule of the Old World and founding a government of their own meant that the eyes of both staunch traditionalists and fresh liberationists

[2] Robert S. Levine, gen. ed., "Introduction: American Literature 1820-1865," in *The Norton Anthology of America Literature, Volume B: 1820-1865*, 9th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2017), 5.

were turned to evaluate their performance in what was essentially an experiment: the American experiment.

One of this experiment's first tasks was to create a culture that was distinctively and unapologetically American. Accordingly, Americans' performance of all aspects of their culture, including literature, became a question of national pride. As the editors of *Norton* further explain, the culture-makers of this era were "[c]onvinced that a sign of a great nation was the existence of a great national literature," likely due to their own exposure to the impressive canons of England, Italy, Germany and France.[3] Thus, "[f]rom the moment of the successful outcome of the American Revolution, literary nationalism had an important place in the emergent culture of the new nation" as American authors were urged "to develop a distinctively American literature worthy of a democratic republic that sought to take its place among the great nations of the world."[4] The perspective was clear: a national literature was a necessary component of a nation's identity.

Attempting to justify its position as a new world force, then, America sought to establish a literature that was *distinctly American*. The question of what was *distinctly American*, of course, drew varying opinions. Generally speaking, however, the question of setting was significant, with the States themselves—or the frontier-land that was slowly being swallowed by those ever-expanding states—being the favored space. Even more crucial, however, were the themes this literature pursued. In order to be truly American in tone, it was felt, American literature must explore *American* themes, such as

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[3] Levine, "Introduction," 5.
[4] Ibid., 5-6.

"difficult questions about the nation's future, about its strengths and vulnerabilities, and about its character and potential as a democratic republic."[5] Entangled in this notion of the nation's future was the American peoples' fittingness to act as upright citizens of the American republic. Accordingly, much of the literature from this period was dedicated to instructing American readers in the principles of freedom, civic duty, and Christian morality as a means of creating an educated populace whose morals fitted them to carry on the great Republic.

The result of this press for a distinctly American literature was unique. Between 1790-1830, the States produced a smattering of literature from each of the major genres. James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales," which feature a frontiersman who wanders the American west, garnered instant popularity, while his novel *The Spy*, set during the American Revolution, was similarly successful.[6] *The Coquette*, a heavy-handed morality tale by Hannah Webster Foster, was "one of the most reprinted early American novels"[7]; in a related, though more skillful vein, the works of Catherine Maria Sedgwick thoughtfully interrogated the civic virtues through which the Republic's future might be secured.[8] Washington Irving's protagonists ramble the New England countryside in descriptive short stories, while William Cullen Bryant's poems reflect the related belief that encountering America's landscape was central to her citizens' personal and spiritual growth.[9] This brief list features works that have earned acclaim during both

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[5] Ibid., 8.

[6] Ibid., 7.

[7] Cathy N. Davidson, "Introduction," in *The Coquette* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), x.

[8] Charlene Avallone, "Catharine Sedgwick and the Circles of New York," *Legacy* 23, no. 2 (2006): 117-20.

[9] Levine, "Introduction," 8.

their own and modern times; however, much of the country's literary production during this era, though lauded in its time, has subsequently been adjudged wanting by modern critical analysis with its increased emphasis on aesthetics over nationalism.

Indeed, the standards for assessing the quality of this crop of literature were, as Poe would later note, not altogether of a literary—or unbiased—nature. When assessing the quality of America's literary output, American critics tended to prioritize the Americanness of the writing over that writing's aesthetic quality, glorifying the efforts of her authors. As Poe himself described the scenario in an 1842 review, "[a]mong all the *pioneers* of American literature, whether prose or poetical, there is *not one* whose productions have not been much over-rated by his countrymen…. gratitude, surprise, and a species of hyper-patriotic triumph have been blended, and finally confounded, with mere admiration, or appreciation, in respect to the labors of our earlier writers."[10] On the burgeoning new field of American literature, the American cultural machine was defined by its commitment to fiercely protecting and defending its own.

Unsurprisingly, as the American literary establishment evolved over the early nineteenth century, this atmosphere of fierce protectiveness gave rise to literary cliques. Each of the major publishing centers—such as Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond—developed its own network of editorial and authorial alliances that served purposes not always artistic in nature. As Sidney Moss explains in his landmark analysis of Poe's tangle with the literary system of his era, "[o]nce a clique had established itself, it became more and more clannish and powerful, discriminating in

[10] Edgar Allan Poe, "John G. C. Brainard," in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 404.

favor of belongers and working against outsiders, in a kind of mutual protection league."[11] As Moss and others have explored, belonging to one of these "leagues" enabled an author to maintain connections with important editors and publications, thus ensuring the author's economic stability.[12] Additionally, belonging to a clique guaranteed that one's works were received positively, as the coterie system relied on a system of mutual review-puffery.[13] In this way, as David Dowling observes, "Authors were not employees of their coteries, but nonetheless stood to benefit directly from their association with the circle much in the way workers enjoy privilege and status based on affiliation with powerful and prestigious companies."[14] Such affiliation was not official, but it was concrete—and potent.

A surface reading of this system may yield the impression that its impact was, on the whole, positive; after all, it was contributing to the financial stability of and attending to the promotion of writers in an economy in which neither was particularly secure. Perhaps if it had contented itself with those acts of care, the clique system would be remembered more positively by literary historians. As it existed, however, the coterie

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[11] Sidney Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles: The Critic in the Context of His Literary Milieu* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1963), 30. As Moss further explains, "This was bound to happen, however haphazardly, so long as writers, living in the same city and having similar literary interests and publishers, met, as they often did, socially and professionally at one another's home and offices, and were concerned, if only for the sake of their livelihood, with maintaining close relations for purposes of magazine publication, entrees to publishers, and the vitally needed puffs for their works."

[12] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 30-31; David Dowling, *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 2-10. Additional studies of this era's clique system have been conducted by Lara Langer Cohen and Sandra Tomc, to name a few.

[13] Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 23-64.

[14] Dowling, *The Business of Literary Circles*, 2.

system had a dark underbelly. As Moss indicates, the benefits of "belonging" for some was counterbalanced by—or, more accurately, purchased at the price of—the disadvantages of *non*belonging that accrued to other authors. These benefits and disadvantages manifested themselves most noticeably in the realm of literary criticism. As Moss explains, "magazine criticism was being vitiated by the predilections of the coteries…. the reviews published by editors engaged in this traffic were, for the most part, superficial and, far worse, misleading, acclaiming or denouncing the work of an author in unqualified terms, depending upon whether the author was in favor with the clique."[15] This system of exclusivity, then, altered the landscape of American literature such that "[t]o entertain the notion of success, writers had first to come into the good graces of editors—a process that involved toadying and quackery, the current words of contempt for the truckling and charlatanry on the part of contributor to editor and editor to the public."[16] Thus, as Dowling highlights, belonging to a clique became an economic necessity during this era, as succeeding not only without the *support* of but also *with the active antagonism of* a powerful clique was almost impossible.[17]

As this discussion's mention of "magazine criticism" has obliquely hinted, one final factor influenced the configuration of the American literary scene prior to Poe's

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[15] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 30-31.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Dowling, *The Business of Literary Circles*, 2-10. Moss further proclaims in this regard that "the power a clique could and did wield when it banded together to defend an issue was enormous" in *Poe's Literary Battles*, 63-64. In pages 64-67, Moss recounts the story of a young poet, James McHenry, who attempted to slug it out with the New York clique much as Poe later did but who was signally *destroyed* by the clique's power. This narrative proves that Poe was not merely antagonistic but *skilled* in his antagonism. Poe managed not only to survive to fight another day but also to rise in reputation, whereas McHenry was drawn and quartered by the group.

arrival on it in the 1830s: the explosion of the periodical as a venue in the early nineteenth century. Susan Smith and Kenneth Price highlight this explosion in their work *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, noting that during this time, "technological developments in papermaking, the widespread use of the cylinder press, cheaper postal routes, rising literacy rates, and wide distribution by railroads altered the courses of publication and deeply affected writers and readers alike."[18] The development of print technology significantly changed the manner in which printed material was produced as those advancements "made possible the publication of low-priced periodicals and books at a greatly accelerated pace."[19] In addition to these technological developments, advancements in means of transportation contributed significantly to the evolution of publication distribution, leading Lara Cohen to comment of the time that "[a] rapid succession of technological and economic innovations in the early nineteenth century transformed the early republican period's largely artisanal print shops into a major commercial industry."[20] This improvement in means of dispersal led to a corresponding boom in readership as printed material could reach farther and farther-flung audiences that Weinstock characterizes as "[a] growing and increasingly literate population gr[owing] hungrier for reading material."[21] With this combination of factors—the rise of cheap printing, the means of easy dissemination, and the emergence of a

[18] Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth Price, "Introduction: Periodical Literature in Social and Historical Context," in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 3.

[19] Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, "Magazines," in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context,* ed. by Kevin J. Hayes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170.

[20] Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature,* 6.

[21] Weinstock, "Magazines," 171.

voracious reading audience—the scene was set for the explosion of a specific mode: the periodical.

And explode it did. As Smith and Price narrate in their extensive survey of periodical literature of nineteenth-century America, "[b]y 1825, there were some one hundred magazines in circulation in the country, most of them distributed through the mail…. by 1833, there were approximately 1,200 newspapers in existence, of which sixty-five were published on a daily basis."[22] This number had swollen to 2,526 by 1850[23] and by 1861 *Godey's Lady's Book* alone had achieved a list of 150,000 subscribers, facts that lead Smith and Price to join the *New York Mirror* of that era in proclaiming "This is the golden age of periodicals!"[24] Thus, as Terence Whalen highlights, Poe's own coming of age years coincided with and likely involved core memories regarding the dawning supremacy of the periodical.[25]

The golden age of the periodical, however, was not without its clay lining. As readership expanded, it encompassed a diverse audience who increasingly consumed magazines primarily for entertainment. As periodical editors sensed this growing voracity for quantity over quality of reading material, the terms of writing for the periodicals correspondingly shifted. Now, the periodical author was expected to produce material quickly rather than skillfully, leading to the proliferation of what Meredith McGill terms

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[22] Smith and Price, "Introduction," 4.

[23] Terence Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 74.

[24] Smith and Price, "Introduction," 5.

[25] Whalen, *Poe and the Masses*, 23; Whalen declares "As a boy, Poe in fact spent long hours on the second floor of the Ellis & Allan establishment, where in addition to books there was a collection of such popular periodicals as the Edinburgh Review, Blackwood's, and the London Ladies' Magazine."

"cheap literature."[26] To participate in the major print mode of the era, then, an author not only needed to curry favor with a clique of editors, but also needed to be willing to produce work whose primary quality was speed of completion not finely worked style or craft. Moreover, these new expectations regarding literary production and the host of operational duties attendant on magazine production produced a new category of "literary" figure—the "magazinist," literary individuals who as authors, editors, or both, employed their pen primarily within the world of periodicals.[27] Simply bypassing contribution to the magazine, much like opting out of currying favor with a clique, was almost never viable for authors as publication in periodicals was an essential step in developing a loyal audience even for poets and novelists of the era.[28] Those who did bypass the periodical pathway were almost always possessed of independent means; i.e., they wrote for pleasure rather than as a profession.

This was the scene on which Edgar A. Poe, armed with his readings in British romanticism and a catalog of personal tragedies, arrived. His own publishing career, which spanned from 1827 to 1849, fell during the peak of the periodical's dominance and, as I will later argue, his career was, in many ways, determined by his situatedness within the machine that was the American literary establishment. Moreover, a close reading of Poe's canon and career decisions reveals that Poe became acutely aware of his

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[26] Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 2.

[27] For more information regarding the "magazinist" in general and Poe's performance as a magazinist in particular, see Philip E. Phillips, "Poe the Magazinist," in *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Scott Peeples (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[28] Smith and Price, "Introduction," 6

positionality and the dependency of his career on what he *made* of that position very early on in his career.

A skilled multilinguist from an early age, the young Poe struck his observers as—and certainly believed himself to be—a man destined for letters. He was an author destined to engage in taste-making in a literary, possibly collegiate capacity. Within his first semester at university, however, his dreams of a collegiate career evaporated when his penurious foster father refused to cover Poe's living costs or satisfy the debts Poe incurred through gambling for funds. Thrown into the world, Poe's military career(s) likewise capsized as he proved unable to sustain a life outside of letters. Thus in 1831, Poe directed his full attention to the question of pursuing a literary career, an undertaking that necessarily entailed his serious evaluation of the American literary establishment that had snubbed his earlier attempts at publishing poetry.[29]

This consideration yielded the professional resolutions that, I will argue, motivated the majority of his decisions across the remainder of his career—the desire to achieve poetic preeminence through accomplishment of audience; the procurement of a lyre in the sky through relentlessly placing himself "before the eye of the world." Recognizing his own disadvantaged position within the clique system, Poe shouldered the task of critical reform not merely for its own sake, but rather as a means to an end; wanting to be a poet, he undertook this critical reform as both a means of carving out a space for himself within the literary establishment as well as a means of making enough

[29] Poe published three volumes of work at the beginning of his career: *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* (1829), and *Poems* by Edgar A. Poe (1831).

of a scene to draw "the eye of the world" to his poetry. That he did earn the establishment's attention is demonstrated by the host of countercriticisms he faced from that establishment in his lifetime. These very countercriticisms give rise to the second half of my argument: Poe employed his writing not only as a means through which to carve out a place for himself within his era's literary establishment, but also as an outlet through which to channel and transmute his affective responses to the repeated rejections, resistance, and retaliation he experienced at that establishment's hands.

In advancing these arguments, I am not the first to situate Poe in the context of his literary or technological milieu. Poe biography has taken many directions in the one hundred seventy-three years since his death, but of late, attempts have emerged at least to acknowledge and to explore Poe's enmeshment within the clique-driven literary culture of his day as well as his more material immersion in the physicality of print culture. This emphasis was pioneered by Sidney Moss's landmark *Poe's Literary Battles*, cited earlier, in which Moss was among the first to make the case that Poe's motives in criticizing his era's establishment arose not from a vicious character but from a true regard for excellence in literature.[30] Moss's positive characterization of Poe's critical style has made possible the works of more recent scholars whose studies employ diverging lenses to situate Poe constructively in the print culture and literary circles of his day.

Perhaps the most significant example of the former is *Poe and the Remapping of Antebellum Print Culture*, in which J. Gerald Kennedy and Jerome McGrann collect essays that situate Poe directly *in* space and *in* time through their treatments of Poe's

[30] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles: The Critic in the Context of His Literary Milieu.*

engagement with multiple "contemporary" issues, such as the American Renaissance, ongoing political debates, and the impact on the literary imagination of the expanding urban cityscape. Of the issues canvassed in this study, the presentation of Poe's experience as a magazinist through the lens of literary "lionization" was the most helpful in constructing my understanding of Poe's performance as a critic.[31] This work is, itself, indebted to the earlier *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, in which Terence Whalen examines the economic considerations that shaped the antebellum literary marketplace and thus, necessarily, Poe's experience within that marketplace. In undertaking this examination, the opening chapters of Whalen's study supplied invaluable insight into the economic pressures Poe experienced in his role as an editor, particularly at the beginning of his career.[32]

While the majority of my information regarding Poe's interaction with his era's literati arose from biographies, his own critical sketches, his letters, and the responses he reaped from the literati themselves, Eliza Richards' *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circles* was crucial in developing my sense of the figure Poe cut among the elite circles of the coterie, especially during the year in which he frequented the New York City salons.[33] Moreover, while Richards emphasized the gendered experiences of the female writers themselves in her study, her exploration of Frances Sargent Osgood's encounter with Poe between 1845-46 brought to light a specific, significant manner in which Poe used his time among the New York literati to continue carving his authorial

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[31] J. Gerald Kennedy and Jerome McGann, eds., *Poe and the Remapping of Antebellum Print Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

[32] Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*.

[33] Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

figure and substantially bolstered my overall argument regarding Poe's authorial practices.

In addition to these explicitly Poe-oriented studies, several studies that treated the American literary scene of this era more generally also provided valuable depth to my understanding of Poe's position in his culture. Meredith McGill's work *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* illuminated the political dimensions of print culture and further elucidated the particular apprehensions regarding reproducibility that drove Poe to pursue a distinct authorial construct, while Lara Cohen's emphasis on the "puffed" and fraudulent nature of literary criticism in Poe's era contributed to my own exploration of Poe's war *against* puffery in his critical regime.[34] Finally, in his work *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America*, David Dowling lays bare the scaffolding of literary society in Poe's era, minutely analyzing the relationships within and between various spheres of literary power. As a more current study, Dowling's work served to supplement and expand Moss's earlier treatment of the issue of Poe's social setting. [35]

Taken altogether, these works buttressed my own exploration of Poe's performance within the context of the complex network of competing pressures then at play in America's social, literary, and print cultures. My work situates itself in close proximity to this growing mass of scholarship and adopts that scholarship's interest in Poe's situatedness within his own milieu and the manner in which he and that milieu

[34] McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*; Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature*.

[35] Dowling, *The Business of Literary Circles in Nineteenth-Century America*.

contributed to the other's evolution as its backdrop. In my work, however, I place special emphasis on acknowledging the manner in which Poe's critical perspectives and affective experiences interwove together throughout not only his life, but also his canon. As a means of contextualizing Poe's work and author-figure within his own print culture, I spend the opening portion of each chapter "setting the scene" with a discussion of the biographical or interpersonal happenstances that undergird the particular critical carvings under consideration in that chapter before then pivoting into a discussion of the primary texts. To both explore and demonstrate the aforementioned "interwovenness" of Poe's critical and affective lives, I myself interweave analyses of his writing from across genres that are typically approached individually, rather than in tandem, by modern scholars. In pursuit of this argument, I encompass over fifty discrete pieces by Poe—ranging from his criticism to his poetry and short stories—which I organize into four distinct phases in the evolution of Poe's career.

In Chapter One, "Lyre within the Sky: Poe, *Poems* (1831), and Literary Angels," I lay the groundwork for my arguments regarding Poe's professional aims by examining his development as a writer from his school-boy years through the publication of his third collection of poetry, *Poems* (1831). Arguing that prior to the publication of this volume Poe's fledgling encounter with the literary establishment had led him to reconsider his strategy in achieving an audience for his poetry, I then turn to two pieces from the collection both to reinforce and further develop that argument. First, I analyze the prose preface, "Letter to Mr. ——," that Poe affixed to the head of the work, examining it for clues to the new critical strategy Poe had devised to effect his acceptance by the literary establishment. Second, I examine his well-known poem, "Israfel," noting several specific

phrases within the poem that evidence the affective impact Poe's first tangle with the establishment had on his creative outlook.

In Chapter Two, "A Question of Criticism: Poe's Authorial Carvings," I apply my interpretive lens to the decade in which Poe produced the majority of his enormous critical output. Beginning with his first editorial post at the *Southern Literary Messenger* (1835 – 1837), I note the energy with which Poe threw himself into the task of engaging critically with American literature, the aesthetic principles he developed and applied throughout this early criticism, and the vivacious, eye-grabbing tone he employed throughout that criticism. Progressing deeper into his career as a "magazinist" and his stints at *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* (1839 – 40), *Graham's Magazine* (1841 – 42) and the New York *Evening Mirror* (1844 – 45), I highlight Poe's growing frustration with the resistance his attempts at the critical elevation of literature reaped from the cliques to which the authors he criticized belonged. The most notable of these, of course, was the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, from whose supporters Poe's criticism of the Bostonian poet received immediate and volatile backlash. Further examining Poe's criticism from the "Little Longfellow War," I argue that Poe viewed this feud as yet another means by which he could carve out his critical position while simultaneously gaining the attention of many of the literary world's "eyes." I further assert that this series, less intentionally on Poe's part, served as an outlet for expressing his emotional frustration toward the clique system's elevation of inferior-but-inner talents (such as Longfellow's) and expulsion of superior-but-unaffiliated talents (such as his own).

In Chapter Three, "Cat among the Pigeons: Poe and the Literati, 1845-1846," I narrate the manner in which the publication of "The Raven" led to the acme of Poe's

popular success and corresponding entry into the world of literary society. The nature of his performance in the eyes of (and subsequent falling out with) the literary salon scene proved critically-portentous to Poe, as these events led Poe first to experiment with the sentimental poetry tradition while within the literati's pale and then to produce the main text this chapter examines—"The Literati of New York City" —upon his expulsion from that pale. In the latter series, published serially in the months after Poe's falling out with the literati, Poe employs his critical pen to lambast thirty-eight of their number in a set of caustic biographical sketches that treat their subjects through an alternatively critical and gossipy pen. An examination of these sketches reveals Poe integrating his critical sense and affective sensibilities more consistently and aggressively than at any previous point in his career. In light of this examination, I argue that, while Poe's critical faculties were not waning late in his career, his patience at the critical configuration that contrived to underate him while lauding lesser lyres was on the verge of expiration.

In the Fourth and final Chapter, "Craft and Cabal: Retaliation and Revenge in Poe's Last Days," I situate an analysis of Poe's two late revenge tales—"The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) and "Hop-Frog" (1849)—in the context of the larger editorial war that I argue inspired them. This war, fought most intensely between Poe and Thomas Dunn English, sprang from Poe's critical treatment of English in "The Literati," English's prickly response to Poe, and the resulting libel suit Poe pressed against English. Against this backdrop, I embark on a comparison and contrast of English's novel *1844*, penned in the midst of their feud, and Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," which I argue is a direct response to *1844.* Through this close reading, I demonstrate that, in "The Cask," Poe both establishes his artistic superiority over English by adopting and improving on specific

themes from *1844* and also expresses his savage resentment over the entire Literati affair of the previous two years. Having effected this comparison of "The Cask" and *1844*, I progress into a comparison of "The Cask" and "Hop-Frog," ultimately concluding that, in the two and a half years that elapsed between the two pieces' production, Poe's attitude toward his treatment by the literary establishment had evolved significantly. That evolution consisted primarily of the development of his frustration into a deep-seated resentment of the establishment that had, for the past eighteen years, detained him from his true goal of living as a poet and offered him both insult and injury in return for his attempts to elevate the quality of 1830s – 1840s America's literature.

By surveying these multi-genre offerings from the beginning to the end of his career from roughly 1831 to 1849, I hope not only to illustrate the development of Poe's nexus of cognitive and affective responses across that career, but also to explore how the many eccentricities of that career may be explained through the single proposition that Poe sought to place himself "before the eye of the world" in order to generate an audience for his poetry, a goal that set in motion the critical and creative carvings I examine in this thesis.

Chapter One — Lyre within the Sky: Poe, *Poems* (1831), and Literary Angels

On February 8, 1831, former Sergeant Major in the U.S. Army and future literary giant Edgar Allan Poe succeeded in getting himself court-martialed from the ranks of West Point, where he had been training as a cadet for the previous seven months.[1] Poe's deliberate decision to incur ejection from West Point was at least partially motivated by his discovery in November of the previous year that his foster father, John Allan—with whom he had long shared a testy relationship—had remarried and would likely soon possess a new heir upon whom to devolve his many thousands upon his death.[2] Poe, long accustomed to basing his calculations regarding the future upon the presumption that he would one day regain either patronage or patrimony from the Allan estate, instantly recognized the impact of this development on his future life. Disillusioned with his present life under West Point's stringent strictures, Poe elected to strike out against his foster father's act of rejection by going to Baltimore, the home of his biological father's family, and there beginning a new career. In departing ignominiously from West Point, however, Poe did not leave empty-handed; instead, he bent his way towards Baltimore with monetary pledges from 131 of his 232 fellow cadets towards a book of verse, which would materialize just months later as *Poems by Edgar A. Poe* (1831).[3]

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[1] Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (New York, US: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 169, 174. Poe achieved the rank of Sergeant Major of Artillery before resigning from the army (133).

[2] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 170. According to Quinn, Allan remarried in October; upon his discovery of the news in November, Poe instantly resolved to quit West Point.

[3] The most reliable of Poe biographies provide conflicting data regarding the amount paid by the cadets. Quinn states the contributions were $ .75 cents apiece in *Edgar Allan Poe*, 175. By contrast, Kenneth Silverman asserts that the amount was $1.25 in *Edgar A. Poe: A Biography* (New York, US: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 67. For our purposes, the precise amount of these pledges is less significant than the fact that they enabled Poe to publish his third volume.

The last of three short volumes of poetry that Poe published between 1827 and 1831, both *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (1831) and its two companion volumes—*Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827) and *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems* (1829)—have long been regarded as a sort of prelude to Poe's literary career, which, upon its true commencement, encompassed such a wide variety of roles and pursuits as to leave readers and critics of contemporary and subsequent decades alike puzzled as to whether Poe should be regarded more as an essayist, editor, cryptographer, critic, poet, reviewer, hoaxer, or fictionist. Attempts to resolve these disjointed features of Poe's career typically focus themselves on the later acts in that career—the years in which Poe applied himself most energetically to the pursuit of the widest cross-section of roles—in the belief that the means by which to arrive at a reconciliation of those discordant pursuits is by examining how they impacted one another at their moments of closest alliance. I, however, wish to suggest that the key to understanding the trajectory of Poe's career lies not at the *end* of that career, but at its beginning; wish to suggest that, while it has typically been regarded as merely the third in a trio of books unsuccessfully launched before Poe's career had even truly begun, the *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (1831) should instead be regarded as a pivotal text within Poe's canon; a legend to decoding Poe's choices within his subsequent mystifying career.

In pursuing my interpretation of this text, I lay especial emphasis on the adjective "pivotal," which I have selected as a descriptor of the work not on the basis of its more common denotations of "significant" or "important" but rather for its secondary, mechanistic definition—that is, for its denotation of the action of a pivot. Indeed, while I certainly wish to argue that this manuscript is "pivotal" in the sense that it is "important"

or "significant," I believe that the very importance, the very significance of the text arises from the fact that it is "pivotal" in the mechanistic sense—in the sense that it served as a pivot upon which Poe's literary career swung from its early, idealistic track onto the altogether different track that Poe pursued after the work's publication. The pursuit of such an argument demands that we approach the analysis of *Poems* (1831) with at least a basic understanding of that early, idealistic track on which Poe was originally determined to succeed if we are to understand how it altered surrounding the publication of *Poems* (1831). Therefore, to analyze the work's performance as a pivot, we must first adopt its function as our model in this study, beginning our investigation with a brief examination of Poe's early formulation of his career before pivoting into an analysis of *Poems* (1831) and the career towards which it redirected Poe. As few autobiographical materials exist from Poe's childhood and early adolescence, we will rely upon the behavioral record that emerges from his school performances as well as from the reminiscences of Poe's foster father, friends, and instructors to aid us in reconstructing Poe's early sense of his vocation.

An opening survey of these records reveals that, by the age of ten, the young Edgar A. Poe had already lived an eventful life. Orphaned at the age of two and fostered immediately by the wealthy Richmond merchant John Allan and his wife Frances, Poe had not only undergone a dramatic transformation in social station, but had also lived in three different countries before the conclusion of the first decade of his life.[4] Indeed, in

[4] For a concise yet informative account of Poe's childhood, see James M. Hutchisson, "An Orphan's Life: 1809-1831" in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe,* 18-21.

contrast with the majority of his compatriots, Poe began his formal education not in America, but rather in Great Britain, whence the Allan family moved during his sixth year, and where Allan enrolled the young boy in a succession of respectable institutions, including most noticeably a grammar school operated by a set of Misses Dubourg and later a boarding school overseen by Dr. John Bransby in Stoke Newington.[5] Between these several institutions, Poe received a solid education, participating in geography, history, spelling, and even dancing lessons; however, even at this early moment, school records and his teachers' recollections reveal that Poe's true talents lay in language studies and that he acquitted himself in both French and Latin with considerable skill.[6] Poe's familiarity with the British Romantic poets, who would so influence his early works, almost certainly began during his stay in England, a period of time that coincided with the height of their productivity; what is more certain is that his study of classical texts while in England bred in him an interest in versification such that, by the time he returned to American shores, he was both reading and writing poetry.[7]

Upon the Allan family's return to Richmond in 1820, Poe was immediately enrolled in one of the city's best academies where, under the oversight of Trinity College graduate Joseph H. Clarke, he recommenced his study of Latin and French and added to these accomplishments a study of the Greek language. As in England, his courses encompassed a broad range of subjects that extended beyond language studies; however,

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[5] Hutchisson, "An Orphan's Life," 20-21.

[6] Quinn supplies a list of Poe's classes with the Misses Dubourg in *Edgar Allan Poe*, 69; Silverman adds dancing to the skills Poe learned at Stoke-Newington in *Edgar A. Poe*, 18; and Hutchisson reports Poe's excellence in language during this period in "An Orphan's Life," 21.

[7] J. Gerald Kennedy, "The Realm of Dream and Memory: Poe's England," in *Poe and Place*, ed. Philip Edward Phillips (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 78-79.

also as in England, it was in languages that he most excelled, a fact that is demonstrated by the remembrances of his schoolmates, who recalled even at a much later date Poe's "ability to 'cap' Latin verses with others beginning with the same letter, [and] his fondness for the odes of Horace."[8] These reminiscences highlight that, more significantly still, the courses in which Poe most excelled were those which were based upon and allowed him to interact most intimately with *poetry*. Moreover Poe's interests in poetry were not limited to the effusions penned by others; during this time, Poe also began writing what Kenneth Silverman describes as "satirical and other verses in English, some of which he showed to the other boys."[9] The quality of these verses impressed his schoolmates to such a degree that, upon Clarke's departure from the academy in 1822, they selected Poe to compose an ode in honor of his tenure at their school.[10] At the age of thirteen, then, Poe was a commissioned poet.

Nor were his schoolmates the only figures upon whom Poe had managed to impress his talents as a poet during this era; Clarke himself, in later years, recalled Poe's inordinate talents at this early age, asserting that "his poetical compositions were universally admitted to be the best in the school. While the other boys wrote mere mechanical verses, Poe wrote genuine poetry: the boy was a born poet."[11] Linked to this

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[8] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 84.

[9] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 23. Silverman indicates that only one of these early poems survived: "Oh, Tempora! Oh, Mores!" in which the youthful Poe co-opted a phrase from Cicero to fuel an eighteenth-century style satire on a young store clerk. While not on par with his later works, Poe's selection of style and integration of multiple traditions indicates how ambitious his poetic enterprises were during these years.

[10] Hutchisson, "An Orphan's Life," 22.

[11] Joseph H. Clarke qtd. in E. L. Didier, *The Life and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York, US: W. J. Widdleton, 1877), 30. While penning his early biography of Poe, E. L. Didier contacted Clarke, who supplied extensive reminiscences of Poe.

declaration was Clarke's further memory of an occasion that serves as a strong indication that Poe had, by this time, begun to take his own interest in poetry very seriously and, indeed, had begun to regard himself *as* a poet. Writing of this time, Clarke recalled:

> Mr. Allan came to me one day with a manuscript volume of verses, which he said Edgar had written, and which the little fellow wanted to have published. He asked my advice upon the subject. I told him that… it would be very injurious to the boy to allow him to be flattered and talked about as the author of a printed book at his age.… The verses, I remember, consisted chiefly of pieces addressed to the different little girls in Richmond.[12]

This account—and particularly Clarke's record of his response to Allan's request for advice—is notable on two counts. The first is that, in advising Allan not to publish, Clarke at no moment raised the quality of the volume as a point against its publication. This implies that the volume's contents were, if not altogether inspired, at least of a sufficiently advanced quality as not to make the suggestion of their publication altogether implausible. The second is that, in cautioning against the effect such an early publication would have on Poe's development, Clarke's response discloses the unstated assumption that Poe would continue developing as a poet and that he further had the potential to achieve even greater heights of poetic skill. In Clarke's eyes as much as in Poe's or his schoolmates' then, Poe was hard upon the path to poethood.

Heretofore, both the testimony of Poe's contemporaries and his own actions testify that in his earliest years Poe had trained his sights upon the title of poet. In these paragraphs, however, we have been examining the actions of a boy—the proficiency of a child participating in classes that were chosen for him and pursuing hobbies that delighted him but between which he was by no means yet qualified to make a decision

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[12] Clarke qtd. in Didier, *Life and Poems*, 31.

regarding his adult life. While his behaviors during these years may be described as a conclusive indication of Poe's unusual *taste* for poetry, they cannot constitute in themselves a declaration of allegiance to poetry *as a lifelong vocation* on Poe's part. To conclude our sketch of Poe's early career aspirations, then, we must shift to the years traditionally associated with the pursuit of vocation—Poe's enrollment at university.

Upon matriculating at the newly founded University of Virginia, Poe had the opportunity to enroll in a surprisingly broad selection of classes in subjects ranging from mathematics to natural or moral philosophy, medicine, and law.[13] Had he been inclined to pursue one of the three professions thought most fitting for gentlemen of this period—the church, the law, or medicine—classes in the latter three emphases should have been among those prioritized by Poe. However, rather than opt for these more practical selections, Poe promptly enrolled in two courses: Modern Languages and Ancient Languages.[14] Through these classes he continued to interact with and translate poetry in multiple languages, progressing in his study of Greek and possibly adding knowledge of Italian and Spanish to his already considerable skills in Latin and French.[15] Just how considerable those skills had become was proven by the end of the semester, when Poe was recognized as having "excelled" in his senior Latin and French classes, a recognition

[13] "The Progress of Science," *The Popular Science Monthly* 67 (July 1905): 281. In this issue, the *Popular Science Monthly* outlined the University of Virginia's history and early curriculum.

[14] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe,* 29.

[15] Ibid., 30; Silverman not only asserts that Poe "studied Italian (and probably some Spanish), and with distinction," but also provides the following anecdotal evidence of Poe's early commitment to poetry: "According to a later account, Blaetterman [professor of Ancient Languages] once urged his students to render into English verse a portion of Tasso, not requiring the exercise but recommending it as beneficial. At his next lecture he announced that of the entire class only Edgar had done the translation, and complimented his performance."

Silverman notes "represented the highest student honors" then available at the university.[16] Outside of class, Poe's poetical tendencies, rather than diminishing, grew apace with his developing knowledge of language, and he began to read widely from such archangels of the craft as John Milton, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and, of course, Lord Byron.[17] That these wider readings were matched with personal aspirations is demonstrated once more by the recollection of one of his closer classmates during that time:

> Poe, as has been said, was fond of quoting poetic authors and reading poetic productions of his own, with which his friends were delighted & entertained, then suddenly a change would come over him & he would with a piece of charcoal evince his versatile genius, by sketching upon the walls of his dormitory, whimsical, fanciful, & grotesque figures, with so much artistic skill, as to leave us in doubt whether Poe in future life would be Painter or Poet.[18]

This passage reveals that, far from outgrowing his boyish preoccupation with versification, Poe had not only continued to write poems, but had carried on with his habit of seeking out an audience for them—and, by extension, for himself—by sharing them with his classmates. Moreover, this passage also highlights the fact that Poe's association with poetry was by this time so widespread—his pursuit of it so basic to his being—that the seriousness of the suggestion of any other career could only be indicated by its being placed in association with—proposed as an alternative to—his certain path as a poet. Despite our doubts, then, the university years confirm that, regardless of how

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Jay Hubbell, "Poe and the Southern Literary Tradition," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1960): 155.

[18] Miles George to E. V. Valentine, May 18, 1880, in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*, 69.

scattered his attention would become in later years, at the beginning of his literary career, Poe's most treasured ambition was to assume the mantle of a poet.

Whether in pursuing training at university Poe had hoped that he would be enabled in his later years of eminence to become himself a professor of languages—and, by extension, of poetry—or whether he intended merely to apply the linguistic expertise cultivated in these courses to his poetic voice, we cannot with any certainty ascertain. Whatever his intentions were in this regard, however, they were swiftly derailed by John Allan's refusal in the wake of Poe's first year at college to provide his foster son with the money either to return to college or even to settle the debts he had incurred there during his first year. This act of penury, which effectively terminated any hope Poe held for achieving a higher education or occupying any literary plane that required higher education, precipitated the confrontation towards which the two men's mutual, if hitherto masked, antagonism had been tending for a number of years. Over the winter of 1826-1827, the two men quarreled bitterly, whereupon Poe—then only eighteen years old and with no social connections beyond Allan's circle—departed Allan's home in search of a new home and career.

Upon being cast entirely upon his own devices, Poe's first impulse was to hie to Boston—then, as now, one of the publishing capitals of the States.[19] After arriving in the city of his birth in April 1827, Poe instantly began his search for a printer who would be willing to undertake the first publication of the poetry on which his future now depended. Finding just such a man in the young Bostonian Calvin F. S. Thomas, the two men

[19] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 118.

together produced Poe's first work of verse, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), which Poe, idiosyncratically, chose to publish not under his own name, but under the cognomen "A Bostonian." Appearing in the summer of 1827, *Tamerlane* (1827) ran to a length of forty pages and included ten poems: nine short verses and the lengthier title poem, *Tamerlane,* which Poe placed at the head of the collection.[20] While the precise number of copies included in this edition is not known, given the relative inexperience of the printer and the absolute poverty of the poet, it cannot have been a large number. This volume emphasized the poet's youthfulness—indeed, the preface declared that "the greater part of the Poems which compose this little volume, were written in the year 1821-2, when the author had not completed his fourteenth year,"[21] an assertion most biographers regard as an unwarranted exaggeration on Poe's part. [22] Indeed, throughout the work Poe, consciously or not, projected a poetic persona of melancholic youth that scholars have universally ascribed as arising from the influence of the demigod of self-enshrining poetry, Lord Byron, whose works had dominated the decade.[23]

Two years later, Poe demonstrated his unwavering commitment to his interest in poetry through the publication of the slightly lengthier *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Other*

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[20] For all bibliographical details see Edgar Allan Poe, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (Boston, US: Calvin F. S. Thomas, 1827).

[21] Poe, *Tamerlane,* iii.

[22] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 129; Quinn votes against this early dating while further intimating that such exaggeration was unnecessary to make Poe's age at publication remarkable. Thomas Ollive Mabbott similarly asserts, "in the ordinary sense of the word the composition of almost everything in the book must be placed in the years 1825 to 1827," in "Introduction," in *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1941): xlviii.

[23] That the young Poe operated partially under Byron's sway is indicated by his own later profession to Allan, "I have long given up on *Byron* as a model," in Poe to Allan, May 29, 1829, 20. Poe's statement indicates that he had at some point *taken* Byron as a model—likely during the university days in which he etched charcoal drawings upon his ceiling and luxuriated in a general sense of poethood.

Verses, which he issued from Baltimore, where he was then temporarily living. Despite the passage of time, this volume—to which he, unlike with *Tamerlane*, affixed his name—was not much longer than its predecessor, containing thirteen poems in its seventy pages.[24] As with *Tamerlane and Other Poems,* Poe chose to place his most intimidating poem—this time the lengthy and mystical "Al Aaraaf"—at the beginning of the work, with his shorter efforts trailing away from it. In this volume, Poe's insistence upon youthfulness has tapered, but as in the first, it nevertheless displays a carefully cultivated poetic *persona* that exudes through the various poems in the collection. Indeed, unlike his fellow American authors, whose poetical emphasis remained primarily on external foci, Poe actively directed attention towards *himself* as a figure of poetry. His presence in the volume was not merely that of an author, but that of a *poet,* replete with a personal mythology of loss and a youth spent in imagination-fueled sympathy with nature.

It is fitting, then, that it is in this period that we first hear the sentiments expressed in words from Poe's pen that we have thus far observed so dramatically demonstrated through his behavior—a formal declaration of poethood. This declaration, so long delayed in its delivery, arrived while Poe was soliciting second opinions on his poetry in the interim between the publication of the first two volumes of his verse. Writing to the critic John Neal, whose good opinion he sought during this era, Poe defined himself as "a poet — if deep worship of all beauty can make me *one*."[25] Finally, then, we have Poe's

[24] For all bibliographical details see Edgar Allan Poe, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Other Verses* (Baltimore, US: Hatch & Dunning, 1829).

[25] Poe to John Neal, Oct.-Nov. 1829, in Poe, *Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, 32.

own profession *of* his profession—Poe's declaration of his perception of himself and, correspondingly, his declaration of his forward path. An ambitious youth with a strong sense of his poetry's superiority, Poe firmly believed the dictum he penned to his foster father during this same year when, during a temporary reconciliation, he sought monetary support for his second volume. In this letter, Poe proclaimed, "At my time of life there is much in being *before the eye of the world*—if once noticed I can easily cut out a path to reputation."[26] If his poetry could but catch the eye of the world—if it could but take flight—its genius was such, Poe felt, that it could gain lofty heights; once noticed, his poetic genius would cut its own course towards the stars.

Such a course of action, however, involved a variable over which Poe had no control—the world itself and where it chose to cast its elevating eyes. Here, Poe encountered obstacles in his grand plan to hang aloft the night, for the world, seemingly, was uninterested in welcoming yet another poet to her roster of recognition. Between the two slim volumes of poetry that Poe had so hopefully launched in search of accolade, they garnered less than a dozen notices and even fewer reviews. Of the few reviews that did appear, the tone adopted by their authors was not altogether complimentary. Among the most positive that appeared were those published by the poet Sarah Josepha Hale and by the critic to whom Poe had first addressed himself as a poet, John Neal. Hale, then serving as editor of the *American Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* ceded of the poems, "A part are exceedingly boyish, feeble, and altogether deficient in the common characteristics of poetry; but then we have parts, and parts too of considerable length,

[26] Poe to Allan, May 29 1829, 20.

which remind us of no less a poet than Shelly [sic]."[27] Neal, in his recently-founded magazine *The Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette,* offered a closer reading of Poe's poetry, which he accompanied with the observation, "If E. A. P of Baltimore —— whose lines about *Heaven,* though he professes to regard them as altogether superior to any thing in the whole range of American poetry, save two or three trifles referred to, are, though nonsense, rather exquisite nonsense — would but do himself justice, might make a beautiful and perhaps a magnificent poem."[28] Poe would later declare of Neal's proclamations regarding his writing that they were "the very first words of encouragement [he] ever remember[ed] to have heard" and in his gratitude to the more established author, Poe dedicated the poem "Tamerlane" to Neal when he revised and reprinted it in *Al Aaraaf* (1829).[29] So eager was Poe for praise from the establishment in whose eyes his future rested that even praise that was mixed with accusations of nonsense evoked a strong reaction of thankfulness.

These positive assessments were not the rule, however, and several of the literary establishment's more feisty critics ridiculed Poe's fledgling verse openly. John Hill Hewitt, with whom Poe would later engage in a conflict not only of words but also possibly of fists, launched a venomous barb at Poe's bid for exaltation, opining:

> It is said that poetry is the gift of nature; if so, we will venture to say she hesitated in imparting to the author of *Al Aaraaf &c.* that portion of inspiration essential to the formation of a poet of common order: we love to foster young budding genius, to place modest merit in the beams of the sun of glory, and to befriend the productions of those whom nature intended to be an honour to the literary

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[27] Sarah Josepha Hale, "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, &c. by Edgar A. Poe," *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3 no. 1 (1830): 47.

[28] John Neal, "To Correspondents," *The Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette* 3 (September 1829): 168.

[29] For Poe's statement regarding the impact of Neal's praise, see Poe to Neal, Oct.-Nov. 1829, 32. For the dedication to Neal, see Poe, *Al Aaraaf,* 41.

> character of our country. We have great reason for fearing that *Al Aaraaf* will not add a single radiant to our diadem.[30]

Similarly mocking in its exclusion of Poe from the diadem of American verse was the appraisal offered by N. P. Willis. Willis would later develop a much higher opinion of Poe's work, eventually employing him in 1844 and publishing his famous poem "The Raven" (1845) in his own journal; however, at this early moment, he labeled Poe's poem "Fairy-land" a set of "sickly rhymes," and, in a hope-puncturing passage, described the rapturous pleasure he felt in consigning the more inferior of the works of poetry submitted to his journal—including Poe's "Fairy-land"—to the flame.[31]

Poe, ever quick to take insult, could not have been pleased with these mocking treatments of his offerings in verse; Poe, in search of the heavens, cannot have rejoiced in his calloused consignation to the flames and the roadblock that consignation exercised against his forward movement as a poet. Even more galling to him, however, would have been the fact that these negative treatments of his verse did not arise from a more general attitude of disparagement towards poetry, but rather appeared in magazines that were simultaneously adulating the works of a select handful of poets even while they lambasted his. Indeed, during this time, Poe—an avid reader of magazines—would have

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[30] John Hill Hewitt, "John Hill Hewitt, review in the Baltimore *Minerva and Emerald*," in *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage,* ed. Ian Walker (Cornwall, UK: Routledge, 1997), 72. Poe and Hewitt's rivalry erupted in 1833 when Poe learned that Hewitt had "anonymously" submitted a poem to a writing competition hosted by the newspaper that he then edited (the Baltimore *Saturday Visiter*). Silverman narrates that when Hewitt's poem beat out Poe's "The Coliseum," Poe suspected foul play and the two came to fisticuffs over the matter in the *Visiter's* office, *Edgar A. Poe*, 93.

[31] N. P. Willis, "The Editor's Table," *American Monthly* 1, no. 8 (November 1829): 587. In *Edgar Allan Poe,* 434, Quinn indicates that Poe joined Willis' New York *Evening Mirror* staff in October 1844. In Ibid., 438, Quinn documents that "The Raven" appeared in the *Evening Mirror*'s pages three months later on January 29, 1845.

seen positive reviews accruing to the coterie of lyricists that the nation's reviewers had elected to elevate. He would have seen such puffing as the *New-York Mirror & Ladies' Literary Gazette*'s proclamation that James Gates Percival's latest works "were poetry in the true sense of the word" and that they "entitled the author to a proud place among the sons of song."[32] He would have been aware of the *Boston Statesman*'s assertion—reechoed by magazines across the country—that the sentimentalist Lydia Sigourney's poetry deserved "the applause of the tasteful in elegant literature" and the widespread opinion of Fitz-Greene Halleck's poetry that, "If tenderness and warmth of feeling, playfulness of fancy, imagery, not abundant, but appropriate, and great copiousness, and invariable euphony of language, constitute a claim to excellence, his effusions are excellent."[33] More significantly, Poe would have discerned the basis on which this celestial coterie of well-educated New England songsters were praised, critical codes that were revealed by the *New York Mirror & Ladies' Literary Gazette*'s affording William Cullen Bryant's poems praise for the "tone of *lofty moral sentiment* [that] pervades every piece in the collection, elevating the mind with *pure thoughts* and expansive images"[34] and the exaltation of Sigourney's poetry with the plea that it "is of the purest character. It bears the traces of a *pious* mind in every *sentiment*."[35] Not only was Poe's verse being

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[32] "James G. Percival," *New-York Mirror & Ladies' Literary Gazette* 5, no. 29 (January 1828): 288.

[33] While the *Boston Statesman'*s piece on Sigourney is no longer accessible, a reprinting may be found in "Poems by the Author of Moral Pieces," *Mrs. A. S. Colvin's Weekly Messenger* 2, no. 2 (September 1, 1827): 27. For a biography and this analysis of Fitz-Greene Halleck, see "Fitz-Greene Halleck," *New-York Mirror & Ladies' Literary Gazette* 5, no. 26 (January 26, 1828): 227.

[34] "William Cullen Bryant," *Philadelphia Album & Ladies' Literary Gazette* 2, no. 29 (February 8, 1827): 307.

[35] "Poems by the Author," 27.

overlooked and rejected in favor of the effusions of a favored few, but the critical terms on which his devaluation was being effected made it unlikely that his poetry would ever be ranked at the summit of this establishment's estimation.

All this Poe observed as he sought to establish his poethood between 1827 and 1831. During these years, Poe, no longer supported by Allan, had enlisted first in the military and subsequently at West Point to support himself financially until his genius would be recognized and his future as a man of letters confirmed. While he might easily have sought to earn his keep through an occupation more closely related to his interest in words, Poe instead throughout this period steadfastly resisted applying his pen to its more plebian potential pursuits; his view of himself as a crafter of words remained focused on his skills as a poet and did not extend to the freelancing of his voice to less than poetic ends. His pen was for the penning of *poetry*; he hoped to become a heralded genius through its usage, but as he waited for it to be accepted to the ranks of America's lyricists, he looked to the ranks of America's military, not her magazines, for the funds to support him until he achieved that breakthrough. Poe was, as yet, unwaveringly a poet.[36]

However, as we have noted, by the beginning of the year 1831, Poe determined to quit West Point. He had embarked on his military career with the belief that, while in training, he would have time to write poetry—that being a soldier would facilitate his

[36] As Philip Beidler highlights in "Soldier Poe," *The Midwest Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2012): 331, Poe's selection of the career of soldier was, itself a romantic gesture linked to his pursuit of the poet-persona: "In significant literary-cultural aspects of his choice of a military life, Poe, by assuming the pen and the pose of the warrior, was actually paying homage to well-established conventions of military manhood, embodied in Renaissance concepts of the soldier-courtier—Sir Philip Sidney, for instance, or in a closer New World analogue, Sir Walter Raleigh… to this might be added the image of the hot-blooded young romantic aristocrat-adventurer, the dandy, with Lord Byron his most immediate literary-cultural model."

construction of himself into a romantic poet-figure.[37] In reality, Poe found less time to write poetry than he had hoped and the time he did spend writing was spent composing satirical verses for his fellow soldiers. More significantly, he had enlisted at West Point as the heir presumptive to the Allan estate, a status that, if it meant little to West Point, clearly figured largely into Poe's perception of his future and of himself. Allan's hasty marriage, therefore, not only acted as a stressor to their relationship, but further threw Poe's conception of his future into such a state of uncertainty that he was forced to grapple with the terms of that future—to reassess his understanding of his career both as a soldier and, more essentially, as a poet.

In evaluating the events of the previous four years, Poe cannot have avoided the conclusion that the track towards poethood upon which he had thus far bent his energies had not succeeded. His strategies for engaging the eyes of the world upon his genius had reaped little notice and less praise; worse, he had seen his verse denigrated by critics who could not themselves boast so highly developed a sense of poetry as that he himself possessed. More essentially, Poe's engagement with the establishment over the previous four years had illustrated the fact that both the critical milieu of that establishment—its preference for verses of a sentimental or pious nature—and its penchant for excluding from circulation those authors not among the handful of lyricists it selected for exaltation made his success within its current configuration on his current credentials unlikely. If he was ever to achieve the title of lyricist then, Poe must modify the strategies through

[37] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 174.

which he attempted to claim that mantle—must reposition himself in such a way as to enhance his participation within and appeal to that establishment. The terms of his pursuit of poethood *must change.*

Immediately, Poe set about in pursuit of this change. His first step was to depart from West Point, whose former attractions now no longer served the new track on which he was resolved to embark. More importantly, as he prepared for this external shift in career, Poe began soliciting pledges from his fellow cadets for a literary project—a new volume of verses that he intended to release upon his departure from West Point. The timing of this fundraiser proves that Poe formulated *Poems* (1831) at the exact moment when he was formulating this transition in his career; the volume, accordingly, is a reflection upon, and outworking of Poe's intention to pivot *into* that new career.[38] At this moment, as he arrives in Baltimore intent upon metamorphosizing himself, Poe releases *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (1831).

Poems by Edgar A. Poe (1831), much like Poe's previous volumes, was relatively short, containing eleven verses spread across one hundred twenty-four widely spaced pages.[39] Progressing past this superficial similarity, however, numerous differences begin to emerge between *Poems* (1831) and its predecessors. The most blatant of these changes leaps out at us from the title, for whereas the first collection had refused Poe's name altogether and the second had allowed it grudgingly on its spine, here Poe's name

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[38] One of the more curious facts about this fundraiser is the fact that the cadets believed that Poe intended to produce a collection of light verse; they were ignorant of the fact that Poe intended to use this volume as a renewed bid to the literary world. For the cadets' reactions to *Poems* (1831), see Kevin J. Hayes, "Poetry in Manuscript and Print," in *Poe and the Printed Word* (New York, US: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 26-27.

[39] For all bibliographical details see Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (New York, NY: Elam Bliss, 1831).

dominates the title of the collection itself. This modification further indicates a shift in emphasis from the lengthier works, “Al Aaraaf” and “Tamerlane,” which were given precedence in the first two collections, but which here are removed from the spotlight. This shift in prioritization reappears in the body of the work itself, in which the lengthy poems have been extracted from their placement at the beginning of the volume and are instead placed at the conclusion of the book; now, the volume opens with the newest of Poe’s lyrical fugitive verse rather than with the verse most designed to overawe with complexity.

More notable even than these poetic maneuverings, however, is the fact that in this, his third volume of poetry, Poe elected to begin that volume not with poetry, but with a work of prose—a 2,700-word essay titled simply “Letter to Mr. ——.” As the title implies, this work is a letter of sorts—that is, Poe *frames* it as a letter to an unnamed but apparently familiar acquaintance. As we begin our reading of that letter, however, we cannot help but feel that this acquaintance must be a very great lover of poetry indeed to warrant the commission of such a letter, and as we progress through its body, we realize that this is no letter at all, but rather a critical essay disguised as a piece of personal correspondence. Given our knowledge of Poe’s later voluminous outpouring of criticism, the presence of his critical voice here seems insignificant *until* we remember that this is the first time that Poe has aired that voice publicly—that hitherto he has avoided publishing prose and that, while he had exhibited his poetry in the first two collections, he had never tasked himself with explicitly voicing either the critical or aesthetic theories that lay behind his poems. This, then, is Poe’s debut in the rabid world of literary criticism.

Given Poe's unapologetic preference for poetry, the knowledgeable reader might easily assume that, in embarking on his earliest critical essay, Poe will angle directly towards poetry and expend his energies in its explication. Indeed, the Poe of 1827 or 1829 very likely would have effected just such a course; but the Poe of *Poems* (1831) instead adopts a more circumspect approach. A careful reading of the essay reveals that, while Poe does eventually arrive at the question of his own notion of poetry, he does so by means of a more deliberate tripartite or three-act discussion of critical themes. As Poe's selection of these themes was undoubtedly motivated by his perception of the significant features of the literary establishment from which he had experienced such resistance over the previous four years, their nature becomes to us, as we prepare to study them, a matter of not only critical but also intensely biographical curiosity.

In the first of the three sections of his essay, Poe commences his remarks by addressing himself to the basic critical question of literary "judgment" or "opinion"—the attitudes the individual reader develops towards the literature he encounters. Such critical opinions, Poe asserts, are held not only by those who *read*, but also by those who *do not read* the literature about which they propose to have an opinion. Critical judgment, then, cannot altogether be regarded as arising from the minds that hold it; or, as Poe himself phrases it, "The opinion is the world's, truly, but it may be called theirs as a man would call a book his, having bought it; he did not write the book, but it is his; they did not originate the opinion, but it is theirs."[40] The opinions of the "individual," Poe maintains, are no more his own than are the ideas of the books that are his "own" because he "owns"

[40] Poe, *Poems,* 14-15.

them—literary judgement is, for the common man, a *mass-produced* affair that has very little to do, indeed, with critical judgment and everything to do with wishing to *appear* to have critical judgment. Critical judgment, Poe avers, has been *outsourced*. Having thus disserved the opinions of "the world" from the "world" that is supposed to have generated them, Poe then assiduously traces the dissemination of those opinions to the "world" that really produced them. In this investigation, he moves from the class of least critical judgement, the fool, who adopts his opinion from his neighbor, to the neighbor, whose opinion "has, in like manner, been adopted from one above *him*, and so, ascendingly, to a few gifted individuals, who kneel around the summit, beholding, face to face, the master spirit who stands upon the pinnacle."[41] Here, Poe employs religious language to describe what he believes to be the fundamental truth of American literary judgment—that it arises from an external critical source that has developed into an oligarchic class of tastemakers.

None can doubt that in delineating the operations of this structure, Poe was, in fact, describing the workings of the very literary establishment whose mass-adoption and dispersal of critical judgment had so negatively impacted the success of his own verse over the previous few years. Indeed, Poe himself identifies this establishment when he attests to its exclusionary nature, which he regards as one of its primary functions, remarking to "Mr. ——," "[y]ou are aware of the great barrier in the path of an American writer. He is read, if at all, in preference to the combined and established wit of the world. I say established; for it is with literature as with law or empire—an established

[41] Ibid., 15.

name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession."[42] This observation demonstrates that, as he struggled along the outer borders of the literary establishment, in the preceding years, Poe had been engaged not in cowering before that establishment's censure, but rather in closely studying that establishment's inner workings. He had been involved in the literary circus for long enough to trace the patterns in its behaviors towards authors—to note the preference that was demonstrated towards those with "estate"—higher education, monetary independence, and luminary connections—as well as to note the additional advantages that accrued to and solidified the "estates" of these preferred authors as they and their eulogizers devised a system of mutually beneficial but critically corrupt puffing. Having fallen among the ranks of those without "estate," Poe could personally attest to the harmful impact this system had not only (though certainly) upon himself, but also upon the common readers and uncommon authors subsumed under its auspices. Such a system, in distributing honor on the basis of party politics, served as a serious threat not merely to Poe, but also to America's pursuit of excellence in literature.

After establishing that the critical establishment then presiding over America consisted of a syndicate of high priests who administered (un)critical judgment to the masses, Poe subtly shifts from this descriptive assessment into a prescriptive passage. Returning to the theme he had briefly referenced at the head of the essay—whether poets or non-poets perform more astute analyses of poetry—he builds upon his preference of the poet to opine in contradiction to the idea that "no poet can form a correct estimate of his own writings" that, on the contrary, "a poet, who is indeed a poet, could not, I think,

[42] Ibid., 16.

fail of making a just critique."[43] As forming a just estimate of own's one writings is more difficult than forming a just criticism of another's, the implication of Poe's statement is clear; the poet—as apt judge of his *own* writings—must necessarily be a discerning judge of *others'* writings. The juxtaposition of this discussion with the previous is so suggestive as to demand their conflation into a single tenet, the proposal of which, indeed, is fundamental to Poe's purpose here: if a hierarchy is to exist within criticism, there is no mind, Poe proposes, more fitted for the position of master critic—high priest of the establishment—than the figure of the superior poet-critic. Only such a figure as the impartial poet-critic could be relied upon to disperse criticism of literature that is not only intelligent and insightful, but—perhaps more importantly still—impartial.

Having thus delivered an unequivocal judgement of the literary establishment as a critical machine—as a taste-making, poet-crowning industry—and proposed the figure of the poet-critic as the only fitting high priest over such a scene, Poe now shifts into the second of his three acts—an exposition of his own opinion of the poets that have been exalted by that machine. Whereas in the previous section Poe had contented himself with a rather tame reference to the work of Shakespeare, in this section he forcibly demonstrates his familiarity with major critical figures, invoking not only the poets John Milton, Samuel Johnson, Sophocles, and James MacPherson but also the philosophers Aristotle and Francis Bacon, as well as the Metaphysical school of poets, all in the course of a mere seventeen hundred words. These, however, are mere references—mere

[43] Ibid., 16-17.

flourishes, mere displays of erudition—that Poe flamboyantly emits while in pursuit of his real subject: the Western world's reigning literary movement, British Romanticism.

While the selection of British Romanticism as a subject in his opening foray into the world of criticism may seem an uninspired choice to modern readers, who have become habituated to its features, we must judge Poe's judgment in selecting his theme on the same basis that Poe himself selected it—its currency in American literary discourse. Indeed, while the works of a few emerging American authors were a major focus in contemporary American criticism, analyses of their works often spent as much space discussing the most recent of Britain's literary movements, British Romanticism, in their attempts to delineate and assess the quality of American writing. Thus, the most prized of America's early poets, William Cullen Bryant, was described as "the American Wordsworth," while America's early fictionists were likewise paired with such British authors as the romantic novelist Sir Walter Scott.[44] In addition to appraising the works of others through the veil of British Romanticism, American critics and authors of poetry alike often carved out definitions of their own aesthetic theories by contrasting and comparing them with various of the Romantic authors. Thus, in a review of Sir Philip Sidney's *A Defence of Poetry* the following year, Poe's future critical target, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would spend a vast majority of his space discussing not Elizabethan, but American and British Romantic poetry, ultimately asserting:

> No writer has done half so much to corrupt the literary taste as well as the moral principle of our country, as the author of *Childe Harold* [i.e., Lord Byron]…

[44] F. M. Darnall, "The Americanism of Edgar Allan Poe," *The English Journal* 16, no. 3 (March 1927): 189. In this early examination of Poe's position within American literature, Darnall remarks that "Poe's contemporaries were all likened to English writers" (189); James Fenimore Cooper was the "American Scott," Washington Irving the "American Addison," and William Cullen Bryant the "American Wordsworth."

> Happily, this noxious influence has been in some measured checked and counteracted by the writings of Wordsworth, whose pure and gentle philosophy has been gradually gaining the ascendency over the bold and visionary speculations of an unhealthy imagination.[45]

As the examples of Bryant and Longfellow have demonstrated, the American literary scene harbored a general preference for the more "pure" and "gentle" poetry of Wordsworth. Given this alliance, it can come as little surprise to us to learn that Poe, in his entry into the "Lake School" debate, promptly declared himself against the venerated bard and the uninspired style of verse he represented.

Indeed, in this, the icon-assessing segment of his essay, Poe lambasts the much-worshiped Wordsworth by first condemning him on the distinctly Byronic principle that he was "to blame in wearing away his youth in contemplation with the end of poetizing in his manhood" before then shifting into a more concrete attack on his verse.[46] Calling upon his own recent experience of having his less developed poems carved up for ridicule, Poe selects equally undistinguished passages from Wordsworth's canon for inspection, which he then dispatches in quick measure.[47] In addition to undermining Wordsworth's claim to greatness, this section achieves the more subtle effect of demonstrating that Poe's is not the only poetry on the market that can be mocked and that, indeed, the works of even the "greatest" may appear to disadvantage when they are

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[45] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Review of *The Defence of Poesy.* By Sir Philip Sidney," *The North American Review* 34 (1832): 76.

[46] Poe, *Poems,* 23.

[47] Poe quotes two particularly unimpressive passages to this end, the latter of which closes with the following unfortunate lines: "And looking o'er the hedge, be — fore me I espied / A snow-white mountain lamb with a — maiden at its side, / No other sheep were near, the lamb was all alone, / And by a slender cord was — tether 'd to a stone," Ibid., 25. In response to these puerile sentiments, Poe quips, "Now we have no doubt this is all true; we *will* believe it, indeed we will, Mr. W. Is it sympathy for the sheep you wish to excite? I love a sheep from the bottom of my heart," Ibid., 26.

approached with merciless eyes. As if to emphasize the deflating effect of a well-calculated sneer, Poe rounds off his treatment of Wordsworth with the jab, "Yet let not Mr. W. despair; he has given immortality to a wagon, and the bee Sophocles has transmitted to eternity a sore toe, and dignified a tragedy with a chorus of turkeys."[48] Even the most elevated lyricists, Poe is intimating, write quite terrible poetry, poetry that is far more ridiculous than the best of the gentle lines Poe's reader is poised to encounter as they continue perusing his volume.

Before releasing his reader to that poetry, however, Poe must perform the final movement of his tripartite campaign. Thus far he has effectively outlined his view of the country's critical establishment and has offered an analysis of several of the poets that that establishment has been pleased to elevate. All that remained to complete the critical task he has set for himself was to set forth his *own* aesthetic theory—to propound his own definition of poetry. As the first definition of poetry that Poe had ever offered to the public, this definition is worth quoting in its entirety:

> A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having for its object an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *in*definite sensations, to which end music is an *essential*, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without the idea is simply music; the idea without the music is prose from its very definitiveness.[49]

Poe scholars have long acknowledged that this definition of poetry is largely indebted to that advanced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge,[50] whom Poe had praised just paragraphs

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[48] Ibid., 26-27.

[49] Ibid., 28-29.

[50] In his gargantuan *Biographia Literaria* (1827), Coleridge had offered the following definition of poetry: "A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of

earlier, and therefore is not altogether original.[51] As always, however, what is most interesting in Poe's pickpocketing of his fellow writers is the manner in which he *adapts* the material he borrows—the unique twist he places upon the (un)original material. In the case of this definition, while its references to science and pleasure are unoriginal, his emphasis that this pleasure should be an *indefinite* rather than a *definite* pleasure is his own. More importantly, Poe's theorizations regarding this indefinite pleasure's basis in the aural qualities of verse and his corresponding emphasis on the musicality of poetry is a wholly original stance. In later years, Poe would develop these original elements into a much more mature aesthetic network that was far more meritorious than this simple definition; however, as an introductory tilt on the field of aesthetics, even this fledgling definition was perfectly adequate to ensure Poe's entry into the fray.

That definition issued, the essay tapers off abruptly, ending with a quotation from Samuel Butler regarding Indian princes, thieves, and gallows. Even this inglorious conclusion, however, cannot detract from our sensation, as we end the piece, of the sophistication of Poe's first efforts in the critical vein. Indeed, when we recall that its author was a twenty-two-year-old youth yet at the beginning of his literary career, we must marvel at the mastery Poe shows throughout and particularly at his skill in not only

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science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, both truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole* as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part.*" See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria: or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions," in *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge* ed. Donald A. Stauffer (New York, NY: Random House, 1951) 267.

[51] Marvin Laser, "The Growth and Structure of Poe's Concept of Beauty," *ELH* 15, no. 1 (March 1948): 70. Regarding Poe's early aesthetic reliance on Coleridge, Laser reflects, "Poe's aesthetic doctrine, in its earliest form at least, has long been known to be deeply indebted to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Studies by Woodberry, Campbell, and Stovall argue convincingly the domination of Coleridge's thought over Poe's early poetic and aesthetic ideas."

proposing but also satisfactorily addressing his broad range of critical themes. Moreover, the piece is remarkable not only for the *breadth* of its criticism, but also for the *tone* of that criticism, which, though conversational, is curiously authoritative. This impression leaps out most strongly at us in Poe's dealings with his fellow poets, as when he declares of the so-called "Lake School" that "some years ago I might have been induced, by an occasion like the present, to attempt a formal refutation of their doctrine; at present it would be a work of supererogation."[52] In this single sentence, we see Poe employing a set of sophisticated rhetorical strategies to bolster his claims as a critic. The most noticeable of these is his sly reference to a period "some years ago," a time at which, he implies, he was already engaged in acts of criticism. When he speaks of "some years ago," Poe is, students of his biography know, referring to his teenaged years; however, his calculated employment of the phrase here, rather than accentuating his youth, instead cloaks him with a sense of venerability—instead endows him with a background in criticism that he does not in fact possess. Similarly, by refusing to engage extensively with the school, Poe suggests not that he is *incapable* of such a criticism, but rather that he is *above* such a criticism and, by extension, above the poets whose work he is above criticizing. Through this single sentence, which we have taken as an example of Poe's larger tone, we thus see that throughout his musings Poe deliberately channeled a highly authoritative aura that impresses upon the reader that we are reading the works of a seasoned, rather than a novice critic; a fêted, rather than a stripling poet. Because we of the twenty-first century know who Poe is poised to become—know that he is poised to become one of America's

[52] Poe, *Poems,* 18.

greatest critics and most celebrated poets—it is easy to read these maneuverings as simply additional instances of Poe's wider skills as a critic; however, when we remember that this is the work of a young man publishing only his third book of verse—neither of the previous having been particularly successful—we must admire Poe's audacious act of positioning in this preface.

Indeed, shifting from a discussion of the specific techniques Poe employed within "Letter to Mr. ——" and into a discussion of the positioning effect of the piece as a broader whole, we arrive at the fact that the tenor of this discussion will have already made quite clear—that *Poems* (1831) was not merely pivotal in Poe's career when viewed in retrospect, but that Poe himself *actively made it so;* that Poe himself *intentionally designed* the volume to act as a pivot to enact a carefully calculated and desperately needed repositioning of his relationship to the literary establishment. Poe, having assessed the exclusionary nature and inferior critical bases of the current literary establishment, had realized that he could not realistically rely upon being hailed as a genius in the current configuration and that he must therefore adapt his strategies if he were ever to realize his ambition of achieving distinction as a poet. As his discussion of the mass-produced and inherited nature of literary opinion in America demonstrates, Poe knew that the only means by which he could develop a readership was by developing a *taste* for the type of poetry he wished to produce by infiltrating the system that dictated the tastes of American readers: the literary establishment and its criticism-generating machinery. Other careers might have allowed him to employ his linguistic skills and generate a fixed income, but only by entering into the world of America's literary journals would Poe be enabled not only to continue striving to place himself before the

eyes of the world, but also to alter the terms of the critical world and therefore alter the critical reception of his poetry. By creating an essay in which he not only provided a basic explication of his own critical theory and an incisive analysis of the critical machinery itself, but also displayed erudition while engaging with the figures and debates then most treasured in the field, Poe was producing a portfolio of sorts—an application or bid into the world of journalistic criticism. In expanding his oeuvre, Poe was laying the foundation of his "estate in tenure"—was positioning himself to enter into and impact the configuration of the establishment from which he had hitherto sought recognition from without; he was proposing himself to perform the role of the poet-critic whose superior judgment he had championed in his essay. Poe was, in essence, pivoting onto the criticism- and magazine-focused track along which the entirety of his remaining career would progress.

Indeed, while we have focused our analysis of the pivoting role of *Poems* (1831) on the manner in which it redirected Poe's career *from* its previous track, we might just as easily look to the piece for the foreshadowing it offers regarding—the seeds it contains of—the major themes of the new track *onto which* it pivoted Poe. We have already noted that Poe's definition of poetry, though simplistic here, nevertheless remained the core of all his future hypothesizing regarding the function and nature of poetry.[53] Additionally, we see Poe, even at this early moment, chastising what he terms a "heresy" amongst

[53] Portions of this definition reemerge throughout his theorizations, most noticeably in "'Review of Ballads and Other Poems.' By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 683-696; "Review of *Ballads and Other Poems.* By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," in *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 636-43; and "The Poetic Principle," in Poe, *Selected Writings*, 698-704.)

poets—attempts to weight poetry down with too-great attention to questions of truth as represented in the "metaphysical" turn of the Lake School—a position that Poe would later develop into a main theme in his criticism under the title "The Heresy of the Didactic."[54] More noticeably, in this essay we have seen Poe developing in his mocking treatment of Wordsworth the tone of the jibing satirist—the caustic quizzer—that he would adopt to such notoriety later in his career, earning himself the reputation of being a "Tomahawk" reviewer.[55] Perhaps most relevant to our analysis of *Poems'* (1831) documentation and prefigurement of Poe's ongoing repositioning towards the literary establishment, however, is the symbolic portrait of the emotions this repositioning evoked that Poe provides not in the letter which we have now explicated at such length, but in one of the new poems he penned specially for the collection—"Israfel."

The figure of Israfel, better known as the "angel of music" in the Muslim religion, was, much like Orpheus of Greek myth, regarded within his tradition as the highest of the lyricists in that tradition.[56] Penning a poem to or about such a figure of reigning lyricism was, by the nineteenth century, a well-established trope among poets, and poets were eager to link their names to those of celestial superiority by expressing their sensation of aspiration, allegiance, or self-deprecation towards that figure. When reading such lines

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[54] Poe, "The Poetic Principle," 701. The Heresy of the Didactic linked directly to Poe's later division of mental functions into concerns with truth, beauty, and duty, the second of which he designated as the sole province of poetry. The Heresy of the Didactic was a heresy to him because it sought to infuse notions of truth and duty into poetry, which he held should concern itself solely with the beautiful.

[55] Paul Hurh, "Poe the Critic: The Aesthetics of the "Tomahawk" Review," in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe,* 447.

[56] "Israfel," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,* ed. Elizabeth Knowles (New York, US: Oxford University Press, 2000): 526. According to this source, Israfel is "in Muslim tradition, the angel of music who will sound the trumpet on the Day of Judgment."

from Poe's "Israfel" as "To thee the laurels belong / Best bard, – because the wisest" (lines 27-28), we might easily assume that Poe is joining this tradition of self-abasement by prostrating himself before the mighty Israfel, the angel in the sky.[57] However, Poe brings a powerful reversal to this tradition in the last lines of his heavens-peering poem, a reversal that reflects his emotions towards the realities of literary celebrity at this pivotal moment in his career:

> Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
> Is a world of sweets and sours;
> Our flowers are merely – flowers,
> And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
> is the sunshine of ours.
>
> If I could dwell
> Where Israfel
> Hath dwelt, and he where I,
> He might not sing so wildly well
> A mortal melody,
> While a bolder note than this might swell
> From my lyre within the sky.[58]

Rather than deferring to Israfel as God's perfect lyricist in accordance with the tropes of the genre, Poe instead treats the tale with a bold streak of independence that reframes the narrative of angelic song altogether. Rather than debasing himself and proclaiming the overarching superiority of the angel, Poe, so recently handed rejection by America's literary gatekeepers, instead boldly asserts that had he but half the salubrious circumstances—had Israfel been born to a life of woe such as that which Poe had known—had Israfel been born an outsider to the heavenly configuration and had Edgar

[57] Edgar Allan Poe, "Israfel," in *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Poems*, ed. by Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Chicago, US: University of Illinois Press, 2000): 174.

[58] Poe, "Israfel," 174, lines 40-51.

half the worship, half the *estate* of Israfel—the gap between their verses would have been even wider, with Poe's verses proving the more angelic of the two.

Given that much of Poe's later career rested upon his feuds with the literary establishment's most unduly eulogized lyricists, it takes little imagination to recognize that Poe here coopted the religious figure of Israfel to give voice to what was, in fact, a deeply personal recognition of the role of station in determining the earthly as well as the angelic ranks of lyricists; the fact that social privilege such as he had not been granted had the effect of "sweetening" notes, which, though inferior themselves, were perceived as melodious due to the rarefied air in which they sounded. Essentially, Poe proposes in this poem the unalterable conviction that his brushes with the literary establishment had bred in him—that "lesser" figures could sound their lyres with a sublimity not only equal to but *superior to* than their "greaters" had they but half the positional advantage of the angels of the scene. As with the themes we have previously noted in "Letter to Mr. ——," this emotion, rather than abating as Poe set forth upon his new course, would instead resound and compound throughout that career, motivating—among other frays—Poe's series of attacks on the Harvard poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, which Poe himself styled the "Little Longfellow War." However, while this emotion would later sprout thorns, here the shoots are soft and green; while in later years those emotions would develop into something like bitterness—a bitterness that caused Poe, in some instances, to act with less than honor—here they were yet as pure as the notes of the angel whose song he yearned to rival. Here, there is a yearning akin to wistfulness that rouses our pity for the twenty-two-year-old poet, twice-orphaned and seeking to prove the genius that subsequent decades have proven to be inestimable to the gatekeepers of an aesthetically

inferior but aristocratically exclusive literary society. Indeed, in surveying "Israfel" in light of our study, we cannot help but be struck by the deep note of longing that it strikes; its demonstration of the fact that, although Poe is eagerly casting himself onto a new track through which to prove his worth, Poe wishes that that track was unnecessary—wishes that he might instead simply be allowed to play his lyre amongst the stars.

We began our study of Poe, *Poems* (1831), and the literary establishment's angelic order by noting that Poe's mercurial career has been a cause of bemusement for a number decades—that its contours have represented a challenge as mystifying as any of his cryptograms to the critics who have since sought to decipher it. However, as our subsequent study of Poe's early endeavours has demonstrated, the key to that cipher lay quite literally within the first pages of that career—lay within Poe's early declaration of poethood and in the few lines with which he, dramatically referring to himself in the third person, prefaced his very first work of poetry: "He [Poe, the royal he] will not say that he is indifferent as to the success of these Poems — it might stimulate him to other attempts — but he can safely assert that *failure will not at all influence him in a resolution already adopted*. This is challenging criticism — let it be so."[59] The young Poe, bred on Byron and notions of youthful genius, had *resolved* to be a poet—the criticism of the world, he assures that world, cannot avert this resolution. Upon immediately encountering failure in this, his initial pursuit of poethood, Poe, far from altering his intentions towards poetry, instead assessed the establishment whose terms had barred his entrance and created a volume, *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (1831), designed to pivot himself onto a track that,

[59] Poe, *Tamerlane,* iv; emphasis mine.

although it presented a different face, nevertheless cohered around the same goal—the attainment of the title of poet.

Indeed, the essential truth of Poe's life is that his early aspiration to poethood never faded—that throughout his pursuit of myriad genres and occupations, he was seeking for a position that would either place him before the eyes of the world or enable him to place himself before their eyes. He undertook each new title—essayist, editor, critic, fictionist, *tastemaker*—with the steadfast belief that these titles would enhance his "estate"; would enable him to impact the critical reception of his poetry by altering the taste of American readers through his efforts in various roles. Poe could not have foreseen that as the years progressed the very tools that he had taken up to further his poethood would interfere with his ability to continue his output as a poet, that after releasing *Poems* (1831) he would not release another book of poetry for *fourteen years*, and that his output during the remaining eighteen years of his career would cloud the legacy that descended to posterity, blending the title of poet with those of genre-founder and critic. What he did know as he pivoted onto this new course was that he was determined to earn that title of poet—to wrest the laurel crown from the clutching hands of the literary establishment—in his pursuit not merely of critical acclaim but of critical *excellence* with his verse—in his pursuit not merely of the praise of his contemporaries, but the worship of the ages—in his determination to transcend the temporal trappings of beauty and achieve, through his pen, the supernal sublimity only sounded forth from a Lyre within the Sky.

Chapter Two — A Question of Criticism: Poe's Authorial Carvings

The period immediately following Poe's release of *Poems* (1831) and corresponding relocation to Baltimore are perhaps the least well-documented of Poe's entire life. While the feud betwixt Poe and his foster father, John Allan, yielded little but personal grief for either, the correspondence through which they carried on that feud documents valuable information regarding Poe's movements, behaviors, and developing thought across the span of his university and army years. In the wake of his self-eviction from West Point and the decline of his contact with Allan, our records suffer a similar decline. Poe biographer Kenneth Silverman to remark that "[u]ntil the beginning of 1835, no more material survives for reconstructing how he lived than seven letters by him and shreds of information from others."[1] Those few records that do survive, however, provide us with the information necessary to paint a fairly thorough picture of Poe's participation in magazine culture beginning in the early 1830s and stretching through his last editorial stint in 1845. A survey of these records—particularly his critical carvings from this era—sheds light on his early attempts to build literary estate through his critical crusade to reform the American literary establishment; this analysis further illustrates how that criticism became a vehicle through which Poe channeled his frustrations with the resistance he received to his crusade.

After arranging for the publication of *Poems* (1831) in New York City, Poe relocated to his paternal hometown, the city of Baltimore. Here, he took up residence in the home of his grandmother, Elizabeth Poe, who employed her late military husband's

[1] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 85.

pension to support not only Poe but also his brother and multiple extended family members.[2] Immersed in this new family atmosphere, Poe began to take steps towards his new strategy for establishing literary reputation, and, over the next few years, he applied to multiple editorial positions in search of a seat from which he might begin to leverage some critical agency within the literary establishment.[3] Given his lack of editorial experience, it is unsurprising that none of these bids was successful and that Poe found himself living from month to month while scrambling to discover outlets through which he might employ his pen to advance his career.

While thus expanding his literary net, Poe turned to multiple genres that he had hitherto left unhazarded, but now pursued avidly. Among these was the genre for which he now possesses such fame—the short story.[4] Poe's reasons for shifting to the short story are likely numerous; however, a glance at the earliest of his short stories illustrates that, in venturing from the realm of Orpheus, Poe nevertheless maintained Orphean ends in mind. Indeed, the tone of Poe's early stories[5]—as well as the account Poe himself gave of his tone in those stories—reveals that Poe had detected the short story's greater

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[2] Scott Peeples, "A Life in Print: 1831-1849," in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe,* 34.

[3] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 85-86.

[4] Whalen, *Poe and the Masses*, 9; according to Whalen, "Responding to the greater demand for prose "articles," [Poe's] literary output in this period shifted dramatically from poems to tales."

[5] Analyses of these early stories, including "The Duc de L'Omelette," "Loss of Breath," "Bon-Bon," "Lionizing," etc., have long noted the outré nature of their tone. In *Edgar Allan Poe,* 193, Quinn opines that they "have a distinct flavor, not only of irony, but even of burlesque." Silverman describes them as revolving around "bizarre plots" and featuring "a cascade of exotic words and absurd names, exclamations and italics" in *Edgar A. Poe*, 89. These stories have a gaudiness, a bizarre quality to them that is difficult to reconcile with the incredibly nuanced, atmospheric tone Poe cultivated in his later, more popular works.

potential for cultivating an audience at that point in his career and that he intended to employ the genre to that end. This framing is reinforced by Poe's own declaration regarding his intentions with the short story, which he issued while discussing his thematic choices in the short story "Berenice":

> The history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which have attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature—to Berenice*…. I say similar in *nature*. You ask me in what does this nature consist? In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical.… To be appreciated you must be *read*, and these things are invariably sought after with avidity.[6]

Clearly, Poe's original intention in writing short stories was not aesthetic in the sense that we, as critical readers of literature, would accept. Indeed, Poe's expressed intentions here might be interpreted as clashing with his aesthetic professions in "Letter to Mr. ——," did we not recognize that, in Poe's early thought, the short story existed more as a tool towards art than as an art itself. Although he would later develop more refined narrative theories, Poe approached the genre from a remarkably pragmatic perspective at this point in his career. His purpose in writing within the genre was to *be read*, or—to use his earlier phrasing—to be *before the eye of the world*. Poe's goal was to achieve a degree of *popularity* through these stories, so that, having succeeded finally in affixing the eye of the world on his pen, he could return to the creation of poetry. Producing bizarre, noise-generating short stories, then, was one facet of how Poe proposed to build his literary estate.[7]

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[6] Poe to Thomas W. White, Baltimore, April 30, 1835, in Poe, *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe Vol. I*, 57-58.

[7] It was, of course, inevitable for an author of Poe's caliber to interact with a new genre for any length of time without developing a critical theory of or set of aesthetic principles regarding that genre. By 1840, Poe's lengthy exposure to and employment of the short story had

In this, his plan was successful. Even while his applications for editorial positions were being rejected, Poe's short stories began to generate interest, and he managed to place a dozen or so of them in magazines during the early 1830s.[8] Poe incited further interest in his writing by submitting work to multiple writing competitions. The first of these, a short story competition hosted by the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*, he did not win; however, the stories he submitted so fascinated the judges that they elected to print all five of them in the pages of the *Courier* over the following year.[9] Exactly two years later, Poe submitted a collection of short stories, which he titled "The Tales of the Folio Club," to a competition hosted by the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter.* The intervening years had clearly served to improve Poe's skill, for on this occasion the judges not only unanimously selected his story "MS. Found in a Bottle" as the recipient of the $50 first place prize, but also indicated that they found the entire set of stories he had submitted to be of a much higher quality than the other entries. In rendering their decision, they directly remarked on "the singular force and beauty of those offered by 'The Tales of the Folio Club.'"[10] The eye of the world was slowly but certainly turning to rest on Poe.

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led him to theorize regarding the genre's aesthetic ends, which he articulated most eloquently in two of his reviews: "Review of 'Night and Morning.' A Novel. By the author of Pelham, Rienzi, Eugene Aram &c. 2 vols. Re-published by Harper & Brothers, New York," *Graham's Magazine* 18, no. 4 (April 1841): 199-202 and Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of *Twice-Told Tales. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. Two Volumes. Boston: James Munroe and Co*," *Graham's Magazine* 20, no. 5 (May 1842): 298-300.

[8] For a detailed description of these stories and Poe's placement of them, see "Chapter IX: Baltimore—The Early Fiction" in Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 186-217.

[9] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 88; according to Silverman, "In the spring of 1831, the *Saturday Courier* announced a contest to promote American literary development, offering a hundred dollars for "the best AMERICAN TALE." Edgar did not win, but the judges liked what he submitted."

[10] Silverman supplies us with the information regarding Poe's entry to the contest and the prize money, *Edgar A. Poe,* 90. The decision from Kennedy, Latrobe, and Miller is quoted in Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 202.

One of the pairs of eyes that turned to Poe during this time were those of John Pendelton Kennedy, who would be instrumental in facilitating Poe's ascendence to his first editorial post. Kennedy, who had served as a judge for the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* competition, had been particularly struck by the magic of Poe's writing.[11] In the wake of that competition, Kennedy corresponded with Poe at length, offering advice and—ultimately—recommending Poe to an editorial position with Thomas W. White's new journal, the *Southern Literary Messenger*. In writing to White of Poe, Kennedy described Poe as having written "very bizarre tales," but informed White that he would "find it to [his] advantage to give [Poe] some permanent employ."[12] Upon corresponding with Poe, White was impressed with Poe's insight into the literary marketplace; by late 1835, Poe—desperate for employment and estate—accepted White's offer to assume editorial duties for the *Messenger*.[13] Placing himself before the eye of the world with his unusual stories had paid off: Poe now had a literary mentor and an editorship through which he might begin to dictate literary taste.

Upon assuming editorship of the *Messenger*, Poe plunged himself into the world of the periodical. Von Cannon describes this plunge as an "apprenticeship in how to generate taste and achieve celebrity through magazine culture," an assessment that astutely highlights that generating taste and achieving celebrity in the context of

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[11] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 204.

[12] John Pendleton Kennedy to Thomas W. White, April 13, 1835, in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*,149. Kennedy wrote White that 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 very bizarre tales in the hands of —— [Henry C. Carey], in Philadelphia, who for a year past has been promising to publish them. He is at work upon a tragedy [*Politian*], but I have turned him to drudging upon whatever may make money."

[13] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 218.

magazine culture involved vastly different practices than when sought as a lone genius.[14] Whereas he had previously performed literature by writing poetry, short stories, and the occasional opinion piece, Poe was now submerged in the complete range of duties, practices, and genres attendant on involvement with a real magazine. As Whalen phrases it,

> Poe's apprenticeship therefore encompassed the full range of tasks necessary to the survival of a new magazine: checking into available inks and papers; soliciting contributions from recognized authors; revising accepted manuscripts; correcting proofs; declining submissions from aspiring poets; striking deals with the editors of other publications regarding exchanges and favorable notices; drumming up new subscribers; and "filling up" the book review section of the magazine with a curious mixture of hackwork and brilliantly innovative criticism.[15]

Although he was also battling several personal issues, such as the death of his grandmother, the nostalgia attendant upon his return to Richmond, and his growing interest in (and fear of losing) his cousin Virginia, Poe threw himself into these various roles.[16] His letters from this time prove that, within a matter of months, he had not only immersed himself in his editorial role, but had also acclimated to and even begun to thrive in it. As these letters highlight, he not only handled the practical in-office matters of editing and printing, but also maintained correspondences with long-term contributors, solicited contributions from authors, responded to the complaints of those whose work the magazine had been obliged to reject, and quelled the ire of those he had chosen to review in less than glowing terms.[17] These letters highlight a significant new manner in

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[14] Michael Von Cannon, "A Tale of Optics: Poe, Visual Culture, and Antebellum Literary Celebrity," *Poe Studies* 47 (2014): 38

[15] Terence Whalen, "Poe and the American Publishing Industry," in *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe,* ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 70.

[16] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe,* 103.

[17] For the majority of this correspondence, see John Ward Ostrom, ed., *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. I,* 75-107.

which Poe was effecting entrance to the literary establishment. Not only had he acceded to a role from which he wrote to these various figures with some slight degree of *position* if not outright *authority*, but he now also occupied a position—and possessed an outlet—through which he might finally embark upon his own critical evaluation of the literary establishment and the figures who comprised it.

In turning now to an evaluation of the vein of criticism that Poe practiced during his time as editor of various magazines, it is necessary first to refresh ourselves on the state of criticism during this era. As Poe himself had highlighted in his "Letter to Mr. ——," by the mid-1830s, criticism had little to do with critical thinking itself and instead was subsumed into a largely politicized system. Sidney Moss, in his unparalleled study of Poe's conflict-laden interactions with his contemporaries, *Poe's Literary Battles*, remarks of the critical tradition at the time that "magazine criticism was being vitiated by the predilections of the coteries… the reviews published by editors engaged in this traffic were, for the most part, superficial and, far worse, misleading, acclaiming or denouncing the work of an author in unqualified terms, depending upon whether the author was in favor with the clique."[18] More recently, Lara Cohen has reinforced Moss's assessment of the era's practices, both confirming the pervasiveness of puffing and proclaiming that "[a]lthough critics since the nineteenth century have tended to relegate puffery to embarrassed footnotes or humorous anecdotes, it was less the exception than the rule of antebellum literary culture."[19] Moss's discussion of the system further highlights the

[18] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 30-31.
[19] Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature*, 32.

impact of such a system on the authors who attempted to participate in its procedures, and he notes that

> [t]o entertain the notion of success, writers had first to come into the good graces of editors—a process that involved toadying and quackery, the current words of contempt for the truckling and charlatanry on the part of contributor to editor and editor to the public. Authors and editors who preferred to remain independent and self-respecting were, by and large, marked for failure. The occasional writer or editor who clashed with the cliques was practically doomed.[20]

Given our knowledge of Poe's attitude towards cliques, we cannot be surprised that, as he began to engage in his own criticism, he impishly cast his lot entirely with those who were doomed.

Having established the practices of the critical context in which Poe wrote, we now turn to an examination of his performance as the poet-critic he had himself heralded in "Letter to Mr. ——." The first feature of Poe's criticism that springs to our notice is its sheer volume. As Robert Jacobs highlights, Poe's induction to the staff of the *Southern Literary Messenger* heralded something of a shift in that journal's emphasis: "Poe made a sensational editorial debut. The December, 1835, issue of the journal, the first under Poe's as yet unacknowledged editorial supervision, contained three times as much criticism (book reviews) as the previous average."[21] Poe could easily have continued to prioritize his work in creative genres had he so chosen; the fact that the critical content of the journal increased so markedly in the very issue in which Poe assumed editorial

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[20] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles,* 30-31.

[21] Robert D. Jacobs, "Campaign for a Southern Literature: The Southern Literary Messenger," *The Southern Literary Journal* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 77. Jacobs further stresses Poe's role in amplifying the amount of criticism published in the *Messenger* by highlighting how Poe's subsequent departure impacted the magazine's critical section: "The most striking change in the Messenger after Poe's departure in January, 1837, was the virtual disappearance of the book review section, which had been the outstanding feature of the magazine, occupying from fifteen to twenty-seven pages of a normal sixty-four page format," 79.

control of the journal demonstrates intentionality on his part. In this sense, the very pages of the *Messenger* themselves bore testimony to Poe's critical ambitions for the next phase of his career.

Even in his earliest pieces of criticism, we can see Poe leaning into the aesthetic principles that he had begun to develop prior to his accession to an editorial role, principles that became even more calcified as he now engaged with real texts in an editorial capacity. In these reviews, he pursues both abstract and concrete commentary, remarking on aspects of the text as diverse as its composition, plot, originality, syntax, imaginativeness, grammar, and effect on the reader while simultaneously commenting on the larger literary scene of which the text formed a part. Within very little time, we see patterns emerging in his evaluations of authors; the types of traits he praises as literary virtues as well as those he condemns as literary sins as he undertakes to educate the tastes of the reading public in his role as the poet-critic.

Poe's critical themes are many, diverse, and, in a certain sense, irreducible. However, the majority of them may be described as relating to clarity, directness, intuitiveness, and vigor of expression—or, as critic R. E. Foust phrases it, "Poe's critical ideas are few in number, although powerful, and recur in all of his major expositions. The major idea, to which the others stand as parts to the whole, is that of unity of effect."[22] This attentiveness to effect—to precision of expression—begins for Poe at the level of the individual word. Thus, in an early review, we see him praising the author William Godwin on the basis that, "No English writer, with whom we have any acquaintance,

[22] R. E. Foust, "Aesthetician of Simultaneity: E. A. Poe and Modern Literary Theory," *South Atlantic Review* 46, no. 2 (May 1981):18.

with the single exception of Coleridge, has a fuller appreciation of the value of *words*; and none is more nicely discriminative between closely-approximating meanings."[23] In regards to diction, Poe holds no traffic with imprecision, as he makes clear in his complimentary evaluation of novelist Robert M. Bird's style: "Its incidents are well conceived, and related with force, brevity, and a species of *directness* which is invaluable in certain cases of narration… The language is exceedingly unaffected and (what we regard as high praise) exceedingly well adapted to the varying subjects."[24] Similarly, Poe praises the work of J. P. Kennedy in a separate essay by providing this summary of his opinion of Kennedy's writings: "We have called the style of Mr. K. a style simple and forcible, and we have no hesitation in calling it, at the same time, richly figurative and poetical."[25] For Poe, simplicity was not contradictory to but instead supportive of poetic effect.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Poe did not feel obligated to maintain a thoroughly positive opinion of the men whose work he praised, or even of the individual works on which he heaped praise. Whereas party politics demanded that Poe refrain from casting even the slight smirch on those he elevated, Poe himself held to no such dictum, and in these very reviews of Bird and Kennedy, he criticizes the latter as demonstrating a certain deficiency in the realm of grammar and accuses the former of lapsing into unevenness in his narrative style and exhibiting flaws in the development of his

[23] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Godwin," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 259.
[24] Edgar Allan Poe, "Robert Bird," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 401.
[25] Edgar Allan Poe, "John Pendleton Kennedy," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 652.

characters.[26] Through this medleying of critical and complimentary analysis, Poe proved the sincerity—and corresponding value—of both.

The question of characters and plot is a subject on which Poe, in his new-found role at his small helm within the vast fleet of American criticism, regularly held forth. His review of the novelist Joseph Holt Ingraham highlights the manner in which Poe began to flesh out what would later become the staunchest of his aesthetic theories. In this review, Poe proclaims of Ingraham that "[t]he novelist is too minutely, and by far too frequently *descriptive*. We are surfeited with unnecessary detail. Every little figure in the picture is invested with all the dignities of light and shadow, and chiaro 'scuro. Of mere outlines there are none. Not a dog yelps, unsung."[27] This question of detail—of drawing every sketch as tightly as possible with no word out of place, no word introduced without purpose—prefigures the precept Poe would later articulate in a review of Hawthorne: "In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design."[28] Indeed, early prefigurements of this idea of incanting perfect, self-contained worlds undisturbed by lack or excess of detail appears in his review of *The Poetry of Life* by Sarah Stickney, in which he proclaims, "Except in some very rare instances, where a context may be tolerated, if not altogether justified, a world, either of the pen or the pencil, should contain within itself every thing requisite for its own comprehension."[29] In this sense, we can see that Poe's early criticism of others' works were a space in which Poe worked out *through practical application* the

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[26] Poe, "Kennedy," 652; Poe, "Bird," 402.

[27] Edgar Allan Poe, "Joseph Holt Ingraham," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 611.

[28] Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of Twice-Told Tales. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. Two Volumes. Boston: James Munroe and Co," *Graham's Magazine* 20, no. 5 (May 1842): 572.

[29] Edgar Allan Poe, "Sarah Stickney" in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 345.

principles of his own aesthetic theories. Thus, we see that, as he created the principles of his literary criticism, he was, in fact, creating the terms of his own future artistic endeavors—was forecasting the type of literature he himself intended to create and, by dictating it here as aesthetic principle, was employing his reviewing pen to create a taste for—a space for—the writing he intended to create with his more creative pen. Poe was constructing his authorial terms and simultaneously developing in his audience a taste for the very literature he hoped subsequently to produce.

This subtle manipulation of literary taste on behalf of his own projects emerges with particular clarity in a handful of Poe's reviews. The most noticeable of these is his review of a new edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, in which he marvels at great length over Defoe's achievement of "the potent magic of verisimilitude," a skill Poe proclaims to be amongst the foremost an author can possess.[30] The catch is that Poe wrote this review—placed this skill before his audience as praiseworthy—while in the midst of planning and possibly even penning his own maritime adventure novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. *Pym*'s own bid for verisimilitude has long been the predominant theme addressed by the story's critics, and the question of its veracity formed the bedrock of its immediate reception when it appeared in 1838, as critics and readers alike debated the authenticity of this tale from the southern pole.[31] The question of *Pym's* success in passing itself off as authentic is less important here than the fact that

[30] Edgar Allan Poe, "Daniel Defoe," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 203.

[31] This is proven by the many contemporary reviews of *Pym* compiled in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*, 249-59.

it did make the attempt; that, having told his audience what was a praiseworthy skill for an author to possess, Poe then attempted to employ that skill himself.

In addition to these attempts to inculcate a taste for the type of literature that he intended to supply, we also see Poe engaging in a type of affective expression of the pains attendant upon his life as an artist lodged amid an unfeeling, archangel-dominated machine. These expressions, so similar to the wistful mourning that appeared in "Israfel," burst forth only occasionally in Poe's reviews but are unmistakable when they do appear. The most striking example of this transmutation of affect into critical commentary occurs when Poe is reviewing the work of Henry F. Chorley. After first proclaiming that "our whole heart is with the author" and is, indeed, roused "by his chivalric and magnanimous *design*, Poe continues,

> When *shall* the artist assume his proper situation in society—in a society of thinking beings? How long shall he be enslaved? How long shall mind succumb to the grossest materiality? How long shall the veriest [sic] vermin of the Earth, who crawl around the altar of Mammon, be more esteemed of men than they, the gifted ministers to those exalted emotions which link us with the mysteries of Heaven? To our own query we may venture a reply. Not long. Not long will such rank injustice be committed or permitted. A spirit is already abroad…. and in every breath, however gentle, of the wide atmosphere of Revolution encircling us, is that spirit steadily yet irresistibly at work.[32]

Although writing in the editorial "we" in this passage, Poe allows a deep frustration to bleed through his lofty tone. Nor is this frustration simply that of the editorial perspective; this frustration is personal and emanates from his frustration *as an artist* who longs to "assume his proper situation in society." His forecasting of a Revolution is

[32] Edgar Allan Poe, "Henry F. Chorley," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*,164.

partially a prophecy from his new vantage point as an editor but is equally an expression of the hope that first drove him from his poetry collections to his desk as editor and critic.

That very yearning for Revolution led Poe to tackle major tropes of the establishment in his reviews, most notably criticizing it for its hagiographical evaluations of its early "greats," such as John Fenimore Cooper, Joseph Rodman Drake, and James K. Paulding. One such establishment-wide criticism erupts in his review of John G. C. Brainard's works, in which he proclaims, "Among all the *pioneers* of American literature, whether prose or poetical, there is *not one* whose productions have not been much over-rated by his countrymen."[33] Celebration of style, Poe asserts, is not sufficient to compensate for lack of actual talent, even when that celebration is occurring on a national scale. In taking this position, Poe is openly criticizing the predominance of nationalism within literary criticism—is asserting that the pride of having produced *American* literature has led American readers to overestimate the forerunners of that literature. Poe is arguing that American literature's hall of fame has been constructed not through critical analysis, but through a type of primacy bias; those who came first have been idolized far beyond their actual skill simply on the basis of having been the first to brave the untamed wilderness of American expression and pioneer the trails—construct the outposts—that would develop into American literature. This argument leads directly into Poe's secondary point: that the desire to prove its own literary excellence and distinctness from England, far from leading to an excellence in American literature, has actually led to a paucity in the same. In pursuit of this goal, Poe asserts, the American

[33] Edgar Allan Poe, "John G. C. Brainard," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 404.

establishment elevated maudlin authors for the sake of posturing itself on the world scene; she had lionized and continued to lionize her early authors as a matter of foreign policy. And yet, it is only by being willing to criticize—and to criticize harshly—one's native writers, Poe argues, that America could ever arrive at anything like a strong national literature: "We have, at length, arrived at that epoch when our literature may and must stand on its own merits, or fall through its own defects."[34] Dispelling this tendency to elevate mediocrity on the basis of its being American mediocrity, Poe believes, will serve to elevate the quality not only of American criticism, but also of American literature.

This attack on the establishment's historical greats was brazen on Poe's part. Perhaps even more scandalizing, however, was his corresponding belief that, in order to elevate American literature, bias must be rejected not simply as it exists longitudinally—stretching back into history—but also as it works latitudinally, encompassing cliquish contemporaries, who Poe believed should be evaluated independently of their literary loyalties. This belief, of course, did not prevent Poe from using membership within cliques as a means by which to mark out and track down lions whom he might make prey to his especial, satirical scrutiny.

Among those he marked for especial attention was Theodore S. Fay, whose book *Norman Leslie* had been shamelessly puffed for weeks preceding its release in the very journal for which its author was also—*quite incidentally*—an associate editor.[35] Adopting

[34] Poe, "Brainard," 405.

[35] Sidney P. Moss, "Poe and the Norman Leslie Incident," *American Literature* 25, no. 3 (November 1953): 293.

this review as an occasion to strike at the puffing system through the figure of one of its minions, Poe waxed exceedingly satirical in his opening remarks on the work, exclaiming,

> Well!—here we have it! This is *the* book—*the* book *par excellence*—the book bepuffed, beplastered, and be-*Mirrored*: the book "attributed to" Mr. Blank, and "said to be from the pen" of Mr. Asterisk: the book which has been "about to appear"—"in press"—"in progress"—"in preparation"—and "forthcoming:" the book "graphic" in anticipation—"talented" *a priori*—and God knows what *in prospectu*. For the sake of every thing puffed, puffing, and puffable, let us take a peep at its contents![36]

If readers of the review began their perusal with any doubt as to the tone Poe intended to take towards this be-puffed work, this paragraph—the introductory sentences of the review—served to dispel any such misapprehensions and to alert readers that they were embarking on a lion-dethroning romp in the course of which they would be treated to Poe's characteristic attention to detail dipped in a thick layer of acerbity.

Indeed, readers of Poe's reviews cannot have complained regarding the entertainment value of their readings. Far from pursuing any single tone towards the works he reviewed, Poe assumed a variety of tones that rang alternatively astute, acerbic, admiring, and—occasionally—anathematizing. On some occasions, Poe engages with his subjects in deathly earnest, effecting comparisons between the author under consideration and such literary giants as Milton, Homer, Spenser, Pope, Euripides, Bacon, Cowper, Carlye and the Romantics; on other occasions, he engaged in plot summaries and spoofs that traverse the border of the comedic. At times, he commends a work through the intensity of the criticism he applies to it, with the degree of intensity proving the true

[36] Edgar Allan Poe, "Theodore S. Fay," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 540.

merit he finds buried within the rubble[37]; on other occasions, he damns his subjects through excessive praise.[38] Occasionally Poe grows distracted with questions of phrenology, poetic meters he seems to have invented for himself, and debates surrounding Virginian loyalty to the Crown during the Protectorate period.[39] On the whole, however, Poe remains tightly focused on his evaluation of the individual merits of each work he examines, regardless of the clique from which it arises—or, more accurately, often using the work as a means through which to scourge its clique of origin.

In these behaviors, we see that Poe was not only rebelling against the literary establishment by adopting literary standards in the criticisms he penned but was also actively *challenging* the system by *naming* the system for what it was—a scene of critical skullduggery. Within less than a year of his joining the *Messenger*, we see definite patterns of thought recurring within his reviews as Poe began to hammer out principles of criticism that remained constant across the remainder of his critical career. We see him aggressively antagonizing those exalted by the literary establishment while simultaneously penning generous reviews of less lionized figures. Across even such varied treatments as these, however, his tone can uniformly be described as vivid, arresting, and explosive. His tone was *calculated to make noise*—calculated to force the

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[37] For example in "Francis L. Hawks," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 567, Poe subjects Hawks to minute scrutiny before ultimately proclaiming, "Very few, if any, complete sets of diocesan Journals of Conventions are in existence. We will conclude our notice, by heartily recommending the entire volume, as an important addition to our Civil as well as Ecclesiastical History."

[38] Edgar Allan Poe, "Eaton Stannard Barrett," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 106-115 is an example of a high-spirited but poignant mockery that is so delicately spun that it is almost impossible to divine Poe's true purpose.

[39] Meter and alternative sciences materialize often enough in Poe's reviews as to need no specific citation; Poe waxes eloquent over seventeenth century politics in Poe, "Francis Hawks," 557-67.

literary establishment to *notice* him and then, having noticed him, to give heed to that which he articulated; to pay attention to the image he was crafting through his criticism of the ideal author and then to accept him as that ideal author.

As it transpired, the level of noise Poe produced through the pages of the *Southern Literary Messenger*—and subsequently in the pages of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* (1839-40), *Graham's Magazine* (1841-42), the New York *Evening Mirror* (1844-45) and the *Broadway Journal* (1845-46)—was more than sufficient to capture the wandering eye of the many cliques whose authors he had treated in those pages. Much as his short stories had outstripped the popularity of his poetry, Poe's criticism quickly outstripped both his poetry and his short stories in popularity, garnering attention from all corners of literary America. Poe had indeed placed himself before the eye of the world, but that world knew not quite what to make of that which had been placed before it—knew not what to do with this poetic sniper who quipped of the unanimously celebrated William Cullen Bryant that, "The writings of our author [Bryant] as we find them *here*… err essentially and primitively…. Of imagination, we discover much—but more of its rich and certain evidences, than of its ripened fruit."[40] More to the point, they did not know quite how to handle having their favorites marked out as subjects for actual *satire,* as in the case of Poe's uproarious and genuinely *comic* review of J. T. Hadley's *The Sacred Mountains,* in which Poe jibed at Hadley that,

> "Quack" is a word that sounds well only in the mouth of a duck; and upon our honor we feel a scruple in using it: nevertheless the truth should be told; and the simple fact is, that the author of the 'Sacred Mountains' is the Autocrat of all the Quacks… Mr. Headley is by no means to be sneered at as a quack. This might be

[40] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Cullen Bryant," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 441.

> justifiable, indeed, were he only a quack in a small way—a quack doing business by retail. But the wholesale dealer is entitled to respect.[41]

Scrubbings such as these led all corners of literary America to agree on one point—that Poe was a fearsome critic whose blows, when they fell, laid bone bare. This reputation led one critic to dub Poe the "tomahawk man" early in his career.[42]

Opinion as to the actual *merit* of Poe's tomahawking, however, varied. A vast portion of the critical establishment felt that his treatments were not only of far too vicious a nature, but also were marred by questions related to their authorship. Thus, in a review of the *Southern Literary Messenger* published in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, Lewis Gaylord Clark would describe its critical offerings as "decidedly quacky" before continuing,

> There is in it a great assumption of acumen, which is completely unsustained. Many a work has been slashingly condemned therein, of which the critic himself could not write a page, were he to die for it. This affectation of eccentric sternness in criticism, without the power to back one's suit withal, so far from deserving praise, as some suppose, merits the strongest reprehension.[43]

While ignoring the question of "quackery" as Poe proposes it, Clark underscores a different sort of "quackiness" he sees at work within Poe's writing—the hypocrisy of

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[41] Edgar Allan Poe, "Joel T. Headley," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 593. After parading a particularly ungrammatical scene from the work, Poe also comments "that a gentleman should know so much about Noah's ark and know anything about any thing else, is scarcely to be expected. We have no right to require English grammar and accurate information about Moses and Aaron at the hands of one and the same author. For our parts, now we come to think of it, if we only understood as much about Mount Sinai and other matters as Mr. Headley does, we should make a point of always writing bad English upon principle, whether we knew better or not," 591.

[42] In "Poe the Critic," 447, Paul Hurh explains the origins of the title: "Poe would become known as the 'tomahawk man' after being described as having a 'savage skill' in using 'his tomahawk and scalping knife' near the beginning of his career."

[43] Lewis Gaylord Clark, "[1836] 8 APRIL. PHILADELPHIA," in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log,* 197.

snidely carving up pieces whose merits outstrip those of the critic's own work. The right to effect such carving up, Clark believes, should fall to those whose own work is, itself, critically laudable; the question of who determines what works are laudable and how to ensure a fair system of criticism and laudation on the basis of his claims here remain, of course, unaddressed in his review.

Further criticisms of Poe's criticism from this era present features that approach nearer areas of our own enquiry. An example of one such analysis can be found in a review that *The Newborn Spectator* released later during Poe's stint at the *Messenger's* helm. Writing specifically of the *Messenger*, this source opines that "Every man of proper feelings, every lover of literature, who peruses the work, is disgusted with the superficial criticism and uneducated flippancy of its editorial contents, and with the low, egotistical means resorted to, to force it into notice."[44] In reading this latter opinion, we cannot help but wonder if its insinuation that the journal's critical tone had been adopted to attract notice was an untailored sideswipe intended to imply that the journal had not been noticeable previously, or whether it was a genuine evaluation of the tone of the magazine as it struck readers of the time. Regardless of whether this reviewer's assault was perceptive or merely haphazard, the assault itself proves the effectiveness of the very quality it undertook to criticize: the criticism had forced itself to be noticed.

Nor was Poe's criticism, as the lack of authorial identification in the previous two quotes might suggest, spread cut loose from the author who created it. From the earliest moment of Poe's collaboration with the *Messenger*, his authorship of the magazine's

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[44] Newborn Spectator, "[1836] 16 DECEMBER. NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA," in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*, 236.

criticism was well-known, and editors across the country fell regularly into praising or criticizing him by name. On this latter count, the Boston critic, Edwin Percy Whipple, addressed Poe by name in his disapproval of Poe's critical tone:

> "It is certainly a collossal [sic] piece of impertinence for Mr. Edgar A. Poe to exalt himself into a literary dictator, and under his own name deal out his opinions on American authors as authoritative. . . . He does not appear to form his opinions on enlarged principles of taste, but judges of an author by the manner his own particular feelings are affected."[45]

As with the opinion expressed by *The Newborn Spectator*, this attack on Poe is made the more curious by the fact that it identifies a particular aim of Poe's—the desire to dictate literary taste—and makes it the heart of its criticism of Poe's style. Poe did indeed desire to issue opinions on American authors that were authoritative; the establishment of his time queried the basis on which Poe felt himself authorized to wax authoritative and condemned his assumption of critical mantle as presumptive.

Not all readers of Poe's criticisms, however, disapproved of his aims therein. Indeed, while not of a volume necessary to stage the "Revolution" in aesthetic taste that Poe had forecasted in his review of Henry F. Chorley, a moderate band of revolutionary editors sided with Poe in his crusade. For example, the same series of criticism that prompted the *National Archives* to describe him as a "critical tattler" led the editor of the *Democratic Review* to remark,

> Mr. Poe has been for some weeks past engaged in a critical discussion in the *Broadway Journal* on the subject of plagiarism. . . . There is no literary question which requires more discrimination, greater nicety of apprehension and occasionally more courage. We appreciate the latter quality in Mr. Poe. . . . Of all pursuits in the world we know of none more humiliating, more dastardly, or less comfortable to an honest man than the aimless, shifting, puffing, practice of

[45] Edwin P. Whipple, "[1841] BEFORE 18 DECEMBER. BOSTON," in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*, 354.

> literature. . . It is for the interest of literature that every man who writes should show his honesty and not bring letters into contempt. If in doing this he should happen to fall on the other side of harshness or rudeness… let him be pardoned, for it is better both for the cause of truth and virtue that this should be the case than that a man should be always dull and complaisant.[46]

This support of Poe's endeavor as constituting a salvation of true criticism was reinforced from other corners, and Poe received similar support from James E. Heath, the first editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Writing to Poe after Poe's departure from the *Messenger* and assumption of the editorship of *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine*, Heath opined,

> The cultivation of such high intellectual powers as you possess cannot fail to earn for you a solid reputation in the literary world. In the department of criticism especially, I know few who can claim to be your superiors in this country. Your dissecting knife, if vigorously employed, would serve to rid us of much of that silly trash and silly sentimentality with which puerile and conceited authors, and gain-seeking book sellers are continually poisoning our intellectual food. I hope in relation to all such you will continue to wield mace without "fear, favor or affection."[47]

Much like the tone taken by the *Democratic Review*, Heath's tone casts Poe in a noble, rather than churlish light. Poe is not just another critic; he is *the* critic who will clean the metaphorical house of the literary establishment.[48]

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[46] O'Sullivan qtd. in Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles,* 178.

[47] "James E. Heath to Edgar Allan Poe, September 12, 1839," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated November 13, 2009, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t3909120.htm.

[48] This perspective was also expressed by many authors of the era, who like Poe, struggled within the literary machine. A representative example is provided by Thomas H. Chivers, an author with whom Poe remained in sporadic correspondence. Although himself the subject of at least one of Poe's Autography sketches, Chivers opined during Poe's time editing Graham's Magazine that Graham "ought to give you ten thousand dollars a year for supervising it… It is not my opinion that you ever have been, or ever will be, paid for your intellectual labours… I can read a Poem with greater delight after your criticism than before. I consider your definition of Poetry far superior to Lord Bacon's -although I consider him one of the greatest men that ever existed." For this quote and more in the same vein, see "Thomas H. Chivers to Edgar Allan Poe, June 15, 1844," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated April 15, 2021, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4406150.htm.

Perhaps more significant than these expressions of individual admiration was the pragmatic testimony of Harper's, who wrote a friendly letter to Poe in 1836 while he was yet employed at the *Messenger*. After commenting generally on the journal, Harper's asserted, "We are pleased with your criticisms generally—although we do not always agree with you in particulars, we like the bold, decided, energetic tone of your animadversions, and shall take pleasure in forwarding to you all the works we publish—or at least such of them as are worthy of your notice."[49] Three years later, their opinion had not changed, and, learning that Poe had relocated, they wrote to him inquiring, "Are you connected with any of the newspapers in Philadelphia? If so, we should be please [sic] to send you a book for review occasionally."[50] If Poe were merely a vituperative or splenetic critic, a publishing company would never have put themselves out in order to gain his bile; Harper's interest in Poe's critical opinion indicates that there was *some* merit to that opinion, *some* merit to Poe's claim to critic-hood.

Precisely what the merit of Poe's criticism was—or what motive drove his expression of it—remained a point of contention across his career and, indeed, has remained a fundamental question in readings of Poe's criticism throughout the entirety of Poe's reception history. In the years following Poe's death, the narrative of Poe as an unnecessarily cruel critic predominated, largely fueled by the work of Poe's libelous literary executor, Rufus Griswold, who—himself engaged in a smear campaign of

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[49] Harper and Brothers, "Harper and Brothers to Edgar Allan Poe, June 19, 1836," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated November 13, 2009, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t3606190.htm

[50] "Harper and Brothers to Edgar Allan Poe, February 20, 1839," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated November 13, 2009, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t3902200.htm.

gargantuan proportions—sought to distract his readers from his own malfeasance by shifting their outrage onto Poe himself.[51] Negative interpretations of Poe's critical motives therefore persisted throughout the late nineteenth and even early twentieth century. In the former, we find John Esten Cooke condemning Poe on the basis that "invective is the author's favorite style," and observation he reinforces by further explaining, "He searches for weak points in every writer… and when the failing is found, [Poe] pounces upon it with obvious pleasure, enforces it without mercy, and generally winds up his criticism with some stinging jest full of bitterness and contempt for the writer he is reviewing.[52] In the early twentieth century, we find scholar Percy Boynton expressing a similar opinion of Poe, declaring that he "was the assailant of individual literary reputations, a swashbuckler, cutting and thrusting, and strutting about a stage on which he played the villain to his complete satisfaction."[53] These opinions, which are typical of these decades, illustrate how predominant negative attitudes towards Poe's criticism remained through the mid-twentieth century.

Indeed, it was not until 1963, when Sidney Moss published his landmark analysis of Poe's performance within and critique of his contemporary literary establishment, that modern opinion towards Poe's criticism began to shift towards a less negative trajectory—began to return to the perception of Poe as a critical champion that was held by his admirers in the mid-nineteenth century. Writing in the face of a century of dissent,

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[51] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 669-76. Quinn describes Griswold's machinations at great detail.

[52] John Pendleton Cooke, *Poe as a Literary Critic*, ed. N. Bryllion Fagin (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), 6. This work was written in the nineteenth century but not published until it was discovered by Fagin in the twentieth century.

[53] Percy H. Boynton, "Poe and Journalism," *The English Journal* 21, no. 5 (May 1932): 350.

Moss urged his readers to reconsider their understanding of Poe's character by shifting their understanding of precisely what had motivated Poe's criticism. Acknowledging that Poe was often bombastic, Moss attempted to reframe those warmongering displays as being rooted less in personal viciousness and more in the specific circumstances in which Poe was writing. Moss characterizes Poe's attacks as being comparable to those of a military general and excuses them on that basis: "To deplore Poe's splenetic critical temper, or the personalities he introduced into his articles, or his inability to maintain an indifference to abuse as weaknesses is as ridiculous under the circumstances as to deplore a general's aggressive tactics as weaknesses."[54] Poe's criticism, in this view, was not personal violence but a declaration of total war. Moss was also one of the first modern critics to propose that the particular war in which Poe was engaged was not a personal one, but rather one in which the quality and future of American literature itself was at stake: "Poe's literary battles had a singleness of purpose: to prepare the ground for writers of genuine talent and, in consequence, for a respectable American literature."[55] Following this transformation of the terms of the discussion by Moss, criticism of the late twentieth century continued to explore this idea of Poe as the defender of the underdog—the champion of the genius in the war between quality and corruption.

Thanks largely to Moss's pioneering efforts, we have, in the twenty-first century, come so far from perceiving Poe's criticism as mere vials of vitriol that scholar Paul Hurh, writing in *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, proposes that Poe scholarship should pursue "widening the Poe canon to include his review essays as

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[54] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, x.
[55] Ibid., ix.

aesthetic objects," and outlines the specific practices Poe developed while creating reviews of art that are, Hurh asserts, themselves pieces of art.[56] Indeed, on the basis of Moss's scholarship, Terence Whalen has been enabled, writing nearly four decades later, to argue that the very qualities once posed as fueling Poe's malice are, in fact, what made his criticism so astute; that Poe's poverty was not "a negative force" but rather was "the force that transformed Poe into one of the most innovative writers of his day, chiefly by driving him into new fields of literary labor and by granting him startling insights into the artistic implications of capitalist development."[57] Thus, modern criticism has come to entertain the suggestion that Poe's very position outside of the establishment—his very lack of social standing—drove him to a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between social and literary reputation and then to greater pitches of creativity.

Of course, Poe's own tone within his criticism makes it impossible for analyses of his work to give up negative interpretations altogether. As recently as 2012, Jonathan Murphy asserted that "it is hard to imagine a critic less scrupulous than he" while discussing Poe's engagement with contemporary philosophical movements, particularly Transcendentalism.[58] This characterization of Poe's criticism as occasionally unscrupulous in tone roots itself in admissions made during his own time by even Poe's closest supporters, admissions that sometimes reaped retaliation from Poe that reinforced their hesitancy in holding Poe *utterly* unbiased. An example of both may be found in the

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[56] Hurh, "Poe the Critic," 445.

[57] Whalen, "Poe and the American Publishing Industry," 64.

[58] Jonathan W. D. Murphy, "The American Dream Elucidated by Edgar Allan Poe," *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 7.

relationship between Poe and fellow poet, James Russell Lowell. A long-term admirer of Poe, Lowell penned a largely flattering sketch of Poe for *Graham's Magazine*, in which he hazarded this balanced observation in the midst of an otherwise complimentary assessment of Poe's merits as a critic: "Mr. Poe is at once the most discriminating, philosophical, and fearless critic upon imaginative works who has written in America. It may be that we should qualify our remark a little, and say that he might be, rather than that he always is, for he seems sometimes to mistake his phial of prussic-acid for his inkstand."[59] In the wake of this review the two men had something like a falling out—whether due to Lowell's prussic acid comment or not is unknown. Lowell himself attributed the collapse of their friendship to this very sketch, writing privately to one of Poe's then co-editors of the *Broadway Journal* that

> Poe, I am afraid, is wholly lacking in that element of manhood which, for want of a better name, we call character.... I have made Poe my enemy by doing him a service. In the last *Broadway Journal* he has accused me of plagiarism, and misquoted Wordsworth to sustain his charge... Poe wishes to kick down the ladder by which he rose. He is welcome.[60]

This report from Lowell illustrates that, when Poe felt they merited curtailment, even his friends were not safe from the carving blade of his sharpened—and occasionally crooked—scalpel.

Commenting on this aggressiveness of Poe's behavior towards both enemies and friends, Poe scholar Sandra Tomc proclaims that, in 1835, "Poe launched an assault on the existing literary establishment in a series of reviews virtually unprecedented for their

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[59] James Russell Lowell, "Edgar Allan Poe," *Graham's Magazine* XXVII no. 2 (February, 1845): 49.

[60] Lowell to Charles F. Briggs, August 21, 1845, in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*, 563-64.

cruel and vituperative candor" but proceeds to complicate this view by suggesting that Poe cultivated this tone and the reputation that accompanied it *on purpose* as a sort of gimmick that granted him interest in an age filled with indistinguishable penny-a-pop poets: "Although the traditional view of Poe is that he sabotaged his professional career through a personal, dysfunctional animosity to the era's powerful literary and publishing coteries, Poe's professional success was in the first place contingent upon that animosity—and upon the connotations of dysfunction that went with it."[61] According to Tomc, not just Poe's noisiness, but also his occasional cruelty—towards both life-long enemies and former friends—were carefully calculated to fund his reputation.

As this brief survey of both the contemporary and current critical reception of Poe's criticism will have made clear, interpreting Poe's intentions within his criticism is no simple matter. Attempts to characterize Poe's criticism in primarily positive or negative lights typically fail to account for the aspects of Poe's criticism and reception that have led to the development of the alternative interpretation. Moss's proclamation that Poe "wanted to smash the power of the literary cliques intrenched in Boston and New York City that could make the reputations and fortunes of those authors, editors, and publishers with whom they were in league, and that could ruin those who were outside the pale or who threatened their interests" is accurate, but it is not comprehensive; it imputes to Poe a self-disinterested nobility that cannot account for the fact that Poe *did* sometimes misrepresent those he critiqued, *did*—as Lowell testified—occasionally

[61] Sandra Tomc, "Poe and his Circle," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 29-30.

misquote an original source to convict an innocent of plagiarism.[62] Conversely, attempts to characterize Poe's criticism as mere vitriol ignore that, as Poe himself testified, the majority of Poe's criticisms were not violent—in fact, it was only on rare occasions that Poe did not mix praise with censure—and, likewise, the majority of these criticisms did appeal to aesthetic criteria to fund that censure.[63]

The most quintessential instance of these many factors we have been discussing—Poe's criticisms of the establishment, Poe's yearning for recognition within the establishment, Poe's attempts to garner attention by making noise, the establishment's response to him, and the confusingly intermingled artistic and personal motivation on display in that criticism—are all summed up in a single exchange that also provides us with the key to our arriving at a solution to those seeming contradictions: The Little Longfellow War. Waged between 1839 and the late 1840s, The Little Longfellow War serves not only as the most dramatic incarnation of the seemingly contradictory interests in Poe's critical writing, but also serves to evidence Poe's usage of criticism as an affective outlet of his disappointments and thus sheds greater light on Poe's motives in writing criticism.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, now remembered primarily as the author of *Evangeline* and "The Song of Hiawatha," began his career in the same decade as Poe. Much like Poe, Longfellow's earliest efforts ranged between occasional prose criticism

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[62] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 3; Lowell to Briggs, August 21, 1845, 563-64.

[63] Poe to the Editor of the Compiler, *ante* September 2, 1836, in Poe, *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. I*, 101. In this letter, Poe rejects the Editor of the *Compiler*'s accusations of critical slashing, noting, "Since the commencement of my editorship in December lasts, 94 books have been reviewed. In 79 of these cases, the commendation has so largely predominated over the few sentences of censure, that every reader would pronounce the notices highly laudatory."

and more ambitious works of poetry; unlike Poe, Longfellow's work garnered attention almost immediately upon its publication, generating not only critical favor but also, by extension, an extensive readership.[64] Longfellow's poetry was being included in gift books and anthologies by the early 1830s—the very years during which Poe's poetry was being rebuffed and he was being forced to turn to editorial work in search of literary estate—despite Longfellow's never having published a whole book of verse.[65] Over subsequent years, Longfellow finally began to release volumes of his own; with each new release, his popularity grew immensely.

Poe's first review of Longfellow appeared in 1839 and focused itself on Longfellow's newly released collection of poems, titled *Hyperion, a Romance*. In this review, Poe subjected Longfellow to the same medley of cuffs and caresses with which he treated the majority of his subjects. Indeed, almost all of Poe's reviews of Longfellow are what we would describe as "mixed reviews," containing a mixture of affirmations of skill and devaluations of effort; affirmations that Longfellow possessed *some* genius *somewhere* in his verse, but further proclamations that that genius was mediated by a good deal of fluff. In the earliest reviews, Poe strikes this balance rather moderately and is not unduly aggressive towards Longfellow. Indeed, throughout his career, Poe identified "jewels" in corners of Longfellow's canon, even going so far in one review of

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[64] Anne Whitehouse, "Poe vs. Himself," *New England Review* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 105. As Whitehouse explains, "Longfellow could afford to ignore his critics. No other American poet, before or since, has enjoyed such great popular success or tremendous sales." The public was interested in Longfellow for his personal writings; the public was most interested in Poe for his takedowns of others. At some point, this had to gall Poe—this realization that he was more valued in the negative as it were, than in the positive.

[65] Loring E. Hart, "The Beginnings of Longfellow's Fame," *The New England Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 1963): 66.

Longfellow's verse as to declare of his poem "The Bridge of Sighs" that, "Our taste—our critical feelings are in sad condition indeed, when such jewels as this are fairly made part and parcel of a volume of "waifs." "The Bridge of Sighs" should have been received all over the world at once, and *with acclamation*."[66] As this quotation demonstrates, Poe is willing to acknowledge merit in Longfellow's verse and to couch that acknowledgment in complimentary terms. This evaluation, however, was in reference to *specific* of Longfellow's poems, not Longfellow's canon as a whole.

In regard to Longfellow's larger canon, Poe had many hesitations. Literarily speaking, Longfellow was not overly original and, indeed, he might easily be termed imitative. A large portion of Longfellow's unoriginality, Poe felt, arose from a subject for which he had an especial penchant—the sin of didacticism. Poe had been attacking didacticism for years prior to his first encounter with Longfellow's work; Longfellow, by contrast, openly defended didacticism, nominating the conveyance of "correct moral impressions" as the proper end of poetry.[67] It was likely on the basis of this very declaration of Longfellow that Poe felt it incumbent upon him to proclaim that,

> We demur[] to Mr. Longfellow's *themes*, or rather to their general character. We found fault with the too obtrusive nature of their *didacticism*… We have said that Mr. Longfellow's conception of the *aims* of poesy is erroneous; and that thus, laboring at a disadvantage, he does violent wrong to his own high powers; and now the question is, what *are* his ideas of the aims of the Muse, as we gather these ideas from the *general* tendency of his poems? It will be at once evident

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[66] Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of Longfellow's *Waif*, with an Exchange," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 700.

[67] Longfellow qtd. in Kenneth Alan Hovey, "Critical Provincialism: Poe's Poetic Principle in Antebellum Context," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 345. Hovey documents that Longfellow's original piece was published in volume 36 of the *North American Review* (1833).

> that, imbued with the peculiar spirit of German song (a pure conventionality) he regards the inculcation of a *moral* as essential.[68]

It was the very pursuit of the didactic, Poe asserted, that led Longfellow—along with a large percentage of the rest of American literature—into uninspired, imitative realms away from otherwise not inconsiderable creativity.

Such opinions were not unusually harsh for Poe; if anything, they were unusually complimentary. Indeed, it is unlikely that, when he wrote his first review of Longfellow, Poe had singled Longfellow out as an especial target, and he likely would have moved on from Longfellow with little thought were it not for a particular circumstance—that circumstance being the nature of the *reception* of his criticism of Longfellow. Poe had long been slinging accusations at the establishment's favorites, reaping the occasional victory and the occasional retaliation from their number. However, in the case of Longfellow, the establishment's reaction was far more dramatic. Reading Poe's fairly balanced analyses of Longfellow, they refused to hear Poe's legitimate criticisms, instead perceiving his moderate stance as an attack on a man they had adopted as an anointed angel of their ranks. Accordingly, numerous of their set—including such varied figures as George S. Hillard, Charles Sumner, and Lewis Gaylord Clark himself [69]—stepped

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[68] Poe, "Review of *Ballads and Other Poems*. By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," 683-84.

[69] Edward Piacentino provides the abbreviated list of Longfellow's supporters in "The Poe-Longfellow Plagiarism Controversy: A New Critical Notice in 'The Southern Chronicle,'" *The Mississippi Quarterly* (1989): 175. Moss provides the details regarding Clark's treatment of Poe: "Longfellow maintained silence… His friends, however, were hardly silent. Lewis Clark, for instance, replied to Longfellow's assailants, abusing Poe personally." (Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles,* 184)

forward to defend Longfellow from Poe's pen, with Clark, stooping to "abusing Poe personally" in his response.[70]

Far from discouraging Poe from his war, these defenses catalyzed his greater interest in the campaign. As Moss incomparably phrases it, the appearance of an "enemy of a self-supporting, self-respecting authorship" served only to rouse Poe's combative spirit, after which he "assailed it whenever he could, whether by exposing cliquism as a racket or by assaulting those who were implicated in the cliques."[71] The sight of many dozens rising to defend Longfellow served only to indicate to Poe that he had struck a nerve—had hit upon a weak spot in the cabal; critics' resistance to his criticism of Longfellow indicated to Poe that, however innocent Longfellow himself might be, he represented something far less innocent in the hands of the literary establishment.

Indeed, over time—and as more and more figures stepped forward to defend Longfellow's mediocre poetry from Poe's less aggressive assessments of them—Poe became more and more motivated to launch actually aggressive assaults on Longfellow's poetry. Personally, Poe still held a fairly positive view toward Longfellow's work; personally, Longfellow was not particularly culpable for the establishment's circling round his figure. Professionally, Longfellow was culpable for the usage to which the establishment put him; for the prestige in which it, too worshipful, enthroned him. Therefore, though Longfellow himself was not the worst poet—he was simply a poet who had legitimate flaws that the establishment *would not* hear of—*forcing those flaws* down

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[70] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles,* 184; Moss provides the details regarding Clark's treatment of Poe: "Longfellow maintained silence… His friends, however, were hardly silent. Lewis Clark, for instance, replied to Longfellow's assailants, abusing Poe personally."

[71] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 82.

the establishment's throat became, professionally speaking, increasingly important to Poe. Longfellow came to be less *a* representative and more *the* representative of the entire clique system to Poe; as that representative literary angel, Longfellow must be dethroned, must be toppled, if the oligarchic system were ever to be dismantled: "As we have said, Longfellow came to be an incarnation to Poe… 'As Poe's earlier reviews suggest, he understood Longfellow as a personification of what he scornfully called an American 'clique' mentality—that is, of the coterie mentality that pumped life into genteel commercial literature.'"[72] The secret to Poe's obsession with Longfellow lies not in Longfellow as a poet, but rather in Longfellow as a literary lion much lionized—Longfellow as a representative of the type of puffery that proliferated in the establishment. In attacking him, Poe was making a statement regarding the establishment by harpooning that establishment's quintessential author.

That Poe was dealing not with sincere and literary-oriented analyses but with personally-fueled defenses when he interacted with supporters of Longfellow is best demonstrated by the response to Poe written by a pen that identified itself as a friend of Longfellow's but only signed itself with the relatively anonymous cognomen "H." Pushing back against the charges of plagiarism Poe launched at Longfellow in 1845, this author proclaimed, "From long and intimate knowledge of Mr. Longfellow, I pronounce the charge wholly untrue. He is remarkable, among his friends, for his warm and generous commendation of the poetical efforts of his contemporaries.… The charge of habitually imitating other American poets touches Mr. Longfellow in his public character

[72] Sandra Tomc, "Edgar Allan Poe and His Enemies," in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe,* 566.

as a poet."[73] The terms of this defense are unmistakable to any reader versed in the coterie system and clearly rely on a system of personal vouching rather than on engaging with the actual content of the criticism dealt to the author. Earning such responses, Poe was learning, was the fate of those who sought to touch the angels. For every critical review that might be launched, another powerful author stood ready to stand as character reference for the favorites of the establishment. Longfellow, "in his public character as a poet," was invulnerable to literary attack on the basis of his personal friendships with powerful, pen-wielding men.

Such rejoinders to his legitimate criticism caused Poe no end of frustration, partially because they represented disagreement with his particular judgments but more because they evidenced a more general enslavement of judgment to establishment-ordered perspectives. Rejoinders such as these reminded Poe of how, for all the noise and controversy he had stirred up, the establishment still powered on—for all that his pen had done, the poet-figure he was attempting to sculpt through his criticism was still resisted by those in power. As he continued to meet with the very resistance that had initially drawn him to Longfellow's figure, Poe became more frustrated with the clique's preference for defending a mediocre poet than in joining a scintillating critic in that poet's critique. Regardless of his most skilled attempts at dethronement, Poe was learning, Longfellow would always command greater popularity than he—would always be defended simply on the basis of *who he was* rather than on whether he was actually a good author or not. Any attempt Poe made to unseat Longfellow from the realm of

[73] H., "To the Editors of the Evening Mirror," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 703.

favoritism—any attempt he made to drag Longfellow into the ring and spar with him on the basis of poesis rather than preeminence—would be met with personal defenses from biased tongues.

As resistance to Poe's assessment of Longfellow mounted, Poe's criticism of Longfellow took a sharp twist. It was at this point, in 1845, that Poe embarked upon the main campaign in the Little Longfellow War. In this campaign, Poe began striking out more violently against Longfellow and accused him of various forms of plagiarism, including inaccurate attribution of translations and cribbing materials for his own poems. More significantly, Poe, now with six years of war under his belt, did not limit himself to purely literary commentary. During these months, his frustration toward Longfellow as the representative of the literary establishment that had long rejected him led Poe to unleash more personal attacks. Gunning for Longfellow's social celebrity, Poe remarked,

> The poetical reputation of Mr. Longfellow is, no doubt, in some measure well-deserved; but it may be questioned whether, without the adventitious influence of his social position as Professor of Modern Languages and Letters at Harvard, and an access of this influence by marriage with an heiress, he would even have acquired his present celebrity—such as it is.[74]

Longfellow's success, Poe asserted, was due primarily to social status and wealth-by-marriage.

Nor did Poe rest content in casting Longfellow's wife as the obliging economic bastion of the Longfellow literary endeavor; he also went so far as to drag her name before the public when he referred mockingly to her and the poet's offspring while on a general rant against the newest of Longfellow's defenders, the pseudonymous critic,

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[74] Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of Four Works by Longfellow," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 761.

"Outis." After asserting that "Outis" undoubtedly considered him (Poe) a fool, Poe continued, "this idea is also entertained by Mr. Aldrich, and by Mr. Longfellow—and by Mrs. Outis and her seven children—and by Mrs. Aldrich and hers—and by Mrs. Longfellow and hers—including the grand-children and great grand-children, if any, who will be instructed to transmit the idea in unadulterated purity down an infinite vista of generations yet to come."[75] The tradition of assaulting one's enemies with *ad hominem* arguments was fairly well established by criticism at this point; directing acerbic comments toward their *family*, however, was taking things much too far. Even the mid-twentieth century Poe biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn, who treated Poe's life with profound respect and even positivity in his lengthy biography of the same, condemned this choice from Poe, proclaiming, "worse than the bitterness with which Poe pursued lines and stanzas of Longfellow to their supposed origins, was his vulgarity in his personal references to Longfellow. There can be no excuse for [his] remarks."[76] Quinn's attitude reflects that which was held by readers at the time and, as Quinn further narrates the events of these months, Poe's indiscriminate accusations of plagiarism did not merely tarnish Longfellow's reputation but additionally "raise[d] some serious questions regarding Poe's apparent ulterior motives in these attacks."[77] Involving Longfellow's wife and children in the debacle hinted that Poe's feelings regarding Longfellow's reputation rose to a much higher pitch of animosity than could be explained under the typical professional-frustration model, and critics both then and now have been forced to

[75] Edgar Allan Poe, "A Continuation of the voluminous History of the Little Longfellow War—Mr. Poe's farther reply to the letter of Outis," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 722.

[76] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 455.

[77] Ibid.

query exactly what grievance held by Poe against Longfellow could have driven him to such savage, personal extremes.

In pausing to examine this question ourselves, we find curious patterns emerging. Indeed, as Longfellow's reputation—rather than simply his writings—became more of a focus to Poe, we see that Poe's criticism of Longfellow began to rest more and more on attacks related to the circumstances surrounding Poe's own literary estate. Poe had early noted that estate—caste even—was a necessary prerequisite to survival within the literary establishment.[78] A brief glance over Longfellow's biography proves that Longfellow was guilty of possessing an abundance of estate. Where Poe had lost his none-too-well-to-do parents as a child and then been abandoned by his foster-father when he reached adulthood, Longfellow had come of age swathed in paternal care; whereas Poe had been effectively homeless beginning at the age of 18, Longfellow's father-in-law had purchased a home for Longfellow and his wife to live in, from which Longfellow was free to write as much poetry as he pleased, untroubled by the question of where next he would be forced by circumstance to lay his head.[79] Whereas Poe had had to wring pennies from his pen, Longfellow had never lacked money. Poe's education had been cut off after a single semester, effectively preventing him from the hope of ever seeking a

[78] We find Poe's opening discussion of "literary estate in *Poems by Edgar A. Poe*, 16. In Letter to Robert T. Conrad, Jan. 22, 1841, in Poe, *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, 154, Poe employs the term "caste" while pursuing similar themes: "As a man of the world you will at once understand that what I most need for my work in its commencement (since I am comparatively a stranger in Philadelphia) is caste…. if I could obtain the influence of your name in an article (however brief) for my opening number, I feel that it would assist me beyond measure."

[79] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 254. Silverman notes here that "Poe clubbed Longfellow not only for his poetry but also for his life. A Harvard professor of distinguished ancestry, well-traveled abroad, Longfellow had married the daughter of a wealthy Boston merchant, who bought the couple Craigie House as a wedding present."

career within academia or holding forth on literatures from an academic font and thus forcing him into journalism if he wished to contribute to American letters; Longfellow had completed a college education, including time spent studying abroad and had returned to assume professorship of Modern Languages and Belles Lettres at Harvard.[80] Longfellow's authorial construct was, in a sense, independent of the literary establishment; he simply *was established*, on which basis they worshiped him. His claim to authorial fame was not prodigy but pedigree. The former Poe could achieve; the latter, he could not. The disparity between the two men's literary reputations, therefore, was rooted in a disadvantage over which Poe had no control, itself an injustice before which Poe—as his criticism testifies—writhed.

In this way, we can see that Poe's assault on Longfellow was equal parts a critique of the corrupt literary system and an expression of the personal frustrations that arose from a man of genius's interaction with that corrupt system; was a channeling of his frustration regarding his own lack of estate compounded by the establishment's demand for estate. It was an assault born, if not of absolute jealousy of Longfellow, then at least from indescribable frustration with the system that had produced the Longfellow phenomenon, the Longfellows of the world. Longfellow was at once what Poe despised and what he wished to be; what he despised as the symbol of mediocrity elevated to status of genius through puffery and what he wished to be as the established academic author grounded in location, career, and audience. Longfellow's peculiar sin was in being

[80] See Hart, "The Beginning of Longfellow's Fame," 63-64 for information on Longfellow's education and travels abroad.

everything Poe hated *and everything Poe wished to be within the system*.[81] In the years after Poe's death, many of his readers identified Poe as the angel Israfel of his famous poem, first published in *Poems of Edgar A. Poe* (1831). In Poe's estimation of the late 1830s and early 1840s, however, *Longfellow* was Israfel—a talented singer, but inferior to more earthbound poets, such as himself.[82] Longfellow was Poe's personal Israfel, towards whom he might direct both his ire and jealousy.

Much as Longfellow personified the establishment to Poe, Poe's fixation on Longfellow as a target of critical rage has caused scholars to regard the Little Longfellow War as the quintessential example of Poe's criticism, particularly as it informs questions regarding the aims of Poe's criticism. As we have already noted, analyses of Poe's critical agenda have tended to fall into a binary as they seek to identify the ultimate

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[81] Leon Jackson, "'The Rage for Lions': Edgar Allan Poe and the Culture of Celebrity," in Kennedy and McGann, *Poe and the Remapping of Antebellum Print*, 43. Jackson explores this cognitive dissonance in Poe's thought: "Poe was not a passive or consistent consumer of celebrity culture. He was, rather, both drawn to *and* repelled by it. He was drawn to it to the extent that it seemed to hold out precisely the kind of applause and validation he craved; he was repelled by it to the extent that it struck him as fraudulent and unjustifiable valorization of those lacking in talent; and his vacillations were driven by his hopes and fears. When he was able, or hoped to be able, to enjoy the benefits of celebrity, he tended to endorse its premises and institutions and participate in them. When, by contrast, he felt that he was not receiving the attention he deserved, he tended to lash out at the phenomenon in its entirety."

[82] The poet Frances Sargent Osgood wrote a poem that Poe published in the *Broadway Journal* that was very clearly addressed to him. In this poem, Osgood effects the following linkage between her love-object / Poe and Israfel: "I cannot tell *the world* how thrills my heart / To every touch that flies thy lyre along… / But this *I* know—in thine enchanted slumbers, / Heaven's poet, Israfel, —with minstrel fire— / Taught thee the music of his own sweet numbers, / And tuned—to chord with *his*—thy glorious lyre!" Shortly after Poe's death, Frances wrote a poem in honor of Poe describing his as, "The hand that swept the sounding lyre / With more than mortal skill" (lines 1-2). In this poem she not only continues to link the figure of Poe to that of Israfel but also effects the translation of Poe from mortal to "more than mortal" status. For these two poems, see "To ------," *The Broadway Journal* 2, no. 21 (November 29, 1845): 318 and "The Hand That Swept the Sounding Lyre," in *Poems* (New York: Riker, Thorne & Co., 1849), 465, respectively. An early twentieth century Poe biographer, Hervey Allan, continued the tradition, titling his biography *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe*.

motives behind Poe's criticism—tend to breakdown over whether Poe, in these criticisms, was self-consciously and honorably fighting to defend American literature against its destroyers or whether he was, himself, a type of destroyer who slashed at those he disliked, gutting reputations without heed to accuracy or integrity. Ultimately, the question is, was Poe a self-sacrificial knight wielding his pen in the service of American literature and the impoverished genius, or was he a self-serving freelancer thinking only of his own needs?

In light of the survey of Poe's criticism that we have just conducted, I wish to propose that these two interpretive strands are, in fact, not binaries, but rather can be made to accord with one another—may, if interpreted carefully, be seen to be compatible with and mutually productive of one another. While the two strands do not initially strike our sensibilities as being integrable, they are not mutually exclusive and, indeed, a close examination of the two in relation to one another reveals that they are, in Poe's case, deeply intertwined. The compatibility between the two halves of the binary shifts into view if we approach the balancing act through the lens of the theorem that I proposed at the end of the previous chapter: that Poe was a *poet* and that he embarked upon his critical career with the intention of carving out a space for his poet-self within the reigning literary establishment. As we have seen, that establishment was flawed; the establishment did not prioritize supporting or celebrating an author figure that rooted its efforts in genius rather than in party politics. In order to carve out a space for himself to serve his own interests, Poe had first to critique and reform the American literary establishment. In order to carve out a space for himself, he had to devise, propose, and defend authorial standards that protected disenfranchised geniuses and cultivated the

tastes of American readers such that those geniuses and the works they produced might be embraced by both critical and popular audiences. Because he *was* a good writer, Poe, in fighting to create a space for himself within the establishment, necessarily battled on behalf of genius against mediocrity. Hence, in angling toward carving out a place for himself, Poe became involved in the protection of American literature because he was essentially engaging in the protection of the genius author against the cliques that would destroy them. His work was at once self-serving and broader in vision; Poe wanted to devise his own space, and, in order to do that, he needed to draw attention to his theories, to have the eye of the world upon him. The fact that his was an excellent art, meant that, in his fight to create a literary world that was welcoming of *him* he necessarily fought to create a literary world that was welcoming of *artistic genius*; in this way, Poe achieved the messianic effect for which he has been so lauded over the past fifty years and for which he was partially acknowledged during his time.

Thus we see that both of these alternative interpretations that have been offered throughout the years find their perfect integration within the theory that we are here discussing—the theory that Poe was employing his pen not simply to defend American literature or abuse those who earned his personal dislike, but rather to carve out a space for himself within American letters by redefining that which the critical establishment held to be praiseworthy. Identifying Poe's critical performance as a double-edged sword enables us to return to and reevaluate long-treasured notions regarding Poe's performance as a critic.

For example, let us circle back to Moss's identification of Poe's battles as having been launched "to smash the power of the literary cliques entrenched in Boston and New

York City that could make the reputations and fortunes of those authors, editors, and publishers with whom they were in league, and that could ruin those who were outside the pale or who threatened their interests" as well as "to establish conditions favorable for authorship and attractive to men of creative power."[83] In rereading this passage, I agree with Moss regarding the goals Poe adopted but query Poe's *reasons* for developing these objectives—after all, Poe clearly was not favorable to all "authorship" and was not above attacking rather than paving the way for select "men of creative power." By acknowledging that the reason for these objectives was the creation of a space for himself, Poe scholars are provided with a critical apparatus that makes sense of what have hitherto seemed contradictory wings of Poe's criticism: his alternatively impersonal and personal criticisms of authors. Through this lens, we discover that the impersonal criticisms were Poe's attempts to carve the system into a more aesthetically rigorous scene in which he and other men of his peculiar ilk of genius might survive; the personal criticisms represent the moments when his frustration with the system's unresponsiveness to his impersonal criticisms flared out in linguistically-channeled rage. To the degree that Poe expressed vitriol, that feeling arose less from some viciousness of his character and more from the natural affect attendant upon the single-handed battle he was waging. Ire toward individual authors slipped out because it *was maddening*—infuriating—to see this critical machine into which he was now throwing his all continuing to elevate those who did not deserve elevation.

[83] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 3.

This interpretation of Poe in less than messianic terms should not be regarded as a diminution of Poe's immense courage and even integrity in pursuing his crusade. As Moss himself stressed, each of the individual cliques that Poe targeted was "a group that could destroy his burgeoning reputation in a matter of months… the power a clique could and did wield when it banded together to defend an issue was enormous."[84] In the same passage, Moss recounted the story of a poet, James McHenry, who also tried to slug it out with the New York clique but who was signally *destroyed* through that encounter, his reputation *ruined*. This narrative proves that Poe was not merely antagonistic but *skilled* in his antagonism. Whereas McHenry was gutted by the establishment, Poe managed not only to survive to fight another day but also to rise in reputation.[85]

Indeed, despite the fire he drew from the major cliques between 1835-1845, we find Poe not merely *surviving* by the time we arrive at the end of the Longfellow War but actively *thriving* in his criticism. That Poe had, through this ordeal, developed his authorial construct from its abstract poetic beginnings into a confident journalistic force is demonstrated by Moss's description of Poe's response to critical controversy by the end of this decade: "his attitude shows that he was becoming quite sure of himself and of the journalistic value of his critical pen. Alone, he had harried and defied the powerful literary clique of New York and had defended himself against the editorial powers of the South, to emerge triumphant and with reputation."[86] By January 1845, then, Poe's figure—however much portions of that establishment might resent it—had proven itself a

[84] Ibid., 63-64.
[85] Ibid., 64-67.
[86] Ibid., 58

force that could not simply be ignored or chastised into silence by his detractors. However much the next chapter of his life—with its dramatic pitches of literary fortune and cliquish clashes with the New York City Literati—would threaten Poe's reputation as a critic, his status as a critical fixture within American literature was, at the head of 1845, an indisputable reality.

Chapter Three — Raven among the Pigeons: Poe and the Literati, 1845-1846

Between 1835 and 1842, Poe served in an editorial role for three major magazines—the *Southern Literary Messenger, Burton's Magazine,* and *Graham's Magazine*—and contributed poetry, short stories, and marginalia to a further dozen journals.[1] After Virginia first displayed symptoms of tuberculosis in 1842, Poe plunged down a path of decreased stability, resigning from *Graham's* to seek more lucrative employment with the government, but ultimately failing to secure a post.[2] In April 1844, Poe departed from Philadelphia, where he had edited not one but two magazines, and relocated to New York City, the home of several of America's greatest cliques.[3] There, at the literary epicenter of America, Poe experienced such a dramatic rise and devastating plunge in his literary positioning that his acquaintance Dickens' famous line, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times," could not have been more accurate if it had been written in description of Poe's fortunes over the years 1845-1846 rather than of the Reign of Terror. Throughout this rise and fall, Poe continued to employ his pen to reimagine his positioning in relation to the literary establishment, this time from the *inside* of one of that establishment's most prestigious literary salons. He accomplished that (re)positioning first by participating in the traditions of the sentimental poetesses with

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[1] Philip E. Phillips, "Poe the Magazinist," 483. Phillips succinctly summarizes Poe's major magazine involvements, stating, "Over his professional career, Poe moved up and down the East Coast and worked in all the publishing capitals of antebellum America. He contributed to more than thirty periodicals, most notably *The Southern Literary Messenger, Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, Godey's, Graham's Magazine, the Democratic Review,* and the *American Review*." Phillips further confirms Poe's employment by and dates of employments with the three magazines—the *SLM*, *Burton's*, and *Graham's*.

[2] For the timing of Virginia's first symptoms see Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 347. For Poe's resignation from *Graham's*, see Ibid., 340. For his pursuit of federal employment, see Ibid., 360.

[3] Ibid., 406.

whom he fell into company upon his induction into the New York literati scene and later by staging an exposé of that same literary scene in his famed pseudo-critical series, "The Literati of New York City."

In decamping to New York City, Poe knew that he was not shifting to neutral territory. Indeed, no one knew better than he that he was, as historian of Poe's literary context, Sandra Tomc, describes it, "effectively stepping into the world of his enemies" in moving to New York City.[4] Here rose the headquarters of Lewis Gaylord Clark, the editor of the *Knickerbocker Magazine* with whom Poe had sparred for nearly a decade dating from Poe's earliest attacks on New York literary figures in the *Southern Literary Messenger,* attacks to which Clark had responded defensively.[5] Here, too, lay the empire of Evert Duyckinck, with whom Poe had shared an uneasy relationship, and here lived Fitz-Greene Halleck, Cornelius Mathews, and Laughton Osborn, each of whom Poe had reviewed with varying degrees of derisive relish over the preceding decade. Thus, in moving to New York City, Poe was moving into a den of lions who would not be unhappy to transform his literary reputation into a scene of carnage.

Surprisingly, the first major result of Poe's relocation was not carnage but an occasion that catapulted Poe to the forefront of literary America. Indeed, January 29, 1845, saw the appearance of a new poem by Poe in the pages of the New York *Evening Mirror*. The poem was not long; stretched only to 108 lines. It featured two characters—one human, one avian. Its meter was trochaic octameter; its rhyme scheme a curious

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[4] Tomc, "Edgar Allan Poe and His Enemies," 565.

[5] Sidney P. Moss dedicated the entire fourth chapter, "The Anatomy of a Campaign: Poe and Lewis Gaylord Clark," to the conflict between Poe and Clark in his monumental *Poe's Literary Battles*, 85-131.

mixture of end line and internal rhymes. Its subject was somber—morbid even—and rooted in a theme Poe had explored on numerous occasions, both in prose and in verse. When considered purely in terms of its formal characteristics, there were no specific aspects of the text that could have led anyone—excluding a seer worthy of the poem's supernatural tone—to predict the nature of its reception, either for good or for bad.

Indeed, "unpredictable" is the only way to describe the reception of "The Raven"—the only way to characterize its swift winging of itself into the minds and lives of readers throughout America and even across the Atlantic.[6] No one could have predicted that Edgar Allan Poe, then best known as an unstinting literary critic, would, overnight, achieve literary fame not with a short story—a genre within which he had some reputation—but with a *poem*, a poem that mesmerized its readers with its incantatory rhythm and hypnotizing repetition of the single word: "Nevermore." Yet, in the weeks following the release of "The Raven," the poem utterly captured the imagination of the American people. The word "Nevermore" became a catchphrase across all classes of society as, in Quinn's own words, "'The Raven' made an impression

[6] Elizabeth Barrett Browning reported the effect of "The Raven" over Britain in "Elizabeth Barrett to E. A. Poe, April 1846," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated June 11, 2021, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4604000.htm. In this missive she writes, "Your 'Raven' has produced a sensation — a "fit horror" — here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it, & some by the music — I hear of persons haunted by the "nevermore" — and one acquaintance of mine… who has the misfortune of possessing a "bust of Pallas", never can bear to look at it in the twilight. I think you will like to be told our great poet Mr. Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus,' & the 'Bells & Pomegranates' was struck much by the rhythm of that poem." In *Edgar A. Poe,* 238-39, Silverman reports a further enchanting tidbit in his commentary on this moment in Poe's life: "An English publisher named Frederick Saunders later reported that Poe thought of going to England to read the poem before Queen Victoria, and of presenting her a copy, bound sumptuously."

probably not surpassed by that of any single piece of American poetry."[7] Poe himself experienced the phenomena his poem had incited when he visited the theatre, where, as he later proudly reported to a friend, an actor not only adlibbed the line "Nevermore!" into his performance, but the audience itself reacted to the word with recognition.[8] Silverman reports that the poem further entered into popular culture as a spate of spoofs, parodies, and imitations of "The Raven" sprang up in newspapers: "Periodicals in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia comically turned the famous bird into other creatures, "The Black Cat," "The Craven" (by "Poh!"), "The Gazelle," "The Whippoorwill," "The Turkey," "The Mammoth Squash" ("Green and specked with spots of golden")."[9] More significant for our conversation regarding Poe's authorial figure is the fact that, as The Raven winged its way across the states, it did so *as Poe*—or, more accurately still, when Poe began to move around the city, he did so *as The Raven*.

Indeed, in several of the literary salons at which Poe began, slowly, to make his appearances in the wake of "The Raven," the hosts introduced him *as* "The Raven," and

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[7] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 439. The recently-published, *Anthologizing Poe* demonstrates how frequently "The Raven" has been republished, anthologized, and translated: Emron Esplin and Margarida Vale de Gato, eds., *Anthologizing Poe: Editions, Translations, and (Trans)National Canons* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press; Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2020).

[8] The friend, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, recorded this incident in her reminiscences of Poe: "Mr. Poe was pleased with the impression produced; he was sensitive to blame or praise, at all times, and at this time had many causes for uneasiness. He was present at the theater, he told me, when the principal actor, I forget who, interpolated the words "nevermore." A thrill seemed to pass through the whole audience, and the sensation, together with its cause, were not to be mistaken. How still, and with what an unearthly look of pleasure, Poe told me this. His large, open eyes fixed upon vacancy, and his clear intellectual face radiant. He then saw supernal lights, and heard supernal voices." Additional details of this tale may be found in Elizabeth Oakes Smith, "Autobiographic Notes: Edgar Allan Poe," *Beadle's Monthly* (February 1867): 154.

[9] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 237-38. Quinn documents a similar cultural uprising in *Edgar Allan Poe*, 439-42.

the attendees sat agog and listened, spellbound, as Poe recited the poem to them.[10] Poe was finally making a splash before the eye of the world, and he was making it precisely where he wanted to—in the literary salon.

As this is the first instance in which Poe—after almost twenty years of longing for acceptance from the literary establishment—finally achieved a degree of recognition from the nation's literati, the moment is well worth exploring. The first point to be explored is the phenomena of the literary salon itself, as such a survey aids in establishing precisely how significant the invitation to participate in literary salon culture was in Poe's press for authorial recognition. Indeed, when we speak of the literary establishment during Poe's time, we must realize that, while we refer to it in the singular and its effects often were executed in the singular, the establishment itself was a composite force: a composite of the coteries that existed within the establishment. Coteries and salons were not identical, but they did intersect, for while coteries did not require the existence of a salon to exist themselves, the geographically-bound nature of coteries often led to the development of salons where members of any given coterie met and consolidated their alliances. Conversely, the attendees of a salon did not always map perfectly onto the members in a city's coterie, but oftentimes coteries formed from the ranks of those who attended a particular salon.

In his recent examination of the characteristics and politics of salon culture in the 1800s, David Dowling provides an exceedingly helpful description of the role that the conjunction of coterie and salon played in the literary world. Dowling notes that there

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[10] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 278-79.

were two main benefits that accrued to members of either type of group. The first of these benefits revolved around the member's status or protectedness. On this subject, Dowling asserts, "[a]uthors were not employees of their coteries, but nonetheless stood to benefit directly from their association with the circle much in the way workers enjoy privilege and status based on affiliation with powerful and prestigious companies."[11] The coterie or salon acted as "marketing vehicles" with those who belonged to the coterie or salon reaping the benefit of their membership as "the coterie name became a commodity itself circulating in the marketplace, crucially encoding the significance of literary works and their attendant authors' reputations as they circulated through myriad economies of exchange."[12] As Edward Whitley further explains, "Writers could leverage the cultural capital that they accrued through salon appearances into regular employment or publishing contracts, as book publishers and periodical editors attended salon events alongside authors and socialites."[13] Belonging to a salon or coterie had the ability to amplify reputation, enhance estate, and deed artistic "caste" to the member.

In addition to this more economic or pragmatic benefit, the meetings also provided a secondary, more artistic benefit to their attendees. These salons acted as a space in which attendees might meet fellow artists; a forum in which artists exchanged and refined their ideas through conversation with one another. The conversation that occurred within and the collaborations that emerged from salons were a means by which the artist might improve their art and develop their thought. In this sense, Dowling's

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[11] Dowling, *Literary Circles*, 2.

[12] Ibid., 3, 20.

[13] Edward Whitley, "Bluestockings and Bohemians," in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe,* 578.

labelling of these meetings as an "economy of exchange" was not a purely "economic" description; it was a description of creative atmosphere as well. As we have noted, the salons that opened their doors to Poe in the wake of his success also invited him to recite his poetry aloud. This type of artistic airing was common in these circles, and many artists wrote poems especially for circulation in salons—especially to receive feedback from an exclusively critical rather than a popular audience.[14] Thus, belonging to a salon placed individual artists in a position not only to increase their literary estate but also to improve their actual artistry as the attendees luxuriated in the company of and derived inspiration from interactions with their fellow artists.

The reasons why Poe, ravenous for literary estate and in desperate need of support wherever he could find it, would long to be included in literary salon culture should be obvious. As a relative outsider with few literary connections within New York City, Poe stood to profit exponentially from any associations he might build through the city's literati scene. Although he had been ignored, socially, for the first eight months of his

[14] Joanne Dobson, "Sex, Wit, and Sentiment: Frances Osgood and the Poetry of Love," *American Literature* 65, no. 4 (December 1993): 633. Through her research in Osgood's archives, Dobson discovered what she calls "Osgood's salon verses"—"witty, sexy, and cosmopolitan salon poems, [that] although not published, were treasured in manuscript by friends and kept in draft form by Osgood herself," 633. Another example of the salon's role in generating / circulating verse is found in the performance of Sarah Helen Whitman, who sent verses to Lynch to be read before the salon. Caroline Ticknor tells the story of this occasion in *Poe's Helen* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 42-43, where she recounts, "Mrs. Whitman complied with the request of her friend Miss Lynch… to send a contribution of her "Valentine" party. A similar request had been already complied with during the previous year when Mrs. Whitman had forwarded some sprightly verses which were read at one of the literary gatherings presided over by this clever hostess." Lynch's parties also proved that the interchange of art within a salon could lead to "real world" publications—"Last year on the evening of Valentine's Day, which came on Saturday, I had a Valentine party; that is there were valentines written for all present, mostly original, and in general merely complimentary verses. The best of them were selected and read, and some of them were afterwards published. I am going to have another this year," Lynch to Whitman, qtd. in Ticknor, *Poe's Helen*, 43.

tenure in New York City, after the publication of "The Raven," Poe was invited to and began attending several salons, including those hosted by the popular essayist Caroline M. Kirkland and the poet Anne Lynch.[15] Speaking both socially and biographically, Lynch's salon was by far the most important salon that Poe ever attended and, indeed, was the most popular gathering place of the city.[16] This salon, historians have noted, "played host to some of the broadest cross-sections of literati in the city's history"; it was, moreover, a site at which multiple coteries assembled to interact with other coteries not only from New York City but also from cities as far removed as Philadelphia, Boston, and Providence.[17] Lynch's gathering place was, as it were, the salon of salons, and Poe had been granted entrance to its high court.

Poe's literary estate began to improve immediately upon his entrance to the salon scene in New York City, and he soon began to feel the benefits of moving amongst "high" literary society both on an economic and a literary front. Indeed, entering the economy of exchange impacted Poe's career almost immediately, as he connected through the salon scene with Charles Briggs, who was then founding a new magazine, *The Broadway Journal*. Briggs later outlined Poe's impact in the salon scene, describing

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[15] Whitley, "Bluestockings and Bohemians," 578. Whitley asserts that Kirkland was, in fact, the first hostess to invite Poe into literary society; it was Lynch, however, who made him popular in the salon scene.

[16] Grace Greenwood, then a famous journalist, children's author, and women's rights activist, was one of many to testify to the overweening charm of Lynch's salon: "[Lynch] had about her a goodly company of choice spirits, artistic and literary—a delightful circle, gathered she hardly knew how; for she was far from realizing the subtle attraction, the peculiarly gentle magnetism, of her own personality. This circle widened and widened, till from it and for it she formed the most brilliant and successful *salon* I have ever known in America." For this and additional commentary, see Greenwood, "A Loving Tribute," in *Memoirs of Anne C. L. Botta Written by Her Friends with Selections from her Correspondence and from her Writings in Prose and Poetry*, ed. Vincenzo Botta (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1893), 42-43.

[17] Dowling, *Literary Circles*, 16.

his appearance there as "betoken[ing] the visit of a celebrity," an accomplishment Briggs interprets through his further observation that, "[Poe] aimed at nothing, thought of nothing, and hoped for nothing but literary reputation."[18] Shortly thereafter, Briggs and his partner John Bisco invited Poe to be involved in the *Broadway Journal*, to which he agreed. As Poe would explain later to a correspondent, "[i]n view of the public I am responsible for all that has appeared in "The Broadway Journal," since the period when my name, as one of its editors, was placed upon its title-page. But, in fact, my connextion [sic] with the paper during the first six months of its existence, was simply that of contributor."[19] As this statement makes clear, Poe's own name was, through his entry into the salon system, coming to possess some measure of the cultural currency he had so long desired to wield. Indeed, the collective celebrity attendant upon Poe's Ravenesque entry to the salon world reaped a variety of opportunities almost immediately, and, during this time, Poe was also invited to give lectures on American poetry, recite poems before societies, judge a composition contest for Rutgers Female Institute, and perform a reading at the Boston Lyceum, among other things.[20]

In addition to thus undergoing an explosion in his range of professional associations and activities, Poe also plunged directly into the second perk of salon culture: interacting with and deriving inspiration from his fellow artists. As we have

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[18] Charles Frederick Briggs, "From 'The Personality of Poe' (1877)," in *Poe in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, ed. Benjamin F. Fisher (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 298.

[19] Poe to Laughton Osborn, August 15, 1845, in Poe, *Letters Vol. I*, 293.

[20] For the composition competition, see Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 459. For the invitation to read poems and the Lyceum performance, see Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 260 and 266, respectively. Briggs notes that Poe "delivered a lecture on American poets" in 1845 in "From 'The Personality of Poe'," 299.

already noted, this was a novel experience for Poe, who had hitherto conducted his criticisms of and attempts to position himself in relation to the establishment largely from outside that establishment. As the first occasion on which Poe had the opportunity to attempt to shape either his authorial practices or reputation from *within* the establishment—in collaboration with, rather than contradistinction to, major artists of his time—his performance in this setting is worth examining. The fact that these interactions with the literati would fund Poe's greatest achievements by way of literary "estate" and would also prove the instrumentation through which that rising popularity would be unseated only serves to make the survey more fascinating for our purposes.

Upon his entry into the salon scene, Poe struck an unusual figure. We have already noted that Poe often recited "The Raven" before assembled companies, thrilling their number to the tones of his haunting poem.[21] His poetic presentation of himself did not end here, and, according to another attendee, Poe "did not affect the society of men, rather that of highly intellectual women with whom he liked to fall into a sort of eloquent monologue, half dream, half poetry. Men were intolerant of all this, but women fell under his fascination and listened in silence."[22] Poe certainly was in more than usual favor with

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[21] Silverman *Edgar A. Poe*, 278-79. Silverman provides the following fascinating interweaving of quotes from the era: "[Poe's] entrée was insured by the recent fame of his poem, which he seems to have read impressively at several gatherings: "to hear him repeat the Raven," one guest remarked, "which he does very quietly, is an event in one's life." Together with his reputation for such eerie tales as "Mesmeric Revelation," his mournful bird made Poe a magnetic figure to the other guests. "People seem to think there is something uncanny about him," one reported, "and the strangest stories are told, and, what is more, *believed*, about his mesmeric experiences, at the mention of which he always smiles. His smile is captivating!" He became a literary lion of the New York drawing rooms, "the observed of all observers," a contemporary said."

[22] Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *Selections from the Autobiography*, ed. Mary Alice Wyman (Lewiston, ME: Lewiston Journal, 1924), 88.

the most important hostess of the entire scene, Anne Lynch, as proven by the fact that she repeatedly solicited his appearance at her salon.[23] As his then friend and later enemy, Thomas Dunn English, noted of the time, "Poe soon became a lion with a coterie of literary ladies."[24] Among this "coterie" of literary women with whom Poe most interacted were a handful of "sentimental" poetesses with whom he engaged in a type of economy of exchange that would impact his subsequent life and career.

In her significant work *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle*, Eliza Richards carefully examines the exact nature of Poe's relationship with the women writers of Lynch's salon, probing its seemingly social nature to discover deep literary implications beyond its surface. At this time, Richards explains, poetry was considered to arise from feminine capacities, and critics widely believed that, in order to write good poetry, one must write in a *feminine* vein—must tap into a *feminine* aspect of oneself to achieve the true heights of ethereal beauty necessary to produce true poetry.[25] This was not to say that women were the best writers of poetry, but rather that the "feminine" must be achieved in order to be among the best writers of poetry. Poe's entry into Lynch's salon was his first real contact with any female poet—much less with a coterie of them—and Richards posits that his interactions with them had direct ramifications upon his own work. More specifically, Richards asserts that Poe and the female writers of Lynch's salon consciously entered into a type of contractual exchange in which each stood, on some level, to profit. These women, ranging from the playwright Anna Cora Mowatt, to

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[23] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 279. Some evidence even suggests that Lynch authorized Poe to offer the occasional invitation to her own salon on her behalf.

[24] Thomas Dunn English. "Reminiscences of Poe [Part 03]," *Independent* XLVIII (October 29, 1896): col. 1.

[25] Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception,* 4.

the poets Mary E. Hewitt, Elizabeth Ellet and even Anne Lynch herself, cast Poe as a type of critical mentor, soliciting his reviews of their work, and expressing deep trust in his critical judgment. Thus, in a letter to Poe written in March 1845, Anna Cora Mowatt would opine,

> (I regret that) I have not a more legible manuscript of the Comedy to submit to your perusal, or even one containing all the corrections made at the suggestion of critical advisers. The only fair copy is in the hands of the managers, and that I could not procure. Your criticisms will be prized — I am sorry that they could not have been made before preparations for the performance of the Comedy had progressed so far.[26]

Nor was Mowatt the only writer to request private review from Poe. In a missive sent the following month, famed poet Mrs. Hewitt wrote to Poe, asking, "Will you not favor me with a reply, should this reach you? And do me the favor to read and find fault with my last poem, which I enclose for your perusal."[27] Poe was finally achieving the critical status he desired, and he was achieving it in a context that also yielded him creative benefits.

Those creative benefits accrued to Poe through his own portion of the contractual exchange into which Richards describes Poe as entering with these women; one in which Poe attempted, himself, to enter into not only the *consumption* of, but also the *production* of the feminine in his own verse as a means of pursuing even greater poetic fame. Poe accomplished this, Richards claims, by mimicking, channeling, and participating in the sentimental poetry tradition; by entering into the tropes of sentimental poetry and taking

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[26] Anna Cora Mowatt, "Anna C. Mowatt to Edgar Allan Poe, March 20, 1845," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated November 28, 2009, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4503200.htm.

[27] Mary E. Hewitt, "Mary E. Hewitt to Edgar Allan Poe, April 15 (14), 1846," Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, updated November 17, 2009, https://www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4604150.htm.

up those tropes in his own poetry as a means of appropriating and then exploiting the "feminine" aspects of verse. While such a claim sounds extreme, its underlying assertion—that Poe capitalized on his new estate to effect an extremely complex positioning of himself within a preexisting discourse—is compatible with our own. As the primary instance of Poe's artistic interactions with these sentimental poetesses also functioned as the means through which Poe fell from literary grace and returned to the world of cutthroat criticism, that encounter merits exploration on both counts.

The most profound example of the impact of Poe's interaction with female poets on his crafting of poetic output, the most dramatic instance of his stabs at positionality during this period, and the inciting incident that led to his subsequent expulsion from the salon scene can be found in the form of his relationship with Frances Sargent Osgood across the summer, fall, and winter of 1845. By the time that the pair met in the spring of 1845, each was already well-known to the other.[28] Poe's criticisms were famous across both New York City and Boston, where Osgood had previously resided, and Poe had not only published Osgood's poetry in *Graham's Magazine* before he departed its editorship in 1842, but had also spoken positively of her work in his recent lectures on poetry.[29] Poe was not alone in holding Osgood's poetry in high regard; a recent resident of England, Osgood's verse had achieved acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic and she was largely

[28] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 477-78; Quinn includes a lengthy quote by Osgood documenting her thoughts and sensations on the occasion of this first meeting.

[29] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 281-82; in his lecture, Poe forecasted that Osgood would experience "a rosy future of increasing power and renown."

held to be among the most accomplished, the truest *poetess* in America.[30] As Anne Boyd Rioux proclaims, Osgood "embodied the ideal of the 'poetess.'"[31]

Critics have long puzzled over the exact nature of Poe and Osgood's relationship, particularly querying whether it was more professional or personal in nature. Formally, the relationship consistently of interactions within the confines of Lynch's salon before it spilled into the pages of the *Broadway Journal,* over which Poe then exercised some editorial control. In the journal's pages, Poe published the poetry that Osgood sent to him, much of which appeared to be obliquely addressed to Poe himself and which further appeared to express Osgood's interest in him and desire that their friendship might progress to more intimate terms than that on which it then rested.[32] Poe responded to several of these poems with verses of his own, and the two also exchanged letters over the course of their acquaintance before it was hastily discontinued in 1846. On the basis of these formal characteristics, interpretations of the nature of the relationship have run an entire gamut. Some authors have gone so far as to suggest that the two were lovers and

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[30] Rufus Griswold, "Frances S. Osgood," in *Female Poets of America* (Philadelphia, PA: Carey and Hart, 1849), 272-73. In his authoritative anthology, Griswold commented of Osgood's skills: "Mrs. Osgood…. has been one of the most constant and popular contributors to the literary magazines… Throughout all [her work] appears the poet, and the affectionate and enthusiastic woman. Of none of our writers has the excellence been more steadily progressive. Every month her powers have seemed to expand and her sympathies to deepen."

[31] Anne Boyd Rioux, "Lions and Bluestockings," in Hayes, *Poe in Context,* 133. As Rioux continues, "In that sense, then, she transcended the maligned bluestocking, whose learning was deemed affected and pretentious. Osgood's ultra-feminine literary persona thus made her alluring rather than threatening (as the bluestocking was. Her sexually charged lyrics found their way from soiree performances to the pages of the popular magazines and back again."

[32] Silverman *Edgar A. Poe,* 282. The following quote from Silverman is particularly telling: "Poe printed several other poems by Fanny and himself that seem gambits in a hands-off, but interested, courting game. So far as they may be interpreted as obliquely raising the possibility of a serious romance, they show Fanny as genteelly seductive and Poe hesitant to the point of appearing indifferent, preoccupied, or guilt-ridden," 283.

that the child Osgood gave birth to in 1846 was, in fact Poe's.[33] More respectable interpretations deny that there was a physical aspect to their relationship but disagree over the exact nature of their feelings for one another. Some critics assert that there was likely some legitimate romantic interest between the two, while others suggest that the exchange in the *Broadway Journal* was a mere literary courtship; an interaction that was *designed* to inspire gossip, inspire interest.

I wish to suggest, however, that their relationship may be best perceived through the lens offered to us by Richards' scholarship—that the relationship can only be rightly interpreted when we perceive it through the lens of authorial construction and when we perceive Poe and Osgood as interacting with one another primarily as authorial selves. Poe arrived on the literary salon scene eager for estate, hungry for elevation, and committed to adapting and refashioning his positionality in relation to the literati as a means of achieving that end. As he interacted with the poetesses of the set, he discovered a previously untapped sphere for poetic experimentation and exploitation; within that sphere, Osgood was by far the most innately talented, as is proven by Poe's own constant

[33] John Evangelist Walsh argues in *Plumes in the Dust: The Love Affair of Edgar Allan Poe and Fanny Osgood* (1980) that Frances was separated from Samuel in the mid-1840s and that Poe fathered her third child. This is a fringe perspective and is denied by almost all of Poe's more assiduous biographers, who point to psychological traits of both figures, questions of timeline, and even the positive attitudes that both poets' spouses held towards the poetic duo's relationship to refute the allegation. As ever, Moss's scholarship is incomparable on this front. He writes in *Poe's Literary Battles*, 211, that "No letters (except perhaps for the note mentioned in note 28) from Poe to Mrs. Osgood have been discovered. Neither Poe's wife nor Mrs. Osgood's husband—Samuel Stillman Osgood, a portrait painter—objected to the friendship. Virginia encouraged the relationship, it seems, feeling that Mrs. Osgood "had a restraining and beneficial effect" upon her husband, and Mr. Osgood, apparently, was used to his wife's impetuous and unconventional behavior." Silverman also supplies a fairly thorough rebuttal of the ideal that their affair extended beyond the literary in *Edgar A. Poe,* 287-290.

elevation of Osgood's skills in his lectures.[34] Poe's recognition of Osgood's talents extended beyond an appreciation of her poetic skills and encompassed an admiration of Osgood's skill in transforming herself into a cultural force, a figure whose name held currency as "one of the best-known female poets of the period."[35] It was this perception of Osgood as possessing mass audience appeal, rather than a particular attraction to her person that led Poe to stage their public drama in the pages of the *Broadway Journal.*

Through this exchange, Poe managed both to cast himself as the object of sentimental art—thus exalting himself as the uncapturable love-object of America's best-loved poetess—as well as to cast Osgood as his muse—thus exalting himself through his association with her. To be the love object, the poetic subject, of the most famous poetess of the country elevated his own position, subsumed her literary fame into hers—allowed him to appropriate her considerable fame by making her a footnote in his own reputation. Moreover, by casting the best poetess in the country not as his superior, but as his *muse,* as the *inspirer of his art,* Poe deftly reversed their roles, displacing Osgood's poethood with his own. The more emphatically Osgood voiced her desire for him, the more Poe's reputation blossomed; the more he cast her as his muse in his responses to her in his journal, the more his own reception widened.

Thus, we see within Poe's interaction with Osgood—and, to a lesser extent, with the female poetesses of Lynch's salon—that Poe was intentionally experimenting with

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[34] Richards, *Gender and Poetics,* 1. Richards begins her study by referencing the following proof of Poe's estimate of Osgood's skill: "In 1845, at the height of his career, Edgar Allan Poe asked popular "poetess" Frances Sargent Osgood to write a poem "equal to my reputation" that he could present at the Boston Lyceum (*EAP* 286). The request presumes Osgood's ability to emulate his work so closely that her poem could pass as his own."

[35] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe,* 281.

and devising his author construct through his positioning of himself in relation to and appropriating the styles of those with whom he came in contact through his expansion of literary estate. Now, at last "within" the establishment, Poe was shrewdly exploiting that positionality to bolster his burgeoning reputation. The fact that he embarked upon this exploitation of the affordances of his new estate so swiftly—and skillfully—upon acceding to that estate demonstrates that this leveraging of circumstance to affect his positionality was no accident. Indeed, Poe's immediate employment of the salon scene to these ends proves that such leveraging had been engrained into his persona by long practice—that this leveraging had long constituted the primary strategy of his authorial self-construction.

It is difficult to conjecture how long Poe's residence and escalating reputation-making among the New York literati would have lasted were it not for his dealings with Osgood. What is certain is that it was those very dealings with Osgood that brought the whole show crashing down—that it was his own hubristic stab at social scaling that upset the balance of Poe's steadily rising popularity, derailed his project of self-aggrandizement, and sent him spiraling down a less propitious path.

Having spent the majority of 1845 editing and then finally owning the *Broadway Journal* (in which he conducted his literary takeover of Osgood), Poe lost the journal in January 1846. Despite this collapse, Poe was maintaining his relatively positive position within the New York Literati as the women whose attention he loved so well had only pity for his lost journal and his wife's failing health. This idyllic state of affairs was all to change, however, through the instrumentality of his "literary affairs"—through the very women whose worship he had so assiduously courted. As this anecdote forms the bridge

that illustrates how Poe transformed from the beloved, be-petted lion of the salon to the embittered, enraged tiger of the gossip column within the space of a few months, we will briefly glance at its features.[36]

As we have noted, Osgood and Poe carried on a very public exchange that had the appearance of a courtship or flirtation in the pages of the *Broadway Journal*. Moreover, the two met at Lynch's and others' salons and Poe received letters from Osgood. This state of affairs was still in full motion by early 1846, when Elizabeth Ellet, another literary lady with an interest in Poe whose poems Poe had prominently featured in the *Broadway Journal*, called on the Poes at their home. There, she viewed a letter from Osgood to Poe that led her to write to Osgood in the wake of that visit urging her to retrieve her letters immediately from Poe lest he bend them to dishonorable means and Osgood's reputation suffer.

Osgood, frightened by Ellet's suggestion that her reputation could be damaged by the letters she had penned to Poe, sent several literary women—possibly Margaret Fuller and Anne Lynch herself—to request the return of her letters from Poe. Poe was indignant at this meddling and hinted that it was not Osgood but Ellet who should be concerned regarding the making-public of the letters she had sent him. This statement, clearly, was not calculated to deescalate Ellet, and she retaliated by sending her own brother, a U. S. Army officer, to collect her letters from Poe. Poe, claiming that he had already returned her letters to her, regarded the appearance of her brother as an insult. Rushing away, he called on his friend, Thomas Dunn English, and demanded the usage of his pistol to duel

[36] The full details of this tangled affair are comprehensively summarized in Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 209-17 and Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 280-93.

with Ellet's brother. English refused, and the matter descended into a fistfight that each man later claimed to have won.

As this recitation will have made clear, there are many details of this narrative that were hotly contested by the participants in that narrative—whether Ellet actually wrote any letters, if she did whether Poe actually returned them or only pretended to have returned them to avoid a beating at the hands of her brother, who won the Poe-English fistfight, etc. Regardless of these details, the end result was the same: "Poe found few, if any, defenders in the affair of the letters, and the general opinion seems to have been that he had reprehensibly impeached the integrity of an innocent woman. His fall from favor was sudden and extreme."[37] Ellet was a fixture at Lynch's salon and an extremely verbal one at that; Lynch herself was displeased with the affair in general and Poe's behavior in particular, later describing the affair with the words, "There was a great war in bluestockingdom some time ago and Poe did not behave very honorably in it… I now scarcely ever see him."[38] With such forces as these arrayed in judgment against him, Poe could hardly hope to maintain his former position within the literati.

Thus, Poe was expelled from literary society, removed on account of the dishonor he had paid to its most prized members. His journal had collapsed just weeks prior to this ejection, leaving him without a source of income and not only out of contact with, but *actively in disfavor* with those on whom, just a month before, he might have relied to provide him with basic employment. In essence, whereas early 1845 had seen

[37] James B. Reese, "A Reexamination of a Poe Date: Mrs. Ellet's Letters," *American Literature* 42, no. 2 (May 1970): 160-61.

[38] Rioux, "Lions and Bluestockings," 134

the publication of "The Raven" and the upward ascendency of Poe, early 1846 triggered the downward plunge of Poe—the decimation of his carefully crafted position within the New York Literati. Poe's estate, so recently expanding its holdings to encompass the leas of the salons and the founts of poetesses such as Osgood, had shriveled to its previous postage-penny lot size.

Desperate to justify himself to the world, Poe avoided the one thing that, as in so many of his feuds, might have restored him to society: an apology. Instead of apologizing for his incendiary remarks to Ellet, he opted to cajole a statement from his doctor to the effect that he (Poe) suffered occasional bouts of insanity that left him unresponsible for the things he said and did while *in* those bouts, a statement Poe circulated with the explanation that he had been suffering from just such a bout in his dealings with the Starry Sisterhood. Rather than alleviating the censure in which he was held, this report—predictably—served only to inflame that censure; to pair the juicy tidbit of Poe's *certifiable* madness with that of his witnessed madness. Private opinions of Poe remained low, and Poe remained without employment as the year shifted towards its summer.

In May of 1846, *Godey's Ladies' Magazine*—then one of the nation's most read periodicals—ran the first installment of a series that called itself "The Literati of New York City: Some Honest Opinions at Random Respecting Their Autorial Merits, with Occasional Words of Personality." Asserting that it would continue indefinitely until it had exhausted itself of subjects, this series promised to reveal the truth of that which transpired behind the closed doors of the literary salons; the truth of what those who congregated behind the closed doors of the literary salons thought not only of each other but also of the literati who lay beyond those doors. It proposed to achieve its tell-all ends

through the purveyance of individual sketches of the various figures who attended the salons, sketches that would be replete with biographical backgrounds, career overviews, and critical analyses of individual works. The series was, of course, written by none other than Poe, and the first edition of the issue sold out almost instantly as readers ate up Poe's insider expose of the literary circle that had been providing them with their entertainment for the preceding decade.

Between the six installments of the "The Literati" that appeared between May and its final appearance in October 1846, Poe canvassed thirty-eight artists, including the foremost of the attendees of Lynch's salon. The only truly noticeable absentee from the list of New York City notables Poe treated was Elizabeth Ellet, who, by excluding, Poe indicated he felt was beneath notice—was beneath the title even of literati. The sketches reveal much regarding the ways in which Poe's understanding of the literary establishment and his relation to it had evolved through his integration within it the previous year and, close examination confirms, they stand themselves as an instance of Poe's attempting self-consciously to define his positioning in regard to the larger establishment in the wake of his banishment from its most visible incarnations.

In penning "The Literati of New York City," Poe created a series that was unique in the history of American letters. Indeed, while his own "Autography" series might be described as a type of conceptual forerunner to "The Literati," it in no way can compare to the experiential knowledge of American authors Poe exhibits in the "Literati."[39] Poe

[39] Poe first began writing his "Autography" sketches while still editing the *Southern Literary Messenger*. By the time he began editing for *Graham's Magazine*, he had refined his approach. Quinn describes the series thus in *Edgar Allan Poe*, 328: "In *Graham's* he presented the autographs, followed by a brief paragraph, in which he described the literary, and, at times, the personal characters of about one hundred American writers." Although the series

himself made very clear in both the introduction to the Literati and in his personal statements regarding the series that he never intended for the series to be perceived as *criticism*; rather, he intended for the works to convey a sense of the author-figure to their reading public and to provide insight into how that figure was *really* viewed by the larger literati. The purpose was not to engage in a systematic analysis of the author under consideration, but rather to provide an *experience* of that figure—to enable readers to catch a glimpse of the figure their favorite author cut when privately encountered in society rather than on the pages of the many magazines in which their pieces appeared. Thus, the sketches are not simply criticism disguised as gossip or gossip disguised as criticism—they are their own genre in which elements of both are integrated into a fuller whole.

Perhaps the most noticeable example of the uniqueness of this new critical-gossip genre is the fact that, rather than remain in the realm of the aesthetic or non-material in his treatments of these authors, Poe concluded each sketch with a description of the figure's persona—their physical features, their personalities, their general effect, what it felt like to stand next to them. In some instances, this description is fairly straightforward, as in the case of the French-born American playwright Anna C. Mowatt, whom he describes as having a face "of that precise character best adapted to the stage" with a well-formed nose "with the Roman curve" and a large mouth "with brilliant and even teeth and flexible lips, capable of the most instantaneous and effective variations of

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encompassed a far larger range of authors, each piece—only a paragraph in length—did not contain nearly the detail or personal knowledge of "The Literati."

expression."[40] Just as often, these catalogues of physical features dipped into descriptions of personality that display affection, distaste, or—occasionally—amusement from Poe, the latter bleeding through strongly in his portrait of John W. Francis:

> His address is the most genial that can be conceived, its *bonhomie* irresistible. He speaks in a loud, clear, hearty tone, dogmatically, with his head thrown back and his chest out; never waits for an introduction to anybody; slaps a perfect stranger on the back and calls him "Doctor" or "Learned Theban;" [sic] pats every lady on the head and (if she be pretty and *petite*) designates her by some such title as "My Pocket Edition of the Lives of the Saints."[41]

The level of detail Poe reported regarding his figures, in additional to being delightful, achieved two concrete ends. The first was to prove his own ethos; the precise conversational and physiognomic details he conveys are things that only an author who had jostled shoulders with these figures could write. These are no mere generic sketches of generic people; they are exact sketches of exact individuals. The very detail provided here served as Poe's reference letter, his proof of participation in the clique he was now critiquing. Moreover, the fact that Poe afforded attention to the most minute details of the New York literati in his interactions with their figures and the resulting minutia of detail he provides in reference to their physical characteristics lent veracity to his documentation of attitudes, biographies, and literary merit elsewhere in the sketches.

As this last sentence hints, Poe does not rest content with providing only descriptions of personality in these sketches, and he does embark on critical assessments of each of the figures he canvasses. Unsurprisingly, given the terms on which he was

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[40] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Anna Cora Mowatt," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1140-41.

[41] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: John W. Francis," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1136.

ejected from salon culture, Poe does occasionally use these sketches as an opportunity to launch barbs against his treasured enemies. This latter usage of the series bleeds through especially in his commentary on his unfortunate co-editor of the *Broadway Journal*, Charles F. Briggs; his long-term rival, Rufus Griswold; his newfound rival, Thomas Dunn English; and the head of the New York clique, Lewis Gaylord Clark. Of the four, Griswold is let off the lightest, primarily because Poe did not dedicate an entire sketch to his person. Instead, Poe simply snipes at the accuracy of Griswold's editorial work in another author's sketch, noting, "Doctor Griswold, in a foot-note appended to one of her poems quoted in his "Poets and Poetry," speaks of the "volume" from which he quotes; but Miss Bogart has not yet collected her writings in volume form."[42] Poe waxes much more satirical in his description of Briggs' style, which he characterizes as being "a kind of writing which, to ordinary and especially to indolent intellects, has a very observable charm. To cultivated or to active minds it is in an equal degree distasteful, even when claiming the merit of originality."[43] In the wake of this snarky description, Poe roundly observes, "Mr. Briggs has never composed in his life three consecutive sentences of grammatical English. He is grossly uneducated."[44] Whether Poe's especial ire for Briggs arose more from their interactions while co-editing the *Broadway Journal* or from the fact that Poe wanted to clear himself of the accusation of inadequacy in his failure to maintain the *Broadway Journal* after Briggs withdrew is unclear; that he was throwing Briggs gloriously under the bus is indisputable.

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[42] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Elizabeth Bogart," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1199.

[43] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Charles F. Briggs," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1132.

[44] Poe, "Charles F. Briggs," 1133.

Of all the figures Poe reviewed, it was Clark who received the most sophisticated condemnation from his pen. He begins his sketch by declaring that, "*Mr. Clark* is known principally as the twin brother of the late *Willis* Gaylord Clark, the poet, of Philadelphia," thus insinuating that Clark's main claim to fame was the fact that he was the twin brother of a better *littérateur*. Poe further undermined the defender of the New Yorkers by proclaiming of the Editor's Table found in Clark's *Knickerbocker Magazine* that, "Were a little more pains taken in elevating the *tone* of this "Editors' Table," (which its best friends are forced to admit is at present a little Boweryish,) [sic] I should have no hesitation in commending it in general as a very creditable and very entertaining specimen of what may be termed easy writing and hard reading."[45] If the tone of Clark's editorial column were elevated, Poe asserts, then he might recommend it as an "entertaining specimen" of inferior literature; as it stands, it is not even entertaining in its inferiority. Poe further offers insult to both Clark and his newspaper, *The Knickerbocker,* in this sketch when he criticizes the magazine's blandness by stating of it that "As the editor has no precise character, the magazine, as a matter of course, can have none."[46] Both Clark and his journal, Poe essentially informs his readers, are vapid and unworthy of even any small reputation they may possess.[47]

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[45] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Lewis Gaylord Clark," in Poe, *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, 1204-1205.

[46] Poe, "Lewis Gaylord Clark," 1205-1206.

[47] Poe's "report" here is interesting given the estimation offered by Poe's most fair-minded biographer, Quinn, regarding the *Knickerbocker*'s significance at this time. Writing of Poe's 1844 relocation to New York City, Quinn notes, "He [Poe] could hardly have expected to be helped by the *Knickerbocker Magazine,* considering what he had said concerning Lewis Gaylord Clark, its editor, and yet it set the tone in New York more than any other periodical," *Edgar Allan Poe*, 405. Poe's "Honest Opinions," then, were not always accurate—or widespread—ones.

These bludgeonings, however, are the exception rather than the rule within the "Literati" sketches, and, in several of his sketches, Poe actually offers the figures who had so recently rejected him legitimate praise. Writing of the poetess Emma Embury, Poe opines, "MRS. EMBURY is one of the most noted, and certainly one of the most meritorious of our female *littérateurs*… She has also much imagination and sensibility, while her style is pure, earnest, and devoid of verbiage and exaggeration. I make a point of *reading* all tales to which I see the name of Mrs. Embury appended."[48] Writing of Charles Fenno Hoffman's recent efforts in travel writing, Poe remarks of his work that "[i]ts scenic descriptions are vivid, because fresh, genuine, unforced. There is nothing of the cant of the tourist... The author writes *what* he feels, and, clearly, *because* he feels it. The style, as well as that of all Mr. Hoffman's books, is easy, free from superfluities, and, although abundant in *broad* phrases, still singularly refined."[49] These are strong words of praise when one considers that Poe wrote them in reference to individuals who had participated to some extent—even if through silence—in his own expulsion from their company.

Bouts of extreme antagonism and elaborate praise are equally unusual in these sketches, however, and, on the whole, Poe maintains a fairly balanced tone. Indeed, given the scenario out of which Poe was penning these pieces, the tone he adopts towards the majority of the literati is actually remarkably charitable. Additionally, while we have already observed that these sketches diverge from his more typical critical work in that

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[48] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Emma C. Embury," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 1185-86.

[49] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Charles Fenno Hoffman," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 1208.

they include a greater volume of personal descriptions of and observations regarding the *persons* of the authors, it is worth noting that they also differ from the critical sketches in terms of the ethos Poe strikes through his *organization* of the sketches.

In his wider criticism, Poe pursues incredibly *structured* analyses of his subject, often taking a single work or a collection of works as his focus and then examining that subject closely, crafting a series of observations regarding its merit that involves carefully contrived argumentation. In these critical pieces, Poe may offer nuanced observations regarding an author or their work, but he typically arrives at a conclusion of some sort—a single judgment, positive or negative, that he delivers regarding that author or work. As a dispenser of literary taste, Poe ensures that that taste is unmistakable and irrefutable through the rationalities, syllogisms, and proof-making he devises to buttress it.

In the "Literati," by contrast, Poe adopts a far more conversational tone that—almost certainly by design—approximates the tone of conversation employed by the literati whose unfiltered private opinions he is claiming to represent.[50] Rather than designing a fool-proof argument replete with evidence and textual analysis with which to hammer his readers into agreement with him, Poe instead simply provides his opinions as facts, referencing the occasional *example*, but more generally refusing to *defend* his position. He is opinionated, but not argumentative; assertive, but not defensive.

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[50] Jeffrey A. Charis-Carlson, "'You, Who So Well Know the Nature of My Soul': Poe and the Question of Literary Audience," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 12 (2002): 204-205. Charis-Carlson describes the submissions Poe made to *Godey's* that year (the "Literati" and "The Cask of Amontillado," which we will discuss in the next chapter) as enacting "a move away from the business-defined limitations of a masculine literary sphere and contribut[ing] to a conversational, sisterly voice that interpenetrates the separate spheres by addressing the magazine's female audience." In this sense, Poe's very tone in the "Literati" sketches may owe partial credit to his encounter with and entering into the "feminine" dialogue of sentimental poetry.

The effect of this approach is truly unique. Because Poe is not desperately defending his position with quotes and statistics, his opinions ring almost more authoritative than his typical declarations; because he does not undertake to defend his opinions, they seem not to be opinions at all, but a *report of fact*. This factual verisimilitude and the generally non-contestable air of each sketch is reinforced by the fact that, in the majority of the pieces, Poe blends positive and negative assessments of the author under consideration in the same paragraph—in the same sentence sometimes—without insisting that either the positive or the negative observation form the lens through which its counterpart is interpreted. Of William M. Gillespie, for example, Poe remarks that his "style is pure and sparkling" but immediately describes the content written in that style as "never very exceptionable, and never very profound."[51] Of Ralph Hoyt, Poe asserts that the quaintness of his writing "impinged upon the ludicrous. The poem, nevertheless, abounds in lofty merit, and has, in especial, some passages of rich imagination and exquisite pathos."[52] In his sketch of the creator of the dime novel, Ann S. Stephens, Poe describes her writing tone as "suffering from verboseness and floridity. It is, in fact, generally turgid — even bombastic — involved, needlessly parenthetical, and superabundant in epithets… Her sentences are, also, for the most part too long; we forget their commencements ere we get at their terminations."[53] In the wake of this aggressive observation, Poe then concludes, "Her faults, nevertheless, both in matter and manner,

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[51] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: William M. Gillespie," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 1131.

[52] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Ralph Hoyt," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 1145.

[53] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Ann Stephens," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews,* 1160.

belong to the effervescence of high talent, if not exactly of genius."[54] These mingled caresses and cuffs do not read like the observations of a man with a point to prove, and thus Poe—with a good many points to prove—proves those points through the guise of not proving anything at all.

This conversational, unassailable tone assumed by Poe is our first clue regarding the precise type of positioning work Poe is undertaking in the series. Indeed, Poe's explicit comments on the Literati do not form the only comment he is assaying in this series; the fact that he is assaying to make comment on the Literati at all is, itself, a profound comment on the unfolding situation. In the previous chapter, we noted that Edwin P. Whipple had proclaimed of Poe's critical productions, "It is certainly a collossal [sic] piece of impertinence for Mr. Edgar A. Poe to exalt himself into a literary dictator, and under his own name deal out his opinions on American authors as authoritative."[55] In that chapter, we noted that in this criticism—partisan though it is—Whipple correctly identified that the question of "authority" was fundamental to the work in which Poe was engaged. Five years and a whirlwind of literary politics later, the question of Poe's authority as a critic—as a critic who had been expelled from New York literary society, no less—was once again a controversial issue on the journalistic scene. By writing "The Literati" sketches, Poe weighed in on the question of his own critical authority, once more asserting his qualifications for the role of poet-critic. By simply writing the series, Poe was asserting that *he had the right to write* the series; by placing

[54] Poe, "Ann Stephens," 1160.

[55] Edwin P. Whipple, "[1841] BEFORE 18 DECEMBER. BOSTON," in Thomas and Jackson, *The Poe Log*, 354.

himself in a position of judgment over the Literati, Poe was positing that he possessed the critical authority to stand as judge over the most famous pens in the country.

Whereas in 1841, Poe had felt himself justified in writing from an authoritative position by virtue of his fair-minded commitment to the betterment of American literature, by 1846, Poe's sense of his authority in this realm had evolved and expanded. We have noted that his year of interaction with the literati had enabled Poe to command a superior ethos within his critiques of their authorial reputations, and this was certainly a factor in his increased confidence in assessing their number. It was another aspect of that interaction, however, that provided Poe his true sense of justification in thus holding court on the literati. This aspect is described by Poe himself in the introduction to the "Literati," where he writes of his sojourn amongst the city's authors that "[t]he author accustomed to seclusion, and mingling for the first time with those who have been associated with him only through their works, is astonished and delighted at finding common to all whom he meets conclusions which he had blindly fancied were attained by himself alone and in opposition to the judgment of mankind."[56] Elaborating on this point at greater length, Poe explains that, during his time among the literati, he has discovered that critical opinion amongst these figures operates along a distinct binary between *public* and *private* opinion; between what he describes as "the popular "opinion" of the merits of contemporary authors, and that held and expressed of them in private literary society."[57] In public, these figures puff and peddle the works of their favorites for the benefit of the clique in which they operate and in the hopes that they will receive similar treatment

[56] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1120.
[57] Poe, "The Literati of New York City," 1118.

whenever their own works are aired to the public. In private, Poe reveals, the editors and authors with whom he often found himself at variance in the press expressed opinions not dissimilar to his own.[58]

This two-faced critical program has two detrimental effects on American authorship, both of which Poe outlines in this introduction. The more obvious effect is the blow such dichotomous opinion-making deals to the quality of American literature through making a mockery of critical effort and, inevitably, elevating the work of inferior "quacks." As Poe himself notes after outlining the system, "In this way ephemeral "reputations" are manufactured which, for the most part, serve all the purposes designed — that is to say, the putting money into the purse of the quack and the quack's publisher."[59] Equally interesting, if less immediately harmful, is the second effect Poe identifies as springing from this distinction between public and private opinion. This effect is best articulated by Poe himself:

> the very editors who hesitate at saying in print an ill word of an author personally known, are usually the most frank in speaking about him privately. In literary society, they seem bent upon avenging the wrongs self-inflicted upon their own consciences. Here, accordingly, the quack is treated as he deserves — even a little more harshly than he deserves — by way of striking a balance.[60]

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[58] Poe cannot resist pointing to Longfellow as an example of a figure about whom he and the larger literati's *private* opinion are in agreement: "Mr. Longfellow, who, although little quacky per se, has, through his social and literary position as a man of property and a professor at Harvard, a whole legion of active quacks at his control — of him what is the apparent popular opinion? Of course, that he is a poetical phenomenon, as entirely without fault as is the luxurious paper upon which his poems are invariably borne to the public eye. In private society he is regarded with one voice as a poet of far more than usual ability, a skillful artist and a well-read man, but as less remarkable in either capacity than as a determined imitator and a dexterous adapter of the ideas of other people," Ibid., 1120.

[59] Ibid., 1118.

[60] Ibid., 1119.

The puffing system, Poe emphasizes, results in a curious backfiring against even those authors it ostensibly supports. This backfiring occurs when the dishonest reviewer, laboring under the cognitive dissonance created by his falsification of opinion in the press, explodes under that pressure and issues an even more aggressively negative opinion than perhaps he feels as a means of overcompensating or balancing out his opinions.

In this description, Poe not only criticizes the hypocritical nature of the criticism that lay at the heart of the critical machine—a dishonesty of which he would not have known had he not maneuvered his way into the salon scene—but also, inadvertently, embeds a defense of his own critical practices. Over the preceding decade, many of the literati had protested against his criticism, deeming it either inaccurate in its condemnation of their favorites or too aggressive in tone. A personal encounter with those same literati, however, revealed that they actually *agreed* with much of that criticism and, when in company only with themselves, expressed far more vituperative criticism of authorial figures than even Poe ventured to articulate. By revealing both of these behaviors to the public, Poe essentially demonstrated his superior integrity as a literary critic. His observations, it is true, sometimes ring harsh, but they are uniformly *honest*—are, without exception, his *actual* perspective. In this, for all their occasional prussic acid, they are more honorable than the works of reviewers whose hypocritical puffs place his opinion in the minority. The only reason his opinion is in the minority, he further implies, is because he is one of the few critics brave enough to admit no division between his personal and public rulings on literature.

This fact—the fact that he was being ousted from the salon scene by individuals who agreed with his critical dictums behind closed doors, where doing so would draw no fire—had to make his fall from grace doubly galling for Poe. He had attended the salons—he had spoken with the critics and discovered that he was not, in fact, a critical outlier; *and yet they ousted him* the moment he tangled with more elevated figures of their group. They were happy to capitalize on the critical success of "The Raven," but had no difficulty in casting him forth from their number as an enemy the moment they were asked to choose between him and one of their own. Their behavior made clear the fact that Poe could not ever truly rely on these figures for friendship or anything like the *loyalty* they afforded to members of their set; their wholesale hypocrisy and double dealing with him had proven that their friendship meant little and their good opinion less.

Thus bereft of the network of support through which he had longed to achieve literary fame, Poe decided to opt for the next best option. The literati had, at his moment of greatest need, refused him their friendship? Very well. He would refashion the connection to other ends; would amass the knowledge he had gathered of the literati and employ it to strike a different pose in relation to their number: that of an enemy. He would leverage his association with the literati in the negative, still capitalizing on the currency of their popularity to achieve his own reputation-building—only this time, from the opposite angle. In pursuing this strategy, Poe adopted a course of action not altogether unknown in antebellum literary politics. Indeed, it was a not uncommon practice for authors of this period to engage in what Sandra Tomc defines as a reverse to the

"networks of friends" phenomenon: the "networks of enemies."[61] As Tomc further explains this phenomenon, "When friendship and gift giving met their limits in this economy, the circle of friendship could be exploited by entrepreneurial minds for other ends."[62] These "other ends" involved a set of practices that, in a dark counterpart to the network of friends, could likewise incite interest from the reading public: "Not unlike gift exchange, which generated networks of indebtedness, enmities generated networks of revenge, scandal, and spectacle, inflating productivity, reputations, and sales."[63] Grooming a set of enemies, then, was a counterpart of cultivating a collection of friends in this literary economy—an equally effective means through which to form a reputation.

Poe had participated in what might be termed a "light" version of this enemy-exchange prior to his involvement with the New York City literati through his hacking at cliques from without the walls. On the current occasion, however, the terms were different. On this occasion, Poe *had* been within the walls; on this occasion, Poe had circulated within the very group he now undertook to subject to his sweeping judgment. In embarking on this judgment, Poe knew that he reinforced himself as a figure of controversy—was, in fact, long accustomed to generating negative publicity in order to garner attention. What Poe did not seem to realize was that generating this type of negative publicity was far more dangerous now that he *had* developed a national reputation, now that he *had* socialized with the Literati. He was no longer simply a scrapper on the field; he perched atop a small pedestal in the larger public's eye and

[61] Tomc, "Poe and His Enemies," 565.
[62] Ibid., 562.
[63] Ibid., 561.

could fall from it through a display of viciousness. The public might be willing to accept Poe's eviction from literary society as the falling out of high-spirited personalities, but in launching a critical series against that very society, Poe ran the risk of appearing, himself, a backbiter.

This potential blow to his reputation seemed not to enter into Poe's consideration as he plotted his series, possibly because—to Poe—that series had come to represent a very different type of reputation-carving, one that rested equally as much on his affective response to his rejection by the literati as on his critical judgment. Experiencing the exclusion of the literary establishment between 1827-1845 had been difficult for Poe primarily because he believed that, as we have quoted his opinion before, "there is much in being *before the eye of the world*—if once noticed I can easily cut out a path to reputation."[64] Part of the reason Poe struggled so deeply with his "outsiderness" early in his career was because he believed that if he could but catch the world's eye that world would happily worship at his creative font. Experiencing the exclusion of the literary establishment in 1846, however, was different because Poe *had* been before the eye of the world; he *had* captured the attention of the literary establishment. Their exclusion of his person in 1846 was no longer the action of an impersonal machine who judged him unworthy without ever actually casting its eye over his figure; it was the personal rejection by specific individuals of his genius, the rejection of his dream of assuming the status of poet-critic at their head.

[64] Poe to John Allan, May 29 1829, 20.

In turning to pen "The Literati," then, Poe labored under an excess of emotion, the primary tenor of which was a sense of rejection—rejection at the hands of inferior craftsmen, no less. Poe knew he could not rely on the discretion of any of their number and that the story of his eviction from the salon scene would spread from city to city on the literati's terms—that is, paired with the explanation that they found him unworthy of their continued notice as the explanation for his departure from their number. This, Poe—ever-proud and painfully sensitive—could not bear. He, the master critic, rejected others as unworthy of notice; he was *not* rejected by others, especially not those who were inferior to himself in judgment. Expressing his preemptive rejection of the literati, then, became a necessity, and writing "The Literati of New York City" became Poe's way of assuring the public that the literati had not broken up with him; he had broken up with the literati. They had not interacted with him and found him wanting; he had assessed them and found them mediocre, laughable, or, at best, of uneven talent. Poe assumed a sarcastically superior tone in numerous of the sketches precisely as a means of expressing this emotion that was driving him to redefine his relationship to the New York City literati as that of enemies—or, at the very least, exes. Through these sketches, he was informing the world that he *had*, in fact, roamed with the lions of their literature and those lions, if not uniformly talentless, were not the monarchs of taste they peddled themselves as being.

Unsurprisingly, the lions of New York City were not thrilled by this treatment from the mouse they had so recently entertained in their parlors. Indeed, the violence with which the literati of New York City responded to the first round of sketches in *Godey's* May issue illustrates that they knew how deeply Poe, now armed with insider

information, might cut against their number. Reece highlights this uneasy response in his patchwork of quotes from the year:

> The misgivings of the New York coterie were reflected in Godey's June number, which noted that "we have received several letters from New York, anonymous, and from personal friends, requesting us to be careful what we allow Mr. Poe to say of the New York authors .. There was, as Simms reported from New York in July, "no little rattling among the dry bones of our Grub street [sic]."[65]

This unease was only amplified by the public's avidity for the series. Here was Poe, formerly an insider of the circle, casting himself as a type of double agent—a spy within the gates—returned to tell tales of those whom readers across America had learned to admire but of whose personal lives or natures they knew very little. The public, while acknowledging that Poe himself was likely something of a scoundrel for thus turning on the group that had welcomed him so warmly, could not help but be fascinated by that very aura of betrayal, and, as Moss describes the series' impact, "In May, the first series made its appearance and caused such a sensation that Godey could not satisfy the demand. He had to put out extra editions of the magazine and finally reprint that series along with the second series in the June number."[66] Estimates of *Godey's* circulation before and after the release of the Literati series indicates a massive increase of subscribers during the period of Poe's exposés.

The literati's unease was further amplified by the fact that Poe seemed unconcerned with the potential consequences of his series—seemed in fact, to welcome whatever chaos it might trigger. The fact that Poe, even in his comparatively positive

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[65] James E. Reece, "A Reexamination of a Poe Date: Mrs. Ellet's Letters," *American Literature* 42, no. 2 (May 1970): 162.

[66] Sidney P. Moss, "Poe and His Nemesis—Lewis Gaylord Clark," *American Literature* 28, no. 1 (March 1956): 40.

essays, was still throwing off such satirical comments as "Mr. Cary is a vivacious, fanciful, entertaining essayist — a fifth or sixth rate one — with a style that, as times go — in view of such stylists as Mr. Briggs, for example — may be termed respectable, and no more" and "THE REVEREND C. P. CRANCH is one of the least intolerable of the school of Boston transcendentalists" led the literati to believe that he would treat none of them with a tone tempered by charity.[67] This belief triggered a series of infighting, such that Sandra Tomc comments, "Not surprisingly, before *Godey's* had published two instalments of the series, the New York literary scene exploded with the "War of the Literati," as Hiram Fuller, now the editor of the New York Mirror, dubbed it. Fuller opened the doors of the *Mirror* to any of Poe's enemies seeking to retaliate."[68] Among the few who retaliated directly to Poe was Clark himself who, anticipating Poe's tomahawk upon his scalp, lambasted *Godey's* for providing Poe with a platform through which to foray and pillage about the literary world. *Godey's* did not appreciate Clark's insinuations and responded to them in their own pages while other editors took up their own pens to weigh in on the series. Thus, we see that, while Poe's own sketches were not nearly so violent as he might easily have made them, they *bred* and *begat* violence across the city's magazines; they generated terror through their implication that much else could—and might yet—flow from his pen.[69]

Inevitably, Poe's decision to pen the "Literati" triggered violence that expressed itself not only as editorial in-fighting, but also as vicious counterattack. Indeed, while

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[67] For the quote on Cary, see Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Henry Cary," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1167. For the quote on Cranch, see Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York City: Christopher Pearse Cranch," in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, 1168.

[68] Tomc, "Poe and His Enemies," 569.

[69] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles*, 110-112.

Poe's critical and affective motives in penning the "Literati" make his performance a subject more for sympathy than for censure to modern audiences, the literati of his era were less prone to view Poe's display charitably, and several of the authors whom Poe subjected to the most scathing of his sarcasm responded in kind. Thus, by time the last installment of the Literati series appeared in October 1846, Poe had not only given voice to the sensation of having undergone a rollercoaster of professional repositioning and personal rejection over the previous year and a half, but he had also generated the controversy that would lead to the final, most protracted bout of authorial posturing of his career, a bout that would concretize both his critical and affective attitudes towards the establishment in whose oppressive pale he labored.

Chapter Four — Craft and Cabal: Retaliation and Revenge in Poe's Last Days

Over the summer of 1846, Poe's use of his "Literati" sketches as a public forum through which to process his own affective response to the cliquish sanctions lately imposed on him by literary society triggered a paroxysm of apprehension, consternation, and in-fighting among New York City's literati. Indeed, each new installment of the "Literati" sketches catalyzed fresh rounds of controversy that spread further abroad, reaching the periodical columns of other states, where editors began chiming in and commenting on the massacre then ongoing in New York City.[1] The most emotionally charged response Poe evoked, however, arose from within New York City and sprang from none other than his old crony, Thomas Dunn English, in whom apprehension and consternation swiftly gave way to exasperation and a desire for retaliation. Indeed, if Longfellow loomed as the (s)elected villain of Poe's early career, English assumed the role not only more concretely but also far more powerfully during the last years of that career. In many ways, English's insistence on checking Poe's aggressive sorties at the New York City set triggered the last of Poe's critically-affective transmutations: the two short stories categorized together as his "revenge" tales. In these two tales, "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) and "Hop-Frog" (1849), Poe rises to a pitch of frustration and fury unmatched elsewhere in his canon, a pitch that textual and historical evidence demonstrates is linked directly to Poe's late confrontation with both English and the literary establishment for which English metonymically stood.

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[1] Hutchisson provides a detailed list of these editors along with short synopses of the positions they took in *Poe* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005), 198-99. Sidney Moss likewise compiles many of those editorial chime-ins in *Poe's Major Crisis: His Libel Suit and New York's Literary World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1970), 3-25, 39-42, 60-66, 69-72.

As his confrontation with English dramatically influenced Poe's production of the primary texts under examination in this chapter, we will spend a short space here tracing that encounter's contours. The inaugural sally of this more concentrated war appeared in the July 1846 number of *Godey's Lady's Book*, where, between sketches of James Aldrich and Henry Cary, Poe applied his pen to the using up of THOMAS DUNN ENGLISH. Poe began this sketch by acknowledging that a few of English's poems have merit before quickly proclaiming:

> I place Mr. English, however, on my list of New York *literati*, not on account of his poetry, (which I presume he is not weak enough to estimate very highly,) but on the score of his having edited for several months, 'with the aid of numerous collaborators,' a monthly magazine called "The Aristidean." This work… was unfortunate, I fear, in not attaining at any period a very extensive circulation.[2]

Poe's insinuation that English's verse is of patently inferior quality is an insult of no small proportion and seems unduly harsh when compared to the selection of poetry Poe provides as proof of his condemnation. His criticism of the *Aristidean* rings equally unfair when we learn from Sidney Moss that Poe and English "had become companions… in New York when Poe, conducting his "Little Longfellow War" in the *Broadway Journal*, found an ally in English's *Aristidean*."[3] During the Little Longfellow War, English had extended a supportive pen to Poe; in criticizing English on the basis of the *Aristidean*'s collapse, then, Poe exploited the failure of a journal to which he had previously turned for support in his wars, using its demise to lambast its editor and his former friend.[4] Poe's snideness over the *Aristidean's* demise is made all the more ironic

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[2] Poe, "The Literati of New York City.—No. III. Thomas Dunn English," 17.

[3] Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 26.

[4] Moss, attempting to downplay the sartorial nature of Poe's patchwork of insult and injury, provides the following account of Poe and English's friendship, which only serves to emphasize how thorough a betrayal Poe's treatment of English here really was: "There was a

by Poe's own failure to sustain *The Broadway Journal* for more than three months beyond his acquisition of its ownership.[5]

Poe continues his treatment of English by insinuating that the *Aristidean* failed due to a lack of studious application on English's part, an observation he reinforces by commenting, "No spectacle can be more pitiable than that of a man without the commonest school education busying himself in attempts to instruct mankind on topics of polite literature."[6] As with his previous criticism of the *Aristidean*, this attack on English's education is made absurd by the fact that English had, in fact, graduated from a private academy, earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1839, and achieved admittance to the Philadelphia bar in 1842. In contrast to this impressive institutional list, Poe had completed only one year at the University of Virginia before assuming the type of editorial posts that he here insinuated English was incapable of satisfactorily maintaining. That Poe had a more refined literary style than English history has established beyond question; that English's faults sprang from a lack of education, however, was a silly claim for Poe to advance.[7]

In an inimitably Poe-etic flourish, Poe rounds off this slapdashery of insult by pretending that English was a stranger to him, proclaiming, "I do not personally know

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great deal of editorial hanky-panky between Poe and English, both of whom liked to gibbet dunces. Both the *Broadway Journal*, once Poe owned it, and the *Aristidean* listed 304 Broadway as the address of their respective editorial offices. One can at least imagine Poe and English in the apartment at their writing desks, hilariously spurring each other to greater and greater excesses as they collaborated in lampooning one dunce or another," *Poe's Major Crisis*, 27.

[5] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 495.

[6] Poe, "Thomas Dunn English," 17.

[7] For English's educational background, see Mark Canada, "English, Thomas Dunn," *American National Biography Online* (Oxford University Press, 2000), para 1. The circumstances of Poe's disappearance from the University of Virginia's roster are oft repeated in Poe studies, Hutchisson, "An Orphan's Life," 25-27.

Mr. English," when he had known him for nearly half a decade. Indeed, Poe knew Mr. English so personally that he had applied to English for a pistol when, in the throes of his conflict with the Starry Sisterhood, he found himself in want of support.[8] Poe's sketch of English was, in short, a piece of work well-calculated to offend its subject.

And offend it did. Even before the appearance of this sketch, editors across the country had begun to protest the severity of Poe's pummelings. Hiram Fuller of the New York *Mirror* noted of the "great sensation" the sketches were raising about the country that it was largely "one of disgust" and opined of Poe, "Mr. Poe is the last man in the country who should undertake the task of writing 'honest opinions' of the literati. His infirmities of mind and body, his petty jealousies… his unfortunate habits, his quarrels and jealousies, all unfit him for the performance of such a duty, as the specimens already published abundantly prove."[9] Further comparing Poe's critical skill to that of classical critics, Fuller concludes that Poe's uncharitable bludgeonings "must appear monstrous" when considered in light of those more sophisticated studies.[10]

In the same volume, Fuller republished a retort against Poe by one "MUSTARD MACE." Apostrophizing Poe as "Dictator Poe, / Of Scribblers' Row!" (lines 1-2), this author proceeded to aver in earnest if jangling lines that Poe was not poking at "a slavish throng" (line 29) who would take their poking lying down. On the contrary, MACE issued a warning to Poe:

> Beware lest you
> A storm may brew…

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[8] Poe, "English," 18; for a description of the Starry Sisterhood, see Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 290-91.

[9] For these quotations, see Fuller, "Mr Poe and the New York Literati," in Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis,* 16 and 18, respectively.

[10] Ibid., 18.

> And you may rue,
> And learn to sue
> For quarter to[o].
> The folks you smite
> With rare delight
> May find your might
> Of brain is slight,
> And in a fight
> Show spite for spite,
> And trip you quite.
> A pretty plight!
> 'Twould serve you right,
> You waspish wight! (lines 9-25)[11]

Given that the sketch of English had not yet appeared, "MACE" cannot have had any foreknowledge of English's impending retaliation against Poe; nevertheless, the piece assumes a prophetic tone when reviewed in light of the response to Poe that proceeded forth from English's pen less than two months after the poem's initial appearance.

That response appeared on June 13, 1846, in Hiram Fuller's own *Mirror*. In this piece, titled "A Card: Mr. English's Reply to Mr. Poe," English exhibits the full force of his exasperation with Poe's latest bombardment on him. English begins, like Fuller, by questioning Poe's ability or suitability to render "honest opinions" of the literati. Where Fuller merely doubted Poe's ability to produce such a thing, English undercuts the literati sketches' merit by saying of them, "These [Poe] names by way of distinction, I presume, from his ordinary writings, '*honest* opinions.'"[12] After then exposing Poe's great dishonesty in claiming not to know him personally, English proclaims his own purpose in responding to Poe's public attack on his reputation: "Unfortunately, I know him; and by

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[11] All quotations from Hiram Fuller, Joseph C. Neal, and Mustard Mace, "The Hornet's Nest Disturbed," in Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 13-14.

[12] English, "A Card: Mr. English's Reply to Mr. Poe," in Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis,* 35.

the blessing of God, and the assistance of a grey-goose quill, my design is to make the public know him also."[13] As his subsequent commentary proved, English did indeed know Poe, and he was not hesitant to broadcast that knowledge should doing so be required to ensure the continuing dignity of his own name.

English's commentary is lengthier than Poe's and yet is remarkably compact; English, clearly, had more relevant material with which to craft a character portrait of his rival than did Poe. Indeed, as Silverman vouches, English was perfectly poised to inflict great damage on Poe: "Poe had made himself vulnerable by calling on English for advice during several desperate moments of his chaotic life over the past year. English now dragged into print and before a sizeable public many embarrassing details of Poe's already well-publicized disgraces."[14] English's salient points are these: Poe owed him money, had behaved dishonorably on multiple occasions while both intoxicated and sober, and grew tiresome in his ludicrous literary attacks.

Of these, the point that would have loomed largest to English's audience was the central one, which touched most directly on the issue of Poe's reputation or, more specifically Poe's recurring dishonorable conduct across multiple occasions. While describing Poe's proclamation that he intended his reading of "Al Aaraaf" before the Lyceum to be a hoax, English not unjustly remarks, "Whether he did [intend a hoax] or not is little matter, when we reflect that he took the money offered for his performance—thus committing an act unworthy of gentleman, though in strict keeping with Mr. Poe's

[13] Ibid.
[14] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 309.

previous acts."[15] Progressing further, English hints at "most ungentlemanly conduct" committed "while in a state of intoxication" before arriving at the Starry Sisterhood incident, which he describes in terms that imply that Poe's defense of his behavior on the plea that he was laboring in a temporary fit of insanity during that incident was a lie.[16]

Arriving finally at an assessment of Poe's appraisement of his own style, English is remarkably tame, if exasperated, in his response:

> His review of my style and manner is only amusing when contrasted with his former laudation, almost to sycophancy, of my works. Whether he lied then or now is a matter of little moment. His lamentation over my lack of common English education is heart-rending to hear. I will acknowledge my deficiencies with pleasure. It is a great pity he is not equally candid…. If he really understands the English language, the sooner he translates his notices of the New York literati, into it, the better for his readers.[17]

English is willing to accept his own shortcomings, he asserts, and only demands that Poe does so as well. In the final paragraph of his piece, English deepens his analysis into an actual assessment of Poe's *character*. Hitherto, he had simply reported on Poe's questionable behavior and demurred the injustice of Poe's criticism of himself. Here, he explains what those behaviors, what the snobbery of that criticism means insofar as they comprise Poe, the man:

> [H]e overrates his own powers… He mistakes coarse abuse for polished invective, and vulgar insinuation for sly satire. He is not alone thoroughly unprincipled, base and depraved, but silly, vain and ignorant—not alone an assassin in morals, but a quack in literature. His frequent quotations from languages of which he is entirely ignorant, and his consequent blunders expose him to ridicule; while his cool plagiarisms from known or forgotten writers, excite the public amazement.[18]

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[15] English, "A Card," 36.
[16] Ibid., 36-37.
[17] Ibid., 38.
[18] Ibid., 38-39.

Much as Poe's initial sketch of English was well-calculated to offend, this sketch of Poe was well-calculated to enrage, and Poe sprang to action at the attack. He was joined in his reaction by the agog literati, who expressed diverging opinions on English's entry to the fray. One editor condemned English's response as being "one of the most savage and bitter things we ever read,"[19] while most other journals, such as the *Public Ledger*, deemed the piece not inappropriate as a matching of tone with Poe's own: "Mr. Poe evidently waked up the wrong passenger and caught a tartar, for Mr. English is out in a terrific rejoinder upon Mr. Poe, and carves him in the most caustic manner imaginable."[20] Poe himself seemed invigorated by the carving, and he fell to crafting a response to English with the utmost deliberation.

This response appeared approximately four weeks after the publication of English's own piece—appearing on July 10, 1846—and pursued both literary and legal lines of thought.[21] On the literary scene, Poe's comments are desultory. Responding to English's analysis of his person with force, if not clinical precision, Poe declared of English "that he is a blackguard of the lowest order—that it would be silly truism, if not unpardonable flattery, to term him either a coward or a liar—and, lastly, that the magnitude of a slander is usually in the direct ratio of the littleness of the slanderer."[22] He excuses himself from the critical foibles of his literati sketches by asserting his own detachment from the series—"It will not be supposed, from anything here said, that I

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[19] George Pope Morris, "Literary Squabble," in Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 42.

[20] Public Ledger, "Quarrels among the Literati", in Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis,* 40; several other journals, including the *Morning News, Philadelphia Spirit of the Times*, and *Mirror* treated this response as acceptable, if extreme, 39-40.

[21] Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 49.

[22] Poe, "Mr. Poe's Reply to Mr. English," 50.

myself attach any importance to this series of papers."[23] All in all, Poe condemns "the scurrility of this man's statements… oozing from the filthy lips of which a lie is the only natural language" while evidencing none of the succinctness that English had employed in his own upbraiding.[24]

More significant, however, was Poe's detection of two assertions in English's tirade that, if unsupported by proof, amounted to libel. Regarding these claims—that Poe owed English money but was refusing to repay him and that a local merchant had accused Poe of committing forgery—Poe declares, "It will be admitted by the most patient that these accusations are of such character as to justify me in rebutting them in the most public manner possible, even when they are found to be urged by a Thomas Dunn English. The charges are criminal, and with the aid of "The Mirror" I can have them investigated before a criminal tribunal."[25] Before printing this proclamation, Poe sought council with fellow editors and trained lawyers, Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Mathews, to determine both the legality of his case and the suitability of his response to English in the context of a potentially-brewing lawsuit.[26]

The situation was a curious one. Poe was right to identify English's claims as libel; indeed, his acumen in identifying these accusations as libel outstripped English's in this regard, a superiority that is made the more curious by the fact that it was English who

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[23] Ibid., 51.
[24] Ibid., 51.
[25] Ibid., 57.
[26] Heyward Ehrlich, "Poe in Cyberspace: The $5 Billion Question," *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 21, no. 1 (2020): 150. Ehrlich explains, "Poe took legal matters very seriously. Before submitting to Godey's his reply to English, on June 29, 1846, he cautiously asked Evert Duyckinck and Cornelius Mathews, both lawyers, to look it over carefully, "anxious that some friend should read it before it goes" (CL 1:587). The equally cautious Godey declined to print it in his magazine, instead paying ten dollars to insert it in The Spirit of the Times," 150.

was the practicing lawyer. Perhaps this heightened legal perspicacity derived from Poe's greater skill in the art of the feud; perhaps English believed that Poe, a veteran of duel-by-criticism, would remain on that field for their struggle. Perhaps English's accusations were partly true, and he thus did not think Poe would challenge him to produce *legal* proof of their veracity. Whatever the reason, English had committed a tactical error, and Poe did not intend to allow him to escape unscathed. In his rebuke of Poe, MUSTARD MACE had opined that Poe might "rue, / And learn to sue / For quarter to[o]" from those he'd eviscerated; Poe did not yet rue, but on July 23, 1846, he filed suit against Hiram Fuller and Augustus W. Clason, Jr., editors of the *Mirror*.[27] The charge? Libel.

Unsurprisingly, this suit exercised a significant influence on Poe's life and writing. Indeed, on the latter scene, the case is significant. With the case now initiated, English and Fuller were cautious of printing any further editorial critiques of Poe that might further compound the charges against them, and Poe himself avoided direct attacks on English for similar reasons. Neither man, however, could resist commenting on the case altogether; as a result, the terms of their engagement transformed from the scene of the non-fictive to that of the fictive. Deprived of their critical pens, the men both redirected their emotions toward and passive aggressively commented on the situation by landing blows on one another through *fictional* prose. Mimicking that "turn" from non-fiction to fiction, we too shall now turn to the affect-laced fiction produced within these unique circumstances: "The Cask of Amontillado," English's *1844: or, The Power of the S.F.*, and, finally, "Hop Frog."

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[27] Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 77.

Of these works, "The Cask" is by far the best-known. Indeed, while many of Poe's short stories enjoy perennial success, few have achieved the popular and critical appreciation that "The Cask" maintains. In his authoritative edition of Poe's works, Thomas O. Mabbott opines that "The Cask" is "one of the undeniably great stories, by some critics regarded as the finest of all Poe's tales of horror," further noting that "it is unsurpassed for subtly ironic touches."[28] Its terse plot, perfect pacing, finely drawn dialogue, and gradual development of suspense all qualify the story as an instance of literary excellence, and it is continuously analyzed on literary grounds. These analyses often probe the extremes of Montresor's psychology, seeking to delineate the precise degree of his (in)sanity; others query the mysterious nature of the "injury" and "insult" Montresor has sustained, while all ask themselves to whom the story—whose second sentence addresses "You, who so well know the nature of my soul"—could possibly *be* addressed.[29] These several inquiries are wholly justified by the nature of the text, whose literary qualities demand that it be assessed *as* literature. Literary studies of "The Cask" continue to reveal the complexities contained in the "Cask"—complexities that testify to Poe's own skill as an artist—and are thus valuable. In the context of this study, however, I wish to focus on "The Cask" in the context of its production prior to publication in November 1846 and examine "The Cask" as a text produced in the context of and as a response to the literary scuffle in which Poe was then embroiled.

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[28] Thomas Ollive Mabbott, "The Cask of Amontillado," in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Tales and Sketches 1843-1849*, ed. by Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), 1252.

[29] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado," in Poe, *Selected Writings,* 415.

That "The Cask" contains strong linkages to the quarrel in which Poe was then embroiled with English is no new argument. The simple fact that Poe wrote a story on *revenge* at a moment when he had several objects on which he must have wished, heartily, to visit revenge makes it impossible to ignore the relevancy of the tale to Poe's emotions at the time. Indeed, as early as 1954, Francis B. Dedmond explored the situatedness of "The Cask" in a heavily-footnoted article that begins with a description of the story as "a product of the Poe-Fuller and the Poe-English feuds" and concludes with the opinion that, through it, Poe "had punished and with impunity."[30] Subsequent biographer Silverman describes the story as "a tale that took up in fictional form where [Poe's] 'Literati' had left off," while scholar James Hutchisson describes Poe's preoccupation with revenge beginning in late 1846 as "a direct offshoot of his professional quarrels and rivalries at this time"—that is, of Poe's quarrel with English and the literati.[31]

Indeed, acknowledgment of this link has become so common that more recent critics have begun demurring from it. Their position is best summarized by John Freehafer, who declares, "It is a misunderstanding of Poe's art, however, to see in his tale a miniature *roman a clef*, in which Montresor is Poe, Fortunato is a rival author… and the story is based upon a law suit."[32] This commentary raises several interesting points. Most noticeably, it raises the question of whether Poe's short stories, which recent criticism has

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[30] Francis B. Dedmond, "'The Cask of Amontillado' and the War of Literati," *Modern Language Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1954): 137, 146. The latter quote is, of course, a reference to Montresor's own professed intentions in the opening paragraph of "The Cask."

[31] For Silverman's comment, see *Edgar A. Poe*, 136; for Hutchisson's see *Poe*, 203.

[32] John Freehafer, "Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado:' A Tale of Effect." *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 13 (1968): 135.

revealed contains adroit metaphorical analyses of the publishing world, are not offered greater insult by attempts to read them divorced of the commentary he was so careful to embed in them. More to the point, I agree that Poe's art is insulted when the scope of its inspiration is curtailed by criticism; however, I perceive a denial of its origins as an equal curtailment and hold that, in this case, a closer examination of the precise circumstances—and texts—to which the story responded reveals a layer of artistry rarely recognized or explored in its history of criticism: the precise skill with which Poe crafted a timeless story from a precise set of details furnished him by a single, badly constructed novel: *1844, or The Power of the S. F.*

The first installment of *1844, or The Power of the S. F.* appeared in the *Mirror* on July 25, 1846, a mere two days after Poe filed his lawsuit against the *Mirror*'s editor. The seventh and final installment appeared on November 7, 1846, within weeks of "The Cask"'s own appearance in the November volume of *Godey's Lady's Book.*[33] Written by none other than Thomas Dunn English, the timing of *1844*'s appearance alone makes it of interest in this study; a closer survey of its plot reveals that that interest is not misplaced and, rather, amplifies that interest.

The uneven opening of *1844* hardly bears description and, indeed, the oddly paced story corkscrews from melodramatic potboiler to pedantic political commentary with an irregularity that is nearly dizzying. In its more interesting moments, it follows the action of two secret societies—the "S. F." and the Gaunifs of the Grey Gown—as they

[33] Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis*, 100. Moss provides a complete list of these serializations, noting that the serial began on July 25, 1846, with subsequent installments appearing at irregular intervals: September 5, 1846, September 19, 1846, October 3, 1846, October 24, 1846, October 31, 1846, and November 7, 1846.

plot to rig a local election. Among this drama's characters are two men—Hercules, aka, Sir Catesby ap Catesby, and one Charles Campbell —whose lurid association with each other through a shared lover has led to a mutual and unequivocal thirst for revenge. By the end of the novel, a revenge of sorts has unfolded—a dénouement of sorts has been reached; equally, by the end of the novel, readers are left wondering just what they have read and why they are expected to care about the well-being or punishment of any of the characters. The novel is remarkable chiefly for how unremarkable—how truly mediocre—it is; how alternatively sentimental, stodgy, and outré its narrative, characters, and dialogue ring. And yet, we remark on it.

The reason we yet remark on this story—the reason it remains before the eye of the world at all—rests on the shoulders of one character: Marmaduke Hammerhead. As we have noted, the first installment of *1844* appeared two days after Poe filed his suit; thus, it was almost certainly completed before news of the suit reached English. Hammerhead debuted in a haphazard role that is inexpertly integrated into the plot in the very next serial; thereafter, Hammerhead made exactly one appearance in each of the subsequent installations of the series until the novel's completion.[34] The reasons for his creation—and, indeed, who that creation represents—becomes apparent through a cursory glance at his first appearance in the story, where his personal character is drawn thus:

> That is Marmaduke Hammerhead—a very well known writer for the sixpenny periodicals, who aspires to be a critic, but never presumes himself a gentleman. He is the author of a poem, called the 'Black Crow,' now making some stir in the literary circles…. he never gets drunk more than five days out of the seven; tells the truth sometimes by mistake; has moral courage enough to flog his wife, when

[34] Moss tracks these appearances in *Poe's Major Crisis*, 100-123.

> he thinks she deserves it… and has never, that I know of, been convicted of petit larceny. He has been horsewhipped occasionally, and has had his nose pulled so often as to considerably lengthen [it].[35]

In the ensuing passages, Marmaduke is described as being much petted by the weak-minded ladies of the literary set (all literary ladies, in English's sweep of them, being weak-minded) and as commanding "charlatanry… in all his productions."[36] In his next appearance, Hammerhead is unequivocally drunk and yet, the elements of his conduct and diction strike familiarly on the ear:

> The truth is that Hammerhead was drunk—though that was no wonder, for he was never sober over twenty-four hours at a time.... His cups had given him a kind of courage; and though naturally the most abject poltroon in existence, he felt an irresistible inclination to fight with some one... Hammerhead accosted the first comer, [saying]—
> "Did—did—did you ever read my review of L—L—Longfellow?"
> "No!" said the one addressed…"I dare say it's very severe, but I never read it."
> "Well," said Hammerhead, "you lost a gr—gr—eat pleasure. You're an ass!"
> "Oh! not quite so bad as that, surely," said the puzzled man…
> "Yes you are, damn you!—I'll kill you!" exclaimed Hammerhead.
> The stranger saw but one course to pursue—the controversy was exciting a crowd—so he knocked Hammerhead down, and quietly went on his way. Hammerhead lay on the pavement for a moment or so, when one of the bystanders helped him up... Hammerhead refused to budge—offered to fight the whole crowd, six at a time—entered into a disquisition on English metre, to the amusement of the bystanders, and finally begged some one in the crowd for God's sake to lend him sixpence.[37]

In his subsequent appearances, Hammerhead continues in the same vein, assaulting one editor with the insult, "You're a transcendentalist, and eat brown bread," and soliciting all and sundry for funds in between expostulations regarding Longfellow, crows, and

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[35] Thomas Dunn English, *1844: or, The Power of the "S.F.": A Tale: Developing the Secret Action of Parties During the Presidential Campaign of 1844* (New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co., 1847), 121.

[36] Ibid., 124.

[37] Ibid., 161-62.

hexameter.[38] Ultimately, Hammerhead descends into madness and is committed to an asylum, where two of the characters visit him to listen to him assert that "Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, being a Yankee, may be considered a squash," quote Herodotus as having said, "'Brandiarum est pernicium et abominalibus'—Brandy is pernicious and abominable," and criticize the works of Carlyle on the basis that "in less than ten pages of his book, [he has] discovered no less than one hundred and ten dashes, instead of parentheses. Can any man who uses the dash instead of the mark of parenthesis, be considered a man of genius? Certainly not."[39] To these displays, the visiting character responds, "Why, his language is very queer, to be sure—but all that he wrote before he came here, was of the same character," a parting shot that serves to identify definitively Hammerhead's style as consisting, in its essence, of lunacy. [40]

This portraiture, then, as much as it is now, was unmistakable. Marmaduke's status as both literary critic and author of "The Black Crow" as well as his recurring disparagement of Longfellow, requests for money, and drunkenness all name this character Edgar Allan Poe. In addition to these obvious indicators, English also carefully wove more specific references to their exchange into the caricature. In describing Marmaduke as "the most abject poltroon in existence"—a not common phrase—English reechoed his earlier assertion that he "found [Poe] at the critical moment, to be an abject poltroon."[41] In concocting a physical altercation in which Hammerhead is easily knocked down by a stranger, English inserts references both to Poe's snide claim not to know

[38] For the transcendentalist comment, see Ibid., 208.
[39] Ibid., 274-75.
[40] Ibid., 276.
[41] Compare these quotes on Ibid., 161-62 and English, "A Card," 37.

English and to his own version of the men's fistfight earlier that year.[42] In describing Marmaduke's education thus—"He has a knowledge of no language except his own, and that to a very limited extent; and of course interlards his work with an abundance of quotations, obtained from the works of other authors. As he does not understand the meaning of these, he occasionally commits some rather ludicrous errors"—before then supplying copious examples of the poet misquoting from multiple authors and languages, English references the men's squabble over education.[43]

Given that Poe had described English as "the animalcula with moustaches for antenna that is in the capital habit of signing itself in full, 'Thomas Dunn English'" while also congratulating himself for scratching through a sentence in his original sketch that highlighted "the family resemblance between the whole visage of Mr. English and that of the best-looking but most unprincipled of Mr. Barnum's baboons," it is unsurprising that English indulged in a harsh portraiture of Poe in *1844*.[44] If anything, it is surprising that that portraiture remained human in form. Regardless of how invited or merited this harsh portrait may have been, however, we see that Poe could not possibly allow such treatment of his reputation to escape unaddressed but instead required a expression of the indignity he felt at thus beholding his character lampooned in fiction.

In taking up his pen to write "The Cask," then, Poe's mind was almost certainly bent toward revenge both personally and artistically. As our swift plunge through *1844*'s plot has also revealed, however, the theme of revenge did not originate in Poe's mind—it

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[42] For Poe's claim, see "English," 18. For English's version of the fight, see "A Card," 37.

[43] For Marmaduke's education and misquotations see English, *1844*, 124 and 275, respectively. For the squabble over education, see discussion earlier in the present chapter.

[44] See Poe, "Mr. Poe's Reply to Mr. English," 50-51.

appeared first in English's revenge-laced political melodrama. This recognition instantly begs the question—was Poe's decision to take up the theme of revenge in "The Cask" purposeful or incidental? Can "The Cask" be regarded in any way as answering *1844* not only obliquely, as it has typically been interpreted, but also specifically in terms of its themes? This question can only be answered through a close reading of the texts.

Moving beyond revenge—or, rather, reserving revenge for later probing—a comparison of the two stories immediately reveals suspicious points of overlap. The most obvious of these is the idea of the secret society, which figures garishly into the full title of *1844, or The Power of the S. F*. In *1844,* secret societies loom large, dominating the plot with overdramatic meetings and cringey religious diction; their existence forms the backdrop to the events of the novel and the source of much of its action. By contrast, the notion of the secret society arises only once in "The Cask," but to powerful effect:

> He [Fortunato] laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.
> I [Montresor] looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.
> "You do not comprehend!" he said.
> "Not I," I replied.
> "Then you are not of the brotherhood."
> "How!"
> "You are not of the masons."
> "Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."
> "You? Impossible! A mason!"
> "A mason," I replied.
> "A sign," he said, "a sign."
> "It is this," I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my *roquelaire* a trowel.
> "You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces.[45]

[45] Poe, "The Cask," 418-19.

Poe's usage of the secret society here is infinitesimal in comparison to English's but somehow accomplishes far more by way of character development than all English's chapters on the subject. Poe also uses this passage to reference, deflatingly, a device that English pursued in his novel with the delight of a child discovering a new toy: the secret signal. The secret signal recurs throughout *1844*, with a special knock:

> The swarthy man… commenced rapping on what seemed a door. The succession of raps he gave, six in number, was very peculiar, and the first and last very loud, and at some interval from the rest.[46]

a special button:

> It was not circular, like most buttons, but its sides defined an octagon, with truncated angles; or, in other words, a sextadecagon, with unequal sides. On its surface there was engraved a hawk, with a snake peering from beneath the half-outstretched wings, and beneath this the letters—S. F.[47]

and not one but two special hand signs:

> The stranger had dropped his newspaper, and sat with his hand in a peculiar position. The thumb apparently supported the chin, the forefinger, which was crooked, touched the nose, and the remaining fingers were clenched.[48]
>
> _____
>
> Each brother raised his right hand, with his fore finger upwards, and the remaining fingers closed over the thumb, and then, at a signal from the priest, changed the thumb from its place, struck it against the second finger, and simultaneously dropped them again.[49]

These secret signs grow more laughable each time they are used in *1844*; Poe satirizes the notion of using a secret sign to establish brotherhood by having his character produce a "sign" of belonging to the masons that is more relevant to the practice of masonry than the actual sign, but which is a symbol of the murder he intends to commit momentarily.

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[46] English, *1844*, 21.
[47] Ibid., 15.
[48] Ibid., 20.
[49] Ibid., 24.

The location of that murder is, itself, suggestive. Each of English's secret society meetings occur in a "spacious subterranean apartment" that he describes thus: "It was supported by brick columns, and the arches were of solid mason work. It was damp and uncomfortable…. The walls had been whitewashed repeatedly, for the thickness of the depositions of lime shown [sic] where the damp had peeled it off, proved this. The ceiling, columns and walls, were festooned with cob-webs."[50] By comparison, when Poe constructs the Montresor family vault, he depicts his characters descending to "the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors," where Montresor instructs Fortunato to "observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls."[51] Poe has adopted the setting of English's attempt at melodramatic mysteriousness and has made it the foundational setting of his protagonist's most elemental family heritage.

Further, even smaller elements of *1844* make their appearance in "The Cask." For example, Poe's decision to dress Fortunato in "a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and [a] conical cap and bells"[52] mirrors English's choice to costume his characters in vaudevillian aspect for their secret meetings: "every one was clad in a grey gown, of coarse cotton stuff, similar to that worn by his companion and himself. The hood of this was thrown over the head in such a manner that all except the eyes was concealed."[53] Comically unnecessary dress is integral to the fantasy world English had conceived into being, and thus became a choice element for Poe to incorporate in his response to that fantasy world.

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[50] Ibid., 22-23.
[51] Poe, "Cask," 417.
[52] Ibid., 416.
[53] English, *1844*, 23.

The most essential element, however, of *1844*'s world is the theme of revenge. In comparing and assessing the relative skill with which each man treated the subject, we find that the most obvious divergence between their approaches to revenge is that of scope, in terms of both plot timeline and manuscript length. As we have already noted, Poe's narrative is succinct, with "absolutely no excess."[54] Poe provides the only essential background information needed to understand his drama in his opening sentence, which reads: "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge."[55] With this backdrop, we plunge directly into the vault of the Montresors. By contrast, the storyline of *1844* has sprawled messily across two decades and two continents by the time we join it; after we join it, it continues sprawling for over 200 pages. These two facts, of themselves, do not necessarily undermine the quality of the narrative; the fact that those 200+ pages consist just as frequently of accounts of unruly political rallies as they do of interactions between the two rivals necessarily undermines its quality as a tale of revenge.

In addition to this flaw of development, the dénouement of English's revenge is strikingly hollow, despite the lurid circumstances and scandalous motives that precipitate it. The motives, briefly, are these: the main character, Charles Campbell, fell in love with a young English woman beyond his station. Upon applying to the woman's guardian for permission to marry, Campbell was duped by the guardian and Catesby / Hercules, who tricked him into departing the scene so that Catesby / Hercules could marry the woman.

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[54] David S. Reynolds, "Poe's Art of Transformation: 'The Cask of Amontillado' in its Cultural Context," in *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*, ed. Kenneth Silverman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 102.

[55] Poe, "Cask," 415.

By the time Campbell discovered the men's duplicity, the marriage had already taken place. Swearing revenge, Campbell seduced his former lover and convinced her to elope to America with him, taking her child by Catesby with them. In the decade between this abduction and the opening of *1844*, the woman has died, the child (we learn in the course of the novel) has been swapped out multiple times, and Catesby has, unintentionally, migrated to the same city in which Campbell currently resides. The two men, upon accidentally meeting and belatedly recognizing each another grow verbally indignant one another, as illustrated by this passage, in which Catesby threatens Campbell:

> "If I had desired physical revenge I could have had it before now—I could have knocked you on the head like a dog, and no one would have been a bit the wiser. But I have a revenge more certain, more horrible than mere physical injury. Live you to enjoy it—live through years of agony if you will—hopeless—powerless agony. Live—to hate yourself, to curse yourself—to bemoan the day you were born—and to die at last—while the object of your ambition is at your very grasp, a wretched and degraded man. Your revenge has overreached itself. Your own evil passions have been my most certain avenger. You shall know what I mean in good time, never fear."[56]

After thus reviling one another intermittently over the course of a hundred pages, Campbell kills Catesby by shooting him when he, with no warning or escalation of plot, leaps at Campbell in his study. Campbell lives on another eighty pages, finally committing suicide after losing an election and realizing that his current mistress is almost certainly his own daughter.[57] In the moments leading up to this suicide, Campbell waxes amazingly moralistic regarding his own life:

> "I have lived for only two objects—revenge and ambition. Fool! madman! that I was! yet no; I struggled well. Fate was against me. If in my revenge I seared my own heart—if I murdered my own flesh and blood—I at least let my vengeance fall on those who made me heartless and criminal. Catesby—Ellen—crime-

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[56] English, *1844*, 106.
[57] Plot twist: she isn't.

> degraded you lived, and crime-degraded and wretched you died. Lie and rot! lie and rot!... Oh! God! Susy! Susy! my daughter—incest! death! Is there a hell? Is there a retribution? Is there a God?"[58]

In the wake of these reflections, Campbell procures a pistol and, executes Catesby's posthumous revenge upon himself.

Clearly, the manner by which each member of this unfortunate duo meets his end is disappointing from a "revenge" perspective. Catesby's death is almost accidental and features no cultivation of suspense whatsoever; Campbell's death is self-inflicted and therefore bears little semblance of "revenge." When compared to the delicate descent into the vault—the suspenseful progression towards the niche in which, in an instant Fortunato is fettered! with hardly a word, he is walled up!—these deaths are clumsy.[59] In *1844*, the pair threaten and bluster with grand-sounding words; in "The Cask," Montresor delights that he has never let on that he is anything other than a friend to Fortunato. This is the difference between punishment and revenge. The twist—the surprise—the betrayal!

The reason English's "revenge" feels so hollow derives at least partially from its failure to perform adequately in the realm of motive. Indeed, I would argue that the construction of "motive"—so often deconstructed in analyses of "The Cask"—is one in which Poe's superiority as a craftsman best shines. In *1844*, motive looms so luridly that almost any dénouement *must* feel underwhelming; in "The Cask," the question that haunts both its pages and its readers' minds is, "What *is* the motive?" At the head of the

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[58] Ibid., 286.

[59] In addition to trumping the "revenge"-deaths, the walling up of Fortunato also outstrips a subterranean death that English narrates between pages 257-260 of *1844*. English summons flames, flood, and much else as his victim meets his melodramatic demise. The difference between the two deaths is striking; the didacticism undoubtedly meant to amplify the horror in English's account only serves, unsurprisingly, to prevent any more intense an emotion than incredulity in its reader.

story, Poe states significantly through the mouth of Montresor that when injury gave way to insult, that was the moment at which revenge became inescapable; however, never once does Montresor state what either the thousand injuries or the damning insult *were*.

Unsurprisingly, an entire field of inquiry built itself upon this single question. In the 1920s, a popular strand of interpretation asserted that the men's conflict was religious, pointing, as proof of their argument, to Montresor's significant repetition, "yes… for the love of God!" when he leaves Fortunato to die.[60] Multiple critics, such as Patrick White, argue that Montresor's motive is a wrong done to his family—that Montresor acts to avenge family honor.[61] Another faction, well-represented by Codrin Liviu Cutitaru, asserts that Poe derived inspiration from the real-life story of Captain William Morgan when constructing "The Cask," and Montresor is a high-ranking mason who has been commanded by his society to silence the loose-lipped Fortunato.[62] Each of these interpretations of motive expand the potential meanings of "The Cask" and thus expand "The Cask's" literary estate as a work that merits critical engagement.

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[60] For religious characterizations of motive, see especially James E. Rocks, "Conflict and Motive in 'The Cask of Amontillado,'" *Poe Studies* 5, no. 2 (1972): 50 and Kent Bales, "Poetic Justice in 'The Cask of Amontillado,'" *Poe Studies* 5, no. 2 (1927): 51. For my part, I find it significant that the phrases "Oh God!", "for the sake of your own soul", and "For God's sake!" are employed repeatedly in one of the penultimate scenes of *1844*, 111.

[61] Patrick White, "'The Cask of Amontillado': A Case for the Defense," *Studies in Short Fiction* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 552-53. White comments, "To do justice to Montresor, we should understand that he is not an individual person seeking redress for personal insult or injury but, rather, an agent of retribution acting on behalf of his family," 552.

[62] Codrin Liviu Cuţitaru, "The Art of Dissimulation. The Good Christian vs. the Loyal Freemason." *Philologica Jassyensia* 13, no. 2[26] (2017): 208-209. Cuţitaru comments, "Undoubtedly, Montresor is a high-rank Freemason who has the mission to eliminate Fortunado [sic] the Fool! He acts in disguise, though, in order to deceive both his confessor (the priest, the listener) and the audience (the reader, the receiver)." See this passage for a full description of Captain William Morgan's life and death.

What falls between the cracks of these interpretations, however, is the very fact regarding motive that I emphasized previously: that Poe supplies none. As his own "Philosophy of Composition," published earlier in the year, evidenced, Poe was acutely attuned to the impact that each individual element of a tale exercised on both its meaning and its affective impact on its readers.[63] Thus, we can assume that Poe's decision to leave a complete void in place of a motive was not haphazard; it was calculated. Moreover, the effect of this calculated decision constitutes a large measure of the genius of the tale. In an immediate sense, by leaving a void, Poe allowed readers to supply the motive they, by this late stage in the feud, would have known to be his own: a hatred of English and desire to enact vengeance on him. The fact that no one is quite sure *what* Fortunato has done to enrage Montresor so utterly makes it all the easier to imagine English's face below the dangling bells of his jester's cap.

From a more complex psychological perspective, this omission of motive is, likewise, a stroke of genius. Whereas *1844*'s overblown sensationalism renders readers' self-identification with its action impossible, Poe seduces readers into his plot by creating a revenge in which no motive is given; in which readers are left to supply their own motives, to enter into the story on the terms of their own jealousies, insults, and passions. Ultimately, the lack of motive is precisely what makes "The Cask" so fine from an artistic and psychological perspective. *1844* claims to be a tale concerned with revenge

[63] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in Poe, *Selected Writings,* 675. In this essay, Poe notes, "Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *denouement* before any thing be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *denouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention," 675.

but bogs down so interminably in motive that by the time the half-hearted revenge is achieved its suspense—and interest—is sullied. By eliminating motive, "The Cask" focuses exclusively on its topic: revenge, *pure* revenge. It does not allow itself to be distracted from revenge even by an exploration of motive. By obviating motive, Poe also "avoid[s] the arguments that would otherwise have ensued as to [the revenge's] adequacy and propriety"; there can be no question of the revenge's justness if no reason for the revenge is provided.[64] The revenge must be considered wholly on its own terms; which is to say that the revenge itself must be considered as a work of art.

As a work of art, "The Cask" unquestionably accomplished its intended ends. As Silverman notes of the exchange, "If English was a bare-knuckled foe, Poe had weapons of greater refinement and more enduring effect."[65] In his detailed analysis of the exchange, Richard Rust bluntly asserts what any reader of both works must conclude: "In comparison with 'The Cask of Amontillado,' English's *1844* is a book created by a blockhead," a remark he bolsters with the observation that, "through subtle allusions to English's *1844*, Poe takes revenge by demonstrating his literary superiority in ways English would know but would never be able to admit."[66] This sense of Poe's superior craftsmanship must also be our own in the wake of our close comparison of Poe's taking up and more skillfully employing the elements so clumsily introduced by English.

In penning "The Cask," Poe crafted his story as a means of defusing a portion of his frustration regarding the literary events of 1846, which had included his expulsion

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[64] Freehafer, "'Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado,'" 139.

[65] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 316.

[66] Richard Dilworth Rust, "'Punish with Impunity': Poe, Thomas Dunn English, and 'The Cask of Amontillado,'" *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 47-48.

from the literati, subsequent feud with their number, and ongoing lawsuit with English. Equally, we see that, by adopting and improving upon the themes offered by English, Poe entered into a type of literary rivaling or posturing. Nor was this any ordinary type of posturing; it was a type of posturing that linked securely to the core of Poe's own conception of himself as an author. This linkage between Poe's performance in "The Cask" and his authorial self-concept is best illustrated by an amalgamation of examples from Poe's canon compiled by Richard Rust:

> Poe [took] the stock character… of George Pope Morris's "The Little Frenchman and His Water Lots" as inspiration for "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" (462)… Poe's "The Duke de L'Omelette" is "a satiric parody of the literary style… [of] Willis" while "A Tale of Jerusalem" "is a satire on the rage for didactic historical novels set in the Holy Land, parodying in particular Horace Smith's *Zillah, A Tale of the Holy City*." The satirical story "Bon-Bon," with its subtitle, "A Tale a la Blackwood"… points to the object of its satire…. Too, "some critics… have felt that 'Berenice' is a 'Folio Club' parody of a contemporary style of storytelling." Besides its [pertinence] to the serialized *1844*, a superior variation by Poe of English's novel would also pay back English's earlier parody of "The Black Cat" in his "The Ghost of a Grey Tadpole."[67]

As this list underscores, imitating, parodying, and proving himself more skilled at his rivals' themes and styles was of indescribable significance to Poe in his artistic practice. Demolishing English in his own genre was not simply a fun jaunt for Poe; it was a means through which he confirmed his own superiority and the legitimacy of himself *as* an author to himself and his audience. In this sense, Poe portrayed his own strategy toward English in his description of the last interactions between Fortunato and Montresor:

> A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated, I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied…. I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I

[67] Rust, "Punish with Impunity," 40.

> re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still.[68]

Integral to Poe's perception of his own authorial skill was his ability to go toe to toe with any of his contemporaries, his ability to match scream with scream. Propose a secret society? He will one-up the secret society. Propose a subterranean vault? He will one-up the subterranean vault. Propose revenge? *He will create the last word in revenge*. "The Cask" is not merely a howl for personal revenge; it is an archetype of its own emotion—any other study of revenge, including English's absurd attempt, will ring hollow in comparison to the horror-laced scream that reechoes from the Montresor vault.[69] In "The Cask," Poe accomplished a literary walling-up of his own and thus confirmed both to others and to himself his status as an author.

For once, Poe's fictional victory was matched with a concrete factual victory. Although the libel trial was originally expected to be held in September 1846, a full court calendar necessitated its postponement till February of the following year.[70] On February 17, the case was laid before a jury. Miraculously, given the perverse imp that attended on Poe throughout his life, the jury convicted Fuller of libel and moved to award Poe both $225.06 in damages and $101.42 in court costs.[71] For once, Poe's triumph over the Fortunatos of his world was unmistakable.

Though unmistakable, this sense of victory was thoroughly *assailable* and, indeed, it is unlikely that Poe felt anything like victory upon emerging from this suit the

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[68] Poe, "The Cask," 420.

[69] Kevin J. Hayes, *Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 155. Hayes remarks, "Whereas English sought revenge in heavy-handed satire, Poe transmogrified their personal dispute to create a short story that transcends time, place and personality."

[70] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 315, 327.

[71] Ibid., 327-28.

vindicated party. The trial itself excited significant attention from the city's press, which led to a fresh round of attacks on and airing of grievances against his person, assaults ranging from snide criticisms by editors still sore over his treatment of them in the "Literati" sketches to rekindled discussion of the Starry Sisterhood scandal.[72] Even these attacks paled, however, in comparison to the far more personal loss Poe suffered less than a month before the trial: the death of Virginia.

We may never know the exact nature of Poe's feeling for Virginia; he certainly altered his characterization of their attachment as best suited his purposes over the years.[73] We cannot doubt, however, that, over the five years that elapsed between her first tuberculosis symptoms and her death, Poe had felt the intense stress and pain of watching a loved one undergo a slow and debilitating death, a torturous experience to any caring or artistic spirit. Thus, Virginia's death constituted an emotional cataclysm for Poe and in the wake of that death he, quite literally, crashed. Physically, Silverman records that the nurse who attended Poe during this period found his state "moribund" and "did not expect him to live long" on the basis of his irregular pulse and sustained brain fever.[74] More significantly from an artistic perspective, he struggled to write. On every other occasion on which he fell out with the literati, Poe had resurrected himself from the ashes of his reputation through the agency of his caustic pen; on this occasion, his pen failed

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[72] Ibid., 328.

[73] When he learned that the thirteen-year-old Virginia had been invited to live with their cousin and receive an education, Poe's profession of despair-laced love was unequivocal; several years after her death, Poe claimed he married Virginia for her happiness where he "knew that no possibility of [his] own existed." See Poe to Maria Clemm, August 29, 1835, in Poe, *Letters Vol. I,* 71 and Poe to Sarah Helen Whitman, October 18, 1848, in Poe, *Letters*, 393, respectively.

[74] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 329.

before the failing of his own health. Over the remaining months of 1847 and through the beginning of 1848, Poe produced little and was unable to find another editorial position.

These last few years of Poe's life did not elapse in a complete blank, however, and the events they held were at least partially responsible for reigniting his taste for revenge. Ironically, a primary catalyst to this new thirst for vengeance began in the most innocent manner possible: a courtship. Over the late summer and early fall of 1848, Poe, still licking his wounds from the previous years' literary conflicts, initiated a romance with the Providence poet and literary critic, Sarah Helen Whitman.[75] The two were not incompatible intellectually and stood equal matches on the field of literary knowledge and experience. Despite this seeming harmony of mind, their relationship was fraught with tension, a sizable portion of which rose from a single source: letters sent by various members of the literati to Whitman detailing dubious aspects of Poe's character. Of a circumspect nature herself, Whitman sought explanations for these reports from Poe, who resented the credence she instilled in the reports by bringing them to his attention.[76] Their relationship continued to deteriorate the further they progressed into their engagement until Whitman finally ended that engagement and severed contact with Poe upon discovering that he had broken a temperance pledge just days before their wedding was scheduled to occur.[77]

In the wake of this break-up, Poe officially placed blame for the relationship's demise on Whitman's mother, who had opposed the match.[78] He expressed a different

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[75] For a thorough account of the pair's relationship, see Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 572-87.
[76] Poe to Sarah Helen Whitman, October 18, 1848, 391-94.
[77] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe,* 386-87.
[78] Poe to Sarah Helen Whitman, January 21 (?), 1849, in Poe, *Letters Vol. II,* 421. In this letter, Poe exclaims, "Heaven knows that I would shrink from wounding or grieving you! I blame

state of mind altogether, however, to his confidante Annie Richmond. Writing to her of the split in January 1849, Poe declared, "But of one thing rest assured, Annie—from this day forth I shun the pestilential society of *literary women*. They are a heartless, unnatural, venomous, dishonorable *set,* with no guiding principle but inordinate self-esteem."[79] This statement clearly illustrates that Poe was processing his failed relationship as part and parcel of his treatment by the literati at large. Whitman's rejection of him had, in his mind, become intertangled with his long history of rejection at the hands of the nation's critics. Less than a month later, Poe wrote to Annie, "The 5 prose pages I finished yesterday are called—what do you think?—I am sure you will never guess—"*Hop-Frog!*" Only think of *your* Eddy writing a story with *such* a name as "Hop-Frog"! You would never guess the subject (which is a terrible one) from the title, I am sure."[80] As we now turn to "Hop-Frog" as the final of our primary texts, we find that it is, in a sense, terrible—that it bears within its corpus the heightened mood of renewed frustration with and ire toward the literati that the intervening years between it and "The Cask" and the failed romance with Sarah Helen Whitman,had served to intensify, rather than diminish.

"Hop-Frog"—both the story and the character—is a strange little creature. Formally, the story tells the tale of a court jester, Hop-Frog, who, on account of his dwarfish stature and crippled physique, is made the object of ridicule by the king (and, by extension, the king's men) in whose court he serves. Hop-Frog bears this ridicule mildly enough until the king and his men insult a fellow dwarf, the graceful Trippetta, whose

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no one but your Mother.… So far I have assigned no reason for my declining to fulfil our engagement — I had none but the suspicious & grossly insulting parsimony of the arrangements into which you suffered yourself to be forced by your Mother."

[79] Poe to Annie L. Richmond, January 21(?), 1849, in Poe *Letters Vol. II*, 419.

[80] Poe to Annie L. Richmond, February 8, 1849, in Poe *Letters Vol. II*, 425.

only offense was that she defended Hop-Frog from the more cruel of the king's jests. Her injury evokes Hop-Frog's long-dormant fury, and he hatches a plot for revenge that culminates in the hauling aloft and setting fire of the king and his men before an assembled masquerade party. After a final pronouncement of vengeance, Hop-Frog disappears with Trippetta, leaving the human conflagration behind them.

While Quinn describes "Hop-Frog" as "one of [Poe's] most powerful stories," most critics regard the piece as an oddity in the later Poe canon and agree with biographer Hutchisson's opinion that, "the story is indeed one of Poe's weaker efforts."[81] Both Hutchisson and Silverman believe the story's tone primarily reflected Poe's mood following his severed engagement with Whitman, which Hutchisson describes as "bilious."[82] On the interpretive front, opinion is limited in both volume and scope. Those who do analyze the piece typically identify a commentary on tyranny at its core; opinions differ, however, as to which brand of tyranny Poe intended, specifically, to address. Hutchisson identifies the kingly figure as being "reminiscent of John Allan"[83] while Katrina Bachinger perceives the king as a Napoleonic figure sprung from Poe's Byronic streak[84] and Paul Christian Jones interprets the piece as a commentary on slavery.[85]

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[81] Quinn, *Edgar Allan* Poe, 595; Hutchisson, *Poe*, 235.

[82] Hutchisson's full observation reads, "'Hop-Frog'… shows Poe's bilious mood following his failed courtship of Helen Whitman," *Poe*, 234. See also Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 406.

[83] Hutchisson, *Poe*, 236.

[84] Katrina Bachinger, "Together (or Not Together) against Tyranny: Poe, Byron, and Napoleon Upside Down in 'Hop-Frog,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 373-74.

[85] Paul Christian Jones, "The Danger of Sympathy: Edgar Allan Poe's 'Hop-Frog' and the Abolitionist Rhetoric of Pathos," *Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 2 (Aug. 2001): 240.

Of those who critique "Hop-Frog," Silverman creeps nearest to linking the tyrannic tale to the subject of the literati when he remarks, "The conflict between the mighty king and the crippled jester dramatizes years of accumulated gripes and griefs. In the king's indifference to the suffering of others, his callous affronts, his demands to be entertained, Poe summoned up a small army of people by whom he had come to feel abused and misled."[86] Silverman remains general in this linkage, however, and neither he nor critics in general seek to establish any real thematic link between the content of "Hop-Frog" and that of "The Cask of Amontillado." This is partially understandable, as the stories seem, plot-wise, to share little commonality beyond the fact that they are the only tales in Poe's canon that may, strictly speaking, be termed *revenge* tales. This very uniqueness of the two tales in Poe's canon, however—their very shared focus on revenge—begs their closer comparison. Through this close comparison, we will see that, in addition to one-upping English's *1844* in "The Cask," Poe further used the tale to begin a commentary on the literary world that he evolves and amplifies in "Hop-Frog."

The most easily identifiable similarity between "The Cask" and "Hop-Frog"—beyond their mutual treatment of revenge—is the fact that both feature protagonists who exist, at some level, as outsiders. Montresor is the descendant of a proud dynasty, to be sure, but as Elena Barbaran explains:

> since a rich and powerful man such as Fortunato cannot remember the Montresors' insignia, it is logical to assume that Montresor was not an active participant in the life of local aristocracy… Montresor's other remark, 'You are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed' (852), provides further

[86] Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 407.

> grounds to believe that Montresor is no longer as rich and socially conspicuous as he used to be.[87]

The identification of his insulter as "Fortunato"—he who is smiled upon by fortune—and the fact that this "fortunate" one possesses the social latitude to venture on not only injury but also insult further indicates that Fortunato possesses a distinct social advantage over Montresor. Less nebulously, Fortunato himself affixes outsider status to Montresor when he tests him to see if he is "of the [Masonic] brotherhood."[88] By comparison, Hop-Frog's "outsider" status, which encompasses his "treble" value of freakishness in the king's eyes, is so extreme as to mark him as an actual Other; one completely at the mercy of those who are "insider" or who "belong."

By definition, the "outsiderness" that appears in both stories necessitates the corresponding recurrence of "insiderness"; of a society or consortium by whom the protagonist is excluded or made to feel Other. In the case of "The Cask," that society is the brotherhood of the Masons; in "Hop-Frog" that consortium is the council formed by the king and his seven wise men. Superficially speaking, these two groups seem to have little in common; however, they are bound together, obliquely, by a single idea—that of craft or art. While membership in the Masonic brotherhood did not require skill in masonry, the underlying notion of the masonic craft clung to the group, as is evidenced by Montresor himself, who claimed membership in the group by producing a trowel, a

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[87] Elena V. Baraban, "The Motive for Murder in 'The Cask of Amontillado' by Edgar Allan Poe," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 58, no. 2 (2004): 51. Baraban further concludes, "A number of onomastic and semantic characteristics of the text indicate that 'The Cask of Amontillado' is a story about the characters' power relations and their social status," 51.

[88] Poe, "The Cask," 418-19.

tool of masonry.[89] Similarly, while there is no craft *officially* affixed to the king and his men, Poe himself affixes one in the opening sentences of the story: "I never knew any one so keenly alive to a joke as the king was. He seemed to live only for joking. To tell a good story of the joke kind, and to tell it well, was the surest road to his favor. Thus… his seven ministers were all noted for their accomplishments as jokers."[90] The king and his men, then, share a craft: joking.

This presence of craft across both stories is significant on multiple levels. One such level is established by a reference to the source materials that inspired each story. Biographers have long regarded "A Sketch, A Man Built in a Wall" by Joel T. Headley (whose work Poe knew and reviewed), as the primary plot inspiration for "The Cask." Recent critics have identified further potential sources, among them works by Honoré de Balzac and George Lippard. What is significant across these proto-"Casks" is the fact that, while each of them treats on some variation of revenge or walling up, none incorporates the question of craft.[91] Similarly, both Quinn and Bachinger name Lord Berners' translation of Froissart's "Frogère and the Emperor Paul" as supplying the notion of a masquerade-turned-conflagration that Poe placed at the pitch of "Hop-Frog's"

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[89] Cuţitaru, "The Art of Dissimulation," 205. Cuţitaru comments of the nuanced clique-yet-craft nature of the Masonic order and its appearance in "The Cask" that "[t]he two men talk about Masonry in the terms of an incredible semantic incongruence. While Fortunado [sic] refers, obviously, to the speculative sense of the concept – Masonry as a secret organization, based on occult and ritualistic practices –, Montresor, in his "understanding" of the context, does not abandon the concrete area of significance, i.e. the operative meaning of the notion – Masonry as a traditional profession (craft) of humanity. The narrator claims he has "masonic" training (which implies he would have specific abilities in the field of "constructions"), revealing (as "a sign") a trowel he has on him (accidentally?) at the time of his encounter with Fortunado [sic]."

[90] Edgar Allan Poe, "Hop-Frog," in Poe, *Selected Writings*, 421.

[91] See Reynolds, "Poe's Art of Transformation," 94-95 for details of the works by Headley, de Balzac, and Lippard. Reynolds further explicates the psychological superiority of Poe's work in comparison to these antecedents on pages 103-104.

plot, but Quinn is quick to stress that Poe's reworking of the story is what lends it its effectiveness: "What makes the story a great one, however, is the way Poe breathes into the jester the incarnate spirit of a revenge taken by the physically weak but mentally alert cripple for a wrong done to the woman he loved. There is no jester and no revenge in Froissart."[92] The lack of jester points directly to the lack of jest itself as a craft in the original tale. Altogether, then, this survey of source materials reveals that Poe intentionally *introduced* the element of craft into both stories and that it is, therefore, fundamental to the meaning of both stories.

What that meaning is—what the potential meaning or identity of a hierarchical power system that derives its identity from and revolves around the practice of a craft could be—should not escape readers of the preceding chapters of this thesis. The literary establishment, with its networks of cliques and editors, its insistence on its own superior craftsmanship, maps perfectly onto the trope. Indeed, our discussion of "belonging" and "non-belonging" recalls the passage by Moss quoted in the Proem to this thesis, in which he outlined the fundamental functions of literary cliques by proclaiming that "[o]nce a clique had established itself, it became more and more clannish and powerful, discriminating in favor of belongers and working against outsiders, in a kind of mutual protection league."[93] This identification of the "craft" cabals in "Hop-Frog" and "The Cask" with the literary establishment that had so long worked against Poe, the ultimate

[92] See Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe,* 596; Bachinger, "Together (or Not Together) against Tyranny," 380.

[93] Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles,* 30.

outsider, congeals perfectly with the ultimate usage Poe makes of the "craft" element in both tales: as an inescapable and poetically-fitting instrument of revenge.

Montresor, Hop-Frog, and Poe were all outsiders facing the exclusionary power, the mocking voice, of those who excluded them from "belonging" on the basis of a self-declared superiority in the practice of a craft. For Montresor, that craft was masonry; for Hop-Frog, that craft was jest; for Poe, that craft was authorship. Those who excluded them did so by degrading their skills from a place of unassailable power—or rather, from a place of *nearly* unassailable power. As each story highlights, that power did carry with it a vulnerability, and that vulnerability was the very craft in which it considered itself superior. Montresor does not belong to the Masons, but at the moment that it matters, he employs skills in masonry to savage one of their number. His practice of masonry proves that when one is arraigned against one's enemy in the belly of a cellar, one's external connections—one's membership in clubs or cliques—is of negligible value. What is of value in such a moment is one's skill in deploying a trowel, in practicing *literal* masonry; despite his exclusion from the clique, Montresor practices masonry more genuinely than Fortunato ever did. Likewise, Hop-Frog is not among the king's consortium of ministers; his role as a jester is to be made a jest *of*—to serve as the scapegoat on whom the king and his ministers employ their wit to demonstrate their superiority over him. And yet, at the crucial moment, it is Hop-Frog who practices a lethal jest upon the king and his men. The jest is, perhaps, not so refined as their tepid asides, but it accomplishes precisely

what it needs to—his enemies are destroyed as he, hovering over them, proclaims, "I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester—and *this is my last jest*."[94]

The idea of "the jest" becomes crucial in our readings of these tales. "Jest" bobs up in "The Cask" in the form of Fortunato's costume, which consists of "a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and… [a] conical cap and bells"—clearly a jester's costume.[95] When Montresor produces a trowel as a symbol of belonging to the brotherhood, Fortunato responds "You jest" and recoils.[96] When Fortunato realizes that screams will not save him, he appeals to Montresor from behind the wall with the words, "Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!—a very good joke, indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!"[97] The mere fact that Fortunato characterizes Montresor's malevolent behavior as a joke or jest is significant; more significant still is that, while describing it thus, Fortunato is acknowledging Montresor's superiority over him—is crying uncle, so to speak.

This usage of jest to invert social positioning continues in "Hop-Frog," and, indeed, becomes more concentrated due to the jest's role as the central craft of the tale. Variations of the words "jest," "joke," and "laugh" recur nearly forty times throughout the short narrative, and there is not a scene that elapses without some sort of jest or joke figuring into its fabric. The recurrence of jest in this context reveals a sinister quality to jest, one that leads us to question the meaning of jest—its role and function—in Poe's

[94] Poe, "Hop-Frog," 428.
[95] Poe, "The Cask," 416.
[96] Ibid., 417.
[97] Ibid., 420.

thought. It seems not to consist of gentle little nothings or charming asides—so what does the jest mean to Poe?

Such reflection leads us directly to Poe's own practices as a critic—his well-established habit of "using up" authors in his reviews. Writing of Poe's reviews as, themselves, an art form, Paul Hurh states definitively that "sarcasm was native to Poe's reviewing practices from the start" an observation he reinforces with a more nuanced description of Poe's reviewing style: "Poe's citation of the text is presented first, offering the reader a test that then is resolved in the sarcastic joke that follows…. by always "instancing" his claims, Poe opens the work up to the judgment of the reader, and the humor of his quips depends upon the reader being able to parse out in retrospect the errors in the cited sentence."[98] In his criticism, Poe was pursuing a type of jesting, a type of humor or sarcasm that was calculated to achieve specific ends: the unseating of the merit-claim of that which was the subject of its jest. We saw just such unseatings in many of the reviews discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. To refresh ourselves on the jesting tone of that criticism, let us cast our eye back to Poe's treatment of Joel T. Headley, whom he described as "the Autocrat of all the Quacks."[99] Poe maintains a similar tone throughout the essay, reinforcing his disquisition on Headley's claim to this title with passages such as the following:

> that a gentleman should know so much about Noah's ark and know anything about any thing else, is scarcely to be expected. We have no right to require English grammar and accurate information about Moses and Aaron at the hands of one and the same author. For our parts, now we come to think of it, if we only

[98] Hurh, "Poe the Critic: The Aesthetics of the "Tomahawk" Review," 447, 456-7. Writing of the Poe-English exchange in *Poe's Major Crisis*, 26, Moss describes Poe's original foray as an "outrageously *playful* sketch"; if this estimation is true all it proves is that, when Poe *played*, he did not come *to* play.

[99] Poe, "Joel T. Headley," 593.

> understood as much about Mount Sinai and other matters as Mr. Headley does, we should make a point of always writing bad English upon principle, whether we knew better or not.[100]

This passage is humorous—funny even—but it is a humor that comes back to bite, a laugh that curls into a sneer ere it dies.

Nor is this bite, this sneer, purposeless. Poe is not simply antagonizing Headley; he is, to use his own language, quizzing him. While this term has limited connotations to modern readers, in Poe's time, its meaning was broader. Commenting directly on Poe's habit of "quizzing" his contemporaries, Hurh helpfully defines the term: "To quiz something is to test it by making fun of it, to test, that is, the worth of a book by mocking it."[101] Thus, when Poe proudly declared in the midst of his war with Cornelia Wells Walter that "We [the royal we] have been quizzing the Bostonians, and one or two of the more stupid of their editors and editresses have taken it in high dudgeon," he did not mean that he had politely posed questions to their number; he meant that he had jibed at and ridiculed them as a means of undermining their claim to superiority.[102] Poe was not merely poking fun at his fellow authors when he poked fun at them; he was maneuvering himself into a position of aesthetic ascendancy over them, was establishing his footing in the larger critical game, the larger literary establishment.

This linking of critical jest to literal jest in the context of a story we have already seen is, itself, a continuation in a vein of commentary on Poe's critical adventures, provides us with a key to understanding what Poe believed he was accomplishing through

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[100] Ibid., 591.

[101] Hurh, "Poe the Critic," 448.

[102] Edgar Allan Poe, "Editorial Miscellany," *Broadway Journal* 2, no. 16 (October 25, 1845): 248.

his criticism—the terms of the battle in which he felt himself arraigned. Hop-Frog is created as a thing to be laughed at—this laughing from the king and his men establishes their superiority over him. To laugh at a thing is to rise superior to it, to exercise power over it. By exercising his craft, the craft of the jest, Hop-Frog—Poe—upends the configuration of his relationship to his superiors; establishes himself in a position of power over them, places himself in a position to *laugh at them*. In doing so, Hop-Frog / Poe reveals what was true all along—that the king in his superiority, the critical cliques in their snobbery were, at their essence, a thing to be laughed at, derided—they were ma*jest*ies, begging to be made the object of sartorial mockery. Poe describes Hop-Frog as trussing up the king and his men "with the rapidity of thought"; this in itself forms one of Poe's most emphatic thought-wishes: a belief that, through the rapidity of his thought, the majesties of the literary establishment might be similarly dethroned.[103] Perhaps Poe did not wish *literally* to set aflame the carcasses of the editors and cliquish authors who had, for so long, exercised their positions of power to sneer at his work, but this story undoubtedly expressed his desire to fan a fire about the heels of those who, comfortable in their own mediocrity, took malicious delight in thwarting his designs towards devising a respectable literary estate.

Hitherto, I have noted the shared themes between "The Cask" and "Hop-Frog" as a means of illustrating that they are, indeed, treatments of the same basic theme. Having examined the source material, however, we can see that "Hop-Frog" did more than treat on the same theme; in many ways it *expanded* on those themes, consolidating and

[103] Poe, "Hop-Frog," 427.

intensifying them. The power imbalance that is so subtly present in "The Cask" springs powerfully to the forefront of "Hop-Frog"; the idea of craft, embedded in Montresor's trowel, looms palpably within "Hop-Frog," forcing itself to the forefront of consideration. The word-play present in the names of "Montresor" (*my treasure*), "Fortunato" (*fortune*), and "Amontillado" (*a little pile*, i.e., of bones) is aggressively concentrated into the single "Hop-Frog", which summons at once the insulting "Poh!" offered him in 1845 by his erstwhile nemesis, Cornelia Wells Walter, as well as the idea of the "Frogpondians," the insult for the Bostonians he coined in response to her assaults.[104]

Most suggestive of all, however, is the development of the revenge theme itself. While "The Cask" is widely (and rightly) considered the better study of revenge, "Hop-Frog" is an altogether more *vengeful* study of revenge. A comparison of not only their endings, but also critiques of their endings highlights the major difference between the two. In "The Cask's" final paragraph, Montresor's behavior is related thus: "I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let if fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so."[105] This single line, "My heart grew sick" has been sufficient to cause critics to question the tenacity with which Montresor clings to his revenge—the possibility that

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[104] Baraban supplies the translation of amontillado, further pointing to the "cask" as being suggestive of "casket" in "The Motive for Murder," 55-56. Freehafer further notes of the wordplay in "The Cask" that when asked for another draught of Medoc (suggestive of medicine), Montresor supplies Fortunato with "De Grave" instead (suggestive of… the grave), "Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado," 138. In Hutchisson, *Poe*, 236, Hutchisson points out the significance of "Frog" as a reference to the Frogpondians and notes that "Hop" is "Poh" inverted, but does not link that "Poh" to Poe's collision with Walters, instead remarking on its application to Poe's father during his lifetime.

[105] Poe, "The Cask," 421.

he, perhaps, was seized with a twinge of regret for his actions.[106] Compare this to the final speech from Hop-Frog:

> The dwarf seized his opportunity and once more spoke:
> "I now see *distinctly*," he said, "what manner of people these maskers are. They are a great king and his seven privy councillors—a king who does not scruple to strike a defenceless girl, and his seven coucillors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester—and *this is my last jest*."[107]

The transformation here is immense. Critics may never agree whether Montresor regretted his actions; what is essential is that, at the end of 1846, Poe left enough of a margin for regret in his revenger's mind to leave critics in disagreement over the issue. Here, at the beginning of 1849, there is no question of regret in his protagonist's mind; he is, instead, so far from feeling regret that he orates the company in a speech that, in Poe terms, is surprisingly didactic. He has not only accomplished revenge, but also feels *justified* in that accomplishment.

This sense of justification in the total destruction of a cliquish cabal is significant as it represents a culmination of sorts to—a rendering of verdict upon—Poe's decade and a half of interaction with the mid-nineteenth century American literary establishment. When Poe penned "Hop-Frog," he had no knowledge that his own death would occur before the end of the year. However, he would have been sensitive to the fact that he was poised on the verge of a shifting decade, both in terms of calendar (soon shifting from the 1840s to the 1850s), but also in terms of his own life (he turned forty in January 1849,

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[106] John A. Dern, "Poe's Public Speakers: Rhetorical Strategies in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and 'The Cask of Amontillado,'" *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 63. Dern asserts, "Montresor undertakes to convince not only his auditor, but also himself that this "sick" heart does not signal a moment of scruple. In fact, the excuse for his constitutional weakness is too hackneyed to be worthy of Montresor were he not having a momentary doubt."

[107] Poe, "Hop-Frog," 428.

just before writing "Hop-Frog"). Much as the moment of his emergence from West Point eighteen years earlier had resulted upon years of upheaval and triggered a reevaluation of positionality, early 1849 likely was a moment of processing for Poe. In 1831, Poe had taken stock of his career and elected to shift tactics the better to place himself "before the eye of the world."[108] At the head of 1849, as he emerged from years filled with the savagery of literary feuding, the weight of Virginia's illness and death, and the frustration of his broken engagement with Whitman, Poe cannot have helped but pause to review the nature of and evaluate the success of that appearance before the eye of the world.

To assert definitively that this processing led Poe to view Hop-Frog as himself—himself as Hop-Frog—would be too broad a glossing of the issue. Poe knew his own merits and possessed some hope that they would, even at this moment of his life, be recognized. However, in revisiting the progression of his career over the previous decades, an artist of Poe's intelligence and sensibility cannot have been pleased to realize that, in attempting to place himself before the eye of the world in order to gain the literary fame necessary to ascend to poethood, he had succeeded primarily in participating in the production of himself into a caricature of himself that, for all the time and energy he had expended, was no closer to being heralded as a *vates*, as the Israfel of his country's laurels. While he may not have gnashed his teeth literally, as Hop-Frog did, Poe must have felt chagrin as he recognized the degree to which his own authorial reputation had been swept up in and hijacked by what Sandra Tomc describes as "a literary industry that embraced and cultivated dysfunction as a condition of authorial productivity and repute,"

[108] Poe to John Allan, May 29, 1829, 20.

a literary establishment that, much as the king and his men urged Hop-Frog to "hop" before them that they might be the better entertained by his deformities, jibed authors who did not function within the protective pales of a clique to dance for their readership "by cultivating sensationalism, scandal, and notoriety—by trafficking, that is, the peculiar and outrageous features of their own personalities."[109] Poe had embarked on his critical and editorial career as a proem—a precondition—to his dream within a dream of standing, in the end, a recognized poet; the literary establishment in which he was required to function to labor toward that goal had refused his attempts to refine its art, instead sapping the most vital years of his life before cruelly expelling him from its circle.

Young Poe, who cut his teeth on Byron, had dreamed of creating a beauty so supernal that it would bring a sense of Beauty herself to his readers; the Poe of 1849 could console himself with the knowledge that he had poured his every energy into the crafting of himself into a purveyor of beauty, but he could not eradicate the pain he felt attendant upon the rejection of both himself—and, by extension, Beauty herself—by those who claimed to love her best. Over the course of his career, he had used his craft to attempt to craft for himself a space within the establishment within which he functioned, and he had succeeded in becoming a force unlike any other—but not on the terms for which he had hoped to be acknowledged. He had sought the laurel crown of the poet. We in our day grant it to him freely—the gatekeepers of his own day refused his offerings. The works he did produce, however, evidence a soul on the hunt for itself—an author in

[109] Tomc, "Poe and His Circle," 22, 26.

pursuit of his own legacy, an aesthete bound by self-integrity to produce that legacy into one of literary excellence.

As he stood at the head of his career, Poe had proclaimed, “At my time of life there is much in being *before the eye of the world*—if once noticed I can easily cut out a path to reputation.” By the end of that life, Poe must have realized that cutting a path towards reputation was neither so certain nor so simple a thing as his younger self had assumed—that in putting himself before the eye of the world, he had placed in the hands of that world the power, at least partially, to determine the cut of that reputation. Poe had striven with great thought and feeling—through both aestheticism and affect—to effect his wider reception within, the improvement of, the literary culture in which he labored. Although the establishment of his own era rejected him, his labors have resulted in history’s recognition of him as having accomplished both of his disparate ends: of having established, through a vast body of critical texts, the groundwork for the subsequent development of American literary standards and of having produced poems of strange and unparalleled beauty. Poe lives now, as he truly did then—a Critic-Poet.

Po(e)stmortem: Dissecting Poe's Posthumous Author Figure

Edgar Allan Poe died on October 7, 1849. The nature of his death, while tragic, is universally regarded as thematic of his own life and literary interests. Poe died in a hospital in Baltimore in a state of delirium after disappearing for a week.[1] When he was discovered on the streets of Baltimore by two distant acquaintances, he was dressed in clothes not his own and was only semi-conscious.[2] No one knows why he was in Baltimore, by what means he was reduced to the state in which he was found, or his precise cause of death. All that is known is that, in the dark hours of the morning, Poe expired with the phrase "God help my poor soul!" on his lips.[3]

Although Poe died, the author-figure, Poe, lived on, growing stronger in stature by virtue of the man's death. In this thesis, we have explored the crooks and crannies of Poe's obsession both with carving out the poet-critic role within the literary establishment and with constructing himself into that poet-critic. In yet another thematic twist worthy of Poe's oft-prophetic narratorial voice, Poe's own fixation with his reputation as an author-figure acted as something of a horoscope—a foreshadowing—of the turn his critical reception would take, and, over the past one hundred seventy years, critical analysis of Poe has revolved equally around his person as around his canon.

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[1] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 640.

[2] Ibid., 639.

[3] Quinn reports, "God help my poor soul," while Silverman reports "Lord help my poor Soul"; both base their reports on the testimony of the same witness, who changed the details he reported regarding Poe's discovery several times as he repeated the story across the decades. Already, the fictionalizing touch of time begins its work on Poe's story. See Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 641 and Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe*, 435, respectively.

This focus on Poe's person emerged within days of Poe's death when Rufus Griswold, Poe's erstwhile rival, infamously commented on Poe's death by anonymously publishing the following obituary:

> EDGAR ALLAN POE is dead… This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was well known, personally or by reputation, in all this country… but he had few or no friends; and the regrets for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art has lost one of its most brilliant but erratic stars.[4]

In the paragraphs that followed, Griswold freely blended literary with personal criticism, claiming, among other things, that Poe's personality was dominated by "that desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition… that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self conceit."[5] It is fascinating to see Griswold here pinpoint the two characteristics we have, ourselves, noted through our study—Poe's desire to "rise" before the eye of the world and his frustration towards that world for its failure to acknowledge his merit—while gruesomely distorting those characteristics through his own animosity towards Poe.

Griswold's cynicism towards Poe, while aggressive, need not have permanently marred his reputation. The situation was aggravated, however, by the fact that Poe's aunt, Maria Clemm, asserted that Poe had named Griswold his literary executor.[6] The truth of this assertion has never been fully established. There seems no reason for his aunt to have lied, but equally, no evidence from Poe himself of his preference in this regard has

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[4] Rufus W. Griswold, "Death of Edgar A. Poe," *New-York Daily Tribune* 9, no. 156 (October 9, 1849), 2, cols. 3-4.

[5] Griswold, "Death of Poe," 2. Griswold quotes from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's description of his protagonist Francis Vivian in "The Caxtons," a character Poe himself had criticized. Once again, it is worth noting the fictionalizing approach to Poe; Griswold resorts to the words of a novelist penned regarding a fictional character to paint a picture of Poe.

[6] See Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 656 for the timing of this acquisition.

survived.[7] The men's ongoing feud casts the selection in a suspicious light, as it seems unlikely that Poe would select a man with whom he had so often tussled in the press to be trusted with his posthumous legacy. However, as several Poe biographers, including Scott Peeples, have pointed out, it is possible that it was precisely because the two men had feuded that Poe selected Griswold for the role. The idea of disappearing from before the eye of the world would have been terrifying to Poe; perhaps he believed that leaving his estate in the hands of a foe was the best way to ensure its longevity, as Griswold would not be able to resist capitalizing on the opportunity to disseminate the works with his own commentary affixed to them. Furthermore, as Peeples underscores, Griswold was a well-established name within the world of poetic anthology and criticism, and he had executed others' estates before; perhaps, in the end, Poe trusted him simply to get the job done where he suspected a friend might balk before the task of presenting his full canon to the world.[8]

Regardless of why or even whether Poe selected Griswold, Griswold took hold of Poe's literary reputation.[9] His management of that reputation has been the subject of much commentary, primarily because he capitalized on his position to slander Poe's reputation, most noticeably through his inclusion of a "Memoir" in his edition of Poe's complete works to which the application of the adjective "biographical" rather than "imaginative" is an act of charity. In this sketch, Griswold blended fact with fiction, false praise with slander, insult with injury in a manner Poe would have sardonically lambasted

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[7] Scott Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Camden House, 2004), 34. Peeples, citing Burton Pollin, is skeptical of this claim's authenticity. In his words, "no letter in Poe's handwriting to this effect has ever been located," 34.

[8] Peeples, *The Afterlife*, 4.

[9] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 656.

had he yet been living. Framing even more positive aspects of Poe's life in a tone that tempts its readers to question Poe's motives, the memoir additionally suggests certain improprieties on Poe's part that, if true, would be considered blackening by most moral standards.

Perhaps, in publishing this memoir, Griswold thought that he would be joined in a general free-for-all against Poe by the many authors Poe had angered through blunt commentary; instead, he found himself assailed on all sides by defenders of Poe. Upon its publication, no less a figure than George Graham, the owner of *Graham's Magazine,* for which both Poe and Griswold had previously served as editor, leapt to Poe's defense, writing:

> I knew Mr. Poe well — far better than Mr. Griswold.… I pronounce this exceedingly ill-timed and unappreciative estimate of the character of our lost friend *unfair and untrue*…. The man who could deliberately say of Edgar Allan Poe, in a notice of his life and writings, prefacing the volumes which were to become a priceless souvenir to all who loved him — that his death might startle many, "*but that few would be grieved by it*"… is a judge dishonored.[10]

John Neal, then a giant in American letters, also joined the fray, specifically condemning Griswold for his misappropriation of his position as literary executor and slamming him for his questionable treatment of Poe's legacy: "The biographical notices [of Poe] are just and wise… with one single exception, that of the Rev. R. W. Griswold… to whom the dying poet bequeathed his papers, and his character, to be hashed over, and served up, little by little, with a *sauce piquante,* resembling the turbid water, in which very poor

[10] George Graham, "The Late Edgar Allan Poe," *Graham's Magazine* 36, no. 3 (1850): 224. Graham proceeds to dissect Griswold's portrait of Poe and supply his own appreciative one in almost three full pages of tightly-spaced prose.

eggs have been boiled to death."[11] Even at this early moment, we see that Poe's characteristics as an author are becoming ingredients that each critic treats according to his own recipe—that each critic carves as he chooses.

Over the subsequent years of feuding, Griswold decided to combat this resistance to his "authoritative" perspective by making Poe do his work for him. He pursued this strategy through one primary practice: tampering with the evidence. Griswold collected anything Poe wrote that he might twist to sound critical of those who rose to Poe's defense and then altered those documents to be even more insulting to those friends before then "quoting" from them. These "quotations"—forgeries, really—painted Poe as a cruel and, in many cases, ungrateful blackguard for whom no friendship was sacred, no loyalty respected. This strategy, unfortunately was mostly successful. Annoyed at being criticized from the grave, as it were, several of Poe's staunchest defenders held their tongues while Poe's detractors seized upon the "quotations" to reinforce their own excoriations of his character.[12] Those friends who had not fallen under Griswold's forging hatchet did step forward to offer defenses of Poe, but these too often fell silent before Griswold's overt hints that he could supply criticism by Poe that would damage their reputations, too.[13]

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[11] This essay, originally published in April 26, 1850, is sampled in Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 667.

[12] Quinn specifically identifies Evert Duyckinck as a friend whose defense Griswold averted through twisted quotations and Lewis Gaylord Clark as a detractor who gloried in the general carnage promised by Griswold's suggestive biography in *Edgar Allan Poe*, 673 and 677, respectively.

[13] According to Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 680, Griswold attempted to win silence through soft blackmail when Whitman's friend, W. J. Pabodie, stepped forward to contend Griswold's over-dramatized rendering of Poe and Whitman's broken engagement.

One of the few figures who refused to be silenced even in the face of this threat was Sarah Helen Whitman, the Providence poet to whom Poe had become briefly engaged in the fall of 1848. Outraged by Griswold's abuse of Poe's figure, Whitman penned a lengthy essay titled *Edgar Poe and His Critics*, which she published in 1860. The feisty spirit of the piece may be gathered from its preface, in which she pointedly spotlights Griswold's inaccuracies and contradicts his claim, quoted earlier, that Poe had no friends:

> Dr. Griswold's Memoir of Edgar Poe has been extensively read and circulated; its perverted facts and baseless assumptions have been adopted into every subsequent memoir and notice of the poet, and have been translated into many languages… As an index to a more equitable and intelligible theory of the idiosyncrasies of [Poe's] life, and as an earnest protest against the spirit of Dr. Griswold's unjust memoir, these pages are submitted to his more candid readers and critics by
>
> One of his Friends.[14]

Whitman's subsequent exploration of Poe the author-figure, Poe the man, and Poe the canon was of such masterful quality that Quinn comments of it, "When she had finished, Edgar Poe in his real nature was there for the eyes of those who wish a true picture."[15] His usage of the phrase "true picture" is fascinating in the context of our discussion, given our growing sense of Poe's multiplicity of visage. However, Quinn is almost certainly right in the sense that Poe himself would have appreciated Whitman's words regarding him, such as her assertion that Poe's character was "one very difficult of comprehension to the casual observer" and his speech and writings, "presented a combination of qualities rarely met with in the same person; a cool, decisive judgment, a

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[14] Sarah Helen Whitman, *Edgar Poe and His Critics* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1860), 1.

[15] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 688.

wholly unconventional courtesy and sincere grace of manner, and an imperious enthusiasm which brought all hearers within the circle of its influence."[16] In depicting Poe as possessing rare, ingenious qualities that made him Other than his peers, Whitman painted Poe in the colors he himself felt he bled. In this portrait lies the artistry that should have flowed from the biographical pen of Poe's literary executor, but which instead required the pen of a true peer to achieve. During Whitman's own time, the work led to the evolution of her own author-figure, and she became something of an expert within Poe studies.[17]

In the late 1860s, several biographers—professing their opinion that Poe had been wronged by biographers of previous decades and desire to rectify this injustice—began work on biographies of Poe. Four of these biographers, Richard Henry Stoddard, William F. Gill, John H. Ingram, and Eugene L. Didier, wrote to Whitman soliciting help in discerning between Griswold's truths and half-truths in their pursuit of the real Poe.[18] Whitman corresponded avidly with these biographers, supplying them with her own recollections and soliciting materials from other of Poe's friends on their half. Thanks in large part to her influence, this set of biographies shifted from Griswold's derogatory tone and at least attempted to strip back the inaccuracies mobilized by his contributions. By the end of the nineteenth century, then, the American establishment was still discussing Poe's figure.

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[16] Whitman, *Poe and His Critics*, 42-44.

[17] For full descriptions of Whitman's rise to preeminence in the field of Poe studies, see the following two sources: Laura York, "Whitman, Sarah Helen (1803-1878)," in *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 16, ed. Anne Commire (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2002), 475-76 and Noelle A. Baker, "'This Slender Foundation… Made Me Immortal': Sarah Helen Whitman vs. Poe's Helen," *Poe Studies* 34, no. 1-2 (2001): 11.

[18] Ticknor, *Poe's Helen*, 205-206.

Poe's reputation, however, was not limited to American shores. Even during his own lifetime, Poe's works were read across the Atlantic. *The Narrative of the Life of Arthur Gordon Pym* underwent two printings in England compared to its single printing in America, and his works were often republished in British periodicals, occasionally to humorous results.[19] The most noticeable of these humorous occasions surrounds the English publication of his "Facts in the Case of Monsieur Valdemar," which was reprinted in the *Popular Record of Modern Science* and treated as scientific fact until the fictionality of the account was confirmed.[20] An extant letter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning further illustrates that Poe's "Raven" took the country by storm, while Charles Dickens interceded with a British publisher to produce a copyrighted version of Poe's stories shortly after their meeting in 1842. [21]

The true scene of Poe's international audience in the nineteenth century, however, was France, where his authorial construct was probed and reimagined in terms that more closely approximated his own conception of himself. While not the first translator of Poe, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) shaped the "face" of Poe studies indelibly through his identification with, embellishment of, and service to Poe's author figure. First encountering Poe's works in the 1840s, Baudelaire spent over seventeen years of his professional life studying, translating, and popularizing Poe scholarship among his countrymen. Baudelaire's investment in Poe's legacy sprang from several fronts that

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[19] Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe*, 263.

[20] Ibid., 560; Quinn notes that the piece was reprinted under the title "The Last Conversation of a Somnambule."

[21] For a record of Browning's attitude towards Poe, see her letter to him: Browning, "Barrett to E. A. Poe." For an account of Poe's encounter with Dickens, see Tara Moore, "Charles Dickens," in Hayes, *Poe in Context*, 282-83.

ranged from aesthetic to biographical but rooted itself in the "shock of recognition" he experienced on encountering Poe—the personal rapport he instantly established with the *person* of the American versifier.[22] This "personal" encounter led not only to Baudelaire's profession of identification with Poe, but also to his conceptualization of and rearticulation of Poe's life in highly specific tones:

> What a grievous tragedy was the life of Edgar Poe!.... for Poe the United States was nothing more than a vast prison which he traversed with the feverish agitation of a being made to breathe a sweeter air,—nothing more than a great gas-lighted nightmare,—and [] his inner, spiritual life, as a poet or even as a drunkard, was nothing but a perpetual effort to escape the influence of this unfriendly atmosphere.[23]

This description of Poe clearly extends beyond a synopsis of chronology and into an analysis of Poe the author-figure or, indeed, into a *creation* of Poe, an author-figure. A further survey of Baudelaire's critical writings on Poe illustrates that this understanding of Poe—this perception of Poe as the quintessential *poète maudit*—was fundamental both to Baudelaire's work with Poe and simply to his work as a poet himself. Keeping this Poe beside him at all times, Baudelaire spent more time translating Poe than writing his own poems in a given day, and the year that his own magnum opus, *Les Fleur du mal* (1857), appeared fell at the center of his multi-decade devotion to Poe's figure.[24]

Unsurprisingly, then, Poe's own person became the foundation—the font—for the literary movement of which *Les Fleur du mal* (1857) proved the inaugural text:

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[22] Vines quotes Baudelaire's reaction to Poe in "Poe in France," in Vines, *Poe Abroad*, 165.

[23] Charles Baudelaire, "Edgar Poe, His Life and Works (1856)," in *Baudelaire on Poe: Critical Papers*, ed. and trans. by Lois Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr. (Carrolltown, PA: Bald Eagle Press: 1952), 90-91.

[24] Goulet, "France," in Hayes, *Poe in Context*, 42. Goulet notes both these facts, writing of the former, "According to his journal, Baudelaire allotted five hours a day to translating Poe's stories and only three hours to composing his own poems!"

Symbolism.[25] Indeed, not only did Symbolism integrate Poe's poetic rejection of didacticism into its core principles, [26] but the primary figure of each successive generation of the movement—Charles Baudelaire, Stephan Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry—exhibited inordinate interest in Poe's person.[27] Especially worth noting, however, is that the Poe in whom each of these men found inspiration was a slightly different man to each man. In his lengthy exploration of the Symbolists' recursive obsession with Poe, Lawler remarks, "Poe showed different facets of himself to each of his readers who adopted him in various ways: Baudelaire focused on the *poète maudit*, Mallarmé on the prosodist, and Valéry on the theoretician."[28] For each man, the author-figure of Poe was significant, despite the fact that, for each man, that author-figure was different. Through his scattered canon, Poe managed to be all things to all men.

Returning to the Anglophonic world, the first half of the twentieth century saw American and English critics finally begin to progress past the didactic "hand-wringing over his moral character,"[29] that had dominated previous criticism and into psychoanalytic and New Critical readings of his canon. Psychoanalytical approaches

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[25] Ibid., 44. Poe biographer John Henry Ingram, who was acquainted with Mallarmé, placed the French poet in correspondence with Sarah Helen Whitman in the late 1870s. In this exchange, Mallarmé requested permission to dedicate his translation of "The Raven," to Whitman and sent her a complimentary copy of the published work, *Le Corbeau*. *Le Corbeau*'s illustrations were drawn by Edouard Manet. For this and further jewels from their correspondence, see the chapter "Stephane Mallarme" in Ticknor, *Poe's Helen*, 259-79.)

[26] Jonathan Elmer, "Poe and the Avant-Garde," in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, 700. Elmer writes "Poe's repudiation of the 'heresy of The Didactic' (ER: 75) was a game changer for Baudelaire and his symbolist and decadent followers, with whom it evolves into the idea of 'l'art pour l'art,' an insistence on radical aesthetic autonomy."

[27] Vines, "Poe in France," 9. Vines notes that each of these men, "sang [Poe's] praises and were influenced by his work."

[28] James Lawler, "Daemons of the Intellect: The Symbolists and Poe," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Autumn 1987): 96**.**

[29] Peeples, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe*, 64.

maintained a focus on Poe's figure but directed their biographical attention to probing and understanding his mind, oftentimes through probing and analyzing the tales, rather than delivering anything like a *moral* verdict on his person.[30] By contrast, New Critical readings focused on the formal elements of Poe's verse, evaluating his technical (in)excellence.

This focus, amusingly, led the New Critics to interrogate the French reception of Poe. This theme found its ultimate expression in Patrick Quinn's book-length study *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (1957), in which Quinn set forth to discover "how and why Poe came to be so mistakenly overrated in France" before his study transformed his attitude into one of appreciation of Poe."[31] Transatlantic poet and critic T. S. Eliot, by contrast, maintained his skepticism toward the French's interest in Poe in the wake of a close reading, asserting that the French ignored the many small, language-level "blemishes and imperfections of Poe's writing" that Eliot insists "strike an English-speaking reader."[32] This emphasis on Poe's formal deficiencies is not unfair, but it ignores precisely what the French saw in Poe's writing: Poe himself. The fact that New Criticism or "formalism" prioritized the study of the text as a self-contained entity, rather than as an extension of its author, explains much in this regard. New Critical readings, focusing primarily on the "formal" elements of the text would, as T. S. Eliot was, be prone to detect fault in the occasionally desultory nature of Poe's craft because taking

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[30] Ibid., 63. Peeples notes, "psychoanalytic critics of this period would announce that they had come not to judge Poe's character but to explain it, and yet they fueled readers' lurid interest in Poe's substance abuse and sex life (or lack thereof)."

[31] Patrick Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1954), 5.

[32] T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry," *The Hudson Review* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1949): 331.

"Poe" out of Poe dispels what makes Poe the presence that he is within literature; it removes the mythos that Poe made the most fundamental machinery of his canon.

Eliot himself seems to recognize this issue, and he described Poe as a "stumbling block for the judicial critic" on the basis that Poe's writing, when examined in detail, yielded "nothing but slipshod writing, puerile thinking… haphazard experiments in various types of writing." Continuing in the wake of this harsh assessment, Eliot proclaims that resting content with such criticism, "would not be just" because "if, instead of regarding his work analytically, we take a distant view of it as a whole, we see a mass of unique shape and impressive size to which the eye constantly returns."[33] What Eliot identifies here is crucial: to read Poe "in detail"—divorced from its larger life—is to read Poe as he never meant to be read. To do so is to divorce the writing from its original intent, an intent that succeeds the moment Eliot retreats to view it as a whole; it is created to be a mass to which the eye incessantly is drawn.

Despite its persistent avoidance of Poe's author figure, New Critical readings were essential in ushering American criticism of Poe into a far more prolific and, frankly, receptive state. As Peeples describes it, "The 1960s and 1970s saw a proliferation of intelligent readings consistent with this tradition, regarding the texts as objects of study independent from their author but in dialogue with literary and philosophical traditions."[34] America was still troubled by the unruliness of this, her most unruly child, but was also willing to acknowledge merit in his offerings. Indeed, in the second half of the century, Poe's canon began to receive much more complimentary treatments at as

[33] Eliot "From Poe to Valéry," 327
[34] Peeples, *The Afterlife*, 81.

deconstructionist and poststructuralists readings swept across the academy. Critics of this era began to recognize that "much of [Poe's] work anticipated—and, of course, influenced—what authors and artists began doing in larger numbers about a hundred years later. Put differently," Weinstock continues, "the world seems to have caught up with Poe, who was "PoMo" before it was cool."[35] While not offering their perspective on whether Poe was "cool," the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and deconstructionist Jacques Derrida certainly found Poe to be postmodern, and, as Rosenheim and Rachman explain, they and other continental critics "test[ed] or contest[ed] their theories in the crucible of Poe's prose," particularly "The Purloined Letter." [36] By this time, terminology had been coined to recognize, in Poe, a man ahead of his time. Poe was not simply a belated Romantic; he was a prophet of Modernism, a participant of Postmodernism, a figure who transcended literary ages.[37]

Work in the 1980s and 1990s built upon the work of deconstruction but also sought to ground Poe to a place in time. The seeds for the current turn in scholarship on Poe, in which I have based my own study, sprouted from these decades' emphasis on restaging the manner in which the author's performance is set with his own culture. These restagings, as we have seen, examine both the material and social context in which Poe labored.[38] This has occurred through studies of Poe himself, studies of Poe in comparison with his contemporaries, and wider cultural histories. Perhaps the best

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[35] Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, "Postmodern Poe," in Kennedy and Peeples, *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe,* 718-19.

[36] Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman, eds, *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), x.

[37] Peeples, *The Afterlife,* 68.

[38] Ibid., 115–119.

statement of the drive to re-home Poe within his original setting is offered by Rosenheim and Rachman in their groundbreaking collection *The American Face of Poe*. Assuring their readers that their volume "represents no simple injunction to 'historicize!'," the editors assert the need within Poe studies "to recognize that Poe's most extravagant literary maneuvers were usually based in the specific cultural and political climate of antebellum America" and to "restore his writings to the cultural milieu from which they appear to have been wrenched." [39] Rather than insisting on inducting Poe into the national literature towards which he stood at such strange odds during his lifetime, this strain of criticism instead roots Poe in time by tracing how the themes his stories addressed have slowly developed into the questions that occupy American thought.

As we have also seen, however, not all of our interpretive problems are solved by restoring Poe to his cultural milieu. Indeed, this restoration has led primarily to the realization that Poe's life—hitherto messy on a moral and critical front—is also messy on a professional front in the sense that he occupied and pursued a vast range of roles that seem to have little binding fact; he seems to have pursued performances in pell-mell style without particularly bothering to integrate those performances into a single, cohesive package. We now know however, what the binding thread was—what drove each of the various outré performances: the strategy of being ultimately "before the eye of the world." This goal was not merely one for fame's sake but, rather, like his theory of art, was for art's sake.

[39] Rosenheim and Rachman, *The American Face*, xi.

The arts have, of course, formed their own sphere of reception for the Poe figure. Scott Peeples dedicates the final chapter of the book to which I have so often referred in this po(e)stmortem, *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe*, to a discussion of Poe's uptake within the realms of multiple visual arts, a topic also canvased by Kevin Hayes in his compact biography *Poe* and by Barbara Cantalupo in her work *Poe's Pervasive Influence*.[40] The latter examines Poe's influence as it pervades not only literary but also, more significantly, non-literary realms, such as film, psychoanalysis, paintings, etc. Rosenheim and Rachman join Cantalupo in her estimate of Poe's vast influence, writing "In Europe, in South and Latin America, and even in Japan, Poe has served as a crucial and much celebrated literary model for generations of writers and readers"[41] while Lois Vines surveys Poe's influence in over twenty countries and fifteen specific artists in her *Poe Abroad*.[42] What is most important to realize at this juncture is that, while such studies partially describe the impact of Poe, the literary canon, they just as surely describe the impact of Poe, the figure, the face, the construct. As Weinstock narrates,

> His face appears on the Barnes & Noble book chain shopping bag, his poetry has been narrated by notables from Vincent Price to James Earl Jones to Christopher Walken, his fiction has been repeatedly adapted for film and other formats such as opera and theater, and Poe himself has appeared as a character in books, comics, film, and theater. As J. W. Ocker quips concerning Poe in the introduction to his *Poe-Land: The Hallowed Haunts of Edgar Allan Poe*: "I mean, he's a Halloween decoration. Take that, every other writer."[43]

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[40] Hayes, *Edgar Allan Poe*; Barbara Cantalupo, ed., *Poe's Pervasive Influence* (Plymouth: Lehigh University Press, 2012).

[41] Rosenheim and Rachman, *The American Face,* xi.

[42] Vines, *Poe Abroad*. Eight of the forty-five chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe* focus on a particular movement or genre for which Poe served as a major inspiration.

[43] Weinstock, "Postmodern Poe," 718.

Take that, every other writer and, perhaps, the literary establishment with which Poe struggled so valiantly across his beleaguered career. Poe not only survives where those lionized by his era are long forgotten, but he survives as one of the most recognizable *persons,* the most recognizable *faces* of all of literature.

Physiologically, the face is Poe's own. But what of metaphorically? We have just spent a dozen pages surveying the throes and tantrums of Poe's reception history, each installment of which seemed to produce multiple Poes. We have seen Poe as Griswold's friendless critic, Baudelaire's saintlike *poète maudit*; Poe as the forerunner of multiple schools of art, the darling and devil of alternative schools of criticism, and the historically-produced poet-printer. And these are only his posthumous lives; his "pre"-humous life featured just as many contradictions as multilinguist, cryptographer, poet, tomahawk reviewer, copy-editor, hoaxer, and lover of beauty jostled elbows within his own curiously-tuned mind. Moving forward, what do we do with these Poes?

Acknowledging their existence is an excellent starting place. In the Afterword to his impressive survey of Poe's critical—and personal—reception history, Peeples declares that "a basic assumption behind this study is that there are many posthumous Poes."[44] This a perspective that the "post" (structuralist, modernist, etc.) world of criticism has proven willing to accept. Equally, however, acknowledging that, despite his writing's tendency to beat its path forward, hovering just ahead of each new literary theory the Western world sees fit to produce, Poe did live in specific cities—walked particular pathways and set long-since-destroyed but nevertheless historically real pieces

[44] Peeples, *The Afterlife*, 159.

of type to meet the real deadlines applied to his mind like thumbscrews by business-minded editors—is another positive step towards painting a likeness of Poe.

My own work in this thesis possibly forms nothing more than yet another mug shot in the long scrapbook of posthumous Poe portraits—is possibly so much more clattering in the well-oiled stage-play that is Productions-of-Poe. Yet, I hope this is not the case. While certainly not worthy of being inducted into Peeples's list of posthumous Poes, I hope that this study of Poe's author-figure—and, more specifically, this study of *Poe's* self-conscious carving of his author-figure—has added another brushstroke or two to the canvas of Poe's cross-century face. If this is too vain a hope, I hope, at least, that this portrait accomplished what it set out to do: to compile and integrate several of the more confusing elements of Poe's author-figure—most noticeably his purpose in doing what he did and writing what he wrote—into a single Poe whose several personas fall into place as springing from motives not altogether as contradictory as the behaviors occasionally seem: his own desire to carve out a reputation for himself among his peers.

While concluding his study of Postmodern Poe, Jeffrey Weinstock comments in regard to Poe biography that, "Like Pym's story, Poe's, too, is incomplete—and our attempts to finish it make a mockery of completion."[45] When I read this statement, I spent several minutes puzzling over whether I agreed with it. It was not until I realized that this statement is actually two statements—statements that I could accept or reject independently of one another—that I was able to formulate my reaction. I agree with Weinstock that Poe's story is incomplete—that Poe's life did not end with his life—that

[45] Weinstock, "Postmodern Poe," 732.

his life is still being lived and therefore is incomplete. However, I do not believe that writing biographies of Poe—and attempting to offer some assessment of Poe, some "conclusion" regarding Poe, if you will, does mockery to Poe. On the contrary, I believe it is through these biographies as much as through his own canon that Poe's life continues to live, to unfold, to exist in temporal time. As additional biographies accrue to Poe with each passing decade, these biographies become part of his biography; these biographies, these studies of Poe the man as much as Poe the canon, achieve what Poe through his canon hoped to achieve; the articulation of an author-self. In writing Poe's biography, we become agents of Poe's self as we analyze and facilitate his canon's own outworking of its author's figure in successive schools of thought. Poe's legacy as a poet—the one for which he strove for the right to achieve his whole life—has been confirmed through over 150 years of analysis both by the popular reader whose taste he hoped to instruct and by the critical establishment whose poet-critic he wished to be.

In studying Poe, then—in writing his biography, plastering his face on coffee mugs, deconstructing the slippages of meaning in *Pym*, reading him in the context of his literati squabbles, and circulating Raven statuettes—we participate in his own aspiration by placing him where he strove his whole life to be: "before the eye of the world."

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