EDGAR ALLAN POE AND THE POLITICS OF PERCEPTION

A Thesis by

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I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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Richard Spilman, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

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Anne Carroll, Committee Member

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Ramona Liera-Schwichtenberg, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To my parents
and Kerry
with love and thanks

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ABSTRACT

Many Edgar Allan Poe biographers reference his stories in terms of when they were published and their success; however, they have not drawn a connection between how his life and his work parallel each other. Some critics do refer to Poe's life when analyzing his stories, but they only select a narrow time-period in his life to support their theories. While studying Poe's biographies and reading his works, I realized a distinct pattern: Poe's life and work engage similar manipulative devices to control how the public perceives him; he wants them to view him as intellectually superior.

Throughout his career, Poe utilized a variety of methods to manipulate the public's perception of him, as well as to receive personal or financial gain. These methods include: the use of daguerreotypes, pseudonyms, cryptograms, and falsified documents. Poe's tales also employ manipulative devices. In his female protagonist stories, such as "Berenice," "Morella," and "Ligeia," Poe attributes brilliant minds to female characters and then kills them, as if to emphasize the superior position of the narrator. He also uses such manipulative devices as the doppelganger as in "William Wilson," and doubling, in "The Fall of the House of Usher," which display his ingenuity. With each of these manipulations, Poe emerges as a man driven by his own neurotic insecurities – insecurities that served him well and lay at the heart of his "genius." By understanding these insecurities and the person behind the literary figure, we will gain a new perspective of his works as well as open up new opportunities for further study.

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People have a tendency to care more about what others think than about what they themselves think, allowing others to ultimately control their actions. Edgar Allan Poe displayed this psychology, but to a more dramatic degree. For Poe, the perception that his peers and his readers had of him was his primary focus; however, due to his inability to maintain a steady income through his writing, he began to feel inferior to the other successful authors of his time. This anxiety can be seen in his repeated attempts to emphasize his superior intellect. Within his life, he used several methods to manipulate the public's perception of him, including the exploitation of contemporary scientific trends of the period, such as the daguerreotype and phrenology, as well as "literary games," such as pseudonyms, cryptography, and falsified documents such as the "The Balloon Hoax." These methods of manipulation also extend to Poe's literary output, as seen in his portrayal of female protagonists, his use of the doppelganger, and his detective stories. My argument is that Poe's life parallels his fiction. In both, he attempts to create a larger-than-life image of himself and magnify his status as an author and an intellectual.

Throughout the massive amount of Poe criticism, many critics have discussed his life, analyzed his work, and psychoanalyzed both, but only a few people have questioned the ways he manipulated the perspective through which his life and work was perceived. When biographers have looked at his life they have overlooked the evidence in his background that could provide new information to analyze his works; instead, they seem satisfied with documenting his life. In particular, we see little if any discussion of how his work begins to mirror his life. Arthur Hobson Quinn, in a biography entitled *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, published in 1998, discusses, describes, and gives minor commentary on the events and of Poe's life, as well as documenting when his texts were published and what success they achieved. However, he

does not establish a connection between Poe's life and the history of his work. Moreover, many Poe critics including Eliza Richards, Marita Nadal, and Karen Weekes, while they do consider his life, do so only as it touches on specific topics, such as the women in his life and his stories. Others like Kent P. Ljungquist have looked at Poe in terms of the criticism that he wrote. Still other critics, like Teresa A. Goddu, explore his perspective on slavery or, like Sandra Tomc in "Poe and His Circle," discuss elements of his life, without discussing how those elements relate to or impact Poe's work. These critics pick and choose what history is relevant for their topic and then dismiss the rest of Poe's life. While some critics believe that a literary analysis based solely on biographical information is not as viable as other methods of analysis, an examination of Poe's manipulation of fact, both about his own life and within his fiction, can yield a deeper understanding of him as a person and a writer. A pattern seems to arise that other scholars have overlooked: Poe's life parallels his fiction.

In many ways, Poe attempted to control what the public saw about him and even how the material would be interpreted. For instance, to manipulate his image, Poe intended to have his biography and an accompanying picture published in the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum* newspaper (Hayes 483). Critics have questioned whether the resulting article was written by Henry B. Hirst or by Poe himself. We know that Poe wrote to F. W. Thomas and sent a copy of the article explaining his dissatisfaction with the picture, and he also stated that it was Hirst who wrote the biography (Hirst 483). However, Poe provided Hirst with much of the material and invented outright lies to describe his past. Kevin J. Hayes gives a sample from the biography to demonstrate these false statements with internal quotes from Hirst: "he went to Greece 'with the wild design of aiding in the Revolution then taking place.' Though he did not reach the scene of action, as the story goes, he did manage to make his way to St. Petersburg, Russia, 'where,

through deficiency of passport, he became involved in serious difficulties, from which he was finally extricated by the American consul'" (483-484). Poe claimed to have traveled and participated in these events when in actuality he never traveled to either country. Whether Poe or Hirst wrote the biography is immaterial, for the authorship ultimately resides with Poe – either as the actual writer of the article or as the supplier of information who created, or authored, his own history. Hayes states, and I agree, that "Hirst wrote the essay; Poe authored the biography. Supplying autobiographical information to a friend, one Poe could trust to write a biographical essay in a suitable style, he performed what Elizabeth Bruss has termed an 'autobiographical act'" (484). Here Poe provided false biographical information that Hirst collected and wrote into an essay for Poe's biography. The "biography" also contained an accurate description of Poe: "In person, he is somewhat slender, about five feet, eight inches in height, and well proportioned; his complexion is rather fair; his eyes are grey and restless, exhibiting a marked nervousness; his forehead is extremely broad, displaying prominently the organs of Ideality..." (Deas 15). Ironically, this description differed from the accompanying portrait. The three quarter length daguerreotype created a plumper appearance than what was actually described. As previously stated, Poe was greatly dissatisfied with the picture since it was of little resemblance to him or the description. Poe was able to manipulate both the content of the biography and the viewer's perception of his person through the publication of the Hirst biography. Kenneth Silverman says it best as he states, "abridged versions of the (auto)biography were published in Boston and Baltimore, familiarizing many readers with the story of Poe's life, as he wished them to perceive it" (196).

Poe found the actual depictions of himself to be quite unsatisfactory, especially when compared to the description that was given in the biography. For the *Museum* article, two

daguerreotypes were taken: a portrait and a three-quarter length shot. The portrait, now known as the McKee daguerreotype, and the three-quarter length daguerreotype are a starting point for people to view an unaltered images of Poe, which create what Hayes refers to as "indexical" portraits of Poe (491).   After this point, Poe took control of the creation of the daguerreotypes to establish a specific image that he know would later be published in other newspapers and magazines. Through this process Poe creates an icon of himself; thus Hayes refers to the succeeding images of Poe after the McKee and three-quarter length daguerreotype as "iconic" (491).

> Though Poe recognized his helplessness at the hands of the engravers, he came to understand that he could exercise control over the daguerreotype images on which the engravings were based. After sitting for the McKee daguerreotype,….he was able to fashion his image into something that was less characteristic of his actual appearance, yet more indicative of his attempt to shape himself into a unique icon. (Hayes 486-489)

We see that Poe did not alter the first two daguerreotypes, the McKee and the three-quarter length, since they were the first photographs taken and he did not know how to anticipate the outcome. In contrast, Poe supervised the photographic process for subsequent portraits and had the photographers manipulate what the camera captured to ensure an image that he approved of—the same image that readers recognize today.

The main reason for altering his image is to create a photograph that incorporated popular pseudo-scientific trends of the era. During this time, physiognomy, the study of facial features, and phrenology, the study of the shape of the head, were both popular, and it was believed that through them one could better understand a person's personality. Phrenology divided people

into four categories, which clarified their psychological types: "the 'nervous,' distinguished by a large brain, delicate health, and emaciation; the 'bilious,' marked by harsh features and firm muscles; the 'sanguine,' characterized by large lung capacity and moderate plumpness; and the 'lymphatic,' with rounded form and heavy countenance" (Davies 3). Using this we can determine that Poe's physiology marked him as "nervous," characterized by a more active brain and excitable nerves that allowed for superior mental agility and quickness of thought (Davies 181). For Poe, his broad forehead was an important feature that marked him, according to phrenology, with the qualities of "highly developed organs of ideality, the mental faculty responsible for poetic ability," which might assist his career since the people that believed in these scientific theories would also believe that Poe was innately proficient in poetic endeavors (Hayes 485). By emphasizing that he had the physical qualities of a poet, he could prove his abilities not only through his work, but through physical qualities considered inherently poetic. To enhance this image, Poe manipulated his posture and the light source to allow his forehead to appear even more pronounced than usual. Once he discovered the ability to alter his image, he used this method throughout his career.

After the McKee daguerreotype, Poe was also concerned with his deep and clearly defined philtrum (the vertical groove between the upper lip and the nose). He found it particularly distasteful in pictures. Later, Poe wore a moustache to mask his upper lip. Moreover, he made sure that the light was positioned to cast a shadow on his nose to further hide his upper lip. Hayes writes, "Still, it is not hard to imagine Poe poised for a daguerreotype, his head motionless in its stabilizing brace yet his mouth in movement, whispering last-minute instructions to the cameraman regarding the placement of the sunlight reflectors" (486). One may assume, based on Hayes statement that Poe would have most likely been looking into a

mirror during this process to see exactly where the shadow was cast; otherwise he would not be able to give the directions needed to correct the reflectors. Hayes argues that Poe may have applied the mastery of light and shadow obvious in his literary work to the presentation of his portraiture as well. Poe used the elements of light and shadow to control features within his fiction, such as ambience, character development, and symbols relating to light and dark. Due to the relevance of Hayes' argument, I will cite his explanation in its entirety:

> While the level of control Poe exercised over his daguerreotyped images is a matter of conjecture, it makes good sense that he would extend his mastery of the visual beyond his imaginative writings and into his portraiture. In his fiction, Poe proved himself an expert at using chiaroscuro. Think of the streaming lamplight that throws shadows on the floor in "The Raven," or the single thin ray of lantern light that penetrates the darkness to illuminate the eye of the old man in "The Tell-Tale Heart"….The effective arrangement of light and shadow in his fiction offered a precedent for the effective use of light and shadow in his photographic portraiture. In much the same way that he helped control the image of himself for the biographical essay Hirst composed, Poe exercised control over the images of himself that the daguerreotype photographers created. (486-487)

As we are beginning to see, Poe's use of light and shadow in his daguerreotypes parallels the use of light and shadow in his work. Poe knew the effects that these elements could have on his fiction, and he took advantage of his knowledge of chiaroscuro to control the daguerreotypes that would help influence the public's perception. Hayes finishes the article by saying that in spite of what the photographers were looking to represent, "Poe sought to create an iconic image of himself"; it is that very image of Poe that has begun "to symbolize American literature and

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culture in recent years" (490). With this image he established the face of Poe that we know today.

The daguerreotype was originally conceived of by Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre, who "was a skilled painter of dioramas and through this art had become familiar with the camera obscura. Soon he became obsessed with the idea of fixing the image that it produced" (Marbot 20). Through the assistance of his partner Nicephore Niepce and a chemist named Jean-Baptiste Dumas, he discovered in 1835 that when mercury vapours are exposed to the plate, the latent image developed. Later in 1837, they discovered that sodium chloride fixed the image when the print was immersed in the solution (Marbot 20). Daguerreotypes were the first type of machine-created iconography that created a life-like depiction of the subject. They were, though, quickly replaced by the negative-positive process in the 1850's. However, the way that photographs are viewed and interpreted today can also be applied to daguerreotypes.

Even when one looks back as far as Plato's Cave, the images seen in the cave are only shadows of the real object or person and must be interpreted. The same is true for modern photography, as well as the daguerreotype. Susan Sontag writes in *On Photography*:

> Any photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination….Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy. Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks. (23)

A photograph is an inventory of what is present or what something looks like at the time that the picture was taken. In Poe's time as well as today, people pose for pictures; they dress according

to how they want to be viewed or remembered. Sontag also states, "in the situations in which most people use photographs, their value as information is of the same order as fiction" (22). Here Sontag is essentially saying that most people use photography to create an impression, thus we pose for pictures; we arrange items to make them aesthetically appealing or to create a false perception of reality. Similarly, Poe created a fiction by manipulating the daguerreotypes. Thus, the iconic representation of one of America's greatest authors is in fact part of his fictitious work. We must ask, then, why Poe felt the need to perform these manipulations. To answer we might note that each time that Poe manipulated the public's vision of himself, he did so in a way to emphasize his intellectual capacity. This would lead one to believe that he may have been concerned that the general public or his peers would not consider him as one of the great intellectual minds of the period.

The daguerreotype was not the only means by which Poe attempted to control people's view of him. As early as 1827, Poe began to use pseudonyms, referring to himself as "Henri Le Rennet," a Frenchified version of Henry Leonard, his brother's middle names (Silverman 37). Furthermore, Poe enlisted in the United States Army on May 26, 1827, as a private under the assumed name of "Edgar Allan Perry" (Quinn 119). Later, he created the name Edward S. T. Grey, using it in late 1845 to obtain funds for the *Journal* of which he was "'sole editor' and part owner" (Silverman 273). Poe also went by the pseudonym of Walter G. Bowen, which he used to sign an attempted criticism on his own work:

> In "A Reviewer Reviewed"....he signed the essay by the pseudonym Walter G.
> Bowen, left it unfinished, and never published it...for it confirms the suspicion
> that in depicting the English as self-demeaning, he was in some degree speaking
> of himself. Writing as "Bowen," he reviewed his own works, playing both the

assassin Montresor and the victim Fortunato. "Bowen" remarks that Poe's

criticisms seem to him "captious, faultfinding, and unnecessarily severe." He

therefore feels justified in teaching him a lesson, "showing him [Poe] that he is far

from being immaculate himself." (Silverman 318)

With the use of different pseudonyms, Poe was able to essentially disappear. This also served

practical purposes. Several times he would forge false leads about his location to detour his

foster father John Allan, creditors, and even, on occasion, a jailer:

To make his whereabouts uncertain, he also created a false trail of maritime

roving. John Allan told his sister that he thought Edgar had "gone to Sea to seek

his own fortunes"; a pursuing creditor learned that he had "gone off entirely…to

join the Greeks" in their fight for independence; a relative of Allan later

mentioned letters by Edgar sent from St. Petersburg, Russia. (Silverman 37-38)

By providing extravagantly inaccurate evidence that detailed his position, Poe was not only able

to manipulate people's knowledge or perceptions of him, but he also gained the practical ability

to elude the various problems that arose during his life—primarily debts. Poe may have

thoroughly enjoyed the "game" he created with the pseudonyms; however, one cannot discount

the fact that this was a necessity for him due to continuous financial difficulties.

In 1840, Poe developed a strong interest and skill in the art of cryptography (the act of

encrypting or decyphering a secret code), which he would use as one of his manipulative tools.

Soon after, he began to gain public attention for this ability. In July of 1841, he wrote "A Few

Words on Secret Writing" for *Graham's Magazine*, an essay that explored various forms of

encrypting and decyphering, as well as the history of cryptography and his own decyphering

success. In this cryptography article he wrote, "in one of the weekly papers of this city, about

eighteen months ago, the writer of this article...ventured to assert that no cipher of the character above described could be sent to the address of the paper, which he would not be able to resolve" (Quinn 326). In response to this article, he received approximately one hundred codes and solved all but one that was later proved fraudulent. He then increased the challenge by publishing two cryptograms written by Mr. W. B. Tyler, saying that he was "a gentleman whose abilities we highly respect" (Rachman 77). These two cyphers went unanswered for 150 years. However, in 1985 Louis Renza and in 1997 Stephen Rachman came up with the same hypothesis: Poe used the name W. B. Tyler as a pseudonym for himself. If this hypothesis is true that would mean that Poe did not solve the cypher as he implied, but created it instead to once again establish his superior mental capabilities by solving a cypher that was almost unsolvable.

In 1992, Terence Whalen, during his studies in graduate school, decrypted the first Tyler/Poe cypher, which read:

> The soul secure in her existence smiles at the drawn dagger and defies its point. The stars shall fade away, the sun himself grow dim with age and nature sink in years, but thou shall flourish in immortal youth, unhurt amid the war of elements, the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds. (Rachman 79)

These lines come from *Cato*, a play written by Joseph Addison in 1713. Establishing who wrote the quote does not tell who actually created the cypher, yet a pattern of allusion is presented that resembles Poe's. The creator of this cypher purposely went back a century to find material that would provide a source for his cypher, but that would also provide evidence the creator was and knowledgeable about past literature. Poe often referred to classical writers and by "making the deciphered text about Poe's textual strategies the authorial signature enables us to interpret the quotation" (Rachman 79). Since the quotation cannot lead to an author of the cipher, looking at

who may have used classical references on a regular basis may provide a link between the cypher

and the creator. Poe has referenced many classical writers in his tales including but not limited

to: Aristotle, Bacon, Milton, Homer, Democritus, Voltaire, Shakespeare, Virgil, Seneca, and

Machiavelli.[1] There are also references to classical mythology and Christianity. While this

connection cannot definitively prove authorship of the cypher, it is one more link that supports

the theory of Poe's authorship.

The second cypher created an even greater challenge for cryptographers due to the fact

that it was encrypted with six separate alphabets.[2] Poe would have had knowledge of at least six

languages, since he had studied language while at the University of Virginia. It is documented

by the testimony of William Wertenbaker, and within faculty records, that he knew at least five

foreign languages: French and Latin, in which he excelled, and Spanish, Greek, and Italian

(Quinn 100-01). Furthermore, the briefness of the text provided, 150 words, also presented a

problem since cryptographers did not have sufficient material to work with. In order to break

codes that use letter or symbol substitution as their basis, cryptographers rely heavily on letter

frequency. For example, the letter "E" is the most frequently used letter in the English alphabet.

Thus, with an English language cryptogram, one would begin the decyphering by looking for the

most commonly used letter and replacing that letter with "E." This does not always work, but it

is a starting point. However, when six different alphabets are used in a single cypher, this

method is less effective, and the cypher "stumped" those who attempted to unravel its mysteries

for many years. In 1998 the cypher was finally decoded by Gil Broza, who utilized his computer

skills to uncover the following message:

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[1] A description of these references can be found in the footnotes of Poe's works in the *Anthology of American Literature* 7th ed.
[2] In comparison, the first cypher mentioned was comprised of only one alphabet.

It was early spring, warm and sultry glowed the afternoon. The very breezes

seemed to share the delicious langour of universal nature, are laden the various

and mingled perfumes of the rose and the jessamine, the woodbine and its

wildflower. They slowly wafted their fragrant offering to the open window where

sat the lovers. The ardent sun shoot fell upon her blushing face and its gentle

beauty was more like the creation of romance or the fair inspiration of a dream

than the actual reality on earth. Tenderly her lover gazed upon her as the

clusterous ringlets were edged (?) by amorous and sportive zephyrs and when he

perceived (?) the rude intrusion of the sunlight he sprang to draw the curtain but

softly she stayed him. "No, no, dear Charles," she softly said, "much rather

you'ld [sic] I have a little sun than no air at all." (Rachman 78)

Even though the second cypher is now decoded, we are no closer to knowing who actually wrote

these words before they were encrypted. One of Rachman's motives for decyphering the riddle

was to find a new Poe text. He states that the person who decyphered the text would become a

co-author and forever be "wedded by asterisk and scholarly note" to Poe. However, did Poe

actually write the mystery excerpt? If one can prove that Poe wrote this text, it would mean that

he also created the first cypher previously discussed and intentionally presented both under a

false name to create the perception that he is an analytical genius for solving such difficult

cyphers. Rachman seems to believe that authorship cannot be determined: "so we present to the

world an orphaned text, to which we cannot even bring the usual scholarly parentage of

attribution" (79). On the other hand, I believe that the excerpt itself contains clues that can

provide evidence to prove authorship.

While reading the passage, I noticed two key elements that could indicate Poe as the author. The first clue was the use of "dream" within the cypher. This could of course be a coincidence; however, dreams were a well-known part of many of his works. For example, in "Berenice" Poe describes the protagonist in terms of a dream metaphor: "I had seen her—not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream" (498).[3] In this second cypher, Poe also refers to the woman in terms of a dream: "the fair inspiration of a dream" (Rachman 78). Secondly, and more significantly, this passage can be seen as an example of Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" and his theory on beauty.[4] There are certain words or phrases in the decyphered excerpt that lead me to believe that the woman is dying. First, the fact that the window is open could imply that she is not able to go outside for fresh air. This is also implied by the reaction of Charles, her lover, as he "sprang to draw the curtain," indicating that the sun may not have been appropriate or comfortable for her either (Rachman 78). Of course, his reaction could be seen as over-protectiveness toward someone who is not well. Either interpretation could lead the reader to believe that she is at least ill, if not dying. The "blushing face" could also show her to be a "consumptive woman…[as] her cheeks and lips redden from fever" (Weekes 149). Moreover, the repeated word "softly" to help describe the woman leads me to believe that she is in a weakened state: "but softly she stayed him. 'No, no, dear Charles,' she softly said, 'much rather you'ld [sic] I have a little sun than no air at all" (Rachman 78). The ability to softly stop somebody is an indication that close attention is being paid to that

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[3] In "Berenice," Poe tells a tale about Egaeus who is about to marry his dying cousin Berenice and develops a fascination with her teeth. After Berenice dies, he unknowingly returns to her grave and decimates her body by taking out all of her teeth. He realizes what he has done after picking up a box sitting next to him and spilling its contents—it contains dental instruments and ivory white teeth.

[4] "The Philosophy of Composition" is a work in which Poe describes how he wrote "The Raven." Here he also describes his theory on beauty and what he considers to be the most poetical topic in the world—the death of a beautiful woman.

individual, as it does not take much for them to get their lover's or caretaker's attention. That she spoke softly may also indicate her state of health. Finally, the words that she spoke, "a little sun than no air at all," suggest a metaphor—the acceptance of the light, life, along with the air that can maintain life, instead of no air or death (Rachman 78).

The tone at the end of the passage is one of sadness—the question of accepting a "little sun" or "no air at all" (Rachman 78). Comparing this passage to Poe's "Philosophy of Composition," we see that he writes, "Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation—and all experience has shown that this tone is one of *sadness*….Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones" ("Philosophy" 24). Later in the essay, Poe continues his discussion of melancholy and expands the definition by saying, "Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?' Death—was the obvious reply" ("Philosophy" 26). Poe then furthers the discussion by describing the type of death that provides the most melancholic topic of all: "When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world…" (26). Therefore, we see that the descriptions found within the second cypher coincide with Poe's philosophy, lending further proof to Poe's possible authorship. Moreover,

> Poe indulged his "most poetic topic in the world" by repeating this idea
> obsessively: poems on the subject include "Lenore," "To One in Paradise,"
> "Sonnet—To Zante," "The Raven," "Deep in Earth," "Ulalume," and "Annabel
> Lee"; tales include "Eleonora," "Ligeia," "The Oval Portrait," "Berenice,"
> "Morella," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue,"

"The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Assassination," "The Oblong Box," and

"The Premature Burial." (Weekes 148-49)

Finally, Poe is known to objectify the women in his stories and "fragment the female[s] into

parts" (Weekes 153). In one particular tale, "Morella," he uses "ringlets of silken hair" as one

objectified element of Morella (Weekes 157).[5] Within the cypher, he uses "clusterous ringlets"

as a fragment of the lady of his prose. I believe that Poe did write this excerpt in an attempt to

further his image of being a gifted cryptographer. The fact that the cypher is attributed to Tyler

should not deter us since Poe often used pseudonyms. Additionally, there are numerous

similarities between the style of the cypher and that found in his works as seen in the proceeding

paragraphs. If we accept Poe as the author of this cypher, we can demonstrate that Poe is once

again consciously trying to manipulate the public's perspective of him. For Poe claimed, in a

newspaper article, that W. B. Tyler had sent him this cypher. The fact that he alone could

decypher the code maintains Poe's status as genius; yet, if my theory is correct, Poe did not crack

the code, but rather created it.

It has been documented that Poe had problems accepting the fact that somebody else was

able to decode a cypher that he believed he alone could crack. Dr. Failey sent a cryptogram

submission to Poe's challenge. After decyphering the submission, Poe published the cypher with

the key and posted a reward of a year's subscription to the newspaper to anyone that could solve

the cryptogram. Much to Poe's surprise and distrust, Richard Bolton solved the cypher. On

November 18, 1841, Poe reluctantly sent a letter congratulating him. A little over a week later,

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[5] In the tale "Morella," the narrator marries Morella and later finds her oppressive and begins to long for her death. She informs him that she is dying and that she will have his child. She dies during her daughter's birth, and the father does not name his child until her baptism when she is ten years old. At her baptism he names her Morella and she collapses on the spot saying "I am here." On taking his daughter to the tomb of the mother, the narrator does not find the mother's body in the tomb.

Poe wrote a letter to Frederick W. Thomas in regard to Bolton's solution saying, "fully a month after the preparation of the number containing the answer by myself. He pretends not to have seen my solution—but his own contains internal evidence of the fact" (quoted in Ketterer 59). To Poe's dismay, William F. Friedman, a contemporary of Poe's, later concluded, after studying the contents of Bolton's solution, that Bolton did not even use the key that Poe had provided. Thus, after printing the two previous Tyler/Poe cyphers, Poe may have been frustrated with his inability to maintain the appearance of a uniquely skilled cryptographer. Ketterer claims that Poe's reaction and inability to accept Bolton's claim was borderline psychotic (59). Poe believed that all of his effort to establish a public image of himself as a "mental giant" in the field of cryptography had come crashing down around him after Bolton's success. Terence Whalen stated, "Poe had used cryptograph both as a means to attract the attention of the literate masses and as an illusion of what separates the masses from the true person of genius" (39). Since his solution of Dr. Failey's cypher had separated Poe from the other cryptographers, Bolton's success was a detriment to the image Poe had worked endlessly to establish. He was no longer the only true person of genius.

A few years later in 1843, Poe went beyond the use of cryptography in articles and began to use cryptography in some of his works, particularly in "The Gold Bug" where the protagonist, William Legrand, is required to solve a cryptogram before continuing on to the treasure.[6] In the case of "The Gold Bug" the reward of a year's subscription changes to the treasure of Captain Kidd. Furthermore, Poe writes in "The Gold Bug" a slogan similar to this one he wrote in

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[6] In the story "The Gold Bug" William Legrand's servant, Jupiter, finds a rare beetle on the beach beside a half-buried ship along with a piece of parchment. The parchment has a cipher on it, and the narrator is asked by Legrand to help them find this treasure. After solving the cipher and following the instructions, they find a treasure of gold and jewels that once belonged to Captain Kidd.

Graham's Magazine: "It may well be doubted whether human ingenuity can construct an enigma of the kind which human ingenuity may not, by proper application, resolve" (Gold Bug 36). *Graham's Magazine* included the following slogan; "Human ingenuity cannot concoct a cypher which human ingenuity cannot resolve" (Ketterer 248). By playing off his idea of cryptography and human ingenuity for his article, he develops a prizewinning story and is able to establish himself as a skilled cryptographer as well as author within the public eye.[7]

"The Gold Bug" was not the only story that he used to alter people's perspective of himself and his work. Poe also used a unique form of intertextuality within his work. He pretended to cite another author's work, but the citation was actually an invention. By copying another author's style and then giving the author whom he imitates the credit, he was able to use these created citations as a device to manipulate what his audience actually read and, in turn, how they interpreted his work. He did so by establishing a central theme within the epigraph and then contriving that theme throughout the story. The location of the epigraph, at the beginning of the story, gave this theme a privileged space and thus further stressed the importance of the idea found in the epigraph over the other themes in the work. The epigraphs that he used for many of his works display one form of Poe's device. In such cases, one may suspect that Poe was looking for a Renaissance or Classical writer to restate what he was trying to say in his story in an attempt to align his genius with that of a known philosopher or poet. Thus, when he was not able to find a source to accompany his work, he created one. For instance, the epigraph for "Ligeia" is as follows: "*And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through*

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[7] Poe won first place and one hundred dollars in a best short story contest sponsored by the *Dollar Newspaper* in 1843 for his story "The Gold Bug."

the weakness of his feeble will" (Poe 738).[8] It was attributed to Joseph Glanvill. However, "The

quotation has not been found in his writings. It was, perhaps, contrived by Poe" (McMichael

738). Another such example involves the epigraph to "William Wilson" which says, "*What say*

of it? what say of CONSCIENCE grim, / That spectre in my path?" ("William Wilson" 749).[9]

Poe attributes the quote to William Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida*, yet "the lines quoted by Poe do

not appear in the poem" (McMichael 749). Furthermore, "The Purloined Letter" is accompanied

with an epigraph attributed to Seneca: "*Nil sapentieae odiosius acumine nimio*" ("Purloined"

780),[10] which translates to "Nothing is more odious to good sense than great cunning"

(McMichael 780). Nevertheless, the editor of the *Anthology of American Literature* once again

points out, "The quotation has not been found in Seneca's work" (780). When reading these

epigraphs and comparing them to their accompanying tales, one can see that each epigraph helps

display a key element within the tale that it precedes. For "Ligiea" the epigraph discusses *will*,

for "William Wilson" *conscience*, and for "The Purloined Letter" *great cunning*. This subtle

form of manipulation directs the readers' interpretation of the story. This is quite simply another

way that Poe could control the public's perspective. By initiating a train of thought and planting

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[8] "Ligeia" is a tale about a beautiful woman, who has an enormous, passionate energy around her
and yet she is ill. Ligeia dies and the narrator mourns her death, but soon weds Rowena who
becomes sick after two months of marriage. Rowena dies and as the narrator is sitting alone with
the veiled corpse he believes his sees his Ligeia coming through his second wife's dead body.
[9] "William Wilson" is a story about a man who believes he has a double that shares the same
name, birthday, and physical appearance and attends the same school as he does. The narrator
has a life of leisure and gambling that leads to con Lord Glendinning in a card game where he is
found cheating by a cloaked visitor, the double of William Wilson. The narrator travels and is
always followed till he pulls his shadow into an antechamber and challenges him to a duel.
There he stabs himself and realizes that he is his double.
[10] In the tale "The Purloined Letter," C. Auguste Dupin is commissioned by the Prefect G--- to
find a letter that Minister D--- took from a certain royal lady. After several failed attempts by the
police, Dupin visits the Minister, scans the office for the missing article, and after spotting it,
memorizes its appearance. He creates a copy and switches the real letter for the fake one on his
next visit by staging a ruckus outside to insure the Minister will leave the office.

a theme into the readers' minds, Poe can guide the readers to a specific interpretation of his work. There is, however, one other possible motivation for Poe's inclusion of these fictitious references. By citing both Renaissance and Classical writers, Poe demonstrates his familiarity with the literary "canon," which in turn heightens the impression of his own intellectual prowess. This use, however, is ultimately ironic since Poe chooses to invent the citation rather than search for one that illustrates his theme.

Another work that was taken as truth was "The Philosophy of Composition," where Poe details his process of composing "The Raven." Poe writes, "Most writers—poets in especial— prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition— and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought…" ("Philosophy" 21). However, Poe continues, "It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its ["The Raven"] composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" ("Philosophy" 22). By explaining the "secret" that most writers do not want exposed, Poe assumes a "good guy" persona; however, he explains the method of composition to show the high level of intellect at which he functions. By claiming that he methodically planned his strategy—choosing the length, originality, effect, tone, refrain, and application—he forces the audience (originally "The Philosophy of Composition" was written as a lecture) or reader to accept that his genius created the work by logic and craft alone. Brushing off luck, inspiration, or intuition of any kind, he is able to take full conscious responsibility for the success of the poem and show editors who may want to publish his work that it was not an accident, but the result of a process which Poe has perfected. Moreover, Poe ironically claims that "each of these lines, taken individually, has been employed before, and

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what originality the 'Raven' has, is in their *combination into stanza*; nothing even remotely approaching this combination has ever been attempted" ("Philosophy" 28). There are speculations on the sources that Poe used for "The Raven," some of which include Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* for the suggestion of the raven and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" for several of the lines (Quinn 440). Speculations such as these establish that Poe was indeed presenting a truth about his use from other authors. Revealing the fact that he borrowed from these authors, and the extent to which he borrowed, he gains an element of control with how the readers perceived his work. By presenting a truth, Poe is also able to present what he wants considered as truth, which is the genius that was required to create "The Raven" through a process that only such a genius could use. This is not the sole occurrence of borrowing other authors' texts. Silverman states, "Much as he [Poe] copied and paraphrased into 'Hans Phaall' some dozen paragraphs from an astronomical treatise by J. F. W. Hershcel, he lifted the quotations and surrounding commentary of 'Pinakidia' nearly verbatim from various secondary sources" (116). In the epigrams, Poe falsifies citations while "recognizing" his source, but with these examples we see that he heavily "borrows" from other authors without acknowledging the source. Thus, it is only acceptable to him to acknowledge the fictitious source and not an actual borrowing, suggesting his insecurities and his need to establish his superiority as a writer.

Poe also alters his reader's perspective of the world in a fabricated journalistic piece now referred to as "The Balloon Hoax." Originally titled as "Postscript: Astounding Intelligence by Private Express from Charleston via Norfolk!—The Atlantic Ocean Crossed in Three Days!!—Arrival at Sullivan's Island of a Steering Balloon Invented by Mr. Monck Mason!!" this story was written as a first-person narrative, which, when combined with the "quasi-scientific tone,"

allowed it to became an incredibly successful literary hoax (Frank 32). Poe published the "The Balloon Hoax" on April 13, 1844, in the *New York Sun* newspaper within days after arriving to New York City. Subsequently he published another article a month later on May 25th in the *Columbia Spy* newspaper expounding on the reaction to the fictitious report: "The 'Balloon Hoax' made a far more intense sensation than anything of that character since the 'Moon-Story' of Locke….I never witnessed more intense excitement to get possession of a newspaper….[and] at almost any price. It was excessively amusing, however, to hear comments of those who read the 'Extra'" (Quinn 410). Letters that detailed his financial situation, one of which contained the preceding citation, were sent to the *Columbia Spy* and show "how dependent he was upon some immediate if small return, for the paper was limited in circulation" (411). In Quinn's view, a possible purpose can be found for the publication of the Hoax, in terms of Poe's acquiring financial stability through the prospect of future job offers; however, there was no guarantee that it would work. I would suggest that he had another purpose for this sensational article. The plan was to use this article, "The Balloon Hoax," as a means to get published right away, securing an income at the beginning of his family's arrival to New York City. This would also allow him to present himself to the publishers, with whom he would later be trying to initiate a working relationship. He also sought to increase the public's estimation of him as an intellect capable of fooling the entire city of New York.

Poe took Virginia, his wife, and her mother, Mrs. Clemm, from Philadelphia to New York in 1837, but did not have much success with the newspaper industry: "Poe's attempt to establish himself in New York was not successful….He had some prospect of employment on the *New York Review,* but…he seems not to have printed anything in the *Review*" (Quinn 263). He only published two short stories during his time in New York, and was obviously

disappointed with his stay and moved his family back to Philadelphia in the summer of 1838. He published thirty-one successful stories in Philadelphia over the next six years and then returned to New York City: "What determined Poe to leave Philadelphia for New York in April, 1844, may never be known" (Quinn 403). It appears, though, that after achieving success in Philadelphia, Poe desired to return to New York to finally establish himself in this rising literary venue. We see then that "The Balloon Hoax" was the first publication after his return, and as he did with his epigraphs, Poe decided to fabricate a story to accomplish two agendas: one, to obtain a publication that would secure him an income, and two, to obtain name recognition for future positions. For his own purposes Poe presented a falsified report and misled the people through a newspaper—something that people typically accept as truth. Yet it was not the first time that he had published a falsified document in the public media.

While at the *Southern Literary Messenger* magazine, Poe "took from an English literary magazine the idea of printing a group of fictional letters by contemporary literary figures, and appending to them facsimiles of the writers' actual signatures….He invented brief letters from, and gathered the signatures of, thirty eight American writers" (Silverman 116). When first looking at what would seem a benign act, one may not initially find a benefit that would suggest an alternative motive to create a forged letter. Quinn says only that Poe "used the autographs of well known authors in a humorous way" (328). Nevertheless, the letters that Poe presented are similar to the epigrams previously discussed, since with both Poe created a citation/letter and then attributed it to an existing author. Thus, in both cases, the reader assumes that the material is indeed that of the author that Poe lists. With both the letters and "The Balloon Hoax," Poe demonstrated that he did not have an issue with publishing fictitious and deceptive articles that affect the public's view of the world and ultimately of himself. These instances as well as others

previously mentioned lead me to believe that Poe had a purpose for the magazine articles that he wrote throughout his life—to use known interests of the general public to manipulate the public's perception.

He further tries to manipulate his reader's perspective by controlling how his work is interpreted. As is true in his non-fiction publications, in his tales Poe also felt the need to create a personal image to manipulate the public's perception of himself. As in the daguerreotypes, Poe created images that are realistic and subtly familiar to his readers. Luring them into his world of oddities and blurring the lines between reality and fantasy, Poe establishes the viewpoint that he wants his readers to see from. Through the detail-laden tales, Poe wraps his readers in language then walls them up, buries them, and brings them back to life as he does to many of the characters within his stories. Using suspense Poe asserts his power over the story, and also over the reader. No matter the subject of the tale, Poe continuously pulls the reader back to the awareness of who is really driving the story—not the narrator, but Poe himself. For instance, "The Fall of the House of Usher" clearly demonstrates "the self-referential devices—elaborate sentence structures, texts within the text, relentless use of doubling and reflection—[that] keep pushing us back outside the story, reminding us that *Poe* is the real master of the house" (Peeples 186).[11] To further reference himself, it has been documented that Poe embeds within this story a likeness of himself in the narrator. Weekes commented on how Poe's narrators "peculiarly resemble each other" (151). Joan Dayan describes Poe's narrators as "vain, abstract, and diseased" a description similar to that of his female protagonists within Poe's tales that focus on

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[11] In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the narrator travels to the home of the twins, Roderick and Madeline Usher. Madeline is ill and the doctors cannot provide a diagnosis. Madeline dies and the narrator consoles his friend. Soon after the narrator begins to read "Mad Trist" to Roderick, Madeline rises from the dead and attacks her brother. The narrator runs and barely escapes the House of Usher as it collapses behind him.

women. Additonally, Dayan states that Poe "himself is an anomalous identity" (9).   The

narrators are rather vague, yet "the writer himself seems to be most 'heartfelt' when most vague"

(9). Perhaps Poe's vagueness allows him to insert his own identity into that of the narrators,

which allows him to flush out his own emotional issues through the guise of his characters.   She

continues, "The trial of thought or desire is always for Poe a fragmentation of assumed identity"

(9).   Furthermore, James W. Gargano also states in "The Question of Poe's Narrators" how

some critics have believed "that Poe and his narrators are identical literary twins" (177). In this

article, he tries to dispute that statement; however, I follow the critics that have viewed Poe and

his narrators as one and the same.

Poe's conflation of himself with the narrative voices can also be seen in his tales that

focus on the death of a beautiful woman, which, as previously stated, was considered by Poe to

be the most poetic subject in the world. Ironically, Poe endows his women with "gigantic"

minds. In "Ligeia," Poe writes:

> I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where
>
> breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, *all* the wide areas of moral,
>
> physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive,
>
> that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was
>
> sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a childlike
>
> confidence. (741)

Similarly, when discussing "Morella," Nadal writes: "In this tale, the lady [Morella] possesses a

vast erudition ('her powers of mind were gigantic')…so her husband—the narrator—in many

matters becomes her pupil" (154). Berenice is discussed in like terms by Poe as he writes, "In

the strange anomaly of my [the narrator's] existence, feelings with me, *had never been* of the

heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind" ("Berenice" 498). Due to the fact that Poe

wants the public to perceive him as he perceives himself, he repeatedly writes stories such as

these to return the narrator (or Poe) to the intellectually superior position. Poe obtains this

position by killing the superior intellect, the woman, off and once the woman in each story dies,

the narrator is no longer in the place of the child or the pupil, thus allowing him to rise to the

position of mental genius. In turn, Poe is able to expel his own inferiority complex and

emotional waste through the death of these women as well. Weekes states,

> Poe's female characters thus become a receptacle for their narrator's angst and
>
> guilt, a *tabula rasa* on which the lover inscribes his own needs. His fictional
>
> "ideal" is a woman who can be subsumed into another's ego and who has no need
>
> to tell her own tale; she is killed off so quickly that her silence is inscribed quite
>
> irrevocably. Instead her image functions merely as a mirror that reflects man at
>
> twice his size….It is hard to determine which repeated treatment of women is
>
> more demeaning: to see them as creatures in their own right, but ones who must
>
> die in order to serve a larger, androcentric purpose, or to utilize them as lifeless
>
> pasteboard props for the purposes of the narrator's emotional excesses. (150)

In his stories, whether readers focus on the idealized women that he kills or on the narrators, both

will inevitably echo their creator's emotional angst. Poe enters his tales with an idea and a

perspective and leaves "man," or should I say himself, twice his size through the death of the

woman. Marita Nadal states, "in these tales Poe's female characters can be regarded as doubles

of the male ones, who project on the women their own obsessions" (152). By perceiving the

male counterparts (narrators) as extensions of Poe and the women as mirroring the narrators we

can postulate that Poe is then creating a reflection of himself in the women of his stories. Then,

by connecting the idea of Poe reflecting himself in the women and realizing the characteristics of the women's minds, we can see that he is not reflecting an actual image of himself, but an ideal image of how he believes himself to be. Thus, we can return to the idea that Poe's obsession with securing the admiration of his intellectual capabilities among the public is also demonstrated within many of his "most poetical" works.

Poe also manipulates his readers through the doubling of his characters, which creates the presence of a doppelganger (i.e. a mysterious double), which is most apparent in "William Wilson." In the first sentence, Poe writes, "Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson" ("William Wilson" 749). This statement appears to give the narrator an assumed name, a technique that Poe himself employed with his use of pseudonyms. The narrator does not allow the audience to understand who he is while, ironically, he asks the same question—"who and what was this Wilson?" (758). Throughout the text, the reader will also find that the narrator seems to be particularly partial to the phrase "in truth," which he uses to give a factual feel to the story and its claim that the double of the pseudonymous William Wilson is in every way like the original—he goes everywhere and does everything that his namesake does. However, in the end, the reader discovers that the narrator kills William Wilson and since they are the same character every reader has to ask the question, "Who wrote the story?" Poe manipulates his audience by assuming the identity of William Wilson to tell a dead man's tale, forcing the reader to look not within the story, but to Poe, for he is the only "survivor." In a mirror Wilson looks at his pale and bloody body, realizing what he has done, and states in the last lines of the story, "*In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered theyself*" [sic] ("William Wilson" 763). By referencing "image" within the text, Poe makes it very clear that it is only through the reflection of William Wilson, his own image, that

he sees the truth about himself. For Poe, it is only through writing and self-referencing himself within his work that he is able to see and prove the truth that he believed of himself—that he is intellectually superior. As Whalen says, "Poe's work is trapped in a never-ending spiral of self-reference" and it is through the same sort of self-reference that Poe uses to expose the truth about himself that he is able to unravel the mystery of William Wilson's double's identity (44).

Poe incorporates this doubling into several of his works. One such work is "The Gold-Bug," with its twin pairing in the characters of William Legrand and William Kidd (Whalen 47). Through their intellect, they break the code to find the treasure, and by doing so they allow Poe to demonstrate his cryptography skills both as a cryptographer and creator as previously noted (Silverman 47). "The Fall of the House of Usher" also uses the theme of doubling, but, in a far more symbolic way than "William Wilson." Joseph J. Moldenhauer in "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision" states,

> The theme [of doubling] is nowhere more effectively dramatized than in "The Fall of the House of Usher," with its repeated doublings on the literal and symbolic planes. These include (1) the house and its mirror image in the tarn; (2) the Usher family and the Usher mansion, both "houses"; (3) the physical house and the sole male survivor, Roderick—a doubling developed symbolically in the descriptions of the mansion and of Roderick's features, and presented allegorically in Roderick's emblem poem; (4) Roderick and Madeline—twins, both ill of nervous diseases, between whom "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed"…; (5) the left side and the right side of the house, the two halves being separated by a fissure and symbolizing the two surviving Ushers, or the ambivalent, indeed schizophrenic mental state of Roderick as the life-urge and the

death-wish compete within him; and finally, (6) if the narrator is seen as an

adjunct to Roderick, introduced for merely technical purposes, the doubling of

Madeline on the one hand and "us" on the other. That is, to exploit a pun in the

hero's name, the story deals with the fall and completion of the house of "Us-her"

(295).

Here Moldenhauer demonstrates just how many aspects Poe incorporates into this story that deal

with the theme of doubling. Moreover, as Peeples documents Poe uses the citation below that to

take the theme of doubling further by mirroring his sentence structure within "The Fall of the

House of Usher," beginning with the first sentence of the story:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year,

when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone,

on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found

myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy

House of Usher. ("Fall" 356)

By stretching the doubling/mirroring characteristic of the story to the level of sentence structure,

Poe is able to once again show off his intellectual skill. Understanding that the reader may not

realize the depth that the doubling theme appears, Poe can assert himself as superior to the reader

by knowing something that the reader does not. He can also obtain control over the reader, much

as he takes control over the structure. For instance, upon the narrator's arrival, Poe presents the

house as one that is in the process of collapsing with a fissure running through the wall.

However, the collapse does not occur until the narrator points out the "blood-red moon, which

now shone vividly through that once barely discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as

extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction to the base" ("Fall" 379). Peeples

points out,

> Yet the fall of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is not an admission of failure on
>
> Poe's part but a further assertion of the writer's control; what matters is that the
>
> writer or artist controls the structure, even when that means bringing down the
>
> house through what might be described as "controlled demolition."… Again and
>
> again Poe tells us that control is illusion, and yet he insists that the work of fiction
>
> itself remain under control. (186)

It is Poe's display of control that marks his power over the reader's perception. Through the use

of this power, Poe asserts his intellectual superiority over the reader.

Poe also creates a new genre, the detective story, to expose his superior intellect through

analytical reasoning, namely in the Dupin adventure series: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue,"[12]

"The Mystery of Marie Roget,"[13] and "The Purloined Letter." In the first of these tales, "The

Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe begins the glorification of the analytic mind—one that enjoys

such activities as enigmas, conundrums, hieroglyphics, and, in the case of Poe, cryptograms—by

indicating how the methodical and pragmatic reasoning behind the solution presented may

appear to ordinary minds mystical and entirely based on intuition (46). This quality seen in the

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[12] "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a tale about Dupin and the murders of two women:
Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter Camille L'Espanaye. Dupin analyzes the scene of the
crime, and by reviewing evidence retrieved by the police and finding evidence that they missed,
he proposes that an orangutan committed the murders. To prove it he puts a notice in the
newspaper that an orangutan has been captured and that they are looking for the owners. Just as
surmised by Dupin, a sailor responds to the notice and explains the events that led the orangutan
to the murders of the women.
[13] "The Mystery of Marie Roget" is based on the actual murder of Mary Rogers, but tells a tale
about how Dupin tries to solve the murder of Marie Roget, a beautiful young girl who
disappeared and was later found in the river. Through analysis of evidence, Dupin comes up
with the conclusion that she died at Madame Deluc's inn or in a thicket near the river where a
sailor killed her and then dumped her body in the river from a boat.

protagonist, Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, is far superior to that of a genius. The narrator says,

"observing him..., I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and

amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent" ("Murders"

52). Here, Poe creates Dupin as though he is built out of more than just an average man; he is a

superior being to the extent that he is twice the man than any other. For Poe also sees himself as

a Bi-Part Soul—author (poet) and intellectual. It is this Bi-Part Soul that he believes separates

himself from the others whether that be through analytical genius or poetic superiority.

The second story in the series, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," is based on the actual

murder of Mary Rogers, which Poe attempts to solve. As a documentation of evidence and a way

to publish his results, Poe assumes Dupin's detective role in the case of Rogers and ascribes his

own inferences about the murder to the analytical analysis and reasoning powers of the character.

Therefore, if Dupin solves the case, Poe solves the case. Due to the police's inability to solve the

mysterious murder, Poe was keen, after reading about it in newspapers, to try to solve what

seemed to be an unsolvable murder. As with the cryptograms and the challenge that he proposed

to his readers, Poe assigned himself the task of solving this case in an effort to try to assert his

intellectual superiority. This time, unlike the cryptograms, which were purely on paper, Poe

takes on an actual case. Ironically, however, as William Kurtz Wimsatt, Jr. states in "Poe and

the Mystery of Mary Rogers," "…[T]hose who approached the question as students not of Poe

but of crime or mystery—the retired police officers, journalists and specialists in grisly

cases...[were] unanimous in the opinion that Poe contributed little or nothing toward solving the

mystery" (230). Here we can verify that Poe did not assist in any way with the resolution of the

murder, which will be further explored later. Poe does, however, provide evidence that

establishes a possible intention for trying to solve the murder and writing the story through

several letters to different editors. He wrote letters in 1842 to "George Roberts, editor of the

Boston *Mammoth Notion*" in Philadelphia; "J. Evans Snodgrass, editor of the Baltimore *Saturday*

Visitor"; and "the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger,*" discussing his intention of solving

the Mary Rogers' murder (Wimsatt 233). Wimsatt continues to state in a footnote that, "despite

the denial which is part of Poe's fiction…, the drift of the story is in clear accord with his letter

to Roberts. He clinched the matter in the first of the notes added to the 1845 version…: 'the

investigation of the truth was the object.'…There can be no doubt that Poe at least pretended to

believe that he had solved the mystery" (233 n 12). With the understanding that Poe was

attempting to solve the murder, he was no more successful than the investigators at the actual

scene of the crime. Since Poe was in fact in Philadelphia at the time the murder took place in

New York, he used the evidence presented in the newspapers to develop his own theory.

Nevertheless, in the beginning of "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Poe's description of the event

is quite dramatic, and Wimsatt describes the section as follows: "that part about the identity of

the body, more than a dozen pages, is merely theatrical, a supererogatory solution of problems

which never had existed or at least no longer did" (234). Furthermore, Poe based much of the

rationale used to solve the case on the laws of probability. At the end of the story Poe writes:

> This is one of those anomalous propositions which, seemingly appealing to
>
> thought altogether apart from the mathematical, is yet one which only the
>
> mathematician can fully entertain. Nothing, for example, is more difficult than to
>
> convince the merely general reader that the fact of sixes having been thrown twice
>
> in succession by a player at dice, is sufficient cause for betting the largest odds
>
> that sixes will not be thrown in the third attempt. A suggestion to this effect is
>
> usually rejected by the intellect at once. It does not appear that the two throws

which have been completed, and which lie now absolutely in the Past, can have

influence upon the throw which exists only in the Future. The chance for

throwing sixes seems to be precisely as it was at any of the various other throws

which may be made by the dice. ("Mystery" 152)

While Poe's logic with the dice may seem accurate, he neglected one important fact that is

relevant to the case – New York's crime statistics for the period. The newspapers covered

multiple insistences of gang violence toward women during that time and it was suggested that

Rogers may have been a victim of gang violence. As Wimsatt noted, "Poe could not have been

ignorant" of this fact, particularly while staying current on the incoming evidence of the Mary

Rogers murder (237). It was plausible that Poe did not want to consider this possibility since it

conflicted with his own deductions concerning the murder. Therefore, he created his dice theory,

cited above, to "explain" why Rogers could not have been murdered by a gang. Nevertheless, it

would have been logical to explore the possibility that certain gangs in New York may have

perpetrated the crime. In Poe's attempt to find the murderer he works under false assumptions

that the evidence did not provide, which as far as detective work is concerned is not the quickest

way to catch a killer.

Furthermore, in "The Mystery of Marie Roget," as well as in the other two detective

tales, Poe continuously insults the "general reader," in order to boost his intellectual ego. Other

than the reference to the general reader on the probability of rolling sixes in dice, Poe mocks the

police as well in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue": "This idea [the obtuse instrument being the

fall from the bedroom window], however simple it may now seem, escaped the police for the

same reason that the breadth of the shutters escaped them—because, by the affair of the nails,

their perceptions had been hermetically sealed against the possibility of the windows having ever

been opened at all" (79). Phrases like "ordinary understanding" ("Murders" 48), "that class of thinkers" (77), "general reader" ("Mystery" 152), "casual observer" ("The Purloined Letter" 781), and "ordinary intellects" (788) all present the mentality of an audience which is less intellectual than the "characters" of the story. Poe considers his readers inferior on topics such as the ratio of sixes rolled, which justifies why the explanations of such topics are there as well as showing the same audience that he considers ignorant that he is intellectually capable of understanding and explaining such matters. Therefore, through Dupin, Poe is able to assert his intellectual superiority to the general reader.

On the other hand, Poe alters his findings in another version of "The Mystery of Marie Roget." For instance, the original story included the theory that the murder had occurred in the thicket: "That it *was* the scene, I believe" (quoted in Wimsatt 242). In the current version of the story, the same line now reads "That it *was* the scene, I may or may not believe—but there was excellent reason for doubt" ("Mystery" 134). Wimsatt states that the following two lines must also be deleted from the original text so that Poe may pretend that his original intent was not to solve the murder: "I admit the thicket as the scene of the outrage," and "We are not forced to suppose a premeditated design of murder or of violation. But there was the friendly shelter of the thicket, and the approach of rain—there was opportunity and strong temptation—and then a sudden and violent wrong, to be concealed only be one of darker dye" (Wimsatt 242). These lines, as well as others, have been altered due to evidence that was later brought to light. Though it is not certain, evidence suggests that an abortion was performed on Mary Rogers resulting in her death. Thus, the scene was not the thicket as previously believed and stated in Poe's original "The Mystery of Marie Roget." In actuality, a Mrs. Loss probably performed an abortion in her own home on Mary Rogers and when it went badly, her son disposed of the body in the river,

leaving drag marks that were later found. This theory was based on a delusional testimony of

Mrs. Loss and contradictory testimonies from her three sons (Wimsatt 245). To avoid being

proved wrong by future readers, Poe re-wrote parts of his story in order to preserve his reputation

as a man of analytical ingenuity.

Poe also emphasizes his intellectual faculties by presenting the Minister in "The

Purloined Letter" as a poet and mathematician. Obviously, Poe himself is a poet and in "The

Philosophy of Composition," he describes his method of writing as similar to that of a

mathematician. This sentiment can be seen in the compliment that Dupin extends to the

Minister: "As poet *and* mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could

not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect" ("Purloined"

789). It is the poetic trait that lends the Minister his edge to out-smart the police: "if the Minister

[the thief] had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no

necessity of giving me this check. I knew him [the Minister], however, as both mathematician

and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity…" (790).[14] The skill of the Minister as

poet and the presumption of Monsieur G--- that all poets are fools allows Poe to show the

intelligence of the Minister and Dupin, who is also a poet, and prove the Prefect wrong since he

cannot out-smart a poet on two accounts: his assumption about poets and the premises on which

he based the recovery of the purloined letter. Moldenhauer states that Dupin "ironically tells the

obtuse Prefect that he has 'been guilty of certain doggerel' himself, and his intellectual method

embraces and transcends even the most sophisticated mathematics. It leaves the petty, crawling

method of the Prefect far behind, and outflanks the cunning Minister's rationale, which is but a

reversal of the police logic" (294). With each of these detective tales, Poe tries to assert his

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[14] Here Dupin describes how Monsieur G---, the Prefect, has asked him to help with the case of
the purloined letter.

intellectual genius in three ways: (1) by solving the crimes through the process of analytic reasoning, (2) by putting down the general audience, which is assumed incapable of such logic, and (3) in "The Purloined Letter" by presenting poets as a group capable of the most imaginative analytic thinking.

In conclusion, I ask, what do we really need to know about an author? Do we only need to know a writer's works? As we have seen here, the knowledge gained from looking at Edgar Allan Poe's life can strongly affect the way that we view Poe as an intellectual and an author. By addressing different strategies that Poe used to manipulate the public's perception of him, we can see how these strategies within his life and work reflect each other. Specifically within his life, he continuously strove to prove his superior intellect through the use of daguerreotypes and phrenology as well as other literary devices such as pseudonyms, cryptography, and falsified documents. Furthermore, when we look at his work, we can see how the manipulative methods that he used in his life parallel those used in his work, including casting his female protagonists as doubles of the narrators, using doppelgangers, and creating a detective who resembles his author. Personally, I find that the examination of Poe's biography allows the reader and the critic not only to encounter a new perspective of Poe but also to open up new avenues for interpretation of his work. By adding connections between Poe's life and works that biographers and many critics have failed to mention, I resurrect a method of analysis that has not been used to its full potential in Poe criticism to provide fresh insights that suggest an opportunity for further study into how we view Poe, as well as how we view his works.

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