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The A. B. C... of *Autography*:  
Edgar Allan Poe and Archive Trouble of Antebellum American Literature

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B.A., Appalachian State University, 2003

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a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
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## Abstract

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By: Seth Wood

This dissertation is a reading of a much neglected but wildly compelling work of Edgar Allan Poe's in which he analyzes the handwriting of over one hundred of his contemporaries—from fellow poets, prose writers and magazinists to Supreme Court Justices and one former President—while also furnishing exemplary specimens of the handwriting in the shape of a collection of facsimile signatures or autographs. Given that this dissertation is the first comprehensive study of Poe's *Autography*, its first principal aim is to build a context in which this highly eccentric work can be appreciated: to illustrate its relation to the unique literary climate of antebellum America, in which it took shape, and to explore its resonance with the rest of Poe's idiosyncratic *corpus*. While the extraordinary richness and complexity of *Autography* makes the way to meet this aim relatively clear, it also introduces an element of mystery into this first concerted effort to give *Autography* its due. If, as this dissertation argues, *Autography* is profoundly resonant with the rest of Poe's *corpus* and the historical moment in which it was published, then why would it have gone for so long unnoticed and unread? To the end, not of definitively answering this question, but of addressing it, the second principal aim of this dissertation will be to make the long tradition of *Autography*'s being of little to no interest to American literary history a meaningful aspect of the interpretations of it given here, while their first impulse is to break with this tradition. The idea is that this particular forgotten thing should be remembered first as a forgotten thing if and when it is going to have a future.

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Upon completion of a dissertation, as with anything, it is to be expected that one will have incurred certain debts along the way, and I would like to take the opportunity of remembering some of mine here. I would like first to express my profound gratitude to the Department of Comparative Literature at Emory University, which has been less of a Department to me than a home for almost a decade now. The voyage in thought and the friendships forged will never be forgotten, but my degree will not confer without a sense of loss at the idea of being (at least officially, if never so in spirit) a former student of Comp Lit. I would also like to extend a special word of thanks to Alian Teach, who, for myself and countless others, has been both ballast and a welcome gust of wind, depending on what the situation demanded: always just the right thing at just the right time. As for my dissertation committee, who signed off on this work in ways they'll never know, they know my penchant for going on at length. To keep things brief (and meaning no immodesty by it) I would like to thank them in an idiom I hope to have given them the means to translate:—The autography of Michael Elliott is illegible and *uneven*: the characters are variously cramped and sprawling. No one would expect a person who writes thus to have such characteristic *steadiness* as Professor Elliott. It is possible he has not always written thus; the variance may be owing to his occupations of late at the University or to the genial and open hospitality for which he is renowned, both publicly and privately.—The autography of Geoffrey Bennington is uniform of impression, both in the formation of the individual characters and in its *tout ensemble*. A superior implement is employed. Being given to ornament without undue straining after effect is a quality that evinces equally well in his handwriting as in his writerly productions. In each the effect is *decided*.—The autography of Elissa Marder is legible and distinct, indicating a convergence of forcefulness and grace. The prevailing character is *picturesque*. This is the sort of handwriting one might expect of a painter generally, and one with an eye alive to the beautiful; in this specimen, however, the *i* is dotted with a hurried purposiveness usually reserved for certain heads-of-state.

I also wish to acknowledge my family here: my parents, Timothy and Kristy Wood, I thank for seeing me to this moment and for all that they do as the people on whom I call in moments of triumph and of despair; my sister, Alison, I thank for her unrivaled care-packages and uncanny knack for making me smile; and my brother, Logan, my first student, I thank for teaching me much in recent years about what it means to be graduating. I also wish to acknowledge the people who have lately redefined what I know by family. To my wife, Ariel, I can only say thank you for the innumerable hours spent reading drafts and patiently listening to impromptu lectures on American literature, all the while reminding me to live and of what is worth living for. To my son, Mark, I can only say thank you for reminding me of the meaning of play and for giving me my first glimpses of joy (and sorry for spending so much time at the “compooper”).

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## Introduction

### **A Character-Sketch of Edgar Allan Poe's *Autography***

Edgar Allan Poe's *Autography* is comprised of two series of articles, published during Poe's editorship of two prominent American literary magazines of the antebellum period—the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in 1836, and *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, from 1841 to 1842—in which he purports to analyze the handwriting of over one hundred of his contemporaries: from notable political names of the day, like Judge Joseph Story and President John Quincy Adams, to men and women Poe more understandably ranked among “*the most noted among the living literati of the country*,” including, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Washington Irving, and Catherine Maria Sedgwick. Adopting a suggestion of Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Physiognomische*, Poe pursues a theory that “a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man's chirography and character” (GLG 19.5, 225).<sup>1</sup> His “practical application” of this theory, wherein it is met

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<sup>1</sup> The relevant passages to consult in Lavater's *Whole Works on Physiognomy* (trans. George Grenville, 1800), as the ones that undoubtedly inspired Poe's work in *Autography* are to be found in Volume 4, Lecture IX, at the close of Chapter V, “Of Design, Colouring, and Writing.” Lavater writes there: “The more I compare the different hand-writings which fall in my way, the more I am confirmed in the idea, that they are so many expressions, so many emanations, of the character of the writer” (Lavater 201). He even mentions a certain “wonderful analogy between the language, the gait, and the handwriting” (ibid. 203), which may have inspired Poe's choice to articulate the relation between handwriting and character as a “strong analogy” in *Autography*. Also of interest, in view of the survey of collections of character-sketches in the antebellum period that follows, of which *Autography* is but the most remarkable example, are Lavater's remarks on the idea of a “*national hand-writing*,” his notion “that every nation, every country, every city, has its peculiar hand-writing, just as they have a physiognomy and a form peculiar to themselves” (ibid. 201). Given Poe's passion for “pseudo-sciences” generally, this passage from Lavater is of particular interest: “A truth the most palatable, a truth which constitutes one of the principal foundations of physiognomy, and which attests to the universal signification of every thing pertaining to our physical essence; a truth whose evidence, hitherto not sufficiently felt seems reserved for future ages—it is this, *that a single member well constituted, a single*



with varying degrees of failure and success, is accompanied by a collection of facsimile signatures (what Poe more regularly refers to as “autographs”), printed copies of actual signatures, the vast majority of which Poe obtained by less than forthcoming means.<sup>2</sup>

This much the two series in the *Autography* series have in common. There are also some notable differences between them. In the early series for the *Messenger*, Poe prefaces his

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*detached and exact contour, furnishes us with certain inductions for the rest of the body, and, consequently, for the whole character. This truth appears to me as evident as that of my existence; it is irresistibly certain”* (ibid. 197). For Poe’s relation to Lavater, especially with regard to *Autography* and the “history of graphology,” cf. Joseph Seiler, *De Lavater à Michon: Essai sur l’histoire de la graphologie*, vol. 1 (Saint-Paul: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1995), especially, “Troisième partie: L’accueil fait à Lavater dans les pays anglophones,” which is almost entirely devoted to Poe and to *Autography*. For a study that more briefly discusses Poe and *Autography* in relation to the impact of theories about handwriting in antebellum America, but written in English, cf. Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), especially, 72-107.

<sup>2</sup> For his later articles of *Autography* for *Graham’s Lady’s and Gentlemen’s Magazine* it is known that Poe corresponded directly with some people in order to solicit autographs he wished to have among his collection, but even there most of the signatures he likely obtained by less forthcoming means. In the case of the early articles of *Autography* it is presumed that he gleaned the majority of his collection from his editorial desk at the *Messenger*, clipping them from various office memoranda (letters of submission and subscription, bill payments, and the like). Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson intimate in *The Poe Log* that they checked some of the autographs included in *Autography* against the listed subscribers to the *Messenger* (“(see *Messenger* wrappers)” (PL 191)). Thomas more definitively confirms some sources for the autographs reprinted in *Autography* in his 1975 article on “James F. Otis and ‘Autography.’” In 1836, James Frederick Otis was working as a correspondent for the *Daily National Intelligencer*, in whose pages he often lavished praise on the *Messenger* and Poe in addition to reporting on the political news of the day. Thomas unearths a fascinating relic of *Autography* series history, a mangled piece of correspondence in which Otis had passed Poe twelve autographs: three of which still remain attached to what is called “Griswold MS 796” and up to six of which appeared in the August 1836 installment of *Autography* (Thomas [1975] 13). Though Thomas does not speculate much on the February 1836 article of *Autography*, Otis’s letter from June 1836 reveals that he was attending meetings of United States House of Representatives at the time; he writes to Poe having “just come out of the House of Reps. after a session of Twenty Five Hours—jaded, tired, and nipped” (ibid. 12). It is possible, but impossible to confirm absolutely, that he is the source for some of those autographs in the February 1836 article *Autography* article which are difficult to imagine how Poe could have come by otherwise: namely, those of President John Adams, Chief Justice John Marshall, William Wirt, and Judge Joseph Hopkinson, all prominent political names of the day. Otis may have conspired with Poe more completely still. In his review of the February 1836 number of the *Messenger* Otis had the following to say about *Autography*: “The number closes with a most amusing paper containing twenty-five [*sic*] admirably executed *fac simile* autographs of some of the most distinguished of our literati. [...] the whimsical character of the pretended letters to which the signatures are attached is well preserved. Of almost all the autographs we can speak on our own authority, and are able to pronounce them capital” (PL 203).

articles with raucous, fictitious narratives explaining the origins of this curious production, wherein Poe also pens fictive letters in the names of the American *literati*, as if they were the very letters that afforded the autographs. In the later series for *Graham's*, Poe does away with the more patently fictional aspects of his design in favor of claiming a more general, natural, and even rational basis for the highly eccentric work of *Autography*.

Poe was not the only writer of his day to resort to such creative means of surveying the American literary landscape of the antebellum period. There is, in fact, a plethora of like-minded works, whose titles give a fair impression of the character of work at issue here. James Russell Lowell's *A Fable for Critics* (1848) is perhaps the most famous example, but there are no few others, much less well-known: Laughton Osborn's *The Vision of Rubeta: An Epic Story of the Island of Manhattan* (1838); Lambert A. Wilmer's *The Quacks of Helicon: A Satire* (1841); Nathaniel Hawthorne's original version of "The Hall of Fantasy," published in *The Pioneer* from February 1843; *The Poets and Poetry of America: A Satire* by "Lavante" (1847) (not to be confused with Rufus W. Griswold's famous literary anthology of the same name, which "Lavante" was satirizing); Thomas Dunn English's *1844, or, The Power of the "S.F."* (1847); and, *Parnassus in Pillory* (1851) by Motely Manners, Esquire, a pseudonym of Augustine Joseph Hickey Duganne.<sup>3</sup> What all these works have in common with Poe's *Autography* (notably, the first series of which predates them all) is their being comprised of writing in the medium of the "character-sketch": brief, often humorous and/or satirical, and sometimes informative representations of their subjects—sketches of character never far

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<sup>3</sup> A fragment of *Parnassus in Pillory* appeared two years previously in the January 1849 number of *Holden's Dollar Magazine* under the title *A Mirror for Authors*.

from caricature. There are several reasons, however, why Poe's *Autography* stands out from the rest.

Firstly, collections of character-sketches from the antebellum period usually adapted themselves to conventional literary media. Those of Osborn, Wilmer, "Lavante," Lowell, and Duganne are all poems; *Parnassus in Pillory* is unique among them for being accompanied by a series of cartoons by renowned illustrator F. O. C. Darley, and *A Fable for Critics* is interspersed with sketches of the heads and faces of Lowell's subjects. English's *1844* took shape as a novel, Hawthorne's "Hall of Fantasy" as a tale. Poe's *Autography* is certainly no poem, no novel, no tale; it is not even clear that it should count entirely as prose. Owing mainly to the presence of those facsimile signatures or autographs, the genre of *Autography* is not easy of identification apart from deferring to the context of its publication as series of magazine articles. This uniqueness of *Autography* (more about which below) leads to another reason it stands out among the many collections of character-sketches in the antebellum period: the fact that Poe was engaged in such work throughout his career as a writer for magazines. The *Autography* series, both series in the series, represent significant ventures in a medium of writing formative of *The Literati of New York City*, a series of character-sketches for *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1846, which everyone knows had the effect of embroiling Poe in some heated controversy<sup>4</sup>, but which far fewer people know was in stark contrast to the all but unanimous popularity of *Autography* four years previously. (For a comparison of the differing public receptions of *Autography* and *The Literati of NYC* as an aesthetic difference between these collections of character-sketches, see Part III of this

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sidney Moss, *Poe's Major Crisis: His Libel Suit and New York's Literary World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970).

dissertation, “The Signature-Architecture of *Autography*.”) Poe envisioned a department of character-sketches for his never realized ambition of founding a literary magazine of his own<sup>5</sup>, and there is every indication that his project of *Literary America*, left incomplete upon his death, was to be “a book on American Letters generally” (Otsrom 2:332) comprised of the sorts of character-sketches he had dabbled in with *Autography* and *The Literati of NYC*.<sup>6</sup>

Given the fact that Poe took an active interest in writing character-sketches throughout his career, it is perhaps fitting that most of the collections mentioned above are most well-known today for being in some way connected with Poe. Lowell’s lines on Poe—“There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge, / Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge” (Lowell [1848] 78)—are among the most often cited from *A Fable for Critics*. The fact that Poe issued a largely unfavorable review of Lowell’s *Fable* in March 1849, where he also makes some passing jabs at Osborn’s *Vision of Rubeta*<sup>7</sup>, is also of interest in this respect. Poe’s somewhat more polite but still unfavorable review of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Poe, “Prospectus of *The Stylus*” (1843): “An important feature of the work, and one which will be introduced in the opening number, will be a series of *Critical* and *Biographical Sketches of American Writers*. These sketches will be accompanied with full length and characteristics portraits; will include every person of literary note in America; and will investigate carefully, and with rigorous impartiality, the individual claims of each” (ER 1035).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kevin J. Hayes’s account of the genesis of the character-sketch in Poe as “The road to *Literary America*” in *Poe and the Printed Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98-111.

<sup>7</sup> Poe asked, for instance, in the review of *A Fable for Critics*, “[W]hat is ‘The Vision of Rubeta’ more than a vast gilded swill-trough overflowing with Dunciad and water?” (ER 816). Poe had issued some more measured remarks on *The Vision of Rubeta*, however, in his character-sketch of Osborn for *The Literati of NYC* from two years previously: “[A]s ‘The Confessions of a Poet’ was one of the best novels of its kind ever written in this country, so ‘The Vision of Rubeta’ was decidedly the best satire. For its vulgarity and gross personality there is no defense, but its mordacity cannot be gainsaid. In calling it, however, the best American satire, I do not intend any excessive commendation—for it is, in fact, the only satire composed by an American” (ER 1152). Poe registers one other sentiment in *The Literati* that is of some interest compared to his own condemnation of *Rubeta* two years later but of more particular interest in view of work to come on the art-work of *Autography*: “The press, without exception, or nearly so, condemned the work, without taking the trouble to investigate its pretensions as a literary work” (ibid.)

Wilmer's *Quacks of Helicon* appeared in August 1841, a couple of months prior to reviving his *Autography* series for *Graham's*. Thomas Dunn English's *1844* is rarely referred to anymore except to marvel at the misadventures of one Marmaduke Hammerhead: a persona through which English leveled repeated vituperative character-attacks at Poe in retaliation for the injustice done to him in Poe's character-sketch of him in *The Literati of NYC*. Duganne's *Parnassus in Pillory* is only gathered among the titles listed above by virtue of a solitary article found on this piece, which gives particular prominence to the character-sketch of Poe therein; in fact, the article is somewhat strangely titled, "Poe in Pillory: An Early Version of a Satire by A. J. H. Duganne," as if Duganne's character-sketch of Poe were in some way representative of the whole of this "early version of a satire."<sup>8</sup> As for *The Poets and Poetry of America: A Satire* by "Lavante," one of the only available reprints of this poem is an 1877 volume by Geoffrey Quarles "with an Introductory Argument to prove that 'Lavante' was Edgar Allan Poe." Quarles certainly makes a compelling case for Poe's authorship over the course of thirty-six pages (the poem itself is only thirty-five pages long), and it is of further interest that he does so precisely by way of sketching Poe's literary character. He sums up the matter from the very beginning as follows: "POE (*poet*) + POE (*eccentric*) = 'LAVANTE'" (Quarles 5). The equation never convinced anyone, however, and it did nothing to help the case of Oliver Leigh that he had published his argument for Poe's authorship of the poem pseudonymously, just like "Lavante" had done with the poem itself.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. John E. Reilly, "Poe in Pillory: An Early Version of a Satire by A. J. H. Duganne," *Poe Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (June 1973): 9-12.

<sup>9</sup> Compare H 7:246ff and M 1:510n80.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Hall of Fantasy" is not so intimately wrapped up in Poe's literary legacy as the others and, not necessarily for that fact, best exemplifies the unique character of these collections of character-sketches, with respect *both* to the particular literary climate in which they were published *and* to its relation to American literary history generally. The text of "The Hall of Fantasy" Hawthorne later collected in the 1846 edition of *Mosses from an Old Manse* differs in one glaring respect from the article that appeared as the lead article of the February 1843 number of James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter's short-lived magazine, *The Pioneer: A Literary and Critical Magazine*. In both versions Hawthorne describes "a certain edifice, which would appear to have some of the characteristics of a public Exchange" (Hawthorne [1843] 1). The Hall of Fantasy itself is only part of this larger edifice, in whose upper stories "the inhabitants of earth may hold converse with those of the moon," and in whose basement are "gloomy cells, which communicate with the infernal regions, and where monsters and chimeras are kept in confinement" (ibid.). Access to the Hall, being situated somewhere "above, below, or beyond the Actual" (ibid.), is given by the faculty of imagination or "the universal passport of a dream" (*Mosses* 134); that is, it can happen that one finds oneself there both willfully and by accident. "It has happened to *me*, on various occasions," the narrator begins, "to find myself" in this Hall, where "the light of heaven" filters through stained glass windows, "painting its marble floor with beautiful or grotesque designs; so that its inmates breathe, as it were, a visionary atmosphere, and tread upon the fantasies of poetic minds" (Hawthorne [1843] 1, emphasis added). During the narrator's guided tour of the Hall of Fantasy and its "inmates," he passes: "statues or busts of men, who, in every age, have been rulers or demi-gods in the realms of

imagination, and its kindred regions” (Homer, Aesop, Dante, Ariosto, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Bunyan, Fielding, Richardson, Scott, “the author of Arthur Mervyn,” Goethe, Swedenborg) (ibid. 1-2); groups of people huddled in the light from the stained glass windows, who drink the water from an ornamental fountain at the center of the Hall and “talk over the business of their dreams” (ibid. 1); another group, consisting of men who “would have deemed it an insult to be told that they stood in the Hall of Fantasy,” is busy hatching plans for cities, roads, dams, factories, and other “every-day realities,” as though they had “found the genuine secret of wealth” (ibid. 3); there are “inventors of fantastic machines” (ibid.) and an assembly of “noted reformers of the day” (ibid. 4).

However, only in the 1843 version of “The Hall of Fantasy,” as it appeared in the pages of *The Pioneer*, does the narrator also make note of several prominent figures in American literary society populating the Hall, standing out among the crowds huddled in the light from the stained glass windows. “Mr. Poe,” for example, had “gained ready admittance for the sake of his imagination, but was threatened with ejection, as belonging to the obnoxious crowd of critics” (ibid. 3). The narrator also observes “Mr. Rufus Griswold, with pencil and memorandum-book, busily noting down the names of all the poets and poetesses there and likewise of some, whom nobody but himself had suspected of ever visiting the hall” (ibid.). The character-sketch of Griswold is particularly significant for the way it conversely reflects the narrator’s own professed anxieties as a recorder of names: “But, woe is me! I tread upon slippery ground, among those poets and men of imagination, whom perhaps it is equally hazardous to notice, or to leave undistinguished in the throng. Would that I could emblazon all their names in star-

dust! Let it suffice to mention indiscriminately such as my eye chanced to fall upon” (ibid. 2-3). While the narrator suspects Griswold of including too many names in his record of visitors to the Hall, he worries that his own record will prove woefully short. It is as “hazardous” to notice some of these “men of imagination” as “to leave [them] undistinguished in the throng.” Those that the narrator’s eye “chanced to fall upon” are mentioned as follows: Holmes, Bryant, Percival, Dana, Halleck, Willis, Sprague, Pierpont, Longfellow, Washington Irving, Geoffrey Crayon, Mr. Cooper, Washington Allston, John Neal, Lowell, “the young author of Dolon,” Epes Sargent, Mr. Tuckerman, Hillard, Spenser, Mr. Poe, Miss Sedgwick, and Mr. Rufus Griswold. There are also some familiar names noted among “the herd of real or self-styled reformers” gathered in the Hall (ibid. 5): O’Sullivan, Mr. Emerson, Jones Very, Mr. Alcott, Mr. Brownson, and Mrs. Abigail Folsom. These names and the brief character-sketches they represent in “The Hall of Fantasy” constitute roughly one-fourth of the original article, missing from its place in the 1846 version collected in *Mosses*.

So, even Hawthorne, by all accounts (including his own) one of the more private and withdrawn writers of his day<sup>10</sup>, engaged in the practice of surveying the American literary landscape through the medium of the character-sketch. In spite of his apparent desire not to have this material remain for posterity, scholars have duly noted that the collection of character-sketches and Hawthorne’s suppression of them are the most

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<sup>10</sup> Hawthorne admits as much in “The Hall of Fantasy,” in a passage which reads all the more ironic in the later version of the tale collected in *Mosses*, given the considerable portion of his text missing from its place just prior to it: “‘Thank heaven,’ observed I to my companion, as we passed to another part of the hall, ‘we have done with this techy, wayward, shy, proud, unreasonable set of laurel-gatherers. I love them in their works, but have little desire to meet them elsewhere’” (Hawthorne [1843] 3).



interesting aspects of “The Hall of Fantasy”<sup>11</sup>: a rare instance of a writer, who was never in the position (and who never wanted to be in the position) of having to compose a work like *Autography* or *A Fable for Critics*, issuing some “honest opinions at random” on the men and women with whom he populated the American literary field, as if they had “seemed suddenly to rise up around [him]” “while [his] mind was busy with an idle tale,” as if he had “wandered [into his own Hall] unawares” (ibid. 1).

The emergence of the character-sketch as a popular, all but irresistible medium of literary discourse during this epoch in American literary history makes perfect sense in view of the “watchword” of ““a national literature!””<sup>12</sup> echoing in almost every quarter of the literary world in the antebellum period, as both enthusiastic declarations and skeptical questions as to how, why, and whether this literary world should be American. Perhaps better than anyone, James Russell Lowell gave voice to the anomalous situation this feverish literary nationalism thought itself called upon to mediate, as what Poe would call a *desideratum*.<sup>13</sup> Not by chance, Lowell gives voice to this anomalous situation of American literature in the context of another character-sketch of Poe for yet another series devoted to surveying the American literary landscape of the antebellum period, this one with a more limited scope: the “Our Contributors” series for *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, in 1845.

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<sup>11</sup> Hawthorne’s revision to “The Hall of Fantasy” was first noted by Nina E. Brown in 1905, cf. *A Bibliography of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1905), 54. However, the suppressed material was not closely scrutinized until 1940, when Harold P. Miller acknowledged its intrinsic worth as a rare moment in Hawthorne where he “surveys his contemporaries,” cf. “Hawthorne Surveys his Contemporaries,” *American Literature*, vol. 12 (May 1940): 228-35.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Poe, “Exordium to Critical Notices” (ER 1027).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Poe’s review of Rufus W. Griswold’s *The Poets and Poetry of America* (ER 550).

The situation of American literature is anomalous. It has no centre, or, if it have, it is like that of the sphere of Hermes. It is divided into many systems, each revolving round its several sun, and often presenting to the rest only a faint glimmer of a milk-and-watery way. Our capital city, unlike London or Paris, is not a great central heart, from which life and vigor radiate to the extremities, but resembles more an isolated umbilicus, stuck down as near as may be to the centre of the land, and seeming rather to tell a legend of former usefulness than to serve any present need. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, each has its literature almost more distinct than those of the different dialects of Germany; and the Young Queen of the West has also one of her own, of which some articulate rumor has reached us dwellers by the Atlantic. Meanwhile, a great babble is kept up concerning a national literature, and the country, having delivered itself of the ugly likeness of a paint-bedaubed, filthy savage, smilingly dandles the rag-baby upon her maternal knee, as if it were flesh and blood, and would grow timely to bone and sinew. (Lowell [1845] 49)

So Lowell's is a de-centered and multi-centered view of the American literary landscape, one in which America's cultural capital is dispersed into various and distinct urban centers. While Poe's *The Literati of NYC* certainly affords a striking illustration of this view<sup>14</sup> and the *Graham's* "Our Contributors" narrows the "sphere" and the "system" in question even further to the institutional character of a single magazine-house (one within the "sphere" or "system" of Philadelphia), for the rest, in the vast majority of the

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<sup>14</sup> As did Poe's much researched rivalry with the "Frongpondians," i.e., Bostonians, especially in mounting the campaign he called his "Little Longfellow War." Cf. Sidney Moss, *Poe's Literary Battles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), 132-189.

collections of character-sketches considered here, certainly in *Autography* and in Lowell's own *Fable for Critics* (published just three years after these remarks, after having already spent some time on the shelf<sup>15</sup>), there is a concentrated drive to treat the American literary landscape as one "sphere," one "system." How might these works, overtly nationalist in character and scope, relate to the image of a not even stillborn but never-born infancy of American literature: as the new life of a mere puppet, a "rag-baby" dandled upon a "maternal knee," reared not even amidst the customary "babble" inspired by babies, but a veritable Babel, a land of "different dialects," "each revolving round its several sun, and often presenting to the rest only a faint glimmer of a milk-and-watery way"?

An answer—one which will be formulated only provisionally here, as in many ways it is the very subject of this dissertation on *Autography* that will figure most prominently in Part II, "The Hoax which is Not One: Poe's *Jeu d'Esprit* and the Literary Circle of *Autography*"—is that none of the collections of character-sketches being considered here can be taken more or less than half seriously (expect perhaps for that extreme case of *Graham's* "Our Contributors" series). There is an irresolute semi-seriousness about the popular literary discourse of the character-sketch in the antebellum period, about the very popularization of this unique medium for surveying the American literary landscape. Lowell repeatedly reminds his reader in the address "To the Reader" heading his *Fable for Critics* that the work is just "a Fable, a frail, slender thing, rhyme-

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<sup>15</sup> Lowell writes in his address "To the Reader: —" at the outset of *A Fable for Critics*: "This trifle, begun to please only myself and my own private fancy, was laid on the shelf. But some friends, who had seen it, induced me, by dint of saying they liked it, to put it in print. That is, having come to that conclusion, I asked their advice when 'twould make no confusion. For though (in the gentlest of ways) they had hinted it was scarce worth the while, I should doubtless have printed it" (Lowell [1848] 9).

ywinged, with a sting in its tail,” a “trifle [...] in a style that is neither good verse nor bad prose”: a “*jeu d’esprit*” (Lowell [1848] 7-11). Poe would likewise refer to his early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger* from 1836 as a *jeu d’esprit* upon reviving the series for *Graham’s* in 1841. This term does not connote that Poe and Lowell are merely joking, but that, if they are joking, then, in the way of all jokes, they’re doing so at least half seriously. Lowell sums up the matter nicely in the conclusion to his address “To the Reader”: “One word to such readers (judicious and wise) as read books with something behind the mere eyes, of whom in the country, perhaps, there are you, including myself, gentle reader, and you. All the characters sketched in this slight *jeu d’esprit*, though, it may be, they seem, here and there, rather free, and drawn from a somewhat too cynical standpoint, are *meant* to be faithful, for that is the grand point, and none but an owl would feel sore at a rub from a jester who tells you, without subterfuge, that he sits in Diogenes’ tub” (ibid. 11).

What is remarkable about this passage is that when Lowell addresses his reader directly as “you,” as one of two “(judicious and wise)” readers who “read books with something behind the mere eyes” (the other being himself), there is a sense in which this utterly open-ended “you,” which would seem extend to anyone who at anytime happens upon this page, at one time or another, in one way or another, foreclosed itself. *A Fable for Critics* at one time or another, in one way or another, stopped being read and started being used, as did Poe’s *Autography*, merely mined for those preciously brief, condensed, always pungent, in a word, *effective* character-sketches of a whole generation of American writers who made possible the very “national literature!” the authors of these character-sketches were always so ambivalent about. One could say that the collections

of character-sketches from the antebellum period are not infrequently mined but never minded as such.

Arthur Hobson Quinn is highly self-aware about this trend that he exploits to great effect in his landmark *Critical Biography of Poe* from 1969. After a brief description of *Autography* he writes: “It was a journalistic device and was probably of some interest to readers of the magazine. Today it is valuable partly to inform us who these writers were, for outside of elderly biographical dictionaries it would be hard to find any information about some of them. It is also interesting to see Poe’s early opinions of men like Lowell, Longfellow, and Emerson” (Quinn 328). So the “interest” of *Autography* is that of a certain “device.” Its “value” is for the “information” it provides, not just some “early opinions” that one could measure against some later opinions, but information that could be come by in no other way, save for by consulting “elderly biographical dictionaries” (and who would do that with a fresh, new *Critical Biography* like Quinn’s *Edgar Allan Poe* on the shelf?). One of the principal thoughts informing the work of this dissertation on *Autography* is that this “device” from which one would extract “information,” as if from a “journalistic” source, as if picking something up out of an old newspaper, as a record of fact, is going to afford information only of the most precarious sort for having been extracted from a literary “device.” Lowell is explicit about this point in *A Fable for Critics*, but he really needn’t have been, since *A Fable for Critics* presents itself so blatantly as a literary work, namely, a poem. Thus the point about *Autography*’s singular anomalousness when it comes to questions of generic classification—owing in especial to that collection of facsimile signatures or autographs—returns as an aspect of this work once again setting it apart from the other

collections of character-sketches of the antebellum period. In a way, Quinn has a point that *Autography* is not so readily identifiable as having been written in a purely literary medium; at least, it is certainly less readily identifiable as such than most of the other titles mentioned here as like-minded to *Autography*.

Yet, the fact is, Quinn is part of a small and exclusive minority in American literary history that even ventures to say this much about *Autography* (and one could make the case that he is uniquely situated to do so being a biographer of Poe, moreover, one writing a Critical Biography). Like most of the collections of character-sketches discussed here, traditionally, *Autography* is far less often read so as to be used than just not read at all. So the very anomalous situation now in view is this: a veritable genre of works that actively engaged in surveying the American literary landscape, nearly all patently designed with a nationalist character and scope but one given a highly self-conscious, highly self-referential, highly creative, highly stylized, in a word, literary, context has proved of little to no interest to American literary history, apart from some occasional extractions of “information.” This is true generally speaking, although, in the case of *Autography* there are the slightest indications that the time may now, in 2011, finally be right and ripe for a critical conversation on this most rich and provocative work of Poe’s. At the close of “The Purloined Letter of *Autography*,” in Part I of this dissertation, the potential beginnings of this critical conversation will be marked out between Jonathan Elmer’s *Reading at the Social Limit* from 1995 and Meredith McGill’s *The Culture of Reprinting* from 2003.

The uncanny import, then, of Hawthorne’s decision to suppress the single instance in which he gave his pen over to surveying the American literary landscape, and

doing so through the medium of the character-sketch, comes strikingly into focus. His decision seems to reflect the idea that upon becoming a formal literary production, collected (if not anthologized) in a volume of what, apart from “mosses,” he describes as “idle weeds and withering blossoms [...] old, faded things [...] flowers pressed between the leaves of a book [...] fitful sketches” (*Mosses* 26), something about the collection of character-sketches in “The Hall of Fantasy” did not fit, was out of place and therefore left missing from its place. A similar idea seems to have long held true and on a much larger scale in American literary history and its relation to curious collections of character-sketches like *Autography*, as if upon American literature becoming American literature as such, these fitful surveys of the American literary landscape no longer fit, had no place and were therefore left missing from their place.

Yet, is there not a palpable sense in which these collections of character-sketches were overtly partaking in the collective fervor for ““a national literature!”” reflected in a thousand different ways in the literature of the antebellum period, even if (or perhaps precisely because) they were doing so uniquely, in literature, in jest, in satire, or in downright hoaxing? All of the works discussed here were published over a half-century prior to anything like an American literary curriculum.<sup>16</sup> Many of them, like *Autography*, were published over a decade prior to F. O. Matthiessen’s dating of the “American Renaissance,”<sup>17</sup> and most of these collections of character-sketches appeared in the very decade that saw a boom in the popularity and availability of American literary anthologies, especially those of Rufus W. Griswold. What might it *tell* about the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Joseph Csicsila, *Canons by Consensus: Critical Trends and American Literature Anthologies* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Francis Otto Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), vii.

character of these collections of character-sketches that the majority of them were quite popular among the American readership of the antebellum period, especially so in the case of Lowell's *Fable for Critics* and Poe's *Autography*, but have not proved popular to any subsequent generation of the American readership?

To the end, not of answering this question, but of framing it in such a way that will illustrate how this question will play itself out in this dissertation through a study of *Autography*, it is perhaps fitting to add one more anomaly to the heap in the shape of Jacques Derrida and to let him say that the literary world of antebellum America was "*en mal d'archive*," just as

We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives. Listening to the French idiom, and in it the attribute *en mal de*, to be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble or from what the noun *mal* might name. It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.

(*Archive Fever* 91)

The literary world of antebellum America was "in need of archives." This has been said a thousand times before and in a thousand different ways<sup>18</sup>, but it is not to say that archives

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<sup>18</sup> Nowhere has it been said more hyperbolically and more in keeping with the object and character of the present study than in Henry James's famous "sketch," *Hawthorne*, where he ludicrously makes a list of everything missing from its place in "the texture of American life [...] forty years ago" (i.e., in 1839, three years after the appearance of *Autography*)—"No State [...]"



did not exist in antebellum America generally—far from it. Clifton Hood has shown that not only was there a burning passion for archives in America throughout the nineteenth-century, but the picture he paints of the cultural and functional fragmentation of these archival networks makes Lowell’s “sphere of Hermes” seem tame by comparison; he notes a radical fragmentation of archives within those defined “spheres” or “systems” of the “urban centers” of America, and (like Poe did with *The Literati of NYC*) he restricts his analysis to New York City, defining a smaller and more manageable context with which to illustrate the anomalous situation in which it partakes. However, as Hood also reminds his reader, archives are not reducible to “storehouses of manuscripts and rare books”; “archives are products of the past as well as sources of information about it” (Hood 147). Precisely, and this is where the trouble came for the writers of the literary world of antebellum America. They exhibited “a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive,” but not so much as “an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” as “an irrepressible desire” to establish themselves as “the origin,” as “the most archaic place of absolute commencement.” And, in a very general way, they managed to so establish themselves. More than any other period in American literary history it is the early 1830s to the late 1850s that seems to compel “an irrepressible desire

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barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages or ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools [...] no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures”—only to acknowledge at the end of it all, where what is missing from its place in antebellum America is finally said to be just “everything,” that he’s just joking: “The American knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains—that is his secret, his joke, as one might say” (James 43-44). In many ways, this dissertation is a claim to the “secret” and to the “joke” of the “good deal” that remains in remains and in their very remaining.

to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” of American literature.

Of course, there are innumerable different ways of writing the birth-certificate of American literature as such, and the point of doing so here is only to reiterate that anywhere and anytime the archive would established itself as such, as “the most archaic place of absolute commencement,” as a “[product] of the past” which would also be a “[source] of information about it,” there will have been “*trouble de l’archive*,” “archive trouble” (*Archive Fever* 91). It is not, however, just by virtue of the fact that the collections of character-sketches considered here have been of little interest to American literary history, apart from some occasional extractions of “information,” that they attest to “archive trouble.” Remarkably, there is something vaguely archival about all of these works marginalized in the American literary archive—in their very character *as surveys*, *as collections* of character-sketches—and the fact that they have survived in a sad sort of half-life in American literary history by being periodically put to use in this way only underscores the point. In order *both* to entertain the idea that these various collections of character-sketches comprise a distinct, unique, and formative mode of writing in the antebellum period, *and* to account for the fact that these works are not just about literature but are all in some way, in very different ways, literary, let them be called literary archives, but not as a genre distinction. For, as discussed above, when it comes to genre, many of these works would have to go by different names, as poems, novels, and tales. Except, that is, for *Autography*, owing to which one might say that *Autography* is the American literary archive par excellence.

*Autography* is not just vaguely archival, but materially archival, as a product of the past that would be a source of information about it, which is also, quite literally, a storehouse of manuscripts. In *Archive Fever* Derrida asks, “is not the copy of an impression already a sort of archive?” (ibid. 28) To entertain even the possibility of such a question in relation to *Autography*, is to entertain the idea that every single one of the some odd one-hundred-and-fifty facsimile signatures Poe printed over the course of the series to appear as autographs is each, in itself, “a sort of archive.” On the one hand, this is true and in a very real way, since each and every one of these so-called “autographs,”<sup>19</sup> before it was a facsimile signature, was just a signature. Each and every one of the exemplary objects of *Autography* has (or at least had) a history, is in itself a storehouse of its own history as a materially iterated impression. On the other hand, the very design of *Autography* meant that the history of these signatures as signatures would be almost surely erased as such in being wrenched from their original contexts, mechanically copied, and put into the service of another context as facsimiles or autographs. This is as much as to say that *Autography* can only be archival insofar as it manifests “archive trouble,” where it can be found “anarchiving” itself, and this is where the “archive trouble” of *Autography* turns to “*mal d’archive*,” “archive fever.” In Poe’s editorial commentary for *Autography*, wherein he explores the efficacy of that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character,” he does not remark on the signature with anything near the frequency with which he remarks on the general characteristics of the handwriting under consideration, but, then, many of his observations on this front seem to take him rather far afield from describing

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<sup>19</sup> “So-called,” because, what one generally means by an autograph is something written by hand, when what Poe asks his reader to accept in *Autography* is the idea of an autograph-in-print.

handwriting. When, for instance, Poe remarks on the color and quality of paper and ink, the presence or absence of rule-lines (whether hand-drawn or mechanically produced), the color and size of wax seals (even noting instances where a wafer or stamp is used make the impression on the seal), or ventures educated guesses as to the writing implements used (whether steel pen or goose-feather quill), he is not describing handwriting as much as he is describing the physical specimens of handwriting (the MSS., manuscripts) he effectively had to destroy in order to accomplish his design in *Autography*, almost as if he were trying to compensate for the fact.

That should suffice as a very general picture of the literary archive of *Autography* and, going hand-in-hand with it, its “archive trouble,” which it will be the object this dissertation to explore in greater detail. In Part I, the notion of “archive trouble” will prove particularly efficacious for charting the history of what happens to the literary archive of *Autography* when it becomes the object of various modes of collection, canonization and archivization, in as and by the history of Poe’s *Collected Works* (see, “The Purloined Letter of *Autography*”); in “The *Autography* of ‘The Purloined Letter’” the notion of the archive as “archive trouble” will be treated for its more general thematic relevance to Poe’s *corpus* through a study of his tales of ratiocination, the Dupin tales in particular. Throughout, the thesis of this dissertation is a series of two<sup>20</sup> questions that irresistibly follow upon a remarkable, even impossible coincidence, as the very coincidence of this coincidence: How can it be that the one work of Poe’s never accorded a place in any canon and never given a sure place in the American literary archive

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution*: “Since the minimum number needed to constitute a series is three (even if there are only two items in a series, the idea of their serial relationship is already a third thing)” (Irwin 38-39).

generally, is itself an American literary archive? How can it be that the writer most famous for his anomalous situation in American literary history—always *uniquely apart and uniquely a part*—is found in his most unread of works not just surveying the very landscape to which he is traditionally thought to belong only tenuously, but doing so in a particular medium of surveying widely popular among his contemporaries and one which he did more than anyone else to popularize? Although the object of this dissertation is confined to *Autography*—which is to say, to its anomalous situation in relation to Poe’s anomalous situation in American literary history—the implication of this series of questions is that the echo of an entirely other literary world is at stake in it.

Part I

**The Purloined Letter of *Autography***

“I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the Hotel.”  
 - G —, The Prefect of police

I began this dissertation illustrating (all too quickly and schematically) that Poe’s *Autography*—this series of articles, this thing, this event—marks the site of certain “archive trouble,” that it partakes in American literary history chiefly by not partaking in it, that *Autography*’s place has no place, is no place, a not taking place. In a way, too, it has no place taking place. In not taking place it has found its proper place. However, what is odd (“excessively *odd*”) about the immitigable absence *Autography* presents to American literary history—about the cultural amnesia in which it has for so long been entombed that it must remain to some extent essentially forgotten, even in this dissertation which will have made an unprecedented effort to remember *Autography* to the history in which has (had) no place—is the simple fact that *Autography* has been at least adequately remembered to American literary history. While there is no question as to *Autography*’s not being in the Poe canon, it has been, in a word, archived. *Autography* has been archived, certainly not so excessively and redundantly as, say, “The Raven,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Gold-Bug,” “The Black Cat,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and the like: works of Poe’s which have been reprinted in countless books, reproduced in every imaginable medium (from films to flash-mobs), and have audience wherever one may travel in the world (at least one of which would probably be immediately recognized by your average high-school sophomore, hair-dresser, taxi driver, or politician, *and immediately recognized as bearing the signature of Poe*).

*Autography* has been archived, perhaps not even so well as, say, “The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether,” “Landor’s Cottage,” and “X-ing a Paragrab”: works of Poe’s which have been the subject of many fine studies while never being accorded the sort of importance one attributes to the titles listed above, but which nonetheless have always had their place, however minor, in the canon of Poe’s writings.

Still, the facts are these: *Autography* (at least some series within the series or event within the event) has been reprinted in landmark editions of Poe’s collected works since 1875 and has been referenced by prominent biographers of Poe since 1850. More recently, *Autography* has been scanned into the digital archives of nineteenth-century American periodical literature which have increased dramatically in scale and scope in the last ten years, and would therefore have appeared among the listed results of any search of these electronic databases performed with the name of Poe or any one of the over one hundred names which the series counts among the most distinguished American *literati*. The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore has also furnished a transposition of *Autography* from print to a digital medium on its popular website, [eapoe.org](http://eapoe.org). There readers can view an online reproduction of the series that, sadly, lacks the autographs but the absence of which is somewhat compensated for by the useful biographical information linked to many of the names that appear there, which are often automatically cross-referenced between *Autography*, Poe’s critical writings and correspondence, and Poe scholarship at large; there is also a fully linked “Index of Authors in ‘Autography’” which will direct a viewer to the entry in *Autography* for any name that may happen to stand out among the rather impressive list. The notion of autography even made a brief

cameo in Matthew Pearl's New York Times Bestselling novel from 2007, *The Poe Shadow*.

So, the situation I'm trying to frame here is this: even if someone had only happened upon the word "autographer" in *The Poe Shadow* (Pearl 29), or the titles "Autography" or "A Chapter on Autography" in a biography or critical commentary on Poe, and then just "Googled it," he or she would find *Autography*. Put simply, *Autography* is in the archive. It is just there, hiding in plain sight. Yet, "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am" that *Autography* is not in the archive (UP 923). It is simply not in the archive for its being not simply in the archive. Anyone who would see *Autography* there in its "hyperobtrusive situation" in the American literary archive will have been duped (UP 931).

What follows is a survey of the history of Poe's collected works, already a fraught and complex history which proves, as might be expected, particularly troubled when it comes to *Autography*, from the perspective of what I will call, here and throughout this dissertation, *Autography* series history. In the terms of the thesis of this dissertation, this survey may be read as a chronicle of the "archive trouble" which must arise from a work which is itself a literary archive of Poe's being submitted to variously established, contested, and renewed efforts to collect, canonize, and archive Poe's *Works*. As I will show, throughout the history of Poe's collected works, archiving the literary archive of *Autography* produces views on this most anomalous work which are all in different ways partial and incomplete; each time uniquely the information given about *Autography*, even if just in the shape of the letter of text itself, proves in some way mis-taken: mis-informed, informed by mis-understanding, or culpable in disseminating mis-information.



In sum, this survey will track the ways in which *Autography* remains missing from its place in the American literary archive, even as I desperately chase after those ephemeral moments where it might be seen to take its proper place, only to find it (always already) purloined, *volée*, flown: “never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away,” as Derrida says in *Archive Fever* (91).

Another aim of the survey, however, is to explore the ways in which even these partial and incomplete views on *Autography* are all in some sense trying to take *Autography* into account, even if they do so (as they so often do) only vaguely, indirectly, or accidentally, and even if (perhaps especially when) they do not do so at all. The occasion of a work being collected among a collected works will always in some sense already imply a certain interpretive stance in relation to the work. For instance, the first time *Autography* was ever collected among Poe’s *Works* the letter of Poe’s text was significantly altered so as to have many of the autographs and Poe’s editorial commentaries appended to them missing from their place. The textual status of *Autography* implied in this unlicensed revision or hijacking of the letter of *Autography* seems to confirm the thesis of this dissertation, that *Autography*, this series of articles, this thing, this event, so long missing from its place in the American literary archive, is itself an archive, and, just like an edition of Poe’s *Works*, can be collected and re-collected as is the editor’s wont. This initial (deferred) entry of *Autography* into Poe’s collected works will prove much more complicated, however, for the way in which this re-collection of *Autography* survives for decades, (more or less unwittingly) reprinted by subsequent editions of Poe’s works that would seem to want to forget the broader context of re-collection in which the forgotten re-collection of *Autography* takes place.

I will conclude my survey of Poe's collected works with a brief reflection on the situation left to *Autography* series history today. Noting an apparent forgetting of *Autography*'s being forgotten in some recent works by Jonathan Elmer and Meredith McGill, which have come closer to founding a critical conversation on *Autography* than at any other time in history, I will consider *Autography* series history today as arrested in a moment of in-decision between, on the one hand, the extraordinary richness of the untapped potential of this most anomalous work of Poe's and, on the other hand, a sense that *Autography* has gone neglected for so long that its very legacy is to remain in some way unknown, unnoticed, forgotten. I dream here of Derrida's writing on the purloined letter in "The Purveyor of Truth." Of a writing that is "missing from its place" ("*manque à sa place*"), having a "lack in its place," it cannot justly be said that even "this lack has its place [*manque a sa place*]" (*The Post Card* 425). With the purloined letter, that is, the purloined letter of the purloined letter of "The Purloined Letter," vaguely in view here (where it will be much more in the foreground in the subsequent chapter on "The *Autography* of 'The Purloined Letter'"), this survey might also be read as a fiction of detective work, like "The Purloined Letter," wavering somewhere between a *whodunit* and a *whatdunit*. While my "militantly melancholic" work of mourning for the purloined letter of *Autography* will periodically remind itself of the fact (as a beam of light through green glass) that *Autography* is just there, in the archive, my sensibilities are more intimately attuned to the prolonged and failed machinations of the Prefect of police; endlessly boring holes and excavated dark corners disclosing nothing but what is already missing from its place will be, happily, too, for me, "as good as it gets."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Geoffrey Bennington, *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of*

The Troubled History of Rufus W. Griswold and John Henry Ingram

As with Poe's literary legacy more generally, *Autography* series history had an ominous sort of recommencement with Rufus Wilmot Griswold's management of Poe's literary estate after his death in 1849. Of course, today, Griswold is perhaps most well known throughout the world for the inflammatory obituary of Poe pseudonymously published under the name "Ludwig" in the *New York Tribune* on October 9, 1849 (as it happened, the day that Poe was buried, the first time). The effect of Griswold's character assassination of Poe in the context of one of the first widely publicized acknowledgments of his untimely death was so profound that this little pseudonymous article has very nearly eclipsed Griswold's own literary legacy even in America, save for his luminous anthologies of American literature. Not long after, Griswold's own character was further brought into question by the supposedly self-serving way he went about compiling (with the assistance of poor Miss Clemm) Poe's life's work for publication in *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, which contained a re-edition of Griswold's memoir, expanded with bibliographic and "bio-graphic" detail.

No doubt Griswold's memoir of Poe is deserving of the ignominy with which it has long been unequivocally associated; however, it is less often noted these days that, whatever distortions Griswold would have embedded in Poe's legacy forevermore, his *Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* remained the definitive compilation of Poe's works for over half a century, and every subsequent edition of Poe's *Works* owes some specific debt to the Griswold-edition. After all, this was the first place that Poe's poetry shared a cover with his prose, the first place that his critical writings were collected at all; this is

the edition Charles Baudelaire had to hand for his breakthrough translations of Poe into French. While biographers of Poe and subsequent editors of his works have had to work tirelessly to correct Griswold's campaign of misinformation (from the Memoir itself to inexplicable errors in Poe's texts)—notable among them, John Henry Ingram, James Albert Harrison, and Arthur Hobson Quinn—the necessity of this editorial labor only underscored and even prolonged the staying-power of the Griswold edition, where, I come to it now, *Autography* was not included among Poe's collected works.

*Autography* is mentioned once in the Griswold-edition and, of all places, in the notorious Memoir (both the original, pseudonymously published obituary and its later expanded editions) in the midst of Griswold's account of what he calls “one of the most active and brilliant periods of [Poe's] literary life” (G 3:xvii), his editorship of *Graham's Magazine* from February 1841 to May 1842. Griswold refers to *Autography* as having “challenged attention” (ibid.), which is his cagey way of acknowledging the fact that *Autography* was quite popular among the American readership of its day. Now, Griswold's unqualified praise of Poe extends to only a handful of works, most of which are to this day considered to be among Poe's masterpieces: for instance, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Raven,” and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” Like all of these works, *Autography* was almost unequivocally favorably noticed among Poe's contemporaries, but, unlike all these works, this immediate recognition of *Autography's* value and interest did not translate into a more enduring sort of fame and notoriety. To this day it remains one of the most profound paradoxes in *Autography* series history that something that proved so popular among the American readership of the antebellum

period would be so promptly forgotten by American literary history, especially as it so compulsively returns to this period in search of the origins of “the national literature.”

Not until 1875 would *Autography* make an appearance among Poe’s collected works, and when it did it did so pronouncedly, as the title-work of the fourth volume of John Henry Ingram’s *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Still, *Autography* “challenged attention”; its transposition to book-form remained incomplete. Moreover, a strange, chiasmatic reversal marks this site of *Autography*’s deferred entry into Poe’s collected works. Poe’s reputed nemesis, Griswold, singles it out as a rare silver lining in a dark and dismal career and then does not bother to collect it among the *Works*; then Ingram, who by all accounts made one of the greatest efforts to redeem Poe’s legacy from Griswold’s baneful influence (however temperamentally he is thought to have gone about it, a kind of flawed savior), does include at least a part of *Autography* among his edition of the *Works*, but singles it out in *his* memoir of Poe as if it were a blotch on the triumphal landscape of Poe’s editorship of *Graham’s*.

Here is the passage from Ingram in question (Poe might have caught a whiff of plagiarism in the opening sentence of this paragraph, which is uncannily similar to the one which opens the paragraph in Griswold I quoted from above, as though Ingram is trying to right or rewrite the Poe-Memoir line-by-line):

Towards the close of 1840, Mr. George R. Graham, owner of *The Casket*, acquired possession of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, and merging the two publications into one, began the new series as *Graham’s Magazine*, a title which, it is believed, it still retains. [The sentence appears in Griswold as follows: “In November, 1840, Burton’s miscellany was merged in ‘The Casket,’ owned by Mr.

George R. Graham, and the new series received the name of its proprietor, who engaged Poe in its editorship” (G 3:xvii). Now the phrase that most clearly betokens plagiarism here is “the new series,” which is all the more uncanny, since the only point on which Griswold and Ingram are differing at this moment in their respective memoirs is that of “the new series” of *Autography*, that is, the second series within the series.] The new proprietor was only too willing to retain the services of the brilliant editor, and he found his reward in doing so—Edgar Poe, assisted by Mr. Graham’s liberality to his contributors, in little more than two years raising the number of subscribers to the magazine from five to fifty-two thousand. His daring critiques, his analytic essays, and his weird stories, following one another in rapid succession, startled the public into a knowledge of his power. He created new enemies, however, by the dauntless intrepidity with which he assailed the fragile reputations of the small bookmakers, especially by the publication of his papers on “Autography.” (I 1:xl-xli)

As in Griswold’s memoir from twenty-five years previously, this single mention of *Autography* in the memoir prefacing the Ingram-edition is brought up in the context of what is described as a period of almost unqualified success in Poe’s career as an editor of magazines. Ingram’s representation of the dramatic increase in the circulation of *Graham’s Magazine* under Poe’s editorship—“in little more than two years raising the number of subscribers to the magazine from five to fifty-two thousand”—can be taken with little more than a grain of salt since Terence Whalen’s painstaking demystification of “Poe’s fables of circulation” in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*.<sup>22</sup> Yet, there is no

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, 58-75.

denying that Poe did a more than adequate job editing “the new series” of *Graham’s Magazine* at a time when magazines were dying out and new ones being born in their place with greater rapidity than television programming today. Further, “the new series” of *Autography* that ran in *Graham’s* from November 1841 to January 1842 did yield a significant share of Poe’s popularity as the magazine’s editor; Ingram is right that it earned Poe some “new enemies,” but it also earned him some new allies<sup>23</sup> and, more importantly, scores of new readers. All of this is of the utmost importance for *Autography* series history, because what Ingram refers to here as the “papers on ‘Autography,’” and what appeared the following year in the fourth volume of his edition of the *Works*, has reference only to “the new series” of articles that ran in *Graham’s* from November 1841 to January 1842: the two “Chapters on Autography” and the “Appendix of Autographs.” By 1875, the articles of *Autography* that ran in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836 (the two articles entitled “Autography”) still had not made their entry into Poe’s collected works.

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<sup>23</sup> One of the more well-known instances in which Poe is thought to have made a “new enemy” owing to his work in *Autography* concerns Henry T. Tuckerman, who Poe characterized in the December 1841 “Chapter on Autography” for *Graham’s Magazine* as: “a *correct* writer so far as mere English is concerned, but an insufferably tedious and dull one” (GLG 19.6, 276). The following year, in December 1842, Tuckerman, having acquired the editorial chair at the *Boston Miscellany*, rejected “The Tell-Tale Heart” for publication, and had his publishers write to Poe in explanation: “if Mr Poe would condescend to furnish more quiet articles he would be a more desirable correspondent” (PL 388 and Ostrom 1:220). Yet, even in this instance, Tuckerman’s rejection of “The Tell-Tale Heart,” presumably in retaliation for Poe’s biting remarks in *Autography*, became an important milestone in Poe’s relationship with James Russell Lowell, who gladly accepted the tale for publication in the inaugural issue of *The Pioneer* for January 1843. In corresponding with Poe in preparation for the launching of *The Pioneer*, Lowell had also suggested that Poe’s “chapter on Autographs [was] to blame” for Tuckerman’s “verdict” (PL 389), and in reply Poe makes it quite plain that if he had made a “new enemy” in Tuckerman then he was not troubled by the fact: “Touching the ‘Miscellany’—had I known of Mr T’s accession, I should not have ventured to send an article. Should he, at any time, accept an effusion of mine, I should ask myself what twattle I had been perpetrating, so flat as to come within the scope of his approbation” (Ostrom 1:220).

Even apart from these early articles of *Autography*, there is much to be said about the scene of “archive trouble” betokened by the partial inclusion of *Autography* in the Ingram-edition. Firstly, but perhaps least importantly in itself, there is the usual confusion about *Autography*’s entitlement in the Ingram-edition. In his memoir, Ingram refers to the series of articles that ran in *Graham*’s as Poe’s “papers on ‘Autography’” (as though in remembrance of the still uncollected “papers” from the *Messenger* entitled “Autography”), but the volume of the *Works* in which these “papers” are reprinted has them tabled under the title “A Chapter on Autography.” What this title names in the text of the Ingram-edition is a condensation of the two articles Poe entitled “A Chapter on Autography” and the article entitled “An Appendix of Autographs.” Ingram does acknowledge in an editorial note that what he calls “A Chapter on Autography” “originally appeared in two parts” (Ingram 4:50n), but the “two parts” to which he refers has reference, on the one hand, to the two “Chapters on Autography” from November and December 1841 and, on the other hand, to the “Appendix of Autographs” from January 1842. In the text of the Ingram-edition, there is a page-break between these “two parts”: on one side of the break leaving the page half-empty and commencing the next page with the abbreviated title “APPENDIX.” This confusion of *Autography*’s entitlement is important to note mainly for recognition of the way in which Poe’s series of texts becomes altered and revised in the course of its inclusion in the Ingram-edition. For instance, Ingram excised Poe’s editorial preface to the “Chapter on Autography” from December 1841: an alteration that certainly helps to maintain his assertion that the series of articles that appeared in *Graham*’s “originally appeared in two parts” (when, strictly speaking, they were a series of three articles each published a month apart).



Ingram made still more extensive editorial alterations to the series of articles that Poe published in *Graham's* from November 1841 to January 1842, alterations which would be all but invisible to anyone not intimately acquainted with the letter of *Autography*. Most extensive and inexplicable of all is the excision of eighteen autographs from the series and their attending editorial commentaries. Ironically, in the editorial preface to the December 1841 “Chapter on Autography” that Ingram saw fit not to reprint, Poe had written the following with regard to his collection of autographs: “The diligence required in getting together these autographs has been a matter of no little moment, and the expense of the whole undertaking will be at once comprehended” (GLG 19.6, 273). In the spirit of this “diligence,” indeed, in commemoration of Poe’s own “diligence” in accomplishing the design of *Autography* and in response to what is to my mind “a matter of no little moment” in this moment of *Autography* series history—a moment of censure or suppression—I wish to take on the “expense” of at least naming those persons whose autographs the Ingram-edition has missing from their place in *Autography*, for reasons that will never be totally known. They are (preserved here in the order which they appear in *Autography*, where Poe claims to have “thought it unnecessary to preserve any particular order in their arrangement” (GLG 19.5, 225)):

Judge Joseph Hopkinson (GLG 19.5, 232), C. H. Waterman Elsing (ibid. 234), E. F. Ellet (ibid.), Mordecai Manuel Noah (ibid.); (this semicolon marks the break between the November and December articles of *Autography* from 1841 that Ingram elides) Thomas G. Spear (GLG 19.6, 273), Benjamin Matthias (274), “Count” Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro (ibid. 276), Daniel Bryan (ibid.), Joseph Evans Snodgrass (ibid. 280), Andrew McMakin (ibid. 282), John C. McCabe (ibid. 283),

John Tomlin, a.k.a. “Joe Bottom” (ibid.), Thomas Roderick Dew (ibid. 284), Charles J. Peterson (ibid.), George “Gaslight” Foster (ibid. 285), William Cutter (ibid. 287); and, from Poe’s “Appendix of Autographs,” Gulian C. Verplanck (GLG 20.1, 49)...

I cannot even begin to speculate on the reasons behind Ingram’s decision to omit the considerable portion of Poe’s work in *Autography* represented by these names, not least because this is not simply one decision at stake here, but many (who knows how many?) decisions, and, let it be said, this list could have gone on. I could have listed a name here for every bit of Poe’s text missing from its place in *Autography* by virtue of Ingram’s decision to omit the series of articles from 1836, but, as Poe says in *Autography*, “to give *all* would be a work of supererogation” (GLG 19.5, 225), if only because some of the names would have to be repeated.

Still, these were not Ingram’s only alterations to the letter of *Autography*. Scanning the Ingram-edition in the course of my humble work of mourning, while building my modest memorial to *Autography* series history, I happened upon alterations made by Ingram in the portion of Poe’s text that actually appears in the 1874/5-edition of the *Works*. First, I noticed he corrects Poe’s misspellings of Charles West Thomson’s surname and Oliver Wendell Holmes’s middle name,<sup>24</sup> which I thought generous on the whole until happening upon this alteration (which I never would have missed, as it occurs in one of my most beloved sentences in all of *Autography*):

It assures us that the differences which exist among us are differences not of real, but of affected opinion, and that the voice of him who maintains fearlessly what

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<sup>24</sup> In *Autography* Poe refers to the former as “Mr. Thompson” (GLG 19.6, 281) and the latter as “Oliver Wendel Holmes” (GLG 20.1, 47).

he believes honestly, is pretty sure to find an echo (if the speaking be not mad) in the vast heart of the world at large. (I 4:51)

Make sense? Try Poe:

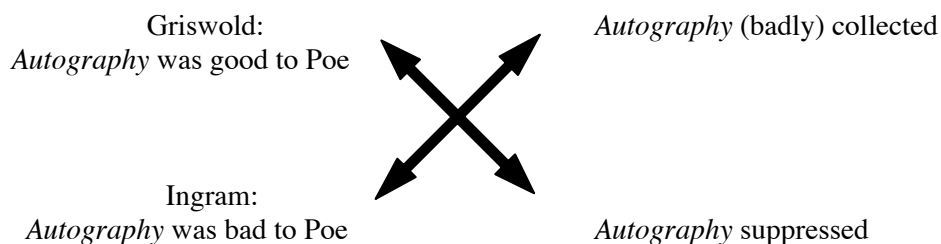
It assures us that the differences which exist among us, [I will grant only Ingram's unnecessary removal of this comma to be in keeping with his editorial duties] are differences not of real, but of affected opinion, and that the voice of him who maintains fearlessly what he believes honestly, is pretty sure to find an echo (if the speaker be not mad) in the vast heart of the world at large. (GLG 20.1, 44 [emphasis added])

I cannot even begin to speak to this particular alteration in the letter of *Autography*, to the countless ways in which what Poe (the supposed speaker) is speaking to here uncannily, even tragically anticipates what Ingram (the speaking speaker) does here. What has he done, exactly? Could this have been an accident? Is he mad? By way of at least approaching the character of Ingram's inexplicable and, most troubling of all, unannounced alterations to the letter of *Autography*, I would like to pose a question (which is really a statement), the beginning of an answer (which is really a question), and between them something between a question and answer.

As to the necessity of Ingram's alterations to *Autography* in the shape of those eighteen autographs and editorial commentaries missing from their place, if these editorial decisions were made with a view merely to economize space in this volume of his *Works*, he surely would not have preserved that half-empty page between the supposed "two parts" of Poe's *Autography* series for *Graham's*, between the (so-called) "Chapter on Autography" and the (so-called) "APPENDIX." As to the fact that Ingram

does not identify any of his extensive alterations to the letter of *Autography*, I will just let Derrida say, in the words of *Archive Fever*: “We will always wonder what, in this *mal d’archive*, he may have burned [*ce qu’il a pu [...] brûler*: what he was able to burn, what he had the power to burn]” (*Archive Fever* 101[155]). So what has Ingram done, exactly? As to the beginning of an answer, I would like merely to cap off my work of mourning for the letter of *Autography* and for those autographs so unceremoniously missing from their place (you may have noticed there were only seventeen names in the roll above, though I had promised eighteen). This name is the spindle atop my modest memorial to *Autography* series history; may it yet be the vane: ...Rufus W. Griswold (GLG 19.6, 275).

A vast network of psycho-historico-graphical readings would have to be called upon to bring into proper relief the scene of “archive trouble” I wish to draw out here about the unique situation of *Autography* in the history of Poe’s collected works in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Poe’s legacy and the very letter of his works began to be piloted by the machinations of his executors. Of course, Griswold has the most famous claim to the title of Poe’s executor, but, as I hope to help illustrate by way of a heuristic that I will call the vane of *Autography* series history, perhaps uniquely as seen from the perspective of *Autography* series history, the wind did not blow in any one direction at once during any one epoch of the editorial declamations and reclamations comprising the turbulent history of Poe’s collected works. At the outset of this survey I remarked a strange, chiasmatic reversal marking the site of *Autography*’s deferred entry into Poe’s collected works, by which I meant to illustrate something like this:



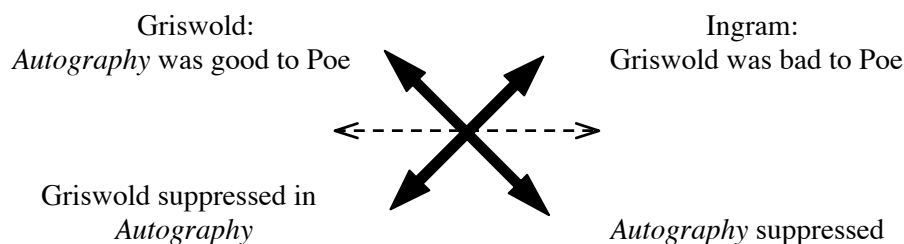
As I noted above, considering Ingram's decision to collect at least a part of *Autography* in his 1874/5-edition of the *Works* in conjunction with Griswold's decision to omit it altogether seems to evince a reversal in each of their valuations of *Autography*, as Griswold remarks in his memoir that *Autography* was, simply put, good to Poe, while Ingram reports in his memoir that it was bad to Poe, making him "new enemies." This latter remark is of particular significance here, since, of all of Poe's so-called "enemies," the one with whom Ingram was most preoccupied throughout his career was Griswold.

In the preface to his 1874/5-edition of *The Works*, Ingram announces his confidence that his new Poe-Memoir will "alter the prevalent idea of Poe's character," which he claims to be so obscured by "misrepresentations [...] copied or quoted" from the "*soi disant* 'Memoir of Edgar Poe' by Rufus W. Griswold [...] that the attempt, at this late period, to refute them, will appear to many an almost hopeless task" (I 1:v-vi). Despite its apparent hopelessness, there is no doubt that refuting Griswold's "misrepresentations" of Poe's life and works is precisely the "task" Ingram set for himself in his memoir, throughout which he dispels many of the mendacious myths Griswold embedded in Poe's biography<sup>25</sup>, spurns Griswold for his "systematic

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<sup>25</sup> Among the "myths" of Poe's biography promulgated by Griswold, according to Ingram: that Poe was expelled from the University of Virginia (I 1:xx-xxii), that "MS. Found in a Bottle" won the \$50 premium for "best Tale" in the now famous contest held by the Baltimore *Saturday Vistor* in 1833 merely because Poe had been "'the first of geniuses who had written legibly'" (I 1:xxviii-xxx), that Poe was dismissed from his editorship of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1837 for

depreciation of Poe’s genius” (I 1:xlii), and just generally devotes himself to debunking Griswold’s “habitual inaccuracy” (I 1:lx), as when, for instance, Ingram points out that *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* collected Poe’s longer and more vituperative sketch of “Thomas Dunn Brown,” rather than the one which actually spurred all the controversy surrounding *The Literati of New York City* entitled “Thomas Dunn English” (I 1:lx). This last charge leveled against Griswold’s editorial malfeasance is particularly funny coming from Ingram, since, as I have shown, Ingram was certainly not loath to altering the letter of Poe’s text in accordance with his own “*animus*” (I 1:xxxviii). In fact, I must adjust the vane to reflect the perpetual climatological shift in Ingram between setting the record straight and (much like Griswold before him) hijacking the letter of Poe’s text for his own aims:



Ingram’s alterations to the letter of *Autography* for its inaugural inclusion among Poe’s collected works in 1874/5 are so extensive and inexplicable as to justify speaking of them, en masse, as a suppression of *Autography*, which, if not as total and complete as Griswold’s suppression of *Autography*, seems almost more disturbing for this fact. I would suggest that the precise character of Ingram’s suppression of the letter of *Autography* is to be sought in the direction of his omission of Griswold’s autograph from

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drunkenness (I 1:xxxv) and quitted his editorship of *Graham’s Magazine* under similar circumstances (I 1:xlili-xliv), and that (once again drunken) Poe had to be forcibly removed from the home of Sarah Helen Whitman by the police after she broke off their engagement in 1848 (I 1:lxxvi-lxxix).

*Autography*, along with Poe's editorial commentary appended to it, which is quite simply the most favorable notice of this supposed "enemy" of Poe's ever penned by Poe. He writes, "MR. GRISWOLD has written much, but chiefly in the editorial way, whether for the papers, or in books. He is a gentleman of fine taste and sound judgment. His knowledge of American Literature, in all its details, is not exceeded by that of any man among us" (GLG 19.6, 275). Imagine these words of Poe's appearing in the Ingram-edition, sharing a cover with Ingram's Memoir and standing alongside such phrases as Ingram uses to characterize Griswold: "a man, who, although several years Poe's junior in age, had, by many years' 'knocking about the world,' gained an experience of its shifts and subterfuges that made him far more than a match for the unworldly nature of our poet" (I 1:xliv), an "implacable enemy" (I 1:lxxxvii), who had shown "fine taste and sound judgment" and "chiefly in the editorial way"!?

Yet, Ingram's suppression of Poe's fair and balanced notice of Griswold in *Autography* is not merely an attempt to consign this particular account of the character of Poe's executor to oblivion, as though to homogenize or "blackwash" the representation of Griswold in the Ingram-edition as the "implacable enemy" of Poe. Rather, it is an attempt to consign Griswold himself to oblivion, and to confirm that he, Ingram, had supplanted Griswold as Poe's editor-in-chief. Ingram explicitly speaks to this attempt to supplant Griswold toward the end of his memoir, though, of course, he does so in the name of doing justice to Poe:

In the preceding "Memoir" an attempt has been made for the first time to do justice to the poet's memory. Many of the dark stains which Griswold cast upon it have been removed, and those which remain, resting as they do solely upon the

testimony of an implacable enemy, and proved liar, may safely be ignored as, in the mild words of Mrs. Whitman, “perverted facts, and baseless assumptions.” (I 1:lxxxvii)

Ingram’s language is revealingly incongruous here in this extended metaphor of the stain. At first, he says his Memoir has “removed” (but removed to where?) “many of the dark stains [...] Griswold cast upon” Poe’s memory. Then, he says, while some stains “remain” (remain where?), those “may safely be ignored,” “resting as they do solely upon the testimony of an implacable enemy, and proved liar.” There are three distinct claims here (strictly speaking, one claim, a concession, and a command), no two of which entirely make sense together in “the speaking” of this passage, which is a beautiful illustration of what is called, after Freud, “kettle-logic”:

1) Ingram claims to have removed some stains. 2) He concedes that some stains remain. 3) He suggests, ignore the stains. Now, some questions (the only mode in which to address such “kettle-logic”): If it were at all possible for Ingram to have “the dark stains [...] Griswold cast upon [Poe’s memory] [...] removed” (but removed to where?), then why would he not have removed all the stains? If some stains yet remain, by which I understand him to mean that there is more rigorous biographical and bibliographical research yet to be done in order to truly set the record straight, then whyever would one want to ignore them? If these stains can be simply ignored, based on the fact that Griswold is a “proved liar” and an “implacable enemy” of Poe, then why would any of them have to be “removed” in the first place? Ingram is trapped here in a double-bind, “*en mal d’archive.*”



On the one hand, he feels he has to do away with Griswold in order to set the record straight. Five years after the publication of his edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, in 1880, he is much less ambiguous on this point; indeed, he is emphatic. Griswold's memoir is, he says, "*now* suppressed and consigned to that limbo whither all 'myths in the life of Poe' are *now* being consigned" (Ingram "The Poe Wrangle" [emphasis added]). On the other hand, Ingram simply cannot do without Griswold. Griswold's memoir is not only his principal target but also his main source—in a word, his asset—and whatever stains he may have "removed" (but removed to where?), the fact remains that Ingram's memoir follows Griswold's at almost every turn, as though trying to set the record straight in-step with the latter's "misrepresentations." What Ingram does not seem to realize, and this blindness on his part partly informs the "kettle-logic" I was drawing out above regarding the staying power of the stain, is that so often returning to Griswold's Memoir, in effect, only underscores and prolongs its staying power. Ultimately, Ingram cannot have "removed" any of Griswold's "misrepresentations," because they are archived forevermore in Griswold. Even if every single copy of Griswold's Memoir and, by extension, every copy of *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* were removed from the face of the earth<sup>26</sup>, to return nevermore, Ingram's Memoir

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<sup>26</sup> William Fearing Gill, one of the earliest American biographers of Poe to try to actively supplant the authority of Griswold's memoir—which he characterized as a long-standing "representative biography of the poet, [which] was, to all intents and purposes, a tissue of the most glaring falsehoods ever combined in a similar work" (Gill [1877] 4)—may have been proposing just such an apocalyptic means of combating Griswold's staying power two years prior to the publication of his *Life of Edgar Allan Poe*, in 1875 (the very year that saw the complete publication of the Ingram-edition), when he wrote the following: "[S]hould any man of taste and sense, not acquainted with Poe, be so unfortunate as to look at Mr. Griswold's preface before reading the poetry, it is extremely probable he will throw the book into the fire, in indignation at the self conceit and affected smartness by which the preface is characterized. As a matter of fact, the demand for the complete edition of Poe's works containing the Griswold memoir is so limited, that within a few months, calling for this edition at two of the largest book-houses in

would become a testimony, perhaps the privileged testimony, for what Griswold had said. In short, Ingram cannot remove, suppress, or consign Griswold from the archive without removing, suppressing, or consigning himself from the archive as well. Thus, in a way, the staying power of the Griswold stain is a testament to Ingram's own staying power. It is the very germ of his self-exaltation and self-preservation as Poe's editor-in-chief. Ingram may very well have ignored this fact, but that does not necessarily mean he will have done so "safely."

### Autography and the Re-Naturalization of Poe's Works

It is no mere coincidence that Ingram's emphatic claim in 1880 to have "*now* suppressed and consigned" Griswold's Memoir to "limbo," was prompted by a criticism of his own Memoir by the man who was to be the next editor-in-chief of Poe's literary legacy, Richard Henry Stoddard. In fact, Stoddard had begun working on his own memoir of Poe as early as 1872, a premature version of which appeared in the *Harper's Monthly Magazine* from September of that year. Expanded and only somewhat refined versions of this memoir would subsequently appear in his 1875-edition of Poe's collected poetry and in *The Select Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Prose* from 1880 before being canonized in his own six-volume edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* in 1884.<sup>27</sup> The editorial wrangle that ensued between Ingram and Stoddard from the mid-

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Boston, I was unable to obtain a copy, and was informed that the calls for it were so few that they, the dealers, were not encouraged to keep this edition of Poe in stock" (Gill [1875] 280-281). It is also worth noting here that in his preface to *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe* Gill had expressed the hope for this work that it might, in part, "serve to answer the complaint of an English writer [namely, John Henry Ingram], that 'no trustworthy biography of Poe has yet appeared in his own country'" (Gill [1877] 5).

<sup>27</sup> Stoddard himself owned up to the inaccuracies and failings of the various editions of his Memoir in his review of George E. Woodberry's *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe* from 1885: "It was

1870s to the mid-1880s had to do, of course, with the fact that they were concurrently publishing what by today's standards appear to be very similar works on Poe.<sup>28</sup> Stoddard also had allegiances to Griswold, however, and lingering bitterness toward Poe, which no doubt exacerbated tensions between him and Ingram. Indeed, Stoddard's edition of the *Works*, like that of Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry, which appeared ten years later in 1894/5, is most well-known today for its defense of Griswold as Poe's first and intended literary executor against Ingram's attempt to have Griswold's Memoir, Griswold's authority, and, indeed Griswold's very presence in Poe's legacy "suppressed and consigned to that limbo whither all 'myths in the life of Poe' [were then, according to Ingram] being consigned." Between Stoddard and Stedman and Woodberry there was a concentrated effort on the part of editors of Poe's collected works in the late nineteenth-century to reclaim Poe not just in the name of Griswold but in the name of a corporate American-ness of Poe's literary legacy, which they had perceived to have been denaturalized by Ingram's editorial authority.

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my misfortune," he writes, "to be an early worker in the field which has yielded him such an abundant harvest, and I was at least eight years in reaping the obloquy that grew out of that good-natured action. My garners were heaped with forage which was hardly fit for army horses in times of famine" (Stoddard "Review *Edgar Allan Poe*" 10). The "forage [...] hardly fit for army horses in times of famine" to which he refers here is Griswold's memoir. For "my misfortune," Stoddard goes on, "dates further back than the [eight years] I have indicated"; it "dates back to the volume of Poe's *Works* that contained Griswold's Memoir," to 1850 (ibid.).

<sup>28</sup> The editors of [eapoe.org](http://eapoe.org) have pointed out that Stoddard and Ingram's careers were also moving in opposite directions at this time. Whereas Stoddard began by composing his Memoir and edited Poe's collected works over a decade later, Ingram had composed his memoir expressly for the publication of his edition of the *Works* and later expanded the memoir for his landmark biography of Poe from 1880, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters and Opinions*. This gave Stoddard something of an advantage over Ingram in having the latter's somewhat hastily composed memoir prefacing 1874/5 edition of the *Works* to hand when he was armed with new facts and/or theories about Poe's controversial biography. However, the difference in orientation between Ingram and Stoddard's careers also gave the former something of an advantage over the latter in that Stoddard's edition of the *Works* owed specific debts to Ingram's editorial labors, significantly so in the case of *Autography*.

Arthur Hobson Quinn speculates that the extensive biographical and editorial labors Stoddard devoted to Poe “can only be explained by his desire to make some money, for he did not like Poe, nor did he appreciate his work” (Quinn 681). However, the articles Stoddard “wrote so often” on the subject of Poe’s life and works plainly show that he had other motivations besides the reasonable desire to make a living (ibid.). Far from any wholesale acceptance of Griswold’s *Memoir* (which Quinn also attributes to him), Stoddard was driven, like Ingram, to set the record straight on certain matters in Poe’s biographical record. He was obsessed, for instance, with dispelling the “myth” that Poe’s birthday is January 19, as all the world now believes it to be (Stoddard “Some Myths” 2). In fact, the circumstance of Poe’s birth was a point on which Stoddard found the memoirs of both Ingram and Griswold unreliably sketchy; he also faults the two previous editors-in-chief of Poe’s life and works for too hastily doing away with Poe’s parents in their accounts of their deaths (ibid. 1-2).

Apart from his pet theories concerning Poe’s biography, however, Stoddard was, on the whole, devoted to unburdening Griswold of the mountain of ignominy heaped upon his name in the four decades that had passed since the publication of that first notorious obituary of Poe. In 1889, Stoddard claimed, contra Ingram, that Griswold “was the life-long friend” and “not the enemy of Poe,” which “was demonstrated by the fact that he collected and edited his verse and prose for nothing” (Stoddard [1885] 111). A similar vindication of Griswold, or, as I will call it, “return to Griswold,” also characterized the 1894/5-edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* edited by Stedman and Woodberry, whose “General Preface” makes clear that theirs was a direct descendent of the Griswold-edition, subtly downplaying the editorial labors of John Ingram in passing:

The works of Poe were collected by Dr. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, his literary executor, and published in three volumes by J. S. Redfield, New York, 1850. The edition, thus authorized was protected until lately by copyrights owned by the publisher, and has remained substantially unchanged in its successive issues, although enlarged in later years; the papers added, and the few corrections made under the stimulus of the English editions of Mr. J. H. Ingram, should, perhaps, be specifically referred to; but the edition is practically as Griswold left it, and should be known by his name. It was good enough for his own time; and, in view of the contemporary uncertainty of Poe's fame, the difficulty of obtaining a publisher, and the fact that the editorial work was not paid for, little fault can justly be found with Griswold, who did secure what Poe in his lifetime could never accomplish,—a tolerably complete collected edition of the tales, reviews, and poems. But after the lapse of nearly half a century, something more may be exacted from those who have had the custody of a great writer's works, and something more is due from those who care for the literature of the country. Poe's fame has spread as widely through the world as that of any imaginative author of America; and longer neglect of the state of his text would be discreditable to men of letters among us, now that his works have passed by law into the common property of mankind. With this conviction the present edition has been undertaken, in order to ascertain and establish as accurate and complete a text of his permanent writings as the state of the sources now permit. (SW 1:v-vi)

I quote this passage at length in order to show the two distinct stated aims of the Stedman-Woodberry edition. The first, as I have mentioned, is to establish a direct line of

descent from the Griswold-edition to this latest edition of Poe's *Works*. The self-justifying tone in which the editors attempt to clear Griswold of any "fault" in the preservation of Poe's legacy—citing the "uncertainty of Poe's fame," "the difficulty of obtaining a publisher," and, like Stoddard before them, "the fact that [Griswold's] editorial work was not paid for"<sup>29</sup>—is proof enough that this return to Griswold was a rather uncharacteristic gesture for persons now in "custody of a [certain] great writer's works." The second stated aim of the Stedman-Woodberry edition is to "ascertain and establish as accurate and complete a text of his permanent writings as the state of the sources now permit." Now, the editors do not mention, though they knew it all too well, that many of the errors in the text of Poe's collected works traced back to the Griswold-edition. In order to overcome the incongruity between these two aims, then, their rationalization for Griswold's ham-handed custodianship of Poe's works becomes the very impetus of their own editorial labors. It is as if they are saying, "The Griswold-edition 'was good enough for [its] own time,' but not for ours. The former 'uncertainty of Poe's fame' has now been decided; his 'fame has spread as widely through the world as that of any imaginative author of America; and longer neglect of the state of his text would be discreditable to men of letters among us.'" So, for these editors, "the state of [Poe's] text" is something that should be respected and handled with care but only contingently, not because Poe was a great American writer but because some tempest of fashion had later made him decidedly famous in America. Stedman and Woodberry undertake an extensive revision of "the state of [Poe's] text" not because the mangled

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Burton R. Pollin's refutation of this claim in "The Living Writers of America: A Manuscript by Edgar Allan Poe," *Studies in the American Renaissance* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1991), 151.

state in which “Griswold left it” is discreditable in itself or to the memory of Poe or the legacy of his work but because its “longer neglect [...] would be discreditable” to them.

So Poe’s status as a great American writer seems to have been confirmed in precisely the moment that the editorial authority of the Stedman-Woodberry edition is founded. Yet, how might this remarkable coincidence relate to the fact that Stedman and Woodberry also cite the passing of “[Poe’s] works [...] by law into the common property of mankind” as an impetus behind their labors? The representation of the founding of their editorial authority begs us to accept the historical coincidence of the passing of Poe’s works into the public domain, a shift from a former “uncertainty of Poe’s fame” to a concerted international consensus about his status as one of the greatest American writers (which certainly did not happen overnight but must have been some time in the making), and the availability of certain “sources” which make possible an unprecedented capacity on their part “to ascertain and establish as accurate and complete a text of his permanent writings as the state of [these] sources now permit.” I would suggest that another point deserves consideration in this all but providential representation of the impetus for 1894/5-edition of Poe’s *Works*: a current of nationalism, which, far from appearing as just another illuminating point in the awe-inspiring alignment of the stars under which Stedman and Woodberry conducted their good work, may be seen as the absented force or matter binding their constellation together.

This current of nationalism was not the sole province of the Stedman-Woodberry edition but was underway decades prior in Stoddard’s work on Poe and in his edition of the *Works*. Stoddard had intimated twice in the short piece “Some Myths in the Life of Poe” from 1880 that Ingram had no business evaluating much less condemning

Griswold's performance as Poe's literary executor simply for the fact that he was not, like Poe and Griswold, American: "Mr. John H. Ingram, of England," as Stoddard introduces him in the article, "has [...] *made it his business* for several years past to instruct Poe's countrymen in all that relates to him" (Stoddard "Some Myths" 1 [emphasis added]). What is no more than an undercurrent of nationalism in "Some Myths in the Life of Poe" turns to a veritable deluge of nationalistic banter in the conspicuously anonymous indictment of Ingram published in the same issue of the *New York Independent* in which Stoddard's piece appeared, entitled "Ingram *in re* Poe *et al.*" After a derisive survey of Ingram's literary labors prior to editing Poe's works (which culminates in a mockumentary of his efforts to aid Poe's ailing surviving sister, Rosalie Poe, as an attempt "to attach himself and his talents (such as they were) to the much-maligned memory of Poe and to whitewash the same forever"), the writer goes on to say:

We have collected the literary antecedents of Mr. Ingram in order that American readers may know who it is that has undertaken to enlighten them in regard to Edgar Allan Poe. He started with the assumption that Poe was without reputation in his own country, than which there never was a greater absurdity; but that henceforth he would have an immortal one, now that he had taken him in hand! He seemed to think that he had a monopoly of all that related to Poe, and that no one but himself could possibly know anything about him. [...] What motive, pray, has actuated any American who has written about Poe — we will not say in the past, knowing the opinion which Mr. Ingram holds of Dr. Griswold, but — since Mr. Ingram has constituted himself the defender of Poe? We know of no motive except the simple one of telling the truth, so far as it can be ascertained; and our



means of detecting and divining motives are equal, if not superior, to any that Mr. Ingram has discovered for himself or has had imagined for him by others. We know, better than he can, the estimation in which Poe's conduct was held during his life, and the estimation in which his reputation has been held since his death; and we know that the first was generous, rather than just, and that the last is as great as, if not greater than, is warranted by the intellectual value of his work. Mr. Ingram's enigmatical allusion to motives which do not exist is a rhetorical trick, which he would hardly have used if his case were a good one. He is merely blackguarding the plaintiff's attorneys. ("Ingram *in re* Poe *et al*" 14, col. 2-3)

Much could be said here *in re* the ways in which this tirade speaks more to the malignity of Americans than anything Ingram ever charged to Griswold *et al*.<sup>30</sup> What is especially of note, however, and it echoes Stoddard's more understated comments to the same effect, is the assumption that Ingram's attempt to teach Poe's countrymen something about Poe is presumptuous by virtue of his not being American and, conversely, that by virtue of being American one is automatically more in the know *in re* Poe because he was American. The audacity of this presumption (a marvelous, early example of American exceptionalism when it comes to Poe) is all the more pronounced for being pronounced in

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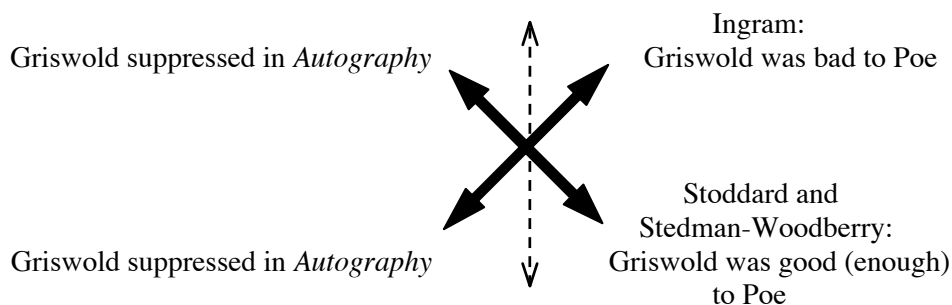
<sup>30</sup> Ingram was, of course, not entirely immune from these nationalistic wranglings. He had famously written in his Memoir with regard to Griswold's campaign of misinformation: "the wonder is, not so much that the biographer's audacious falsifications should have obtained credit abroad, as that no American should have yet produced as complete a refutation of them as could and *should* have been given years ago" (I 1:xliv). However, Ingram was also right to point out in his reply to this tirade that the anonymous writer distorts what he, Ingram, expressly said in his memoir, that "[he] never stated 'that Poe was without reputation in his own country,' nor asserted 'that henceforth he would have an immortal one, now that I [Ingram] had taken him in hand'" ("The Poe Wrangle"). In fact, Ingram's charge to Poe's compatriots in his memoir of Poe is much more biting than this. For there he appeals precisely to the sort of naïve nationalistic prepossession of Poe that Stoddard *et al* are boasting. He is saying, in effect, that as an American one *should be* automatically more in the know (or at least automatically more interested in being in the know) *in re* Poe because he was American.

the same breath as a devaluation of Poe's life and work. "We know, better than he can, the estimation in which Poe's conduct was held during his life, and the estimation in which his reputation has been held since his death; and we know that the first was generous, rather than just, and that the last is as great as, if not greater than, is warranted by the intellectual value of his work." While history certainly has not borne out this assessment as truth (and our writer claims to "know of no motive except the simple one of telling the truth"), one might forgive it as a naïve conception of "intellectual value" of the kind that hindered critical interest in Poe in America for so long (or at least overlook it in view of other, more worthy examples of this naïveté).

What is downright funny here, however, is our writer's boasting of having "means of detecting and divining motives [...] equal, if not superior, to any that Mr. Ingram has discovered for himself or has had imagined for him by others." It is funny because not to be expected that our writer ever noticed, given the fact that Stoddard never noticed, nor Stedman and Woodberry after him, that Ingram had hidden his most pointed attempt to suppress Griswold and consign him to "limbo," and had done so in plain sight. Of course, Stoddard *et al* would never have thought to look in their own re-naturalized editions of Poe's *Works* for Ingram's real slight on American "means of detection and divining." Stedman and Woodberry proudly announce that "[h]undreds of errors have been corrected" in "the state of [Poe's] text," for their edition of the *Works*, while failing to mention that most of them were put there by Griswold; "and, though the editors cannot hope that all the original and accumulated faults have been amended, they have spared no pains to verify whatever was susceptible of any doubt" (SW 1:vii-viii), "[W]hatever was susceptible of any doubt": this vague editorial directive evidently did not extend to, I

come back to it now, the “Chapter on Autography” collected in the ninth-volume of the Stedman-Woodberry edition. The editors’ seemingly off-handed reference to “the papers added, and the few corrections made under the stimulus of the English editions of Mr. J. H. Ingram” is especially ironic in light of the fact that one of these “papers added” to Poe’s collected works by Ingram was the “Chapter on Autography” collected in the 1874/5-edition of the *Works*, after Griswold had all together suppressed *Autography* (save for that one brief remark in his memoir, where he says *Autography* “challenged attention,” and this is still a propos, since decades later *Autography* is still challenging attention). This self-same version of the “Chapter on Autography” was also collected in the sixth-volume of Stoddard’s edition of the *Works* in 1884. Through those inexplicable and unannounced alterations to the letter of *Autography*, Ingram was able to attest to his own staying power in the midst of a concentrated effort on the part of subsequent American editors of Poe’s *Works* in the late nineteenth-century to suppress and consign him to “limbo,” just as he had tried to do with Griswold years previously.

I must now adjust the vane to reflect the ebbs and flows of a tide of Americanism that would want nothing more than to repatriate Ingram—save for, perhaps, to suspend him in “limbo”: “not yet crossed the Atlantic” (“Ingram *in re* Poe *et al*” 14, col. 2-3)—while remaining ignorant of, just never seeming to notice, the Ingram immigrated and naturalized on the very authority of those who sought to supplant him.



Stoddard and Stedman and Woodberry after him all take advantage of Ingram’s editorial labors in reprinting the “Chapter on Autography” from the 1874/5-edition of the *Works*, but in so doing Ingram seems to be taking advantage of them. The American editors that would seek to re-naturalize Poe’s *Works* reprint a “Chapter on Autography” that had been significantly altered by Ingram, and, in that one notable case, to suppress the autograph and Poe’s own generous account of the character of the very man whom the American editors are trying to restore to his proper place in the phallo-genetic economy of the *Poe et al*, as the categorical American executor whose mantle they would don as the new, resident American editors-in-chief. One reason the heuristic of the vane immediately suggested itself to me in plotting the scenes of “archive trouble” comprising *Autography* series history, one which might be more readily apparent if it appeared here with its customary emblematic woodcock, is that what is being compulsively contested here is the question of who or what occupies the seat of phallic power in the maintenance of Poe’s literary legacy. (“Weather-cock,” after all, being just another name for the vane.)

As I have tried to show, the history of Poe’s collected works is marked by highly charged, sometimes violent claims to authority, manifesting as *both* challenges to pre-established seats of executorial power (like Ingram’s challenge to Griswold) *and* reclamations of overturned seats of executorial power in order to issue new challenges to

newly-installed forms of editorial authority (Stoddard and Stedman and Woodberry's return to Griswold). However, perhaps as seen uniquely from the perspective of *Autography* series history, the history of Poe's collected works never affords a clear picture of to whom authority ever really "belongs" but rather contradictory impressions of various paths of authority in transit. The nationalistic undercurrents of these relations make them more distinct, and yet, there is Ingram iterating his editorial privilege in the very re-naturalized editions of Poe's *Works* that would want to exile him, and, in that one remarkable case, suppressing the name if not the signature of Griswold in the context of a concerted effort to reestablish a new line of succession from it. At the same time, the suppression of Griswold in *Autography* by the very editions of Poe's *Works* that ground their own editorial authority in a return to Griswold, and the resultant return or revenge of Ingram in the very editions of *The Works* which sought to suppress him, all of this is made possible by the fact that Ingram had so violently taken possession of Poe's text in the first place. Indeed, one could argue that the only version of *Autography* to appear in Poe's collected works in the nineteenth century is less Poe's "Chapter on Autography" than it is Ingram's. And who would deny that this violent effacement of the letter of Poe's text demands restitution in turn? Ingram's editorial authority may only be said to reconstitute itself in the Poe *et al*, even if only as a sort of haunting-effect of reprinting, by virtue of decisions and revisions that bend if not break the strictures of that authority.

On the other hand, I would merely suggest at this point that all the questions of naming, of signature, of editorial authority, and of individual and nationalist character that seem to arise from the strange, transient and anomalous iterations of Ingram's former glory in Stoddard's and Stedman and Woodberry's present glory might not manifest from

the perspective of *Autography* series history merely incidentally or coincidentally, but rather as effects of what is not one work of Poe's among others, but one overtly and ambivalently preoccupied with questions of naming, of signature, of editorial authority, and of individual and nationalist character. I would suggest that Ingram is not appropriating or hijacking the letter of *Autography* to as great effect as *Autography* is inhabiting, if not appropriating or hijacking, the history of Poe's collected works. I would suggest the possibility, in short, that *Autography* is not so much being made an object of the history of Poe's collected work as the history of Poe's collected works is being made an object of *Autography*. In Part II of this dissertation, "The Hoax which is Not One: Poe's *Jeu d'Esprit* and the Literary Circle of *Autography*" the possibility of such effects is explored in detail.

James A. Harrison's Unprecedented Archivization of *Autography*

All this "archive trouble" of *Autography* series history could have vanished in 1902, with the publication of James Albert Harrison's seventeen-volume *Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. The "Editor's Preface" to this latest edition of Poe's collected works (for a truly "complete works" of Poe still remains to be seen) evinces a pronounced distrust of every previous edition of the *Works*, owing especially to their having "more or less faithfully followed" the Griswold edition (H 1:vii). "After a thorough examination of all the existing editions of Poe's works," Harrison writes,

the editor became convinced that no satisfactory text of the poet's writings could be established without direct study of the original sources in which these writings first and last appeared. Existing editions conflicted in so many points that no

course was left except to reject them all [...] and extract a new and absolutely authentic text from the magazines, periodicals, and books of tales and poems which Poe himself had edited or to which he had contributed. (ibid.)

Not everyone was pleased with Harrison's unprecedented editorial policy of returning to the "original sources" of Poe's text as the basis for his "canon" (ibid.). In December 1902, an anonymous reviewer for *The Nation* (later identified by Killis Campbell as George E. Woodberry, of the Stedman-Woodberry edition<sup>31</sup>) voiced certain reservations about the "facsimile method of editing" employed by the Virginia-edition (Woodberry "New Editions of Poe" 445). After a compelling debate between the reviewer and Harrison's text concerning Poe's *The Literati of New York City* series, the reviewer resolves: "the editor's prejudice against Griswold has led him to reject Poe's own late and mature revision of his major critical writings in favor of these early, scattered, and fragmentary forms in which they appeared in the magazines in their original helter-skelter production" (ibid. 446).<sup>32</sup> Whatever reservations one might have about the editorial

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<sup>31</sup> Cf., Campbell, *The Mind of Poe and Other Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1933), 95n.1.

<sup>32</sup> Of course, if Woodberry is the author of this review, his distrust of Harrison's editorial policy was not without bias. It is worth at least noting that two titles are announced as the subject of this review, two "new editions of Poe": the first, Harrison's newly issued seventeen-volume *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* and, the other, a reissue of the ten-volume Stedman-Woodberry edition, here given the new title *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. In what is perhaps the fairest moment of the review, the "editorial method" of the latter (with which the reviewer does, after all, seem intimately acquainted) is merely contrasted with that of the former. Having "went to the original sources, rearranged the matter, modernized the mode of spelling, punctuation, and so forth, corrected errors in dates, names, quotations, foreign terms, and the like, and, in a word, established a text such as any author desires of his own works," the Stedman-Woodberry edition is said to have produced a "critical edition" of Poe's *Works*, "best for the general public" (Woodberry "New Editions of Poe" 445). By contrast, "the facsimile method of editing" employed by the Virginia-edition, "reproducing [the sources] in their original state" is judged "most useful to the special literary student" (ibid.). Harrison's "facsimile method of editing," has, after all, been especially useful to this "special literary student," whose only hope is that one day his interest will be shared by "the general public."

method of the Virginia-edition, however, there is no doubt that as far as *Autography* was concerned Harrison's "direct study of the original sources" of Poe's text was invaluable.

In 1902, the series, that is both series within the *Autography* series, appeared for the first time in their totality or, perhaps, in the "scattered," "fragmentary forms" of "their original helter-skelter production": an unaltered version of the previously collected series from *Graham's Magazine*—Poe's "A Chapter on Autography" and "An Appendix of Autographs"—preceded by the hitherto uncollected "Autography" articles from the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836. It is clear, too, that this unprecedented archivization of the *Autography* series is one of the points on which Harrison prides his editorial labors. While cataloguing the many "new features" which "abound" in this latest edition of the *Works* in his "Editor's Preface," Harrison introduces *Autography* as follows:

Poe's well-known papers on "Autography" appeared in two divisions, years apart, the one a hoax, with hoax letters but genuine signatures attached, the other an article reproducing the signatures of the persons discussed, along with Poe's comments on them. The first of these has never before been reprinted, and the second, in mutilated form only, after Griswold. They both appear intact in the present edition, from the original text, the first paper being printed from the "Southern Literary Messenger," as *photographed* by the editor. (H 1:xiv)

Harrison's unprecedented archivization of the whole of Poe's *Autography* series in 1902 affords some of the first focused statements about the textual status of this most



anomalous work of Poe's since Poe himself wrapped up the series in 1842.<sup>33</sup> For starters, Harrison acknowledges that *Autography* is marked by certain "divisions": not only divisions of time, the two series within the series having been published "years apart," but also divisions of genre. Harrison classes the early articles of *Autography* from the *Messenger* as "a hoax" and the later articles that appeared in *Graham's* as, more vaguely, "an article." While he strangely remarks in passing that the articles of *Autography* reprinted now for the first time are "well-known" (strange because Harrison is the first editor to collect these articles among the *Works*), Harrison clarifies this description in the fifteenth volume of the Virginia-edition, where *Autography* appears alongside *The Literati of New York City*, and where he briefly elaborates on all his observations on the textual status of *Autography* ventured in the "Editor's Preface":

We fancy it will be an agreeable surprise to most readers and students of Poe to find reprinted in this volume for the first time the famous "Autography" papers of the "Southern Literary Messenger" of February-August, 1836. If we exclude "Hans Pfaall," this was the earliest of his celebrated hoaxes, and created an immense stir in its day. Its mixture of humor and audacity was prophetic even at this early age (26) of things yet to come in the way of sardonic satire, biting wit, and grotesque extravagance. It is accompanied in this volume by its "double," the

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<sup>33</sup> Recall Griswold and Ingram had at least mentioned *Autography* in the introductory memoirs to their editions of the works. The former, after vaguely remarking that the series "challenged attention," notes that in *Autography*, Poe, "adopting a suggestion of Lavater, [...] attempted the illustration of character from handwriting" (G 3:xvii). Griswold had not, however, collected any portion of *Autography* among his works, so there would have been no way of knowing, based solely on the Griswold-edition, that *Autography* actually contained any printed samples of handwriting. Ingram, for his part, while including the much-altered "Chapter on Autography" in his edition of the *Works*, is much less informative and, indeed, downright misleading in his characterization of the series as an occasion in which Poe "created new enemies [...] by the dauntless intrepidity with which he assailed the fragile reputations of [...] small bookmakers" (I 1:xli).

paper of genuine autographs, reproduced exactly from “Graham’s Magazine” for November, December, and January, 1841-42. Poe promised, in the latter series, one hundred autographs, with running comments thereon, but actually gave one hundred and twenty-eight or twenty-nine in all. The autographs omitted by Griswold (among them his own!), have all been restored, as has also been reprinted here Poe’s Appendix to the original series.

It may interest the reader to know that the type of the Messenger papers was set up from carefully prepared photographs of the yellowed pages of the old periodical. He will also find it interesting to compare Poe’s judgments and criticisms in “The Literati” with those in “Autography.” (H 15:x)

Several important things happen here in Harrison’s brief account of *Autography* (brief compared to the lengthy commentary on *The Literati* furnished by his introduction to this volume). Firstly, it is worth noting that this is the first time the dates of *Autography*’s publication history were recorded together in book-form (sixty years after the conclusion of the series). More importantly, however, Harrison makes crucial associations here between Poe’s work in *Autography* and the Poe canon. Next to “Hans Pfaall,” the *Autography* series is said to contain one of the “earliest of [Poe’s] celebrated hoaxes.” Thus the “well-known” status of Poe’s early articles of *Autography* from the *Messenger* is clarified to reflect the fact that *Autography* was popular among Poe’s contemporaries, and “created an immense stir in its day.” And, as we remarked above, to this day it remains one of the most profound paradoxes in *Autography* series history that something that proved so popular among the American readership of the antebellum period would be so promptly forgotten by American literary history, especially as it so compulsively

returns to this period in search of the origins of “the national literature.” Harrison also cues the reader to compare the “judgments and criticisms” contained in *Autography* with those in *The Literati*, both of which, as I showed in the Introduction, are landmark works in Poe’s career-long interest in the critical genre of the character-sketch.

Harrison goes much further than simply drawing comparisons between *Autography* and celebrated titles of Poe’s, however, in suggesting that *Autography* contains a privileged forecast of characteristics of his style that have been prominent themes in studies of Poe as long as there have been studies of Poe. “Its mixture of humor and audacity was prophetic even at this early age (26),” Harrison says, “of things yet to come in the way of sardonic satire, biting wit, and grotesque extravagance.” The ways in which *Autography* might relate to the Poe canon with respect to these features of his style are virtually limitless, but, I would suggest that precisely by virtue of the crucial, supportable associations Harrison makes here, they are not “prophetic [...] of things yet to come.” One should bear in mind that “even at this early age (26),” as Poe composed his first articles of *Autography*, he had already published not only “Hans Pfaall” (June 1835) but also “Berenice” (March 1835) and “MS. Found in a Bottle” (1833), then, more in *Autography*’s midst, the devastating review of Morris Mattson’s *Paul Ulric* (February 1836) and “Maelzel’s Chess-Player” (April 1836), and, just later, the so-called review of Washington Irving’s *Astoria* and the beginnings of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (January 1837). Surely, one cannot claim that all of these texts are merely “prophetic [...] of things yet to come.” Rather they all in some respect are the coming of the things themselves, if “things” they are—“sardonic satire, biting wit, and grotesque extravagance”—and it is not immediately clear why *Autography* should be thought of any

differently unless precisely because *Autography* is different for so rarely having been remarked by readers of Poe for its profound resonance with the rest of Poe's *corpus*. It is as if Harrison cannot himself partake of the veritable readerly goldmine he had given in the shape of a complete and unaltered *Autography* series but merely show his reader to the shaft.

While his interpretive forays into *Autography* remain (perhaps a little too) prudently limited, Harrison does venture some remarks on the fact that the work had hitherto appeared "in mutilated form only" that give me some trouble. He alludes to "[t]he autographs omitted" from *Autography* in previous editions of the *Works* as having been originally "omitted by Griswold (among them his own!)." The surprise or dismay Harrison registers when faced with this fact has to do, of course, with the fact that this is not a fact, that it was not Griswold but Ingram who omitted Griswold's autograph in *Autography* and his reasons for doing so could not have been more self-evident, or, perhaps, they were "[a] little *too* self-evident" (UP 918). How, "[a]fter a thorough examination of all the existing editions of Poe's works," could Harrison have mistaken this point? How could he have missed the fact that the "mutilated" "Chapter on *Autography*" to which he refers did not appear in Griswold's *The Late Works of Edgar Allan Poe* but only later in a volume of the Ingram-edition from 1875? Harrison explicitly refers to the publication history of *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* in a footnote to "Mrs. Clemm's Preface to the Griswold Edition" collected in volume one of his Virginia-edition. "This edition of Poe's works [Griswold's] was copyrighted by J. S. Redfield in 1849, appearing first in two volumes, then with a third volume containing the notorious Memoir, and finally ending with a fourth and last volume in 1856. It will be

noticed that Mrs. Clemm's preface is prefixed gratefully to the volumes that had no "Memoir" (H 1:347). This account of the first printing of the Griswold-edition is almost entirely accurate, and Harrison even calls special attention to the third volume of *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* as the one "containing the notorious Memoir." It is thus somewhat remarkable that he did not notice that in this third volume of the Griswold-edition (originally titled "Literary Characters" and later revised as "The Literati") not a trace of *Autography* is to be found, save for Griswold's mentioning it in his Memoir which, after 1852, was relocated to prefix volume one.

Harrison's claim that Griswold was responsible for "the mutilated form" of the "Chapter on Autography" collected in later editions of Poe's works might be explained by the four-volume edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* published by W. J. Widdleton in 1876. Now, it confuses matters a bit that this edition is sometimes referred to as a reprint of the Ingram-edition. In the Bibliography of the Stedman-Woodberry edition, for example, Widdleton's text is referenced in the same entry as the four-volume edition of Poe's works published by Adam and Charles Black (Edinburgh), in 1874-75, which was later reprinted in 1899 by said publishers as the "Standard Edition" of Ingram's *Works* (SW 10:273). However, Widdleton's 1876 edition of *The Works* was more like a hybrid Griswold-Ingram edition than a reprint of either. In the arrangement of volumes it more closely resembles the Griswold-edition (volume one containing "Poems and Miscellanies," volume four containing "Pym," and, reversed from the original Griswold-edition, volume two containing "The Literati, etc." and volume three containing "Tales"). However, Widdleton also incorporated many materials from the Ingram-edition into his text. Most notably, he replaces Griswold's memoir with Ingram's

and incorporates several articles Ingram added to Poe's collected works from 1874-75, among them, Ingram's "Chapter on Autography."

It is possible that Harrison, recognizing the form of the Griswold-edition behind Widdleton's 1876 edition of Poe's works, attributed the drastic alterations of Poe's text to Griswold.<sup>34</sup> Even rationalized thus, however, Harrison's misattribution of the "mutilated form" of Poe's "Chapter on Autography" to Griswold, while in keeping with his characterization of Griswold as an unreliable editorial precedent in the history of Poe's collected works, also credits him with collecting a text (however "mutilated") that he in fact suppressed. Harrison says of the two series within the *Autography* series: "The first of these has never before been reprinted, and the second, in mutilated form only, after Griswold." If Harrison had never said another word on this subject after this remark in his "Editor's Preface," then ambiguity would have worked in his favor. What, I suppose, he means to say when he says "in mutilated form, after Griswold," is that subsequent editors of Poe's works followed Griswold in reprinting the "mutilated" "Chapter on Autography," when, in fact, it only entered Poe collected works "in mutilated form, after Griswold." The real interest, however, in this accidental installation of Griswold at the head of *Autography* series history for a positive (if "mutilated") contribution where one does not exist is the way it seems to echo a more general troubled dynamic in Harrison's relationship with Poe's notorious executor.

Harrison famously claims at the outset of *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* that "[a]fter a thorough examination of all the existing editions of Poe's works," he

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<sup>34</sup> Harrison may also have been inclined to see Griswold's hand behind the mutilation of the "Chapter on Autography" given his similar handling of the *Marginalia* series. Cf., H 16:vii-viii; also, Edward H. O'Neill, "The Poe-Griswold-Harrison Texts of the 'Marginalia'," *American Literature* (November 1943), 15: 238-250.

found them “conflicted in so many points that no course was left except to reject them all—beginning with Griswold, whom all had more or less faithfully followed—and extract a new and absolutely authentic text from the magazines, periodicals, and books of tales and poems which Poe himself had edited or to which he had contributed” (H 1:vii). Thomas Ollive Mabbott and others have pointed out that Harrison is a bit disingenuous on the subject of his indebtedness to previous editors of Poe’s works, especially as it concerns Griswold<sup>35</sup>; however, it has never to my knowledge been pointed out that Harrison is building the editorial character of his *Works* on a fundamental contradiction here. The history of Poe’s collected works is said to be, on the one hand, “conflicted in so many points that no course was left [to him] except to reject” every previous edition of Poe’s collected works “and extract a new and absolutely authentic text from the magazines, periodicals, and books of tales and poems which Poe himself had edited or to which he had contributed.” On the other hand, this radically conflicted history is said to be comprised by editions of Poe’s works which “all had more or less faithfully followed” the Griswold-edition. Harrison’s misidentification of Griswold as the first person to include the “Chapter on Autography” in Poe’s collected works (however “mutilated”) thus engenders a *mise en abîme* of a more general contradiction in the founding of editorial authority in the Virginia-edition. Supposedly Harrison can “extract a new and absolutely authentic text” for Poe’s collected works only in rejecting the entire history of

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<sup>35</sup> Cf., M 3:1400n, and George Egon Hatvary, “The Whereabouts of Poe’s ‘Fifty Suggestions’,” *Poe Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (December 1971), 47-48. Though Mabbott has evidence of Harrison’s relying on the Griswold-edition at several points in the text of the Virginia-edition, he refrains from any generalized assertions about Harrison’s claim to having wholly rejected the Griswold-edition. The reverse is true of George Egon Hatvary who has evidence of Harrison’s reliance on the Griswold-edition in one case only, that of Poe’s “Fifty Suggestions,” on the basis of which he boldly claims: “notwithstanding his frequent disparagement of Griswold’s editing, Harrison, while creating the impression that he was going back to the original version, was actually basing his text on Griswold’s” (Hatvary 47).

Poe's collected works. He says this is the only course left to him. However, this rejection can only take place by reconstituting a conflicted or complex history as a unified whole, "more or less faithfully" following on itself. In this way, Harrison authors the very thing his editorial authority is supposed to be unique in rejecting: a continuous editorial history of Poe's collected works beginning with Griswold, which, in the case of *Autography*, is established by an avoidable error.

Not only because Harrison claims to reject every previous edition of Poe's collected works but also because his edition is said to be based on "direct study of the original sources in which these writings first and last appeared," the Virginia-edition ought to have put an end to the nationalistic editorial wrangling underwriting the canonization of Poe's writings for the better part of the last half of the nineteenth century. As I have indicated, it is at least possible that Harrison's misattribution of the "mutilated form" in which *Autography* previously appeared in Poe's collected works arose owing to a kind of Americanization (moreover, a Griswold-ization) of the Ingram-edition at the hands of W. J. Widdleton in 1876. Secondly, and infinitely more importantly, Harrison's unprecedented archivization of the *Autography* series could have put an end to all this "archive trouble" in giving what is, after all, "a new and absolutely authentic text" for the series. The text of *Autography* given by the Virginia-edition is simply archived to the letter. Indeed, every time Harrison mentions *Autography* in his editorial remarks, he invokes a direct line of descent between Poe's original text and what is given in the Virginia-edition, and always in the same breath intoning the seemingly unquestionable fidelity of a technological medium. He speaks of texts "reproduced exactly," "as



*photographed* by the editor,” “set up from carefully prepared photographs of the yellowed pages of the old periodical.”

Now, there is no denying that the Virginia-edition is, simply put, good to *Autography*. I, like Harrison, have based my work on *Autography* on “direct study of the original sources,” but where Harrison had access to “the yellowed pages of the old periodical,” I have the luminous surface of a computer screen; where Harrison relied on the high fidelity of the photographic medium, I rely on the fidelity of the digital scan. Still, the only “absolutely authentic text” of the *Autography* series in book-form remains, to this day, Harrison’s *Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Nevertheless, there is a side effect of Harrison’s picture-perfect facsimile reproduction of *Autography*, which is that it all but erased a half-century’s worth of *Autography* series history in the process. Now, this erasure, or what I would call a suppression of *Autography* series history, is not of the character of Griswold’s decision to omit *Autography* from *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, nor of the character of Ingram’s suppression of the first series within the series and the not inconsiderable portion of the series he does collect. Harrison does not document any of the specific alterations to *Autography* that made it appear for decades “only in mutilated form,” that is, apart from the exclamatory remark that Griswold suppressed his own autograph in *Autography*, whereby he misleads the reader, but this is ultimately because he privileges archiving Poe’s text to the letter over attending to any previous editorial wrangle in which this text was embroiled—precisely the sort of gesture one would appreciate if not expect of a literary editor or executor.

Indeed, Harrison delivers such a picture-perfect edition of *Autography* that, after the Virginia-edition there would seem to be no cause to look back on the way *Autography*

previously appeared or did not appear in previous editions of the *Work*, unless, that is, one was interested in *Autography* and *Autography* series history. And no one has ever seemed all that interested. Even Harrison gets a few facts wrong, and whom would a reader be inclined to trust in matters of *Autography* if not him, the only editor of Poe's *Works* to do this work any justice? Harrison's unprecedented archivization of the *Autography* series, coupled with the traditional lack of any sustained critical conversation about it, effects something more like an institutional suppression of *Autography* series history: a suppression not attributable to any particular person or body but the American literary archive itself, as if it were conspiring to keep *Autography* unknown. What can be attributed to the person of Harrison and to the body of his Virginia-edition, however, is the myriad opportunities he afforded to the study of *Autography*, opportunities both great and small.

Of the latter variety, for instance, Harrison's "facsimile method of editing" should have effectively ended all the obnoxious problems of entitlement accompanying *Autography* in editions of Poe's collected works from the nineteenth-century. For half a century before Harrison, there was the relatively small matter of editors of Poe's works indiscriminately titling and re-titling the articles comprising *Autography*'s publication history. In the table of contents to his 1874/5 edition of the *Works*, Ingram had itemized the (much altered) later series of articles from *Graham's Magazine* under the one title "A Chapter on Autography," while still preserving a break in the body of this text between Poe's "A Chapter on Autography" and his "An Appendix of Autographs," which Ingram re-titled "APPENDIX," all the while having the word "AUTOGRAPHY" appear as the header of the pages in which these articles were reprinted. Years later, Stoddard

(following W. J. Widdleton's 1876-edition of the *Works*) added to the confusion by having "A Chapter on Autography" appear as the title of the same text that appeared by that name in the Ingram-edition at both the beginning of the text and as the header of its every page, while listing the piece in the table of contents as "A Chapter on Autographs." While these errors and inconsistencies are merely obnoxious, like so many symptoms they reflect a greater issue of *Autography's* entitlement or lack thereof, whereby there has never been an agreed means of referring to *Autography* by name. (As I have previously mentioned, most scholars after Harrison who do mention it refer to both series within the series as "Autography," which is a bit confusing since the work headed thus would contain two articles called "Autography.")

A much greater opportunity presents itself in the event of Harrison's having both series within the series sharing a cover for the first time in history. From the Ingram edition of 1874/5 to the 1894/5 Stedman-Woodberry edition *Autography* remains incompletely, even badly archived, not just for the mutilated "Chapter on Autography" that appears in them, but for the glaring absence of the 1836 articles of *Autography* from the *Messenger*. I would say the early articles of *Autography* are noticeably missing from their place in Poe's collected works before 1902, but the point here is that neither Ingram, nor Stoddard, nor Stedman and Woodberry, seem to notice anything missing from its place. Yet, since Poe began his revival of *Autography* for *Graham's Magazine* in November 1841 with a lengthy retrospective on the articles of *Autography* that appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836, the "Chapter on Autography" collected in all three major editions of Poe's collected works after the Griswold-edition provides a detailed record of the compositional history and public reception of something these

editions of the collected works do not include. In fact, in the “Chapter on Autography” Poe directly quotes the suppressed series within the series. Thus while Poe thought his early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger* were worth revisiting and even citing in his revival of the series for *Graham’s Magazine* in 1841, this did not inspire in his editors a thought that those articles warranted inclusion among his collected works. This situation would be analogous to including “The Philosophy of Composition” in an edition of Poe’s *Works* that does not also provide “The Raven.”

To my mind, one of the greatest, which is to say, most general opportunities presented by Harrison’s unprecedented archivization of *Autography* might be thought in terms of a seminal event in *Autography* series history, whereby the site of “archive trouble” was turned from one notion of the letter of Poe’s text to another. On the one hand, all the obnoxious problems of entitlement and Ingram’s inexplicable suppressions of large portions of Poe’s text were all corrected by Harrison “facsimile method” of editing Poe’s *Works*. On the other hand, he opens up a new set of problems of how to go about beginning to interpret a text that had survived for over half a century “only in mutilated form.” As I have shown, with respect to commencing this different epoch of *Autography* series history, Harrison mainly draws comparisons between *Autography* and the Poe canon, remarking characteristics of Poe’s style common to them. He does much more than this, however, in what is to my mind the most profound statement made about *Autography* in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*; in fact, it is not even a statement but a word Harrison deploys in transitioning from one series within the series to another. Having briefly accounted for the “mixture of humor and audacity” in the series from 1836 as “prophetic [...] of things yet to come in the way of sardonic satire, biting wit,

and grotesque extravagance,” Harrison announces that “[i]t is accompanied in this volume by its ‘double,’ the paper of genuine autographs, reproduced exactly from ‘Graham’s Magazine’ for November, December, and January, 1841-42.” I say this is the most profound statement made about *Autography* in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, but a case could be made for it being the most profound statement made about *Autography* in all of *Autography* series history. Harrison does something here, albeit in just the space of a word, incredibly rare in *Autography* series history, which is to suggest that the two series within the *Autography* series should be read together: not simply as one thing, unified and self-identical, but as an event of difference, which he marks with one of the richest words in the Poe lexicon, “‘double.’”

It would be beyond the reach of this chapter if not already beyond me to situate the manifold works of the double in Poe and the countless critical interpretations this notion has given rise to in studies of Poe. From “William Wilson” to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, from the tales of ratiocination to the “be-mirrorment” of the subjects of his criticisms, doublings traverse Poe’s writing at every turn. William Wilson and William Wilson, Pym and Augustus, Pym and Peters, Pym and “Poe,” Dupin and his friend and chronicler, Dupin and the Minister D—, Dupin and the Prefect, Monos and Una, on(e) and on(e), the double is not so much a theme or motif in Poe’s writings as it is the very matter of his writings. So often it seems the “double” is what is the matter in Poe, that it is what ever is the matter. For his part, Harrison does not much follow through on what he means by deploying the word “double” to negotiate the event of difference between the two series in the *Autography* series, but could be of further interest in comparison with that earlier remark of his from the “Editor’s Preface” to the Virginia-

edition, where he refers to *Autography* as being comprised of “two divisions, years apart, the one a hoax, with hoax letters but genuine signatures attached, the other an article reproducing the signatures of the persons discussed, along with Poe’s comments on them.” So the early *Autography* series from the *Messenger* is said to be “a hoax” and the later series just “an article,” but precisely what kind of article would be the “double” of a hoax? Once again, I have to defer the exploration of this temptingly fraught question to Part II of this dissertation, on “The Hoax which is Not One,” where I will consider Harrison’s claim here in greater detail, along with some others like it found in T. O. Mabbott and, later, the work of Meredith McGill.

I dwell here on Harrison’s account of *Autography* as a “double,” because it is one of the most remarkable features of *Autography* series history that this work which took over sixty years to appear *en masse*, archived to the letter in an edition of Poe’s collected works, would spend the next century being redivided by editors and by literary critics, and indeed by circumstances beyond human control. This is not to say that it happened often or even routinely but rather that when it did happen, in those rare and fleeting moments, it did so as a matter of course. In fact, after Harrison’s unprecedented archivization of *Autography* in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, no significant interpretive advance is made into the text until T. O. Mabbott’s landmark “recension” of Poe’s collected works in the 1960s (Mabbott *Poems*, xvii). That seminal event of *Autography* series history effected by Harrison’s unprecedented archivization of the series—the turning from one notion of the letter of *Autography* to another—remains, in some ways, still to this day, a sleeping powder-keg of untapped potential.

T. O. Mabbott's "Recension" and *Autography* Series History Today

Thus far, I have tried to illustrate some different ways in which, throughout the history of Poe's collected works, editors' handling or mishandling of *Autography* affords a *mise en abîme* of the editorial character of their editions as a whole that exposes a latent potential of editorial authority to undercut or undo itself. Griswold first suppressed *Autography*, as was his editorial privilege, only to be followed by Ingram, who silently manipulated the letter of this uncollected work of Poe's in order to suppress Griswold. This over-application of editorial privilege flatly contradicts Ingram's program of purging Poe's life and work from unnecessary distortions, most of which, Ingram says, trace back to Griswold. Then, in the return to Griswold mounted by American editors of Poe's works after Ingram, the reprinting of Ingram's distorted version of the "Chapter on *Autography*" seems to speak against or contravene Griswold's return, to keep him suppressed even as he is being revived, and to attest to Ingram's own staying power amidst a concentration of editorial authority to supplant him. Then, in 1902, Harrison did more than any editor of Poe's *Works* before him or since in noticing *Autography* and doing justice to this text. Still, Harrison's picture-perfect reproduction of *Autography* came at the cost of suppressing the unique position this text had already occupied in Poe's collected works for over fifty years. While Harrison champions the version of *Autography* archived to the letter in the Virginia-edition as proof of the legitimacy of his "facsimile method of editing," this facsimile of *Autography* only comes at the cost of ruining *Autography* series history. Indeed, the fate of *Autography* played out in the Virginia-edition is not wholly unlike all those facsimile signatures given in *Autography*, only Poe, in his archive fever, scrupulously documented all that had to be lost in order to

accomplish his design, whereas Harrison did not. In fact, Harrison authors some new “archive trouble” in his unprecedented archivization of *Autography*.

After Harrison, the character of the editorial labor left to T. O. Mabbott, the next and latest editor-in-chief of Poe’s *Works*, is two-fold. On the one hand, Mabbott’s edition of the *Works* aims to account for texts which were discovered or substantiated as Poe’s since 1902: in brief, those “inaccessible to Harrison” (M 1:xvii). Mabbott notes in his “Preface to the Projected Edition” that since Harrison “[t]he bulk of Poe’s writings [...] has been increased about twenty per cent” (ibid.). On the other hand, apart from this quantifiable adjustment in the scope of Poe’s (un)collected works, Mabbott introduces a qualitative refinement of his editorial duties, one that is only possible because of Harrison’s landmark edition of *The Complete Works* (a title which Mabbott says Harrison “used with some propriety”) (ibid.). “As I see it,” Mabbott writes, “the chief duties of an editor are to present what an author wrote, to explain why he wrote it, to tell what he meant when he wrote it (if that be in any way now obscure), and to give a history of its publication. In addition, some evaluation of the more important works may be desirable” (M 1: xvii-xviii). Mabbott characterizes editorial authority as, chiefly, an interpretive authority. In addition to presenting “what an author wrote,” the editor should, in Mabbott’s eyes, “explain why he wrote it” and “tell what he meant when he wrote it,” and in applying this “recension” of editorial duty to *Autography* Mabbott makes some significant departures from his predecessor.

*Autography* is among, but not entirely among, the “few items classified by Harrison as essays” which Mabbott collects in his volume of Poe’s “Tales and Sketches”



(M 1:xvii, n.2).<sup>36</sup> For Mabbott's reclassification of *Autography* only applies to the early articles from the *Southern Literary Messenger* that Harrison first included among Poe's collected works in 1902. Mabbott explains this editorial decision, which, in keeping with the editorial character of this edition of *The Works*, must be understood as an interpretive decision, in his preface to "Autography":

Poe's two early articles called "Autography," published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836, have a fictional setting, and although the signatures were reproduced from genuine originals, the letters are all made up. Some have a humorous or satirical turn, and because of this and their fictional nature it seems desirable to collect these two papers among the Tales and Sketches. "A Chapter on Autography" in two installments and "An Appendix of Autographs," Poe's three later articles in *Graham's Magazine* for November 1841 to January 1842, are purely factual and critical, and therefore are left for a later volume of this edition. (M 2:259)

Mabbott's decision to consign the *Autography* series to separate volumes of his edition of the *Works* constitutes one of the most significant interpretations of *Autography* in the twentieth-century. He cannot justify this editorial decision without venturing broad interpretive statements about both series within the series; the early articles of *Autography* are collected among Poe's "Tales and Sketches" owing to their "fictional setting" and "fictional nature," whereas the later articles of *Autography* are said to be "purely factual and critical." Now, it is a matter of no little moment in *Autography* series

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<sup>36</sup> Other notable pieces that were previously classed as essays or critical writings and are collected by Mabbott among the "Tales and Sketches" are "Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison House" and Poe's "Preface to Marginalia."

history that based solely on Mabbott's edition of the *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, one could not confirm or deny the legitimacy of his "recension" of *Autography*. The "later volume of this edition," which was supposed to contain Poe's later articles of *Autography* never appeared, owing to Mabbott's death in 1968.

Thus *Autography* is once again divided into one archived series and one suppressed series. However, in Mabbott the re-division of the *Autography* series repeats with a notable difference: those early articles of *Autography* so long excluded from Poe's collected works until Harrison become the only articles of *Autography* collected among Poe's *Works* in the latest edition. Mabbott's editorial authority, too, is divided in the event of his death, as, with respect to *Autography*, he lives up to one of his editorial directives while failing in the other. Concerning the whole of the *Autography* series Mabbott does speak to "what [Poe] meant when he wrote it"; however, where the later series within the series is concerned, Mabbott did not "present what [Poe] wrote." Now, it might be said that this re-division of the letter of *Autography* is merely a historical accident, that Mabbott's death is related only incidentally to the aborted reprinting of the *Autography* series, the broken promise of the "later volume of this edition," but breaking this promise was a possibility engendered by Mabbott's own interpretive stance in relation to this text, the interpretive stance necessitated by his own declared views about "the chief duties of an editor." It would be a disservice to Mabbott's legacy *not* to acknowledge that there was a disservice to the letter of Poe's text in the case of *Autography*.<sup>37</sup>

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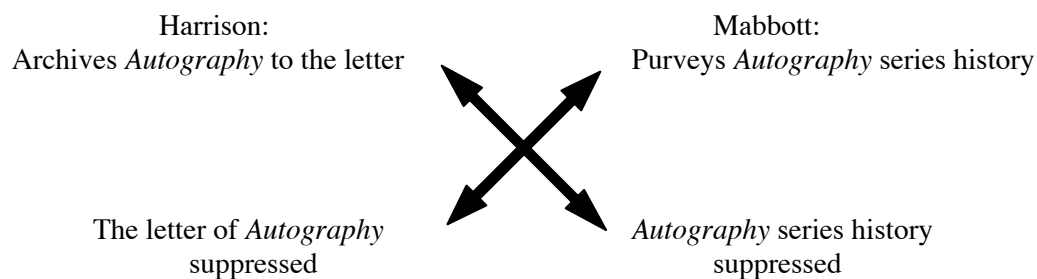
<sup>37</sup> I am taking issue here with how Eleanor D. Kewer and Maureen C. Mabbott characterize T. O. Mabbott's editorial labor in their "Acknowledgments" upon completing the compilation of Volumes II and II of Mabbott's edition of the works. They write, "In his edition of Poe's *Works* he emphasizes sources and records rather than his own opinions" (M 2:v). This summation seems

Still, the later articles of *Autography* from *Graham's Magazine* remain archived to the letter in Harrison's edition of the *Works*, readily available and faithfully preserved, in a way that they never had been before and never would be since 1902. Thus the only remedy for the restitution of the letter of *Autography* necessitated by the aborted reprinting of the series in Mabbott's edition of the *Works* is to return to the edition that the latter was supposed to not merely add to or update, as "a mere revision," but to wholly supplant, perhaps even censure to some degree, as "a complete recension" (M 1:xvii).

As ever in *Autography* series history, the letter of this much-neglected text of Poe's remains caught up in the most liminal events in the history of Poe's collected works, which never orient the reader simply toward the past or toward the future, but somewhere between or beyond the two, like the furtive returns of the *Mare Tenebrarum* in *Eureka* and "Mellona Tauta." Before coming to the two readers of Poe who have come closer than anyone else in history to founding a critical conversation on this much-neglected work of Poe's in *Autography*, Jonathan Elmer and Meredith L. McGill, I must adjust the vane to reflect the fraught situation both these writers are automatically enmeshed in by virtue of their wanting to talk about *Autography* while being caught up in the complex moment of *Autography* series history today, after Harrison and Mabbott.

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to me to oversimplify if not contradict how Mabbott characterizes his own editorial "recension" of Poe's *Works*.



In my two previous illustrations of the vane I included a cross-secting dotted line (once vertically and once horizontally) that was meant to indicate a borderline of suppression, as a means of emphasizing how, on one side of the line, the editors in question seem to be disagreeing, espousing opposite views (e.g., Ingram: Griswold was bad to Poe; Stoddard and Stedman-Woodberry: Griswold was good to Poe), while, on the other side of the line, they are made to seem in accord, espousing the same view through *Autography*. Of course, it is not a little disingenuous to suggest that Ingram, Stoddard, and Stedman and Woodberry are all united in their respective positions as the editors-in-chief of Poe's *Works* by virtue of that furtive suppression of Griswold by both the Ingram-edition and those editions of the *Works* that would restore him to his proper place in the phallo-genetic chain of the Poe *et al.* Nonetheless, I believe and hope to have at least suggested that there is also something to the uncanny way in which they all appear to be about the same thing from the perspective of *Autography* series history. I have abandoned the borderline of suppression in order to account for the situation of *Autography* series history today, after Harrison and Mabbott, and not without reason.

I did so, firstly, in order to recall the strange chiasmic reversal with which I started out this survey of the history of Poe's collected works (Griswold: *Autography* was good to Poe > *Autography* suppressed; Ingram: *Autography* was bad to Poe > *Autography* (badly) collected). The borderline of suppression was inappropriate in this schema

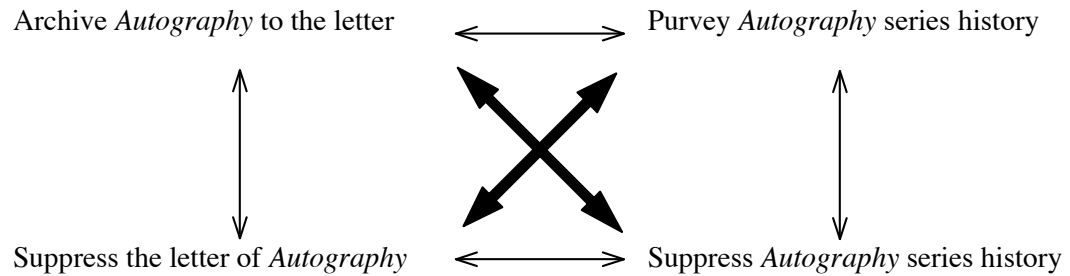
because Griswold and Ingram are not in accord on either side of the vane. Their valuations of *Autography* are definitely opposed, and while both of them suppress the letter of the text to an extent, there is no getting around the fact that Ingram introduced *Autography* into Poe's collected works. Still, it is only taken together that Griswold and Ingram make those compelling first fifty years of *Autography* series history possible, and, as I have indicated, there is a certain undecidability when it comes to the ethical import of their mutual (mis)handling of *Autography*. What is the more consistent and self-identical image of editorial authority in relation to this much-neglected work of Poe's, to value *Autography* and wholly suppress it or to devalue *Autography* and collect a version of it perverted into a vehicle of self-interest? A similarly momentous but much more complex undecidability remains, it seems to me, to *Autography* series history today, after Harrison and Mabbott.

There is no question as to the rigorous attention paid to Poe's text by both these landmark editors of the *Works*, but the respective characters of their editorial labors could not be more different. I have shown how Harrison privileged archiving *Autography* to the letter over and above documenting (and perhaps even investigating) the half-century's worth of editorial wrangling played out in this work of Poe's. Indeed, Harrison does not make one editorial remark on the whole series outside his brief introductions (which don't even preface *Autography* as much as they do the volume in which it appears and the lead volume to the edition as a whole), as though he could not bear to submit his "new and absolutely authentic text" of *Autography* to any editorial intervention after rescuing it from the "mutilated form" in which had survived for fifty years. Mabbott, by contrast, seeing his editorial authority as a predominantly interpretive authority, makes

considerable editorial interventions into the text and, as with so many other of Poe's works, to great effect. He not only prefaces the 1836-articles of *Autography* with daringly sweeping interpretive claims about the series as a whole, but also provides thirty-eight footnotes to the text, almost all of which deal in biographical and bibliographic information on the persons whose autographs appear in *Autography*. So, in the terms of the vane above, Harrison's scrupulous, even fetishistic preservation of the letter of *Autography* effects an institutional suppression of *Autography* series history and Mabbott's determination to interpret the work, to purvey *Autography* series history, effects a suppression of the letter of *Autography*.

Matters are not, however, as simple as that. If the situation of *Autography* series history today means any one thing it would be that the letter of *Autography* and *Autography* series history are not so easily distinguished or distinguishable, not least because *Autography* series history is so much about the uncertain fate of the letter of Poe's text. Moreover, as I have tried to show, while there is cause to speak of a kind of institutional suppression of *Autography* series history effected by the Virginia-edition, Harrison's unprecedented archivization of *Autography* is, at the same time, one of the most seminal events in *Autography* series history. Then, Mabbott, for his part, knew that doing justice to the letter of Poe's text demanded more than having the correct titles of a work appear in the table of contents or having a picture-perfect reproduction of the work appear in Poe's collected works exactly as it appeared in "the yellowed pages of the old periodical" (though these things are no doubt desirable). He knew that "what [Poe] wrote" ultimately only has meaning coupled with questions of "why he wrote it" and "what he meant when he wrote it," even if Mabbott himself only answered this questions

provisionally or even unsatisfactorily in the case of *Autography*. So I must adjust the vane once more to reflect what is not merely two crisscrossing lines or trajectories of *Autography* series history today but something more in the way of a frame.



These four imperatives left to *Autography* series history today, after Harrison and Mabbott do not, taken together, afford the slightest hope of reconciliation; however, this does not make any one of them any less demanding. For starters, the unique situation of *Autography* in American literary history is such that *Autography* series history can only be purveyed, smuggled as it were, into histories, concepts, and other contexts from which it has been traditionally estranged and to which it must remain to some extent a stranger. This is precisely what both Jonathan Elmer and Meredith McGill do in their readings of *Autography*, which are each limited to only a handful of pages yet entail considerable suppressions of the letter of Poe's text, suppressions of both what Poe explicitly says and does in *Autography*, and *Autography* series history more generally. Now, these suppressions are not to be regretted. There is no question, to my mind, that reading *Autography* today, even where it involves abandoning the imperative of archiving it to the letter, ought to be preferred to the general state of neglect to which this text has long been condemned.

For instance, one should know from page x of *Reading at the Social Limit* (1995) that Jonathan Elmer's reading of *Autography* will have been limited in advance by his having to hand only Mabbott's edition of the *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. The build-up to the reading of *Autography* embedded in Elmer's chapter on "Publicity, Plagiarism, and the Mob" prepares the reader to accept a "notion of originality" which is ever in Poe caught in the "troubling" drift of "shameless transposition, borrowing, mutation, and downright plagiarism" (Elmer 36). Yet, the many complex ways in which Poe shamelessly transposes, borrows, mutates, or plagiarizes his own work in *Autography* in the later series of articles from *Graham's Magazine*, will not be explored or even mentioned in Elmer's reading of *Autography*, which concerns solely the 1836 articles from the *Southern Literary Messenger*, as this is all he has to hand via Mabbott. Still, the limitation of his reading to the first series within the series does afford an unprecedented degree of specificity to his remarks on this much-neglected work of Poe's.

Recall that Mabbott had consigned the two series within the *Autography* series to separate projected volumes of his *Collected Works* owing mainly to the "fictional setting" of Poe's early "Autography" articles for the *Messenger* and to the "fictional nature" of the letters Poe ascribes there to the American literati. This editorio-interpretive decision is not wholly unfounded. Poe's name appeared nowhere in the first two installments of *Autography* published in the February and March numbers of the *Messenger* in 1836. The facsimile signatures printed in these articles are attributed to the collection of one Joseph Miller, Esq., an autograph hound and a "friend and particular acquaintance" of the editorial office of the *Messenger*, whose highly embellished narrative of a series of odd encounters with Miller serves as a preface to both installments of the series (SLM 2.3,



205). Miller, it is said, has given the editor of the *Messenger* not so much a collection of autographs as a package of letters, supposedly responses from notable men and women of American letters to various epistles indited by Miller: some of which appear to have been direct requests for an autograph, but all of which are made to appear to have accomplished their design in obtaining a signature from the respondents. The supposed replies from the American literati are printed, the editor relates, “*verbatim*, and with facsimiles of the signatures, in compliance with our friend’s suggestion” (ibid. 206). Keeping up the façade of this “fictional setting,” Miller’s name appears at the end of each letter printed in *Autography* with his middle initial rotating sequentially through (almost) every letter of the alphabet, as though giving each item in his correspondence a unique seal of authenticity, or the force of law (he is Joseph A.B.C... Miller, *Esq.*, after all). At the same time (and again, each time uniquely), the authenticity of the correspondence is obscured or displaced since in effect no two letters are countersigned by the same name. Finally, the editor, or Mr. Messenger, announces that he has added the commentary that appears beneath each facsimile signature pertaining to the character of the writer as indicated by his or her MS. (ibid.).

Elmer is ultimately interested in Poe’s design for the way in which, like *The Literati of New York City*, it puts the notion of “personality” to work (the section containing his reading of the early articles of *Autography* is titled “Personalities”). He takes issue with Richard Sennett’s understanding of the widespread popularity of pseudo-scientific discourses like phrenology, physiognomy, and (using Poe’s term) autography in the nineteenth-century as attempts to render “all public appearance interpretable as ‘direct expressions of the “inner” self,’” which “led, inevitably, in Sennett’s view, to the decay

and disappearance of an impersonal ‘public realm’” (Elmer 38-39<sup>38</sup>). By contrast, in Elmer’s view, the notion of “personality” emerges in *Autography* and in Poe more generally as a “*generic* phenomenon [...] a public phenomenon, generated in and across a medium of publicity” (ibid. 39). Thus, in spite of citing the passage from Poe’s November 1844 *Marginalia* where he claims to have been “far more than half serious in all that [he has] ever said about manuscript, as affording indication of character” (ER 1323), Elmer does not take what he calls Poe’s “autographic analysis” even half so seriously.

The pleasure to be had in a piece like “Autography,” on this hypothesis, would lie more in the curiously inconsequential nature of its conclusions than in any revelations its analyses might offer. For while there was probably a certain pleasure in hearing that “there is no distinctive character” about James Fenimore Copper’s handwriting, “and that it appears to be *unformed*” (M, 2: 268), the energy and humor of “Autography” do not finally lie in the actual analyses of chirography. Along with the facsimile signatures, Poe includes the letters ostensibly written in response to various unknown requests made by one Joseph Miller (about whom more in a moment), and these letters always reveal more of the character than the autographic analysis per se. (Elmer 39)

Elmer is more interested, then, in the way that Poe puts on “the character” of the various “personalities” to whom he attributes the fictitious letters included in his early articles of *Autography* than he is in the way that Poe puts on the character of the “autographer.” Of course, in all of this Poe is putting his reader on to some degree, and it might not do to

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<sup>38</sup> Elmer is citing here Richard Sennet’s *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 146, 153.

take him any more than half seriously “in all that [he has] ever said about manuscript, as affording indication of character.” Nonetheless, Elmer’s “hypothesis”—that “[t]he genre of personality, and the interpretive systems such as autography and phrenology, which could be mobilized on its behalf, might answer less to an uncomplicated wish for moral legibility than to a kind of interpretive opacity attendant upon public celebrity” (ibid.)—leads him to a overly simplified presentation of the “interpretive opacity” of “Autography” as a problem of more-and-less. The fictive letters Poe includes in the 1836-series are said to “always reveal more of the character than the autographic analysis per se.” Now, how is one to calculate or even gauge the degree to which “the character” is “revealed” in a fictitious letter as compared to the supposed “autographic analysis” of the handwriting of said fictitious letter, especially if the latter is taken no more than half seriously? Certainly there are differences in the presentation of character in these two contrivances of Poe’s design in “Autography,” but can these differences be precisely determined in terms of more or less presence of “the character”?

Elmer also misleads his reader a bit by implying that analyzing handwriting for its indication of character is all that Poe does in his editorial commentary, when, as I have previously shown in the Introduction, Poe makes many remarks on characteristics of the MSS. which afford no more than an incidental relation to “the character” in question. That is, Poe never claims to discern the character of a person based on his numerous observations as to the type of paper or ink employed, whether or not a wafer or rule-lines are used, etc. (though he does often blithely judge these things: e.g., “The paper tolerable—and wafered,” or, just above, “The paper is bad—and wafered” (SLM 2.3, 208)). Moreover, what becomes of Elmer’s reading of *Autography* if carried forward to

the later articles from *Graham's Magazine*, where the contrivance of these fictitious letters is almost entirely abandoned and, along with them, the character of Joseph A. B. C... Miller?

I am not trying to downplay “[t]he pleasure to be had” in the fictitious letters in the early articles of *Autography*; rather I believe Elmer downplays the pleasure to be had in Poe’s editorial commentary, since he does not want to take “autographic analysis” too seriously, at least definitely not more than half seriously. He rightly surmises that in *Autography* as in Poe more generally one finds “a radically ambivalent stance toward the question of the signature” (Elmer 42). “Why should Poe, or his readers,” Elmer asks at crucial turning point in his reading of *Autography*, “be interested in simultaneously acknowledging and obscuring the relation between individual identity and its textual authentication by means of the signature?” (ibid.) I will not follow here where and how Elmer goes on the force of this question, after which his reading of *Autography* frames a complex meditation on “print culture’s ambiguous role in the installation and authority and legitimacy in democracy” (ibid. 43).<sup>39</sup> For now, only the stated subject of the question is of interest: “Why should Poe, or his readers...”

Elmer’s reading of “Autography” is entirely based on the popularity of the series among the American readership of Poe’s day. At every turn, whether he is accounting for “the energy and humor” of “Autography,” its “possible benefits or gratifications” (ibid. 42), “the pleasure to be had” in it, or taking issue with Sennett’s understanding of the pervasiveness of pseudo-scientific discourses like phrenology and physiognomy in the

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<sup>39</sup> I do, however, take up this turn in Elmer’s argument in my reading of the relationship of “Autography” to its British precedent, “The Miller Correspondence,” in Part II, “The Hoax which is Not One.”

nineteenth-century, Elmer's reading of "Autography" is wholly bound up in the fact that it was popular among Poe's contemporaries, that Poe and his readers are accomplices in effecting the "radically ambivalent stance toward the question of the signature" in "Autography," as in *Autography* more generally. Even the character of the autograph hound, Joseph A. B. C... Miller, whose correspondence with the American literati is supposed to have furnished those letters whose "character" Elmer is so invested in, is assumed to have contributed to the popularity of "Autography" among the American readership.<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps no mere coincidence that Elmer's reading of *Autography* begins precisely on the point of the popularity of "Autography": "One of Poe's more popular pieces was a two-part series entitled "Autography," published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836" (ibid. 37).

Yet, Elmer never gives a source for this claim.<sup>41</sup> This matter so pivotal to his reading of "Autography"—its popularity—is not supported with any documentary

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<sup>40</sup> In spite of Elmer's complex treatment of this character as "publicity itself, the abstract generator of identity and personality he can never have" (Elmer 45), Miller is supposed to have been immediately recognizable to Poe's audience as the Joe Miller of "*Joe Miller's Jest Book*, an eighteenth-century British collection still popular in Poe's day," and, "[m]ore immediately," perhaps as a relative of the Reverend George Miller of "'The Miller Correspondence' which had appeared in England in 1833" (ibid. 40, 41). As Elmer points out, Poe obscures the allusion in "Autography" to the British precedent for his design by attributing it to the *London Athenæum* rather than *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, where "The Miller Correspondence" actually appeared in November 1833.

<sup>41</sup> Based on the bibliography of *Reading at the Social Limit*, I assume he pieced together the impression from a few sources. One may have been Michael J. Allen's *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (1969), where Allen twice refers to the popularity of *Autography*, though each time suggesting that Poe himself is the only known source for this attribution: see, Allen 147, 177. Then again, the odd fact is that although Poe's 1836 articles of *Autography* were professedly a spin on "The Miller Correspondence" which had appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* of "the British magazine tradition" a few years earlier, Allen does not mention them in *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* but rather Poe's later articles of *Autography* from *Graham's Magazine*, 1841-42, which Elmer only acknowledges in passing and which markedly abandon the contrivances which most interested him: the fictitious letters and the character of Joseph A.B.C... Miller. There is certainly plenty of correspondence among John Ostrom's edition of *The Letters*

evidence and referred to casually as though a matter of fact, when the fact is few reading *Reading at the Social Limit* would know what “Autography” is, much less how it was received among the American readership of the antebellum period. Indeed, the rhetoric of this sentence confesses as much, reading as though Elmer is making a first introduction between his reader and “Autography”: “One of Poe’s more popular pieces was a two-part series entitled...” Moreover, it is no self-evident matter to refer to the popularity of a text that is itself, according to Elmer’s own reading, a discourse on popularity, or, in his words, “the interpretive opacities attendant upon public celebrity.” “Autography” is, more simply put, a hoax on literary celebrity: not wholly unlike P. T. Barnum’s *American Museum*, “filled to bursting with curiosities, objects in need of the spectator’s interpretation as to their provenance or use” (ibid. 183), but also not a far cry from Sacha Baron Cohen getting Pamela Anderson into a “Kazakh Wedding-Sack” (see *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*). However, for his part, Elmer never identifies *Autography* as a hoax, much less reflects on how its status as a hoax was integral to the popularity of Poe’s design (a feature of Elmer’s reading of “Autography” that may trace back to Mabbott, who never refers to it as a hoax for all his investment in its “fictional setting” and “fictional nature”). Elmer never mentions that many of Poe’s contemporaries immediately recognized “Autography” as a hoax or that Poe himself explicitly discusses his early articles of *Autography* as such in his editorial preface to the revival of the series for *Graham’s Magazine* in 1841. It would no doubt have been interesting to see what “provenance or use” Elmer might have found for “Autography” in the last chapter of *Reading at the*

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*of Edgar Allan Poe* that may have clued Elmer in to the popularity of the series among Poe’s contemporaries. The point, however, is that one has no way of knowing.

*Social Limit*, “The Cultural Logic of the Hoax,” which begins precisely with the question of Poe’s characteristic semi-seriousness that Elmer had intoned to such great effect in his reading of “Autography”: “Why is it so hard to take Poe seriously?” (ibid. 174) In this context, I would only ask in reply, Why is it so hard to take *Autography* even half so seriously as we generally take Poe to be (even if that is no more or less than half seriously)?

Meredith McGill’s reading of *Autography* in *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting: 1834-1853* similarly hinges on the popularity of Poe’s design. For McGill, however, popularity was built into *Autography* by its very design, as a sort of mechanism, rather than depending on the recognition of a vague stratum of “personality” manifesting within the design, whether on the part of Poe’s contemporaries or readers of *Autography* today. (Notably, McGill arrives at this view of *Autography* by consulting sources that actually provide documentation of the reception of Poe’s design among the American readership of the antebellum period (namely, *The Poe Log*.)

What is perhaps most intriguing about this series [...] is the way in which Poe’s insertion of fake signatures in a mass-produced magazine generates profits by disrupting the process of reprinting. Due to the popularity of the piece and the expense of commissioning new woodcuts of the signatures, editors who sought to reprint Poe’s extravaganza found it economical to apply to the magazine in which Poe’s “Autography” first appeared in order to rent the “originals.” It is also likely that Poe’s “Autography” produced profits based on other magazines’ *failure* to reprint it. One editor praised the series, lamenting “We wish we had the cuts, so that we might transfer it.” Calling attention to the magazine while neglecting to

reprint its contents could only increase the value of the original. Indeed, the disruption Poe introduces into the system of reprinting actually *produces* this mass-produced magazine as an original. It is not simply the incorporation of handwriting into print that generates this value, but Poe's setting the facsimile signature within a context that raises the question of its availability, alternately asserting and denying its susceptibility to reproduction. (McGill 183)

The value of McGill's insights into *Autography* here derive from their circumvention of what may be the greatest allure and the greatest lure of *Autography*: Poe's pirating the signatures of over one-hundred of his contemporaries and exposing them *en masse* publicly in print as autographs. McGill does not focus on the facsimile signatures themselves (where they came from, their prehistory as genuine signatures) as the site of the "disruption Poe introduces into the system of reprinting" in *Autography*, but rather on the total design in which they partake. Of course, the facsimile signatures are still the crucial features of this design. Owing to "the expense of commissioning new woodcuts of the signatures, editors who sought to reprint Poe's extravaganza" could only "rent the 'originals'" or "[call] attention to the magazine [in which Poe's "Autography" first appeared] while neglecting to reprint its contents." Thus *Autography* was able to "produce profits" on two fronts: on the one hand, by being reprinted as per the usual workings of the "system" or "process" of reprinting, and, on the other hand, by generating the possibility of a "*failure* to reprint it," by "disrupting" this "system" or "process" of reprinting. Yet, McGill does not offer any account for why, whether resulting in a successful reprint or a "*failure* to reprint," there would be a desire to reprint



*Autography* in the first place; she ultimately subordinates the question of the popularity of Poe's design to its potential to "produce profits."

Elmer's reading of *Autography* in *Reading at the Social Limit* is more helpful in this respect. Despite the complete absence of any supporting evidence for his claims about the popularity of Poe's design, Elmer does manage to portray a complex mass-cultural investment in "[t]he genre of personality, and the interpretive systems such as autography and phrenology, which could be mobilized on its behalf," in the antebellum period that would explain why readers (and thereby editors) would have been drawn to *Autography*. It is worth acknowledging here and now the reason I identify Elmer and McGill as the two readers of Poe that have come closer than anyone before them to founding a critical conversation on *Autography*. At the outset of McGill's reading of it in *The Culture of Reprinting*, in the paragraph prior to the one cited above, buried in a footnoted reference to Poe's early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger*, McGill offers what is, as far as I know, the first reference given in a reading of *Autography* to another reading of *Autography*: "For an astute analysis of Poe's 'Autography' as a meditation on the way in which 'personality was seen to emerge from a generic publicity' (40), see Elmer *Reading at the Social Limit*, 37-43 [for what it is worth, I would read to page 47 to see Elmer's reading rounded out]" (ibid. 319n75). Yet, even accepting Elmer's reading of "Autography" as a precedent in the question of the popularity of Poe's design (which is odd, since this remains a wholly undocumented point in Elmer), as a sort of pre-given corrective or completion to McGill's reading, far from advancing or capitalizing on Elmer's work, McGill retards it somewhat by describing what are collected in *Autography* here as "fake signatures." I have previously discussed in the

Introduction the inconsistent way in which McGill names and treats the referential status of the things collected in *Autography*, which seem to offer such a beautiful illustration of her thesis of *The Culture of Reprinting*; here I will merely iterate the question: What would have been the draw of a collection of mere forgeries?<sup>42</sup>

One point shared by both Elmer and McGill's forays into *Autography* and, I would suggest, the point that brings the anomalous situation of this work in relation to the Poe canon and the American literary archive into striking relief, is that both of them foreground the fact that *Autography* was popular among the American readership of Poe's day while leaving this fact sparsely documented and leaving completely unsaid the fact that *Autography* has never been popular among any subsequent generations of readers of Poe. In other words, while Elmer and McGill together have come closer than any readers of Poe in history to founding a critical conversation on this much-neglected

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<sup>42</sup> Though this question (somewhat) exaggerates the implications of McGill's phrase; it is precisely the question that ought to be put to Dawn B. Sova, whose *Edgar Allan Poe, A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*—recently, more modestly (and more fittingly) retitled: *Edgar Allan Poe: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*—claims that Poe forged all the signatures that appeared in *Autography*. Although the series proves quite useful to Sova in augmenting her encyclopedic entries for almost every person mentioned in *Autography*, the entries for the series itself are woefully inaccurate (although Poe might have proven himself even more ingenious if these claims were true). “‘Autography’: A series of articles [...] in which Poe purports to analyze the actual signatures of writers and other public figures to determine their true personalities. Rather than solicit actual correspondence, Poe wrote a series of fictional letters and claimed that they were written by contemporary figures, including 38 American writers. Poe then created fake signatures for each writer and proceeded to impute specific personality characteristics to the presumed writer on the basis of the penmanship of the signature. In essence, he used the series as a means of praising people whom he favored and to condemn and criticize those who had offended him or whose work he disliked” (Sova 207). Of course, I only mention Sova in this context, since here she uses the exact same phrase that McGill uses to describe what is collected in *Autography* in *The Culture of Reprinting*: “fake signatures.” I am by no means suggesting that I believe McGill's handling of *Autography*'s to be at all comparable with Sova's. Indeed the latter's errors concerning the publication history and content of Poe's text are so numerous that I cannot even afford the space to correct them here, even if I am tempted to do so in the name of her publisher: Facts on File, Inc. Yet, while Sova cannot hold a candle to the rigor of McGill's work in *The Culture of Reprinting*, McGill does invite the comparison with that unfortunate phrase, “fake signatures.”

work of Poe's, no one would know from reading Elmer and McGill that *Autography* is a much-neglected work of Poe's. So Elmer and McGill are my unwitting heroes of *Autography* series history. So what if *The Culture of Reprinting* ignores *Autography*'s vast and complex history of reprinting to focus instead on its profit-making potential for a handful of magazine proprietors in the 1830s and 40s; I will not even speak to Elmer's slight on *Autography*, given in passing in his adumbration of the thinguma-Bhabha's "we can already see adumbrated in a piece as apparently slight as 'Autography'" (Elmer 43). There is no question, to my mind, that reading *Autography* today, purveying *Autography* series history, where it would involve (for most) abandoning the imperative of archiving it to the letter, ought to be a preferment to the general state of neglect to which this work has long been condemned. Perhaps Elmer and McGill give an indication that *Autography*'s time has come, but they give no indication that the timing of such a coming would be any matter for wonder.

#### *Autography* and "the Ever Open Grave of Deferred Duties"

Leading myself inexorably back to the vane and to the four imperatives with which I framed the situation of *Autography* series today—Archive *Autography* to the letter, Suppress the letter of *Autography*; Purvey *Autography* series history, Suppress *Autography* series history—I find that all I have been trying to frame with these four imperatives is just this: X. Apart from the long history of omissions, suppressions individual and institutional, I have documented in this survey, all the ways in which the letter of *Autography* has been neglected, hijacked, perverted, or simply ignored, the whole of this survey has dealt only with *Autography*'s presence—however limited,

partial, indistinct, or “slight”—in the American literary archive. There remains another side of this story, the story of *Autography*’s immitigable absence, of its repression rather than its suppression. This story must remain untold. As Derrida says in *Archive Fever*,

[N]o tunnel in history will ever align the two translations of *Verdrängung*:

“repression” in English, as in Spanish, a word that belongs to the same family as “impression” (the *Verdrängung* always represses an impression), and *refoulement* in French, a word that is not allied to the semantic family of the “impression,” as is the word *répression*, which we reserve in French for the translation of *Unterdrückung*, most often translated in English, as in Spanish and Portuguese, by “suppression.” (*Archive Fever* 28)

Suppressions of *Autography* past, present, and to come can be made up for, emended or restituted; however, the repression of *Autography* is untraceable and unpayable. “Its price is infinite” (ibid. 100). When was *Autography* forgotten?<sup>43</sup> This question has no answer, on the one hand, because, in a way, *Autography* has never been totally forgotten. It has always been there, in the archive. On the other hand, it has never been there, for never being simply there. The repression of *Autography* is so total, perfect and complete that the very forgetting of *Autography* has been forgotten. The repression of *Autography* has no origin or end, for it involves the erasure of its own origin and end. And so X marks the spot.

Say someone or something were to finally archive *Autography* to the letter, the imperative this dissertation will have set before itself more than any other, whatever this

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<sup>43</sup> I would like to thank Armando Mastrogiovanni for asking me this question after a presentation of a portion of my dissertation research for the Department of Comparative Literature Graduate-Faculty Seminar in Fall 2010 at Emory University. I was only able to give a feeble answer at the time, but the question stayed with me and informed much of my thinking for this chapter.

would mean would never make up for lost time. In spite of my best efforts to enumerate the countless ways in which *Autography*, perhaps better than any text of Poe's, illustrates his tenuous but unquestionable belonging in American literary history, the exhaustive and exhausted history of "the problem of Poe" as one always uniquely apart and uniquely a part, whatever this will have meant it will never answer to what *Autography* might have meant to, say, F. O. Matthiessen and his *American Renaissance*, to *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, to Baudelaire, Mallarmé, or Derrida, or to any number of traditions into which it has never been translated. In other words, *Autography* series history is a history of censure and suppression, but it is also a history of missed encounters and missed opportunities. All these non-events of *Autography* series history can be made up for only in being made up, written after-the-fact or staged like puppet-theater. Ultimately, however, "[t]here is no sense in searching for the secret of what anyone might have known [*a pu savoir*: could have known or had the power to know]" (*Archive Fever* 100 [154]).

Moreover, and here I arrive at the undecidability, the yawning aporia facing *Autography* series history today, *Autography* cannot be and should not be, finally, known. The very legacy of this text is to be unknown, unseen, forgotten. The imperative to suppress *Autography* series history, to suppress the letter of *Autography*, is but the tribute demanded by the very singularity of this most anomalous of works in Poe's *corpus* and in the American literary archive more generally. The suppression of *Autography* must carry on in remembrance of its repression. X marks the spot of "a treasure of incalculable value" (UP 822), a hoard of untapped potential in *Autography*, but even if all the treasure were rescued from the holes, as in "The Gold-Bug," the "golden burthens" are carried

home “leaving the holes unfilled” (ibid.). This situation seems to have been fated since Poe’s very first article of *Autography* from February 1836, where he penned the following letter in the name of Catherine Maria Sedgwick:

*New York* — — . *My Dear Sir*,—I owe you a very humble apology for not answering sooner your flattering epistle of —ult. The truth is, being from home when your letter reached my residence, my reply fell into the ever open grave of deferred duties.

As regards the information you desire I regret that it is out of my power to aid you. My studies and pursuits have been directed, of late years, in so very different a channel, that I am by no means *au fait* on the particular subject you mention.

Believe me, with earnest wishes for your success,

Very respectfully yours,

[autograph] (SLM 2.3, 207-208)

How uncanny that in the letter of *Autography*, which would, more utterly than any other work of Poe’s, fall “into the ever open grave of deferred duties,” this figure would be given, conjuring a vast network of similarly open graves throughout Poe’s *corpus*. From the “opening of the vault” in one of Poe’s earliest tales, “Loss of Breath” (UP 109), to the open grave of the scene-of-the-crime in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”—the command that concludes “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “tear up the planks!” (UP 803)—the tempestuous return of Madeline Usher—the “skeletons found in the hole” atop the treasure of Captain Kidd, the final speculation of “The Gold-Bug” (UP 836)—the easy toppling of the cellar walls of the “*excellently* well constructed house” at the close of “The Black Cat,” revealing the erect corpse and “hideous beast”

consigned to the tomb (UP 844, 845)—the veritable tradition of “the premature burial” given by the text of that name—the open grave which occasions “Some Words with a Mummy”—on and on, *ad infinitum*, the very immanence of the “ever open grave” in Poe (so immanent as to hardly justify calling it a figure but rather a matter, like the double, the very matter of Poe’s *corpus*) indicates, each time uniquely, some “deferred duties” attending this figure in Poe, an impossible mourning, and so too with *Autography*.

I could re-numerate here all the subtle ways in which over the course of *Autography* series history, even as “studies and pursuits [seem] to have been directed [...] in so very different a channel,” the letter of *Autography* comes to archive the very psycho-historiographical matrices of literary interpretation inattentive to it, “by no means *au fait* on the particular subject” of *Autography*: the ways in which, for example, *Autography* makes the history of Poe’s collected works uniquely readable as such, in, as, and by its handling or mishandling of *Autography*. Indeed, another reason the vane immediately suggested itself to me in plotting the scenes of “archive trouble” comprising *Autography* series history was owing to its rotary character. Turning the name *Autography* around the vane until it came to position itself in the customary left-to-right/top-to-bottom orientations of reading, I wanted to illustrate that *Autography* will have been (always already) reading and writing *Autography* series history before the former is even read and before the latter is ever written. Still, I am ultimately most interested in the aporia, the “ever open grave” of *Autography*, this ruined literary history, has left to *Autography* series history today.

On the one hand, I cannot help but feel that Jonathan Elmer and Meredith McGill’s mostly unsubstantiated deferments to the popularity of *Autography* without any

mention of the fact that from the perspective of American literary history no work of Poe's is perhaps less popular, in some ways miss the mark. On the other hand, they also seem to cut right to the quick of the state of the *Autography* series today. What grounds do I have for condemning their cursory readings of *Autography*? What would I have them do? Not forget the absolute forgetting of *Autography*? Remember to remember the forgetting of *Autography*? Do Elmer and McGill not, after all, treat this anomalous work precisely in accordance with its very legacy in American literary history? Are they not right at home in *Autography* series history? How can one begin to calculate or even gauge the "deferred duties" owed to this text? Who could express the character of the "humble apology" it deserves? Who could write the letter that would respond truly, completely, and justly to the letter of *Autography*?

Ultimately, the present study is situated no differently with regard to the absolute forgetting, the repression of *Autography*. So I return to (having been nowhere other than) the impasse: this moment of impassable, impossible complexity, the procession of my own archive fever. While I will have made here an unprecedented effort to remember *Autography* to American literary history, I cannot ultimately make up for lost time any more or better than Elmer or McGill could have done and/or did not do. I remain convinced that being unseen, unknown, forgotten is the very legacy of *Autography*. Thus in every illustration of the vane with which I plotted the scenes of "archive trouble" comprising *Autography* series history, while the name "*Autography*" appeared just beyond the reach of certain arms of the vane, each time the X of the vane itself was meant to situate the purloined letter of *Autography* itself: the very matter of or with this text.



Likewise, as I proceed in this dissertation, with a burning desire to archive *Autography*, finally to do this text justice and give it its due, every time the letter of this text appears, whether by implication or explicitly called by name, it must be read under erasure, as never arriving at the thing itself for the thing itself never arriving. X marks the spot of limitless riches but also the site of an impossible mourning: an immeasurable loss and the “unthinkable weight”<sup>44</sup> of the “deferred duties” owed to the letter of *Autography*. Of course, in saying as much, I am already somewhat betraying the exigency of the aporia I am trying to frame with the convention of the present/absent X. In doing so, however, I am just taking my proper place in the phallo-genetic economy of the Poe *et al*; that is to say, I am just following Poe, who put the matter best: “when the exigency *does* occur, it almost always happens that *x* is adopted as a substitute for the letter deficient” (“X-ing a Paragrab,” UP 1171).

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<sup>44</sup> Cf., Jacques Derrida, “[l]e poids d’impensé” (*Mal d’archive* 52). Eric Prenowitz translates this phrase “unknowable weight” (*Archive Fever* 29). But neither “unknowable weight” nor “unthinkable weight” adequately stand-in for Derrida’s phrase, which has as much the sense of a “weight of the unthought or unthinkable” as an “unthinkable weight.”

### **The Autography of “The Purloined Letter”**

“‘As wet as ever,’ said Alice in a melancholy tone:  
 ‘it doesn’t seem to dry me at all.’”  
 - Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

“‘[I]n either case we lose our labor;  
 since it is Monsieur G— — with whom we have to deal.’”  
 - Dupin, “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”

*This chapter represents something of departure or detour from what (for lack of better words) could be called my usual approach to the very unusual topic of this study: the anomalous situation of Autography in relation to the canon of Poe’s writings and in the American literary archive more generally. Thus far the assumption has been that in the absence of any sustained critical conversation on Autography itself, it can only be retroactively inserted into extant conversations ostensibly about different matters. On the one hand, the extraordinary richness of Autography lends itself easily to this process; on the other hand, remaining faithful to its singularity as a very neglected, unread and in some ways unreadable work demands that such insertions never entirely lose their character as interruptions. In the previous chapter, I considered how the anomalous situation of Autography may be appreciated from the perspective of the history of Poe’s collected works, how various failures simply to collect the text and various successes at doing so afford certain impressions of its meaning. However, it was also my aim there to show how the meaning of Autography, far from being contained by any single gesture of collection, canonization, or archivization, in fact seems to be more appreciable for the ways in which it may be rather affecting than being effected by the history of Poe’s collected works.*

*There is a way in which, inevitably, it seems, inserting Autography into anything, whether a volume of Poe's collected works or (as in this dissertation) extant academic conversations, at once involves certain interruption. A similarly anomalous situation will rear its head in the subsequent reading of the hoax of Autography, as well is in my attempt to read Autography in terms of Poe's aesthetics of Truth and Beauty, for its "unity of effect," in the place of conclusion. Here, on the other hand, the approach is different. Here I will treat Autography less in itself than as an index of things that go neglected, overlooked, even forgotten in Poe. Framing the preceding survey of Poe's collected works as a kind of detective-work hovering somewhere between a whodunit and a whatdunit was not an entirely innocent gesture after all. Here my most direct concern will be Poe's tales of ratiocination, especially the Dupin tales, "The Purloined Letter" in particular, and most particularly of all, who or what has gone neglected, overlooked, even forgotten in the legacy of these works of Poe's (which are among his most famous): the character of the Prefect of police. So, while a case can certainly be made for the autography of "The Purloined Letter," I would suggest that the anomalous situation of the Prefect of police in the legacy of Poe's detective fiction gives cause to consider the possibility of an Autography of the "The Purloined Letter."*

In the preceding chapter, I intoned the notion of the purloined letter in relation to *Autography* as something of a known quantity, something that would be familiar to almost any reader of Poe, as a heuristic of sorts, just helpful in giving notice to something almost entirely unknown even to devote readers of Poe. The efficacy of this gesture has been tested in a thousand different ways before. I am thinking here of Joseph Riddel's posthumously collected writings, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in*

*American Literature*, in which “purloined letters” appears as “a theme” that “Poe introduces” and “‘American’ literature obsessively retells” (Riddel 129), and of the numerous other books, chapters, articles, and reviews that take “Purloined Letter(s)” as their title or which have some variation on this “theme” in the title (as in the case of the present study), but I am also thinking here of the regularity with which the phrase(s) “purloined letter(s)” appear(s) today in headlines of mass-media outlets and Internet blogs. In recent years, people have made use of the notion of the purloined letter to help explain matters as diversely particular as Poe’s influence on Japanese crime fiction, the theoretico-historical import of the publication of Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, and the Iraq War.<sup>45</sup> I am thinking here too, of course, of the great (what shall I call it?) “Caucus-race”<sup>46</sup> that circumnavigated “The Purloined Letter” mainly from the mid-1970s to late-1980s, which forever affixed the names Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida to the legacy of this tale. In 1988, when John P. Muller and William J. Richardson gathered some of the sayings and doings of the “Caucus-race” in one book as if to give some definite shape or contour to an event that seemed to scatter in multiple directions at once, no two parties moving in precisely the same direction or at the same pace, the book was titled *The Purloined Poe*, in acknowledgment of the undeniable potency of the notion of the purloined letter for explaining all things Poe and matters generally (literary, historical, political, psychoanalytic, autobiographical, etc.), certainly, but also in acknowledgement of a sense in which the notion of the purloined letter is so potent as to have exceeded and become somewhat separate and distinct from its “source” or “origin” in Poe.

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mark Silver, *Purloined Letters: Cultural Borrowing and Japanese Crime Literature* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2008); Fredric Jameson, “Marx’s Purloined Letter,” *New Left Review* 1/209 (Jan.-Feb. 1995); Juan Cole, “Halliburton and Iraq: The Purloined Letter,” <http://antiwar.com/cole/?articleid=3524>.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lewis Carroll, “The Caucus-race” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

This is as much as to say that treating the notion of the purloined letter as a sort of heuristic has, indeed, is a tradition in its own right, one which carries on more and less independently of the specificity of the purloined letter or “The Purloined Letter” in Poe. This tradition will only ever have had meaning and will ever have had its meaning challenged by the thousand different ways in which the notion of the purloined letter is not and never will be a known quantity, not least of which is the fact that in Poe the purloined letter never discloses its contents: that always troubling purloined letter of the purloined letter of “The Purloined Letter.” The potential uniqueness of a comparison of *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter,” or an analogic co-implication that would address the purloined letter of *Autography* or the autography of “The Purloined Letter,” is that it would inevitably, by necessity, involve at once both the question of certain knowability and that of certain unknowability.

For starters, one need not look very closely to note a profound resonance in design between “The Purloined Letter” and *Autography*. In fact, the more closely one looks the more vivid becomes the possibility or fancy of another life or another world in which the comparison of “The Purloined Letter” and *Autography* would have drawn legions of interested readers. Consider the following points of correspondence:

1) Like “The Purloined Letter” and numerous other works of Poe’s (“MS. Found in a Bottle,” “Mystification,” “Mellonta Tauta,” and *Eureka*, to name but a few...Indeed, this “theme” of the letter (Riddell) is so immanent in Poe as to hardly justify calling it a “theme” at all, but rather a matter, like the double, like the open grave, the very matter of Poe’s *corpus*.), *Autography* makes a great deal of the matter of the letter. Consider all that correspondence ruined in order to accomplish the design of *Autography*—a pirated

correspondence, gathered as such only in being stripped of its signatures and left scattered to the wind, to an uncertain fate as dead letters of the most unique sort, not without their returns but simply never returned for never being simply returned—the fictive letters attributed to the American literati in the first series within the series from 1836, even the absented pretext or pretense of the correspondence which is supposed to have occasioned the latter.

2) One might recall that the recognition of the singularity of a handwritten impression is a recurring pivotal plot device in “The Purloined Letter,” figuring prominently in those famous scenes plotting the letter’s (letters’, that is) movements through the tale. Scene one, the initial theft of the letter from the ““royal apartments””: ““At this juncture enters the Minister D—. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, *recognises the handwriting of the address*, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret”” (UP 919 [emphasis added]). Scene two, Dupin’s theft of the letter from the Hotel D—: ““At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery fillagree card-rack of pasteboard [...]. In this rack [...] were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle [...]. *It had a large black seal, bearing the D— cipher very conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand*, to D—, the minister, himself” (UP 930 [emphasis added]). Scene three, again one of recognition but one not recounted as much as foreseen by Dupin at the close of the tale: ““To be sure, D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clue. *He is well*

*acquainted with my MS.* [emphasis added], and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words — / — — *Un dessein si funeste / S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste*”<sup>47</sup> (UP 932).

3) As in *Autography*, the circulation of a facsimile is a prominent feature of the design of “The Purloined Letter.” Dupin’s reproduction of the “D— cipher” for his “*fac-simile*” copy of the purloined letter is but an inventive mimicry of (or a sort of economic home-remedy for) the printing process whereby Poe furnished the facsimile signatures in *Autography*. The former is fabricated *du pain*, whereas the latter *du bois*: “I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *fac-simile*, which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings—imitating the D— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread” (UP 931). Meredith McGill points out something of this resonance between *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter” in *The Culture of Reprinting*: “One might also recognize the strategy of keeping a nearly perfect, but identifiably flawed facsimile in circulation as Dupin’s signature move at the end of ‘The Purloined Letter’” (McGill 181). Indeed, while the “strategy” of circulating a facsimile not only “might” but surely will be recalled as (at least one of) “Dupin’s signature move[s]” in

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<sup>47</sup> It is a not infrequent mistake in readings of “The Purloined Letter” that the quote from Crébillon’s *Artrée et Thyeste* which Dupin inscribes into his facsimile letter is supposed to be the sole means by which the Minister D— will be able recognize by whom he has been duped. For instance, in *America the Scrivener*, Gregory S. Jay calls it “[t]he signature quote, which takes the place of [Dupin’s] proper name” (Jay 201). But, as others have duly pointed out, it is the singularity of Dupin’s MS. which stands in for his signature, much like in *Autography*, where the exemplarity of the signature is regularly subordinated to Poe’s interest in “the general hand.” What, to my knowledge, no one has observed before is how artfully Poe interweaves the singularity of Dupin’s MS. in the poetic lines from *Atrée et Thyeste*. Transcribing the context in Poe as if it were poetry makes the rhythm and the rhyme more plain:

“He is well acquainted with my MS.,	A (10)
and I just copied into the middle	B (6)
of the blank sheet the words—	C (6)
— — <i>Un dessein si funeste</i>	A (6)
<i>S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.</i> ”	A (10)

“The Purloined Letter,” the question remains why it is not just as (if not more) immediately recognizable as Poe’s signature move, given *Autography*. (The answer, which one will not hear from McGill, is that *Autography* is never a given.)

4) Another point of correspondence between *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter” has to do with “character.” Here is Dupin speaking to the narrator, not long after the hasty departure of the Prefect of police from “No. 33, Rue Dunôt,” letter-in-hand, just after Dupin’s recounting “the game of “even and odd””:

“[T]he Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification [the “identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent”], and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of *the mass*; but when the cunning of the individual felon is *diverse in character from their own* [emphasis added], the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below.” (UP 925-926)

Along with (perhaps even prior to) the recognition of the singularity of a handwritten impression, the mode of detection that results in having the purloined letter to hand involves a recognition of “character” or of the crucial difference put in play by the context of “character.” The “lynx eye” of the Minister D— “recognises,” at once, “the handwriting of the address” on the letter *and* “the confusion of the personage addressed,” whereby he “fathoms her secret.” More pronouncedly, Dupin’s having the



letter to hand depends both on his recognition of the “*very conspicuously*” fashioned “D— cipher,” accompanied by that “diminutive female hand,” and on the cipher of D—’s character. Prior to his visit to the Hotel D—, the reader is led to believe, Dupin has given thought to D—’s reasoning “[a]s poet and mathematician” (UP 927), “as a courtier, too, and as a bold *intrigant*” (UP 928)<sup>48</sup>; then, while there, he finds the “soiled and torn condition of the paper” he spots in that “trumpety fillagree card-rack” “so inconsistent with the *true* methodical habits of D—” (UP 930). At the end of that famous passage where Dupin describes the “*radicalness* of [the] differences” between the letter he spots in the Hotel D— and “the one of which the Prefect had read [him] so minute a description” (observations, by the way, all made in the vein of autography: “Here the seal was large and black, with a D— cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S— family. Here, the address, to the Minister, was diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided” (UP 930)), Dupin concludes, “these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in view of every visitor [...]; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect” (UP 930-931). The “suspicion” of “one who came with the intention to suspect”: the crucial qualification of Dupin’s success here where “the Prefect and his cohort” fail (twice),

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<sup>48</sup> Dupin says repeatedly, and implies even more frequently, “I know him well” (UP 927): “I knew him, however, as [...]”; “I knew him as [...]”; “He could not have failed to anticipate [...]”; “He must have foreseen [...]”; “I felt, also, that the whole train of thought [...] would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister”; “It would imperatively lead him [...]”; “*He* could not, I reflected [...]”; etc. (ibid.). This “whole train of thought” by which Dupin admeasures his reasoning to that of Minister D— is driven by speculations on “character” as a deciding factor in his having the purloined letter to hand. For an account of the “identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent” crucial to winning the schoolboy’s “game of “even and odd”” as a “purloining of character,” cf. Gregory S. Jay, *America the Scrivener* (199-200).

since, of course, the police do not just suspect D— but know him to be the culprit, is all to do with “character.” Tracking the precise ways in which “The Purloined Letter” traverses the span bridged in *Autography* by “that strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exists between every man’s chirography and character” is beyond the scope of this argument, but suffice it to say that in both texts it is achieved (if at all) by a figure, in a space of literature.<sup>49</sup>

These simple, more or less obvious points of correspondence between *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter,” all these observations touching on the autography of “The Purloined Letter,” belong (as yet) to the fantasy of another life, another world. They are (as yet) but shadowy apparitions of the missed opportunities or nonevents comprising that other half of *Autography* series history, the untold story of *Autography*’s repression.<sup>50</sup> In this world, such an easy comparison of *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter” is only possible given a betrayal of both these works’ unique literary legacies. Or rather such an easy comparison of *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter” will only ever have had meaning and will ever have had its meaning challenged to the extent that it would be by necessity enfolded in both these works’ unique literary legacies: for “The Purloined Letter,” to be in excess, overdetermined, read to no end; for *Autography*, to be at a loss, lacking, unread and in some ways unreadable. While I maintain that there is certain novelty and even certain timeliness about the “anomalous situation” of *Autography*<sup>51</sup>, there is also a sense in which, as the comparison with “The Purloined Letter” makes all

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<sup>49</sup> See Part III: “The Record of Fact and the Record of Feeling: The Signature-Architecture of *Autography*.”

<sup>50</sup> See the concluding section to “The Purloined Letter of *Autography*,” “*Autography* and “the ever open grave of deferred duties.”

<sup>51</sup> See the Introduction to this dissertation, “Stories upon Stories of Archive Fever.”

the more evident, all “*too* self-evident,” there is nothing new about this question of lack and excess—a question which is in fact double: one of excess-in-lack and one of lack-in-excess—when it comes to Poe.

In *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses* Terence Whalen bemoans his own (self-described) “oblique beginning” to his book, claiming that it “would perhaps be unnecessary were it not for the vast accumulation of critical and cultural sediment which threatens to distort Poe’s historical situation beyond all hope of recovery” (Whalen 3). Among the “variety of sources” identified as having contributed to this “vast accumulation of critical and cultural sediment,” Whalen lists “French appropriations of Poe by Baudelaire, Lacan, and Derrida” alongside “familiar American portrayals by such mass cultural luminaries as Bella [*sic*] Lugosi, Vincent Price, and Homer Simpson” (Whalen 3-4): as if the great “Caucus-race” stirred up around “The Purloined Letter”<sup>52</sup> could be swept away in the same breath as the beloved inaugural installment of *The Simpsons*’s “Treehouse of Horror” (as if even this could be so easily swept away). Now, of course, Poe has long drawn such mass-cultural investments, especially in America,<sup>53</sup> as

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<sup>52</sup> I cannot guess what else Whalen may have in mind here when he speaks of “French appropriations of Poe,” apart from the common threat of distortion that attends every translation, not just Baudelaire’s of Poe. I am fairly certain that Whalen is unaware of Jacques Derrida’s homage to “The Bells” in *Glas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974) 173-178, his weighty allusion to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in *Dissemination*, which I will frame near the close of this chapter, the epigraph from “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” heading *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: PUF, 1967 [*Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)], an the compelling analogue to this latter reference to be found in Jacques Lacan’s treatment of “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” as an “allegory of psychoanalysis” in “The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956” from the *Écrits* (486 [484]).

<sup>53</sup> Such mass-cultural investments in Poe seem all but irresistible when it comes to the raven: from the stuffed animals that grace windowsills in the Poe House in Baltimore and the fabled “Poe Room” at the University of Virginia (the latter which is hermetically sealed, but for once a year, behind a pane of Plexiglas and neatly installed on the West Range in view of The Rotunda), to the mascot of the National Football League’s Baltimore Ravens and the accessory-raven that

Whalen's own allusion to Poe's profound influence on American cinema makes plain,<sup>54</sup> so the question becomes what is the urgency and the timeliness of Whalen's attempt, "today," in 1999, "to sweep away" (ibid. 58) some of this critical and cultural sediment?

Whalen was not alone in giving voice to an urgency and timeliness when it comes to "Poe's historical situation" in the 1990s. A few years previously Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman had published the widely influential volume *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, which in many ways presents itself as a response and counterpoint to *The Purloined Poe* from 1988. In their editors' preface they cite a "growing impulse [...] to restore [Poe's] writings to the cultural milieu from which they appear to have been wrenched" (Rosenheim and Rachman xi). A similar sentiment has been expressed by Richard Kopley as recently as 2008; again, also citing the "Caucus-race," Kopley suggests: "The work of these critics, if unworthy of Dupin, is worthy of the Prefect. Reconsideration of *The Purloined Poe* may suggest that it is time to purloin Poe back" (Kopley 83). Rosenheim and Rachman at least offer a somewhat restrained, if somewhat vague, version of this urgency by concluding thus: "Because he was always both in and out of his time, Poe can now stand, Janus-faced, in—and out—of ours as well" (Rosenheim and Rachman xx). However, far from going "beyond 'the problem of Poe'" (ibid. ix), I view all these claims to the urgency and the timeliness of doing something about something wrong when it comes to Poe as but iterations of "the problem of Poe" as it has come down since his first rise to popularity among the American readership in the 1830s. Representing a span of almost two decades, all of these critics in one way or

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comes perched atop the shoulder of the Edgar Allan Poe Action Figure, which (fittingly enough) can be detached and removed to almost anywhere.

<sup>54</sup> For an impressive and comprehensive survey of the influence of Poe's works on American cinema, Cf. Don G. Smith, *The Poe Cinema: A Critical Filmography of Theatrical Releases Based on the Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (McFarland and Co., 2003).

another claim that “the time has come”<sup>55</sup> to do something about some unfortunate state of “Poe’s historical situation,” the “cultural milieu” of his texts, “Poe’s principle of identification” (Kopley 83), his “American face,” etc., in a spirit not so wholly different from that which saw fit to print the “Memorial Edition” of Poe’s poems and essays from 1876, in order “to do justice to the memory of Poe” (ME xii).

There is a sense in which Poe inevitably yields, at once, a sense of certain excess and a sense of certain lack.<sup>56</sup> To my mind this double-question of lack and excess (lack-in-excess and excess-in-lack), has not just happened to always attend “Poe’s historical situation,” especially in America (There seems to be no lack of Poe in France.), as a problem to be got beyond, a mystery to be solved, or a disease to be cured, but rather as a perversion precisely constitutive of his “historical situation” as one of the most widely written about and artistically doubled American writers of all time. Why, in this view, would anyone ever want “to sweep away” any particular manifestation of “the problem of Poe” or to get beyond it? Thus, to my mind, the comparison of *Autography* and “The Purloined Letter” poses problems and questions far from new but rather touching on the very character of Poe’s literary legacy; at the same time, it does require taking a novel view of some very old problems and questions when it comes to Poe.

So, my question started out as a simple one: is there anything lacking in the excessive and overdetermined legacy of “The Purloined Letter,” something not based on

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Lewis Carroll, “The Walrus and the Carpenter,” *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and Geoffrey Benington, “Is it Time?” *Interrupting Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 128-140.

<sup>56</sup> For what is to my mind a reading more sensitive to this dual-question of lack-in-excess and excess-in-lack posed by Poe’s literary legacy, see: Michael J. S. Williams, *A World of Words: Language and Displacement in the Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), where Williams describes “the fate of Poe’s literary reputation in America” as, at once, “indisputably popular, particularly among the young, and yet segregated from the healthy ‘living’ writers of the American canon” (xiii).

a vague demand for historical context or cultural milieu—which are not made by Poe’s text, and which if somewhat lacking in *The Purloined Poe* are certainly not lacking elsewhere (certainly not in the legacy of the Dupin tales as seminal, prototypical works of the genre of detective fiction, for instance, since commentary on this genre is often quite historically- and culturally-based)—something lacking not only in the “Caucus-race” but also in the various attempts to reconsider and reread the Dupin tales in order “to purloin Poe back” from it, something lacking in all these movements to purloin Poe or purloin him back but not lacking but in excess in Poe’s text?

I found G—, the Prefect of police and, with him, a somewhat surprising confirmation of the thesis that I had been trying to elaborate with regard to *Autography*: for myself, the most profound mystery of its anomalous situation in the American literary archive, which is that this or these series of texts, this thing, this event so long missing from its place in the American literary archive is itself a literary archive. With the character of the Prefect, I found it to be the archive, yet again, missing from its place. The subdivisions of this chapter, taken together, comprise a record of this discovery and of the failure to discover this record of records in Poe. For if there is any single point about the “Caucus-race” on which everyone agrees, it is this: that it is all but impossible anymore to say anything of substance about “The Purloined Letter” without implicitly or explicitly becoming party to it, even if one does so as a refusal to join in the dance or even to put an end to it. In other words (some helpful terms afforded by Barbara Johnson in “The Frame of Reference” to which I will frequently defer in what follows), reading “The Purloined Letter” these days not just involves but in some ways has become subordinate to reading the vast and complex *critical narrative* inspired by *the literary text*. Following Kopley’s

suggestion that some ways of reading “The Purloined Letter” might be reconsidered worthless for being more worthy of the Prefect than Dupin, I will suggest that the economy of lack-in-excess and excess-in-lack which has left the Prefect seemingly neglected, overlooked, even forgotten, unread or unreadable, by the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” has not prevented him from haunting this critical narrative, as an echo of the power of Poe’s words.

A preliminary word or two on organization: the subdivisions of this chapter fall into two parts, each headed by half of the quotation comprising the last words of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and affording what is to my mind the most enigmatic allusion to the Prefect in all of Poe: “I mean the way he has “*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” (M 2:568), words whose import will not be discussed in any detail until the end but which will have been with me from the beginning.

In the subdivisions which fall under the heading “*de nier ce qui est*” (of denying what is), my object will be two-fold: 1) to show that traditionally the Prefect has seemed only of marginal importance to the excessive and overdetermined legacy of “The Purloined Letter” for his being expressly only of marginal interest in the vast and complex critical narrative inspired by this tale; and, 2) to argue that this marginal status of the Prefect, rather than presenting a high-fidelity reflection of the literary text that the critical narrative is ostensibly about, has yielded something more akin to a photographic negative of the Prefect’s singular place in Poe’s literary design. On the one hand, the institutionalization of the marginal status of the Prefect does attest to a margin of fidelity between the literary text and the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter.” Indeed the latter could be seen as merely capitalizing on what the former patents, namely, the

characteristic incompetence and impotence of the Prefect. Yet, as I will show, the textual justifications for the marginalization of the Prefect are, oddly enough, only buried at the margins of “The Purloined Letter,” founded in Dupin’s and the narrator’s subtle and not-so-subtle depreciations of G— and in all the shadowy ways in which the final installment of the Dupin trilogy conjures its prehistory in the two previous Dupin tales, where the Prefect resides precisely just within and just beyond the margins. On the other hand, everything unique about the Prefect’s place in the literary text of “The Purloined Letter” has been obfuscated, cast into shadow by the critical narrative: for instance, the fact that this is the first and the last of the Dupin tales where he speaks, where his customarily paraphrased discourse gives way to direct quotation, and that his unprecedented degree of discursive presence in the tale arises necessarily in the case of the purloined letter, owing to Dupin’s and his friend’s inability to come by the case or any detail or particular pertaining to it in any other way (i.e., by parsing the newspapers, as is their custom). Even the Prefect’s often-remarked failure to find the letter in his exhaustive search of the Hotel D— has a different character from his previous failures, a difference rarely remarked in the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter.” In this case the Prefect’s failure affords Dupin the “decisive evidence” of *where the letter is (not)*, of its not being within the range of G—’s search and therefore not hidden at all, whereas previously Dupin appears not so readily interested in (much less inclined to trust in) the application of the methods of the Prefect and his cohort.

In the subdivisions which fall under the heading “*de expliquer ce qui n’est pas*” (of explaining what is not), my aim will be to develop this general picture of the singular place of the character of the Prefect of police, or (keeping up the figure of the negative) to



bring a wash of color to the hazy borderlines of shadows and light which have long kept G— confined to deep storage in the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter,” separated as if by a sheet of mylar from the overdeveloped and widely de-doubled legacy of this tale. Here, I come more directly to a notion of the archive: not the word “archive,” which hardly ever appears in Poe and never in reference to the Prefect of police, but a notion of the archive radically and beautifully at work in Poe’s *corpus*—one weaving together a network of concerns that have long been of interest to readers of Poe and of the Dupin tales in particular: crime, information, the record, dimensionality, architecture, power, the State, and the very *ratio* of ratiocination—a notion of the archive which, I hope to show, is invaluable both to addressing the unicity of G— in the literary text of “The Purloined Letter” and the trouble this character traditionally has afforded assessments of him in the critical narrative.

Part I: “*de nier ce qui est*”

### Opening the Door to the Prefect of Police

Of all the characters in “The Purloined Letter,” the Prefect of police is the one most overlooked in the excessive and overdetermined legacy of this tale: a trend fairly represented by the “Caucus-race,” which danced around Poe’s text most vigorously from the mid-1970s to the late-1980s, whose company has come to include, along with Edgar Allan Poe, not only Charles Baudelaire, Marie Bonaparte, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Shoshana Felman, Jane Gallop, Barbara Johnson, Ross Chambers (to name but a few of the principal parties involved), but also some other animals called upon by some

of parties listed above to help stake their claims on “The Purloined Letter”: Heidegger, Freud, Hegel, Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates.<sup>57</sup> Amidst the multitude of characters begot by the “Caucus-race,” all modeled to some extent on the characters of Poe’s tale—the kings and queens, ministers, analysts, “(narrating-narrated) narrators,” and, above all, Dupins and “double Dupins”—there remains only one Prefect: the incompetent and impotent cop.

Now, the lack of any serious, direct critical study of the Prefect is perhaps in part explained by the fact that he plays such a seemingly subordinate role in the two readings of the tale that prompted the “Caucus-race”: Jacques Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” and Jacques Derrida’s “The Purveyor of Truth” (the allusion to Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* would suggest that the former is the Mouse and the later the Dodo.)

Indeed, one of the few points on which Lacan and Derrida seem to agree is their mutual lack of interest in the Prefect. He does make a handful of appearances in Lacan’s Seminar, but in every instance his character is subordinated to (as though a mere stepping stone for) the “genius” of Dupin; “concerning the Prefect,” Lacan speaks of “an incompetence issuing in failure”; “the first dialogue—between the Prefect of Police and Dupin—is played,” he says, “as between a deaf man and one who hears” (PP 33, 34). In the pages that follow, one finds scattered references to the Prefect: to his “lack of imagination on which he has, dare we say, the patent,” his “lack of success,” his “error,” and even his pompousness (PP 35, 37, 40-41). Then, what is very nearly Lacan’s final word on the Prefect in the Seminar, an ambiguous remark, almost a compliment: “That’s

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<sup>57</sup> By the end of this chapter I will have added another name to this already quite imposing taxonomy: Rousseau.

a remark made by the Prefect, whose every word is gold” (PP 47). Though here, too, the compliment (however derisive) is meant to compliment Dupin: “it is true,” Lacan adds, “that the gold of his words flows only for Dupin” (ibid.).

It would appear that Derrida seems to concur with (if only by silent acquiescence) Lacan’s estimation of the importance of the Prefect. In his “energetic squaring-off” and de-doubling of the two triangular dramas Lacan wrenches from the text, Derrida could be said only to repeatedly repeat the identification of the Prefect with “the dead-blind king” proposed by Lacan’s schema (*The Post Card* 414, 492). Indeed, it is somewhat odd that in all the attention he pays to the ways in which Dupin is doubled, not only in “The Purloined Letter” but in the whole Dupin trilogy, Derrida never entertains the idea that the Prefect may be a double of Dupin, since Dupin, the “(narrating-narrated) narrator,” and the Prefect are the only three characters to appear in all three tales. While Derrida makes great sport of the fact that “[t]he work of [Lacan’s] Seminar only begins after the entry of the Prefect of the Parisian police” (ibid. 484), one could argue that the Prefect never enters into Derrida’s reading of “The Purloined Letter” any farther than he enters into the Seminar.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, Derrida’s reading of Lacan’s Seminar could be said to hinge precisely on the position of blindness on which the character of the Prefect “has, dare we say, the patent”: both on the ways in which the position of blindness disseminates in “The Purloined Letter” and the ways in which the text disseminates a position of blindness.

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<sup>58</sup> The absence of any sustained reflection on the character of the Prefect in both the Seminar and “The Purveyor of Truth” is brought into greatest relief by the significance both Lacan and Derrida attribute to the exchange of money in “The Purloined Letter.” While they both take a vested interest in the money Dupin is given by the Prefect in exchange for the purloined letter, they do not equally invest in the greater reward (it is implied) the Prefect will be given for procuring and purveying the letter in turn (cf., Lacan, PP 49-51, and Derrida, *The Post Card* 448-453, 490-491n66).

However well known, it is worth revisiting Derrida's rigorous attention to the many complex factors of blindness attending the purveyance of truth in "The Purveyor of Truth": in particular, Lacan's blindness to "the effects of invisible framing, of the framing within the frame" in the narrative of "The Purloined Letter" and beyond (*The Post Card* 483), and the way in which "all the characters of *The Purloined Letter* and those of the 'real drama' in particular, Dupin included, successively and structurally [occupy] all the positions, the position of the dead-blind king (and the Prefect of police thereby), then the position of the Queen and the minister" (ibid. 492). Derrida is understandably most interested in attending to the ways in which blindness factors into the character of Dupin, since this character, more than any other, is the one Lacan identifies with the position of the analyst in his Seminar.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, however, for Derrida, when it comes to "The Purloined Letter," and perhaps to writing and thinking in general, "There are only ostriches, no one can avoid being plucked, and the more one is the master, the more one presents one's rear" (UP 453). In other words, one invariably gets factored into a position of blindness, even if one is asking for it, even if (perhaps especially when) one sees it coming.

Still, in all that has been said (and much has been said) about the factor of blindness in the sayings and doings of the "Caucus-race," a direct and detailed study of

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<sup>59</sup> As in this well known passage: "In seeing what Dupin sees (not seen by the others), and even what Dupin himself does not see, or sees only, double that he is (on and off the circuit, 'participant' and out of play), halfway (like all others, finally), the Seminar is proffered from the place in which everything is seen 'easily,' 'in broad daylight.'"

Like Dupin, in sum, at the moment when, without taking into account his blindness as a 'participant,' he is called 'the third (who) sees that the first two glances . . . , etc. And like Dupin, the Seminar returns the letter to its destination after having recognized its place and its trajectory, its law and its destiny, to wit, destination *itself*: arrival at destination" (*The Post Card* 455; see also, 442-454, for the identification of "Dupin with the psychoanalyst," and 493n67, for Derrida's speculation on Dupin as, perhaps, "the greatest dupe of the 'story'").

the character of the Prefect has never to my knowledge been given. Simply no aspect of the literary design of the Dupin tales has been less rigorously accounted for than the character of the Prefect. While this may be as true for Derrida as it is for Lacan, if one follows Derrida's claim that "*all* the characters" of "The Purloined Letter" "successively and structurally [occupy] *all* the positions," that "[e]ach position identifies with the other and divides itself, even the position of the dummy and the supplementary fourth" (ibid.), then this suggests not only that a bit of "the dummy" imparts itself to the one who sees and the "(narrating-narrated) narrator" but also that a bit of the one who sees and the "(narrating-narrated) narrator" imparts itself to "the dummy." It suggests, in other words, some Prefect-sight underwriting the very design of "The Purloined Letter."

To begin with a simple question: Why is the Prefect always opening the door to Dupin? In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" this is literally the case, as Dupin has first to apply to the Prefect before he and his friend can gain access to the crime-scene. In fact, the Prefect is first introduced in Poe as a character opening the door not only to Dupin but also to the world's first locked-room mystery:

"As for these murders," [Dupin says to the "(narrating-narrated) narrator,"] "let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement," (I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing) "and, besides, Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful. We will go and see the premises with our own eyes. I know G— — —, the *Prefêt de Police*, and shall have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission." This permission was obtained, and we proceeded at once to the Rue Morgue. (UP 669)

Whereas in “The Purloined Letter” Dupin’s foreknowledge of the character of Minister D— informs his ability to ““go and see”” the letter, here Dupin’s foreknowledge of the Prefect—admittedly, of a more mundane sort than the riddling context of D—’s character, more in the way of a character-reference—informs his ability to ““go and see”” the solution to the mystery. It is only after his first-hand “examination” of “the scene of the atrocity” that Dupin “stepped in for a moment at the office of one of the daily papers,” where he takes out his ad to entrap the keeper of the murderous Ourang-Outang (UP 669).

The Prefect is always opening the door to Dupin in more ways than one. Dupin is only drawn to the murders in the Rue Morgue for their being unsolved, for the fact that, as he and the narrator read in the pages of *Le Tribunal* (notably, the last words of the crucial contrivance of these newspaper articles): ““The police are entirely at fault—an unusual occurrence in affairs of this nature. There is not, however, the shadow of a clew apparent”” (UP 667). In “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” and “The Purloined Letter” the Prefect and his cohort are similarly ““entirely at fault,”” thus occasioning Dupin’s intervention into the case. While this doubling of failure (on the part of the Prefect and his cohort) and success (on Dupin’s part) frames the narrative action of all three Dupin tales, they also register significant changes in the relationship between Dupin and the Prefect and always just at the margins of the narratives themselves.

In “The Rue Morgue” Dupin already knows the Prefect and applies to him in order to (in part) ““afford [himself and his friend] amusement,”” but things have changed over the course of the two years that are said to have passed between “the drama at the

Rue Morgue” and the murder of Marie Rogêt, as the narrator informs the reader near the beginning of “Marie Rogêt”:

It may be readily supposed that the part played by my friend, in the drama at the Rue Morgue, had not failed of its impression upon the fancies of the Parisian police. With its emissaries, the name of Dupin had grown into a household word. The simple character of those inductions by which he had disentangled the mystery never having been explained even to the Prefect, or to any other individual than myself, of course it is not surprising that the affair was regarded as little less than miraculous, or that the Chevalier’s analytical abilities acquired for him the credit of intuition. His frankness would have led him to disabuse every inquirer of such prejudice; but his indolent humor forbade all farther agitation on a topic whose interest to himself had long ceased. It thus happened that he found himself the cynosure of the policial eyes; and the cases were not few in which attempt was made to engage his services at the Prefecture. The only instance, nevertheless, in which such attempt proved successful, was the instance to which I have already alluded—that of the murder of a young girl named Marie Rogêt. (UP 760)

At the close of “The Rue Morgue” Dupin famously pronounces to the narrator his, Dupin’s, satisfaction with ““having defeated [the Prefect] in his own castle”” (UP 684). After this initial defeat of the Prefect by Dupin, which is punctuated by the most devastating descriptions of the Prefect’s characteristic incompetent and impotence in Poe (one which will be of the utmost importance to the reading of “The Rue Morgue” that closes this chapter), the two subsequent Dupin tales have the Prefect bringing the

unsolved cases to Dupin's "castle," always with a vague promise of return on Dupin's investment of time and energy. For in spite of the fact that "the name of Dupin" has become a "household word" in the Prefecture in the two years since "the drama at the Rue Morgue" and many attempts made to "engage his services," the "cynosure," Dupin, remains but an object of admiration and attraction for the Parisian police and does not guide or direct the disentanglement of an investigation until the mystery of Marie Rogêt. Also, it is not owing to any circumstance of the crime itself that Dupin takes the case. In fact, three weeks after the murder, despite the great agitation in "the public mind" it occasioned and its dominating the headlines of the daily papers, not even a "rumor" of the affair had "reached the ears of Dupin and myself," the narrator reports: "Engaged in researches which had absorbed our whole attention, it had been nearly a month since either of us had gone abroad, or received a visiter, or more than glanced at the leading political articles in one of the daily papers. The first intelligence of the murder was brought to us by G— —, in person" (UP 762).

The scene that now transpires, or rather does not transpire but falls out of the narrative frame as an impropriety, between Dupin and the Prefect clearly illustrates that, much like Dupin's relationship to the Minister D— in "The Purloined Letter," there is a lot of double-dealing going on under the table in terms of his and the Prefect's relationship and these characters' motivations with respect to one another. Like the impetus for Dupin's dealing the Minister such an underhanded blow—that "evil turn" done "at Vienna once" (UP 932)—the event which precipitates Dupin's taking the case of Marie Rogêt is absented from the narrative frame even as it informs the very squaring-off of that frame.



[The Prefect] had been piqued by the failure of all his endeavors to ferret out the assassins. His reputation—so he said with a peculiarly Parisian air—was at stake. Even his honor was concerned. [...] He concluded a somewhat droll speech with a compliment upon which he was pleased to term the *tact* of Dupin, and made him a direct, and certainly a liberal proposition, the precise nature of which I do not feel myself at liberty to disclose, but which has no bearing upon the proper subject of my narrative.

The compliment my friend rebutted as best as he could, but the proposition he accepted at once, although its advantages were altogether provisional. This point being settled, the Prefect broke forth at once into explanations of his own views, interspersing them with long comments upon the evidence; of which latter we were not yet in possession. He discoursed much, and beyond doubt, learnedly; while I haphazardly an occasional suggestion as the night wore drowsily away. Dupin, sitting steadily in his accustomed arm-chair, was the embodiment of respectful attention. He wore spectacles, during the whole interview; and an occasional glance beneath their green glasses, sufficed to convince me that he slept not the less soundly, because silently, throughout the seven or eight leaden-footed hours which immediately preceded the departure of the Prefect. (UP 762-763)

In the Dupin tales the character of the Prefect does not just happen to preside at the margin of the narrative frame as a mere accessory to the work of art but rather in each case is an integral factor of the framing-work of these tales, which (perhaps more so than tales of any other sort in Poe) are all about the art of the frame. Throughout the Dupin

trilogy, the reader is never given a direct, unmitigated view of the supposed content of the tale: neither of the crime itself nor of the solving of the crime. It has been duly noted by many readers that almost everything in these tales is mediated. The circumstances of the “extraordinary murders” of Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye are first related to the reader (as to Dupin and the narrator) in the words of *Le Tribunal*, as is Dupin’s solution to the mystery, which he only recounts to the narrator after putting the ad in *Le Monde* that will confirm his solution. The circumstances of the murder of Marie Rogêt are likewise mediated, first by the narrator’s brief synopsis of the case and then by the edited “mass of information” culled from the official evidentiary record filed at the Prefecture and media coverage of the “sad affair” (UP 763). Yet, the art of the frame is more crucial to the design “Marie Rogêt” than to the tale to which it is sequel, since here the solving of the crime is almost entirely omitted from the narrative frame. At the end of the tale, the reader is informed not even by the narrator but by an editorial note given in lieu of some unspecified “portion” of “Mr. Poe’s article” missing from its place “that the result desired was brought to pass; and that an individual assassin was convicted, upon his own confession, of the murder of Marie Rogêt” (UP 797).

Not by chance, in this same editorial note (in fact, in the very same sentence) the frame closes on the secret “compact” between the Prefect and Dupin that brings the latter to the case (*ibid.*). The Prefect’s “liberal proposition” is initially brought into the narrative frame as an exclusion from the narrative frame—as an impropriety having “no bearing upon the proper subject of [the] narrative,” “the precise nature of which I,” the narrator relates, “do not feel myself at liberty to disclose”—but the narrator’s “liberty” must extend far enough to disclose the non-disclosure of “the precise nature” of the

“proposition,” which thus takes place in “the proper subject of [his] narrative” precisely as an impropriety. Otherwise, there is no explanation as to why, after so many failed attempts “to engage his services at the Prefecture,” Dupin takes this case. It is thus entirely fitting that the frame closes on this secret “compact,” indeed that the Prefect’s “proposition” is firstly and lastly referred back to as a “compact,” not within the narrative frame which discloses it in not disclosing it but in the narrative frame that forecloses that of the narrating-narrator in “Marie Rogêt”: the editorial frame.<sup>60</sup>

[For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the *following up* of the apparently slight clew obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass; and that an individual assassin was convicted, upon his own confession, of the murder of Marie Rogêt, and that the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier. Mr. Poe’s article concludes with the following words.—*Eds.*] (ibid.)

One can try imagine the effect this passage would have had in the original version of the tale, addressed as it was to an audience for whom it would have been “obvious” indeed

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<sup>60</sup> While this editorial frame may rightly be said to open in the tale in a footnote adjoined to the very title “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” it does so only after the text’s initial printing in serial-form from November 1842 to February 1843, after Poe’s reworking of the text for the 1845 edition of his *Tales*, whence the reader is informed: “Herein, under the pretense of relating the fate of a Parisian *grisette*, the author has followed in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth; and the investigation of the truth was the object” (UP 758-759n). Another “liberal proposition,” indeed: the applicability of this “argument founded upon [...] the fiction” to the “investigation of the truth.” The editorial frame of “Marie Rogêt” is thus only explicitly opened as such after the fact of its initial publication, where “the foot-notes now appended were considered unnecessary” (758n), but it was there from the beginning in its foreclosure of the narrative frame of the at the end of the tale, even in its original design.

(even without the contrivance of the editorial footnotes Poe later added to the tale) that the author had “followed in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers,” who is twice named in the tale, after all, even in its original dress (758-759n). The supposed omission of the portion of “Mr. Poe’s article” detailing “the *following up* of the apparently slight clew obtained by Dupin” and “the result desired [being] brought to pass”—the very solving of the case of Marie Rogêt—might have appeared as a prudent omission in a work proposing to investigate a “real murder”—the unsolved case of Marie Rogers—based on the “argument of the fiction” (758n). Like the disclosed non-disclosure (from here on out, (non)disclosure) of the Prefect’s “liberal proposition” at the beginning of the tale, which brings Dupin to the case, bringing the solving of the case within the narrative frame by placing it just beyond the narrative frame admits a sort of impropriety in(to) the tale. While the justification for the latter impropriety may be the very possibility of “the fiction” of “Marie Rogêt” to investigate “the truth” of the mystery of Marie Rogers (ibid.), the relation of “the fiction” and “the truth” in this tale is not so simple as that, not least because of the brief reappearance of the Prefect in this editorial note and the squaring-off of the frame of his and Dupin’s secret “compact.” There is simply no instance of this tale admitting the possibility of “the fiction” to arrive at “the truth” which does not redraw the possibility of “the truth” within the frame of “the fiction.”

Consider, for example, the way in which the narrator’s naming of “Mary Cecilia Rogers” at both the beginning and end of the tale occurs in a narrative register wholly different than that of the editorial footnotes Poe appended to the text in 1845, where “the lapse of several years since the tragedy upon which the tale is based” is said to have

“[rendered] it expedient to give them, and to also say a few words in explanation of the general design,” where the reader is introduced to “[a] young girl, *Mary Cecilia Rogers*, [...] murdered in the vicinity of New York” (758n). Where the narrator speaks of “certain things only as of coincidences” (797), the author of the footnotes speaks of “the tragedy upon which the tale is *based*,” of “the *pretence* of relating the fate of a Parisian *grisette*,” the applicability of “all argument founded upon the fiction [...] to the truth,” the “object” of “the investigation of truth” in “the fiction” (758-759n [emphasis added, save for that on “*grisette*”]). At the same time, the editorial footnotes appended to “Marie Rogêt” cannot be so strictly separated from the narrative frame, as if to separate “the fiction” from “the truth” “the fiction” is designed to investigate.

For while these footnotes are generally devoted to revealing the sources of Poe’s “newspaper-files” on the murder of Mary Rogers (which are presented in the tale as literal translations of French news reports pertaining to the murder of Marie Rogêt), as well as to affixing American localities and proper names to their French stand-ins in the tale, one footnote in particular stands out as belonging to the register not of “the truth” but of “the fiction.” I mean the brief footnote appended to the editorial note cited above, where Dupin’s solving of the crime is related in the offing and where the Prefect, the reader is told, “fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of the compact with the Chevalier.” The footnote appended to the attribution of this editorial note, “— *Eds.*,” reads: “Of the Magazine in which the article was originally published” (797n). Poe thus repeats the ruse of this editorial note, where the very possibility of the applicability of “all argument founded upon the fiction” to investigate “the truth” is arguably most wildly wagered in the tale, where, “in brief,” the case is solved, by (re)attributing it to a

real editorial body in the context of a footnote which is supposed to be now the “true” editorial frame of the tale. In doing so Poe attributes all the sayings and doings of the characters of the tale—namely, Dupin and the Prefect—to a real editorial body in the context of an editorial frame wherein, more than anywhere else in “Marie Rogêt,” the reader is supposed to be given unmitigated access to “the truth” “the fiction” is designed to investigate.

I will discuss this structure of (non)disclosure in the Dupin tales in greater detail below; I have dwelt at some length on the *mise en abîme* of “the truth” of “the fiction” in “Marie Rogêt” for two immediate reasons. Firstly, while it is here that Poe himself most explicitly plumbs the possibility of the applicability of “all argument founded upon the fiction” to investigate “the truth,” and does so precisely by way of the framing of his art as the art of the frame, it is “The Purloined Letter” which has become the privileged site of investigating the framing of truth in as and by fiction in the Dupin tales. Secondly, while the Prefect dwells so obscurely at the margins of “Marie Rogêt”—even more obscurely than in “The Rue Morgue,” where the paternal warring of Dupin and the Prefect, the relocation of the site of phallic power from one “castle” to another, all the double-dealing that goes on under the table between these characters, especially at the end of the tale—“The Purloined Letter” evinces the most pronounced treatment of the character of the Prefect in all of Poe.

The Prefect’s unprecedented degree of presence in the design of “The Purloined Letter” evinces, to begin with, some familiar traces of his more marginal place in the previous Dupin tales. The paternal warring commenced in “The Rue Morgue,” after Dupin takes the case to satisfy some “amusement” and which culminates in his being

“satisfied with having defeated [the Prefect] in his own castle” (UP 684), as it carries over into “Marie Rogêt,” reflects a change in the rules of engagement whereby the Prefect not only must bring the case to Dupin’s “castle” but also must persuade him to take it on where he has been previously unsuccessful in doing so. In “The Purloined Letter” the reader finds not only Dupin but also (and more notably) the narrator more exalted than ever before over the Prefect, who, once again, must bring the case to Dupin’s “castle,” which he does only after having “become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than [himself]” (UP 920). The reader is, of course, constantly reminded of the Prefect’s intellectual inferiority throughout the tale, not least because all of Dupin’s and the narrator’s sardonic gibes seem wholly lost on him.

Yet, all the memorable denigrations of the character of the Prefect embedded in the narrated dialogue of “The Purloined Letter” and in the narration itself—the “heartily welcome” he receives upon entering Dupin’s “castle,” “for there [being] nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man” (UP 917); the narrator’s remark on his “fashion of calling every thing ‘odd’ that was beyond his comprehension” (UP 918); Dupin’s sarcastic compliment that “no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined” for the case of the purloined letter (UP 920); and, above all, Abernethy’s “*advice*” (UP 924)—the very patenting of the Prefect’s characteristic incompetence and impotence in “The Purloined Letter,” cannot be cited without acknowledging (explicitly or implicitly) the most notable difference of the framing-work afforded by this character to this tale as compared to the two which precede it in the Dupin trilogy: the fact that he speaks. Not just the fact that he speaks much but the fact that he speaks at all. The most immediately notable difference of Poe’s handling of the

Prefect in “The Purloined Letter,” though it is a difference rarely remarked in readings of the tale, is that this is the first and the last tale in which this character speaks for “himself.”

The Prefect’s unprecedented discursive prominence in “The Purloined Letter” has always afforded him a privileged relation to the singularity of the purloined letter. Given the excessive amount of critical attention devoted to Poe’s (non)disclosure of the letter’s contents, it is not a little surprising that it has never once been acknowledged by any reading of the tale, but perhaps it has never been acknowledged because the character of the Prefect seems almost the exact converse of the letter. He too bears a secret, but he proceeds, as Ross Chambers has pointed out, “to ‘blab’” (PP 292). As the purveyor of this off-the-record case, of this “‘affair demanding the greatest secrecy’” (UP 918), the Prefect behaves in the tale in precisely the opposite manner of the purloined letter in the text. He divulges his secret to the point of excess, which his thinly veiled allusions to certain powers, certain quarters, certain illustrious personages, and (perhaps least discreet of all) “‘royal apartments’” (ibid.), all his “candor of diplomacy” does little to contain.

Rather than remark the Prefect’s unprecedented degree of discursive prominence in “The Purloined Letter” as unique, whether in itself or for the way in which it casts the lack of his speaking role in the previous Dupin tales into greater relief, when the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” does remark the change it is not to say “Hey, he’s talking!” but “Oy, he’s talking too much.” The excess of the Prefect’s discourse is thought to make it more uninteresting than interesting, more suspect than special. Chambers asks, as if rhetorically: “(What is one to think of a police chief so anxious to advertise police methods?)” (PP 292) In “The Frame of Reference” Barbara Johnson



poses a similar question as to the excess of the Prefect's discourse; however, she frames the question rather as one of Poe's excess than one of the Prefect's excess, less in terms of "[w]hat is one to think of [this] police chief" than what is one to think of Poe with regard to the protracted account of the "procedures employed by the police in searching unsuccessfully for the letter":

By appearing to repeat to us faithfully every word in both dialogues [the first, the discourse of the Prefect, interrupted at several points by the narrating and narrated narrator and, less occasionally, by Dupin; the second, Dupin's discourse in which he relates his "explanations" of the matter of the purloined letter, occasionally interposed by his friend], the narrator would seem to have resorted exclusively to direct quotation in presenting his story. Even where paraphrase could have been expected—in the description of the exact procedures employed by the police in searching unsuccessfully for the letter, for example—we are spared none of the details. Thus it is all the more surprising to find that there *is* one little point at which the direct quotation of the Prefect's words gives way to paraphrase. This point, however brief, is of no small importance, as we shall see. [...] What is paraphrased is [...] the description of the letter the story is about. And, whereas it is generally supposed that the function of paraphrase is strip off the form of speech in order to give us only its contents, here the use of paraphrase does the very opposite: it withholds the the contents of the Prefect's remarks, giving us only their form. And what is swallowed up in this ellipsis is nothing less than the contents of the letter itself. (PP 215-216)

What Johnson reveals here, almost in concealing it, is that the singularity of the purloined letter is enfolded in another singularity: that of the Prefect's discourse. The Prefect's protracted discourse on all the details and particulars of his protracted search of the Hotel D— is a moment in "The Purloined Letter," Johnson says, "where paraphrase could have been expected," but why? She does not mention that in the two previous Dupin tales the Prefect's discourse, though directly referred to in both texts ("Let him talk [...] [I]et him discourse," Dupin says in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (UP 684); then, in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," the narrator relates, "He discoursed much, and beyond doubt, learnedly" (UP 762).), is only paraphrased in the narrator's narrating-narration and that this is the reason, perhaps the only reason, why such "paraphrase could have been expected" in "The Purloined Letter." Yet, even if one justifies the expectation of paraphrase with the narrative precedents of "The Rue Morgue" and "Marie Rogêt," would not this expectation have meaning mostly for the fact that it finds itself so utterly disappointed in the case of "The Purloined Letter"? Johnson offers the discourse of the Prefect as but one example of an instance "where paraphrase could have been expected." Are there other such examples? Of course, I may be wrong, but I doubt that anyone would venture such a remark about Dupin's "explanations" of the matter of the purloined letter, for example.

Far from trying to deny the point Johnson is making here with regard to the singularity of the purloined letter, what is to my mind her most profound point about the (non)disclosed contents of the purloined letter inspires the point I am trying to make her with regard to the Prefect. Johnson refers to a way in which "the strategic use of paraphrase versus quotation begins to invade the literary text as well as the critical

narrative” (PP 216). In the context of my argument, what is being repeatedly, even compulsively quoted in and by the critical narrative is the non-disclosure of the contents of the purloined letter; there is hardly a reading of “The Purloined Letter” which does not touch on this most singular of features of the text. In putting the matter thus, I am of course already admitting a paradox, since what is being “quoted” is precisely a moment in the text whose singularity resides in the fact that here of all places “direct quotation [...] gives way to paraphrase.” On the other hand, what is being strategically paraphrased here is the Prefect’s discourse, and in precisely the singular mode of paraphrase identified by Johnson, such that it has become nearly absented (like the content of the letter itself) from the vast and complex critical narrative pervaded by literary text of “The Purloined Letter.” This too is a paradox since the singularity of the Prefect’s discourse in “The Purloined Letter” is precisely that here of all places paraphrase gives way to direct quotation.

There is, in short, a lack in the excess of the Prefect’s discourse—the purloined letter—and a lack in the excess of “The Purloined Letter”—the Prefect’s discourse. What is the relation between these two lacks in/and these two excesses? And to what sort of relation do they attest between the literary text and the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter”? In one way or another this question will reiterate itself throughout the subdivisions that follow. For now, I will try to simplify the question a bit by asking another, one echoing the question with which I started out opening the door to the Prefect of police. I asked there, Why is the Prefect always opening the door to Dupin? I ask here, What difference does it make that at the start of “The Purloined Letter” the Prefect is found rudely, even violently throwing open the door to Dupin’s “castle”? Is one to look

upon it as mere coincidence that “the door of [their] apartment was *thrown open* and admitted [their] old acquaintance, Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian police” (UP 917 [emphasis added])?

### Sighting the Prefect’s Discourse in “The Purloined Letter”

The last words of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” are devoted to a brief description of the “discourse” of the Prefect of police by Dupin, a discourse alluded to only sparingly in this tale and only ever alluded to, paraphrased in the narrator’s narrating-narration. The description is in fact a quotation; Dupin refers to “the way [the Prefect] has *“de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas”*” (UP 684). The quotation, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, translates “of denying what is, and of explaining what is not.” What might this enigmatic characterization of the Prefect’s discourse—one precisely of framing, a discursive framing of discursive framing, a putting in question of what is in and what is out of the frame—mean for the unique discursive status of the Prefect in “The Purloined Letter”? Might it not offer a clue to what happens in the event of the Prefect’s moving from the margins of Poe’s detective fiction to occupying, directly or indirectly, the vast majority of the pages of “The Purloined Letter,” what happens when Poe does finally “[I]et him talk [...] [I]et him discourse” (ibid.)?

Not by chance, the Prefect’s way “of denying what is” may be seen to evince itself in one of the most well-known moments of “The Purloined Letter.” One will recall quite clearly the Prefect’s denial of Dupin’s early assessments of the mystery of the purloined letter as a matter “a little *too* plain [...] [a] little *too* self-evident”:

“Simple and odd,” said Dupin.

“Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether.”

“Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault,” said my friend.

“What nonsense you *do* talk!” replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

“Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain,” said Dupin.

“Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?”

“A little *too* self-evident.”

“Ha! ha! ha!—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho!” roared out our visiter, profoundly amused, “oh, Dupin, you will be death of me yet!” (UP 918)

Three times Dupin suggests to the Prefect the nature of the mystery before him (and what one knows to be the germ of the insight that will eventually lead to Dupin’s success in having the letter to hand), and he does so before the Prefect has related any particulars of “the matter on hand,” that is, apart from its being “*very* simple indeed” and “*excessively odd*” (ibid.). So it is not to be wondered that Dupin has grown a bit weary as his friend excitedly urges the Prefect on in his account of this “*affair demanding the greatest secrecy,*” over which he, the Prefect, “*should most probably lose the position [he] now [holds], were it known that that [he] confided it to any one*” (ibid.).

“Proceed,” the narrator says; “Or not,” says Dupin (ibid.).

However, unlike in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” where Dupin sleeps “not the less soundly, because silently, throughout the seven or eight leaden-footed hours which immediately preceded the departure of the Prefect” (during which time the latter, as

recounted by the narrator, “discoursed much, and beyond doubt, learnedly”), in “The Purloined Letter” Dupin cannot be “the embodiment of respectful attention” in this way. In the case of the purloined letter there are no newspaper articles to consider, there is probably not even an official case-file open in the Prefecture. The ““matter on hand”” demands ““the greatest secrecy.”” This is the main reason why the Prefect’s discourse plays such a pronounced role in “The Purloined Letter.” As per the design of the tale, the whole ““affair”” is off-the-record. Indeed, the Prefect’s disclosure of the circumstances of the case to Dupin and the narrator, which they could come by in no other way, is the only feature of the tale that might suggest that the Prefect’s discourse strays beyond “denying what is” and “explaining what is not.”

In a way, only the Prefect can explain what is the matter of the purloined letter. That certain ““personage of most exalted station”” over whom, ““in a certain quarter,”” a ““certain power”” is being wielded by the Minister D— (UP 919), ““driven to despair [...] committed the matter to [him]”” (UP 920), and it is only after he has assured himself that he cannot resolve the matter on his own that the Prefect commits the matter to Dupin. (In spite of Dupin’s admission to his ““political prepossessions”” at the close of the tale— where he famously claims, ““In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned”” —it seems ““the lady concerned”” is not well enough acquainted with her ““partisan,”” Dupin, to know to commit the matter of the purloined letter to him rather than the Prefect (UP 932)). Still, the Prefect might be thought to explain what is the matter with the purloined letter beyond his pre-possession of the case itself. Dupin never expresses any gratitude for the Prefect’s allowing him to be of service to the lady toward whom he is so disposed,

but he does acknowledge his indebtedness to the Prefect's failed search of the Hotel D— for the letter for his success in having it to hand.

This acknowledgment is given in the course of the most complimentary account of the labors of the Prefect and his cohort in the whole Dupin trilogy. Moreover, it is the first established point of Dupin's often-cited discourse that commences in "The Purloined Letter" after that pivotal "wordless scene" (Johnson, PP 215) punctuated by the Prefect's departure from *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, letter-in-hand:

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D—, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labors extended."

"So far as his labors extended?" said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed—but he seemed quite serious in all he said. (UP 924)

The narrator's laughter here, like the Prefect's outburst upon Dupin suggesting that the matter of the purloined letter is "[a] little *too* self-evident," signals a failure to see something that Dupin sees. The narrator seems unable to believe Dupin earnest in expressing his "entire confidence" in the "labors" and in the "knowledge" that the "duties [of the police] seem chiefly to demand" and in delivering his judgment that the

Prefect performed “a satisfactory investigation,” at least “so far as his labors extended.” Dupin, however, seems “quite serious.” Given how seriously Dupin is almost always taken in readings of “The Purloined Letter,” one might expect that the importance of the Prefect’s protracted discourse on his search of the Hotel D—, not just for the plot of the tale but for the very design of the text, would be taken at least half seriously in turn, but it remains one of the most overlooked even as it is one of the most memorable features of the tale.

Citing the whole of the Prefect’s discourse on this subject would be supererogatory, on the one hand, because it occupies the better part of three pages in the tale and, on the other hand, because no one who has read “The Purloined Letter” even once will fail to recall something of his long and detailed account of “the particulars of [his] search” for the letter (UP 921). Whether the examination of “the jointings of every description of furniture” and of “the moss between the bricks” paving the grounds “by the aid of a most powerful microscope” for “any unusual gaping in the joints” (UP 922); or the measuring of “the thickness of every book-*cover*, with the most accurate admeasurement” and the applying “to them the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope” (*ibid.*); or the digging up of every cellar “to the depth of four feet” (UP 923)<sup>61</sup>; or the division of the “entire surface” of the Hotel D— itself into numbered “compartments,” whereupon each “individual square” was scrutinized, “with the microscope as before,” and with such rigor that “[t]he fiftieth part of a line” could not have escaped the notice of the police (922, 921): something of these or the numerous other details pertaining to the Prefect’s search for the purloined letter will have embedded

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<sup>61</sup> This particular detail, as well as a few others, was edited out of the Prefect’s discourse by Poe after the initial publication of “The Purloined Letter.” Cf. M 3:981m.



itself in the memory of the reader and remained there as a sort of metonymy for the whole endeavor.

Yet, in spite of the haunting nature of the Prefect's search, it almost always happens in readings of "The Purloined Letter" that the sole relevance credited to the Prefect's discourse on all the minutiae he sees and with which he sees in the Hotel D— is the way in which it opens the door to Dupin, prompts him to "go and see" for himself. It is routinely supposed that this Prefect-sight is wholly subordinate to and, therefore, wholly distinct from Dupin's mode of detection. To my knowledge the only party to the "Caucus-race" to even acknowledge that the Prefect's protracted discourse on his failed search for the purloined letter affords him a unique narrative voice in this tale is Ross Chambers, whose third chapter from *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, "Narratorial Authority and 'The Purloined Letter,'" appears reprinted in *The Purloined Poe*. However, for Chambers, the Prefect's "prowess as a narrator" only connotes, to begin with, a "weak narrative authority," which ultimately proves his "narratorial" inefficacy and powerlessness (PP 289, 291). The Prefect's discourse is seen not to partake in the vital aesthetic import of "The Purloined Letter"; he is barred, albeit rigorously, from the tale's "seductive program" (PP 287) and thus from all the compelling notions at stake in Chambers's reading of it.

I will return to Chambers's reading of "The Purloined Letter" in greater detail below, after I have illustrated and challenged the general rule which he proves in being its exception: typically, in readings of "The Purloined Letter" the Prefect's discourse does not appear to be of any interest apart from acknowledging it to be one of certain failure. Daniel Hoffman, though describing the narrative action of "The Purloined Letter" as "a

three-sided battle of wits between the Minister D—, the Prefect of Police, and Monsieur Dupin” (and even acknowledging the Prefect as a “professional rival” of Dupin’s) (Hoffman 120), chalks up the Prefect’s failure to locate the letter “*dangling under [his] nose*” as Poe’s indictment of “the system [...] the entire establishment—society” (ibid. 124, 120), and he resolves: “although much of the tale is given to a description of those methods of the Prefect, the real contest is that between the unscrupulous genius of D— and the resolvent genius of Dupin” (ibid. 120-121). More recently, Shawn Rosenheim’s *The Cryptographic Imagination* (1997) has given a more nuanced account of the Prefect’s failure, also intended merely to set the stage for yet another more nuanced look at Dupin:

[T]he Prefect’s failure derives from his inability to recognize the semiotic flatness of his textual world. His misdirected search for the letter leads him to look in places of occulted depth—in gimlet holes, in the cracks of joints, under carpets, inside seat cushions, and so on. Still infatuated with the world of three dimensions, he sets out to take an inventory of the Minister’s apartments, in all their cubic tangibility, unaware of the essential point that Poe’s letter has no depth—only two sides—and that it is simply *there*, on the surface, and cannot be reached by piercing the page. (Rosenheim 29-30)

Immediately after this account of the Prefect’s failure, Rosenheim draws on “The Frame of Reference” to illustrate that Dupin, “[u]nlike the Prefect, [...] is too sophisticated to make such a mistake with regard to the letter” (ibid.). He cites Johnson’s well-known remarks on Dupin’s finding the letter “‘in’ the symbolic order,” in contrast to the Prefect’s failure to locate the letter “‘in a geometrical space” and the often-criticized

habits of a certain “literal understanding of psychoanalysis” to situate the letter “in an anatomical space” (PP 245). It seems one of the most widely agreed upon points about “The Purloined Letter” in the critical narrative is that the only relevance of the Prefect’s discourse on his failed search for the letter is its irrelevance, its way “of explaining what is not” the matter of “The Purloined Letter.”

Now, in spite of all appearances to the contrary—especially in Johnson and in Rosenheim, where the Prefect’s failure is accounted for as a failed sense of space—almost no one claims that the Prefect manages to explain to Dupin *where the letter is not*; almost no one claims that the Prefect’s failure to have the letter to hand is in any way pivotal to Dupin’s success in finding the letter. Dupin’s mode of analysis is routinely set apart from the Prefect’s methods by way of a pure qualitative difference so as to have the former owing nothing to the latter. As Johnson famously puts the matter: “Dupin finds the letter ‘in’ the symbolic order not because he knows where to look, but because he knows *what to repeat*” (PP 245). Similarly, Rosenheim’s account of the Prefect’s failure implies that Dupin owes nothing to the Prefect’s “inventory of the Minister’s apartments, in all their cubic tangibility,” to his supposed “[infatuation] with the world of three dimensions.” The whole of Poe’s three-page description of the police’s excavation of all those “places of occulted depth—in gimlet holes, in the cracks of joints, under carpets, inside seat cushions, and so on”—is, by these accounts, meant to illustrate merely a single “mistake,” one which Dupin “is too sophisticated to make.” One crucial aspect of Poe’s design in “The Purloined Letter” has been systematically overlooked by the vast majority of readers of this tale: Dupin’s expressed indebtedness to the Prefect’s failed search.

“When G— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D—, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labors extended. [...] The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond question, have found it.”

It is ironic that the narrator merely laughs in response to these words only to find Dupin not sharing in the fun but rather seeming “quite serious.” For, amidst all the laughing at the character of the Prefect that Poe encourages his reader to enjoy throughout the tale, this awkward pause, in which the narrator’s fun is not shared by Dupin, has only rarely occasioned a similar pause in the critical narrative and given cause to consider this character which is taken more seriously than any other in Poe’s tales of ratiocination, Dupin, “quite serious” in his professed indebtedness to the Prefect.

It is also noteworthy that Dupin’s acknowledged indebtedness to the ministrations of the Prefect and his cohort in “The Purloined Letter” overturns a precedent of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” where it appears to be precisely the case that Dupin’s solution to the mystery owes almost nothing to the labors of the police. (That is, apart from that crucial point of the Prefect’s allowing him access to the crime-scene: only after “having shown [their] credentials,” given to them by the Prefect, and being “admitted by the agents in charge,” Dupin, accompanied by his friend, “scrutinized everything—not excepting the body of the victims” (UP 669).) Recounting his search for the mode of ingress and egress to the chamber where the murders took place, while awaiting the arrival of the Ourang-Outang’s keeper, Dupin says: “The police have laid bare the floors, the ceilings, and the masonry of the walls, in every direction. No *secret* issues

could have escaped their vigilance. But, not trusting to their eyes, I examined with my own. There were, then, no secret issues” (UP 672). The clue that leads Dupin to the solution of this locked-room mystery is not hidden in a place of occulted depth, as a “*secret issue*” deposited in a floor, ceiling, or wall, but rather in plain sight. Thus satisfied—not by the police’s search for this “*secret issue*” (which, oddly, he adds, “could [not] have escaped their vigilance”) but by his own eyes—that “[t]here were, then, no secret issues,” Dupin then recounts his famous examination of the sealed windows of the chamber whereby he “terminated the clew” of this locked-room mystery in *le clou sans tête*<sup>62</sup> (674). For the purposes of this argument, the crucial point here is that in searching out mode of egress and ingress to the locked-room mystery of “The Rue Morgue,” the reader finds Dupin “not trusting to [the] eyes” of the Prefect and his cohort, but rather repeating their empty “shell of an examination” (668) before looking elsewhere to fill it.

In “The Purloined Letter” this is just not the case. According to Dupin, his finding the letter hinges not only on his knowing “*what to repeat*” (Johnson) but also on his knowing *what he does not have to repeat*. He does not feel compelled as in “The Rue Morgue” to distrust the eyes of the Prefect and his cohort. He does not first commence a thorough re-search of the Hotel D—, repeat the police’s empty “shell of an examination,” and then go looking for the letter otherwise. He does not go about reprobating for the letter “in gimlet holes, in the cracks of joints, under carpets, inside seat cushions, and so on,” retracing the steps of the Prefect, just in case he missed something.

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<sup>62</sup> I am indebted here to the best extant reading of the clue of the *clou* in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” John T. Irwin’s account of the tale’s “locked-room problem” in *A Mystery to a Solution*, cf., especially, 176-184 and 195-200.

Rather, Dupin simply trusts to the Prefect's eyes, in Prefect-sight, in the "absolute perfection" of the Prefect's "inventory of the Minister's apartments" (Rosenheim). Moreover, he does so not even having witnessed the Prefect's search first-hand; what he trusts in is a second-hand report of the search given to him in as and by the Prefect's discourse.

After a dramatic presentation of the letter that has been hidden away in an *escritoire* for up to a month and the Prefect's hasty departure from *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, with the hot property in hand, Dupin, it will be remembered, enters at length into some explanations to his friend. Just before arriving at his narration of the theft of the letter from the Hotel D—, Dupin refers back to what he calls "the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that [the letter] was not within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search" (UP 929). This "decisive evidence, *obtained by the Prefect*," is placed in a series of considerations (the only other two items of which are "the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D—" and "the fact that the document must always have been *at hand*") which Dupin says led him to discern "that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all" (929-930). It would seem that this "decisive evidence" in being referred to thus—in a detective story, moreover, by the prototypical detective, Dupin—could not have a more decisive importance to the plot and design of "The Purloined Letter." Yet, remarkably, only very rarely has it afforded any "decisive evidence" to a critical reading of the tale.

Accordingly, and as such, it will repeatedly prove of decisive importance to my argument. Below I will consider the more thematic relevance of this "decisive

evidence” for its situation in Poe’s detective fiction, wherein the very uniqueness of the case of the purloined letter, the very trouble it affords the police, seems to be almost utter unmeaningness of gathering and interpreting evidence when it comes to matters “[a] little *too* self-evident” (see “Missing from its Place: The Record of Records”). For now, I would like first to account for the fact that this “decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect,” is only conveyed to Dupin through the Prefect’s second-hand report of his failed search of the Hotel D—, and to question what this means for the narratological efficacy of the Prefect’s unprecedented discursive presence in “The Purloined Letter.” Of course, that the Prefect’s search should be “evidence” at all in the first place, underscores the fact that the Prefect’s must be a discourse of failure. The Prefect does not find the purloined letter (twice). However, the circumstance of the “decisive evidence” of the (first) failure being afforded to Dupin only by the Prefect’s discourse also implies that this discourse is expressly not, as Ross Chambers would have it, a “failed narrative about his failure” (PP 292), but rather a highly effective, successful, and necessary “narrative about his failure.”

For Chambers, the Prefect’s discourse is not just “about [a] failure” but is itself “failed,” for the fact that it gives no token of the notion orienting his study of “The Purloined Letter,” while it is, at the same time, inseparable from it, as the very precondition of the “narratorial authority.” The maintenance of “narratorial authority” consists in “the ‘art’ of seduction” proper to “the modern ‘art story,’” and its progress is coincident and coterminous with an erosion of merely informational “narrative authority” (PP 286). It is this merely informational, “narrative authority” with which Chambers identifies the Prefect’s discourse and its overcoming with which he identifies Dupin’s “artistic (‘narratorial’) success” (PP 287). While much would seem, then, to hinge on the

relation between the Prefect's discourse and that of Dupin, Chambers is only implicitly interested in this difference, and (initially) situates it only vaguely. At one point, he says, "[the Prefect's] failure in 'narrative' authority *sets off* the success of Dupin's 'narratorial' strategies" (290, emphasis added). Then, a couple pages later he says "The Purloined Letter" is "constructed of two *opposed* narrative situations (the Prefect's failed narrative about his failure, Dupin's successful narrative about his success)" (292, emphasis added). Precisely how the Prefect's discourse "sets off" in opposing that of Dupin or how the two are "opposed" in being "set off," one from the other, in their both being incorporated in as and by "the general narration," most directly concerns Chambers in his reading of that pivotal "wordless scene" (Johnson) which begins with "[Dupin's] theatrical production of the letter" from his *escritoire* and ends with the Prefect's hasty departure from *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, letter-in hand:

("I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken.") This parallel in the reactions of the policeman and the friend is important: it suggests a more hidden parallel between the handing over of the letter to the policeman and the "explanations" Dupin is now about to offer his friend, and it betrays the fact that Dupin's true gain is the production of fascination with, and admiration for, his genius, irrespective of whether this is achieved by narrative as an act of non-disclosure (as is the case with the Prefect) or narrative as an act of disclosure (as with his friend). (PP 293)

As "narrative seduction" is central to Chambers's reading of "The Purloined Letter," it is understandably "the fascinating figure of Dupin" that most interests him and, more interestingly, for the way in which he "[diverts] attention from the text's own seductive



program” (PP 287). However, this is just as pivotal a moment in Chambers’s treatment of the Prefect, whose “thunder-stricken” reaction to Dupin’s presentation of the letter is supposed to signal a “final loss of authority” for this character and his discursive presence in the tale.

[The Prefect’s] admission of defeat, when Dupin produces the purloined letter and claims his reward, is therefore most appropriately signaled by his speechlessness. Without authority, one has nothing to say and no right to speak; and in a text such as this, which is so fundamentally concerned with illocutionary relationships [...] to be deprived of that form of power that is the power to disclose (or the right to narrate) is to disappear from the text. So, “This functionary . . . rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.” (PP 292)

Several points interest me here.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, even though the Prefect is “thunder-stricken” and reduced to “speechlessness” upon Dupin’s “theatrical production of the letter,” even though he rushes “unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable,” he does not “disappear from the *text*.” In fact, the Prefect is named no less than ten times in the explanations which Dupin enters into after the hasty departure of “this functionary”: a designation befitting the fact that the character of the Prefect continues to function in “The Purloined Letter” after his exit “from the room and from the house” represented in the tale, much in the way he continues to function in Chambers’s analysis after there appears to be nothing more to say about him. This may seem a minor detail or particular, but, “in a text such as this, which,” as

Chambers points out, “is so fundamentally concerned with illocutionary relationships,” the repeated references to the Prefect’s report of his failed search for the purloined letter and to the Prefect himself in Dupin’s explanations, attests to a continued discursive presence of this character, even if only through the fragile illocutionary force of a proper name. In short, sighting the Prefect’s discourse in “The Purloined Letter” ought to involve the way in which the text (this text, uniquely) poses a question of citing the Prefect’s discourse.

Secondly, Poe’s characterization of the Prefect in “The Purloined Letter” gives every indication that this character has nothing left to gain from Dupin’s explanations. Recall that the Prefect laughs off Dupin’s suggestion at the beginning of the tale to have them hear out the matter of the purloined letter in the dark as ““another of [his] odd notions”” (UP 918), and one might imagine that, similarly, the Prefect would care nothing at all for the schoolboy game of “even and odd,” nor for the way it ““lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rouchefoucault, to La Bruyère, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella”” (UP 925), nor for the ““*non distributio medii*”” of his supposing all poets fools for his feeling all fools poets (UP 926), nor for Dupin’s ““quarrel [...] with some algebrists of Paris”” (UP 927), nor for etymology, chemistry, mythology, or any other ““game of puzzles”” that might be brought to bear on the matter of the purloined letter (UP 929). This is as much as to say that all that the Prefect wants is the letter. At stake in his having it to hand is not only the crippled authority of that ““most exalted station”” of which he is “the functionary” but also the already compromised ““position”” he further risks by committing the matter to Dupin and his friend (Chambers, PP 291). Thus it is already somewhat odd that Chambers would identify the very moment

in the tale when the Prefect's wager appears to have finally paid off, when not just his own "position" but the very authority that position is supposed to protect is seemingly spared, as the moment of his "final loss of authority."

What is more odd still, however, is the interpretive claims Chambers finds on "the type of incomprehension displayed by the Prefect in the early part of the story": "[O]blivious as he is to Dupin's smokescreen and to his irony, [...] he would not perceive the art in Dupin's later narration, nor consequently would he recognize—that is, authorize—the narratorial authority being exercised. He would simply be confirmed in his view that poets are next to fools, and so Dupin is right not to divulge his secrets to him" (PP 299). Previously Chambers has indicated that Dupin has "*chosen* his audience, disdaining the Prefect, who is incapable of understanding his sallies, in favor of the friend"; moreover, this choosing of audience is said to be the one of the first tell-tale signs of the "mastery that allows Dupin to be as prolix and expansive in his discourse as the Prefect himself while maintaining the firmest sense of authority" (PP 293). Now, it is already disingenuous to refer to Dupin's later explanations to his friend as being founded on an authoritative position of "non-disclosure" in relation to the Prefect (*ibid*), when Dupin has not "*chosen* his audience," dismissed the Prefect from his "castle," so much as watched him go without even so much as an expression of gratitude (apart from the check, that is) or a goodbye. Is Dupin really "exerting authority" (PP 293) over and against the Prefect for the fact that he is not compelled to hang around to discover how Dupin recovered the letter but rather seems to care only that he did recover it? Ultimately, what I find most odd about this liberal interpretation of the Prefect's departure from *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, is that Chambers indicates that Dupin "risks a form of failure should he

miscalculate his audience” (PP 299). What would have been different had the Prefect lingered to hear Dupin “divulge his secrets”? Would “the narratorial authority being exercised” really be any less recognizable—that is, authorizable?

Thirdly, there is Chambers’s claim: “Without authority, one has nothing to say and no right to speak.” Does Chambers mean to say that in the event of a loss or absence of authority there is nothing to say or no right to speak? Surely not. Ross Chambers would more clearly acknowledge in any other context that not infrequently in the absence of authority or given a loss of authority not only is there much to be said but one’s right to speak becomes all the more urgent and more saliently necessary for that fact: as in psychoanalysis, as in testimony. What Chambers means to say is there is nothing said which does not imply a question of authority, of who or what has the right to speak. I am merely asking, what sort of authority is conferred to the character of the Prefect when he is afforded such an unprecedented right to speak in “The Purloined Letter”? I believe in this rather fraught sentence—“Without authority, one has nothing to say and no right to speak.”—Chambers merely intends to emphasize Dupin’s “strange ascendancy” in the literary design of “The Purloined Letter” (PP 304), which few (if any) would deny that Dupin does enjoy over the Prefect, and even at that very moment in the text where the Prefect’s authority and that of the “most exalted station” he represents as “functionary” seems to have been spared. It is this ascendancy that gives credence to Dupin’s nominal primacy in such designations as “Dupin trilogy” or “Dupin tales.” I would only suggest that, despite of the general picture afforded by the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter,” the Prefect’s discourse does not need to be silenced for Dupin’s ascendancy to take hold. In fact, Poe’s design in “The Purloined Letter” suggests just the opposite by

having the very patenting of the Prefect's characteristic incompetence and impotence in "The Purloined Letter" coincide with a dramatic rise of his discursive prominence in the tale, such that the height of his narratological efficacy, capacity and power, arises necessarily in the case where his character's incapacity and powerlessness is most profound.

Finally, on "that form of power that is the power to disclose (or the right to narrate)." Even as his analysis forcibly distances the Prefect's discourse from all vital aesthetic import of "The Purloined Letter," Chambers engages a question here that, I agree, is pivotal to an understanding of the art-work of tale; however, it is a question that evokes, precisely, a relationality traversing all three principle discursive positions represented in the tale (by the only three recurring characters in the Dupin tales), those of Dupin, "narrating-narrated narrator," and the Prefect. It is "a certain question of disclosure" (PP 287). Is it mere coincidence that what Chambers elides in his quotation of Poe's text at the moment when the Prefect's supposedly "disappear[s] from [it]" is not only the "perfect agony of joy" with which he grasps the letter (a sentiment which, as a kind of *jouissance*, seems more multifaceted and complex than an "admission of defeat" and gives a wholly different character to the "speechlessness" supposed to underscore his "final loss of authority"), but also this particular detail: that upon having the letter to hand the Prefect is said to have "opened it with a trembling hand" and to have "cast a rapid glance at its contents" (UP 924)? At the very moment in "The Purloined Letter" where Chambers sees Dupin's "narrative seduction" most decidedly taking hold, "irrespective of whether this is achieved by narrative as an act of non-disclosure (as is the case with the Prefect) or narrative as an act of disclosure (as with his friend)" (PP 293),

the most profound example of non-disclosure in the tale—the contents of the purloined letter itself—is once again disclosed to the reader.

The notion of “narratorial authority” is caught in “a constant tug-of-war between [two] conflicting strategies,” which Chambers sees expressly not evinced in the Prefect’s discourse but rather principally between Dupin’s discourse and that of the “narrating-narrated narrator,” or “the general narration”: “narrative *self-referentiality* whereby the story draws attention to its status as art,” and “narrative *duplicity* whereby the story pretends to be concerned only with its informational content and yet reveals in unobtrusive ways (usually by slight discrepancies) that this is not so” (PP 288). Chambers later qualifies his notion of “narrative duplicity,” Dupin’s signature mode, as duplicitous precisely for the fact that it has “as much the character of nondisclosure as of disclosure” (PP 294). This is precisely in what “the maintenance of artistic authority” consists in “The Purloined Letter,” according to Chambers; it is “dependent on the practice of duplicity as a mode of divulgence and nondivulgence, of openness and covertness, at once” (PP 299). In fact, Dupin’s discourse is said to exhibit such an “*excess* of covertness [...] that it begins to border on artistic self-reflexivity” (ibid. [emphasis mine]), as it is incorporated into “the general narration.”

Finding this suggestion that a certain question of excess binds the notions of duplicity and self-referentiality in “The Purloined Letter” entirely convincing, I would only question the necessity of denying the Prefect’s discourse relevance in this context. After all, Chambers himself repeatedly registers suspicions of a certain excess unique to the Prefect:

Narrative divulgence, which he engages in to the point of indulgence (What is one to think of a police chief so anxious to advertise police methods?) is consequently the reverse of the same coin of which the failed search, and the baffled state of mind it produces is the obverse: each is the sign of the Prefect's lack of authority, the latter with respect to the Minister's superior ingeniousness and the former [...] by contrast with Dupin's combination of acuity and canny narratorial authority.

(PP 292)

The parenthetical question touching on the Prefect's supposed anxiety to "advertise" his methods resonates with another parenthetical remark found farther down the same page, this time concerning the Prefect's return to *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, after re-searching the Hotel D— (as Dupin advises him do): "The narrative he proffers on his second visit is the (mercifully abbreviated) repetition of his initial tale" (*ibid.*). Is the Prefect really "advertising" his methods to Dupin and his friend? Does his discourse not play out in the tale as more of a conversation in which he is repeatedly urged on (most especially, by the narrator) to recount all the details and particulars of his search? What or whose mercy is at stake when confronted with a possible "repetition of his initial tale"? And, by implication, whom or what is not spared in the Prefect's protracted discourse on all the details and particulars of his first search of the Hotel D—? So the Prefect's discourse is identified with certain excess—an "indulgence" in "narrative divulgence," blabbing (*ibid.*)—one which is also marked out by a certain form of non-disclosure.

The most obvious and memorable way in which the Prefect's discourse poses a question of non-disclosure is his signature cant: that "cant of diplomacy" which has it that the party he represents as "functionary" is only ever referred to as a "certain illustrious

personage,” over whom “a certain power” is being wielded by the Minister “in a certain quarter.” Chambers treats this “cant of diplomacy” as a sort of index to the Prefect’s narrative powerlessness:

[H]is childish attempt to salvage some narrative authority by withholding certain information from the pair is merely ludicrous. His would-be discretion is futile, either because he cannot maintain his evasiveness (“a certain document” soon becomes “a letter, to be frank”) or because his phraseology is in any case transparent (no one is in any doubt as to who is referred to by phrases such as “the illustrious personage” and “the other exalted personage,” or, what the issues are— Dupin later reveals that, as a “partisan of the lady concerned” and long-time opponent of the Minister, he is perfectly *au fait* with the political implications of the affair). (PP 292)

Perhaps I am alone in having some “doubt as to who is referred to by phrases such as ‘the illustrious personage’ and ‘the other exalted personage,’” and/or as to “what the issues are” precisely, but at the outset of his reading (again, in parentheses) Chambers also notes: “the ‘personage of most exalted station’ [...] will henceforward be referred to as the Queen,” moreover, “*for simplicity’s sake*” (PP 290 [emphasis added]). Is it not worth asking, what complexity has been spared in the economic substitution of the Prefect’s cant with the language of Kings and Queens, not just by Chambers but by the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” in general, when the very economy of the substitution stems from the fact that every voice in the tale, the text itself conspires to keep the identity of the Minister’s “victim(s)” thus veiled, never referred to by name nor even by title? (Would it make any difference, for instance, if the “affair” concerned a King and



his princess?) The Prefect's cant, even if it is wholly transparent to Dupin as per the design of the tale (or to Chambers), is at the same time reinforced by Dupin as well as by "the general narration." At the end of "The Purloined Letter" the text bluntly faces its reader with the fact that sighting the Prefect's discourse will always have involved a question of citing the Prefect's discourse, precisely in as and by citing his signature cant: "I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when [...] being defied by her whom the Prefect terms "a certain personage"" (UP 932).

The Prefect's signature cant is what appears to most decidedly enfold his discourse in Dupin's characterization of it at the close of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," where Dupin identifies his way ""*de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas*"" as the ""one master stroke of cant, by which [the Prefect] has attained that reputation of for ingenuity which he possesses,"" and for which he, Dupin, claims to like him especially well (UP 684). And in "The Purloined Letter" the word "cant" returns, this time in "the general narration," just at the moment when the Prefect continues to insist on his "would-be discretion" when told, "Be a little more explicit": "Well," the Prefect says, "I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable.' The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy. 'Still I do not quite understand,' said Dupin" (UP 919). Dupin's lack of understanding here is a polite plea, not for explanation but for more information, details and particulars, and the Prefect does, as anyone will remember, proceed "to blab." As I have shown, it is solely on the basis of what Chambers's characterizes as a "long string of 'details' and 'particulars' —a discourse that has its exact correlative in the philosophy of 'nooks and crannies' and of leaving no stone unturned" (PP 292)—that

Dupin avails himself of the “absolute perfection” of the Prefect’s “*application*” of his limited principles and obtains that “decisive evidence” for his solution “that, to conceal [the] letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not concealing it at all” (UP 930).

I have now dwelt at some length on Chambers’s reading of “The Purloined Letter” as one of the most rigorous attempts to situate of the Prefect’s unique discursive presence in this tale, having found that his compelling attentions to Dupin’s “canny narratorial authority” only too readily educe a can’t from the Prefect’s cant. In one sentence, he says three times that the Prefect can’t: “the Prefect’s narrative cannot *advance* (it cannot move forward toward a culminating ‘point,’ since its only point is that he cannot see the point); it can only repeat itself, just as he is condemned to repeat, unproductively, his search” (PP 292). Whether because the Prefect’s discursive prominence in “The Purloined Letter” does not give itself to be seen owing to its false appearance of narrative powerlessness, incompetence and impotence, or because it gives this false appearance precisely in being seen, in either case, the Prefect’s discourse would seem (at the very least) to attest to some “undecidability’ inherent in artistic signs”: even though or, perhaps, precisely for the fact that it is characterized by “information to be conveyed” (PP 301). For “information” in Poe’s fiction—especially when it comes to the Dupin tales, where information cannot be mastered, nor hardly need it be compensated for, precisely for its being “(fictional) information” (PP 286)—is ever caught up in a troublesome economy of (non)disclosure.

Imagine a digitally scanned archive of all the sayings and doings of the “Caucus-race” in which one could perform searches for certain individual words or phrases. If one

were to search, say, the word “certain,” and parse the search-results for occurrences of this word deployed in precisely the sense of such phrases as ““certain illustrious personage,”” ““a certain power,”” and ““in a certain quarter”” —the Prefect’s signature cant—at length, one would certainly find, somewhere under the name “Ross Chambers”: ““a certain question of disclosure.””

### The — of G—(— —) and Poe’s Narrative Economy of (Non)Disclosure

Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure names a pervasive and perverse trend in his fiction. It may be seen at work, for instance, in the momentous break in narrative voice at the end of “Berenice,” in the lost final chapters of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and in “[t]he thousand injuries of Fortunato” and the “insult” which prompt the action of “The Cask of Amontillado” (UP 1090). The disinterment of Berenice (who will have forgotten it?) takes place in a rupture or hiatus in the narrative frame, after which the narrator (along with the reader) are faced with the horrific saving-grace of his actions in the dim form of a suppressed recollection. In *Pym* (as in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” with the (non)disclosed solving of the crime), the non-disclosed final chapters of the novel are revealed as missing from their place by an editorial note which supervenes the narrative frame, effectively completing Pym’s narrative in revealing it to be incomplete. In “A Cask of Amontillado” the (non)disclosed “injuries” and “insult” of Fortunato propel rather than punctuate the narrative’s action, prompting Montresor’s revenge as it opens the narrative frame, while at the same time being set just beyond that frame and thus leaving Montresor’s vengeance forever (un)justified. In this way, the narrative economy of (non)disclosure repeatedly directs the reader to some scene, event,

or bit of information set beyond the narrative frame by sign-posts planted conspicuously within that frame, every one at once beckoning and beguiling interpretation, and it forms no small share of the tradition of the “unreliable narrator” in Poe. While never unburdened of the miasma of the questionable sanity of Poe’s narrative voice(s), whether with regard to madness all too soberly (“The Black Cat”) or all too anxiously (“The Tell-Tale Heart”) denied by the narrator, Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure refers less directly to a notion of textual ambiguity than to a question of textual presence/absence whose effects are radically ambiguous.

Consider, for example, Poe’s pet habit of suppressing dates and proper names in his fiction. There is a notable concentration of this practice in the Dupin tales: Rue C— —; the Minister D—; the Hotel D—; G— — —, the *Prefêt de Police*; and 18—. This date, interestingly enough, marks every one of Poe’s tales of ratiocination (among which one may decidedly count, in addition to the Dupin tales, “Thou Art the Man!” and “The Gold-Bug”) and appears only sparingly outside of these tales.<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere in Poe, dates are more entirely suppressed, as in “Hans Phaall”: “It appears that on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, (I am not positive about the date,) a vast crowd of people, for purposes not specifically mentioned, were assembled in the great square of the Exchange in the goodly and well-conditioned city of Rotterdam” (UP 175). Poe’s first article of *Autography* for the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836 is another case-in-point; here all the fictitious letters attributed to the American literati have their dates appear suppressed, while all of

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<sup>63</sup> “The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether,” for example, is dated 18—; although, there is some justification for counting this piece, if not among the tales of ratiocination, then at least among Poe’s experiments in detective fiction (perhaps less in the vein of *Sherlock Holmes* than in that of *The Wicker Man*). There is also a pair of examples of this bit of narrative mystification in the fictitious correspondence contained in “Mystification” (cf., “*To the Baron Ritzner Von Jung. / August 18<sup>th</sup>, 18— [...] The Herr Johan Hermann. / August 18<sup>th</sup>, 18—*” (UP 477)).

them are given a specific place of origin, such that the letters are all headed in this way: “*Philadelphia, \_\_\_\_\_.*”; “*Boston, \_\_\_\_\_.*”; *New York, \_\_\_\_\_.*”; *Baltimore, \_\_\_\_\_.*”; “*Alexandria, Red River, \_\_\_\_\_, Louisiana.*”; etc. Then, still elsewhere in Poe, proper names are given another unique sort of propriety in being supposedly expendable, though not so expendable as to have no place in the narrative frame, so that the propriety of the proper name takes place as a missing from its place. For example: in “Loss of Breath,” “Having at length put my affairs in order, I took my seat very early one morning in the mail stage for — — —, giving it to be understood, among my acquaintances, that business of the last importance required my immediate personal attendance” (UP 98); in “Mystification,” “I have seen Villanova, the danseuse, lecturing in the chair of National Law, and I have seen D — —, P — —, T — —, and Von C — —, all enraptured with her profundity” (UP 470)<sup>64</sup>; and in “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” where P — —, Dr. D — —, Dr. F — —, and Mr. L — — witness the mesmeric event.

Of course, Poe’s suppression of dates and proper names in his fiction does not prevent his readers from filling in the blanks; indeed, this pet habit has spawned a veritable tradition of filling in the blanks in Poe in studies of Poe. T. O. Mabbott was particularly fond of this practice.<sup>65</sup> More befitting the context of this discussion, John T. Irwin—building on Mabbott’s confirmation of the historical analogue for G — — —, the

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<sup>64</sup> This line was edited out of “Mystification” after its initial publication. Cf. M 2:294k.

<sup>65</sup> Cf., for instance, Mabbott’s suggestions with regard to the proper names suppressed in “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”: “Readers may have expanded P as Poe; F as Dr. John W. Francis, president of the Academy of Medicine and one of Poe’s Literati, who was the poet’s own physician; and D as Dr. John W. Draper, the best-known professor in the Medical School of New York University” (3:1243, n.3), but “L — — has not been identified” (ibid., n.5): (James Russell) Lowell, perhaps?

*Prefêt de Police*, in Poe's Dupin tales as Henri-Joseph Gisquet<sup>66</sup> and further speculating on the historical analogues indexed in "The Purloined Letter" by the name "Dupin" and the Minister's corresponding initial D— —narrows down "the period [...] in which [the tale] is set," indicated there only as 18—, to the "five-year space between 1831 and 1836 when Gisquet was prefect of the Paris police, and probably after late 1832 when [André-Marie-Jean-Jacques] Dupin became president of the Chamber of Deputies" and draws many compelling interpretive claims out of this periodization of the action of the narrative (Irwin 343). No doubt in being preserved as such, the blanks in Poe not only allow but invite such speculations as to what is being absented from his text. At the same time, their presence in his text, precisely for the fact that they are presented as absences or partial suppressions, cannot be wholly suppressed as absented in turn by any, however compelling, gesture of historico-bio-graphical interpretation, excavation or restoration. In short, the very reason these blanks can be filled in the first place is the same reason that any attempt to fill them in ultimately allows and invites (at the very least) interrogation of the necessity of this gesture. The tradition of filling in the blanks in Poe seems particularly suspect where the blanks themselves, their significance as such, is not discussed as part and parcel of the referential value of the historical-bio-graphical interpretation which fills them in (as is the case in §35 of Irwin's *The Mystery to a Solution*). So, in a way, all I want to insist on here is the significance of the — of G—(—

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Baudelaire was the first to suggest that Poe had Gisquet in mind when he named the Prefect of police in his Dupin tales G—, in a footnote penned to this effect in his 1865 translation of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and E.L. Didier also made the connection in a notice of Gisquet's death in 1866 (M 2:573, n.31). Mabbott, in a mode of commission not irrelevant to the trajectory of the present study, announces in his edition of "The Rue Morgue" that he has had the fact of Gisquet's tenure as Prefect "confirmed for [him] by Professor Beatrice F. Hyslop who consulted the Archives of the Prefecture of the Police in Paris" (ibid.).

—). Does attributing meaning to this pervasive mark in Poe risk anything more than the many interpretations founded on other pervasive marks in Poe: G, D, S, etc.?<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to interpretations founded on suppressed dates and proper names in Poe, insistence on the significance of the narratological blanks in his text is all but unavoidable when it comes to reading the scenes, events, or bits of information signaled as missing from their place in the narrative frames of his fiction. For example, one could speculate endlessly on the precise nature of the “insult” which finally prompts Montresor’s revenge in “A Cask of Amontillado” after his already having endured “[t]he thousand injuries of Fortunato.” For generations Poe scholars have done just that (often by way of a question as to what distinguishes an “insult” from an “injury”), but in almost every case these speculations will have been accompanied by a critical reflection on the fact that the precise nature of the “insult” is entirely suppressed from the tale, save for its acknowledgment, such as it is, in the shape of the word(s) “insult” and/or “injury.” Many readings of this tale hinge precisely on the question of what it means that Poe leaves Montresor’s revenge forever (un)justified in his narrative economy of (non)disclosure.<sup>68</sup>

As for the Dupin tales, I have already discussed some of the ways in which Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure is at work in them. I have discussed the secret “compact” between G— and Dupin which brings the latter to the case in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” the (non)disclosed terms of which are said to have been “fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance” by G— in the editorial note that also delivers the

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. John T. Irwin on D and S in *The Mystery to a Solution*, 385-390.

<sup>68</sup> In her contribution to *A Companion to American Fiction: 1780-1865* (ed. Shirley Samuels, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), Laura H. Korobkin quite nicely sums up the issue of (non)disclosure in relation to “A Cask of Amontillado” in terms evocative of the context of my study in Poe’s detective fiction. Along with “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “A Cask of Amontillado” is cited as a tale “whose warped confessional narrators situate readers as jurors assessing credibility on the basis of a one-sided, unreliable evidentiary presentation” (230).

(non)disclosed solving of the crime. I have also mentioned how these (non)disclosed bits of information resemble the (non)disclosed prehistory of Dupin's relationship to the Minister D— mentioned at the end of "The Purloined Letter"—that "“evil turn”" done "“at Vienna once”" —in being set just beyond the narrative frame even as they inform the very squaring off of that frame. There are no few other such examples.

The (non)disclosed prehistory of Dupin's relationship to Le Bon, the man wrongfully accused and imprisoned for the murders of the L'Espanayes—some good turn done once—is given as (one of) Dupin's motivations for intruding on the police investigation in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue": "“and, besides,” Dupin says, “Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful. We will go and see the premises with our own eyes”" (UP 669). And just as this (non)disclosed prehistory between Dupin and Le Bon informs Dupin's entry into the case, that good turn done once is repaid in turn upon the closing off of the narrative frame, where "upon [the] narration of the circumstances (with some comments from Dupin) at the *bureau* of the *Prefêt de Police*, Le Bon was instantly released" (UP 684). I have previously discussed and will have to continue to discuss, that most famous example of Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure in the Dupin tales: the purloined letter itself, whose contents in being almost entirely suppressed effect the complex narrative economy built up around the letter's movements throughout the tale.

All these instances of Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure in the Dupin tales at once beckon and beguile, demand and resist interpretation, but they do not all do so with equal force. Scarcely is a reading of "The Purloined Letter" unaccompanied by an interpretation (whether explicit or implicit) of the unreadable letter, of its unavailability



to being read, of its very unreadability, and the rigor with which the question of the letter's unreadability is pursued will always be matched by its unavailability to being read, its resistance to interpretation. The question of the purloined letter of the purloined letter of "The Purloined Letter" is all but irresistible. William Freedman puts the matter well: "However persuasively we are urged away from the letter's content, by Lacan and Derrida no less than by Poe, that content is of significance and weight. Without such content as the narrative hints at, the letter would hardly be worth pursuing. Without resistance to its revelation, the respective purloiners, D\_\_\_\_\_ and Poe, would lose their potent grip" (Freedman 118-119). By contrast, the case of Le Bon seems to be a more minor instance of Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure. Arthur Hobson Quinn states that Poe "simply *uses* Dupin's gratitude to Le Bon as a reason for his entrance into the case" (Quinn 312 [emphasis added]). Somewhere between or perhaps beyond these two extremes in Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure is G—.

Unlike Le Bon, or even the Minister D—, G— is the only character apart from Dupin and the narrator to appear in all three tales comprising the Dupin trilogy; as such he thus partakes in a more general unicity of these tales with respect to Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure. Because the Dupin tales do, after all, comprise a kind of trilogy, because they are the only place in Poe where the same characters reappear in multiple tales, all the (non)disclosed narrative bits scattered throughout their pages effect a specious sort of architecture, a repository of secret history buried at the margins of the larger narrative trajectory. For example, throughout the Dupin trilogy, the reader will have known that Dupin has standing relationships with Le Bon, G—, and the Minister D—, all of which predate the action of the three tales and all of which are alluded to

within the narrative frames of these tales only sparingly—whether good or evil turns done once, as so many instances of (non)disclosure—but all of which nonetheless have a decided and decisive influence on events that unfold in the tales. Considered from a certain point of view, namely from Dupin’s, all this (non)disclosed prehistory does not seem to add up to much more than a scatter of unrelated (non)events. However, from the points of view of all three recurring characters simultaneously—Dupin, the narrator, and G— —the repository of secret history buried at the margins of the Dupin tales seems to have a story to tell in its own right.

In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” Dupin’s intrusion on the police investigation depends on G—’s permission to view the crime-scene, the giving of certain “credentials” only given given a certain (non)disclosed prehistory of the tale whereby G— is said to be, according to the narrator, “well disposed to my friend” (UP 684). The motivations of Dupin’s intrusion are multiple and all vague. He suggests to his friend that they take the case, in the first place, to afford themselves some “amusement.” Then, not wholly squaring with this motivation but, once again, referencing a certain (non)disclosed prehistory of the tale—some good turn done once—there is Dupin’s motivation of returning a favor to Le Bon. Finally, at the close of the tale, Dupin suggests yet another motivation for his intrusion on the police investigation that does not wholly square with the previous two: his wish to defeat G— “in his own castle.” It does seem, in “The Rue Morgue,” that Dupin has something to prove to G— apart from the circumstances of the case itself, especially at the end of the tale where the solution to the mystery is delivered “at the *bureau* of the *Prefêt de Police*”; the narrative hangs on just long enough after the release of Le Bon in order to register the effect on G—. It is no doubt owing to his having

to release an innocent man he imprisoned for the murders *and* the fact that he was forced to do so not by any findings of his own but by Dupin that G— finds himself “not altogether [able to] conceal his chagrin at the turn which affairs had taken, and [...] fain to indulge in a sarcasm or two, in regard to the propriety of every person minding his own business” (UP 684). But was it not, after all, the propriety of G— (his capacity and inclination to give Dupin certain “credentials”) which made the case Dupin’s business in the first place?

Does not Dupin’s intrusion on the police investigation in “The Rue Morgue” and its effect on G— at the end of the tale set off the idea that G— is another double of Dupin, that between these two characters there is running rivalry, paternal rather than fraternal, one that far exceeds that between Dupin and the Minister D— in “The Purloined Letter” for the fact it spans the whole Dupin trilogy, and thus for which the only other comparable character-relation is that between Dupin and his friend, the narrator? Seemingly in recognition of his defeat ““in his own castle”” in “The Rue Morgue,” from here on out G— will have to make his case in Dupin’s “castle.”

In “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” as Dupin’s relationship to G— inevitably becomes more intimate and overdetermined it is at once marked out by Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure. In “The Rue Morgue” the (non)disclosed prehistory of Dupin’s relationship to G— affords him access to the crime-scene, suggesting that Dupin has some margin of influence, some power of persuasion over G—, while at the same time emphasizing that G— has certain power in a certain quarter where Dupin does not. In “Marie Rogêt,” it is the (non)disclosed secret “compact” between the two characters— marked out by the narrator as excessive, beyond the scope of his narrative, as an

impropriety he is not at liberty to disclose, save for its non-disclosure—which brings Dupin to the case. Like a mirror-image of their relationship in “The Rue Morgue,” this (non)disclosed narrative bit suggests that G— has some margin of influence, some power of persuasion, over Dupin, while at the same time emphasizing that the latter now has certain power in a certain quarter where the former does not.

However, “Marie Rogêt” not only marks out significant developments in the relationship between G— and Dupin but also between G— and the narrator. Recall that Dupin promptly falls asleep after the (non)disclosed terms of the G—’s “proposition” are agreed upon, leaving his friend dutifully attending to G—’s “explanations of his own views, [interspersed ...] with long comments upon the evidence” (UP 762). “He discoursed much, and beyond doubt, learnedly,” the narrator relates, “while I hazarded an occasional suggestion as the night wore drowsily away” (UP 762-763). On the one hand, the narrator’s paraphrase of these “seven or eight leaden-footed hours” during which he “drowsily” attends to G— while Dupin sleeps (UP 763) dramatically underscores the fact that G—, while he discourses “much, and beyond doubt, learnedly,” contributes no information to the case that Dupin and the narrator are not able to glean from the “mass of information” furnished by the Prefecture and media coverage of the “sad affair.” On the other hand, as no information essential to the case is conveyed in this scene, its point seems to be precisely to convey a sort of generic, half-hearted respect for G— on the part of the narrator, such as might be expected for a “functionary” of state. The fact that Dupin sleeps soundly and soundlessly through this exchange registers that his relationship to G— is situated differently; indeed, all the energy and humor of this scene depends on the difference.

In “The Purloined Letter,” the reader finds not only Dupin but also the narrator more exalted than ever before over G—. Here, not only must G— make his case in Dupin’s “castle,” but return to the “castle” in his own time (after following Dupin’s advice to re-search the Hotel D—), not knowing that when he does the letter will be waiting for him there. Moreover, after Dupin does not bother to inform G— that the letter is at hand and the poor man does eventually come calling once more, it seems that it will not be handed over without a little more fun at his expense: most memorably, in Abernethy’s ““*advice.*”” However, the depreciation of G— is established from the very beginning of the tale and notably, not in the narrated speech of Dupin nor even in that of the narrator but in the narrating-narration itself, which accounts for the “hearty welcome” G— receives upon breaching Dupin’s “castle” as follows: “for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man” (UP 917). So, in contrast to G—’s boring presence in “Marie Rogêt,” which nonetheless seems to command a modicum of respect (at least on the part of the narrator), in “The Purloined Letter” G— is not boring but “entertaining” and not respected but “contemptible.”

This survey of the Dupin trilogy clearly shows that its three recurring characters—Dupin, the narrator, and G— —are not static but dynamic characters and that their shifting attitudes with respect to one another mark out a certain progression in the transference of power from G— to Dupin and his friend. But Dupin’s and the narrator’s ascendancy is also strange. The patenting of the G—’s incompetence and impotence in “The Purloined Letter” is such a perfect culmination of his characterization throughout the Dupin trilogy that, I would suggest, it has contributed in large part to the seeming expendability of this character to the excessive and overdetermined legacy of this tale;

however, patenting of the G—'s incompetence and impotence also coincides with a dramatic rise of his prominence in the design of "The Purloined Letter," such that Dupin's narrated ascendancy over and against G— (and even the narrator's narrating ascendancy over and against him) is paralleled by a narratological ascendancy of G— in his own right.

Consider the fact that after all the intimate double-dealing that goes on between Dupin and his friend in the narrator's account of their first meeting and the circumstances of their co-habitation in "The Rue Morgue"—what he refers to in "Marie Rogêt" as his "design" to describe "some very remarkable features in the mental character of [his] friend, the Chevalier C. August Dupin": a design which carries with it, just as he promises for "the wild train of circumstances" he now has occasion to relate, "the air of extorted confession" (UP 759)—"The Purloined Letter" shows a marked absence of any development in the narrator's relationship to Dupin. Rather the pair's prehistory is conjured as it were in the clouds of meershaum in that "little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg, St. Germain*" (UP 917). Just at the moment when those "certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period [...] I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt," hang in the air while the pair maintain a "profound silence," another "wild train of circumstances" interjects G— into the scene: "the door of [their] apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—" (ibid.). From here on out, at least until Dupin's theatrical presentation of the purloined letter and G—'s unceremonious exit from *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, it is G—'s show. His marginal role in the previous two tales gives way to a markedly more nuanced and intimate portrait of

this character, while Dupin and the narrator's highly overdetermined relationship shifts to the margins, nonetheless still palpably present for the unique serialization of character in the Dupin tales.

Yet, what is most remarkable about this revolution of design in the Dupin trilogy is that the critical narrative of the "The Purloined Letter" has traditionally turned itself over in precisely the opposite direction: foregrounding the characters of Dupin and the narrator, often precisely by drawing on the intimate portrait of their idiosyncratic relationship in "The Rue Morgue" to bring it to bear on the final installment of the Dupin trilogy, and marginalizing G—, whether by simply overlooking his pronounced discursive presence in the tale or, more oddly still, taking it into account as *not* part and parcel of the art-work of "The Purloined Letter" (Chambers). What I find most compellingly odd this reversal of fortune between the literary text and the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" is that it seems to reassert precisely the role G— has in the two earlier Dupin tales: always presiding just at the margins, squaring off the framing of art as the art of the frame. Thus the tendency of the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" to marginalize G— —this tradition of denying what is unique about this character in the literary text and/or of explaining what is not significant about his presence there—while it seems, in some respects, to contradict Poe's design in "The Purloined Letter" is, at the same time, urged on by the design of the Dupin trilogy as a whole. Dupin's and the narrator's subtle and not-so-subtle depreciations of G— in "The Purloined Letter," as well as Dupin's somewhat excessive efforts to humiliate him further (first, by not bothering to inform him that the letter is at hand and, then, when G— eventually comes calling once more, by jokingly suggesting he take advice when advice

is no longer needed), all seems designed precisely to conjure Dupin's and the narrator's steady rise in ascendancy over G— marked out at the margins of the previous Dupin tales.

In a way, all that I am asking here is this: why has G— never been considered a worthy double of Dupin, especially given the excessive amount of critical attention paid to the matter of doubling in the Dupin tales, a matter inevitably characterized by excess and overdetermination and at once marked out in advance by certain lacks in Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure? Liahna Klenman Babener has pointed out that "Poe's insistent use of doublings in the ["The Purloined Letter] considerably exceeds that which is necessary for presenting Dupin's method of investigation" (PP 323). Of course, merely "presenting Dupin's method of investigation" is not Poe's sole object in these tales, and, as Babener's nuanced reading of the double-dealing between Dupin and the Minister D— goes on to show, the real interest in the matter of doubling in the Dupin tales lies in the way these relations between characters are excessive and overdetermined in themselves and not in contrast to some main point of the tales.

Dupin's revenge on the Minister D— recounted at the close of "The Purloined Letter" is a case-in-point. When questioned by the narrator, Dupin explains that he left the facsimile of the letter in its place in order to escape "the Ministerial presence alive" *and* to have the Minister "inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction" (UP 932). This facsimile letter with its allusion to gruesome, fraternal revenge more than meets the demands of Dupin's "political prepossessions," overshooting by far his object to "act as a partisan of the lady concerned," and perhaps even overshooting his aim to have the Minister "inevitably commit himself, at once, to



his political destruction,” since the facsimile letter would have had this effect with no message inscribed inside. The motivations for Dupin’s actions, and indeed all the double-dealing that goes on between he and the Minister D—, inevitably direct the reader at once to that ““evil turn”” done ““at Vienna once,”” which Dupin had told the Minister then, ““quite good humoredly, that [he] should remember”” (ibid.). However vividly this “evil turn” appears to have embedded itself in Dupin’s memory, this narrative bit embeds itself in the mind of the reader as but another instance of (non)disclosure.

From this perspective, it is no mere coincidence but rather a “wild train of circumstance” traversing the literary text and the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” which has it that Derrida’s response to Lacan’s Seminar hinges on, on the one hand, literary framing (on the framing of art as the art of the frame) and, on the other hand, the matter of doubling. I want to suggest that these effects are two sides of the same coin in the Dupin tales, both part and parcel of Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure. So, in that famous opening paragraph of “The Purloined Letter,” where the self-referential dimension of the text is overtly spatialized as a “little back library, or book-closet” in which the titles “Rue Morgue” and “Marie Rogêt” are subtly catalogued, just at the moment when “the text enacts its own emergence from [a] silence” resounding with the mental chatter of the whole Dupin trilogy (Chambers, PP 301), the door is rudely, even violently, thrown open to admit “our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—.” Does G— dramatic entry into the text not somewhat rudely interrupt its self-enacting “profound silence,” meditation, and mental chatter? Why is G— never quite at home in the “little back library” of Dupin’s “castle”? Why is he thought to be there only incidentally when he is always opening the door to Dupin?

The question of the Prefect's singularity in the literary text and critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" inevitably comes down at once to a question of framing, of what is in and what is out off the frame, or (as I have been trying to frame the question of framing here), of (non)disclosure. In "The Frame of Reference" Barabara Johnson has given one of the most powerful accounts of the ways in which aspects of the literary text of "The Purloined Letter" begin to "invade" the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" (PP 216), and her characterization of the complex economy between the two with the language of invasion is crucial to my object here for its connotations of textual and critical violence. For there is a sense in which the marginalization of G— in the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter," the — of G—(— —), inherits and de-doubles a violence directed toward this character in the literary text. Yet, the ethical import of the Prefect's marginal place in the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" is complicated, suspended in an irresolvable aporia, precisely for the fact that the literary text seems to invite and encourage the — of G—(— —), irresistibly urging it on by the repository of secret history buried at the margins of the Dupin tales marking out Dupin's strange (nominal) ascendancy.

Thus, when it comes to the singularity of G— and Poe's narrative economy of (non)disclosure more generally, perhaps the relation between the literary text and the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" would be better characterized as one of pervasion and perversion, as a kind of invasion which can never be simply countered, admeasured, or treated since the very modality of any measures adopted toward this end will be occupied in advance by the very forces to be addressed or redressed. From this perspective, the — of G—(— —) in the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter" may

be seen to attest to a (for want of a better word) perfection of this character in the literary text. G— is just the perfect frame. The very power of this character—what renders him the most worthy double of Dupin, if not in the Dupin tales themselves (I will make a case for precisely this below, see “Haunting Poe’s ‘Castle’ of Reason”), then in the pervasive critical narrative which they pervade—is his capacity to disappear at once through that door he is always opening to Dupin.

As with Poe in general, in the Dupin tales excess will have been marked out in advance by certain lack. The overdetermined relations between the characters in these tales are all, by design, built up upon instances of (non)disclosure. Like that elusive, untitled “very rare and very remarkable volume” which occasions the “first meeting” of Dupin and the narrator in “The Rue Morgue” (UP 658) (yet another (non)disclosed narrative bit in its own right, another thing missing from its place), Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure builds a kind of absented Exchange where his characters commune. The site of overdetermination of the titular object of the purloined letter itself is the (non)disclosure of its contents, staged as an interruption of the Prefect’s discourse by the narrator’s narrating-narration: the purloined letter of the purloined letter of “The Purloined Letter” forever kept a perfect secret, framed in a moment of discursive differentiation such that it belongs to no one. Why should the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” be any different, if it is to have a faithful relation to Poe’s text? It seems only fitting that a lack should attend all this excess, and there is no one better to frame it than G—, which is not (to say) to fill it in, the — of G—(—).

Yet, just as excess will have been marked out in advance by certain lack in Poe, by the same token, what is lacking in Poe will have also borne a certain excess unique to

the lack: in this case, the predetermination of the overdetermination of “The Purloined Letter” as the *prefection* (if you will) of “The Purloined Letter.”

Part II: “*d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”

Missing from its Place: The Record of Records

It is often the case that readings of “The Purloined Letter” revert to the language of the post; when one speaks of this tale, it seems perfectly natural to speak of post offices, the various offices of the post: from receiving and delivering mail to storing dead letters. The language of the post is more often than not Lacan’s preferred pedagogical vehicle for meditating on the “pure signifier” of the purloined letter, and its hegemony is all the more inescapable after Derrida’s famous counter to Lacan’s avowal that “a letter always arrives at its destination” (PP 53) with the notion that “a letter always might not arrive at its destination” (*The Post Card* 444, translation modified). In view of the profound effect that poststructuralist theory has had on various offices of literary studies and, in the case of American literary studies, owing in no small part to its investment in “The Purloined Letter,” and in view of the fact that poststructuralist theory was only able to have this effect for having been so profoundly affected by a Poe tale about a letter, one might think the very “post” of post-structuralism as having the character of a post office: returning (to) the letter of history after structuralism (as Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young have suggested), or returning (to) the letter theory as what comes after theory

when it has been made a dead letter (as Bennington suggests in another context).<sup>69</sup> It seems to me that another language has also, just as consistently but more quietly, traversed the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” in all the sayings and doings of the “Caucus-race”: the language of the archive. The questions explored in the Introduction to this dissertation with respect to the timeliness of the archive are of particular interest here. If one can imagine the language of the archive outmoding the language of the post in the critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter,” like E-mail, Facebook, Dropbox, and countless other digital media of the day are outmoding “snail mail,” then what would it mean that the language of the archive has always been there, in the archive, since the days of the Pony Express?

The critical narrative of “The Purloined Letter” certainly suggests that the archive has been on the very tips of people’s tongues, even while attention has been chiefly directed elsewhere. Though he ultimately means it to be taken as literal, Lacan gives the following analogy for the matter of the purloined letter in his Seminar: “of what is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place* [manque à sa place], as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in a library. And even if it were on an adjacent shelf or in the next slot, it would be hidden there, however visibly it may appear” (PP 40 [*Écrits* 25]). In the *Cryptographic Imagination* Shawn Rosenheim speaks of the Prefect’s “*inventory of the Minister’s apartments*” (Rosenheim 30, emphasis mine). In *The Mystery to a Solution* John T. Irwin detects an echo of the lock-room mystery of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in the “hidden-object mystery” of “The Purloined Letter”: a “rigorous

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Geoffrey Bennington and Robert Young, “Introduction: Posing the Question,” *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-11; Geoffrey Bennington, “Inter,” *Other Analyses: Reading Philosophy* (self-published by Geoffrey Bennington, 2004).

circumscription of space,” a “specific finite enclosure” requisite for the letter’s “continued nonappearance” to appear “mysterious” (Irwin 181). Though, of course, Irwin never mentions the fact that this “rigorous circumscription of space” is only accomplished in “The Purloined Letter” in as and by the Prefect’s discourse on his protracted and failed search of the Hotel D—, he does make evident that the “eventment” of the purloined letter in “The Purloined Letter” depends not only its movements through different “intersubjective dramas” between characters (Lacan et al.) but also, each time uniquely, through different spaces, different finite repositories of the letter: from the “royal apartments” to the Hotel D— to Dupin’s *escritoire* and (presumably) back to the “royal apartments.” Irwin goes on to treat the spatiality of both the locked-room mystery and the hidden-object mystery as “a physical embodiment, a concrete spatialization, of that very mechanism of logical inclusion/exclusion on which rational analysis is based” (ibid.). To these observations I would also recall and elaborate on Jacques Derrida’s attentions to that “little back library, or book closet” of *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, as the site where all the “rational analysis” of “The Purloined Letter” takes place and where the prehistory of the previous Dupin tales is conjured in all the “silence,” “smoke,” and “dark” of this place.

There is no denying that the language of the post has a rightful place, even a rightful precedence in readings of “The Purloined Letter.” The tale is about a letter, after all. However, considering “The Purloined Letter” as part of a series, the matter of the letter does not appear with equal force across all the tales. However, what is given consistently throughout all the Dupin tales is talk of libraries, missing volumes, newspaper-files, evidentiary records, memorandum-books, etc. Like the reversion to the

language of the post with regard to “The Purloined Letter,” all the archival language and imagery scattered throughout Poe’s detective fiction seems almost natural. It makes perfect sense.

Crime, in more and less obvious ways, is coincident and replete with questions of the archive. Individual cases inevitably, from murder to petty theft, solved or unsolved, opened or closed, at once demand records: affidavits, evidence chains, crime-scene photographs, phone records, financial statements, maps, autopsy reports, etc. The record of an individual case (the case-file) does not, however, merely document the case as it unfolds but rather is part and parcel of the drive to solve the case; part of its purpose is to be reviewed internally to the investigation or to be copied (in part or whole) to outsource the investigation to other agencies, to the media, to the public, etc. Of course, the case-file can also be censored and/or manipulated, whether in order to guard the solubility of the case or, conversely, its insolubility. This is merely to underscore the demand for records of the records of cases (ala “internal affairs”). Case-files themselves become the evidentiary objects of all manner of investigations and analyses—statistical, historical, economic, juridical, cultural—records of the records of cases which become the evidentiary objects of still other records (court reports and voting records, for instance), and so on, *ad infinitum*. This is merely to intimate the manifold ways in which records beget records; while the relations between different orders of record can be more and less, for better and worse, hierarchically structured, coordinated and orchestrated, each order of record also has the potential to intercede in and at times violently interrupt every other (as dramatically illustrated in recent years by Wikileaks). The notion of the archive is unthinkable without a certain idea of recordability and record-keeping, but what the

archive names is the indefinite and interminable relationality of the very concept of the record. The archive is the record of records (of records of records of records...), without end.

So crime disrupts established order (or at least the desire for established order), demanding records, and crime fiction certainly holds interest in part owing to a public fascination with the disruptive aspect of crime and the complex machinery called upon to account for it. However, crime fiction itself is not disruptive in the same way as crime. Especially in the beginnings of detective fiction, as in Poe, where the hero is not affiliated with the State-sponsored police, the genre depends for its interest hardly on mimicking the quotidian disruptive aspect of crime and not even so much on designing particularly unusual crimes but rather on designing crimes which are unusual precisely for the way in which they stage disruptions within the usual modes in which cases are processed, recorded, and ultimately solved. For example, no small share of the allure of “The Rue Morgue” stems from the perverse pleasure to be had in reading about a corpse ““so firmly wedged in [a] chimney that it could not be got down until four or five [...] united their strength”” (UP 667) and in reading the sailor’s eye-witness account of the Ourang-Outang’s rampage. However, the case demands Dupin’s attention and, by extension, commands the reader’s attention for the bulk of the tale, for the ways in which this sensational crime begets a broken record, for the case lacking a chain of evidence and apparent motive and for its yielding redundant and contradictory newspaper reports. Always and always in very different ways, “archive trouble” is written into the design of Poe’s detective fiction necessarily.



Throughout the Dupin trilogy, one finds a markedly shifty handling of the theme of the record, a differentiation within the theme of the record registering between these tales and, within them, always in proximity to the Prefect of police. As the narrative action of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” unfolds, from a certain perspective, the case appears closed. According to the narrator’s paraphrase of the latest news, “the greatest excitement still continued in the Quartier St. Roch” and “the premises in question had been carefully re-searched, and fresh examinations of the witnesses instituted” (by the police); however, a postscript to the evening edition also mentions “that Adolphe Le Bon had been arrested and imprisoned—although nothing appeared to criminate him,” that is, apart from his circumstantial ties to the 4000 francs left deposited at the scene of the murders (paradoxically, the same bit of evidence that would seem to absolve him) (UP 668). The fact that one of Dupin’s motivations for intruding on the police investigation is to secure the release of Le Bon does support the idea that the character of the detective in Poe is one “unfettered by bureaucracy and law.” Dupin is neither satisfied with nor does he have to accept Le Bon’s imprisonment as a final resolution to the case, but nor do the police, it seems, to be able to lock him up. In fact, the coincidence of Le Bon’s imprisonment and the ongoing police investigation frames a situation of the record in “The Rue Morgue” less akin to the long tradition of “wrongful imprisonment”—in which, on-the-record, the case is closed, where a person is guilty of and serving time for a crime which he or she did (effectively, if not in fact) commit, and it is left to private investigations and legal injunctions to have the record reflect a standard of justice that is perceived to have been perverted—than the contemporary juridical aporia occupied by the “enemy combatant” or “detainee,” imprisoned indefinitely without trial or any

criminating evidence until such evidence can be found to support a trial that would justify imprisonment if not execution, both of which may ensue irrespective of that eventuality: in brief, a closed case awaiting the record.

This is to say, while Dupin may be unfettered by the odd bureaucratic abeyance of law in “The Rue Morgue,” the same cannot be said of Poe’s text. It is clear upon Dupin delivering his solution to the mystery “at the *bureau* of the *Prefêt de Police*,” that this “functionary” of the State is somewhat troubled by the turn of affairs (UP 684). Not only does the circumstance of the L’Espanayes’s killer being an ape (now confined to the *Jardin des Plantes*) seem not to carry the same force of resolution as would imprisoning a man for the crime, but it also seems to somewhat overturn the idea that a crime has even taken place. Thus, while the Prefect’s “chagrin” at this turn of affairs surely has to do with the fact that it is not by any finding of the police that the case is ultimately closed, the real vexation of Dupin’s solution (for the reader as much as for G—) is the way it overturns one form of injustice, the imprisonment of Le Bon, by another, the apparent inculpability of the ape. (The situation here would be like a “detainee” being released from Guantanamo Bay not for it having been proved that he or she is not a terrorist but for it having been proved that there is no terrorism.)

In “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” the apparent insolubility of the case stems from an excess rather than a lack of evidentiary record. The *grisette*’s movements in and about Paris during the four days between her (second) disappearance and the discovery of her corpse diffuses the chain of evidence temporally but also spatially, throughout the city, implicating multiple suspects but none so much as to justify prolonged imprisonment. The reader is informed: “Several individuals were arrested and discharged” (UP 765).

The excess of evidence in this case is also aggravated by the public's captivation with the crime: "For several weeks, in the discussing of this one absorbing theme, even the momentous political topics of the day were forgotten" (UP 761); "[T]he excitement increased hourly. [...] As time passed and no discovery ensued, a thousand contradictory rumors were circulated, and journalists busied themselves in *suggestions*" (UP 765). The pollution of the evidentiary record by "a thousand contradictory rumors" (from the public) and "*suggestions*" (from the media) is not just a feature within the plot of "Marie Rogêt" but informs the very design of Poe's text. The "mass of information" occupying the seven or eight pages in the middle of tale, between the narrator's brief introduction to the case and Dupin's analysis of the evidence, is introduced thus: "In the morning, I procured, at the Prefecture, a full report of all the evidence elicited, and, at the various newspaper offices, a copy of every paper in which, from first to last, had been published any decisive information in regard to this sad affair. Freed from all that was positively disproved, this mass of information stood thus:" (UP 763).

The "case-file" of Marie Rogêt is represented in "Marie Rogêt" as an assemblage of the official evidentiary record furnished by the Prefecture to the narrator and Dupin and media coverage of the "sad affair," framing yet another compelling instance of the complex economy of paraphrase and direct quotation in the Dupin tales not unlike the one I discussed above in terms of the singularity of the purloined being enfolded in the Prefect's discourse in "The Purloined Letter." In "Marie Rogêt" the question of what in the pages that follow is being given from the official evidentiary record from the Prefecture, in contrast to what is being directly, although selectively, quoted from the newspapers is complicated all the more when considered from the point of view of the

historical “parallel” of “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” in the unsolved mystery of Mary Rogers. Poe’s editorial footnotes from 1845 reveal the American sources for the newspaper articles quoted in the course of this edited “mass of information” (which are, according to “the fiction” of “Marie Rogêt” literal translations from Parisian papers). However, the information supposedly gleaned from the official evidentiary record procured from the Prefecture is neither directly assigned nor does it have such a definitive historical analogue in the “real crime.” In fact, it is not all that clear in the tale itself what is supposed to have been furnished by the case-file from the Prefecture, since it is never directly quoted but rather only periodically mentioned in order to correct a particular report in the “newspaper-file.” Poe’s more significant revisions to “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” both in the course of its original publication in serial from between November 1842 and February 1843 and prior to its subsequent reprinting—in particular, the details added and subtracted to have the tale entertain the possibility of a botched abortion as the cause of Marie’s death, in accordance with the latest findings in the case of Mary Rogers—all the more radically illustrate the strange effects that inevitably arise between the open case and the open record, where the hemorrhage of the “cold case” forever suspends the question of justice between the aim to close the case and the aim to close the record.

In “The Purloined Letter,” as everyone knows, the case is markedly different. Here, one of the first established points in the conversation between Dupin, the narrator, and the Prefect (one of the first established points shared by all three, that is) is that the identity of the perpetrator is known in this case; indeed, in this case ““the robber’s knowledge of the loser’s knowledge of the robber”” is known (UP 919). Immediately

prior, the Minister D—'s motive is also (albeit vaguely) confirmed: “the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable” (ibid.). The precise nature of D—'s motive, although kept veiled in the Prefect's “cant of diplomacy,” is possibly, even presumably, but not necessarily more intimately known by the Prefect. If it is the case that the Prefect knows more than he lets on here, it would represent a significant departure from both “The Rue Morgue”—where the police's failure to solve the case arises precisely from their failure to deduce the significance of the evident absence of motive—and “Marie Rogêt”—where, Dupin suggests, the police investigation might be encumbered owing to their great potential in this case for establishing “motive—many motives” (UP 770). Moreover, in the case of the purloined letter there is hardly any evidence to gather much less to interpret. It is noted that the police have twice performed “waylayings” of the Minister and the letter has not been found on his person (information which Dupin takes in as “a matter of course”), all to confirm a suspicion already acted on: that the letter (still) resides in the Hotel D— (UP 921).

So, generally speaking, “The Purloined Letter” situates the Prefect in a privileged seat of knowledge in comparison to the previous Dupin tales: not just with regard to information pertaining to the case (the identity of the perp, the motive for the theft, the location of the hot property of the letter, etc.) but with regard to his prepossession of this off-the-record case itself. At the same time, everything the Prefect knows about this case, every detail and particular, renders his failure to have the letter to hand all the more profound. The occasion of his greatest prepossession of the record of the case—where the whole affair is even secreted from the machinations of the press, which work to such

great and varying effect in the design of “The Rue Morgue” and that of “Marie Rogêt” — is the case that has him risking the most. Whereas in “Marie Rogêt” G—’s “reputation [... is] at stake” and “[e]ven his honor [...] concerned” (762), owing precisely to the public’s captivation with the case, in “The Purloined Letter” his very “position” hangs in the balance of the outcome of this off-the-record case, especially after he commits the matter to Dupin.

Put another way, more generally speaking now, never in the whole Dupin trilogy is the reader given a straightforward representation of a case-file. In “The Rue Morgue” and “Marie Rogêt,” Dupin’s investigations are certainly helped along by vague allusions to certain official workings of the police: by his being given access (by G—) to the scene-of-the-crime in the first case and, in the second case, by his being given “a full report of all the evidence elicited” by the Prefecture (UP 763). However, in both cases, newspaper reports also contribute “decisive information” or crucial bits of evidence to Dupin’s investigations (*ibid.*). (Indeed he depends on them as decidedly as fictionalized investigators today depend on the Internet.<sup>70</sup>)

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<sup>70</sup> “[I]t will be strange indeed,” Dupin says, “if a comprehensive survey, such as I propose, of the public prints, will not afford us some minute points which shall establish a *direction* for inquiry” (UP 782). In “Marie Rogêt” Dupin’s “newspaper-files” lead him in the “*direction*” of discounting the general public opinion (and of decrying “the culpable remissness of the police” in endorsing the general public opinion) “that the girl had been the victim of a *gang* of blackguards” (UP 785); the apparently innocuous story of the boatless rudder reported by *Le Diligence* (attrib.: *New York Standard*) further supports this “*direction* for inquiry” and also helps to explain some idiosyncratic features of the corpse of the *grisette*: “peculiar marks on the back and shoulders of the victim,” “[t]hat the body was found without weight,” etc. (UP 796). In “The Rue Morgue” Dupin similarly boasts of having been *directed* in his inquiry into the L’Espanayes’s murders by the daily news. *Le Tribunal*’s report on the “material testimony” of the host of (impressively cosmopolitan) ear-witnesses to the “sad affair” affords his investigation “a definite form—a certain tendency”: “I do not hesitate to say that legitimate deductions [“legitimate deductions” which Dupin soon underscores as “the *sole* proper ones,” from which his “suspicion arose *inevitably* [...] as the single result”] even from this portion of the testimony—the portion respecting the gruff and shrill voices—are in themselves sufficient to engender a suspicion which

Thus the romanticized and idealized concept of detection at stake in Poe's Dupin tales consists in negotiating different orders of record: not merely in gleaning information from various sources and organizing it into an unequivocal account of the crime, but rather in gathering an evidentiary record in as and by the failings of different modes of organizing information (mainly, police-work and the media) to record evidence as such. It is a point of no small significance that, along with citing failings of police investigations into the mysteries before him, Dupin routinely cites failings of the press to impress upon the singular truth of the reported events: "*Le Tribunal* [...] has not entered, I fear, into the unusual horror of the thing. But we will not revert to the idle opinion of this print" ("The Rue Morgue," UP 669-670). Remarks of this kind abound in "Marie Rogêt": "We should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our newspapers rather to create a sensation—to make a point—than to further the cause of truth" (UP 771); "I wish merely to caution you against the whole tone of *L'Etoile's* suggestion" (UP 772); "the *L'Etoile* was again over-hasty" (UP 766); "there is something excessively unphilosophical in the attempt on the part of *Le Moniteur*, to rebut the general assertion of *L'Etoile*" (UP 773), etc. All the while, the reader is reminded that these remarks are in some respects Poe's on his own "newspaper-files" pertaining to the murder of Mary Rogers. The very recordability of information as evidence in the Dupin tales involves fashioning a record of records (of records...), in a word, archivization.

Now, on the one hand, it would seem that "The Purloined Letter" marks a radical departure from the previous Dupin tales, especially considered from the point of view of records, of the record of records, of the archive. Of course, in this case there are no

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should bias, or give direction to all farther progress in the investigation of the mystery" (UP 663, 672).

newspaper reports to peruse much less to collect into “newspaper-files,” but the matter of the purloined letter is off-the-record in more ways than one. Here, as I have previously indicated, there is hardly a question of evidence: certainly no question of identifying the perpetrator, nor of identifying the whereabouts of the hot property, perhaps a certain question of motive, but one which is all but irrelevant from the perspective of solving the case (if not from Dupin’s motivations for doing so). There is only the merest and meanest of case-files:

“You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?”

“Oh yes!”—And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before. (UP 923)

What apart from this “minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document” might repose in the Prefect’s “memorandum-book” pertaining to the case of the purloined letter is not only not said and not only difficult to say, but all but impossible to imagine. The proper name of the Minister D— could be written down somewhere, but everything disclosed about this shady character—whom the Prefect himself describes as one ““who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man”” (UP 919)—in addition to his being the sole known perpetrator, leads one to think that he is not so forgettable as to warrant a memorandum of his name; no doubt it is haunting the Prefect’s very dreams. The Prefect could have kept a checklist or log of all the details and particulars of his protracted search of the Hotel D—, but such



a record would meet only half the demand of a case-file; that is, it would do nothing to advance the drive to solve the case, at least not in the hands of G—. There could be, perhaps, a one-item “To Do” list inscribed at the end of the Prefect’s notes, written in an agitated hand: “See Dupin.”

On the other hand, all the ways in which the case of the purloined letter represents a departure from Dupin’s previous investigations are also those which most decidedly enfold this case in the tradition of the Dupin trilogy, where the problem repeatedly staged is one of a case only demanding Dupin’s attention for the way it disrupts the usual modes in which cases are processed, recorded, and solved. Whereas in “The Rue Morgue” the disruption is one of a lacking evidentiary record and an absence of motive and in “Marie Rogêt” it is one of an excess of evidence and possible motive, in “The Purloined Letter” it is an abeyance of the efficacy of record-keeping itself, or a neutralization of the very concept of the record, which gives the police such trouble and which demands Dupin’s attention: the almost utter unmeaningness of gathering and interpreting evidence when it comes to matters “[a] little *too* self-evident” (UP 918). Moreover, paradoxically, there is a way in which this abeyance of record-keeping and indeed the very concept of the record seems inevitably to arise in the case which revolves around perhaps one of the most simple illustrations of archival labor imaginable: having a single document put (back) in its proper place. “In fact,” as the Prefect remarks early on in “The Purloined Letter,” “the business is *very* simple indeed,” but of course the matter demands Dupin’s attention for its also being “*excessively odd*”: “Simple and odd” (ibid.).

As I alluded to from the start, Jacques Lacan illustrates the odd simplicity or simple oddity of the matter of the purloined letter with an analogy to a fittingly quotidian example of “archive trouble,” that of a volume “missing from its place” on a library shelf:

But the detectives [*les chercheurs*, literally, the searchers, meaning, the police] have so immutable a notion of the real that they fail to notice that their search tends to transform it into its object. A trait by which they would be able to distinguish that object from all others.

This would no doubt be too much to ask of them, not owing to their lack of insight but rather to ours. For their imbecility is neither of the individual nor the corporative variety [*espèce*]; its source is subjective. It is the realist’s imbecility, which does not pause to observe [*se dire*] that nothing, however deep in the bowels of the earth a hand has ensconced it, will ever be hidden there, since another hand can always retrieve it, and that what is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place* [*manque à sa place*], as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in a library. And even if it were on an adjacent shelf or in the next slot, it would be hidden there, however visibly it may appear. For it can *literally* be said [*peut dire à la lettre*] that something is missing from its place only of what can change its place: only of the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and in any case in its place; it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from it. (PP 39-40, translation modified [*Écrits* 25])

As is his custom, Lacan is doing several things at once here. Firstly, this passage marks a significant elaboration on the relationality of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real:

three terms pivotal to his Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” as to his “return to Freud” more generally. Secondly, and by implication, Lacan is maintaining here the chief theoretical meditation of his Seminar on the purloined letter itself as “a pure signifier”: “a unit in its very uniqueness, being by nature symbol only of an absence. Which is why we cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be *or* not be in a particular place but that unlike them it will be *and* not be where it is, wherever it goes” (PP 32, 39). Thirdly—the point that most directly interests me here, not just in itself but for the less obvious rationale binding it to the previous two points—Lacan is accounting for the failure of the police “to seize the letter [*saisir la lettre*]” (*Écrits* 25), meaning to grasp it where it is *and* where it is not, by its very nature.

At stake here is a seizure that would involve not just holding the letter, laying hands on the thing, since Lacan insists that the police must have laid hands on the thing in their exhaustive search of the Hotel D—, but rather a more rigorous grasping of the matter on hand (arguably, one more befitting the mandate of the police), a grasping not only physical but cognitive, even theoretical and political, an apprehension that would carry with it the force of law: seizure as confiscation, a taking into custody, arrest. “Let us, in fact [*en effet*], look more closely at what happens to the police [*ce qui arrive aux policiers*]” (PP 39 [*Écrits* 24]), Lacan says, as if what he is introducing is not one example among others, as if what he is taking up is not even so much a point-of-fact as a somewhat surprising confirmation of what he has just been saying about the nature of the letter, which (as everyone knows, Lacan will punctuate his Seminar by avowing) “always arrives at its destination” (PP 53). So the question is this: what happens to the police or (*à la lettre*) what arrives to them in this moment when (through them or in spite

of every declared intention) the letter fails to take its proper course back to the “royal apartments,” when the moment of its deliverance from house-arrest is at hand?

There is of course the matter of a certain “imbecility” to consider, which Lacan qualifies as “the realist’s imbecility”: one seduced by the illusion (or “specular mirage” (PP 47)) of the everyday object into thinking that things “must be *or* not be in a particular place.” The Prefect most dramatically epitomizes this species of wisdom in his apparent willingness to stake his life on the fact that the letter must not be in the Hotel D— just because he failed to seize it there: “I am not more sure that I breathe,” he wagers, “than I am that the letter is not in the Hotel” (UP 923). Yet, just labeling this “imbecility” as such does not account for much less dispense with it. For the “imbecility” in question here “is neither of the individual” (the Prefect’s imbecility) “nor the corporative variety” (the imbecility of police-work in general); “its source is subjective.” Understood in the context of the “*allegory of psychoanalysis*” (Felman, PP 147) posed by Lacan’s reading of “The Purloined Letter,” the blind empiricism typified by the police is something that must be repeatedly overcome in and by the working-through of analysis, as much on the part of the analyst as the analysand if he or she is to have a proper place in the intersubjective drama of analysis. So, far from confining this “imbecility” to Poe’s representation of the police’s failure in the tale—consider his suggestion that to expect the police *not* to have their search for the letter take the letter’s place as the object of the search would be asking too much of them, his pardoning their “lack of insight” as “ours”—Lacan affords it a proper place in his own analysis: “Are we not within our rights to ask, how it happens that the letter had been found *nowhere*, or rather to remark that all we have been told of a conception of a higher order of concealment does not

explain, in all rigor, that the letter escaped detection, since the field exhausted by the search [of the police] did in fact contain it, as is finally proved by Dupin's discovery" (*Écrits* 23, translation mine).

Is not Lacan giving voice to—indeed, wagering a right to give voice to—precisely the sort of “imbecility” he charges to the police? Is he not saying of the purloined letter that “like other objects, it must be *or* not be in a particular place”? At the very least Lacan is suggesting that the very palatability of Poe's tale depends upon a literal reading of the police's exhaustive search, which would imply not just that the letter was in fact within the range of their search (a direct contravention of what Dupin has to say on the matter) but that they laid hands on the thing—“what they turned between their fingers” (PP 40)—without grasping what it was they grasped. Just at the moment in the Seminar when Lacan's attempt to track down (*dépiste*) Dupin's own account of the failure of the police, to match a stride (*foulée*) that he says will elude (*dépiste*) him, leads him “into a thicket of bad arguments [*un fourée de mauvaises*]”—whereupon Lacan *fait un pied de nez* at Dupin's “quarrel on hand [...] with some of the algebraists of Paris” (UP 927), as if it were but a stumbling block planted in an atmosphere already clouded with the names La Rochefoucauld, la Bruyère, Machiavelli, and Campanelle as “so much smoke in our eyes” (PP 36)—it is suggested:

Is not so much wit [*tant d'esprit*] being expended then simply to divert our own from what had been indicated earlier as given [*ce qu'il nous fut indiqué de tenir pour acquis auparavant*], namely, that the police have looked *everywhere*: which it was necessary for us understand [*ce qu'il nous fallait entendre*]—vis-à-vis the field in which the police, not without reason, presumed the letter must be found—

in terms of [*au sens de*] a (no doubt theoretical) exhaustion of space, but concerning which the tale's piquancy depends on our accepting it literally [*mais dont c'est le sel de l'histoire que de le prendre au pied de la lettre*]. (PP 38, translation modified [*Écrits* 23])

Lacan seems to think he has caught Poe in a sleight-of-hand, and not without reason, even apart from any misgivings one might have regarding Dupin's explanations of the failure of the police to seize the letter and of his own success in doing so as so much smoke and mirrors. In the course of the Prefect's discourse on his exhaustive search of the Hotel D— for the letter, in his reply to one of the last questions put to him by the narrator, something is notably missing from its place. It is asked, as a matter of course, almost as an afterthought: “You looked among D—'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?” “Certainly,” the Prefect replies (UP 922). While the Prefect goes on to say that they “opened every package and parcel” before entering into a detailed account of their “most accurate admeasurement” of the Minister's library—how they “not only opened every book, but [...] turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting [themselves] with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers,” at which point, Lacan asks, “do we not see space itself shed its leaves like a letter?” (PP 39)—notably absent in this response, no less within a discourse that many have remarked spares its reader none of the details, is any direct mention of letter<sup>71</sup>: a letter, any letter, much less *the* letter. There is not even mention of that “trumpery fillagree card-rack of pasteboard” where Dupin will eventually spot the “solitary letter

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Jacques Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”: “But as for the letter—be it taken as typographical character, epistle, or what makes a man of letters—we will say that what is said is to be understood *to the letter* [à la lettre], that *a letter* [une lettre] awaits you at the post office, or even that you are acquainted with *letters* [que vous avez des lettres]—never that there is *letter* [de la lettre] anywhere, whatever the context, even to designate overdue mail” (PP 39).

[...] much soiled and crumpled” alongside “five or six visiting cards” (UP 922, 930).

This is as much as to say that Lacan has reason to suspect Poe of some hocus pocus here.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately, my interest lies less in the precise way in which Lacan is situating the failure of the police in the truth of the fiction of “The Purloined Letter” in as and by the relationality of the always-having-its-place of the real and the always-missing-from-its-place of the symbolic than it does in the possibility that Lacan is missing half of the joke (*boutade*) staged by Poe’s text, arresting Poe’s *jeu d’esprit* mid-stroke. For what seems to me just as (initially) unaccountable as the police’s failure to seize the letter (when it is indicated that they “have looked *everywhere*”) is the “decisive evidence” afforded by that failure to Dupin’s analysis of the matter on hand. On the one hand, this “decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that [the letter] was not hidden within the limits of that

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<sup>72</sup> Notably, Lacan does not register his suspicion by any direct reference to the text but rather by a mere sense that “*le sel de l’histoire* [literally, the salt of the story]” of “The Purloined Letter”—the very palatability of the *jeu d’esprit* of the tale—depends upon a literal taking-in of (or a being taken-in as literal) the text’s indication “that the police have looked *everywhere*”; since, of course, in truth as in fiction, it can never be said of anyone’s search for anything, however (theoretically) exhaustive, that he or she has *literally* “looked *everywhere*.” So it is not so much the case that Lacan finds Poe’s representation of the police’s failure to find the letter (and/or his representation of Dupin’s account of that failure) hard to swallow; in fact, earlier Lacan claims to discern in “The Purloined Letter” “so perfect a verisimilitude that it may be said that truth here reveals its fictive prescription” (PP 34, translation modified [Écrits 17]). In other words, Lacan wants to eat everything Poe is cooking up, but in the course of doing so he cannot help but sense “[a] trick [*Boutade*, witticism or a joke: Poe’s *jeu d’esprit*]” (ibid.). It is no doubt foresight of where his reading will have led him which leads Lacan to register near the very beginning of the Seminar a certain “reservation [*résèrve*],” a reservation at Poe’s table, certainly, but also perhaps a reserve within the very founding of his own analytic authority: the “fable” which will have brought to light the “truth [...] which makes the very existence of fiction possible” will have done so only “at the risk of having the fable’s coherence put to the test in the process [*quitte à y faire l’épreuve de sa cohérence*]” (PP 29 [12]). A question, one which it is beyond the scope of this argument to address in all rigor but one which I nonetheless wish to register here, seems to follow: if the “fable” charged with bringing to light the truth which makes fiction possible finds itself shaken, compromised in being put to the test of this truth, is the truth itself not thereby shaken? Does it not thereby suffer *aucune épreuve*, which would then render it in some way already *nulle d’épreuve*? It seems to me this is more or less the question put to Lacan by Derrida in “The Purveyor of Truth.”

dignitary's ordinary search'" (UP 930) is precisely what Lacan contradicts in his insistence that "the field exhausted by the [police's] search did in fact contain it." On the other hand, Lacan never mentions the fact that the Prefect's discourse on his exhaustive search of the Hotel D— does seem to avail Dupin of *where the letter is (not)*. As I have previously shown, Dupin does not go about retracing the steps of the Prefect, just in case G— missed something, re-searching for the letter in "the all too well known series of extraordinary hiding places: [...] from hidden desk drawers to removable tabletops, from the detachable cushions of chairs to their hollowed-out legs, from the reverse side of mirrors to the depth of book-bindings" (Lacan, PP 37, translation slightly modified). Rather, as I have previously shown, he simply trusts in the Prefect's eyes, in Prefect-sight, in the "absolute perfection" of the Prefect's "inventory of the Minister's apartments" (Rosenheim), which, moreover, he does not even witness first-hand but which is given to him only in mediated form, as the second-hand report of the Prefect's discourse.

One instance (in fact, the one and only instance I have found) in which a critical reading of "The Purloined Letter" does explicitly acknowledge Dupin's acknowledged indebtedness to the Prefect occurs in William Freedman's *The Porous Sanctuary: Art and Anxiety in Poe's Short Fiction* (2002). In the conclusion to his chapter "Revelation as Concealment," Freedman considers "Dupin's reliance on the dismissed methods and investigation of the Prefect" and what this relation between these two characters means not just for an understanding of "The Purloined Letter" but for "our search for all the letters Poe purloined for our bemused amusement" and "perhaps for every open letter that is fiction":



Dupin's intuitive method, which mocks the Prefect's simpler logic, depends upon that prior exercise, just as his discovery, which locates the letter under the nose of the world, is dependent on his own and D\_\_\_\_'s expectation of the Prefect's search in its labyrinthine interior. [...] Dupin's success, in other words, builds on, requires and includes the failure of the police. [...] The brilliance of D\_\_\_\_'s placement of the letter lies in its assumption—and ours—about the usual location of what we look for: [...] the letter's externalized location is a product of assumptions about the depths, just as its discovery in plain view is made possible by the prior hunt in dark enclosure. The conduct of the search for what is darkly hidden is essential to the discovery of the letter in its exposed location, and Poe's story is not only the narrative of what it finds, but the history of what it rejects and replaces. (Freedman 123)

There has to be some (as yet) unspoken “wild train of circumstances” which has it that this solitary account of the “inclusive dependency” between the characters of Dupin and the Prefect—not just in “The Purloined Letter” but (presumably, for Freedman) in the whole Dupin trilogy—surfaces in a work that proposes “a refreuding of Lacan” (ibid. 111). In some ways, this project endorses a return to a traditional psycho-biographical approach to reading literature, which many (even Derrida) credit Lacan with having undone, as if for good.<sup>73</sup> Freedman justifies this “refreuding of Lacan” with a concept of “textual denial” aimed at addressing the ways in which Poe's text is “supplemented with vagueness, ambiguity, denial, acknowledged concealment, overt refusals of perception

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card* (420 [*La Carte postale* 448]). For a more nuanced and generous account of the challenge posed to the traditional application of psychoanalytic concepts and methods by Lacan's reading of “The Purloined Letter,” cf. Shoshana Felman, “On Reading Poetry: Reflections on the Limits of Psychoanalytical Approaches,” *The Purloined Poe* (133-154).

and explanation, and other familiar forms of obfuscation and evasion” (ibid. 2), thereby drawing Freedman’s more far-reaching analysis to contrivances in Poe’s fiction quite like the ones in the Dupin tales I remarked above in terms of “Poe’s narrative economy of (non)disclosure,” though, to quite different effect. My interest in Freedman mainly has to do with the fact that in this solitary acknowledgement of Dupin’s acknowledged indebtedness to the Prefect registers as paradigmatic of what it means to read Poe. According to Freedman, Dupin’s relationship to the Prefect gives a clue to not just the meaning “The Purloined Letter,” and even the meaning of the purloined letter of the purloined letter of “The Purloined Letter,” but a clue to the meaning of “all the letters Poe purloined for our bemused amusement” and “perhaps for every open letter that is fiction.” I would not so quickly as Freedman turn to Dupin’s relationship to the Prefect as a sort of skeleton key that would unlock all the mysteries of “The Purloined Letter,” of Poe and of fiction in general. What interests me is rather the very surprising way these sweeping claims suddenly erupt out of this one solitary acknowledgment that the Prefect might be of some importance to understanding Poe’s detective fiction. It is for that interest that I take a closer look.

So, the “inclusive dependency” sketched out by Freedman between “Dupin’s inductive method” and “the Prefect’s simpler logic”—whereby the mode of Dupin’s repeated success in riddling out mysteries does differ from that of the repeated failings of the Prefect and his cohort but also “depends upon that prior exercise [...] builds on, requires and includes the failure of the police”—speaks less to an investment in the relation between these characters per se than to one in the interplay of surface and depth

which they personify in “The Purloined Letter”<sup>74</sup>: an economy of discovery-on-the-surface and search-in-depth<sup>75</sup> traversing Poe’s fiction, his aesthetics, and, of course, Freedman’s interpretations of them. In fact, when Freedman goes about the customary business of searching out the character in the tale standing in as “a reflection of Poe,” “a type of the artist” (ibid. 112), it is not Dupin he singles out (as is so often the case) nor, certainly, the Prefect (as is never the case), but the Minister D—:

To turn toward Poe for lessons in the art of concealment is to return to meaning where D\_\_\_\_\_ has hidden it: not in the well or in the excavated joints of table-legs, but on the surface and in darkeningly plain view. The placement and reversal

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<sup>74</sup> Generally suspicious “of the diligence with which Poe warns and detains from the depths,” as “The Purloined Letter” repeatedly (even compulsively) turns the reader’s attention to the surface of the text, Freedman reminds that this tale “is nothing if not a tale of deception—of deceptions replacing and compounding deceptions as deceivers deceive deceivers” (Freedman 118). Throughout, the argument of *The Porous Sanctuary* is that the appearing-all-surface of Poe’s text arises only as an effect of the suppression or denial of its depths, a “textual denial” which leaves traces of depth on the surface, as a surface-work of mourning of depth:

Like the universe of *Eureka*, the Poeian work of art or aesthetic object is driven into continuously externalized expansion by an ‘objectless’ force at the center. It is this force that inverts and sets the letter on the surface, that compels the signifier to float free of its meaning, the symbol to seem a symbol only of itself, the work of art to pose as the work of art *per se*, the purely autotelic entity. In “The Purloined Letter,” as in *Eureka*, that “objectless” center of suggested meaning is the “lost parent,” the longed for queen or goddess from whose bosom the work of art, like the developing or rejected infant, separates in the act of becoming, and to whose nurturing unity it hungers to return. (119)

<sup>75</sup> Shawn Rosenheim makes a similar point in *The Cryptographic Imagination*, not just about “The Purloined Letter” but about the tradition of detective fiction so indelibly marked by this text: “to insist on the detective story as a purely two-dimensional, metatextual narrative form is sterile”; “[a] tension between two and three dimensions, matter and sign, goes to the very core of the genre” (Rosenheim 67). This claim on Rosenheim’s part is somewhat surprising in light of the characterization of the Prefect given some thirty-five pages previously in *The Cryptographic Imagination*, which I discussed above, where the Prefect’s failure is said to derive from and “inability to recognize the semiotic flatness of his textual world,” an “[infatuation] with the world of three dimensions,” which does nothing to render the Prefect an object of interest to Rosenheim’s analysis. Here there is no talk of “tension,” neither between the Prefect and Dupin nor between the search-in-depth of the former and the discovery-on-the-surface of the latter; here nothing about the Dupin’s relation to the Prefect “goes to the very core of the genre.” I am not suggesting that Rosenheim is contradicting himself between his readings of “The Purloined Letter” and “The Rue Morgue” but rather that his readings of each of these texts shows a marked disjunction between a given account of the Prefect and one that may be seen as missing from its place.

of the letter, in other words, is itself a compound image of Poe's aesthetic and his way of work. (ibid.)

[...]

Poe's quest, in his writing and in his writing about it, is for an externalization that will contain and yet impenetrably disguise the self as the letter disguises itself and its contents. The author seeks what evades the Minister: the commission of the perfect literary crime or evasion of detection. (ibid.115)

So Poe plays the "poet-thief" (ibid. 121), revealing the externalization his "self" in his art as a concealment of it on the open surface of the letter of his fiction: a defensive (im)posture, like the Minister D—'s in relation to the Prefect, where "the perfect literary crime" or "evasion of detection" consists in fashioning a "psychologically driven aesthetic" that "offers protection against exposure of that interior" (ibid. 111, 121).

Whilst Dupin plays the "poet-reader," ensuring that the "Poe-as-letter achieves [...] safe physical return to the lost and beloved woman" (ibid. 117, 121).<sup>76</sup> Playing somewhere between or perhaps beyond the "poet-thief" and the "poet-reader" is the Prefect of police.

In "The Purloined Letter" the Prefect orchestrates a kind of preliminary excavation of the Hotel D— in his search for the letter, leaving the place riddled with

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<sup>76</sup> Freedman, a "poet-reader" in his own right, certainly most identifies his own critical (im)posture with Dupin's in the tale, "the sidelong glance that blends psychology and aesthetics" (Freedman 123) in *The Porous Sanctuary* returning Poe's text to psycho-biographical motifs that will seem all too familiar to readers of Poe: "the original addressee" of the open letter of Poe's fiction as the lost, beloved, and forbidden (knowledge of) woman, "necrophiliac union" (ibid.), the simultaneity of attraction and repulsion, etc. What makes Freedman's return to these motifs unique, however, is that it is not only built on so many instances in Poe of merely "implied content" and "suggested meaning," but also what it offers is often merely implied contents and suggested meanings, less in the way of a psychological deciphering of Poe himself (e.g., in Marie Bonaparte) than a cryptographic psychology of his art. In this respect Freedman's work is more resonate with that of Louis A. Renza in "Poe's Secret Autobiography," *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 29-56.

holes. Indeed, it is noteworthy (recalling that network of open graves in Poe, which befell me at the end of the previous chapter) that in the Prefect's protracted discourse of his search, where the reader is supposedly spared no detail, not only is there never mention of letter but also there is never mention of any measures taken on the part of the police to set the Hotel D— to rights, to restore its surface-integrity, for the returns of the Minister after his routine absences. Though such pains were presumably taken, from Dupin and the narrator's perspective, as well as the reader's, the holes are left unfilled. Dupin, then, finding the Prefect's application of his limited principle of search-in-depth "“carried out to absolute perfection,”" proceeds to build on (to use Freedman's phrase) the holey field of this feverish and objectless archaeology.

Whatever Dupin might be thought to build on this field—from one discovery-on-the-surface to ratiocination itself—it will have inevitably, according to Freedman, at once required, included, maintained an "essential" relation to "[t]he conduct of the [Prefect's] search for what is darkly hidden." In other words, the Prefect's feverish and objectless archaeology affords some "“decisive evidence”": for Dupin, of *where the letter is (not)* and of the Prefect's own limited principles, certainly; but of what apart from that, for the reader, exactly? Freedman seems to conclude that what the Prefect ultimately proves is that nothing shall be denied to the open letter of Poe's fiction: "Poe's story is not only the narrative of what it finds, but the history of what it rejects and replaces." He makes this point, precisely, in conclusion; the Prefect surfaces as "essential" for Freedman's analysis only then. While he is mentioned only one other time previously in this reading of "The Purloined Letter" and nowhere else in *The Porous Sanctuary*, what the Prefect represents in the tale quickly turns from seeming to be almost nowhere to seeming to be

everywhere. The condition of possibility of psycho-biographical content and meaning in (Poe's) text, after Lacan and after Derrida: "What is required in our search for 'The Purloined Letter,' Poe seems to tell us, in our search for all the letters Poe purloined for our bemused amusement, perhaps for every open letter that is fiction, is the look within that tells us we must look without and then, one step back, the sidelong glance that blends psychology and aesthetics" (ibid.123). It is not for me to deny Freedman this "step back," but what is crucial to note here is that the precondition of this "sidelong glance" of "the poet-reader" is the doomed "look within" that tells him or her to "look without," just as Dupin's successful discovery-on-the-surface of the letter is preceded by the Prefect's failure to seize it in his search-in-depth. A similar pattern emerges in some of last words of *The Porous Sanctuary*, touching on the truth in and of Poe's fiction: "To perform its function, truth in Poe's fiction cannot be merely absent. It must be sought and undiscovered; it must be promised, pursued, and denied" (ibid. 146). Then, the one and only time that the Prefect is mentioned by Freedman *not* in conclusion, the condition of possibility of his own analysis—the doomed but irresistible "look within"—seems to become its pregnant and impregnable horizon: "What the tale seems to tell us is that we are likely not only to overlook hidden meanings in Poe's work; like the Prefect we may not even know where to search for the objectified forms that embody them. [...] And it invites the question: [...] how many hidden communications might lie exposed on the distractingly open surface of Poe's work?" (ibid. 117)

Remarkably, on the very rare occasion of the Prefect being afforded an essential place in a reading of "The Purloined Letter" to match that of Poe's literary design of "The Purloined Letter," whereas traditionally this character has been either implicitly or

explicitly denied such a place, his vital truth and necessity is that of denial itself. For Freedman what has been denied Poe's legacy and literary studies more generally is precisely denial, the possibility of "textual denial" which is also the possibility of psycho-biographical meaning and content in (Poe's) text which is also the possibility of truth in (Poe's) text: a thesis which, as Freedman suggests at the outset of *The Porous Sanctuary*, protects itself as itself in advance, could only confirm itself in being denied as "a denial of denial" (ibid. 5).

In attending to the various ways in which the Prefect has been denied in as and by the critical narrative of "The Purloined Letter," the argument I have been trying to elaborate throughout this chapter concerning the place of the Prefect of police in the Dupin tales is in many ways sympathetic to Freedman's brief but highly charged treatment of this character. However, if the Prefect is a figure of denial in Poe's text, then the veritable tradition of avowedly denying the Prefect any essential or even vital place in the meaning of the tale, would seem to attest to the fact that "denial of denial" is not only possible, all too possible, but as common to literary studies as to "human behavior" in general and not reducible to "current accounts of indeterminacy in truth-absent texts as forms of reductive rationalization" (ibid. 5). Freedman is right: "Poe's story is not only the narrative of what it finds, but the history of what it rejects and replaces." However, far from confirming a sense in which, for instance (one of Freedman's favorite examples of "reductive rationalization"), Jacques Derrida's reading of Lacan's Seminar on "The Purloined Letter" aims to "exclude content or meaning" from "the open, the very open,

letter that is fiction” (ibid. 122, *The Post Card* 443)<sup>77</sup>, to deny the very possibility of meaning, content, and truth in and as the open letter of fiction (a common misinterpretation of Derrida’s meaning), Freedman’s point seems, to me, addressed more in a Derridean spirit than he would think or perhaps want. Consider from “The Purveyor of Truth” this moment in which Derrida is speaking to the first paragraph of “The Purloined Letter,” to the significance and meaning of the fact that the tale begins in a library:

Everything “begins,” then, by obscuring this beginning in the “silence,” “smoke,” and “dark” of this library. The casual observer sees only the smoking meerschaum: a literary decor in sum, the ornamental frame of the narrative. On this border, which is negligible for the hermeneut interested in the center of the picture and in what is within the representation, one could already read that this was an affair of writing, of writing adrift, in a place of writing open without end to its grafting onto other writings, and that this affair of writing (the third of a series in which the “coincidence” with the two preceding ones already caused

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<sup>77</sup> Freedman is specifically responding to Jacques Derrida’s claim in “The Purveyor of Truth” that “The Purloined Letter” “is left unclaimed” as a “remainder” in Lacan’s Seminar, that the location of “the text bearing this title [...] is not where one would expect to find it, in the framed content of the ‘real drama’ or in the hidden and sealed interior of Poe’s tale, but rather in and as the open, the very open, letter that is fiction” (*The Post Card* 442-443). While Derrida wants to play off Lacan’s delimitation of the “real drama” of the tale as an investment reminiscent of the Prefect, an attempt to fix the location of the letter in “a definable hole or assignable lack” (Freedman 442), Freedman responds that this declared aim to set “The Purloined Letter” adrift “in and as the open, the very open, letter that is fiction” actually works to the opposite effect, closing off the open letter of Poe’s fiction:

The open letter that is this fiction, it seems to me, is open to everything but such exclusions. Derrida is right. [...] The meaning or meaning-locus is not “in the hidden and sealed interior of Poe’s tale,” but that is the point. What is hidden in this tale is precisely *not* in the sealed interior, but on the surface of a letter poised on the skin of the tale. [...] [T]he covert meanings of the fiction are inscribed on the textual surface [...]. To return to the open letter that is fiction, then, is to return to a missive that cannot exclude content or meaning, however unavailing or elusive they remain. (ibid. 122)



itself to be remarked upon) suddenly breaks into its first word [...] (*The Post Card* 484-485)

The framing of art as the art of the frame is variously framed in Derrida's response to Lacan's Seminar, as it is in Derrida's writing more generally<sup>78</sup>; here Derrida's is interrogating the neglect of the "literary decor," "the ornamental frame of the narrative" in Lacan's attentions to "the framed content of the 'real drama' or in the hidden and sealed interior of Poe's tale" (ibid. 443). Derrida is interested in the ways in which the first paragraph of "The Purloined Letter" represents "an affair of writing, of writing adrift" as a site of "grafting onto other writings," in particular the previous Dupin tales. The principle point, the point which would seem to deny Freedman's claims about Derrida's supposed "denial of denial," is that this "affair of writing" is open ended, "a place of writing open without end." However, I am ultimately interested less in how Derrida's remarks here contravene in advance the all too common mode of denying or denouncing deconstruction for or as a supposed denial of meaning than I am in the corrective or needed qualification they afford a seemingly minor point in Freedman's analysis: his comparison of "The Purloined Letter" to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

As Freedman sketches out his notion of the "inclusive dependency" between "Dupin's inductive method" and "the Prefect's simpler logic" in "The Purloined Letter," he inserts the following reference to "The Rue Morgue": "'The faculty with which I shall arrive, or have arrived at the solution of this mystery,' admits Dupin in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' 'is in the direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police' [...]. Dupin's success, in other words, builds on, requires and includes the failure

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<sup>78</sup> Cf., especially, Jacques Derrida "Le parergon" in *La vérité en peinture*, 44-94, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod, "The Parergon," *The Truth in Painting*, 37-82.

of the police. And the inclusive dependency is tighter still in ‘The Purloined Letter’” (Freedman 123). It seems to me that Freedman somewhat vaguely flattens out here some significant differences between the design of “The Rue Morgue” and that of “The Purloined Letter.” If “Poe’s story [‘The Purloined Letter’] is not only the narrative of what it finds, but the history of what it rejects and replaces,” then, as Derrida points out, what must be of interest here is not only the history of what is rejected or replaced in “The Purloined Letter” *and* the history of what is rejected or replaced in “The Rue Morgue” (i.e., the dismissed methods and investigation of the Prefect”), but the history of what is not so much rejected or replaced as re-placed *between* the Dupin tales. “The Purloined Letter” takes place, from the very beginning and throughout the entire tale, in that “little back library, or book-closet” of *No. 33, Rue Dunôt*, wherein the titles “Rue Morgue” and “Marie Rogêt” are not so subtly catalogued. The series conjured in the “‘silence,’ ‘smoke,’ and ‘dark’ of this library” does not beckon recognitions of mere patterns or similarities between items in the series, in the way of a “inclusive dependency” admitted to before which later becomes “tighter still”; the notion of a series certainly puts in play a question of sameness but also a crucial question of difference. If “Dupin’s success, in other words, builds on, requires and includes the failure of the police” then it does not do so, must not do so, in the same way in “The Rue Morgue” as in “The Purloined Letter.” In fact, the very genre of detective fiction, even or especially when it comes to a series of stories by the same author where the same characters reappear (whether Poe’s Dupin tales or Doyle’s adventures of Sherlock Holmes), depends for its “special appeal” on a certain renewed novelty.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. John T. Irwin’s compelling framing of the issue of novelty and “detective fiction as high

I have tried to show here how many things may seem to be re-placed over the course of the Dupin trilogy: for instance, how a lack of evidentiary record and the absence of motive in “The Rue Morgue” gives way to an excess of evidence and possible motive in “Marie Rogêt,” as a way of fashioning new disruptions in the usual modes in which cases are processed, recorded, and ultimately solved in order to open the door to Dupin. I have also indicated that the uniqueness of the off-the-record case of “The Purloined Letter” in this series of mysteries is built on an abeyance of the efficacy of record-keeping itself, or a neutralization of the very concept of the record, the almost utter unmeaningness of gathering and interpreting evidence when it comes to matters “[a] little *too* self-evident,” one which, paradoxically, seems inevitably to arise in the case which revolves around perhaps one of the most simple illustrations of archival labor imaginable: having a single document put (back) in its proper place. Where he previously dwelled so vaguely at the margins of the first two Dupin tales, the Prefect’s unprecedented degree of narrative prominence in “The Purloined Letter” may now be appreciated for the way in which it not only situates him in a privileged seat of prepossession in relation to this case—with regard to the case itself, as the purveyor of this off-the-record, *and* to the information pertaining to the case (the identity of the perpetrator, his motives, and the location of the hot property of the letter itself all being to some extent knowns), *and* to the whole “affair” being secreted from the machinations of the press and therefore from the public eye—but also situates him decidedly and decisively in an archival trajectory repeatedly staged within and across the whole Dupin trilogy.

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art” in relation to “The Purloined Letter” in *The Mystery to a Solution*, 1-12.

In the opening line to his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Leroy L. Panek writes, “Like the poor, in the world of crime fiction cops have always been with us” (Panek 155). A Marxian interpretation of this statement might draw from it the analogy that the poor (in the world) are to capital what cops are to crime fiction and/or detective fiction: a genre, by whatever name, whose history is profoundly resonate with that of capitalism, both histories being indelibly marked by the industrial revolution and the rise of the modern city, for instance.<sup>80</sup> In *Capital* Marx stresses repeatedly that the “surplus-population” or “reserve army” of the poor “have always been with us,” riveted to the production of wealth by a “general law of capitalist accumulation” “more firmly than the wedges of Hephaestus held Prometheus to the rock,” such that: “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labor, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole” (Marx 799). Panek’s likening the character of the police in detective fiction to the poor (in the world) would, then, to Marx’s eyes, suggest at the very least a political economy (if not a fatal dialectic of universal History) inextricably binding the two terms. While Marx’s idea of capitalistic accumulation is unthinkable without the “surplus-population” or “reserve army” of the poor, this is either not Panek’s idea of the poor or not his idea of the police in detective fiction. “[N]obody claims,” he writes, “that the presence of a police officer makes police fiction” (Panek 155). Of course, the mere “presence of a police officer” does not make “*police* fiction” (out of crime fiction or detective fiction); the designation “police fiction” has reference to a

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<sup>80</sup> Cf., Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (1941) (reprint: Carroll and Graf, 1984); Clive Bloom, “Capitalizing on Poe’s Detective: the Dollars and Sense of Nineteenth-Century Detective Fiction,” *Nineteenth-Century Suspense: From Bloom to Conan Doyle*, ed. Bloom et al (Hampshire, UK: Macmillan, 1988).

paradigm shift dating roughly from the mid-twentieth century which moved the stock-character of the cop from the background to the foreground of the genre, from playing a “decidedly subordinate role” in it to becoming its new, heroic mainstay for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (ibid.). However, I would suggest that the mere “presence of a police officer”—namely, G—makes Poe’s detective fiction: not in spite of but precisely for the “decidedly subordinate role” he plays, for the priority and precedence of the subordination of the Prefect to the characterization of the detective “unfettered by bureaucracy and law” (ibid.), Dupin.

My attention has been trained here on a sort of political economy of the archive underwriting Dupin’s relation to the Prefect of police, but it is to my mind worth reconsidering the critical subordination of all those poor cops who “have always been with us,” in the very beginnings of detective fiction, and precisely for the constitutive role their subordination plays in the genre prior to its turn toward “police fiction.” Panek himself compiles a rather impressive list: “From the beginning we find Sergeant Cuff, Inspector Bucket, M. Lecoq, to say nothing of Poe’s Prefect, or Doyle’s Lestrade. In the Golden Age they multiply – Inspectors Alleyn, Appleby, Grant, and Parker, to name only a few” (ibid.). This taxonomic or taxidermic monumentalization of all these characters beyond the scope of Panek’s argument—moreover, at the very outset of his essay—itsself gives a clue, I believe, to the character of their critical (pivotal, productive, and necessary) subordination in as and by the tradition of detective fiction. They are the record-keepers and the purveyors of the case.

### Haunting Poe's "Castle" of Reason

If there be a single reason for Poe's Dupin tales to exist, then it would have to do with reason. In the 1920s Joseph Wood Krutch accounted for the genesis of Poe's detective fiction thus: "First reasoning in order to escape feeling, then seizing upon the idea of reason as the mystery of his own character, Poe invented the detective story in order that he might not go mad" (Krutch 118). Though dismissive of the "biographical fallacy" grounding Krutch's claim, J. Gerald Kennedy could not altogether abandon the idea that the tales of ratiocination "offered [Poe] a distraction from the recurring nightmare of death and disintegration" (Kennedy [1975] 173, 184). In "The Limits of Reason: Poe's Deluded Detectives" he persuasively argues that the years between 1841 and 1844 comprise a distinct epoch in the canon of Poe's writings, a "ratiocinative phase" or "cycle," wherein a *corpus* "preponderantly devoted to terror, madness, disease, death, and revivification" issued within itself "a revealing counterpoint in [its] idealization of reason and sanity" (ibid. 172). More recently, John T. Irwin's seminal work *The Mystery to a Solution* (1994) cites the preponderant "interest in deductions and solutions rather than love and drama" in Poe's Dupin tales to distinguish the genre of "*analytic detective fiction*" ("invented by Poe") from "stories whose main character is a detective but whose main concern is not analysis but adventure, whose true genre is less detective fiction than the quest romance" (as in the tradition of "Doyle and Zangwill or Hammett and Chandler") (Irwin 1, 431). The inducement to delimit a "ratiocinative cycle" within Poe's *corpus* is certainly justified and perhaps nowhere more so than in the case of the Dupin tales, since they insulate themselves in a way for being the only tales where (nominally) the same characters reappear in Poe. Of course, this has hardly prevented Poe's

“ratiocinative cycle” from being shown to have profound resonance with the rest of his *corpus*, his life, and its historical context in antebellum America.

Poe’s writings dating from the early to mid-1840s (of which the Dupin tales are but some of the most famous specimens) are a privileged site for the long tradition of psycho-biographical readings of Poe, from Marie Bonaparte’s classic *Life and Works* to Louis A. Renza’s displacement of the psycho-biographical program in the notion of “secret writing.” Richard Kopley has recently repackaged the Dupin tales with a series of essays in which biographical and genetic criticism blend with close-reading and archival research in a manner supposed to be evocative of Dupin’s “ratiocinative process” (cf. Kopley 1-2). In the hands of Judith Fetterley, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” has given renewed life to Poe’s obsessive theme of death-of-a-woman as [????...????]. “The Rue Morgue” in particular, for its undeniably racialized depiction of the murderous Ourang-Outang, but the whole Dupin trilogy and indeed Poe’s “ratiocinative cycle” more generally also figures prominently in the groundbreaking work in recent decades on Poe and race. From Toni Morrison, Louisa Nygaard, and Joan Dayan in the early 1990s<sup>81</sup> to the indispensable volume from 2001, *Romancing the Shadow*, and beyond, there have been given many definitive illustrations of what Lindon Barrett calls “the ineluctable co-implication of Reason and race” in Poe (Barrett 164). Both Morrison and Liliane Weissberg consider the master-slave relation girding the ratiocinative fantasy of “The Gold-Bug” from 1843, apropos the relation of the cryptographer/treasure-hunter

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Loisa Nygaard, “Winning the Game: Inductive Reasoning in Poe’s ‘Murders in the Rue Morgue,’” *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (summer 1994) 223-254; Joan Dayan, “Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves,” *American Literature* 66 (June 1994): 239-273. Reprinted in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 179-209.

Legrande to his negro servant Jupiter.<sup>82</sup> John Carlos Rowe, across multiple works<sup>83</sup>, follows “the ways Poe’s enthusiasm for racism and imperialism [...] inflects in even his most famous tales,” among them: “The Man of the Crowd” from 1840, “The Rue Morgue” from 1841, and “The Purloined Letter” from 1844 (Rowe [2001] 95). Betsy Erkkila has even read “the question of black intelligence” between the lines of Poe’s brief sketch from 1840, “Instinct vs Reason—A Black Cat” (Erkkila 63).

Thus while Poe’s “ratiocinative cycle” gives a certain impression of “a fair and stately palace” having “reared its head” as “the monarch Thought’s dominion,” inevitably this “castle” of reason is at once a “haunted palace” (UP 539). Its spectral tenants include not only questions of sexual and racial difference, the “amorous bondage” between Poe, ladies and slaves (Dayan), but also, if Poe may be taken at his word in “Instinct vs Reason,” the question of the animal. In the span of a couple pages he mentions “the lion-ant,” “many kinds of spiders,” “the beaver,” “the coral-worm,” “bees,” and of course his pet black cat (UP 539-630). Not to deny any reading of any individual item in the veritable Noah’s Ark bobbing along his *corpus* for its inflections of sexual difference and race, it may also do well to acknowledge that sometimes in Poe a raven may be just a raven, an orangutan just an orangutan, a beaver just a beaver, whatever that might mean. “The line which demarcates the instinct of brute creation from the boasted reason of man,” Poe writes in 1840, at the very brink of his “ratiocinative cycle,” “is, beyond doubt, of the most shadowy and unsatisfactory character” (UP 629).

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 58; Lilian Weissberg, “Black, White, and Gold,” *Romancing the Shadow*, eds. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 127-156, in particular 144-150, for her conversation with Morrison.

<sup>83</sup> In addition to Rowe’s contribution to *Romancing the Shadow*, eds. Kennedy and Weissberg, “Edgar Allan Poe’s Imperial Fantasy and the American Frontier,” cf. “Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism” in *Poe’s Pym: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) 117-138.



It is along these lines, in view of the “shadowy” and “unsatisfactory” ways in which Poe’s “ratiocinative cycle” turns itself over in its troubled incorporation of those things which it would seem to overcome or to exclude, that I would like to reconsider the most widely discussed and (at once) badly accounted for passages in all of the Dupin trilogy pertaining to the Prefect of police: the highly stylized description of this character and his unique species of wisdom which concludes “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” given in the words of Dupin. Through surveying the ways in which this passage has been traditionally (mis)understood with regard to the concept of reason at stake in the Dupin tales, I hope, in the end, to consider how an understanding of *Autography* might be enlightened as part and parcel of a “ratiocinative cycle” in Poe’s *corpus*, for the overtly rationalized revolution in its design in 1841, and how *Autography* in turn further casts Poe’s “castle” of reason into shadow, proves it unsatisfactory in hitherto unheard-of ways.

Before quoting the passage in question from “The Rue Morgue,” I would like to return briefly to J. Gerald Kennedy and “The Limits of Reason” from 1975. Certainly as could be expected given his later editing *Romancing the Shadow*, but as already indicated by the essay’s title, Kennedy does not so much elaborate here a stable notion of a “ratiocinative cycle” in Poe as he does merely entertain it as an heuristic with which to frame the ultimately liminal concept of reason at stake in Poe, where “[c]onstantly [...] irrational forces and inexplicable phenomena threaten ‘the monarch Thought’s dominion’” (Kennedy [1975] 173). In other words, he is not drawing a sharp line of demarcation on either side of “the productive years 1841-44” to delimit Poe’s “ratiocinative cycle”; in fact, he expressly acknowledges that “it is impossible to

determine the origin of Poe's ratiocinative interests," citing (among other things) Poe's essay on "Maelzel's Chess-Player" from 1835 as evidence of "an early analytical bent" (ibid. 172, 173). Kennedy's selection of texts is more telling still, as he passes on the arguably more realized tales of ratiocination—e.g., the Dupin trilogy and "The Gold-Bug"—for two "transitional" works: "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) and "The Oblong Box" (1844), "tales which respectively signal the beginning and the end of Poe's ratiocinative cycle" (ibid. 173).

Kennedy observes that the narrators of both these tales fashion themselves would-be detectives. The narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" pursues, from dusk till dawn, through the streets of London, an "old man" eventually recognized as "the type and genius of deep crime," "[t]he worst heart of the world," which thanks to "one of the great mercies of God" remains a book that "*lasst sich nicht lesen*" ("does not permit itself to be read") (UP 654, 647). In "The Oblong Box," the narrator becomes "abnormally inquisitive" about one Mr. Cornelius Wyatt, an old college chum and "young artist" traveling with him aboard a ship bound from Charleston to New York, and, more particularly, about a certain "matter of the supernumerary state-room" held by Wyatt's party of four (UP 962-963). It is beyond the scope of this argument to reflect the subtleties Kennedy's readings of these tales; the essential point here is that both of these self-fashioned detectives prove, in different ways, deluded.

Regardless of what we may infer from his actions, the man of the crowd retains the ultimate inscrutability of Melville's white whale, symbolizing (if anything) man's inability to ascertain, by means of reason, any absolute knowledge of the world beyond the self. [...] The 'mad energy' of the stranger only mirrors the

narrator's compulsive behavior—his monomaniacal attempt to become the man of reason, to read the book that will not be read. (Kennedy [1975] 178-179)

The “compulsive behavior” of the narrator in “The Oblong Box” similarly leads him into “self-deception” (ibid.) but of a more darkly comical and parodic sort. All fixation on the oblong box itself, which ironically the narrator resolves (not without reason) must contain an artistic masterpiece, never gives cause to consider “the coffin-like dimensions of the box,” which is eventually revealed to contain the corpse of Wyatt's bride, ten-days-dead (ibid. 180). Having originally engaged the three state-rooms aboard the *Independence* for a party of five, after which his wife deceased, Wyatt, at the urging of Captain Hardy, designed to have the oblong box (containing his now “pseudo-wife,” “partially embalmed”) repose in the now “supernumerary state-room” with the thought that “[n]intents of the passengers would have abandoned the ship all together rather than take passage with a dead body” (UP 971).

It is clear to Kennedy, as it will be to any reader of “The Man of the Crowd” and “The Oblong Box,” that the narrators of these tales evince species of wisdom which are a far cry from the “pure reasoning” of C. Auguste Dupin, his balance of “imaginative involvement with analytical detachment” in pursuit of “the Truth which is the detective's goal,” the solution to the mystery coincident and coterminous with the Truth of ratiocination (Kennedy [1975] 182-183). However, it is ultimately the differences between these two tales that most interest Kennedy. On the one hand, “[i]nitiating the ratiocinative cycle, ‘The Man of the Crowd’ dramatizes the effort [one ultimately doomed to failure “because the principles of ratiocination have not yet been mastered”] to escape the conditions of terror and hypersensitivity through a rigidly analytical system of

thought”; while, on the other hand, “The Oblong Box” “presents the opposite extreme—a narrator so detached from the subject of his investigation, so deluded by his own intellectual pretensions, that his ratiocination achieves no resemblance to actuality” (ibid. 182). What interests me about Kennedy’s identification of the arch of Poe’s own “artistic quest for a rational vision of experience” in the early to mid-1840s as rising and falling in “The Man of the Crowd” and “The Oblong Box,” respectively, is the fact that when he does underline a point of similarity between Poe’s entry into and departure from his “ratiocinative cycle,” he does so by alluding to the Prefect of police in the Dupin tales: more particularly, “the way he has “*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” (UP 684, cf. Kennedy [1975] 182). If the characterization of the Prefect of police at the close of “The Rue Morgue” can be illustrative, indeed, representative of both Poe’s entry into and departure from his “ratiocinative cycle,” then may it not also be the case that the context of the characterization of the Prefect (precisely, in the Dupin tales) illustrates, indeed, represents a simultaneous beginning and end of Poe’s “ratiocinative cycle” at the very peak of his “artistic quest for a rational vision of experience”?

Here, then, is the passage in question from “The Rue Morgue,” the tale’s concluding paragraph, cited in full. Dupin is speaking to the Prefect’s “chagrin at the turn which affairs had taken” upon his and the narrator’s delivery of the solution to the mystery “at the *bureau* of the Prefect”; though, he is not speaking to it to the Prefect (I quote from Mabbott’s *Collected Works* here to reflect Poe’s revised version of this passage, but the revisions themselves will prove of some interest to the reading that follows.):

“Let him talk,” said Dupin, who had not thought it necessary to reply. “Let him discourse; it will ease his conscience. I am satisfied with having defeated him in his own castle. Nevertheless, that he failed in the solution of this mystery, is by no means that matter for wonder which he supposes it; for, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound. In his wisdom is no *stamen*. It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna,—or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature after all. I like him especially well for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained that reputation for ingenuity which he possesses. I mean the way he has ‘*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas.*’” (M 2:526)

I have already mentioned the fact that this quotation represents the most widely discussed passage pertaining to the Prefect in all of the Dupin trilogy and registered my suspicion that it is also at once the most badly accounted for passage pertaining to same. Before proceeding to my own interpretation of the passage, it will do well to support this contention and to offer some indication from whence comes the trouble afforded by this paragraph to critical interpretations of it. It may, after all, all come down to a single sentence: “It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna,—or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish.” “The Rue Morgue” has long been of interest to readers for its imagery of decapitation and has proved particularly fertile ground for psychoanalytic interpretations of the tale in this respect: in addition to Dupin’s evocative and no doubt sexually-charged allusion to the Prefect’s *stamen*-less wisdom here, and the strange proximity of this metaphor to those of “all head and no body” and the arguably phallic index of the codfish, one might recall the newspaper’s report of the mutilated

corpse of Madame L'Esplanaye, ““with her throat so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off and rolled to some distance”” (UP 663), as well as the nail with the removable head, whose discovery by Dupin discloses the mode of ingress and egress to the locked-room mystery, as so many figures pointing to a head-body complex in the tale.

Marie Bonaparte detected in these repeated allusions to head and body separation the tell-tale signs of Poe's castration complex, dating the action of the story back to Poe's infancy, when “there seems every reason to believe he did, in fact, observe the *primal scene*,” a real sex-act between David and Elizabeth Arnold Poe (or between her and an “unknown lover”), whose “life [as] two strolling players was hardly such as to enable their child to sleep in a separate room” (Bonaparte 446). Thus “the problem of identifying the actors in [the] hidden drama” (oedipal, of course) posed by the tale becomes relatively easy of solution (ibid. 451). The decapitation of Madame L'Esplanaye at the hands of an enraged Ourang-Outang a transposition of Poe's “infantile observations of coitus which invariably interpret[ed] the sex act as a violent attack on the woman”; the Ourang-Outang “first symbolically penetrates and—by decapitation— castrates the old woman with the phallic razor” (ibid. 447, 455). Later, Bonaparte briefly alludes to Poe's displacement of his castration complex onto John Allan, for whom the Prefect of police stands-in in the tale, and “in [whose] wisdom is no *stamen*” in the sense that, “[t]alk as he might [...] of the crime [i.e. infidelity] that gave Rosalie [Poe's sister] birth, Poe could be full to bursting with “pride in the depths of his knowledge, compared with the fumbings of the police inspector [...] it was *he*, the little Edgar, who had actually seen it committed” (ibid. 455). In the absence of the often-criticized psycho-biographical

methodology underwriting Bonaparte's work, psychologically and psychoanalytically inflected readings of "The Rue Morgue" have focused instead on the way individual characters in the tale represent not different "actors" in Poe's life but different species of wisdom, which taken together are thought to comprise the tale's examination of the nature and limits of human knowledge, the possibility of knowledge as self-consciousness, in a word, the very *ratio* of ratiocination.

The species of wisdom represented in "The Rue Morgue" are often differentiated in accordance with what John T. Irwin calls the tale's "coding of head and body": "[I]n the differential relationship he sets up between head and body, Poe codes the body as nonhuman [...] and thus the head as human in opposition—the standard equation of head, mind, rationality, humanity on the one hand, and of the body, instinct, irrationality, animality on the other" (Irwin 197). While Irwin has some success reading this "standard equation" into some of the tale's imagery of decapitation, Dupin's highly figural description of the Prefect's species of wisdom at the end of the tale is much more difficult (if not impossible) to account for in these terms. First, it is said to be "all head and no body," which, according to "the standard equation," ought to translate: "all ["mind, rationality, human"] and no ["instinct, irrationality, animality]"; then, in the very same sentence, it is figured as animal, "like a codfish" (moreover, Dupin calls the Prefect himself "a good creature after all"). How, then, does this characterization of the Prefect's species of wisdom fit "the standard equation," when it is, at once, "all head and no body" *and* at least ("or, at best")<sup>84</sup> animal-like? The simple answer is that it does not

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<sup>84</sup> After 1845 Poe's revised sentence reads, "It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna,—or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish," whereas the text from 1841 reads, "It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna,—or, at least, all head and shoulders, like a codfish" (UP 684).

fit, which has not, however, prevented Irwin and others from trying to make it fit. It regularly happens that this “coding of heads and bodies” is invoked as “a sort of Procrustean bed” (UP 925), whereby certain elements of the paragraph, or the Prefect’s character altogether, are cut off, excluded, or exempted to have it fit the frame of and by “the standard equation.”

A case-in-point is J.A. Lemay’s essay “The Psychology of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’” whose argument is entirely derived from the paragraph that concludes “The Rue Morgue.” Lemay claims at the outset: “if we fully understand the ways that these three metaphors—and the final quotation—complement the story, then we will understand the psychology of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’” (Lemay 223). “All three tropes”—“[1.] In his wisdom is no *stamen*. [2.] It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna,—[3.] or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish”—Lemay observes, “point to a head-body dichotomy and all concern sex” (ibid.). However, whatever it means to “fully understand” this passage as a “complement” to the tale in which it appears evidently does not entail any sustained reflection on the character of the Prefect, who almost entirely disappears from the argument after the first pages of Lemay’s essay. The only direct claim Lemay makes with regard to the relevance of the final paragraph of “The Rue Morgue” for the character it is ostensibly about is this: “Dupin seems to be saying that the Prefect failed to solve the mystery because he failed to take sex into account—or because he failed to integrate the entire person, head and body, intellect and sex” (ibid.). An account of Dupin’s account of the Prefect’s failure to solve the mystery in “The Rue Morgue” strange for the fact that, according to Lemay,



this failure of a species of wisdom “to integrate the entire person” is one embodied by every other character in the tale, including Dupin.

Whether headless bodies or “bodiless heads” “The Rue Morgue” hosts only characters which fail “to integrate the entire person”: “Dupin and the narrator [...] live in the fourth and top story of their house. In Poe’s common house-as-body metaphor, they inhabit the mind only” (ibid. 242-243). They are thus “symbolic grotesques—bodiless heads,” as are the L’Espanayes, who not only live on the top floor of their building but also, “[b]y their mental illness, by their deliberate suppression of sexuality, by their denial of the body,” represent “another aspect of the head’s supremacy” (ibid. 242, 244, 246). “[T]he ape and the sailor, who represent headless bodies, sheer sexuality and animality” are also identified as “symbolic grotesques” (ibid. 242). Now, many questions could be raised here, not the least of which would be why Lemay sees a text filled to bursting with so much symbolic grotesquery, so many headless bodies and “bodiless heads,” as trying to make the single point that heads ought to have bodies and bodies heads. In contrast to Bonaparte’s interpretation of “The Rue Morgue” as an unconsciously-driven *tableaux* of Poe’s early childhood education in sex, wherein the tale’s final paragraph finds Poe lording the knowledge given to him by his mother over his dead step-father, Lemay reads the drama of headless bodies and “bodiless heads” as a consciously coded assault on “the Enlightenment enthroning of reason” (ibid. 246). So the final paragraph of “The Rue Morgue” is distinct from the tale as a “complement” in the sense that Lemay sees Poe more directly communicating to his reader here through Dupin, handing him or her the key to decoding his cryptographic morality tale about the

dangers of excessive sexuality, embodiment, animality as well as those of excessive reason.

Yet, does the fact that Dupin does solve the mystery, moreover, that he is in a position to explain the Prefect's failure to do so as a failure "to integrate the entire person," not suggest that he, Dupin, does not "inhabit the mind only" as a "bodiless head" but rather "integrate[s] the entire person, head and body"? Shawn Rosenheim's account of the "constant recurrence of heads and bodies" in "The Rue Morgue" in *The Cryptographic Imagination* offers a compelling corrective to Lemay's with regard to Dupin but proves yet a bit Procrustean when it comes to the Prefect:

[I]t is the knowledge of his own embodiment that permits Dupin to solve the mystery of the L'Espanayes' deaths. This is the implication of Dupin's final comments on the Prefect, in which he takes pains to emphasize the futility of the latter's "bodiless" wisdom. [...] Although the Prefect is figured as a "creature," it is just his failure to negotiate between head and body that prevents him from imagining the animal nature of the killer. As a kind of walking bust, all head and shoulders, the Prefect, not Dupin, is an emblem for excessive rationality, unable to accommodate the ape's physical presence. (Rosenheim 85)

Rosenheim is interested in the ways in which Poe's tale is exploiting rather than trying to balance the divide between traditional valuations of the head as "the citadel of reason" (Lemay 224) and the body as the site of instincts, passions, and man's ties to brute, animal nature more generally. While almost the whole of "The Rue Morgue" is designed to enhance the reader's identification with Dupin's "inhuman reason" and to forge an "extreme contrast" between it and "the ape's physicality," Rosenheim argues, by the end

of the tale, Dupin's "cryptographic power," his capacity for solving the mystery (one "specifically predicated on his linguistic prowess," the principle distinguishing feature between man and ape, according to some later developments in this reading), finds itself by necessity "confronting the tangible word" (ibid. 69, 84). Dupin's "disentanglement" of the mystery being wrapped up in the hair of the Ourang-Outang is one telling instance of heady reason having to "accommodate the ape's physical presence," another is the impression Dupin makes upon the fancy of the narrator "[a]fter producing his assembled physical evidence": the often-cited "creeping of the flesh" effected by "Dupin's recreation of the crime" (ibid. 84-85). As "the solution of the Rue Morgue murders requires that Dupin make forceful, even violent, contact with the traces of the ape," similarly Poe's design is to effect "contact with the traces of the ape" on the part of his readers, to have them "ape his ape" (ibid. 84, 69). "To rouse the mind," Rosenheim writes, "a text must also arouse the body" (ibid. 85).

Yet, in spite of these rigorous attentions to the ways in which heady reason and bodily affect co-implicate in and as Poe's design of "The Rue Morgue," the characterization of the Prefect at the end of the tale does not warrant similar treatment. Not only does Rosenheim offer no account of the "animal nature" to which the Prefect's "bodiless' wisdom" is explicitly compared in being likened to "a codfish," but he also encourages the reader to ignore Dupin's calling the Prefect a "creature." Poe's revisions of the tale suggest, however, that he preferred to have the word "creature" cut into here rather than cut out of the letter of his text. In the 1841-version of "The Rue Morgue," the line in question read, "But he [the Prefect] is a good fellow after all" (UP 684), and was later modified to read, "But he is a good creature after all" (M 2:568). In the thrust of an

argument attuned to the necessary co-implication of heady reason and bodily, animal nature in “The Rue Morgue,” it is remarkable that the reassertion of the question of animality in Dupin’s description of the Prefect’s species of wisdom is not only exempted from interpretation but done so precisely in order to situate “the Prefect, not Dupin, as an emblem of excessive rationality” in the tale (Rosenheim 85).

Poe’s interpolation of the word “creature” into the tale’s final paragraph seems to me all the more significant in light of the ways in which one may imagine him making his characters and readers “ape his ape.” The word “creature” appears at least once to refer to the Ourang-Outang in the course of the narrator’s paraphrase of the sailor’s tale of the ape’s escape, in fact, precisely at the moment of the ape’s escape. The sailor’s attempt “to quiet the creature [...] by the use of a whip,” as was his custom, sends the Ourang-Outang “at once through the door of the chamber, down the stairs, and thence, through a window, unfortunately open, into the street” (M 2:565). This tiered description of the Ourang-Outang’s escape apes the progress of this argument to this point, having visited now two Procrustean beds that selectively dismember the account of the Prefect’s species of wisdom so as to have it fit the context which would contain it. Lemay unceremoniously ejects the Prefect from his own bed, through that door always opening to Dupin, who opens the door to Poe. Rosenheim enjoins his reader down the stairs of Dupin’s heady reason, not to some happy, moral middle-ground but to a brute, affective materiality of reading, only not descending so far as to find the Prefect there but leaving him locked away in the uppermost story of the “castle” of reason. *The Mystery to a Solution* is the window, the very open window, leading to the street: one more frame, one

more bed in which to lay, before the “profoundly quiet” cosmopolitan thoroughfare which is the letter of Poe’s text.

John T. Irwin’s account of Dupin’s account of the Prefect’s failure to solve the mystery of “The Rue Morgue” in, as, and by the highly figural description of his species of wisdom that concludes the tale can seem at first glance to resemble that of Rosenheim. He suggests that the reason Dupin is able to succeed where the Prefect has failed stems from his, Dupin’s, recognition in the singular nature of the crime “an animal ferocity, an irrationality, that he knows exists within himself, an irrationality that grounds rationality as the physical body grounds the human mind” (Irwin 199). However, in contrast to Rosenheim, who sees the question of bodily animal nature in relation to Dupin’s heady reason as constantly reasserting itself on the vague margin between Poe’s text and its reader (where one, in one way or another, is always being made “to ape his ape”), Irwin’s argument concerns a mastery over this animal irrationality. “[T]he impulses that have mastered the criminal are those that have been mastered in the detective” (ibid.). It is suggested, at the close of §21:

[O]ne might interpret that intellectual power which both Poe and Dupin consider to be the culmination of rational analysis—the power of intuition—as being the rational mind’s reliance upon, its translation into consciousness of, the animal instincts of the body in which it is lodged, the kind of physical intuition whose lack prevents the prefect, with his all-head-and-no-body reasoning, from recognizing and interpreting the signs of “*brutal ferocity*” in the crime. (ibid. 199-200).

In spite of the significance Irwin attributes here to the “translation into consciousness of the animal instincts of the body in which [the rational mind] is lodged” and on which it relies as the “intellectual power” that is the very “culmination of [Dupin’s and Poe’s notion of] rational analysis,” just a page previously he claims, moreover, as a matter of course, that Dupin’s relationship to the Ourang-Outang is subordinate in the tale to his “battle of wits” with the sailor (the ape’s keeper) and the Prefect. “Dupin does not, of course, engage in a battle of wits with the unthinking killer [...]. Rather, in the absence of a rational culprit in the first analytic detective story, the mental duel between detective and criminal that will become the genre’s mainstay is replaced by Dupin’s outwitting of both the ape’s master and the prefect of police” (ibid. 198). *The Cryptographic Imagination* gives ample evidence to reconsider the seeming obviousness of “the absence of a rational culprit” in “The Rue Morgue” by showing that Dupin only fingers the Ourang-Outang as the L’Espanayes’s killer by literally (as per the design of the tale) “fingering” the ape: touching his hair, fashioning a *facsimile* of his handprint, having the narrator overlay it with his own hand, aping the strangulation of ape’s victims by wrapping the *facsimile* hand-print around a “billet of wood,” the “creeping of the flesh” traversing the whole evidentiary record of “The Rue Morgue” (Irwin does not discuss these crucial bits of evidence but rather emphasizes that “Dupin does not himself capture the ape, indeed, he never even sees it” (ibid.).) Both Rosenheim and Irwin ultimately account for the Prefect’s failure to finger the ape as a failure to ape the ape, what Rosenheim describes as a failure “to accommodate the ape’s physical presence” and what Irwin describes as the Prefect’s lacking “the kind of physical intuition [...], with his all-head-and-no-body reasoning,” that keeps him “from recognizing and interpreting the

signs of ‘*brutal ferocity*’ in the crime,” but Irwin’s version of this argument is most odd. While Rosenheim expressly excludes and/or exempts certain details in Dupin’s description of the Prefect’s species of wisdom which indicate that it is at least (“or, at best,”) animal-like, Irwin not only explicitly acknowledges the animal-like nature of the Prefect’s species of wisdom but this acknowledgement is crucial for his substituting the Prefect for the Orang-Orang in “the mental duel between detective and criminal that will become the [...] mainstay [of the analytic detective story].”

Notably, to make a case for this interpretation of “The Rue Morgue” Irwin draws on the relationship between Dupin’s success and the Prefect’s failure from “The Purloined Letter”:

Dupin’s opponent the prefect, “a good creature after all,” is compared to a mythical being traditionally represented as a head without a body (Laverna, “the Roman goddess of thefts” [2:574 n.40]) and an animal that is “all head and shoulders,” the codfish. The point of this comparison, which figures the prefect’s reasoning as “cunning” rather than “profound” (L. *profundus*, “deep, low”), as higher rather than lower (“all head and no body”), seems to be the same point Dupin makes in “The Purloined Letter”—that the prefect cannot imagine the workings of a mind substantially different than his own, a rule always true when the level of the other’s intellect is above his own “and very usually when it is below” (3:985). These two extremes are illustrated by the prefect’s failure to comprehend the operations of a mind (the minister’s) almost superhuman in comparison to his and of a “mind” literally subhuman, the ape’s. (ibid. 199)

On the one hand, Irwin acknowledges here without reservation that the Prefect's species of wisdom is figured as both "all head and no body" and animal. Precisely here (in contrast to the conclusion to §21 of *The Mystery to a Solution*, cited above, where the animal-like character of this species of wisdom mysteriously drops out of the equation in order to account for how Dupin arrives at the solution to the mystery of "The Rue Morgue" where the Prefect does not), the acknowledgment of the Prefect's hybrid all-head-and-no-body-and-animal-like species of wisdom is crucial for Irwin's associating Dupin's "battle of wits" with the Prefect, which culminates in Dupin having defeated the Prefect "in his own castle," to the myth of Theseus's destruction of the man-animal hybrid Minotaur in the labyrinth (ibid. 198). On the other hand, what is nevertheless odd, indeed, all the more odd, given this acknowledgment, is that the Prefect's species of wisdom is thereby likened to the two types of "mind" that the Prefect is said to be unable to comprehend: the "almost superhuman" mind of Minister D— (in "The Purloined Letter") and the "literally subhuman" "mind" of the Ourang-Outang (in "The Rue Morgue"). Irwin precisely underscores the "superhuman" character of the Prefect's species of wisdom to forge the association to the mythical man-animal hybrid, the Minotaur; he claims the Prefect "is compared to a mythical being" when, more precisely, his "wisdom" is compared to traditional representations of this mythical being, the Goddess Laverna.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, according to "the coding of head and body" Irwin

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<sup>85</sup> I have tried without success to locate an ancient representation (pictorial or sculptural) of the Goddess Laverna as "all head and no body," and judging from the lack of any reference to such a representation of her in the critical literature, I assume previous searches have likewise issued in failure. The information given by Mabbott, which Irwin cites here, that Laverna is "the Roman goddess of thefts" and "mentioned by Horace, *Epistolae*, I, xvi, 60," is incomplete (M 2:574, n.40). Laverna also has ties to the ancient underworld (a connection made evinced in the very name "Laverna," which has etymological ties to the name *Avernus*, the portal to the underworld as represented in Virgil's *Aeneid*), where she formerly presided before being adopted by thieves,



identifies in Poe, the Prefect's species of wisdom being "all head and no body" ought to render it not just all-rational, all-mind, all-human but, indeed, perhaps more human than human, "superhuman," for the absence or negation of body and therefore (again, according to this "coding of head and body") the absence or negation of "instinct, irrationality, animality"? "But," as Dupin says, and Irwin cites it here, "[the Prefect] is a good *creature* after all." His species of mind is also at least ("or, at best") animal-like, "like a codfish," which Irwin also cites here, again, to forge the association with the Minotaur.

How does one account for the Prefect's "failure to comprehend" both the "superhuman" mind of the Minister D— and the "subhuman" "mind" of the Ourang-Outang in, as, and by his incapacity to "imagine the workings of a mind substantially different from his own" (Irwin is paraphrasing here a remark made by Dupin in accounting for the Prefect's failure in "The Purloined Letter"), whilst also at once accounting for the Prefect's species of wisdom as both "superhuman"-like ("all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna") and animal-like ("like a codfish")?

The matter here is not so simple as to point out that Irwin's account of Dupin's account of the Prefect's failure to solve the mystery of "The Rue Morgue" is unsatisfactory, though it is. Not least because previously in *The Mystery to a Solution*, Irwin himself seems to find unsatisfactory Dupin's account of the Prefect's failure to

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deceivers, and criminals to bless their schemes (this is precisely the sort of moment in which Laverna appears or rather is called on to appear in Horace), but Horace never represents Laverna "as a head without a body" (ibid.). It is likely, though I do not think that it has been pointed out by any Poe scholar, that Poe gleaned this allusion to Laverna neither from Horace nor from any pictorial or sculptural representation of the goddess but from Andrew Tooke's *Pantheon*, a popular reference guide to ancient mythology in the first half of the nineteenth-century in America, where one finds the following description of "The Goddess *Laverna*": "the Protectress of Thieves, who, from her, were named Laverniones : They worshiped her, that their Designs and Intrigues might be successful : Her image was a Head without a Body" (Tooke 291).

solve the mystery in “The Purloined Letter,” precisely the moment in the text he paraphrases above, as a failure to imagine the workings of a mind different from his own. In §3 he interrogates this claim, asking whether or not Poe ultimately devises “to make us realize that it is impossible to imagine or conceive of a mind whose workings are radically different from one’s own”:

If, as Dupin says, the reason that the prefect and his men so frequently fail in admeasuring the opponent’s intellect is [...] that they are unable to imagine or conceive of the workings of a mind ‘diverse in character from their own’ (always the case when the level of the mind is above their own and usually the case when it is below), then is there anything that occurs in the rest of Poe’s tale that would lead us to believe this observation of Dupin’s about the reason for the prefect’s failure? Which is to say, if the prefect and his men can only catch felons whose minds are similar to their own and if what they need in this case is the ability to imagine the workings of a mind radically different from theirs, then does Dupin’s method of outwitting the minister provide any evidence that this ability to imagine a radically different mind really exist? (ibid. 24-25).

“We don’t,” Irwin resolves, “have any direct access to another’s thoughts,” just “ideas of another’s mind” which “are still *our* ideas, a projection that we make of that mind’s otherness to our own based on the only immediate experience that one has of psychic otherness, the self’s original otherness to itself, that difference that constitutes personal identity” (ibid. 25). Now, Irwin certainly has a point here about “The Purloined Letter,” which, as he goes on to say, precisely urges the reader to recognize a similarity of mind between Dupin and the Minister D— (“In fact, isn’t all the tale’s emphasis on the

resemblance between Dupin and the minister, on their possessing the same dual creative/resolvent power, part of a plot line in which Dupin outwits the minister only because their minds are so much alike?" (ibid.)). Why, then, does this selfsame account of one's failure to solve mysteries as a failure to imagine the workings of a mind different from one's own later return, imported into Irwin's analysis in order to account for Dupin's account of the Prefect's failure in "The Rue Morgue"? Why is Dupin's account of the Prefect's failure in "The Purloined Letter" suspect there (indeed, supposed to make its reader realize the opposite of what it says) and yet properly illustrative of Dupin's account of the Prefect's failure in "The Rue Morgue"?

To my mind, this question is coincident and coterminous with another: does Dupin not in fact give evidence of his "ability to imagine the workings of a mind radically different from [his own]" in "The Rue Morgue," where his solution to the mystery involves fingering the Ourang-Outang as the L'Espanaye's killer? To this last, Irwin ultimately answers "No." Dupin's fingering the Ourang-Outang has nothing whatever to do with the "otherness" of the ape's species of "mind" but rather, for Irwin, concerns a mere "projection" of "the self's [Dupin's] original otherness to itself": "[T]he impulses that have mastered the criminal are those that have been mastered in the detective." Despite the pains taken by Poe in "The Rue Morgue" to exploit "the most shadowy and unsatisfactory character" of "[t]he line which demarcates the instinct of brute creation from the boasted reason of man" ("Instinct vs Reason")—the numerous ear-witness reports of the L'Espanayes's murders mistaking the Ourang-Outang's cries for foreign human speech, the fact that he gleans from his "master" both the implement (razor) and gesture (shaving in a mirror) that eventually sever the head of Madame

L'Españaye, the etymological meaning of the very word orangutan, “man of the forest,” the “creeping of the flesh” part and parcel of Dupin’s evidentiary record in this case, on and on—for Irwin, all this has nothing to do with a differentiation of the human from the animal as such but rather concerns “differentiating the human” in and as itself (ibid. 411). While the “manlike killer ape [...] evoke[s] a blurring of the difference between human and nonhuman that represents a threatened reversal of the master/slave relationship between mind and body,” he is ultimately “associated with either a riddle or a spatial puzzle whose problematic form encrypts *the mystery of human identity* and whose solution enacts, through the hero’s exercise of reason, the difference between the rational and the irrational” (ibid. 227-228, emphasis added).

Likewise, then, perhaps the solution to the mystery of how Irwin accounts for the Prefect’s “failure to comprehend” both the “superhuman” mind of the Minister D— and the “subhuman” “mind” of the Ourang-Outang in as and by his incapacity to “imagine the workings of a mind substantially different from his own” whilst also at once accounting for the Prefect’s species of wisdom as both “superhuman”-like (“all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna”) and animal-like (“like a codfish”) might be sought in the fact that it is Dupin who delivers this characterization of the Prefect’s species of wisdom. In §12 of *The Mystery to a Solution* Irwin refers to “Poe’s way of presenting the relationship between Dupin and other men [...] as the external doubling of an internal split between mind and body in Dupin, between a godlike pure spirit (a simple intellectual substance) and the complex bodily mechanism which that substance inhabits and directs but to which it is essentially alien” (ibid. 113-114). This certainly offers a preemptive explanation for why the Prefect and the Minister D— have

the same species of mind. In §41 Irwin will elaborate on the ways in which “Poe presents [the character of the Minister] as a combination of animal and human traits” (ibid. 411), as he takes his proper place in the “battle of wits” with Dupin, becomes the latest Minotaur (*monstrum horrendum*) to Dupin’s Theseus, “[culminating] the structure’s genealogy of ‘horrifying monsters’” (ibid. 412). This still in no way accounts for why the Prefect fails to comprehend the Minister’s mind as one different from his own, not least because the only reason one might suppose the Minister to have “superior human intelligence” is his outwitting of the Prefect and his cohort in their search for the letter (ibid.), but it goes to show that Irwin does not consider the characters of the Ourang-Outang, the Prefect, and the Minister D— as discrete characters unto themselves but rather as so many monstrous projections of Dupin’s character.

“The coding of head and body” identified in “The Rue Morgue” is but one winding of a thread tracing a vast, labyrinthine network not only linking Poe to others who follow him in the tradition of “the analytic detective story” (principally, Jorge Luis Borges) but also tracing the tradition itself, through its inflections in Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, the alchemical tradition, cabala, numerology, the invention of chess, and more, to some classic antecedents in the myths of Theseus (and the Minotaur) and of Oedipus (and the Sphinx), as well as in Plato’s allegory of the cave. “And,” as Irwin says at one point in his book, in a wholly different context, “Plato’s is the right name to invoke here” (ibid. 314). For there is every indication in *The Mystery to a Solution* that “the coding of head and body” identified in “The Rue Morgue” is not so much Poe’s or even Irwin’s as it is Irwin’s interpretation of Plato. In the Preface to *The Mystery to a Solution* Irwin refers to “Poe’s sense of his detective Dupin as a kind of

Platonic embodiment, a sedentary mastermind whose very lack of physical exertion emphasizes the mastery of mind over the material world” (ibid. xvi). Irwin develops on this notion throughout the book, as Dupin’s “mastery of mind over the material world” is most appreciable from the perspective of the whole Dupin trilogy, wherein Irwin detects a “Platonic trajectory running from the figure of self as animal body to that of the self as textual, symbolic entity”: one beginning “at the literal, bodily end of the spectrum” in “The Rue Morgue” and concluding in “The Purloined Letter,” “where physical violence has been translated into mental violence (blackmail) and the physical containment rendered problematic in the figure of the self as letter” (ibid. 321, 319). From this perspective the recurring question of animality in “The Rue Morgue” is not so much overlooked as it is overcome by this “Platonic trajectory.” This is hardly the case, however, with the characterization of the Prefect’s species of wisdom which closes the tale, and which, as Irwin acknowledges, bears with it the question of animality.

What falls out of Irwin’s “Procrustean bed,” not just what falls out of his selective quotation of the final paragraph of “The Rue Morgue” but what falls out of the labyrinthine frame of *The Mystery to a Solution* all together, what is never cited anywhere in this book which is characterized above all else by its rigorous attentions to intertextual resonances in Poe’s detective fiction, are the tale’s last words: ““I like him especially well,”” Dupin says of the Prefect, ““for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained that reputation for ingenuity which he possesses. I mean the way he has “*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas.*””” This quotation embeds two contexts, two beds, deathbeds to be exact, in the last words of “The Rue Morgue”: the deathbed of Julie, the heroine of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s immensely popular epistolary novel from

1761, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and the deathbed of Socrates, whose final hours are recounted in Plato's *Phaedo*. I will only be able to outline here the profound resonances between these three texts in the way of conclusion.

First to consider is the matter of a certain mediation of last words.

In *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Part Six, Letter XI), the days leading up to and immediately following Julie's untimely death are recounted late in the novel by a letter from her bereaved husband, Monsieur de Wolmar, to her former tutor, longtime beloved, and eventual family friend, Saint Preux, whose amorous correspondence with Julie comprises the bulk of the early part of novel. The purpose of Wolmar's letter to St. Preux, apart from to acknowledge their shared grief, is mainly to deliver a letter to St. Preux from Julie herself, which appears immediately subsequent in the novel: a letter from beyond the grave, enclosed then in a long and detailed account of Julie's last days. Similarly, from the outset of Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates has already drunk the hemlock and died. The dialogue which takes place is between Phaedo, a devoted pupil who was with Socrates until the bitter end, and Echebrates, who starts things out by confirming that what he is about to hear is not mere hearsay: "Were you with Socrates yourself, Phaedo, when he was executed, or did you hear about it from someone else?" (*Phaedo* 57a). What Echebrates wants is a first-hand account of Socrates's final hours, and Phaedo assures him, "I was there myself" (*ibid.*). Still, in contrast to other Platonic dialogues, even the *Apology* and the *Crito*, the other two dialogues in the death of Socrates cycle, where Socrates speaks for himself, what makes the *Phaedo* the *Phaedo* is the fact that here Phaedo speaks for Socrates, recollects the famous teacher's famous last teaching.

So, as per the design of both *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Part Six, Letter XI) and the *Phaedo*, what are given are first-hand reports of someone's final hours, both of which seem to evince a remarkable if somewhat varied capacity to conjure the tone, diction, syntax, and general spirit of the deceased. Of course, this general picture becomes a bit more complicated when acknowledged that the question of who is writing or speaking in these reports concerns not just M. de Wolmar and Phaedo, writing and speaking, respectively, on behalf of Julie and Socrates, respectively, but also Rousseau (writing in the voice of Wolmar, who is channeling the voice of Julie after her death) and Plato (writing in the voice of Phaedo, who is channeling the voice of Socrates after his death). Then there is Poe: writing the final words of "The Rue Morgue" in the voice of his hero, Dupin, as a direct quotation of Rousseau, whose context is a letter written in the voice of Wolmar, channeling the voice of the deceased heroine, Julie, but which in fact appears in a footnote adjoined to this letter by Rousseau, the editor or collector of his epistolary novel, in which he names Plato and indirectly alludes to the very dialogue in which Plato happens to be, uniquely, writing in the voice Phaedo, who is speaking on behalf of the deceased hero, Socrates.

The most immediate suggestion of the two contexts embedded in the last words of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" — "“*de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas*”" — seems to be that Poe is having his hero-detective, Dupin, parrot Rousseau and thus identifying the object of Dupin's affectionate derision, the Prefect, with Plato. Given this, it is not to be wondered that this quotation entirely falls out of *The Mystery to a Solution*; while embedding a literal textual reference to Plato in "The Rue Morgue," the quotation gives serious cause to reconsider what Irwin calls "Poe's sense of his detective



Dupin as a kind of Platonic embodiment.” One might also consider, in this view, the Prefect’s immemorial error in “The Purloined Letter” of assuming the Minister D— to be ““only one remove from a fool”” for his being a poet (UP 921) a reiteration of Plato’s infamous banishment of the poets from his *Republic*.

Next to consider is the subject that prompts this complex intertextual exchange between “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Phaedo*; it is a matter of certain ghosts, haunting and afterlife.

The day before her death Julie is confined to bed and in the course of “briefly [recapitulating] her entire life” (Rousseau 593) when her Ecclesiastic Minister enters the room. “Following the thread of her notions about what part of her would remain with us,” Wolmar recounts, Julie then “spoke to us of her earlier reflections on the state of souls separated from bodies. She wondered [*admiroit*] at the simplicity of people who promised their friends they would bring them news of the afterlife. That, she said, is as reasonable as the Ghost stories [*contes Revenans*] that wreak a thousand disorders and torment crones [*bonne femmes*], as if spirits had voices to speak and hands to applaud! [*comme si les esprits avoient des voix pour parler et des mains pour battre!*]” (Rousseau 597 [727]) At this point Rousseau inserts the following note:

Plato says that at death the souls of the just who have not contracted any corruption on earth, break free in all their purity from matter by themselves. As for those who have enslaved themselves to their passions here below, he adds that their souls do not immediately regain their primitive purity, but drag behind them earthly parts which hold them as if enchained about the remnants of their bodies [*des debris de leurs corps*]; this, he says, is what produces those visible simulacra

[*simulacres sensibles*] one sometimes beholds roaming [*errans*] in cemeteries, while awaiting new transmigrations. It is a mania common to philosophers of all eras of denying what is, and of explaining what is not [*C'est une manie commune aux philosophes de tous les ages de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas*]. (ibid., translation slightly modified)

Rousseau's summary of the moment in Plato's *Phaedo* which he has in mind here but which he does not explicitly identify as such is a more or less faithful one. As recounted by Phaedo, in his final hours, Socrates is helping his attendees recollect the nature of soul as distinct from that of the body. He finds himself on the subject of the "shadowy apparitions which have actually been seen ["hovering about tombs and graveyards"]," which he accounts for as "tainted and impure" souls, so beguiled by the body in life, so enamored of "its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to [them] but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment" (*Phaedo* 81d, 81b). The enchainment of the soul in the body, unavoidable in life, has not been forgotten by these poor souls even in the event of death. In fact, they remember their embodiment "through fear, as they say, of Hades or the invisible" (ibid. 81d). For such "tainted and impure" souls can never be those of the good—that is, those who in life "pursued philosophy in the right way and really practiced how to face death easily" (ibid. 80e-81a)—but only those of the wicked: "they are compelled to wander about these places as a punishment for their bad conduct in the past. They continue wandering until at last, through craving for the corporeal, which unceasingly pursues them, they are imprisoned once more in a body. And as you might expect, they are attached to the same sort of character or nature which they have developed during life"

(ibid. 81d-e). What Rousseau calls the “new transmigrations” awaiting these poor souls will more likely than not find them reborn into animal bodies: the gluttonous, selfish, and drunk “are likely to assume the form of donkeys and other perverse animals”; the lawless and violent “become wolves and hawks and kites”; those who have at least “cultivated the goodness of an ordinary citizen” in life (the “self-control and integrity” of “habit and practice,” that is, “without the help of philosophy and reason”) will have the happiest outcome of passing into the bodies of “social and disciplined” creatures, “bees, wasps, and ants, or even back into the human race again” (ibid. 81e-82b).

What Rousseau seems to find unreasonable about Plato’s account of the afterlife is the way in which it works as a scare-tactic (What could be more horrible, it is implied, than the idea of being reborn if not being reborn an animal?) by which Socrates endorses the love of wisdom, the pursuit of philosophy, which, in the *Phaedo* as in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Part Six, Letter XI), is coincident and coterminous with learning “how to face death easily”: ““practicing death”” (ibid. 80e-81a). Julie’s ““practicing death”” is characterized above all else by ““the protestant communion which draws its sole rule from Holy Scripture and from reason””; the feverish search ““for what was in conformity with God and with truth”” (Rousseau 586). Here horror stories of the afterlife—whether the idea of the departed souls transmigrating into animal bodies or engaging in or affecting material existence by other means, i.e. poltergeist—cause more trouble than they prevent, “wreak a thousand disorders and torment crones [*les bonnes femmes*].” This does not necessarily mean, however, that even truly *bonnes femmes* are entirely immune to certain ghost stories. While Julie derides the idea of an afterlife which would credit material agency to a departed soul (“*comme si les esprits avoient des voix pour parler et*

*des mains pour battre!* How could a pure Spirit [*pur Esprit*] act on a soul enclosed in a body, and, which, by virtue of this union, can perceive nothing except by mediation of its organs? That makes no sense” (Rousseau 597 [727-728]), she also unsettles the party surrounding her deathbed by entertaining a certain notion of haunting:

But I admit that I fail to see what is absurd about supposing that a soul free from a body that once inhabited the earth could return there, roam about [*errer*], tarry [*demeurer*] perhaps near those it cherished; not to alert us to its presence; it has no means of doing that; not to act upon us and to communicate its thoughts to us: it has no purchase for stimulating the organs of our brain; nor to look in on what we are doing, for it would have to possess sense; but to learn for itself what we are thinking and feeling, through a direct communication, comparable to that by which God reads our thoughts even in this life, and by which we shall in turn read his in the next, since we shall see him face to face. For after all, she added, looking at the Minister, what use would senses be once there is nothing more for them to do? The eternal Being is neither seen nor heard; it makes itself felt; it speaks neither to the eyes nor the ears, but to the heart. (ibid.)

The presence of the Ecclesiastic Minister, whose return to Julie’s deathbed vigil is so conspicuously marked just before her talk turns to ghosts, haunting and afterlife, is soon put to good effect. This Minister, Wolmar has previously informed St. Preux, has already had his suspicions aroused that Julie “held sentiments on certain points that did not entirely agree with Church doctrine, that is with such doctrine as the soundest reason could deduce from Scripture” (ibid. 586), and Julie has previously had great success in assuring the Minister of her dying in good faith. Apart from “the interest he took in her”

as the only person he has known to die so “serenely,” where he has previously found her edifying him where he thought to edify her, the Minister has only returned now to Julie’s bed, Wolmar speculates, to entertain “a secret desire to see whether this calm would be maintained till the end” (ibid. 596). It soon becomes clear that Julie’s talk of “a pure Spirit [*pur Esprit*]” returning to the earth to “roam about [*errer*], tarry [*demeurer*] perhaps near those it cherished,” is precisely one of those “sentiments on certain points that did not entirely agree with Church doctrine”: an error which Julie proves herself “obstinate about defending” (ibid. 586). “I understood,” Wolmar writes, “from the pastor’s reply and from a few signs of connivance, that one of those points previously contested between them was the resurrection of bodies. I perceived as well that I was beginning to pay a little more attention to those articles of Julie’s religion in which faith converged upon reason” (ibid. 597). Not to destroy a thought “that seemed so confronting to her in her condition then,” remaining all “gentleness and moderation” and even affecting “not to object to anything she said,” the Minister “did not cease one minute being an Ecclesiastic” as he proceeds to propound “an opposite doctrine concerning the afterlife” (ibid. 597, 598).

The Minister’s objection to Julie’s notion of the afterlife identifies a *Revenans* in Julie’s notion of *pur Esprit*. The very idea of a pure Spirit having returned to itself in as and by “the immensity, the glory, and the attributes of God,” he argues, ought to negate the possibility of any subsequent return to a particular earthly existence by an independent pure Spirit, one still somehow circumscribed or identified with the memory of its former earthly existence, for having negated the very idea of an independent pure Spirit apart from God, whose “sublime contemplation would erase every other memory”

(ibid. 598). A no doubt reasonable objection and defense of “such doctrine as the soundest reason could deduce from Scripture,” but Julie remains obstinate and proceeds to mount a defense or at least a hope for her notion that a departed soul will have retained memories of its former terrestrial existence:

Nonetheless being able to reason now only upon my ideas, I confess that I feel affections so dear that it would distress me to think I will no longer have them. [...] Moreover, she added, looking at the Minister in a rather cheerful manner, if I am mistaken, a day or two of error will soon be past. Shortly I will know more about this than you yourself. In the meantime, what is very sure for me is that as long as I shall remember that I have lived on earth, I will love those I loved here, and my pastor will not have the lowest place. (ibid. 598)

The idea of a departed soul remaining (*demeurer*) bound to earthly existence, whether *Revenans* or *pur Esprit*, however immateriality, this *errer* is situated right on the brink of error when it comes to the convergence of faith and reason in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The liminality of all this talk of ghosts, haunting and afterlife, in relation to the convergence of faith and reason in Rousseau’s version of “practicing death” is repeatedly underscored throughout his novel: no less by the fever that plagues Julie throughout her final days—in an earlier conversation with her Minister she asks, “Distracted by illness, in the delirium of fever, is it timely to try to reason better than I have done when I enjoyed an understanding as sound as the day I received it?” (ibid. 586)—than by the fact that Julie’s and the Minister’s later debate on the notion of *pur Esprit* was suppressed in the Paris edition of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* from 1761, though her initial speculation which sets it off was not. The essential point for the purposes of this argument is that

while Rousseau derides a certain idea of ghosts, haunting and afterlife, as it finds expression in Plato's *Phaedo*, he himself is not immune to "the mania common to philosophers of all eras *de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas.*" In fact, Rousseau arguably binds himself most decidedly to this tradition by penning his affectionately derisive footnote on Plato and thereby acknowledging the profound influence of the *Phaedo* on the character and the work of his *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

So what might all this mean for Poe? The better question may be: what might it not mean for Poe, whose *corpus* affords countless treatments of the shadowy and unsatisfactory character of the line separating life from death, is characterized perhaps above all else by its "practicing living-death,"<sup>86</sup> its putting itself and its reader repeatedly in and out of the deathbed, such that "[w]ho shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?" (UP 973)

Socrates implies in the *Phaedo* the reason "shadowy apparitions" are seen hovering about tombs and graveyards, actually seen in these places rather than any others, has to do with their being the repositories of the bodily remains of the dead. An

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<sup>86</sup> I am indebted for this formulation to Jacques Derrida's endless speculations on the notion of "mourir vivant," or "living death." A selection of works in which Derrida may be found putting this notion to work: "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale: Un hegelianisme sans réserve," *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 369-407 ["From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) 251-277]; "Circonfessions," period 16, *Jacques Derrida* by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Paris: Seuil, 1991) ["Circumfessions," period 16, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993)]; "Living On: Border Lines," trans. James Hulbert, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Seabury, 1979), 75-175. Not infrequently, Derrida makes explicit the association between his "syntagme 'mourir vivant'" and "être enterré vif [being buried alive]": this from *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 2003) 291. The association is also put to great effect in Derrida's reading of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in his Seminar, *La bête et le souverain, Vol. 2* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), especially, "Cinquième Séance" [*The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. 2*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, forthcoming from The University of Chicago Press]. For the significance of Derrida's notion of "living death" in relation to the *Phaedo*, cf. Geoffrey Bennington, "RIP," *Interrupting Derrida*, 61-75.

“apparition” will still retain some portion of the visible insofar as the departed soul remains attached not just to embodiment or corporeality in general but especially to “the visible and physical part of him, which lies here in the visible world and which we call his corpse,” which “remains almost intact for an incredible time [...] even if the rest of the body decays, some part of it—the bones and sinews and anything else like it them—are practically everlasting” (*Phaedo* 80c). The phenomena of ghosts, haunting and afterlife, stretch the *Phaedo*’s operative distinction between soul and body to the limits of reason, as the former is supposed to be “that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent” and the latter supposed to be “that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent” (ibid. 80b). Ghosts are only possible in Plato given the indissolubility of bodily remains; Socrates even mentions the Egyptian practice of embalming as an extreme case of the staying power of corpses.

Poe’s fascination with the phenomenon of premature burial is driven by a somewhat different thought. The occasion of a body showing every reasonable sign of being a corpse and being therefore interred or locked away in a crypt only to have the person revive there seemed to Poe to evince a capacity of the soul to at once depart from but remain attached to a body so as to return to it in “life” (while in the process giving every indication of death in life) rather than a capacity of the soul to at once depart from but remain attached to a body only in the event of death, as in Plato. In his pseudo-journalistic article on “The Premature Burial” from 1844, Poe writes,

To be buried while alive, is, beyond question, the most terrific of those extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality. That it is has frequently, very



frequently, so fallen will scarcely be denied by those who think. The boundaries which divide Life from Death, are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins? We know that there are diseases in which occur total cessations of all apparent functions of vitality, and yet in which these cessations are merely suspensions, properly so called. They are only temporary pauses in the incomprehensible mechanism. A certain period elapses, and some unseen, mysterious principle again sets in motion the magic pinions and the wizard wheels. The silver chord was not for ever loosened, nor the golden bowl irreparably broken. But where, meantime, was the soul? (UP 973)

Of course, the “at best shadowy and vague” “boundaries dividing Life from Death” attested to by the phenomenon of premature burial are exploited to great effect in much of Poe’s fiction: “Loss of Breath,” “Berenice,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” to name a few. In “Some Words with a Mummy” Poe is working with a much more reduced pseudo-Platonic thought that through preservation a corpse may prove a more ready conduit for retrieving a departed soul; here “the magic pinions and wizard wheels” are set in motion once more by means of applying electric shocks to the mummy’s exposed skin. While the “death-bed horrors” of “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” the haunting effects of the mesmeric arrest of body and soul “*in articulo mortis*,” show Poe in full possession of his signature literary province of “practicing living-death” (UP 1069, 1065).

All of these titles just named could be collected among, to borrow Julie’s distinction, Poe’s *contes Revenans*. For stories in the vein of *pur Esprit*, one would have to turn to Poe’s angelic dialogues, in particular “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” and

“The Power of Words,” and, for their theo-cosmological underpinnings in the Poeian Universe, to *Eureka*. These works all evince a fantastic convergence of faith and reason in Poe, whose apocalyptic overtones are especially pronounced in the early “Conversation of Eiros and Charmion.” One prominent feature shared by all three angelic dialogues, however, is the retention of memory of earthly existence in being “born again” (Julie’s obstinate hope, precisely). In spite of or perhaps precisely owing to the confusion and oppression of “the majestic novelty of the Life Eternal,” “the weakness of a spirit new-fledged with immortality” (UP 704, 1052), there remains “much to say yet of things which have been,” a certain power of words where spirits speak “in the earth’s familiar tones” (UP 705, 1053). “But the memory of past sorrow—is it not present joy?” (UP 705)

There are no few passages in Poe’s angelic dialogues that would certainly have given Julie’s Minister serious cause for concern, such as this: “And here, in the prison-house which has few secrets to disclose, there rolled away days and weeks and solemn months, and the soul watched narrowly each second as it flew, and, without effort, took record of its flight—without effort and without object. Meantime the worm, with its convulsive motion, writhed untorturing and unheeded about me” (UP 711).

Almost everywhere one looks in Poe, there are varied and intricate records of living-death, *Revenans* and *pur Esprit*—from the paeans of his earliest poems (e.g., “The Lake,” “Tamerlane,” “Alone [To M—],” “Israfel,” “The City in the Sea”) and his earliest tales (in addition to “Loss of Breath” and “Berenice,” “Morella,” “Shadow—A Fable,” and “MS. Found in a Bottle”), in the immortal “Ligeia” and in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and on through to “Annabel Lee”—almost everywhere one looks in Poe, deathbeds, in almost every manner of literary writing he practiced, some treatment of

living-death, even in his comic pieces (“King Pest”). In fact, one of the only places one could turn in Poe which does not overtly engage in the “mania common to philosophers of all eras *de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*” is the very place he embeds this tradition with such remarkable prominence, in his detective fiction.

There is not just a notable absence of the tradition of living-death, of stories of ghosts, haunting and afterlife, in the Dupin tales but indeed, at times, a marked denial of it. In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Dupin famously states to his friend, “It is not too much to say that we neither of us believe in praeternatural events. Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye were not destroyed by spirits” (UP 672). It is certainly not the case that Poe was uninterested in the possibility of destruction by spirit (recall “The Raven”), but it does seem that this interest has no interest for detective fiction.

In an impressive recent study of the relation of Victorian ghost stories to the emergence of the genre of detective fiction in the nineteenth-century, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists*, Srdjan Smajic starts out with what may seem a self-defeating generalization: parroting a dictum of Sherlock Holmes in “The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire,” “No ghosts need apply,” he writes, “vampires, ghosts, and similar agencies cannot, *must not* apply in detective fiction” (Smajic 2). However, it is precisely the repeated denials of the preternatural and supernatural in detective fiction that interests Smajic. Later, citing a similar instance of such denial in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, he responds with succinctly stated thesis, “[i]f one of Collins’s characters [...] must insist that ‘[w]e have nothing whatever do to with clairvoyance, or with mesmerism, or with anything else that is hard of belief to a practical man, in the inquiry that we are now pursuing’ [...] this is because the genre in which this pronouncement is made is

contaminated at its source: it is everywhere haunted by what it attempts—and fails—to repress” (ibid. 7). Later, following the thread of this argument into Poe’s Dupin tales, Smajic notes the “signs of affinity with clairvoyance and telepathy” in the characterization of Dupin (ibid. 6): the most notable instance of which is Dupin’s uncanny completion of the narrator’s thoughts “‘of— — —’ [...] ‘— — — of Chantilly,’” of course, in “The Rue Morgue,” what the narrator describes “the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations” (UP 660), but with which Smajic also relates Dupin’s talk of admeasuring his mind to that of an opponent in “The Purloined Letter.” However, the bulk of Smajic’s work on the Dupin tales concerns tracing an economy between scopophilia and scopophobia, a simultaneous fetishization and denigration of visuality as readability, which renders “‘blind’ ratiocination [...] the *sine qua non* of detection” in Poe (ibid. 95). While pointing out some interesting potential traces of the ghost story in the intricate framing-complex of “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” at the end of his chapter on “Poe’s readerly flâneur,” Smajic admits that at this early stage of his study he is still “keeping [“ghost and detective fictions”] separate (for the time being) for the sake of convenience and emphasis” (Smajic 106). Even apart from the interrogations of this distinctions he goes on to perform with great success with regard to other works (both canonical and non-canonical) in the tradition of detective fiction<sup>87</sup>, Smajic gives impetus for further reconsideration of the all too apparent absence of living-death in Poe’s contributions to the genre.

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<sup>87</sup> Cf., especially Smajic’s reading of “detective fiction’s uncanny” in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and his other unique attentions to “occult detective fiction,” *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists*, 131-136, 181-199.

Reconsider, for instance, the narrator's famous description of Dupin's "peculiar analytic ability" which immediately precedes his recollection of the Chantilly affair in "The Rue Morgue":

He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own. His manner in these moments was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, 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 resolute. (UP 659-660)

Is Dupin's "frigid" manner here such a far cry from the "icy coldness" of the extremities, the uncanny rise in the "treble" of his voice and "the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation" such a far cry from the "harsh," "broken" or "hollow [...] sound [...] of distinct—of even wonderfully, thrillingly, distinct—syllabification," the vacancy of his gaze such a far cry from "the expression of uneasy *inward* examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-walking, and which is quite impossible to mistake" as anything other than the tell-tale signs of a self-induced version of M. Valdemar's mesmeric trance (UP 1067, 1070, 1068)? Is Dupin not arrested "*in articulo mortis*"? Is he not living-death? Is there not a certain mortification constitutive of ratiocination? Is not this "old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul" precisely that adhering the "divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble" soul to its bodily remains in Plato's

*Phaedo, pur Esprit* to earthly memory in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and driving the countless “creative and resolute” *contes Revenans* throughout Poe’s *corpus*? Is it not fair to ask of this overtly physiological description of Dupin’s “peculiar analytic ability,” “But where, meantime, was the soul?”

While one could easily build a case on the evidence here of the “mania common to philosophers of all eras” what, finally, does the “way “*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” have to do with the end of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” when Dupin’s “peculiar analytic ability” has done its good work, when he has successfully defeated the Prefect “in his own castle”?

“[I]n truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound. In his wisdom is no *stamen*. It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna,—or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature after all. I like him especially well for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained that reputation for ingenuity which he possesses. I mean the way he has ‘*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas.*’”

Identifying the Prefect with Laverna—patron Goddess of thieves, deceivers, criminals high and low—Dupin seems to be digging into him here in the vein of that sarcastic gibe wholly lost on the Prefect in “The Purloined Letter”: than G— “no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined” to redress a crime, where the desire or imagining is that of the criminal. All this imagery of decapitation (“all head and no body”) and castration (*stamen*-less wisdom) certainly points to a lack of something or another—the wisdom of the body, profundity or efficacy of thought, “sight of the matter as a whole” (M 2:545), or just good sense—something or another missing from its place.

But how contingent is the “truth” Dupin gives voice to here on the circumstance of his having defeated the Prefect “in his own castle”?

He has previously denied the Parisian police their reputation for “*acumen*,” judging them “cunning, and no more” (ibid.), a sentiment he echoes here. However, he has also previously warned, “there is such a thing as being too profound,” such a thing as “undue profundity” (ibid.). As everyone knows Dupin knows, “Truth is not always in a well” (ibid.). Given this and the fact that Dupin’s words at the close of “The Rue Morgue” do not characterize the Parisian police *en masse* but G— in particular, it may do well not to discount a “superficial” explanation of the “truth” given voice to here. Dupin is self-satisfied, and though he “had not thought it necessary to reply” *to the Prefect* when he ungraciously calls attention to Dupin’s meddling, reply Dupin does, as if muttering under his breath to his friend as he takes his leave. Where he has been cut, pointlessly, he cuts back with impunity. Thus there is no doubt a sense in which something or another is lacking, missing from its place in the Prefect’s species of wisdom, but there is also a sense in which something or another has been taken away from it, even violently cut off, as a trophy: a certain triumphalism to consider here, not unlike in Rousseau’s note on Plato from which Poe draws the last words.

Though it certainly strains “the coding of head and body” which has read all sorts of valuations and judgments into this passage, the coincidence of the Prefect’s wisdom being figured as “all head and no body” *and* at least (“or, at best”) animal-like puts me in mind of a hunting-trophy. Hunting ritual often dictates that precisely the head of an animal be invested in—artfully preserved but also given a special place in a home or office—as a privileged souvenir of a moment of victory or accomplishment. Of course,

what is ironic in this practice is that decapitation in human-human relations often implies a gesture of de-humanization (as a head on a pike); conversely, the hunting-trophy would seem to attest to a decidedly human afterlife of the animal after its all too animalistic death. There is something sporting, after all, about the manner of Dupin's intrusion into the police investigation in "The Rue Morgue": "As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement," he suggests; the narrator interpolates at this point, in brackets, "[I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing]" (ibid. 2:546).

Just as Julie cannot chide those *contes Revenans* worthy of crones—"comme si les esprits avoient des voix pour parler et des mains pour battre!"—without risking the impression that what she is obstinately hoping for is nothing more than a mute guardian-angel whose hands are tied, just as Rousseau cannot affectionately deride Plato's explanation of the apparitions actually seen hovering about tombs and graveyards without acknowledging the profound influence of the *Phaedo*'s "practicing death" on that of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Dupin cannot affectionately deride the Prefect's species of wisdom without at once affording it a place of decided prominence and decisive importance in the literary design of "The Rue Morgue." It is no mere coincidence but a "wild train of circumstance" which has it that, taken together, interpretations of this passage comprise the most concentrated critical investment in the character of the Prefect in any and every quarter of the legacy of the Dupin tales. It has to do not just with the fact that the passage itself has a particular prominence as the final paragraph of this prototypical work of detective fiction, not just with the fact that it is so very figurally rich and complex, and not just with the fact that Dupin charges the very atmosphere of the passage electric by



marking the event of the first victory and triumph of his ratiocinative career (if not the first victory and triumph of the world's first fictional detective) in as and by a defeat of the Prefect of police "in his own castle." It has to do with all these things, of course, but it also has to do with a certain notion of tradition embedded in those enigmatic last words, "I mean [the] way "*de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas.*"'"

What Poe found in these words was a kind of lens with which to capture the transmission, the very transmissibility of the tradition of philosophical thought, as a way in which a denial of one way "“*de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas*”" leads to another way "“*de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas,*”" another explanation of ghosts, haunting and afterlife. In Rousseau there is a certain cutting off of the *stamen* of wisdom, a toppling of a head, a coup in the "castle" of reason, which takes place between Rousseau and Plato on the subject of ghosts, haunting and afterlife. However this scene of decapitation is at the same time one of recapitulation. Rousseau inserts the footnote, interrupting the voices of his epistolary novel: where Julie speaks of crones and the wreck of a thousand disorders, Rousseau names Plato, if not the *Phaedo* (who is to say whether principally to conjure Plato's ghost or Plato's ghosts?); Rousseau names the very "mania common to philosophers of all eras" about to be engaged in the voice of his heroine, Julie, above. The notion of tradition at stake here is thus asymmetrical, at once progressive and regressive; it attests at once to a love and violence of wisdom: to say the least. Jacques Derrida says a bit more: "To deny what is, to explain what is not, cannot be reduced here to some dialectical operation; at most, it constitutes *mimed* dialectics. The intermission or interim of the hymen does not establish time:

neither time as the existence of the concept (Hegel), nor lost time nor time regained, and still less the moment or eternity” (*Dissemination* 240 [260]).

I have tried to at least indicate that Poe inserted and asserted himself into this tradition in a thousand different ways, and as literature was his vehicle his way ““*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” variously kept just within the limits reason, strayed into regions of purest fancy, and posed the question of the difference between the two as was his wont. I have also indicated, building on the suggestion of Srdjan Smajic, that if “practicing living-death” is not so absent from Poe’s characterization of Dupin’s “peculiar analytic ability” as it would appear, then it is so not least for the fact that detective fiction is often characterized by a marked denial of talk of ghosts, haunting and afterlife. But what about the Prefect? What does he have to do with ghosts, haunting and afterlife? As if definitively to deny any relevance of the way ““*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” for the character of the Prefect, J.A. Lemay asks, “Are we supposed to think that the Prefect spent his time looking for ghosts?” (Lemay 225)

I think it is precisely the point that one does not know, cannot know the precise character of the Prefect’s way ““*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*,”” that the reader is denied any details or particulars of that ““one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained that reputation for ingenuity which he possesses”” and for which Dupin claims to ““like him especially well.”” Throughout the Dupin tales, Dupin periodically expresses thoughts as to why the Prefect’s ““reputation for ingenuity”” is a bit overblown, in some way undeserved, but the reason this reputation is in place in the first place is never disclosed to the reader. The Prefect’s ““one master stroke of cant,”” his way ““*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” is Poe’s master stroke of

(non)disclosure when it comes to the Prefect, the most profound instance of the — of G—(—). The recapitulation of the Prefect’s way ““*de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas*”” embedded in Dupin’s triumphal decapitation of him at the close of “The Rue Morgue” after defeating him ““in his own castle,”” the cutting off of the *stamen* of his species of wisdom, shows Poe putting his signature on “the mania common to philosophers of all eras” in a different way, in the way of the narrative economy of (non)disclosure traversing his *corpus*, repeatedly directing to some scene or bit of information set beyond the narrative frame while informing the very squaring off of that frame. It may be that this ““master stroke of cant [i.e. (non)disclosure]”” on Poe’s part is so profoundly effective that it has arrested in advance any serious critical investment in the character of the Prefect, even or especially when it comes to “The Purloined Letter,” when the Prefect has such an uniquely prominent place in the literary design of this tale compared to his marginal status in the previous Dupin tales (a situation which I have discussed at length above).<sup>88</sup>

There is always the question of certain violence when it comes to G—: on Dupin’s part, on Poe’s part, and on the part of the countless readers who have more or less unceremoniously cut off the character of the Prefect from all vital import of these

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<sup>88</sup> In fact, one curious fact about the final paragraph of “The Rue Morgue” suggests what I have been trying to suggest throughout this chapter: that “The Purloined Letter,” which Poe famously described as, “perhaps, the best of my tales of ratiocination” (Ostrom 1:258), in some ways may be considered more the Prefect’s tale than just another Dupin tale. The line which came to be revised to read, ““for, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound,”” at one point (in the version of “The Rue Morgue” reprinted in the 1843 volume of Poe’s *Prose Romances*) read: ““for, *Nil sapientæ odiosius acumine nimio*, is, perhaps, the only line in the puerile Seneca not absolutely unmeaning; and, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound”” (M 2:568j). The Latin line—variously translated, “Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than [too much cunning / excessive cleverness or acumen]”—which has never been identified in “the puerile Seneca,” and which in the context of “The Rue Morgue” Dupin seems to find befitting his characterization of the Prefect, would later come to serve as the epigraph to “The Purloined Letter.”

tales, repeatedly citing his characteristic incompetence and impotence as though it were an index of fact and not part and parcel of the complex literary economy of fact and fiction in these tales, as in the genre of detective fiction and as in Poe generally. There is also, however, always the question of certain love. The final paragraph of “The Rue Morgue” does nothing if not put Dupin in bed with the Prefect of police, and in more ways than one.<sup>89</sup>

In the way of conclusion, I would recall that one of those vague and somewhat unsatisfactory ways in which Dupin intones the Prefect’s characteristic incompetence and impotence in “The Purloined Letter” (in addition to his incapacity to read others’ minds

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<sup>89</sup> For instance, in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, Terence Whalen has pointed out how Dupin’s relationship to money changes over the course of the Dupin trilogy: “In the first detective story [...] Dupin does not sell the product of his intellectual labor to the highest bidder; he instead relies on the patronage of his American sidekick. The lingering reliance on patrimony comes to an end in ‘The Purloined Letter’” (Whalen 248). Of course, Whalen does not make much of the fact that the Prefect is of crucial importance to the recurring references to reward-money throughout the Dupin trilogy, nor of the fact that it is the Prefect who makes possible the end of Dupin’s “lingering reliance on patrimony.” However, his observation about Dupin’s unpaid labor in “The Rue Morgue” is of interest for Dupin’s strange reference to the Prefect as “a codfish” in the final paragraph of the tale. To my knowledge no satisfactory reading of the presence of the codfish in the tale has ever been given, but it is well to note that in 1840s America (and for a considerable time after) the phrase “codfish aristocracy” was a very generally applied appellation for anyone who valued financial gain over human rights or basic dignity (a trend that some anti-abolitionists were quick to call “Black Republicanism”). The phrase is thought to have emerged out of Boston, for the codfish fishing-industry that principally founded the economy of New England and, some say, the US economy and, one says, the global economy. A gold-embossed codfish formerly resided in the Boston Hall of the House of Representatives that remains in Boston to this day. Cf. Julius Caesar Hannibal [pseud.], “Lecture V,” *Black Diamonds: Or, Humor, Satire, and Sentiment, Treated Scientificly in a Series of Burlesque Lectures, Drakly Colored* (New York: A. Ranney, 1857), 27 [Disclaimer: *Black Diamonds* is a racist work. I do not cite it here as authoritative but as a work helpful in exploring the full picture of the highly contested claims to wealth that grew up around the phrase “codfish aristocracy” in antebellum America.]; *A History of the Emblem of the Codfish in the Hall of the House of Representatives*, compiled by a committee of the House (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co., 1893); John Jennings, *Boston: Cradle of Liberty, 1630-1776* (Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1947), 117-130; Edward K. Spann, “Wealth,” *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 205-241, especially, 239; Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 126, 244; Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World* (New York: Penguin, 1997).

as open books) is to allude to “[a] certain set of highly ingenious resources [which] are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs” (UP 924-925). In spite of all the “highly ingenious resources” at its command, the legacy of Poe’s detective fiction has traditionally never had a place for the Prefect of police. The — of G—(— —) either instantiates itself as a mere passing over or, more interestingly, a selective dismemberment which would forcibly adapt him to some design, some context, some bed. It is perhaps the most profound mystery of the Prefect of police that this character has been traditionally treated (by Dupin and by Poe no less than by scores of readers of the Dupin tales) in precisely the spirit of his way of treating mysteries. What could all this be, what could all this mean, but the workings of a certain ghost, a certain haunting, a certain afterlife?

Seven months after the publication of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in the same number of *Graham’s Magazine* that carried the announcement of Poe’s accession to the magazine’s editorial chair, Poe issued the lead article to the *Autography* series which ran in consecutive issues of *Graham’s* from November 1841 to January 1842. Whereas, five years previously, the articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger* were prefaced with whimsically embellished fictional narratives and contained fictive letters attributed to the American *literati*, *Autography*’s revival evinces tell-tale signs of Poe having revised and refined his design in accordance with the “castle” of reason. Here Poe refers back to his previous experiments in autography as having “seemed to acknowledge no law beyond that of whim” (GLG 19.5, 225); here he speaks to “[t]he feeling which prompts us to the collection of autographs [as] a natural and rational one” (ibid.). The analysis of handwriting for its indication of character, which was introduced in the early articles of

*Autography* as if it were a mere afterthought, is here introduced as a decidedly more measured and reasoned design: “that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character, will be denied by none but the unreflecting” (ibid.).

Brett Zimmerman has duly noted that Poe is poisoning the well here, as if by denying the general, natural, and rational basis for Poe’s renewed ventures in autography one would arguing his or herself “unreflecting” on that self-same basis (Zimmerman 223). Poe’s rhetorical maneuvering is not, however, the only aspect of the remodeled façade of *Autography* suggesting that in this case, as with the tales of ratiocination and Poe’s writing from the early-1840s generally, despite every appearance of “a fair and stately palace” having “reared its head” as “the monarch Thought’s dominion,” inevitably this “castle” of reason will have been at once a “haunted palace.” *Autography* is also a glaring reminder (as is “The Balloon-Hoax” (1844) and as is “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (1845)) that Poe’s “castle” of reason is haunted not only by questions of race and sexual difference and by ghost stories themselves, but also by the spirit of the hoax, what Poe was wont to call his *jeu d’esprit*. *Autography* is not, however, one example of the hoax among others, but one in which the multitude of phantoms which take up residence in Poe’s “castle” of reason converge: questions of race and of sexual difference, madness, and other ghosts, all amassed in an uncommon spirit of democracy. This troubled and troubling convergence is the subject of the second part of this dissertation, “The Hoax which is Not One: Poe’s *Jeu d’Esprit* and the Literary Circle of *Autography*.”

Part II**The Hoax which is Not One:  
Poe's *Jeu d'Esprit* and The Literary Circle of *Autography***

“The course of experimental investigation is extremely simple.  
Any one who can obtain interesting autographs, and who has a  
circle of intelligent acquaintances, is fully prepared for a course of  
philosophical experiment.”  
- Joseph Rhodes Buchanan on “Psychometry,” circa 1849

“it is true: I taught you to aspire, even to eminence in Public Life,  
but I never expected that Don Quixote. Gil Blas. Jo. Miller & such  
works were calculated to promote the end.”  
- John Allan to Edgar A. Poe, circa 1827

If one of the few known facts in the case of Poe's *Autography* is that it is or was, at one time or another, in one way or another, in one part or another, a hoax, then what do we know? One might say, following Poe, that we know *Autography* to have had a certain *effect*. In the final installment of the *Autography* series for *Graham's Lady's and Gentlemen's Magazine*, the “Appendix of Autographs” from January 1842, in the editorial commentary devoted to the MS. of Richard Adams Locke (one of the most unqualifiedly praiseworthy accounts of the “*unquestionable genius*” of this rival hoaxer ever penned by Poe), he has the following to say about the famous “Moon Hoax” of 1835:

Of the “Moon Hoax” it is supererogatory to say one word—not to know *that* argues one's self unknown. Its rich imagination will long dwell in the memory of every one who read it, and surely if

the worth of anything

Is just so much as it will bring—

if, in short, we are judge of the value of a literary composition in any degree by its *effect*—then was the “Hoax” most precious. (GLG 20.1, 48)

Poe similarly stresses the notion of effect in relation to the hoax in the letter to Evert A. Duyckinck from March 1849 making a case for the publication of what is widely held to be his final hoax, “Von Kempelen and His Discovery”: “I mean it as a kind of ‘exercise’, or experiment, in the plausible or verisimilar style. Of course, there is *not one* word of truth in it from beginning to end. I thought that such a style, applied to the gold-excitement, could not fail of effect” (Ostrom 2:433). In the reading of *Autography* to come, we will have occasion to return to Poe’s complicated relationships to other hoaxers and the complex relations of his hoaxes to other hoaxes as well as to the related question of the “final hoax.” For now, we limit ourselves: firstly, to observing in these two citations Poe’s representation of the enduring value, the very legacy of a hoax and his hope for same with regard a then unpublished hoax with a certain “effect,” which he represents with respect to the “Moon Hoax” in the past tense, as an enduring memory; and, secondly, to asking what is this *effect* proper to the hoax? What is the precise character of the hoax-effect in Poe?

It is well known that the literary critic Poe was wont to judge the relative value of all manner of literary composition—poems (epic and lyric), tales, novels, and drama—on the basis of their success or failure to achieve a certain effect, often leveling condemnations on this score as vaguely substantiated as the compliment he pays to Locke’s “Moon Hoax” in *Autography*. A certain effect rests at the heart of the aesthete Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition” and his “Poetic Principle.” (We will consider these points in detail in Conclusion: “The Signature-Architecture of



*Autography*.”) Closely related to these issues, the hoax depends for its *effectivity* on a “verisimilar style” crucial, for Poe, as it is crucial to literary value in general. The “vital injury” of allegory remarked by Poe even in the midst of his defense of allegory in the 1847 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tales is its tendency to counteract “the most vitally important point in fiction—that of earnestness or verisimilitude” (ER 583). What allows us to close Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Poe says, “quite satisfied that we could have written it as well ourselves”—the wizard wheels and pinions of the “literary performance” thrown into such utter “obscurity by the very stupendousness of the wonder they have wrought” that “Defoe has none of [his readers’] thoughts—Robinson all”— “[a]ll this is effected by the potent magic of verisimilitude” (ibid. 201-202). The character of the hoax (derivative of *hocus pocus*, corruption of *hoc est corpus*), a certain hoax-effect resides at the very heart of Poe’s thought of the magic of literature in general. With this in mind, it is not to be wondered that about half a century ago there was a concentrated effort on the part of Poe scholars to start taking this hoaxing business more seriously and that as soon as the hoax-effect began to be earnestly sought out in Poe it was found everywhere and, therefore, began to appear to be nowhere. The possibility of the hoax-effect meaning something in Poe seems to give way, immediately, almost automatically, to its meaning everything in Poe, which seems to give way to the impossibility of its meaning any one thing in particular.

#### A Brief History of Poe’s History of Hoaxing

John H. Ingram’s *The Life, Letters, and Opinions of Edgar Allan Poe* from 1880 marks a telling moment in the history of Poe’s history of hoaxing. While making note of

Poe's "insatiable love of hoaxing" and the "splendid success" he had at tricking public credulity throughout his career, Ingram judges "jests" such as the 1844 "Balloon-Hoax" as "scarcely the class of productions one would desire to obtain from a poetic genius" and intimates in passing that Poe hoaxed only to meet "the immediate needs of the hour" ("clever impositions" paid better, Ingram supposes, wrongly, "than did the best of [Poe's] poems") (Ingram [1880] 206). While Ingram turns one eye away from Poe's hoaxing as a sort of low-brow writing, as a sort of side-effect of the sad state of Poe's career or American letters in the antebellum period generally, he also advises keeping an eye ever-trained on the hoax-effect in Poe: "Poe's readers and admirers must, in point of fact, always be upon their guard against his inveterate habit of attempting to gauge their gullibility; his passion for this propensity frequently led him into indulging in the practice when least expected—into giving way to the desire of befooling his readers when apparently the most in earnest" (ibid.). If readers heeded Ingram's warning in 1880, then not much evidence of the fact appeared in publication until the 1950s, when Poe's "inveterate habit of attempting to gauge [the] gullibility" of his audience became an object of particular interest to literary scholars, as Poe's "desire of befooling his readers when apparently the most in earnest" began to be matched by a passion in Poe scholarship for unearthing hoaxes scattered throughout his *corpus*.

Dennis W. Eddings's edited volume from 1983, *The Naiad Voice: Essays on Poe's Satiric Hoaxing*, is the definitive testament to a three-decade period in the course of which hoaxing went from meaning next to nothing to Poe scholarship to resting at the very heart of what it means to read to Poe. As to be expected, the word "hoax" (or some variation of it) appears liberally scattered throughout the fifteen essays comprising this

volume, but only rarely does it appear in reference to “The Balloon-Hoax” or other productions of Poe’s which, like Locke’s “Moon Hoax,” were mistaken for a spell as records of fact by their readers. Rather in *The Naiad Voice* “hoaxing” becomes a generic index for a wide range of literary effects in Poe: satire, of course, very frequently, but also allegory and parody, even “allegorical parody” (Richard P. Benton), “self-parody” and burlesque (Benjamin F. Fisher), irony (James W. Gargano, G. R. Thompson, Kent Ljungquist), perversity (James M. Cox and Eugene R. Kanjo), and, perhaps most generic of all, “the imagination at play” (Terence Martin). Eddings’s own contribution to the volume clarifies that these diverse literary effects identified with Poe’s hoaxing all have in common “the idea of duplicity,” wherein, paradoxically, he finds the very “unity of Poe’s fiction”: “It is the relationship between Poe’s vision of the duplicity of the world and his artistic deceitfulness that provides his fiction with its over-all unity” (NV 156). So, for Eddings, what justifies classing a diverse body of Poe’s works if not the entirety of his *corpus*, from his Gothic fiction to his comic sketches and tales of ratiocination, from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* to *Eureka*, as hoaxes is the traces in all these works of “Poe the hoaxer who manipulates the material of the narrative in such a manner that it camouflages satires and jokes that prey upon the expectations of the too literal reader” (ibid). In the twenty plus years since the publication of *The Naiad Voice*, a concentrated generic diffusion of the notion of the hoax in Poe into forms of duplicity great and small—from puns, jokes, and cryptographic signatures embedded in his texts, to his satiric parodies and burlesques of literary conventions, to affronts to public credulity both decidedly willful and more ambiguously intended—has been taken up by a

diverse company of American literary scholars and theorists: John Bryant, Kenneth Dauber, Jonathan Elmer, Louis A Renza, and Joseph N. Riddell, to name but a few.<sup>90</sup>

In the midst of this utter generic diffusion of the hoax in Poe, in 2007, Lynda Walsh dared stop to reconsider just “What is a hoax?” Wary of “the overapplication of the term *hoax* that has plagued Poe scholarship since the 1960s” (Eddings’s *The Naiad Voice* is particularly singled out in this respect) (Walsh 107), Walsh sets out in *Sins against Science* to revise and refine a concept of the “media hoax” in Poe, as distinct from merely “hoaxy” or “hoax-like” texts or aspects of his writing in general. Her corrective to previous scholarship on the hoax takes many different forms, offering provisional distinctions between hoaxing and various other literary effects like satire, parody, burlesque, and fraud, for instance, but her argument has to do mainly with context. Walsh singles out four media hoaxes in the Poe canon—“Hans Phaall” (1835), “The Balloon-Hoax” (1844), “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” (1845), and “Von Kempelen and His Discovery” (1849)—all of which, except for “Hans Phaall,” were not initially published in exclusively literary mediums but ones whose topical inclusivity, from publishing poems to reporting scientific and political news, helped to bolster the potential of these productions to have a hoax-effect on the American readership.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. John Bryant, “Poe’s Ape of Unreason: Humor, Ritual, and Culture,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51 (1996), 16-52, and *Melville and Repose: The Rhetoric of Humor in the American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 88-100; Kenneth Dauber, *The Idea of Authorship in America: Democratic Poetics from Franklin to Melville* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), esp. ??-??; Jonathan Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe*, esp. 192-223; Louis A. Renza, “Poe’s Secret Autobiography,” *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 2002) esp. 30-37; Joseph N. Riddell, *Purloined Letters: Originality and Repetition in American Literature*, ed. Mark Bauerlein, esp. 149-152, 156-158.

<sup>91</sup> The New York *Sun*, where Poe’s “Balloon-Hoax” first appeared (obviously not under that title), was a widely read penny press paper in which Locke had published his “Moon Hoax” to great effect in 1835. In the course of her detailed examination of the relationship between Locke

Along with considering the vehicle of publication, Walsh is particularly invested in documenting and analyzing reader responses to these media hoaxes; her attentions to the relationship between Poe and Locke are particularly nuanced in this respect as it is “through the competition of their moon hoaxes in the Eastern media in 1835” that the two “innovated the genre of scientific media hoax in America” (ibid. 51). She observes a marked absence in scholarship on the hoax of any support for classing a hoax based on reader responses to the text(s) in question, when, according to Walsh, “the whole raison d’être of the hoax is to embarrass its readership for its misapprehension of the ‘real’ world” (ibid. 21). For instance, reconsidering John Bryant’s treatment of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” as a hoax in “Poe’s Ape of Unreason,” one may concede a degree of duplicity in (what has become a stock contrivance of detective fiction) withholding the solution to the mystery until the end, even a certain dupery and victimization of the reader in what Poe famously called Dupin’s “*air* of method” (Ostrom 2:328), but none of the Dupin tales were ever misapprehended by an audience as “true” in the sense of reporting actual events.<sup>92</sup> Walsh does reluctantly concede that under certain conditions

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and Poe, Walsh cites the circumstance of “Hans Phaall” being published in an almost exclusively literary journal (the *Southern Literary Messenger*) just prior to Locke’s hoax as well as some faults in its rhetorical performance as contributing factors to the limited effect of Poe’s tale in comparison to Locke’s and Poe’s abortion of his design to have “Hans Phaall” run as a series (Walsh 60-62). The publication of “Valdemar” in *The American Review: A Whig Journal* certainly did nothing to hamper the potential for its hoax-effect, but it was really the subsequent reprintings of Poe’s tale in England, especially in the London *Popular Record of Modern Science* (which, curiously, Walsh does not mention), which fueled the year-long transatlantic conversation on the veracity of this hoax. The publication of “Von Kempelen” in *The Flag of Our Union* similarly gave the hoax “a fair chance at bolstering its readers’ medium expectations” since it “did report science news and political news,” but as in the case of “Hans Phaall” Walsh cites some faults in Poe’s rhetorical articulation of the hoax which led to its having a much more limited effect than that of “Valdemar”; in the case of “Von Kempelen” Poe just “tried too hard” (Walsh 105-107).

<sup>92</sup> Of course, of all the Dupin tales, “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” poses the greatest challenge to this generalization about the non-hoax status of Poe’s detective fiction since it in a very material way reports actual events, directly quoting, for instance, newspaper reports of a “real crime.”

texts may be classed as hoaxes even if their author did not originally intend them as such; a readership can effect a true hoax based on a merely “hoaxy” production. (She indicates this may have been the case in “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” where Poe’s intention to hoax is much more ambiguous than in the case of “The Balloon-Hoax.”) “The locus of the effect of a hoax is always,” Walsh maintains, “in the reader” (ibid. 21), although she also repeatedly shows that certain rhetorical features of a text can bolster or diminish its potential hoax-effect among a given readership.

The main issue of context in Walsh’s refinement of the concept of the American media hoax, however, the one that ties Poe’s hoaxing to not only that of his contemporary Locke but those that follow them in the tradition of the American media hoax, Mark Twain, Dan De Quill, and Alan Sokal, has to do with science, more precisely, the relation of scientific and literary discourse. “Hoaxes could only occur, she writes, “in the kairos, or rhetorical opportunity, created when writers felt the need to interfere in the process of scientific truth becoming public truth in America” (ibid. 27). Walsh calls Poe “the ideal figure with whom to begin any study of scientific hoaxing in America,” not only for his historical situation in “increasing tensions between scientific and artistic cultures in antebellum America” (ibid. 51, 3-4) but also for his own unique mind: “Scientifically educated beyond many of his peers and a pioneer in at least two genres that showcase scientific epistemologies—science fiction and detective fiction—he embodies the tensions between the arts and sciences in the Jacksonian era” (ibid. 51). Walsh does not provide much evidence for Poe’s supposedly advanced “scientific and rhetorical acculturation” apart the customary guesswork about his reading habits during his stint at

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Accordingly, the question has been entertained whether or not “Marie Rogêt” is a hoax. Cf., Richard Fusco, “Poe’s Revisions of ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’: A Hoax?,” *Poe at Work: Seven Textual Studies*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Baltimore: Poe Society, 1978).

the University of Virginia and as indicated by his early poems, but there is no denying that Poe took an active interest throughout his career, whatever his qualifications for doing so, in interweaving various modes of popular scientific discourse with literary writing. Among the trends that inspired Poe in this respect, Walsh notes: “‘scientific’ spectacles like those in Barnum’s American Museum, mesmerism and other ‘pseudosciences,’ and scientific treatises and articles written for general audiences” (ibid. 54).

As will probably by now be expected, *Autography* is never mentioned in *Sins against Science*, though it has a profound resonance with the essential but obscure relation of scientific and literary discourse with which Walsh marks out the genesis of the American media hoax. The “passion for autographs” Poe nurtured throughout his career certainly attests to an investment in the notion of autography as an emerging “pseudo-” or popular socio-scientific discourse to match if not outstrip his more well known fascinations with mesmerism, phrenology, and physiognomy, one which certainly far outweighs the interest in aeronautics informing his two balloon hoaxes and may even rival the passion for stars and cosmology informing many of his works, from “Al Aaraaf” to *Eureka*. Though the complex relation of scientific and literary discourse in the tradition of the pseudosciences will not be oriented as centrally to our study of *Autography* as it is to Walsh’s *Sins against Science*, the reader response to *Autography* confirms many of her conclusions about the “kairos, or rhetorical opportunity,” capitalized on by the literary culture of the antebellum period as it interceded in “the process of scientific truth becoming public truth in America.” Our reading of *Autography* will be more generally

considering the ways in which it affords some new perspectives on old questions about the hoax in Poe and poses some hitherto unasked questions about the same.

The question of the “double audience” of the hoax is one that we will return to frequently for its unique and complex import for *Autography*. Walsh cites this notion of the “double audience,” the hoax’s performative division of its audience between “readers who ‘fall for it’ and readers who ‘get it,’” as one of the “crucial social complexities of hoaxes” ignored by scholarship on the hoax (ibid. 2), when, in fact, this notion is one of the most consistent features of scholarship on the hoax in Poe. In *The Naiad Voice* alone there is a running conversation on this very subject. Richard P. Benton suggests (in 1963) that only Poe’s “more esoteric fans were in an intellectual position to appreciate his hoax” in “The Assingation” (NV 21). Picking up on Benton’s remark, Benjamin Franklin Fisher suggests (in 1977) that there are “two audiences” simultaneously addressed by the bulk of Poe’s Gothic fiction (not just “The Assingation”): on the one hand, “a larger number [of readers] who would understand everything in the Gothic vein as ‘straight’ terror tales,” on the other hand, “a small elite group who would perceive a master hand moving firmly behind the scenes of apparent seriousness in a burlesque or hoaxing manner” (NV 136). Then, picking up on Fisher’s elaboration on Benton’s notion of the “double audience,” Dennis Eddings reissues it in and as an even more general context at the close of the volume (in 1983):

It is the first audience [reading Poe “‘straight’”] that is the object of Poe’s hidden hoaxes. He deliberately used popular literary conventions to appeal to his readers’ sense of the expected in order to satirize both the conventions and the complacent attitude that refuses to go beyond the surface of things. [...] By being hidden



satires and literary jokes, and thus hoaxes, many of Poe's tales are by definition duplicitous. They are literally double, containing both the narrative tale and the hoax that works through that narration. As a result, the structure of the tale (the construction of the hoax) not only reinforces the theme (duplicity), it actually recreates that theme. If a Poe tale is about duplicity, it is also, by being a hoax, an example of what it is about. Consequently, the reader of the tale is in an analogous position to the character within the tale. Just as that character must resolve the duplicity he encounters, so the reader must resolve Poe's duplicity. [...] The many astute readings of Poe's hoaxes that have appeared of late are, I would suggest, perfect examples of what Poe intended to be done with them. (NV 163-164)

Some of the points made by Eddings touching on the duplicity of the hoax we will return to just below, wanting first to remark that he clearly embraces the notion of the double audience as a sort of narratological theory of how Poe ought to be read (a significant appreciation of Benton's passing speculation on the audience of "The Assignation"). What Walsh would take issue with here is the vague identification of the duped audience, those "readers who 'fall for it,'" with Poe's contemporaries and anyone who would read him "straight" and the other audience, those "readers who 'get it,'" with his own collection of essays and, of course, himself. In *Sins against Science* Walsh uniquely emphasizes the crucial component of "readers who 'get it'" among the contemporary audience of the hoax, "those who catch on and read it as a coconspirator of the hoaxer rather than as his/her victim" (Walsh 119). We will follow Walsh in treating the double audience of the hoax as something that ought to be considered historically, tested in view

of reader responses contemporary to the hoax. However, we will also venture that Poe himself was far from insensitive to the notion of a double audience and consider the ways in which he anticipates, exploits, and de-doubles the double audience in advance, as part and parcel of the machinations of the hoax itself. (There is a remarkable instance of this de-doubling of the double audience of the hoax in *Autography* that we will consider in detail below.) Ultimately, what the notion of the double audience of the hoax being in (on) the hoax will have meant for the double audience of the hoax is that it is not the exclusive province of any generation of readers of Poe to complete the trajectory of his hoaxing, as if they uniquely, finally “get it,” but perpetually falling for the hoax anew is constitutive of every different idea about getting it.

But the greatest questions and challenges *Autography* poses to the notion of double audience most directly concern the overt “content” of this hoax. Walsh says, “Poe’s hoaxes, when defined as carefully engineered rhetorical transactions with a double audience, reveal him not just yearning for community but actually designing and building it” (ibid. 119). Certainly nowhere in Poe’s body of hoaxes, perhaps nowhere in his *corpus* in general, is this idea more radically exemplified than in *Autography*. The question of audience as witting or unwitting “coconspirators” in the hoax-effect is one posed by every single one of the some one-hundred-and-fifty facsimile signatures of his contemporaries that Poe printed over the course of the *Autography* series, to say nothing yet as to its total *effect*. The unfolding of the hoax-effect of *Autography* that will itself unfold throughout the reading to come will frequently bring us to consider how the performative division of the audience of the hoax into two circles, between those “readers who ‘fall for it’” and “readers who ‘get it,’” those “in on it” or just “out of it,” might

relate to the literary circle of *Autography* itself, to the question of who or what is in and/or who or what is out of *Autography*. As we shall see, these issues as well as those fraught questions about the authorial agency, intention, or (im)posture of the hoax (which we only briefly touched on above in considering whether or not a hoax has to be intended to be a hoax to be a hoax), crystallize most beautifully and mysteriously of all in consideration of Poe's printing of his own facsimile signature in *Autography*, where in relation to the literary circle of *Autography* we will have to "speak of a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set" (Derrida, "The Law of Genre" 227): *uniquely apart, uniquely a part*.

In "The Law of Genre" Jacques Derrida famously marks out a notion of genre divided. Where "the law of genre" speaks to a certain delimitation, a more or less established and instituted limit, says, more or less imperatively, with more or less forcible and enforceable "norms and interdictions," "Do" or "Do not" count this or that within a certain "genre," Derrida discerns an other declamation, the possibility of the impossibility of obeying this law of genre (ibid. 224). In the institution and the very institution-ability of the law of genre he remarks an other law "within the heart of the law [of genre] itself," "neither separable nor inseparable" from it, a "counter-law" which would be at once the condition of possibility of the law of genre and an "axiom" of its impossibility (ibid. 225, 224). This "counter-law" is what he calls "the law of the law of genre" (ibid. 227): where the law of genre is characterized by a more or less desired or desirable purity of "sense, order and reason," "the law of the law of genre" is characterized by an irresistible "impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (ibid. 225). Where

the law of genre would play host, “the law of the law of genre” will have instituted “a parasitical economy” at the heart or hearth of the *oikos*<sup>93</sup> of genre (ibid. 227).

What might Derrida’s distinction between the law and the law of the law of genre mean for this most anomalous genre of genres, the genre of hoax: variously called “a metagenre” (by Walsh, 107) and “not a genre” but “a mimicry of genre,” “a critical genre,” “a generic hybrid,” “a trans-generic intervention,” “neither a form nor a genre at all,” “(or genre-cide)” (by Joseph Riddell, 149-150, 152), what we will call, principally for that popular election by a (double) audience requisite for its proper effect but for a thousand other reasons, the most democratic of genres? What might be the “counter-law” to this genre whose only law appears to be certain lawlessness—whose imperative is precisely to mix genres (e.g., scientific and literary discourse), whose norm is parasitism (e.g., the plagiarisms at the heart of Poe’s hoaxes), impurity, anomaly, even monstrosity (e.g. the staunchest critic of *Autography* in Poe’s day called it “a colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence,” he’s to come)—if not a tendency to establish more or less instituted limits, more or less forcible and enforceable “norms and interdictions” within which to consider the effect proper to the hoax even as the very propriety of the proper hoax-effect is to defy and escape such descriptions of it? We have tried to outline a history of this question in the history of scholarship on the hoax in Poe above.

To give an indication of the explorations of these ideas to come with respect to *Autography*, in the shape of a word on terminology, let us resolve at the outset that the word “hoax” will have been something of a misnomer for whatever it would describe.

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (1-7 [11-20])

The Hoax which is Not One and the *Jeu d'Esprit*

Walsh repeatedly stresses throughout *Sins against Science* that hoaxes are not just texts but contexts, historico-rhetorical events. Yet, one of the more marginal but, to us, most compelling issues of her book concerns the way in which the generic confusion of the hoax is not just to be charged to the account of previous scholarship on the hoax but rather arises necessarily as an effect of the iterability of the hoax's textual body. For instance, when Poe titles his composition "The Balloon-Hoax" and it is reprinted in a volume of tales or among his collected works, is it still a hoax? If the hoax depends for its proper hoax-effect on a vehicle of publication that will help bolster its potential veracity as a record of fact, then is there not a reverse-effect of the hoax-text being reprinted in an expressly literary medium?

Sometimes Walsh seems to be arguing against classing "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" as a hoax on precisely these grounds: "Both a machine such as an old combine and a hoax such as M. Valdemar lose their significance when viewed in state of inactivity and removed from the contexts of their original publication—say in a junkyard or a science fiction anthology" (Walsh 223). What might it mean, then, that this removal, distancing, or drift *from* the context of the hoax's "original publication" is not just an aberrant feature of the (con)text of the hoax but a possibility if not an inevitability *at* the very heart of the context of the hoax's "original publication"? Poe was not loath to reprint a hoax. It is as though to have meaning as a so-called "hoax," strictly speaking, the hoax has to have lost its significance as such:

[R]emoving ["Valdemar"] from its original news medium and from a heated kairos of debate over mesmerism's scientific potential forces generic reevaluation.

Readers are incapable of taking mesmerism as seriously 150 years later. M. Valdemar has undergone *letturaturizzazione*, has become science fiction by default because its topic is outmoded in the modern reading context, and it now appears in literary media rather than news media; thus, it has lost its ability to affect readers' perceptions of reality. Any analysis of Poe's hoaxes that ignores the reader's expectations about medium and context in assigning a text to a genre will miss this crucial point. (ibid. 108)

There is something to this. In fact, one reason *Autography* has been so long neglected by literary scholars might be sought in the direction of the issues of generic classification and classifiability raised here. If *Autography* is or was, at one time or another, in one way or another, in one part or another, no longer a hoax, then it is not immediately clear how we might submit it to "generic reevaluation," how to trace the *letturaturizzazione*<sup>94</sup> of *Autography*. However, can we not also admit that "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" does or should profoundly affect our "perceptions of reality" perhaps especially on a first read but really every time we find the page open to it, and wherever that page may be, not unlike good science fiction but not necessarily just as science fiction, rather as signature Poe? Surely, we should not actively deny it its proper *effect*.

In spite of all the rigor Walsh brings to revising, refining, and re-finding a concept of the media hoax in Poe (into which "Valdemar" fits quite nicely, after all) precisely in order to do justice to the historico-rhetorical specificity of the hoax-effect, does she not seem to be saying here that "Valdemar" is not or is no longer a hoax per se, that it has

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<sup>94</sup> Walsh is deriving this notion of *letturaturizzazione* from George Kennedy, "Literary Rhetoric," *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 108-119.

lost its significance as such? This would seem to situate her critical posture with regard to the hoax in a sort of archaeological mode, digging through the remains of the past in search of traces or impressions of its proper hoax-effect, in which case her concept of the hoax seems not so wholly different from the proponents of the generic diffusion of the hoax that she claims to be responding to as a corrective, in some ways writing against. If our concept of the hoax is left so open-ended as to include all manner of satire and literary jokes which are, *solely by virtue of being hidden*, hoaxes, then what becomes of all this hoaxing once it is no longer hidden but excavated, brought to the light of day in the mode of critical deciphering, uncovering or discovering? The question orienting Walsh's study—"What is a hoax?"—while helpful in reconsidering the (con)textual specificity of the hoax in Poe, is ultimately faulty. Inevitably it seems what we aim at with the word "hoax" is already a hoax which is not one. Daniel Hoffman knew this: "As ever, a hoax that both is and is not a hoax" (Hoffman 163). At stake here is not one form of duplicity among others, since it concerns precisely a privileged index for forms of duplicity in Poe. This is to what Eddings et al's collection of "essays on Poe's satiric hoaxing" and the generic diffusion of the hoax more generally ultimately attest, not so much an interest in the hoax per se (Walsh) as an economical means of confronting the hemorrhage of duplicity in Poe.

Our reading of *Autography* will owe specific debts to both approaches to the hoax; we shall consider it as *both* a singular historico-rhetorical (con)text which can be precisely approached, only approached, never fully reconstituted for its proper hoax-effect *and* as a (con)text in a constantly inconstant drift. Both approaches inevitably lose, will have lost in advance the thing they set out to describe, but they will have done so

differently: “all that spurious wisdom,” Poe once wrote, as it happens, in the midst of his first articles of *Autography*, “which will terminate in just nothing at all—in a hoax, and a consequent multiplicity of *blank visages*” (ER 344). However, both approaches also attest to a certain spirit of the hoax, to a question of the survival of the hoax as such, after it is called “Hoax!” and thus becomes a hoax which is not one. As with the question of the “double audience” of the hoax, there is a precedent for treating the question of this spirit of the hoax in Poe and, in *Autography*, as in “The Balloon-Hoax,” in the very hoax we would take as “object.”

Poe’s preferred term when speaking of his own hoaxes—*jeu d’esprit*—while it has been traditionally considered merely a synonym for the word “hoax” in Poe, will be of interest here for the way it is deployed with a heightened sensitivity to the (con)textual drift wherein we search out the spectral survival or afterlife of the hoax. It will prove of crucial importance to assessing the strange fact, never directly addressed by any study of Poe’s hoaxing but crucial for an understanding of *Autography*, that Poe’s hoaxes are all at least double. There are, for instance, two balloon hoaxes, “Hans Pfaall” and “The Balloon-Hoax,” and at least two mesmeric hoaxes, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” and “Mesmeric Revelation.” Accepting the generic diffusion of the hoax in Poe, one may also consider (as Joseph Riddell, Jonathan Elmer, and others have done) the pairing of “The Raven” and “The Philosophy of Composition” as another example of this other way in which in Poe the hoax is not one. *Jeu d’esprit*, we will see, proves a more felicitous term for tracking the complex ways in which hoaxes graft onto hoaxes in Poe, the ways in which dead or aborted hoaxes become revived, reactivated, recycled, reused after their proper hoax-effect is “used up.”



For instance, there is much less evidence to support classing “Mesmeric Revelation” as a hoax than there is to support classing “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” as one. What then are we to make of the fact that part and parcel of “the potent magic of verisimilitude” of “Valdemar,” to which many (including Poe himself) credit its hoax-effect, involves an allusion to his previous article on the mesmeric death-trance? If part and parcel of the hoax-effect in “Valdemar” is an allusion to “Mesmeric Revelation,” then is or was the latter, if not one in itself but precisely for this doubling, the grafting of hoax onto hoax in Poe, at one time or another, in one way or another, in one part or another, not a hoax? Yet, if “Mesmeric Revelation” is or was a dead or aborted hoax, if it is or was no longer, just not, or even never a hoax, then is or was “Valdemar” not by virtue of the graft of this allusion at one time or another, in one way or another, in one part or another, not, already no longer, never a hoax? Then, if we acknowledge that the allusion to “Mesmeric Revelation” in “Valdemar” is quite subtle if not hidden, then what becomes of the grafting of hoax onto hoax when excavated, brought to the light of day in this mode of deciphering, uncovering or discovering?

The grafting of hoax onto hoax in Poe plays out as constantly inconstant (con)textual drift, which becomes even more complex in consideration of the possibility that Poe not only reuses “used up” hoaxes in as and by hoaxing but also hoaxes in as and by using up hoaxes, and reuses his own using up of hoaxes in as and by hoaxing. After all, another legacy of the hoax in Poe is his passion for publicly demystifying hoaxes: as he did in “Maelzel’s Chess Player,” as he did in his writing on Locke’s “Moon Hoax,” as, legend has it, he did on the steps of the *Sun* the day his Balloon Hoax stopped the press. What, then, are we to make of the fact that Poe fabricates a lineage for the titular

character of his so-called “final hoax,” Von Kempelen, tracing back to “Maelzel, of Automaton-chess-player memory,” while at the same time fabricating a lineage for the automaton-chess-player itself tracing back to Von Kempelen: “[If we are not mistaken, the name of the *inventor* of the chess-player was either Kempelen, Von Kempelen, or something like it.—Ed.]” (UP 1159)? This is neither just an allusion to the Maelzel-hoax nor just an allusion to Poe’s using up of the hoax, but necessarily both; it is another allusion to a hoax which is not one in a hoax which is not one.

These complex machinations of the hoax in Poe and the elliptical questions and formulations that would address them are helped along, we maintain, by the term *jeu d’esprit*. Consider the paragraph adjoined to the (con)text of Poe’s Balloon Hoax, which on April 13, 1844, passed off as the day’s news, in its transubstantiation (*hoc est corpus > hocus pocus*) into “The Balloon-Hoax,” circa. 1850, the year after Poe’s death:

[The subjoined *jeu d’esprit* with preceding heading in magnificent capitals, well interspersed with notes of admiration, was originally published, as matter of fact, in the *New-York Sun*, a daily newspaper, and therein fully subserved the purpose of creating indigestible aliment for the *quidnuncs* during the few hours intervening between a couple of Charleston mails. The rush for the “sole paper which had the news,” was something beyond even prodigious; and, in fact, if (as some assert) the *Victoria* did not absolutely accomplish the voyage recorded, it will be difficult to assign a reason why she *should* not have accomplished it.] (UP 884)

The rhetorical performance of this paragraph—precisely the one which occasions Ingram’s advice to Poe’s “readers and admirers” in *The Life, Letters, and Opinions of*

*Edgar Allan Poe* to “always be upon their guard against his inveterate habit of attempting to gauge their gullibility,” his “indulging in the practice when least expected,” his “desire of befooling his readers when apparently the most in earnest”—is indeed remarkable. Of course, the intention here is to reassert the relevance of the “used up” hoax and to appreciate its interest for the reading public. This involves a certain demystification, revealing as matter of fact the work’s pose “as matter of fact,” but there is an entirely different order of facticity put in play by the “in fact” which proceeds the concluding sentence of this note: “and, in fact, if (as some assert) the *Victoria did* not absolutely accomplish the voyage recorded, it will be difficult to assign a reason why she *should* not have accomplished it.”<sup>95</sup> Something of the hoax is being revived, recycled here. We would say this sentence is written in the spirit of the hoax, which may seem an obvious point, but mark the number of rhetorical contrivances lending themselves to this effect, the spectral survival or afterlife of the hoax:

1) the casual manner in which skepticism is registered about the public skepticism about the accomplishment of the *Victoria*, consigning anonymously between parenthesis what is in fact the very pretext of this note: “if (as some assert) the *Victoria did* not [...]”;

2) “absolutely,” this excessive adverb which makes better sense if the verb is read in the affirmative, as in “the *Victoria did* [emphasis on the “did”] [...] absolutely

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<sup>95</sup> Poe made a similar remark with regard to “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” in the *Broadway Journal* from December 1845, in response to a letter from “Dr. Collyer, the eminent Mesmerist,” inquiring after the veracity of that hoax. “[T]he truth is,” Poe replies, “there was a very small modicum of truth in the case of M. Valdemar—which, in consequence, may be called a hard case—very hard for M. Valdemar, for Mr. Collyer, and ourselves. If the story was not true, however, it should have been—and perhaps ‘The Zoist’ may discover that it *is* true, after all” (ER 111). While we cannot help but read Poe’s signature in the line in question from “The Balloon-Hoax,” we also have been among the many duped into reading Poe’s signature where it is not, so we shall merely note that the evidentiary record supporting the idea that Poe actually wrote the line in question is much less sure than the passage re: “Valdemar.”

accomplish the voyage” (If the *Victoria* did *not* accomplish the voyage, then why say that it did not do so “absolutely”? It either did or it didn’t, didn’t it?), and which, notably, one might say in response to some expression of doubt as to whether “the *Victoria* did [...] absolutely accomplish [...]”;

3) “the voyage recorded,” when there was, of course, never a voyage to record;

4) the remonstrance that the narrative’s verisimilitude is so profound that “it will be difficult to assign a reason why she *should* not have accomplished it,” a prideful concession which can mask the subtle way this clause reasserts the material reality of the balloon: “she *should*” (emphasis on the “should”) inclines the reader to think in terms of what she should or should not have done or what she should or should not have been capable of doing, when there is, in fact, no “she” in the first place, no *Victoria* outside of “The Balloon Hoax”;

5) the “if...then...” formulation of the sentence which cues the reader to accept a logical proposition when what is actually being proposed here is the possibility that the power of truth to be fiction survives the power of fiction to be truth.

The narrative subjoined to this note, immediately after this sentence, both of which are subjoined to the “heading” (we would say, headlines) under whose “magnificent capitals” the narrative originally appeared in the *Sun*, all of which is subjoined to the heading “The Balloon-Hoax,” is not a *jeu d’esprit* just by virtue of its being or having been, at one time or another, in one way or another, in one part or another, a hoax, but by virtue of the note itself, the very occasion of its being named a *jeu d’esprit* and the complex (con)textual drift put in play by this naming occurring beneath the naming of “The Balloon-Hoax.” This title heads not just the narrative that when

“originally published, as matter of fact, in the *New-York Sun*, a daily newspaper, [...] fully subserved the purpose of creating indigestible aliment for the *quidnuncs* during the few hours intervening between a couple of Charleston mails,” but also this brief report of the “something beyond even prodigious” effect of the narrative. It is no mere coincidence that Poe often speaks to the legacy of the hoax, its proper hoax-effect, as memory. In “The Balloon-Hoax” it is quoted, as if reported, as if someone had been on the scene, the buzz about “the ‘sole paper which had the news.’” In *Autography* Poe speaks of the “rich imagination” of Locke’s “Moon Hoax” in the past tense, as an enduring, “most precious” memory. “Hoax” names a historico-rhetorical (con)text, an event that can never be reconstituted or relived in all its specificity (which should never stop us from trying to reconstitute it, trying to relive it): the spell that must remain past. *Jeu d’esprit* names the textual remainder of the hoax, the material around which, by virtue of its perfect iterability, can be fashioned an all but infinite series of new contexts, an ever-vanishing horizon of new events and untoward voyages.

In sum, the question orienting this study of the hoax and the *jeu d’esprit* of *Autography* is not “What is the hoax?” but “What becomes of the hoax?” The chronicle of the hoax-effect of *Autography* that follows, taking *Autography* not as its “object” but its constantly inconstant (con)text, may be read as an archive of impressions, faithfully copied and editorialized. If we were to let the secret of its genesis slip, as a moth from a (borrowed) cocoon, we would whisper of “instarring the scatter, the always gathered scatter, the constellation, matter.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Geoffrey Bennington, “Wormwords,” *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 2010), 155.

**November 1833:**

The host-text of “The Miller Correspondence” — An errant page from Harriet Martineau’s *Autobiography* — William Maginn and the article that “would not *tell*” — Poor Miss Edgeworth — Editorio-literary vizards and the hoax which is not one — Missing from its place: the absented object of the Miller Correspondence

It has been duly noted that hoaxes begin as parasitism, which, as Joseph Riddell points out, means that hoaxes simply never begin for never beginning simply: “The notions of originality and invention are made to tremble, reverberate; and the law or laws of genre are violated. ‘Hoax’ acts — that is, mimicks, parodies, repeats, transposes — by a kind of theft, thus inaugurating again a kind of writing before the letter” (Riddell 149). Poe cannot be credited with “inventing or fabricating” the genre of the hoax (as he is, to some extent, in Lynda Walsh’s *Sins against Science*) without immediately registering certain debt, for the “genre” of the hoax being one “which appropriately enough he stole, or appropriated” (*ibid.*), in other words, for the “genre” of the hoax being not one. Appropriately enough, too, the beginnings of scholarly inquiry into Poe’s hoaxes took root in the parasitic repetitions, transpositions, and thefts constitutive of the hoax.

Beginning in the 1910s and through the 1960s, critical attention to “The Balloon-Hoax,” for instance, consisted primarily in tracking the liberal plagiarisms from Monck Mason’s *Account of the late Aeronautical Expedition from London to Weilburg* (1836/7) and his *Remarks on the Ellipsoidal Balloon, propelled by the Archimedean Screw, described as the New Aerial Machine* (1843) that went into Poe’s account of the

transatlantic flight of the *Victoria*.<sup>97</sup> Of course, Poe did nothing to obscure these “sources” or host-texts of his hoax but rather flaunted them by having Monck Mason appear as a character in his Balloon Hoax, as he remains in “The Balloon-Hoax.” While for the spell of the proper hoax-effect Mason’s presence in “The Balloon-Hoax” might have lent veracity to the narrative (assuming readers of the hoax-text to have had knowledge of these host-texts to compare with Poe’s), after the spell receded into its past, Mason’s name became an obvious lead with which to begin to track the machinations of “The Balloon-Hoax” through its *jeu d’esprit*. Similar beginnings of scholarly inquiry into Poe’s hoaxes grew up around the mesmeric *jeux d’esprit*: “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,” “Mesmeric Revelation,” and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”<sup>98</sup> In the case of the parasitism (mimicry, parody, repetition, transposition, theft) at the heart of the hoax of *Autography* we are immediately directed to the host-text of “The Miller Correspondence” from *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* for November 1833.

Since familiarity with this text is even scarcer than familiarity with *Autography*

(today, one of the only claims to fame of “The Miller Correspondence” being its

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Walter B. Norris, “Poe’s Balloon-Hoax,” *Nation* (October 27, 1910), 91:389-390; J. E. Hodgson, *The History of Aeronautics in Great Britain* (London, 1924), esp. 311; Harold H. Scudder, “Poe’s Balloon-Hoax,” *American Literature* (May 1949), 21:179-190; Ronald Sterne Wilkinson, “Poe’s ‘Balloon-Hoax’ Once More,” *American Literature* (November 1960), 32:131-317; T. O. Mabbott, “The Balloon Hoax” Introduction and Notes, *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. 3, 1063-1068 and 1082-1088.

<sup>98</sup> For parasitism and the hoax with regard to “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” cf., Palmer Cobb, “Poe and Hoffman,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (January 1909) 8:68-81; Boyd Carter, “Poe’s Debt to Charles Brockden Brown,” *Prairie Schooner* (Summer 1953) 27:190-196; Ted N. Weissuch, “Edgar Allan Poe: Hoaxer in the American Tradition,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin* (July 1961), 45:291-309; G. R. Thompson, “Is Poe’s ‘A Tale of the Ragged Mountains’ a Hoax?,” *Studies in Short Fiction* (Summer 1969), 6:454-460; Mukhtar Ali Isani, “Some Sources of Poe’s ‘A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,’” *Poe Newsletter [Poe Studies]* (December 1972), 5:38-40; with regard to “Mesmeric Revelation” cf., Mabbott (3:1024-1029); with regard to “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” cf., Sidney E. Lind, “Poe and Mesmerism,” *PMLA* (December 1947), 62:1077-1094; Steve Carter, “A Possible Source for ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,’” *Poe Studies* (1979), 12:36; T. N. Weissuch, “Edgar Allan Poe: Hoaxer in the American Tradition.”

relationship to *Autography*), but for still other reasons that will become clear, it is perhaps best to introduce “The Miller Correspondence” anecdotally. What follows is an excerpt from the *Autobiography* of Harriet Martineau. At the time of the events she is about to relate, Martineau was in the midst of publishing her *Illustrations of Political Economy* series (1832-1834), widely considered the work that secured her lifetime fame, and had just moved to London to be closer to her subjects and the elite literary circle into which she had been newly inducted. Incidentally, since transatlantic travel will be a recurring motif in the chronicle of the hoax-effect now begun, we will note that not long after the events she is about to relate, Martineau set out on a two-year tour of the United States, where she would become a devout abolitionist; her subsequent writings inspired by her travels and the abolitionist cause have credited her with the legacy of the “founding mother of sociology.” The story she has to tell here may seem to pale in significance compared to these other events in her life, but it does warrant a few errant pages in her *Autobiography*, after all.

That was a remarkable hoax. I was the only one of the whole order who escaped the toils. This happened though through no sagacity of my own, but by my mother's in detecting the plot.

One day in 1838 [*sic*], when my mother and I were standing by the fire, waiting for the appearance of dinner, a note arrive for me, which I went up to my study to answer,—requesting that my mother and aunt would not wait dinner for me. The note was this:—

'82 Seymour Street, Sommer's Town :

‘ October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1833 [*sic*].



‘Madam,

‘ A Frenchman named Adolphe Berthier, who says he acted as Courier to you during one of your visits to France, has applied for a situation in my establishment. He says that you will give him a character. May I request the favor of an answer to this note, saying what you know of him.

‘ I have the honour to be, Madam,

‘ Your obedient Servant,

‘GEORGE MILLAR [*sic*].

My reply was easy and short. There must be some mistake, as I had never been in France. As I came down with the note, my mother beckoned me into her room, and told me she suspected some trick. There had been some frauds lately by means of signatures fraudulently obtained. She could not see what any body could do to me in that way; but she fancied somebody wanted my autograph. The messenger was a dirty little boy, who could hardly have come from a gentleman’s house; and he would not say where he had come from.—I objected that I could not, in courtesy, refuse an answer; and my only idea was that I was mistaken for some other of the many Miss Martineaus of the clan. My mother said she would write the answer in the character of a secretary or deputy: and so she fortunately did. We never thought of the matter again till the great Fraser Hoax burst upon the town,—to the ruin of the moral reputation of the Magazine, though to the intense amusement of all but the sufferers of the plot. After a remark on their failure to get my autograph, the hoaxers observed that my story ‘French Wines and Politics’

might have saved me the trouble of assuring them that I had never travelled in France. (Martineau 424-425)

What Martineau would have read under her name in “the great Fraser Hoax” that “burst upon the town” of London in November 1833 is this:

VII.—Miss Martineau

The only “anonymous name,” as an Irish M.P. once phrased it, in the whole collection is that of Miss Martineau’s amanuensis. She will not write, and her scribe cannot venture beyond G. M. What is the “preventative check” in this solitary case? Are the folks ashamed of their names? That Miss Martineau never visited the Continent is evident enough to those who have read any of her stories about the French.

Sir,

I am directed by Miss Harriet Martineau to inform you that there is some mistake on the subject of Berthier’s representation, as she never had the pleasure of visiting the Continent.

(For Miss H. Martineau.)

I am, Sir,

Respectfully yours,

G. M.

*17, Fludyer Street, October 5*

(MC 626-627)

These two citations are enough to correct some misinformation circulating in the scant critical commentary on “The Miller Correspondence,” chiefly T. O. Mabbott’s claim that “unmistakingly,” “the whole thing is fictitious” (Mabbott 1:259). Dr. Shelton

Mackenzie provides a more subtle and correct if still somewhat mystified account of the textual status of “The Miller Correspondence” in his Memoir of William Maginn, co-founder with Hugh Fraser of *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1830, who (with the later assistance of Francis Mahony) oversaw the editorship of the magazine until 1840 under the name Oliver Yorke, to whose pen “The Miller Correspondence” is attributed. The occasion of this memoir is Mackenzie’s editing the fourth volume of *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Late William Maginn: The Fraserian Papers*, fifteen years after Maginn’s death in 1842.

Maginn’s contributions to *Fraser*, collected, would make several volumes. I have only selected such of the “Fraserian Papers,” as I conceived most likely to give an idea of the variety of subjects on which he wrote, and the peculiar characteristics of his style. Many of his most lively and witty articles would not *tell*, out of the Magazine. [...] So, with the “Miller Correspondence”—a curious hoax professing to give copies of the letters written to a certain Rev. George Miller (a lineal descendent of the great Joe Miller), in reply to inquiries by him as to the character of an imaginary servant who, he said, had referred each person written to. It is not ascertainable now whether these letters really were written by the persons in question. Maginn, who wrote the Miller inquiries, was capable of inventing the whole series of replies. The letters are characteristic enough to have been composed by the persons whose signatures they bear [...] The running comments on each letter and its writer were in Maginn’s liveliest manner, but the reprint of the whole (to the extent of thirty pages) was more than I dared risk.

(S. R. Mackenzie lxxiii-lxxiv)

Contra Mabbott and Mackenzie, the testimony of Harriet Martineau inclines us to accept as fact that the letters printed in “The Miller Correspondence” were, if not altogether then in no small part, actually indited by “the persons whose signatures they bear” (which should be modified to read, “the persons whose [names] they bear,” since no signatures appear in “The Miller Correspondence”). Martineau’s reminiscence of “the great Fraser Hoax” begins by asserting that she was “the only one of the whole order who escaped the toils,” and she likewise appears in “The Miller Correspondence” as “the only ‘anonymous name.’” Mercifully, her mother suspected a “trick,” knowing there to have been “frauds lately [perpetrated] by means of signatures fraudulently obtained”; offering to reply to Miller on her daughter’s behalf (since a reply “could not, in courtesy,” be refused), she writes “in the character of a secretary or deputy,” “G. M.,” which appears in “The Miller Correspondence” as the article’s only “amanuensis.”

Nonetheless, Mackenzie’s remarks on “the peculiar characteristics of [Maginn’s] style” offer insight into the character of the writer behind all this character-writing. Of greater interest to Mackenzie than “whether these letters really were written by the persons in question” is the fact that Maginn was “was *capable* of inventing the whole series of replies.” His attention is certainly not to historical inquiry into the article that “would not *tell*” (he does not even collect it among Maginn’s “Fraserian papers”) but to its spirit. In short, he considers the *jeu d’esprit* not the hoax of “The Miller Correspondence.” Mabbott’s claim almost a century later that “the whole thing is fictitious” may be proof enough of Mackenzie’s characterization of Maginn’s style—“Many of his most lively and witty articles would not *tell*, out of the Magazine.”—but Mabbott had other reasons for supposing this to be the case that we will become clear as

we come to *Autography*. For now, let us take a closer look at this text which “was more than [Mackenzie] dared risk” to reprint.

The British *literati* duped into contributing to “The Miller Correspondence” comprise, as the editor of the article puts it, “[a] tolerably extensive list—from Lord Eldon to Henry Hunt, from Sir Walter Scott to Lytton Bulwer, from Coleridge to [Richard] Carlile” (MC 625), embracing thirty individually numbered letters (not thirty pages as Mackenzie has it), each accompanied by a brief editorial burlesque. The editors claim, however, to “have about five hundred of the letters lying before us; but as they in their total bulk would fill the Magazine, we are compelled to make a selection” (MC 624). As in the case with Miss Martineau, Rev. Miller’s correspondence with the British *literati* more often than not concerns the character of certain imaginary footmen, waiting-maids, and other in-door servants. For example, Sir Walter Scott’s letter expresses “regret that his name has been used to mislead [the] benevolence” of Rev. Miller, adding, “I know no such person as Duncan Campbell, nor was a man of the name Campbell ever servant to me” (MC 635). Samuel Taylor Coleridge is “unable to form the most distant conjecture respecting either the person in whose behalf [Miller interests himself], or the object”; he suspects that Miller’s query “may have been intended for one or other of [his] nephews” and helpfully furnishes Miller their addresses (MC 632). James Hogg proves beyond doubt that no one by the name of Philip Muir ever served him: “I never kept a footman, nor ever will. If I could afford fifty servants, they should all be lasses” (MC 635). Lady Charlotte Bury is equally sure that “such a person” as Sarah Deacon “has *never* lived in her service, in ANY capacity—certainly not in that of a lady’s-maid” (MC 628), and Miss M. R. Mifford has “no recollection whatever of any person of the name of

Amelia Riley,” nor does her father, adding that “it is unlikely that a person filling such a situation should have been entirely forgotten in the family” (MC 626). Some few letters collected among “The Miller Correspondence” appear to have been solicited on different grounds. John Wilson replies to a request for an academic recommendation: “On recurring to my class-lists for 1828-9, I find that there were five John Smiths that session; but no one of the number distinguished himself in any credible way whatever. The young gentleman who refers you to me must therefore have made a mistake. I cannot surely have, on any occasion, signified to him my approbation of his intellectual exertions while attending the moral philosophy class here. There was one of them, a John Smith from Manchester, whom I distinctly remember as a disagreeable raff” (MC 633). Richard Carlile deigns to peruse a “Manuscript on the Transubstantiation of the Soul” while cautioning Miller, “you must not look to me to make a speculation with such a subject; for as the word *soul* has no meaning, no type in existing things, I have to learn how any thing sensible can be said upon such a word” (MC 629).

The predominant ruse of the character-reference is more or less calculating. It has sure success at having individual correspondents divulge some private tittle-tattle, such as, Hogg’s fantasy of fifty servants who would “all be lasses,” Washington Irving’s preference for keeping “none but foreign servants” (MC 635), and Miss Martineau’s never having “had the pleasure of visiting the Continent.” Some of the content, however, seems to have a bit more bite. For instance, consider all those former students of John Wilson’s named John Smith, who may have learned that no one of them “distinguished himself in any credible way whatever” and the one from Manchester who may have learned (if he did not already know) that his professor considered him “a disagreeable

raff.” The letters indited by Maria Edgeworth are something more revealing. In her case (like some other of Miller’s correspondents), a number of letters were evidently exchanged, and her page-long attempt to test the testimony of one Margaret Riley evinces marked suspicion but also a marked lack of diffidence about “ransacking her memory” (MC 634). She goes on about an exemplary fondness for a certain dress on the part of one “most indifferent about dress” and the “curly hair” of one Miss Harriett, “worn as a crop—a peculiarity of in her appearance which none who have seen her could forget” (ibid.). Some thirty years after the publication of “The Miller Correspondence,” Harriet Martineau (not the same as Miss Harriett) reflects: “Miss Edgeworth suffered most,—and it really was suffering to her modest and ingenuous nature. She sent a long letter about her lady’s-maids—sadly garrulous in her desire not to injure a servant whom she might have forgotten. The heartless traitors sent a reply, which drew forth, as they intended, a mass of twaddle; and having obtained this from her very goodness, they made game of her” (Martineau 425). In fact, the context of Martineau’s remarks on “the great Fraser Hoax” in her *Autobiography* suggests that the victimization of Miss Edgeworth at the hands of “[t]he heartless traitors” might have inspired this reminiscence.

While, individually, the content of most of the letters comprising “The Miller Correspondence” seems more or less benign (The most frequent remark, which appears in nearly half of the thirty letters, is just this: “there must be some mistake.”), the effect of reading the whole helps to explain why Martineau would have thought Edgeworth “suffered the most” for having written the most, and why she would have been led to reflect that the hoax led “to the ruin of the moral reputation of the Magazine” and to suggest, even thirty years after the fact: “All who may look back at it will be of the same

mind with every gentleman whom I heard speak of the trick; — that plotter and publisher deserved to be whipped from one end of London to the other” (ibid. 426). Taken together, “The Miller Correspondence” strips away the veneer of literary celebrity and renders it a banal class distinction by exploiting that tenuous “metaphysical distinction between knowledge and power,” which the editors claim to be “shadowed forth at the end of the epistle” indited by Coleridge (MC 632). For instance, in spite of the “modest and ingenuous nature” which is supposed to characterize Edgeworth’s reply to Miller, her garrulousness does lead her into at least one cold and self-aggrandizing effusion:

Another circumstance in the words you quote of her makes me doubt it [that one Margaret Riley was formerly in her employ]. She says that the Mrs. Edgeworth the authoress was one of the members of the family she lived with. Now I was at the time I speak of in London, keeping house for myself: I was her mistress, gave her all her orders, and paid her her wages; so that she would not *naturally* speak of me as *one* of the members of the family but as specially her mistress. (MC 634)

The letters the British *literati* were duped into contributing to “The Miller Correspondence” are the principal pretext and pretence but only part of the design of the hoax. Much of the *jeu d’esprit* consists in the editorial burlesques appended to each letter, where Oliver Yorke has a deal of fun making molehills out of molehills. For instance, he is careful to observe a gendered trend within the collection of letters: “the ladies of this correspondence are most curious to see the persons— ‘the young persons’ —about whom the inquiries are made. Miss Edgeworth, Mrs. Norton, Lady C. Bury, Miss Porter, all express their anxiety for the personal appearance of the women who are all described as their former attendants. The gentlemen exhibit no such fancy for their discarded



footmen” (MC 628-629). (More curious than this is the ejaculatory apostrophe this observation provokes from Yorke: “Oh, Gossip! Gossip! what a god thou art among the goddesses of the earth!” (MC 629). Is not the repeated recommendation on the part of women to have the imaginary servant present herself to her former mistress to obtain the desired character-reference a shrewd notion for dispelling the gossipy design of this hoax, even if the former cannot be registered without protracting the latter?) The editorial burlesques furnished in “The Miller Correspondence” are generally more slight and self-effacing than this, consisting in punning and fashioning literary jokes out of the letters’ contents. The burlesque introducing the letter from portraitist and sometimes versifier and novelist Martin Archer Shee is confined to one sentence: “Shee writes as he paints—very tame indeed” (MC 627). Sometimes Yorke fashions remarks on the letters by relating their style or mode of address to that of the inditers’ literary labors: “Miss Porter is gentle and considerate. The letter she answers is designated as ‘polite;’ to her unknown correspondent she professes herself ‘obliged;’ she ‘loses no time in replying;’ and, with most Christian charity, suggests the probability of a mistake, for the sake of the young woman herself. How strange is all this squeamish conscientiousness for the grand humbugger of the Seagrave narrative! Such is human inconsistency” (MC 626). Sometimes Yorke’s remarks are characterized by little more than fault-finding: “Crofty [Thomas Crofton Croker] puts no mark of time to his communication, and then says that he has not been in Ireland for a year from that date” (MC 630).

The most notable relation, however, between the letters and editorial burlesques comprising “The Miller Correspondence” is their attribution to separate editorio-literary personae: Oliver Yorke being the author of the article itself and the usual editorial

persona of *Fraser's*, and Reverend George Miller being the correspondent of the British literati, special contributor or silent partner as it were to *Fraser's*. Throughout “The Miller Correspondence” the reader is periodically reminded of the difference: “We are indignant with Miller for having troubled ‘the superb lump of flesh,’ as Sidney Smith calls [Caroline Norton], with a second application” (MC 629); “Miller should not have written to Carlile” (ibid.); “Nothing reflects greater credit on Miller than his pertinacious badgering of Maria Edgeworth” (MC 633); “It was hardly fair for Miller to hoax Lord Eldon” (MC 635). When T. O. Mabbott somewhat mistakingly suggests that “at the end of [“The Miller Correspondence”] it is unmistakably acknowledged that the whole thing is fictitious” he is responding to this highly contrived veil separating Rev. George Miller from Oliver York being almost utterly rent in the conclusion of the article:

To those who may be inclined to believe that the Rev. George Miller was nothing but a shadow, like Jedidiah Cleishbotham or Dr. Dryasdust, and feel a sort of conviction that this hoax was perpetrated by living people of flesh and blood under the vizard of his reverence—to them we allow the praise of a certain sagacity. But to them also we have to say, that those aforesaid persons of flesh and blood, whosoever they may be, have not given the papers to us; and that we rather imagine the appearance of this series may be as much matter of annoyance to them, as of wonder to their correspondents. This we avouch on the honour of

OLIVER YORKE. (MC 636)

The unmasking of Rev. George Miller at the close of “The Miller Correspondence,” the almost utter exposure of the “hoax [...] perpetrated by living people of flesh and blood under the vizard of his reverence,” is only slightly withheld by Yorke’s insistence that

these “persons of flesh and blood, whosoever they may be, have not given the papers to us.” Some questions remain. Why might the printing of the correspondence be a “matter of annoyance” to the hoaxers? Are we to believe that the hoax of the Miller Correspondence was, appropriately enough, like all hoaxes, appropriated, stolen? Of course, if we allow ourselves “the praise of a certain sagacity” of calling “Hoax!” on the Miller Correspondence, if we see the Rev. George Miller as “nothing but a shadow,” in the tradition of Walter Scott’s editorio-literary vizards, Jedidiah Cleishbotham and Dr. Dryasdust (vizard: a mask, a phantasm or spectre (*obs.*); altered form of visor: *vysar*, *viser*, *vizar* (*OED*)), what are we to make of the fact that we are invited to do so by another editorio-literary vizard in this tradition, one Oliver Yorke? What remains of the hoax of “The Miller Correspondence” when it calls “Hoax!” on the Miller Correspondence? What remains of this hoax which is not one?

The *jeu d’esprit*.—Nearly a full page of the periodical review in *The National Standard* for November 2, 1833, was devoted to a write up on that month’s issue of *Fraser’s Magazine*, where “The Miller Correspondence” is the only article mentioned and liberally quoted from as “the most attractive paper” (Hurst 278). Three letters from the piece are reprinted after which the editors of the *Standard* ask: “Are these genuine? We are assured they are. *Fraser* is not gallant this month,—both Miss Martineau and Lady Morgan are sadly treated, but we fear justly” (*ibid.*). The *Standard* may have been “assured” of the genuineness of the Miller Correspondence outside of “The Miller Correspondence” itself, but it need not have been. The article itself presents them as

genuine (which they are, at least in part<sup>99</sup>), even allows “the praise of a certain sagacity” to those readers who would acknowledge that the letters were solicited by less than “gallant” means, indeed, by certain “flesh and blood” hoaxers. The effect of the hoax of “The Miller Correspondence” calling “Hoax!” on the Miller Correspondence, however, is too much to be believed. The genuineness of these letters is best left an open question. What is surprising is that though the *Standard* does not reprint any of Yorke’s editorial burlesques the editors represent them as “appropriate, and generally very acute commentaries”: “Miss Martineau and Lady Morgan are sadly treated, but we fear justly”! The situation here is a perfect illustration of the characteristic ill-logic of the hoax,<sup>100</sup> the grammar of which is given to us by Poe: in fact, if (as some assert) “The Miller Correspondence” *is* not absolutely genuine, it will be difficult to assign a reason why it *should* not be.

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<sup>99</sup> While the *Autobiography* of Harriet Martineau gives ample evidence that the letters printed in “The Miller Correspondence” are genuine, she also reflects there that in one particular case a letter may have been forged, that of Sir Walter Scott. “Many of the other replies were characteristic enough. Scott’s puzzles me most. I cannot see how there could be one from him, as he died in 1832, and was incapable of writing for long before: and the hoax could hardly have been whole years in preparation. Yet I distinctly remember the universal remark that Scott’s was, of all, most unlike the writer. He called a fictitious applicant a scoundrel, or a rascal, or something of that sort” (Martineau 425-426). Martineau is certainly right to suspect the letter of Scott since “The Miller Correspondence” did not appear until 1833; however, some items among the correspondence suggest that “the hoax could [...] have been whole years in preparation.” Many of the dates to the letters are absent or do not include the year; no few are overscored to read “183—” (cf. the entries for Hunt, Shee, Bury, Carlile, J. W. Croker, Moore, Holmes, Rogers, Coleridge, Edgeworth, Irving, Hogg, and Eldon). In a few cases, however, the letters are scrupulously dated, as the letter from Sir Walter Scott is distinctly dated from the year before his death. What is remarkable about Martineau’s recollection of “the universal remark that Scott’s was, of all, most unlike the writer,” is that the uncharacteristic tone of the letter as well of the question of its date were two mysteries called upon to explain one another in the editorial burlesque attending the letter in “The Miller Correspondence”: “There is only one autograph among all this batch that betrays the slightest shadow of any thing like annoyance, and that, *mirabile dictu!* is the note addressed to our friend Miller by the best-natured great man of our age, or perhaps of any age—Sir Walter Scott. But the date explains all. Alas, alas! the good Sir Walter had had at least one visitation of the mortal malady before he was honoured with the correspondence of Mr. Miller” (MC 635).

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Elmer, “The Cultural Logic of the Hoax,” *Reading at the Social Limit*.

Undoubtedly, “The Miller Correspondence” would have given Poe much food for merriment when he came upon it in the pages of *Fraser’s* in November 1833, but what gave him food for thought was its untapped potential, some broken promises of this article that “would not *tell*.” Consider the following from the editorial preface to “The Miller Correspondence”:

Waving [...] further inquiry into the history of Mr. George Miller, we are about to introduce to public notice the results of his valuable labors. Smitten with a desire of collecting the autographs of the illustrious personages, in the author-line, existing in his time, he bent all the energies of his capacious mind to that important object. It was said long ago, that no more compendious way of procuring such curiosities could be imagined than discounting the bills of literary men, because you might in that case be perfectly certain of retaining their autographs, accompanied by notes. This, however, is somewhat too expensive, as the friends of literary gentlemen are well aware; and the Rev. George Miller [...] felt it much easier to have recourse to a bland and agreeable artifice whereby to extort the desired signatures. Under shapes as various as those of “old Proteus from the sea,” he warily approached his distinguished correspondents, and suited his bait to the swallow of the illustrious gudgeon for which he angled. To some he wrote for the character of an imaginary footman; in another case, an apocryphal amanuensis, or an ideal servant-maid. With some his correspondence was literary, with others philosophical; a tinge of politics coloured some, a touch of benevolent curiosity distinguished others. From all received answers; and they have been forwarded to us by a kindness of a nature so distinct and peculiar, that we do not

think it possible for us to describe it in terms at all adequate to the sublimity of the feeling. (MC 624)

The solicitation of every letter in the Miller Correspondence was meant to serve an entirely different though accessory purpose that rendered the content of the letters (both those sent by Miller and those he received in return) all but arbitrary to the automatic success of his design. The object of Miller Correspondence is to obtain the “the autographs of the illustrious personages, in the author-line, existing in his time.” Though Yorke jokingly suggest that the most efficient means for Miller to obtain these “curiosities” would have been to discount the bills of the *literati*, an approach which would have undoubtedly yielded many kind notes of astonished gratitude (all signed, of course), this would by no means have been the most economical method. Someone must bear the debt, “as the friends of literary gentlemen are well aware.” Thus Rev. Miller “felt it much easier to have recourse to a bland and agreeable artifice whereby to extort the desired signatures.” He becomes a discursive shape-shifter, changing from literary to philosophical modes of address, as the correspondence demands, providing a tinge of politics where prudent and distinguishing other letters more simply with “a touch of benevolent curiosity.” While the range of address in Miller Correspondence is impossible to track owing to the fact that Miller’s letters of solicitation are not reprinted in “The Miller Correspondence” (though at least one survived, courtesy of Harriet Martineau), the replies of the British *literati* do not reflect the mythological dimensions of Miller’s scheme, as Yorke describes it. This may be due, however, to the fact that out of five hundred letters said to have been solicited only a fraction of the fruits of Miller’s “invaluable labors” sees its way to print in “The Miller Correspondence.” While there

may not have been all of four-hundred-and-seventy letters left unprinted, we may imagine there to have been more than thirty. In any event, these missing letters elicit a fragile promise, never kept, of future publication: “It is highly possible that we shall continue the series” (ibid.).

Yet, even more striking than the absence of the four-hundred-and-seventy other letters solicited by Miller and the absence of “the series” is the absence of those “curiosities” which constitute the very object of the Miller Correspondence and, arguably, “The Miller Correspondence” as well, that object to which Miller “bent all the energies of his capacious mind”: the extorted signatures or autographs. Despite the fact that the article’s preface describes the letters as merely a means to an end, only the handwritten letters (and not the neither separable nor inseparable signatures) make the transition into print. Do we not thereby lose something of the sublimity of feeling what we do not think it possible for us to describe? Poe was most drawn to “The Miller Correspondence” for something curiously markedly missing from its place; it was to this that he “bent all the energies of *his* capacious mind.”

**February 1836:**

*Autography* 1.1—Tracing the paternity of Joe Miller and his *Jest Book*—The transatlantic straddle of Washington Irving—The “pure signature” of Joseph A. B. C... Miller—*Autography* and the possibility of democracy—The Ghost-King of American Autography—The promise of the broken promises of “The Miller Correspondence”

“Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task.”  
- Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

A passing glance at Poe's first installments of *Autography* for the *Southern Literary Messenger* from February and August 1836 would immediately confirm one marked similarity to and one marked difference from the design of "The Miller Correspondence." Over the course of these two articles entitled "Autography," Poe printed a total of thirty-eight letters, each individually numbered as in "The Miller Correspondence" (the numeration of letters is continuous across the two articles); however, in "Autography" each letter is accompanied by a facsimile signature or autograph of a member of the American *literati*. A closer look yields more subtle similarities and differences between "Autography" and "The Miller Correspondence." As in "the great Fraser Hoax" which plays host to Poe's hoax, each letter is accompanied by a brief editorial burlesque; however, in "Autography" the editorial remarks are more uniform, devoted principally to making observations on the handwriting or MSS. (exemplified by the autographs) of the American *literati* and interpreting them for indications of character. Also like "The Miller Correspondence," "Autography" begins with an editorial preface wherein the authorial agency of the text is divided between an imaginary autograph-hound and an editorial body charged to print the fruits of his "invaluable labors." Like Maginn, Poe's name appears nowhere in his first articles of *Autography*; however, the Miller Correspondence in "Autography" is editorialized by an even more generic voice than Oliver Yorke, "Mr. Messenger."

In his foray into *Autography* in *Reading at the Social Limit*, Jonathan Elmer trains his attention on the complex relation between "Autography" and its British precedent through the figure of Poe's fictive autograph-hound, a "friend and particular acquaintance" of Mr. Messenger, one Joseph Miller, Esq. (SLM 2.3, 205).



The narrator's name would certainly recall for Poe's readers *Joe Miller's Jest Book*, an eighteenth century British collection still popular in Poe's day: through this allusion, Poe signals his own piece's status as an elaborate textual joke. More immediately, many readers might be expected to realize that Poe's tale was closely modeled on a series of autograph analysis titled "The Miller Correspondence" which had appeared in England in 1833. By naming his autograph-hunter Joseph Miller, Poe simultaneously acknowledges and obscures the source for his tale, since the other Miller was named Reverend George Miller, and the magazine in which it appeared was *Fraser's* and not the London *Athenaeum*, as Joseph Miller claims. (Elmer 40-41)

Elmer's summary is more or less correct, though his identification of Joseph Miller as the narrator of "Autography" is a bit troubling. As we shall see, Joseph Miller has a deal to say in the raucous narrative prefacing Poe's first installment of *Autography*. He even lends his voice to the editorial commentary for the second "Autography" article for the *Messenger* of August 1836. However, if a narrator is going to be named for "Autography," then it is best to call him Mr. Messenger, even though Elmer's mistake attests in its own unique way to the radical ambivalence in "Autography" (as in Poe more generally) to the notion of a self-identical narrator. The name of the autograph-hound, Joseph Miller, certainly recalls *Joe Miller's Jest Book*, but it is also an allusion to "The Miller Correspondence," where Oliver Yorke waves all "further inquiry into the history of Mr. George Miller" apart from this particular detail: "We feel ourselves just now only to say that the Rev. George Miller is a lineal descendent of the great Joe Miller, whose now time-honored tomb is to be found in the burial-ground of St. Clement's Dane, close

in the neighbourhood of Tom Wood's hotel" (MC 624). In the preface to an 1859 edition of the *Jest Book* to which Elmer alludes there is a similar reference to the interment of Joe Miller's remains "on the east side of the Burial ground of St. Clements Danes, in Portugal Street, Clare Market : where a stone still marks the site, and commemorates his virtues" (*Jest Book* [1859] iii\*). (Joe Miller's grave is believed to be lost; today this burial ground is the site of Kings College Hospital, London.)

All these references point to the fact that *Joe Miller's Jest Book* is a very open book indeed. The "original" Joe Miller (as we shall soon see, the very utterance of this name automatically troubles the notion of originality and origination as a joke), a.k.a. Joseph or Josias Miller (1684-1738), was an English stage-actor, who, although cast in several comedic roles (notably, that of the First Gravedigger in *Hamlet*), was reputedly a very grave man. The following character sketch of the "original" Joe Miller is given in the 1836-edition of the *Joe Miller's Jest*s (published in London the same year Poe published "Autography"):

"A man is killed at Waterloo, his name is Grose, and they print it *Grove*; that is Fame!" said Byron. But if there be any truth in the current tradition respecting the author of this celebrated *Jest Book*, Fame is even a more strange and accidental thing—for MR. JOSEPH MILLER, JOE MILLER—JOE, as he is generally called, with a familiarity that smacks of immortality—whose name, as a wit, is now current wherever the English language is spoken, was, when living, himself a jest for dulness. According to report, Miller, who was an excellent comic actor, but taciturn and saturnine, "was in the habit of spending his afternoons at the Black Jack, a well-known public-house in Portsmouth Street, Clare Market, which was

at that time frequented by most of the respectable tradesmen in the neighbourhood, who, from Joe's imperturbable gravity, whenever any risible saying was recounted, derisively ascribed it to him. After his death, having left his family unprovided for, advantage was taken of this *badinage*. A Mr. Motley [*sic*], a well-known dramatist of that day, was employed to collect all stray jests, then current on town. Joe Miller's name was prefixed to them, and from that day to this, the man who never uttered a jest, has been the reputed author of every jest, past, present, and to come." (*Jest Book* [1836] v-vi)

So the joke is that the father of all jokes was no joker, except when he played one on stage. The first edition (supposedly a charity edition) of *Joe Miller's Jest, or the Wits Vade-Mecum* from 1739, the year after Joe Miller's death, was edited by John Mottley but published under the pseudonym of a "lamentable Friend and former Companion, *Elijah Jenkins, Esq.*" (*Jest Book* [1739] title page); subsequent editions of the *Joe Miller's Jest Book* were widely reprinted, expanded, and reedited to include jokes in keeping with the times throughout the nineteenth- and into the twentieth- centuries.<sup>101</sup> So, in 1833, when William Maginn attributed the Miller Correspondence to one Rev. George Miller, "a lineal descendent of the great Joe Miller, whose now time-honored tomb is to be found in the burial-ground of St. Clement's Dane," he was already publicly acknowledging the status of "The Miller Correspondence" "as an elaborate textual joke," just as, three years later, Poe was already publicly acknowledging the status of

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<sup>101</sup> More recent editions of the *Jest Book* include a 1962 Dover facsimile edition of the 1739 *Joe Miller's Jest, or the Wits Vade-Mecum*, accompanied by an illuminating introduction by Robert Hutchinson, and Peter Young's *Data Book of "Joe Miller" Jokes* from 1969.

“Autography” “as an elaborate textual joke” in naming is fictional autograph-hound Joseph Miller.

Now, Poe does put his unique signature on the joke in several different ways. Firstly, as was not the case with the Miller Correspondence of “The Miller Correspondence” (in spite of Mabbott’s report to the contrary), where the joke was that the British *literati* were duped into inditing letters failing to offer character-references for various imaginary footmen, waiting-maids, former students, etc. (except in the case of Miss Edgeworth, who “suffered most,” according to Miss Martineau, for “ransacking [her] memory” so as not to fail), in “Autography” Poe himself penned all the letters attributed to the American *literati*. While Maginn may have been “capable of inventing the whole series of replies” (Mackenzie), Poe took full advantage of this latent potential in the hoax of the Miller Correspondence in “Autography.” A wonderful point of comparison is afforded in the shape of Washington Irving. The great transatlantic straddler is the only character to make an appearance (perhaps the only one who could have made an appearance) in both “The Miller Correspondence” and in *Autography*:

[From “The Miller Correspondence”:]

XXVI.—Washington Irving.

Here is one which we like. “I have resided almost entirely on the Continent,” says Geoffrey Crayon, “and I have non but *foreign* servants.” The affinity of blood and language speaks out in the word. Since the treaty of 1783, Americans of the United States are as foreign to us as Frenchman or Spaniards—*technically*, but not *truly*.

James Chinnoek, for anything Washing Irving could have known, might have been a New Yorker or a Kentucky man. He might have been a white help, or a regular nigger from the land of liberty, as well as a native of the “old country;” but his name was not Jacques or Diego : it was James—Jem. And let the government of the States be what it pleases, that name cannot be *foreign* to the ear of Washington Irving.

*Edgebaston, Birmingham,*

*January 27, 183—.*

SIR,

I have just received your note inquiring respecting a man-servant named James Chinnoek : no such person has ever been in my service. In fact, for the last ten years I have resided almost entirely on the continent, until within the last eighteen months, and I have none but foreign servants.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your very obedient servant,

WASHINGTON IRVING. (MC 635)

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[From “Autography”:]

LETTER XI.

*New York,— — —*

*My Dear Sir,—*I must be pardoned for refusing your request touching on the MS. “Treatise on Pigs.” I was obliged, some years ago, to come to the resolution not to express opinions of works sent to me. A candid opinion of those whose

merit seemed to me small, gave offence, and I found it the best way to avoid a judgment in any case. I hope this will be satisfactory.

I am, my Dear Sir, very respectfully yours

[autograph, W. I.]

JOSEPH L. MILLER, Esq.

Mr. Irving's hand writing is common-place. There is nothing indicative of genius about it. Neither could any one suspect, from such penmanship, a *high finish* in the author's compositions. This style of writing is more frequently met with than any other. It is a very usual clerk's hand—scratchy and *tapering* in appearance, showing (strange to say)—an eye deficient in the sense of the *picturesque*. There may be something, however, in the circumstance that the epistle to Mr. Miller is evidently written in a desperate hurry. Paper very indifferent, and wafered. (SLM 2.3, 209)

Appropriately enough, Poe's signature refinement on the joke of the Miller Correspondence is to afford signatures; there is already something of a joke just in Poe's printing a facsimile of Washington Irving's signature, for instance, as an autograph, especially since he would have likely come by the "original" by less than forthcoming means. He further capitalizes on the joke, however, by attaching the autograph to, as if to have it sign off on, a fictive letter wherein Irving is made to appear reluctant to venture remark "on the MS. 'Treatise on Pigs,'" and he exploits the appropriated object still further by having it appear to illustrate autographical speculations such as "there is nothing indicative of genius about [Irving's handwriting]." With the American readership this joke (or these jokes) took admirably well, but before coming to some reader

responses to “Autography” there is more to say about Poe’s negotiation of his indebtedness to the British precedent for his hoax. Washington Irving’s appearance in both “The Miller Correspondence” and *Autography* is exemplary of the relation between the two not just by virtue of this incidental co-appearance; the editorial burlesque of Irving in the pages of *Fraser’s* is especially revelatory of the fact that the stakes of the respective jokes may not be wholly benign but, as with all jokes, at least half-serious.

As Elmer points out in *Reading at the Social Limit*, the return of Rev. Miller’s ancestor to an American magazine-office is ultimately of interest for the way in which it “simultaneously acknowledges and obscures” the British precedent for Poe’s hoax. Through the editorial vizard of Joseph Miller, Elmer claims, *Autography* “asserts a paternity which, by its very generality and indigenoussness, supercedes its British precedent, indeed any precedent: a categorical paternity which in containing all particular instances, is both everything and nothing, simultaneously ‘everywhere’ and with ‘little connection to either time or place’” (Elmer 41). The “categorical paternity” of Joseph Miller “is not due to any kind of anonymity”—in fact, he is immediately recognizable not only as the Joe Miller of *Jest Book* fame but also as an allusion to “The Miller Correspondence”—“but rather to the fact that he has too many names; or, rather, that he is something like *pure name*” (ibid.). In the course of the raucous narrative prefacing Poe’s first “Autography” article for the *Messenger*, Joseph Miller’s middle initial changes, rotating sequentially through every letter in the alphabet (excepting “J” and “U”), as well as in the body of the article, where Miller’s middle initial shifts sequentially

through the alphabet (again, excepting “J” and “U”<sup>102</sup>), as if to countersign, each time uniquely, every item in his correspondence. (He happens to be caught on P. in the entry for Irving cited above.) “Miller’s unstable initial reminds us,” Elmer writes, “that, while one’s proper name is supposed to link us both to a unique personality (legible in the way we form its letters) and to a familial history, in fact one’s name is purely abstract, a contentless marker drawn from a language that is *not* unique, but common. [...] Miller’s rotating middle initial in its alphabetical inclusiveness, makes him the embodiment of [the] publicity of language in all its double-edged force” (ibid. 42). In other words, Miller’s proper name, while it establishes a certain bond of inheritance and indebtedness between *Autography* and “The Miller Correspondence,” ultimately effects a disruption between the American and British (con)texts through the performative power set adrift in Miller’s rotating middle initial. Thus the effect of Poe’s editorial vizard arises rather from his having too many signatures rather than “too many names”: “*signs* his name, we think, Joseph A. Miller, or Joseph B. Miller, or at least Joseph C. Miller,” so the fun begins in “Autography” (SLM 2.3, 205 [emphasis added]). Joseph A. B. C... Miller is something like, says Elmer, “pure signature” (Elmer 45).

Reading this “pure signature” of Joseph A.B.C... Miller, Elmer argues that *Autography* did for American literary celebrity and publicity in the antebellum period what *The Declaration of Independence* did for “the people” in the Revolutionary period, as a text “of the people, by the people and for the people. *Autography*’s “riddling evocation of contemporary concerns about America’s cultural independence [...]

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<sup>102</sup> For an engaging conversation on the cryptographic significance of these missing letters, cf. Alexander Hammond, “The Hidden Jew in Poe’s ‘Autography,’” *Poe Newsletter* (October 1969) 2:55-56 and Roger O’Conner, “Letters, Signatures and ‘Juws’ in Poe’s ‘Autography,’” *Poe Newsletter* (June 1970) 3:21-22.



indicates Poe's own sense that his play with autograph analysis might have resonances in a larger social context" and "opens onto a fundamental mechanism that Poe's work more generally explores, concerning print culture's ambiguous role in the installation of authority and legitimacy in democracy" (ibid. 43). This argument builds on Jacques Derrida's thought about the constitutively ambiguous structure of "declarations of independence," whose rhetorical force depends on an essential obfuscation or complexity whereby it is impossible to tell whether the declaration preceded the independence or vice versa,<sup>103</sup> and Michael Warner's account in *Letters of the Republic* of how American "writing came to be the hinge between delegitimizing revolutionary politics and a nonrevolutionary, already legal signification of the people" (quoted in Elmer 44). Elmer writes,

The relation between the text of the people and the collection of empirical individuals ostensibly comprising the people is, I would venture, like the relation between Joseph A. Miller and the real-life celebrities he addresses: while Miller affirms the idea of a link between signature and character, he also insures that the link is never unambiguously made. Miller is the literalization (hence his alphabetical nature) of the signature as the sign of unique identity; as Warner points out, however, such a literalization must inevitably be completely abstract ("indigenous every where" with "little connection with either time or place"). Miller is thus unable to render concrete the very thing he makes possible, and equally unable to *be* the unique identity his status as pure signature would seem to

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Déclarations d'indépendance," *Otobiographies: L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1984), 11-32; "Declarations of Independence," trans. Tom Keenan and Tom Pepper. *New Political Science* 15 (Summer 1986), 7-13.

guarantee. He is publicity itself, the abstract generator of identity and personality he can never have. (Elmer 45)

Of course, Elmer is not suggesting that American Literature per se marks out its beginnings in *Autography* just as, historically, the American State marks out its beginnings in the *Declaration of Independence*. Rather, the performative dimension of *Autography* is merely “like” or analogous to the relation between “the collection of empirical individuals ostensibly comprising the people” and “the text of the people.” As the signatories of the *Declaration* “ostensibly” approximate the “completely abstract” “literalization” of the people, the signatories of *Autography* “ostensibly” approximate the “completely abstract” “literalization” of the American *literati*, American literary personality, celebrity, or character itself. Yet, also like the *Declaration* itself, the very thing that makes this “literalization” or the performative dimension of *Autography* possible, the “riddling evocation” of Poe’s editorial vizard Joseph A. B. C... Miler must remain in all its “alphabetical inclusiveness,” “the embodiment of [the] publicity of language in all its double-edged force,” ambiguously both a part of and apart from the abstract generation of identity it makes possible.

Let us say we believe in the possibility of an analogy between *Autography* and a certain notion of democracy: as Elmer puts it, an “image” of “American social space as existential void,” which is “no less powerful and effective, and no less of a historical datum, for being a lie” (ibid. 177); or, perhaps, a hoax? We will explore this possibility of an analogy between *Autography* and a certain notion of democracy in greater detail below, in consideration of Poe’s later *Autography* series for *Graham’s* between November 1841 and January 1842, which Elmer never discusses in *Reading at the Social*

*Limit*. For here Poe seems intent on precisely giving up those contrivances of the 1836 “Autography” articles he appropriated or stole from “The Miller Correspondence”: the fictive letters attributed to the American literati and the editorial vizard of Joseph A. B. C... Miller, which are not simply abandoned but partake in the design of the later articles of *Autography* in the context of a systematic demystification of the *jeu d’esprit* of “Autography.” Since Poe appears intent on stripping down the design of *Autography* to all but his signature refinements on the joke, it is there we will mark out *Autography*’s “declaration of independence.” For us, the early “Autography” articles are of interest for their declaration of indebtedness rather than their declaration of independence, and the highly ambiguous way in which Poe negotiates this indebtedness gestures toward a possible impossibility of ever wholly divorcing the originality of his *Autography* series from its British precedent. All the trouble may come from the same sort of trouble that *Autography* poses to any notion of a “pure signature.”

We are interested now in some spectral turns in the narrative prefacing the first installment of *Autography* (not discussed by Elmer) whereby Poe figures the tyranny and despotism of precedent and indebtedness as that of the merest and meanest ghost, resurrecting Joseph Miller from his once “time-honored tomb [...] in the burial-ground of St. Clement’s Dane.”

Our friend and personal acquaintance, Joseph Miller, Esq. (who, by the way, signs his name, we think, Joseph A. Miller, or Joseph B. Miller, or at least Joseph C. Miller) paid us a visit a few days ago. His behavior was excessively odd.

Walking into our *sanctum* without saying a word, he seated himself with a dogged air in our own exclusive arm-chair, and surveyed us, for some minutes, in silence,

and in a very suspicious manner, over the rim of his spectacles. There was evidently something in the wind. “What *can* the man want?” thought we, without saying so.

“I will tell you,” said Joseph Miller, Esq—that is to say, Joseph D. Miller, Joseph E. Miller, or possibly Joseph F. Miller, Esq. “I will tell you,” said he. Now, it is a positive fact that we had not so much as attempted to open any of our mouths.

“I will tell you,” said he, reading our thoughts.

“Ah, thank you!” we replied, slightly smiling, and feeling excessively uncomfortable—“thank you!—we should like to know.”

“I believe,” resumed he—resumed Joseph G. Miller—“I believe you are not unacquainted with our family.”

“Why, *not* altogether, certainly—pray, sir, proceed.”

“It is one of the oldest families in— in—”

“In Great Britain,” we interposed, seeing him at a loss.

“In the United States,” said Mr. Miller—that is, Joseph H. Miller, Esq.

“In the United States!—why, sir, you are joking surely: we thought the Miller family were particularly British—The Jest-Book, you know—”

“You are in error,” interrupted he—interrupted Joseph I. Miller—“we are British, but not particularly British. You should know that the Miller family are indigenous every where, and have little connection with time or place. This is a riddle which you may be able to read hereafter. At present let it pass, and listen to me. You know I have many peculiar notions and opinions—many particularly

bright fancies which, by the way, the rabble have thought proper to call whims, oddities, and eccentricities. But, sir, they are not. You have heard of my passion for autographs?”

“We have.” (SLM 2.3, 205)

Behaving “excessively odd,” Miller enters the inner office or “*sanctum*” of the *Messenger*. Having “seated himself with a dogged air in [Mr. Messenger’s] own exclusive arm-chair,” he remains in silence “for some minutes,” surveying Mr. Messenger “in a very suspicious manner, over the rim of his spectacles.” As if evoking the Danish prehistory of the site for St. Clements Church in Westminster, Poe has Miller behave precisely like the Ghost of King Hamlet, appearing but not speaking until spoken to, only Poe riffs on this tradition of spectral visitation by having Miller “speak to” Mr. Messenger’s thoughts (not unlike the way he has Dupin respond to his quiet companion’s thoughts in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”). Also as in *Hamlet*, in “Autography” the occasion of spectral visitation, the ghost’s delivery of the reason and purpose for its appearance appears quite distracted in the telling.

“Well, sir, to be brief. Have you, or have you not, seen a certain rascally piece of business in the London Athenæum?”

“Very possible,” we replied.

“And, pray sir, what do you think of it?”

“Think of what?”

“No, sir, not of *what*,” said he—said Joseph K. Miller, Esq. getting very angry, “not of *what* at all; but of that absurd, nefarious, and superfluous piece of autographical rascality therein—that is to say in the London Athanæum—

deliberately, falsely, and maliciously fathered upon me, and laid to my charge—to the charge of *me*, I say, Joseph L. Miller” Here Mr. M. arose, and, unbuttoning his coat in a great rage, took from his breast pocket a bundle of MSS. and laid them emphatically upon the table.

“Ah ha!” said we, getting particularly nervous, “we begin to understand you. We comprehend. Sit down! You, Joseph M.—that is to say, Joseph N. Miller—have had—that is to say, ought to have had, eh?—and the London Athenæum is—that is to say, it is not, &c.—and—and—and—oh, precisely!”

“My *dear* sir, said Mr. Miller, affectionately, “you are a fool—a confounded fool. Hold you tongue! *This* is the state of the case. I, Joseph O. Miller, being smitten, as all the world knows, with a passion for autographs, am supposed, in that detestable article to which I am alluding, and which appeared some time ago in the London Athenæum,—am supposed, I say, to have indited several and sundry characters of literary notoriety about London, with the sinister design, hope, and intention, of thereby eliciting autograph replies—the said epistles, presumed to be indited by me, each and individually being neither more nor less than one and the same thing, and consisting— —”

“Yes sir,” said we, “and consisting— —”

“And consisting,” resumed Mr. Joseph P. Miller, “of certain silly inquiries respecting the character of certain— —”

“Of certain cooks, scullions, and chambermaids,” said we, having now some faint recollection of the article alluded to.

“Precisely,” said our visitor—“of certain cooks, scullions, chamber-maids, and boot-blacks.”

“And concerning whose character you are supposed to be excessively anxious.”

“Yes, sir—I—excessively anxious!—only think of that!—I, Joseph Q. Miller, excessively anxious!”

“Horrible!” we ejaculated.

“Damnable!” said Mr. M. (SLM 2.3, 205)

So the point of Miller’s visit to the *sanctum* of the *Messenger* is simply to make a delivery. The “bundle of MSS. [...] laid [...] emphatically upon the table,” these “papers,” which Miller says are “the result of some—of some ingenuity on [his] part,” are shortly identified as a collection of “autographs—but they are *American* autographs, and as such may be of some little value in your eyes,” he informs Mr. Messenger (ibid.). Yet, Miller is not satisfied with merely delivering these “autographs,” which eventually Mr. Messenger inspects “with a great deal of pleasure” (ibid. 206). Miller adamantly begs Mr. Messenger to understand that he had nothing whatever to do with “a certain rascally piece of business in the London Athanæum,” that “absurd, nefarious, and superfluous piece of autographical rascality [...] deliberately, falsely, and maliciously fathered upon [him], and laid to [his] charge.”

Of course, while having Miller “getting very angry” over having this “piece of autographical rascality” “fathered upon” him, Poe is meantime “deliberately, falsely, and maliciously,” but jokingly, fathering “The Miller Correspondence” upon the London *Athenaeum* rather than acknowledge *Fraser’s Magazine*. While this bit of mystification

was, as we shall see, wholly transparent to Poe's readers, he is also more subtly punning on the word "Athenaeum" here, as another "*sanctum*": etymologically, "Athenaeum" names the temple of Athena—Pallas, goddess of wisdom (on whose bust Poe would later perch his raven), where ancient "professors taught their students and orators and poets rehearsed their compositions"; Poe is also playing on the more modern and figural sense of "athenaeum" as a "literary club, reading-room, library," an "institution in which books, periodicals, and newspapers are provided for use" (*OED*). The institution in question here is one of jests, ala Joe Miller's *Jest Book*, "the most Brilliant Jests," "the Politest Repartes," "the most elegant Bons Mots," "with copious additions," in whose shadow Maginn and Poe have their hoaxes play out. Poe just fashions another balloon<sup>104</sup> as it were in "Autography," in the figure of a specter: the resurrected father of all jokes, who was no joker unless playing one on stage.

At first glance, Joseph Miller seems to behave exactly like Rev. George Miller: mysteriously delivering a bundle of MSS. to an editorial "*sanctum*," interrupting himself into the workings of the magazine, installing himself onto its platform and toward its audience, as though resistance were futile. Looking closer, however, we see that in "Autography" Joseph Miller comes after Rev. George Miller as a before, as a new line of paternity which is also older, bringing with it the fragile power of the arche: that of a "family" "indigenous every where," having "little connection with time or place." Still, Joseph Miller seems quite preoccupied, indeed troubled, "in a great rage" over the question of a certain British indigenusness. From Joseph Miller own pronounced agitation and Mr. Messenger's "faint recollection of the article alluded to" to the

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<sup>104</sup> Recall that the voyage of the *Victoria* was a transatlantic flight.



audience, there is an inescapable impression in “Autography” of an already having been fathered upon—“deliberately, falsely, and maliciously” but memorably fathered upon—of this newly archaic paternal line.

The content of the letters in this “rascally piece of business,” “The Miller Correspondence,” seems to trouble Miller in particular as his memory becomes increasingly acute in conversation with Mr. Messenger.

“I beg leave, however, to assure you that I have resorted to no petty arts for the consummation of a glorious purpose. No man can accuse *me*, sir, *me*, Joseph R. Miller, of meanness or superficiality. My letters have invariably been—have been—that is to say, have been everything they should be. Moreover, they have not been what they should not be. I have propounded no inquiries about scullions. I write not to the sublimated Mr.— — [here we do not feel justified in indicating more fully the name mentioned by Mr. M.] touching a chambermaid, nor to Mr. — —, in relation to a character. On the contrary, I have adapted my means to my ends. I have—I have—in short, sir, I have accomplished many great and glorious things, all of which you shall behold in the sequel.” We bowed, and our visitor continued. (SLM 2.3, 205)

Joseph Miller assures the editors that he has resorted to “no petty arts for the consummation of a glorious purpose.” His letters “have invariably been [...] everything they should be,” namely, different: each uniquely tailored or “adapted” to the correspondent. “Moreover, they have not been what they should not be”: “each and individually [...] neither more nor less than one and the same thing,” “consisting [...] of certain silly inquiries respecting the character of certain — —” / “Of certain cooks,

scullions, and chambermaids,” / [...] “Precisely, [...] of certain cooks, scullions, chamber-maids, and boot-blacks.” Though Joseph Miller has “unfortunately preserved no copies” of his own letters eliciting the replies to offer proof of the fact (*ibid.*), the consistence in difference of the replies themselves will perhaps be enough to satisfy that he has ““adapted [his] means to [his] ends.””

All of which, of course, is important to consider in light of Poe’s authorship of the letters in question and the crucial difference between at least the bulk of the Miller Correspondence in “The Miller Correspondence” and the Miller Correspondence in “Autography” being that the latter is entirely fictive. Nevertheless, even in this Poe is searching out the promise of a broken promise of “The Miller Correspondence” in the Miller Correspondence of “Autography”: “Under shapes as various as those of “old Proteus from the sea,” he warily approache[s] his distinguished correspondents, and suit[s] his bait to the swallow of the illustrious gudgeon for which he angle[s].” The Miller Correspondence of “Autography” is not, we maintain, signed off on by a “pure signature” (Elmer) but by a signature whose very performativity is signed off on in advance, is itself impressed, pre-fathered upon. Like the Ghost-King Hamlet, Joseph A. B. C... Miller is a haunted specter. And like Hamlet, Mr. Messenger seems all too eager to deliver on the charge of the Ghost-King of American Autography, while also seeming to have been somewhat conversely fathered upon by a tendency toward distraction.

Miller’s charge to Mr. Messenger runs thus: ““It will be as well to insert the letters in your Messenger, with facsimiles of the signatures”” (SLM 2.3, 205). No doubt part of the detestableness of that ““detestable article”” ““deliberately, falsely, and maliciously”” fathered upon him has to do with the fact that its ““sinister design, hope, and intention, of

thereby eliciting autograph replies” is never realized in print. “[A]ll the world knows” Joseph Miller to be, so he says, “smitten [...] with a passion for autographs” (ibid.). Ironically, while “The Miller Correspondence” is arguably more “innocent” than *Autography* for *not* reprinting the signatures of the British *literati* solicited by such ungallant and unforthcoming means, this is precisely the fault Miller charges to the account of that “absurd, nefarious, and superfluous piece of autographical rascality” charged to his account. The “autographical rascality” of “The Miller Correspondence” consists in its being hardly “autographical” at all, except for acknowledging the autographs as the very pretext of the enterprise while withholding them and thus rendering itself “absurd, nefarious, superfluous.” Once again, in “Autography” Poe searches out the promise of the broken promises of “The Miller Correspondence.”

Mr. Messenger follows the recommendations of Joseph A. B. C... Miller to the letter, almost: “We print [the letters] *verbatim*, and with facsimiles of the signatures, in compliance with our friend’s suggestion” (ibid. 206). As Hamlet’s taking on the charge of his father’s ghost demands that “from the table of [his] memory / [he] wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books” (*Hamlet* 1.5.91), Mr. Messenger’s editorial authority, identity and agency does seem somewhat overtaken by Joseph Miller, as he seats himself doggedly in the editor’s “own exclusive arm-chair.” However, just as we find Hamlet chasing after traces in “the table of [his] memory” of some “trivial fond recollections” (notably, those of his mother, Hecuba, also the chief distraction of the Ghost-King Hamlet), Mr. Messenger seems to retain a capacity to form his own agenda: “The remarks appended to each letter are our own” (SLM 2.3, 206). This slightest declaration of independence, like that of Hamlet, will warrant another visitation, a kind

reminder and its kind of remainder: ““great and glorious things, all of which you shall behold in the sequel.”” For now, say, what about that (double) audience?

### **February—August 1836:**

The hoax which is not one—“Food for merriment” and “indigestible aliment”—

The matter of reprinting: difference as repetition, originality as copy

Poe’s early “Autography” articles from 1836 were markedly but strangely popular among the American readership. We might expect an odd sort popularity of a work regularly referred to over the years as either a “hoax” or a *jeu d’esprit* by the likes of John Henry Ingram, James Albert Harrison, Henry and Dorothy Partridge, Merle Montgomery Hoover, Michael Allen, Robert C. Jacobs, Merten C. Babcock, and, more recently, Jonathan Auerbach, Meredith McGill, and Jonathan H. Hartmann.<sup>105</sup> However, what is most strange about this “hoax” or *jeu d’esprit* of “Autography” is that it was immediately recognized by its audience as a “hoax,” moreover, precisely for the fact that, as one commentator *New York Evening Star* noted, “its plan is not original” (PL 197).

Hiram Haines, an early ally of Poe’s during his editorship of the *Messenger* and one well acquainted with Poe’s “spirit of eccentricity” (PL 204), stood out as one of the

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<sup>105</sup> Cf., Ingram, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters, and Opinions* (1880), 107; Henry Morton Partridge and Dorothy Cornelia Partridge, *The Most Remarkable Echo in the World* (Privately printed: Cosmo Printing, Co., 1933), 45 and 136; Hoover, *Park Benjamin: Poet ad Editor* (Columbia University Press, 1948), 185; Allen, *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 176-177; Jacobs, *Poe: Journalist and Critic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 99; Babcock, “The Wizards of Baltimore: Poe and Mencken,” *Texas Quarterly*, 13 (1970), 110-115; Auerbach, *The Romance of Failure: First-Person Fictions of Poe, Hawthorne, and James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 52; McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (2003), 181; Hartman, *The Marketing of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 22.

only commentators to reassert the editorial vizard of Joseph A. B. C... Miller. In a larger and wholly favorable review of the February 1836 *Messenger*, Haines had particularly high praise for “Autography” and announced the reprinting of the “whole article” in his *Petersburg Constellation* for the sake of his readers’ good taste: “Last but not by far the least in interest, is Mr. Joseph A. Q. Z. Miller’s ‘Autography.’ We copy the whole article as a literary treat which we should wrong their tastes did we suppose for a moment would not be as highly appreciated by each and all of our readers, as it is by ourself” (SLM 2.5, 348). While Haines was reprinting “Autography” in the spirit of the hoax by doing so still under the name (or names) of Joseph Miller, a reviewer of “Autography” for *Georgetown Metropolitan* was paradoxically pronouncing the work a successful hoax, when, of course, a successful hoax may be more properly considered one that goes unnoticed as such, at least for a spell.

The most extraordinary article in the book and the one that will excite most attention, is its tail piece, in which an American edition of Frazer’s celebrated Miller hoax has been played off on the American Literati with great success—and better than all, an accurate fac simile of each autograph given along with it. The article is extremely amusing, and will excite more attention than probably anything of the kind yet published in an American periodical. It is quite new in this part of the world. (PL 204)

What the *Metropolitan*’s review lacks with respect to the spirit of the hoax it seems to want to make up for in being in the know. Although somewhat neutralizing the proper hoax-effect of “Autography” with the reference to “Fraser’s celebrated Miller hoax,” the *Metropolitan* acknowledges the British precedent of Poe’s enterprise precisely in order to

assert the superiority of the “American edition.” The collection of “accurate” facsimile signatures is given particular notice here as what renders “Autography” “better than all,” and this improvement upon “The Miller Correspondence,” Poe’s fulfillment of this broken promise of “The Miller Correspondence,” was similarly singled out by other editorial offices as the most capital feature of “Autography.” The *Norfolk Beacon* wrote: “The article on Autography is a treat of no common order. We have seen nothing like it in an American periodical. It must have cost Mr. White a great deal of labor and expense in its typographical execution” (SLM2.5, 348). The *New Yorker* commended “Autography” “to the attention of the rational curious”: “[i]t embraces the autographs, quaintly introduced and oddly accompanied, of twenty-four of the most distinguished literary personages of our country [...] We note this as evidence of the energy no less than the good taste of the publisher, and as an earnest of his determination to spare no pains or expense in rendering the work acceptable to its patrons” (ibid.).

While championing “Autography” as a superior “American edition” of a celebrated British hoax seemed to neutralize in advance its proper hoax-effect, there remained for the American readership a vague notion of the literary significance of “Autography” as a *jeu d’esprit*, as a sort of afterlife of the hoax which is not one. From Hiram Haines’s reprinting the “whole article as a literary treat” and the *Beacon*’s similar characterization of it as “a treat of no common order” to the general recommendation to “good taste” reflected in nearly every review of “Autography,” the public reception of “Autography” seemed to attest to something easily digestible about Poe’s enterprise. In this respect its first favorable run through the American press might be likened to that of an immodestly priced but fashionable restaurant and viewed as a scene more of public

consumption than public reception. A critical exchange in the *Richmond Compiler* from March 1836 aptly sums up the matter. Following the ambivalent pronouncement of an anonymous “critical correspondent,” X.Y.Z., that *Autography* was “not exactly to [his] taste, though there are doubtless many who would find in it food for merriment,” the office of the *Compiler* promptly issued a retraction of X.Y.Z.’s remarks in the name of “public opinion,” to clarify that “Autography” was “eliciting the highest praise from the highest quarters” (PL 202-203).

One wonders what T. W. White, proprietor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, made of all this buzz, after having initially decided to omit “Autography” from the pages of his magazine (it seems Poe had an article ready for review as early as September 1835) for fear of being “sued for a libel” (PL 172). Between February and August 1836, “Autography” was widely and favorably reviewed among a readership wholly uninterested in venturing any specific remark as to its significance or meaning (much less one busying itself with drafting legal suits over its contents). If it is or was, at one time another, in one way or another, in one part or another, a hoax, then “Autography” is strangely so for having proved “food for merriment” and not in spite of but precisely for its being immediately recognizable as a “hoax”: a far cry from the “indigestible aliment” with which Poe figured the hoax-effect of his Balloon Hoax in “The Balloon-Hoax.”

As if prompted by its very design, the response to “Autography” among the American readership offers a compelling illustration of McGill’s notion of the “culture of reprinting” as “a literature defined by its exuberant understanding of culture as iteration not origination” (McGill 4). In this view, the originality of “Autography,” its very American-ness—there being “nothing like it in an American periodical,” its being seen as

“quite new in this part of the world”—did not arise in spite of but precisely for its appropriation or transposition of its British precedent. Elmer is right that “Poe simultaneously acknowledges and obscures the source” of “Autography,” but it never entirely “supercedes its British precedent” for both the acknowledgment and the obfuscation of source being constitutive of the popular effect of “culture as iteration.” In *Autography* Poe asks his audience to accept the dubious originality of a copy more ways than one: in its reuse of a celebrated “used up” hoax from the British magazines, in its manifest content (the collection of facsimile signatures or autographs), as well as in its own serial status. *Autography* not only reuses a “used up” hoax from the British magazines, but it also, as we saw with “The Balloon-Hoax” above, reuses itself as “used up” hoax. No doubt hoping to capitalize on the commercial and critical success of his previous ventures in autography, Poe fashioned three consecutive articles of *Autography* during his editorship of *Graham’s* from 1841-1842. Thus the questions of difference as repetition and originality as copy, already characteristic of the early articles of *Autography* from 1836, in relation to both their transatlantic context and their American context, later plays out in *Autography* itself as its own proper context.

**August 1836:**

*Autography* 1.2—The returns of Joseph A. B. C... Miller—The birth and death certificates of the *Declaration of Independence*—What means the Fourth of July?—Democracy and spectral despotism—The Ghost-King of American Autography



When last we left Joseph A. B. C... Miller, Esq. and Mr. Messenger, Miller was just about to take his leave from the “*sanctum*” of the *Messenger*. Mr. Messenger is profoundly and graciously indebted to Miller for the ““*American* autographs,”” which did, as Miller predicted, “prove interesting to the public” (SLM 2.3, 205).

“Mr. Joseph S. Miller” — we began, deeply penetrated by his kindness.

“Joseph T. Miller, if you please,” interrupted he, with an emphasis on the T.

“Well, sir,” said we — “so be it: Mr. Joseph V. Miller, then, since you will have it so, we are highly sensible of your noble, your disinterested generosity. We are —“

“Say no more,” interrupted our friend, with a sigh — ‘say no more, I beseech you. The MSS. are entirely at your service. You have been very kind to me, and when I forget a kindness my name is no longer Joseph W. Miller.’”

“Then your name *is* — is positively Joseph W. Miller?” — we inquired, with some hesitation.

“It is” — he replied, with a toss of the head, which we thought slightly supercilious — “It is — Joseph X. Miller. But why do you ask? Good day! In a style epistolary and non-epistolary I must bid you adieu — that is to say I must depart (and *not* remain) your obedient servant, Joseph Y. Miller.”

“Extremely ambiguous!” we thought, as he whipped out of the room — “Mr. Miller! Mr. Miller!” — and we hallooed after him at the top of our voice. Mr. Miller returned at the call, but most unfortunately we had forgotten what we had been so anxious to say.

“Mr. Miller,” said we, at length, “shall we not send you a number of the Magazine containing your correspondence?”

“Certainly!”—he replied—“drop I in the Post Office.”

“But, sir,” said we, highly embarrassed,—“to what address shall we direct it?”

“Address!” ejaculated he—“you astonish me! Address *me*, sir, if you please—

Joseph Z. Miller.” (SLM 2:3, 206).

When it comes to Joseph A. B. C... Miller, there are problems of address and related problems of departure. Miller simply does not depart or does not depart simply for not being able to be addressed simply. Put another way, Joseph A. B. C... Miller has a tendency to return. Even when he must bid adieu, ““must depart (and *not* remain),”” he invariably returns to remain. All of Poe’s excessive embellishment on his raucous narrative and after his initial departure Joseph A. B. C... returns not to depart again, whether not departing again because he’s come to the end of the line—“Z.”—or come to the end of the line for not departing again, “Autography” does not *tell*.

Mr. Messenger, meantime, is back at his leisure to get back at work, to re-seat himself in his “own exclusive arm-chair”: “The package handed us by Mr. M. we inspected with a great deal of pleasure. The letters were neatly arranged and endorsed, and numbered from one to twenty-four. We print them *verbatim*, and with fac-similes of the signatures, in compliance with our friend’s suggestion. The dates, throughout, were overscored, and we have been forced, accordingly, to leave them blank. The remarks appended to each letter are our own” (ibid.). A novel invention on Mr. Messenger’s part, to editorialize the correspondence, to venture some speculations on the character of the writer based on his or her MS.! What fun! What a collaboration! This merest indication of a declaration of independence on the part of Mr. Messenger occasions another visit from (but did he ever really leave?) Joseph A. B. C... Miller.

Our friend, Joseph A. B. C. D. &c. Miller, has called upon us again, in a great passion. He says we quizzed him in our last article—which we deny positively. He maintains, moreover, that the greater part of our observations on mental qualities, as deduced from the character of a MS., are not to be sustained. The man is in error. However, to gratify him, we have suffered him, in the present instance, to play the critic himself. He has brought us another batch of autographs, and he will let us have them on no other terms. To say the truth, we are rather glad of the proposal than otherwise. We shall look over his shoulder, however, occasionally. Here follow the letters. (SLM 2:9, 601)

Thus begins the second “Autography” article from the August 1836 number of the *Messenger*. Miller is again “in a great passion,” and we begin to suspect that we will never find him otherwise. Only here his presence is something more oppressive. There is a difference in the presentation of the present of “another batch of autographs.” There is no gracious giving as before: “[S]ay no more, I beseech you,” Miller had previously said, “The MSS. are entirely at your service. You have been very kind to me, and when I forget a kindness my name is no longer Joseph W. Miller” (which it already no longer is, of course). Here, Miller holds his autographs hostage, ransoms them as it were for editorial authority over his correspondence, knowing Mr. Messenger will be unable to refuse. He wants the autographs, after all. Notably, Miller’s complaint about Mr. Messenger’s “observations on mental qualities, as deduced from the character of a MS.,” is not that such editorial commentary is inadmissible or irrelevant, just that “the greater part” of the Mr. Messenger’s observations “are not to be sustained.” So now Miller is suffered to play both autograph-hound and autographer, but he is not the only one

changing. Mr. Messenger appears less disposed to reverence, only begrudgingly supplicant, groaning slightly in his “patient sufferance.” But he wants the autographs, after all. He’ll give over his “own exclusive arm-chair” again; he’ll overturn his own editorial authority even more completely than before. His adamant defense of the veracity of his autographic analyses—“The man is in error.”—only underscores how much he is giving up. He wants the autographs, after all. He has to adapt his means to his ends. The slightest shred of agency remains to the poor, entrapped Mr. Messenger: “We shall look over his shoulder [...] occasionally.”

We would suggest that Joseph A. B. C... Miller’s tendency to return and in a fashion which seems to mark out an expansion of his power and authority in haunting the “*sanctum*” of the *Messenger* poses a considerable challenge to Jonathan Elmer’s representation of the declaration of independence in “Autography” as one by virtue of which it “supercedes its British precedent.” If, as Elmer suggests, “Autography” presents a staging and a dramatization of an “ambiguous role in the installation of authority and legitimacy in democracy” (Elmer 43), then the declaration of independence at stake in this performance depends for its effect and its very effectivity on not one but at least two ambiguous events. As Derrida explains in *Specters of Marx*, thinking the performative power and effectivity of something like the *Declaration of Independence* demands consideration of it as *both* a kind of birth certificate *and* a kind of death certificate, both of which depend for their effectivity on an “undecidability between, let’s say, a performative and a constative structure, [...] required in order to produce the sought-after effect” (Derrida quoted in Elmer 43-44).

[E]ffective exorcism pretends to declare the death only in order to put to death. As a coroner might do, it certifies the death but here it is in order to inflict it. This is a familiar tactic. The constative form tends to reassure. The certification is effective. It wants to be and it must be *in effect*. It is *effectively* a performative. But here effectivity phantomalises itself. It is in fact [*en effet*] a matter of a performative that seeks to reassure but first of all to reassure itself by assuring itself, for nothing is less sure, than that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead. It speaks in the name of life, it claims to know what that is. Who knows better than someone who is alive? it seems to say with a straight face. It seeks to convince (itself) there where it makes (itself) afraid: now, it says (to itself), what used to be living is no longer alive, it does not remain effective in death itself, don't worry. [...] In short, it is often a matter of pretending to certify death there where the death certificate is still the performative of an act of war or the impotent gesticulation, the restless dream, of an execution. (*Specters of Marx* 48)

In the context of American revolutionary history, the sought-after death was of course that of British sovereignty over the American Colonies, what the *Declaration* calls “the absolute Despotism” and “Tyranny” of the King of Great Britain: a rhetorical shift in the *Declaration* corresponding to that identifying America as, first, “these Colonies” and, then, “these States,” as the rhetorical displacements constitutive of the declaration of independence itself. Now, the founding fathers did not speak explicitly in terms of the death of the King, for this language would have involved them in an economy of treason, a reaffirmation of the old order of things that has to be put to death. Rather the *Declaration* speaks for “the people,” its people. It’s “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of

Happiness”; “it claims to know what that is.” And as indicated by that fine line in the *Declaration* between a perpetual declaration of war and a perpetual declaration of independence—“whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it”—the more insidious war involved in America’s declaration of independence is the one that follows its ultimate effectivity. As we know, the *Declaration* was more or less effective. Yet “nothing is less sure, than that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead”; indeed, for Derrida, it sometimes happens that “the dead can be more powerful than the living” (ibid.). Any declaration of independence from a dead thing, which would imply independence from the death of the dead thing, any death certificate, remains in some sense in its very performativity nothing more nor less than “the impotent gesticulation, the restless dream, of an execution.”

The “restless dream” of America is certainly not reducible to but may be appreciated in terms of its birth-date, as given on a birth certificate: July 4, 1776. Nothing could seem more straightforward, but nothing is less so. We may well wonder, in the vein of autography, in what sort of state was the *Declaration of Independence* during that month-long interval between the approval of its wording by Congress (on July 4) and the signing of the physical document preserved in the National Archives, which most scholars agree took place in early August 1776, though the document itself still bore the date July 4, 1776. Old Oliver Yorke seemed to have no regard for this date as that of America’s birth. One of the gems of “The Miller Correspondence” incidentally given over to its future “American edition” in that transatlantic straddle of Washing Irving is this: “The affinity of blood and language speaks out in the word. Since the treaty of 1783, Americans of the United States are as foreign to us as Frenchman or Spaniards—

*technically*, but not *truly*.” So in 1833, and in that binding mother tongue, a Brit dates America’s birth from the Treaty of Paris, the formal end of the Revolutionary War, rather than the *Declaration of Independence*, and even then the declaration of independence holds “*technically*, but not *truly*.” Now, old Oliver Yorke is no impartial party to these matters, but, then, neither was Frederick Douglass, who on July 5, 1852 posed a not so entirely different sort of question about the birth-date of America: “What to the slave is the fourth of July?”

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national alter, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us? (Douglass [1852] 367)

As ever, but not always so genially as this, Douglass gives voice to America’s failure to live up to those democratic principles on which it was founded. When Douglass issued these words, “the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence,” they did not even hold technically for the American slave much less truly, since according to the institution Douglass decries, the slave was no more properly American than the property (chattle) held by an American. His point about the glaring hypocrisy of the institution of slavery is rather more bluntly made a few pages later:

What, to the American slave, is your 4<sup>th</sup> of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than any other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour. (ibid. 371)

Throughout Douglass's work, the "restless dream" of American democracy—"Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"—is relentlessly exposed as "a sham," a "swelling vanity," a "hollow mockery," "mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy," so long as it is celebrated in a nation which tolerates slavery. For Douglass, there could be no more decisive evidence than slavery that despotism and tyranny did not die with the *Declaration of Independence*; in fact, as Douglass goes on to discuss at some length in "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," the despotism and tyranny of the institution of slavery was vital to America's declaration of independence from the Despotism and Tyranny of the King of Great Britain. Of course, slavery is not the only proof that "nothing is less sure, than that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead"; even after its abolishment, other forms of despotism and tyranny remain for the new delimitation of "the people." Just as the hard-fought acknowledgment of racial difference



in the United States inaugurated the long, hard fight for racial equality, certain forms of despotism and tyranny become all the more insidious, hard of recognition to say nothing of their ending, for not taking as overtly hypocritical a form as did the institution of slavery but surviving as a sort of spectral despotism constitutive of the very drive to combat despotism.

As John Michael points out in his recent work *Identity and Failure of America*, “Certainly the United States is not exceptional in having failed to achieve [the] laudable goals [of “a government truly of (all) the people, for (all) the people, and by (all) the people, a real empire of liberty and justice for all”], but for no other nation does that failure to negotiate just relationships with diverse identities entail a crisis on the fundamental level of the national identity itself” (Michael 13). Even Douglass, one of the most powerful voices in American history that ever lent itself to correcting a failure of America to live up to its “laudable goals” of “liberty and justice for all,” was not immune to “the failure of America [becoming] his own” (Michael 234), as Michael shows through a comparison of his early writings on racial (in)justice and (in)equality to his later work evincing sympathies for American imperialism. The idea that Douglass could denounce one form of the “shocking and bloody” practices of the people of the United States in the shape of slavery and endorse the “shocking and bloody” practices proving yet another “failure of America” to live up its own democratic principles (in whose shadow we remain to this day, as Michael goes on to show in his chapter “American Identities and Global Terror”), does not detract from but rather underscores the radical and interminable complexity of the cause for justice marked out in *Declaration of Independence* we celebrate annually despite all our “gross injustice and cruelty.” We might ask, today:

What to the immigrant, what to the detainee, or (thinking still domestically) what to the homeless is the Fourth of July? While the all but unattainable if “laudable goals” of “liberty and justice for all” are marked out as part and parcel of the founding of the American State, and certain forms of despotism and tyranny are situated as, externalized entities to be overcome or put to death, the very lifeblood of American identity (as Michael rigorously shows) consists in keeping certain forms of despotism and tyranny alive so as to overcome them. Even if we could imagine a world in which there were “liberty and justice for all,” then such world would have to have retained at least the memory of past failures to be assured of their passing.

On the one hand, these concerns seem to take us far afield from the potential democratic import of what Elmer calls, “a work as evidently slight as ‘Autography,’” as if celebrating democracy here would be something of “a sham,” where one could only boast of its democratic significance with “an unholy license,” its “national greatness” with a “swelling vanity,” our “sounds of rejoicing” in a democratic achievement terminating in just nothing at all but a hoax: “empty and heartless,” a “hollow mockery,” “mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy.” On the other hand, is this not signature democracy? The extreme hazard risked in such a question is brought into perspective by the fact that it was William L. Pierce who said, “democracy is a hoax.”<sup>106</sup> There is cause to see something hoax-like about the survival of American democracy despite the massive and well-documented history of its failures to do what it says: far from effectively ending the sorts of despotism and tyranny embraced by Pierce, perpetuating them. However, for the same reason that we would never dare claim that

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<sup>106</sup> William L. Pierce, “The Lesson of Desert Storm,” *Extremism in America*, ed. Lyman Tower Sargent (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 186.

democracy is just a hoax, namely for the sake of justice, we would also resolve that *Autography* is neither just a hoax nor just democracy. We accept the possibility of Elmer's suggestion that there is something democracy-like at stake in *Autography*, but, like democracy itself, this possibility will only have meaning in view of its failure to manifest itself justly, just as or as just democracy.

One complex feature of "Autography" is that it explicitly negotiates the relation to its British precedent as a spectral despotism, which is only implicit in the *Declaration of Independence*. Whereas an internalized spectral despotism arises as a sort of side-effect of the *Declaration's* death certificate of "Despotism and "Tyranny," as part and parcel of the effectivity of the birth certificate of "these States," the declaration of independence in *Autography* would require a death certificate of an already dead thing. What Elmer calls Joseph A. B. C... Miller's "categorical paternity"—his being "British, but not particularly British" for being "indigenous everywhere" and having "little connection with either time or place"—"This," as Miller informs Mr. Messenger, "is a riddle you may be able to read hereafter," because this riddle is precisely one of the hereafter. If we are to search out such a death certificate of Joseph A. B. C... Miller, we cannot (as Elmer does) look just to "Autography"—the site of his resurrection and his swelling spectral despotism, perhaps just the beginning of a "long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object": his own survival as the Ghost-King of American *Autography*—but to *Autography* and to Poe's concerted effort to give up the ghost of Joseph A. B. C... Miller.

**November 1841:**

*Autography* 2.1—Revolution, in design—Giving up the ghost of Joseph A. B. C... Miller—De-doubling the double audience of the hoax: the be-mirrorment of W. E. Channing and W. L. Stone—The three-fold design of *Autography*'s revival—The irresolute semi-seriousness of autography—The *jeu d'esprit* of *Autography*

Extant commentary on *Autography* comparing the two series within the series for some of the radical differences in design between the two is so scarce (especially in American literary studies) as to be almost nonexistent. This is not to say, however, that these differences have never been acknowledged. On the contrary, it seems to be one of the most well known facts about *Autography* that some decidedly divisive event or revolution in design takes place between Poe's early "Autography" articles from 1836 and his first "Chapter on Autography" for *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* in November 1841. James Albert Harrison notes, "Poe's well-known papers on 'Autography' appeared in two divisions, years apart, the one a hoax, with hoax letters but genuine signatures attached, the other an article reproducing the signatures of the persons discussed, along with Poe's comments on them" (H 1:xiv). T. O. Mabbott also remarked the revolution in design in *Autography* as a justification for consigning the two series within the series to separate volumes of his *Collected Works*: "Poe's two early articles called "Autography" [...] have a fictional setting, and although the signatures were reproduced from genuine originals, the letters are all made up. Some have a humorous or satirical turn, and because of this and their fictional nature it seems desirable to collect these two papers among the Tales and Sketches. [...] Poe's three later articles in

*Graham's Magazine* for November 1841 to January 1842, are purely factual and critical, and therefore are left for a later volume of this edition" (M 2:259). It is in the wake of these two pronouncements from two of the most prominent editors of Poe's *Works* that most other references to *Autography's* revolution in design are made. Meredith McGill seems to be consciously blending the two with her assessment in *The Culture of Reprinting* that "the 'Autography' series, [...] while it began as a hoax, became the basis for two, more serious attempts at criticism" (McGill 181). Kent Ljungquist alludes (almost verbatim) to Mabbott's distinction between the early and late articles of *Autography* in the only mention of the series in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, offering a qualification of it that will prove of crucial importance to our reading below: "If the 1836 'Autography' had a fictional setting, the *Graham's* series appears on the surface to be more factual and critical, but Poe's semi-seriousness or facetious tone, established in his early years as an editor, is once again in evidence" (Ljungquist [2002] 18).

Since Poe prefaced his revival of *Autography* for *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* in 1841 with a lengthy retrospective on his early "Autography" articles for the *Messenger* from 1836, an account of both their compositional plan and public reception, this remarkable piece of editorial writing is an ideal lens with which to take a closer look at *Autography's* revolution in design and to test its supposedly well known effectivity. Whatever the precise character of *Autography's* revolution in design—whether a declaration of independence, a turn from a "hoax" to a (supposedly non-hoax) "article," from a "hoax" to "more serious attempts at criticism," from fiction to fact, or from the appearance of fiction to the appearance of fact—it ought to manifest here.

Although the event in question does not, strictly speaking, take place in *Autography*, its taking place will have only been indicated in as and by the design of *Autography*.

The first difference that must be impressed between the two series with the *Autography* series is that Poe's "Chapter on Autography" for the November 1841 number of *Graham's* falls indisputably or at least dramatically under the name of Edgar A. Poe. His own autograph appears writ large between the title of the piece and its first word: "Under this head, some years ago, there appeared, in the Southern Literary Messenger, an article which attracted very general attention, not less from the nature of its subject than from the peculiar manner in which it was handled" (GLG 19.5, 224). Poe's remarks are clearly oriented as a polite reminder of the public endorsement of his previous experiments in autography, and the span of five years separating the first "Chapter on Autography" published in *Graham's* from the articles published in the *Messenger* warrants the revisitation of the whole, on the whole. There is also no doubt a deal of unrestrained pride as Poe recalls the buzz the articles educed among the American readership and the critical and commercial success the enterprise proved for the *Messenger*: "With the public this article took amazingly well, and many of our principal papers were at the expense of re-printing it with the wood-cut autographs" (ibid.).

Of course, Poe was looking to repeat if not better the previous success of *Autography*, and in this way the preface may be read as a prolonged advertisement for a "used up" hoax. This is a logical starting point for the delicate operation before Poe in setting out to reuse the "used up" hoax, but it puts him in the somewhat illogical position of having to undermine all those contrivances that formed no small share of the "very general attention" commanded by his early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger*. He

can only discuss the public's reception of these articles at the expense of systematically demystifying "the peculiar manner in which [they were] handled." The first contrivance to be thus exposed as "used up" is the editorial vizard of Joseph A. B. C... Miller, Esq., which is not one but at least twenty-four<sup>107</sup> rotating masks. As Poe explains,

The editor introduces his readers to a certain Mr. Joseph Miller, who, it is hinted, is not merely a descendent of the illustrious Joe, of Jest-Book notoriety, but that identical individual in proper person. Upon this point, however, an air of mystery is thrown by means of an equivoque, maintained throughout the paper, in respect to Mr. Miller's middle name. This equivoque is put into the mouth of Mr. M. himself. He gives his name, in the first instance, as Joseph A. Miller, shifts it to Joseph B. Miller, then to Joseph C., and so on through the whole alphabet, until he concludes by desiring a copy of the Magazine to be sent to his address as Joseph Z. Miller, Esquire. (ibid.)

As we have seen, the character of Joseph A.B.C... Miller is written into the narrative that prefaces Poe's early installments of *Autography* with many spectral flourishes, flitting in and out and in and in again the editorial office of the *Messenger*, a haunting effect which Poe smooths over here as the "identical individual in proper person," that is, the dead man, Joe Miller. Here Miller is conjured again but for the last time. The "air of mystery" effected by Poe's appropriation of the editorial vizard of Joseph A. B. C... Miller through the "equivoque" of his shifting middle initial is dispelled but necessarily at the expense of certain details of the narrative prefacing the first installment of *Autography*. In revisiting them Poe smooths over some of the finer points of Miller's revisitations.

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<sup>107</sup> Poe neglects to point out here that odd, recurring absence of J and U in all of Miller's "alphabetical inclusiveness," see note 13, above.

He is not entirely truthful, for instance, in recollecting that this “equivoque” was entirely “put into the mouth of Mr. M. himself,” unless he means this “Mr. M.” to stand for *both* Mr. Miller *and* the narrated and the narrating Mr. Messengers together. The sequential displacements in Miller’s middle initial weave together not only the narrated dialogue between Miller and the Mr. Messenger comprising the bulk of the narrative, but also the dialogue itself and the voice of the narrating Mr. Messenger. (The narrative begins thus: “Our friend and particular acquaintance, Joseph Miller, Esq. (who, by the way, signs his name, we think, Joseph A. Miller, or Joseph B. Miller, or at least Joseph C. Miller) paid us a visit a few days ago.” The editorial “we” that is the narrative’s point of view gets the “equivoque” up and running with the ABCs of Joseph Miller; later, the narrative relates the following bit of dialogue between Miller and Mr. Messenger, here a character in his own narrative: “‘Mr. Joseph S. Miller’ — we began, deeply penetrated by his kindness. ‘Joseph *T.* Miller, if you please,’ interrupted he, with an emphasis on the T.”) This detail in particular is significant since it concerns the relation of the voice (or voices) of Joseph A. B. C... Miller to the editorial “we” that speaks in the fictional narrative that prefaces “Autography,” as well as the relation of those voices to the editorial “we” that speaks in the preface to the November 1841: the one which appears beneath the facsimile signature of Edgar A. Poe and speaks on behalf of another editorial office or *sanctum*, that of *Graham’s Magazine*.

So Poe is, in effect, giving up the ghost of Joseph A. B. C... Miller. Admittedly, our suspicions are already aroused: not so much by the fact that the “equivoque” of Joseph A. B. C... Miller is more intimately interwoven with the editorial “we” in the early articles of *Autography* than Poe suggests as by the fact that he deems such a minute



detail worthy of note—specifies into whose mouth or mouths the “equivoque” is put—in the first place. This is no general observation about his early articles of *Autography*; is his memory just faulty or is it something else? In any event, Poe does nothing here if not remind his audience of the ruse, emphasize once more, albeit differently, the staying power of Joseph A. B. C... Miller, his tendency to return, “[i]n a style epistolary and non-epistolary.” Indeed, Poe intimates that reminding his readers of Joseph A. B. C... Miller might help them recollect their previous interest in “Autography”: “an article which attracted very general attention, not less from the nature of its subject than from the peculiar manner in which it was handled.” Conjuring something, even for the last time, is to conjure it yet again. So why not just make the last time the last time? Let us say for now that this question is contrary to the *jeu d’esprit* that is the spirit of the hoax. Whatever the precise nature of the verbal, editorial, and/or psychic economy at work in this passage, the effect is undeniable: Joseph A. B. C... Miller is anything but a dead letter.

Since this “equivoque” extends to the “rigmarole letters” which appear in the early articles of *Autography*, this is the next contrivance of the hoax to be exposed as “used up”: “The replies only (which it is scarcely necessary to say are all fictitious) are given in the Magazine, with a genuine autograph fac-simile appended, and are either burlesques of the supposed writer’s usual style, or rendered otherwise absurd by reference to the nonsensical questions imagined to have been propounded by Mr. Miller” (ibid.). Poe’s demystification of the Miller Correspondence of “Autography” is conjoined with a discussion of two curious cases in the public reception of this “fictitious” or “otherwise absurd” correspondence. Here Poe offers his own take on that favorite notion

of the “double audience” of the hoax that we discussed above, the performative division of the audience of the hoax into two audiences, a circle of “readers who ‘fall for it’” and a circle of “readers who ‘get it’” (Walsh), those “in on it” or just “out of it.” Poe relates, “Dr. W. E. Channing, of Boston, was at some trouble, it is said, in calling to mind whether he had or had not actually written to some Mr. Joseph Miller” (ibid.). While Channing is reported to have been, momentarily, “at a loss what to make of the matter,” we are led to believe that he, like the others “whose names had been introduced, and whose style had been burlesqued, took the joke, generally speaking, in good part” (ibid.). However, the letter attributed to Colonel William Leete Stone was not so “quietly received” (ibid.). Poe is “ashamed to say” that the Colonel “committed himself by publishing in the Commercial an indignant denial of ever having indited such an epistle” (ibid.). Like Poe’s wistful remembrance of the critical and commercial success of his early experiments in autography, there is certainly some immodest pride and pleasure in his revisitation of these scenes. However, the real point of these particular examples is to celebrate a difference in the public reception of the hoax, from Channing’s bemused belief to Stone’s “indignant denial.” Poe reprints the two letters from “Autography” that provoked these different reactions and does so according to two distinct intentions, both aimed at achieving one general effect: reusing the “used up” hoax.

The reaction Channing is rumored to have had to the letter Poe penned in his name in 1836 is meant to attest to the public’s susceptibility to the hoax of “Autography,” as if the letter so nearly approximated the character of William Ellery Channing that the man himself was forced to admit the possibility that he had, in fact, written it. Not surprisingly, given the general immodesty demanded by the very design of this editorial,

Poe's self-admiration at having so faithfully put-on the aspect of the celebrated Unitarian preacher is his final word on the subject: "The precise and brief sententiousness of the divine is here, it will be seen, very truly adopted, or 'hit off'" (ibid.). At the same time, in keeping with the systematic demystification of those contrivances that "attracted very general attention" for his early articles of *Autography*, Poe characterizes Channing's as a relatively benign reaction to a relatively benign "joke." "The letter," as Poe casually introduces it in his preface, "was nothing more than what follows:—

Boston, — — .

DEAR SIR,

No such person as Philip Philpot has ever been in my employ as a coachman or otherwise. The name is an odd one, and not likely to be forgotten. The man must have reference to some other Doctor Channing. It would be as well to question him closely.

Respectfully yours,

W. E. CHANNING.

To JOSEPH X. MILLER, Esq. (ibid.)

The joke, we mean the one from 1836, does appear innocent enough. The inquiry into one "Philip Philpot" (perhaps a more auspicious name for a cook than a coachman), the absented pretext of this little epistle, harkens back to "The Miller Correspondence" from *Frazer's Magazine*, where, as we saw, a running satire on the notion of character is kept up by a collection of letters solicited from the British *literati*, the vast majority of which are responses to requests for the character of various imaginary footmen, lady's-maids, and other in-door servants. Like the letter Poe attributes to Channing, those comprising

“The Miller Correspondence” are sometimes styled as brief denials of ever having employed or been capable of forgetting a servant by such and such a name. In other cases the distinguished literati appear to find their servants less memorable in general. Poe does not employ the particular contrivance of the “character reference” nearly as regularly in “Autography” as it appears in “The Miller Correspondence,” and it is no mere coincidence that he does so for Channing. Putting on the aspect of one of the most prominent moralists of his day being put in the ethically revealing situation of corresponding about a servant, even (or perhaps especially) one falsely fathered upon him, Poe stages a sort of test W. E. Channing’s moral character. This already impish gesture reaches an even greater pitch of perversity in Poe’s remarks upon reprinting the letter in 1841, when he resolves this test of character in the morally ambiguous connotations of the word “sententiousness.” As though he had already decided the outcome of the moral proof in his staging of it, Poe writes, “The precise and brief sententiousness of the divine is here, it will be seen, very truly adopted, or ‘hit off.’” Thus while this joke appears benign it is at least half serious.

As is the other joke embedded in Poe’s reprinting of the letter attributed to Channing, the one composed for his 1841 audience: the funny way the seemingly benign admissions of the feigned “W. E. Channing” echo the rumored reactions of the real W. E. Channing to the letter Poe cites. Whereas the real Channing “was at some trouble, it is said, in calling to mind whether he had or had not actually written to some Mr. Joseph Miller,” the “W. E. Channing” speaking in the “used-up” letter from “Autography” is asserting the reliability of his memory. Moreover, this difference is made to appear almost logical, since the real Channing is at some to pains to recall having written a letter

that is generic by design and addressed to a name that is also generic by design—Joseph Miller—while the other Channing claims he is not likely to have forgotten such an odd name as Philip Philpot. The be-mirrorment of W. E. Channing multiplies as the letter proceeds—the feigned “W. E. Channing” politely advises Miller that his inquiry into the character of Philip Philpot “must have reference to some other Doctor Channing”—*and* as *Autography* proceeds—Poe reprints the facsimile signature of W. E. Channing in his second “Chapter on Autography” published in *Graham’s* the following month, appended with an editorial commentary, which considerably improves on the one from 1836. The situation is similar to the puzzling fashion in which Poe sets the record straight on the name “William Ellery Channing” in his review of the first collection of poetry composed by the nephew of the celebrated preacher and writer, who was also Channing’s namesake. Both in his review of the later, younger Channing’s poetical works and his treatment of the soon-to-be late Channing in *Autography*, the character in question “is *a*, and by no means *the*, William Ellery Channing” (ER 459). The whole effect is something like that of a hall of mirrors: a throng of W. E. Channings, no two of which see exactly eye-to-eye. While Poe is no doubt having a deal of fun in his remodeled fun-house of *Autography*, for others the effect may be disorienting, even nightmarish.

As though in deference to this fact, Poe proceeds to document the “one instance” in which “Autography” was “taken in serious dudgeon.” In his account of Colonel William Leete Stone’s response to the hoax, Poe not only informs the reading public of the troubled history between Stone and the editorial office of the *Messenger*<sup>108</sup>, which he

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<sup>108</sup> For a detailed account of Poe’s troubled history with Col. William Leete Stone and the provocations of *Autography*, cf. Sidney P. Moss, *Poe’s Literary Battles: The Critic in His Literary Milieu* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), 49-62.

saw as the impetus of the man's disgust with the epistle attributed to his name, but also repeats it (*ibid.*).

Colonel Stone and the *Messenger* had not been upon the best of terms. Some one of the Colonel's little brochures had been severely treated by that journal, which declared that the work would have been far more properly published among the quack advertisements in a spare corner of the *Commercial*. The colonel had retaliated by a wholesale vituperation of the *Messenger*. This being the state of affairs, it was not to be wondered that the following epistle was not quietly received on the part of him to whom it was attributed:—

New York, — — .

DEAR SIR,

I am exceedingly and excessively sorry that it is out of my power to comply with your rational and reasonable request. The subject you mention is one with which I am utterly unacquainted. Moreover it is one about which I know very little.

Respectfully,

W. L. STONE.

JOSEPH V. MILLER, Esq. (*ibid.*)

The troubled history between Stone and the *Messenger* hardly needed retelling, and Poe's renewal of his assault on "some one of the Colonel's little brochures" is clearly one cutting impetus behind the veneer of this seemingly genteel admission. At the same time, as in the case of Channing, the "W. L. Stone" speaking in the "used-up" letter from "Autography," is made to appear to echo the reaction of the real individual to whom it

was attributed. In the context of the joke in 1836, “W. L. Stone” is made to seem redundant by virtue of this “exceedingly and excessively” contrite reply to Miller’s “rational and reasonable” inquiry in regards to a subject with which Stone is “utterly unacquainted” and “about which [he knows] very little.” In the context of Poe’s preface to his revival of *Autography*, the joke has reference to the fact that it was “out of [Stone’s] power” to take the previous joke. Poe writes, “These tautologies and anti-climaxes were too much for the colonel, and we are ashamed to say that he committed himself by publishing in the Commercial an indignant denial of ever having indited such an epistle” (ibid.). As the architect of the “used-up” hoax it is Poe’s privilege to imply that the “tautologies and anti-climaxes” of this little epistle ought to have spoken for themselves, that they are, by definition, their own denials, but he exploits this privilege here to make Stone’s “indignant denial” of the attributions of the hoax seem a redundant response to his having redundancy falsely fathered on him.

A hoax can be retracted of course (as the *Sun* retracted Poe’s Balloon Hoax two days after it hit the press), even systematically demystified and exposed as a hoax (as was Poe’s custom), but Stone could hardly indignantly deny having written a letter falsely fathered upon him without asserting that the false attribution to him had weight and significance. In this way, Stone “*committed himself*” to the hoax of “Autography” more surely than anything Poe did in “Autography.” The subject that the real Stone appears to be “utterly unacquainted” with is being the subject of a joke. It seems “out of [his] power to comply with [the] rational and reasonable request” to, like Channing, take the joke “in good part.” While the “W. L. Stone” burlesqued in 1836 is made to appear somewhat frazzled (and thus it was “not to be wondered that the [...] epistle was not quietly

received on the part of him to whom it was attributed”), the characterization of Stone in 1841 is one of a man beside himself, in noisy opposition to his own self-interest. The be-mirrorment of W. L. Stone, the effect of these Stones appearing side-by-side in Poe’s 1841 preface to the revival of *Autography*, is just nuts; it reflects a “species of unmeaningness,” which in the “Chapter on Autograph” from December 1841 Poe will say “lies, like a nightmare upon [Stone’s] autograph” (GLG 19.6, 275).

In Poe’s account of the public reception of “Autography” in *Autography* both bemused belief in and “indignant denial” of the attributions of the hoax partake in the *jeu d’esprit* that is the spirit of the hoax. At the very least, the be-mirrorment of W. E. Channing and W. L. Stone attests to the fact that Poe’s later articles of *Autography* are not devoid of humorous and satirical turns even if they are not as overtly situated in a “fictional setting” as is “Autography” (Mabbott). McGill does have a point, however, that there is something decidedly “more serious” seeming about *Autography*’s revival. Poe’s earnestness is all but undeniable as he turns his readers’ attention from the past dress and public reception of *Autography* to the present “Chapter on Autography”:

The principle feature of this autograph article, although perhaps the least interesting, was that of the editorial comment upon the supposed MSS., regarding them as indicative of character. In these comments the design was never more than semi-serious. At times, too, the writer was evidently led into error or injustice through the desire of being pungent—not unfrequently sacrificing truth for the sake of a *bon-mot*. In this manner qualities were often attributed to individuals, which were not so much indicated by their hand-writing, as suggested by the spleen of the commentator. But that a strong analogy *does* generally and



naturally exist between every man's chirography and character, will be denied by none but the unreflecting. It is not our purpose, however, to enter into the *philosophy* of this subject, either in this portion of the present paper or in the abstract. What we may have to say will be introduced elsewhere, and in connection with particular MSS. The practical application of the theory will thus go hand in hand with the theory itself. (GLG 19.5, 224-225)

Poe's editorial commentary on "the supposed MSS." of the American literati, "regarding them as indicative of character," (notably, one of his signature refinements on "The Miller Correspondence") is represented here as the "principle" if not the most interesting "feature" of "Autography." Consistent with his demystifying retrospective on the composition and public reception of these articles, Poe characterizes the editorial commentary that appeared in the pages of the *Messenger* in 1836 as "never more than semi-serious." He admits that in these autographic analyses "qualities were often attributed to individuals, which were not so much indicated by their hand-writing, as suggested by the spleen of the commentator." "In fact," Poe states later in the preface, "the whole paper seemed to obey no law beyond that of whim" (ibid. 225). By contrast, he characterizes the present illustration of his "position" "that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man's chirography and character" as in earnest.

The first fold of what Poe describes as the "three-fold design" of the remodeled façade of *Autography* is this: "In the first place, seriously to illustrate our position that the mental features are indicated (with certain exceptions) by the hand-writing" (ibid.). McGill's assessment that Poe's revival of *Autography* for *Graham's* marks an

abandonment of the architecture of the hoax for “more serious attempts at criticism” is most consonant with this fold of Poe’s reuse of the “used up” hoax. However, the sliding scale of seriousness with which Poe distinguishes his early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger* from those published in *Graham’s* is put in place in precisely in order to perpetuate the *jeu d’esprit* of the “used up” hoax. He does confess to “not unfrequently sacrificing truth for the sake of a *bon-mot*” in “Autography.” Even assuming for now that such sacrifices were not made in the later series within the series (as we shall see below, they were), this concession or confession of the potential for Poe’s theory of autography to be perverted by “error or injustice,” by the “desire of being pungent,” by “the spleen of the commentator,” if it does not raise suspicion in itself for the present articles of *Autography* thus prefaced, is still of interest for the fact that this concession or confession simultaneously asserts the dormant potential of this “truth” to be seriously illustrated “in the first place.”

Then, there are two other two folds in the three-fold design of the remodeled façade of *Autography*: “secondly, to indulge in a little literary gossip; and, thirdly, to furnish our readers with a more accurate and at the same time a more general collection of the autographs of our *literati* than is to be found elsewhere. [...] The second speaks for itself. Of the third it is only necessary to say that we are confident of its interest for all lovers of literature” (ibid.). While the indulgence of “literary gossip” may speak for itself, it also seems to speak against or contravene somewhat any simple understanding of the “more serious attempts at criticism” given in *Autography*. Of course, one can take gossip seriously; in fact, four years after wrapping up his *Autography* series for *Graham’s* Poe would propose to do just that in *The Literati of New York City*. “[T]here exists,” Poe

writes in his editorial preface to that series, “a very remarkable discrepancy between the apparent public opinion of any given author’s merits and the opinion which is expressed of him orally by those who are best qualified to judge” (ER 1119). Poe was famously suspicious of a perceived tendency on the part of his fellow literary editors and critics to “puff” authors. He variously discussed reasons for this habit (the nationalistic fervor of the literary culture of the antebellum period, the author having some relation to the editor, critic, or magazine in question, etc.), but it is not the case that he saw the “orally” expressed opinions of authors in private literary circles as necessarily truer than public flattery. Indeed, private opinion is just as prone to exaggeration and distortion as public opinion: “Here [in the “conversational society in literary circles” (ER 1120)], accordingly, the quack is treated as he deserves—even a little more harshly than he deserves—by way of striking a balance” (ER 1119). There are certainly germs of the later design of *The Literati* in *Autography* (Poe’s editorial commentary on the MS. of William Leete Stone, for instance, goes on a bit about “the very remarkable difference” between Stone’s public and private reputations.), but the essential point here is that the seriousness in question in *Autography*, as in *The Literati*, is always going to be something of a task, and never a given.

As Kent Ljungquist rightly reminds us, when it comes to Poe there must remain a question of a certain facetiousness: in the subtitle of *The Literati* series, for instance, “Some Honest Opinions at Random,” or, in *Autography*, where he claims “that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character, will be denied by none but the unreflecting.” As Brett Zimmerman has pointed out, Poe is poisoning the well here: “Anyone who *did* have the audacity to challenge this

mystical (and absurd) connection between one's written signature and mental characteristics would damn himself (or herself) from the outset of the debate as 'unreflecting'" (Zimmerman 223). Still, for Poe, the theory of autography was neither as "mystical" nor as "absurd" as Zimmerman makes out. Three years after reviving *Autography* in the pages of *Graham's*, in the installment of his *Marginalia* for November 1844, Poe returns again to his theory of autography: "I am far more than half serious in all that I have ever said about manuscript, as affording indication of character" (ER 1322). "The general proposition" appears, once again, "unquestionable," but here too Poe summarizes many difficulties and flaws endemic to the theory of autography, while also using it as a pretext to make hasty and gossiping generalizations about the great many asses among his contemporaries (ER 1323). Let us resolve never to take Poe absolutely seriously, nor to take not taking him too seriously so seriously that he is rendered hardly serious at all; let us resolve to let him remain not less than more than half and not more than less than half serious, but irresolutely *semi-serious*: a neologism of Poe's in *Autography*, after all, according to Burton Pollin (cf. Pollin [1974] 36).

The rhetoric of Poe's editorial preface to *Autography's* revival has certainly been enough to assure many readers of Poe that there is a serious difference between the two series within the series. And the abandonment of the editorial vizard of Joseph A. B. C... Miller and the absence of the "rigmarole letters" attributed to the American *literati* certainly lends support to the difference as well as to the thought that *Autography's* revival is not a hoax (Harrison and McGill). However, the strange fact is, as we have shown, there is not a great deal of evidence to support the idea that the early articles of *Autography* ever had a proper hoax-effect among the American readership in the first

place. Unlike the Balloon Hoax or even “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” “Autography” seemed to be immediately recognizable as a hoax, as patently fictive or joking. In fact, the best case ever made for the hoax-effect of “Autography” is the one Poe himself makes in his editorial preface to the revival of *Autography for Graham’s*, five years after the fact. Just as we may be reasonably suspicious of this fact, perhaps we should not be wholly unsuspecting of the fact that Poe himself does so much work in *Autography* to establish this serious difference between the two series within the series. The absence of any sustained critical verification of this difference by a reader of Poe is not even so strange in itself as is the fact that such a verification would have contended with the facticity or seeming facticity, seriousness or semi-seriousness of *Autography’s* revival remaining irrevocably wedded to the hoax which is not one from 1836. The early series within the series is not just revisited and discussed but excerpted, reprinted (albeit selectively), in the later series within the series. As McGill says about Poe in *The Culture of Reprinting*, while seeming to overlook this point when it comes to *Autography*: “thinking about the ways in which Poe’s writing was affected by the culture of reprinting disrupts the stable relation of text to context by returning us to a problem that Poe himself relentlessly dramatized and theorized” (McGill 144). So if the text of *Autography’s* revival is not a hoax but represents some “more serious attempts at criticism,” then what are we to make of Poe’s contextualization of this text with the hoax from 1836? Or, if the text of “Autography” from 1836 is not, either because it never was or is no longer, a hoax, then what are we to make of Poe’s contextualization of it in the text of *Autography’s* revival from 1841 as a hoax?

These questions are most appreciable after consideration of the differences between the reception of *Autography*'s revival among the American readership in 1841-2 and its reception of "Autography" in 1836. While the first series within the series was immediately recognizable as a hoax by Poe's contemporaries, and thus (somewhat paradoxically) has become known as a hoax to subsequent generations of readers of Poe, the second series within the series was never called a hoax by Poe's contemporaries and has never been subsequently called a hoax. Yet, the reception of *Autography*'s revival, precisely for its being taken somewhat more seriously by Poe's contemporaries seemed to yield more of a proper hoax-effect than did "Autography" for the latter being a little too self-evidently a hoax. It is not our intention, however, to call "Hoax!" on *Autography*'s revival; for reasons we have previously discussed, that would do nothing but dispel the magic *Autography* wrought among the American readership, which we are trying to recapture here. Let us say, the "truth" of *Autography* (not unlike the truth of autography: The "truth" "not unfrequently sacrificed [in "Autography"] for the sake of a *bon-mot*," is it the self-same "truth" that "will be denied by none but the unreflecting"?) must always appear at least suspect for the way in which it reflects back on, re-collects, and be-mirrors the *jeu d'esprit* of *Autography*.

**November 1841:**

“Food for merriment” and “indigestible aliment,” again—Joseph Evans Snodgrass and the first reading of *Autography*—Regurgitating the design of *Autography* as “so general a sketch of American literary character”—The “talented collator”: uniquely apart, uniquely a part

Despite *Autography*'s revolution in design between its first run in the *Messenger* and its revival in *Graham's*, in many ways the public reception of Poe's enterprise in 1841 repeated its success of 1836. Before Poe's first “Chapter on Autography” was even available for public consumption, members of the editorial corps, having received their advance copies of the November number of *Graham's*, expressed interest in reprinting the article. Among them, Park Benjamin of the *New World*, who wrote to George Rex Graham requesting a loan of “the wood-blocks of the autographs”: “if you will have the goodness to comply with this request, it will spare us some expense, and it will afford us much pleasure to reciprocate by printing your table of contents and by noticing the admirable style in which your Magazine is presented to the public” (PL 344). The *New World*'s reprint of *Autography* appeared in its November 1841 issue. Not having the influence enjoyed by Benjamin and thus perhaps no accolades to promise Graham that would “reciprocate” the loan of the woodcuts, the editorial office of the New York *Evening Mail* was content with expressing a desire to reprint *Autography*: “Among the articles which interested us most was the article on autography by E. A. Poe. We wish we had the cuts, so we might transfer it” (PL 346). Writing on behalf of the *Pennsylvania Inquirer*, Robert Morris similarly singled out *Autography* as the most capital production

of the November 1841 number of *Graham's*. “The most singular, and at the same time, the most interesting article in the work, is the chapter on autographs, which present [*sic*] ‘*fac similes*’ of the signatures of about one half of the best authors of our country, with a brief critical notice of the style of each—the other half to be given in December. We predict, therefore, that the November and December numbers of this Miscellany, will be carefully treasured up by many of its readers” (PL 345). Morris’s prediction was certainly borne out in the following months, over the course of which several magazine-houses favorably recommended Poe’s revival of *Autography* to public attention and which proved a lucrative term for *Graham's*.

As was also the case for *Autography's* previous run in the *Messenger*, in spite of drawing several brief, laudable reviews or “puffs,” the vast majority of Poe’s audience did not venture any specific remarks as to the value or meaning of *Autography* in its remodeled form. These were not “critical notices” in the sense of the term embraced by Poe. *Autography* was in demand yet again, and yet, again, it seemingly demanded no critical scrutiny. Jesse Erskine Dow, writing for the *Index* out of Washington, D.C., summed up the matter in terms evocative of the scene of public consumption that characterized the public reception of Poe’s enterprise in 1836. “Mr. Poe, the talented critic of the Magazine, gives us a new chapter of wonders. He has gathered together a goodly list of autographs of authors, male and female, and served them up with vinegar and sweet sauce to be rolled upon the tongue of memory for no inconsiderable portion of time” (PL 346). Dow’s figuration of the “food for merriment” enjoyed by the public in *Autography's* revival signals the crucial difference between its public reception and the scene of public consumption characteristic of Poe’s 1836 articles of *Autography*. In



contrast to the easy digestibility of the “literary treat” that appeared in the pages of the *Messenger*, here the public consumption of Poe’s enterprise appears partial, incomplete: “to be rolled upon the tongue of memory for no inconsiderable portion of time.” “[I]ndigestible aliment,” perhaps? For some among the American readership, the delicate infusion of nutgalls and sugar in the remodeled façade of *Autography* was definitely a bit harder to swallow.

Reviewing Poe’s “Chapter on Autography” in his capacity as editor of the *Saturday Visitor* in November 1841, Joseph Evans Snodgrass, while making respectful deference to the undeniable popularity of Poe’s enterprise, took the occasion to pronounce his utter lack of faith in “the notion of *character*” presumed by Poe’s theory of autography.

[T]he *sixty-eight autographs*, and the multiplicity of information given by Mr. Poe, relating to the whereabouts, employments, and qualities of American writers, will issue a large sale of this issue. They are selling rapidly already. The whole article on autographs, has been interesting, and excels anything of the kind yet attempted. No pen but Mr. P.’s, could probably have afforded so general a sketch of American literary character. We say all this, while having no faith in the notion of *character* being denoted by the scratchings of an author! The talented collator is carried away with an innocent belief of the science of autography. (PL 351)

Snodgrass would have had to look no further than the autographic analysis of his own MS. collected in the November 1841 “Chapter on Autography” to discern the flawed sort of scientificity endemic to Poe’s theory and practice of autography. After some brief remarks on Snodgrass’s “whereabouts, employments, and qualities” (out of which only

perhaps the latter does not appear woefully out-of-date), Poe writes the following with regard to his handwriting: “His chirography is bad—stiff, sprawling, and illegible, with frequent corrections and interlineations, evincing inactivity not less than fastidiousness. The signature betrays a meretricious love of effect” (GLG 19.6, 13). Poe’s method in *Autography* is in some instances inductive; given certain facts about a writer’s MS., e.g. Snodgrass’s “frequent corrections and interlineations,” he infers characteristics or mere habits of the writer to whom they belong, e.g. Snodgrass is said to be prone to periodic “inactivity” and “fastidiousness” when writing. While conclusions such as these appear at least logical, they are hardly scientific. The “corrections and interlineations” of the MS. before Poe could be mere anomalies. Perhaps Snodgrass was particularly tired when writing the letter and/or in a desperate hurry. In fact, Poe repeatedly acknowledges in *Autography* that such contingencies undermine the indication of character in a given MS., as he also does in his later note on autography in *Marginalia*. Then, some other of his observations in *Autography* appear purely subjective, or a matter of mere opinion; e.g., Snodgrass’s “stiff, sprawling, and illegible” hand may appear quite readable and even elegant to another, less discriminating observer. Ultimately, measured against the strictures of scientificity, autography is at best a speculative “pseudo-science.” Even if one could agree with Poe’s assessment that Snodgrass’s signature “betrays a meretricious love of effect,” it is not immediately clear what precisely is found wanting in the wantonness of his hand.

Perhaps accordingly, then, Snodgrass does not hesitate to nit-pick what Poe serves up in *Autography*, taking the opportunity in the span of a short review to declare his utter lack of faith in a “notion of *character* [...] denoted by the scratchings of an author.” The

fact that Snodgrass wants to write off the thought underwriting the bulk of Poe's work in *Autography* is all the more interesting for the fact that his review is generally complimentary. Indeed in the absence of his pronounced lack of faith in Poe's theory of autography, Snodgrass's remarks here would easily qualify as a "puff," as it shows tell-tale signs of this genre of review: remarking the rapid sale of the magazine in which Poe's "Chapter on Autography" appeared, as if the article's popularity and commercial success necessarily signal a more general and less calculable value, and consolidating the overall importance of the work and its author in one brief, unqualified abstraction: "No pen but Mr. P.'s, could probably have afforded so general a sketch of American literary character." Snodgrass's review of *Autography* purports, on the one hand, that Poe is simply "carried away" and that a reader need not share in his own "innocent belief in the science of autography." On the other hand, in spite of this pardonable deficiency, *Autography* is said to achieve a "general sketch [...] of American literary character," moreover, one that ("probably") could have been "afforded" by "[n]o pen but Mr. P.'s." Thus Snodgrass draws a relation (more precisely, the possibility of a relation) between signature and character precisely analogous to the "strong analogy" repeatedly illustrated in *Autography*, only here Poe's signature is said to indicate not his own individual character but "American literary character" in general.

We may well wonder to what extent this coalescence of signature and character signals a necessary relation or rather is contingent on either the signature or the character in question or some combination of the two: Does *Autography* afford "so general a sketch of American literary character" merely because it was written by Poe or by virtue of its own unique design? Would every work of Poe's have an equal capacity to afford "so

general a sketch of American literary character” merely by virtue of the presence of his signature? If so, how would we account for the much rehearsed “problem of Poe” in American literary history, the interrogation of his individual, national character or “American-ness” (to say nothing of similar interrogations of his personal character) resumed by every generation of readers of Poe? If not, what might this mean for how we understand *Autography*’s relation to Poe’s signature? If taken as a singular performance of an already singular signature, *Autography* would expose a contingency within the relation of Poe’s signature to “American literary character” in general, his signature indicating this national literary character with more or less fidelity owing to what? content? form? genre? style? Then, what of this “American literary character” itself? Does *Autography*’s “general [...] sketch” of this national literary character hold true for all readers at all times? Does not *Autography*’s relative anonymity since its earliest appearances in print precisely illustrate that national literary character itself is contingent on a flux of circumstance that cannot be fixed, made whole, or delimited by any one particular “sketch,” design or impression?

If for no other reason than that all of these troubling questions follow from a vague generalization of *Autography*’s relevance and influence that is immediately followed by a declared lack of faith in the “notion of *character*” evidently at stake in *Autography*, we might suspect that there is some hocus pocus at work here. Poe is, according to Snodgrass, merely “carried away” with a “notion of *character* [...] denoted by the scratchings of an author,” “carried away,” that is, with the very theory of autography in *Autography*, which for all that does not fail to afford a “general [...] sketch of American literary character.” Thus, as if by a sort of alchemy, while experimenting

with an utterly coarse concept of character, Poe achieves a sketch of character arguably greater and more precious—certainly more so than any one of the individual autographical analyses collected in *Autography*, perhaps even more so than all of them taken together. Then, there is also something magical about the fact that Snodgrass’s articulation of the relevance and influence of *Autography* concerns precisely the (general, natural, and rational) relation of two things expressly underscored by Poe in his brief remarks on the theory of autography and repeatedly illustrated by the very appearance of *Autography* on the page or screen: namely, that between signature and character.

Another mysterious regurgitation of the very design of *Autography*—its singular content, form, genre, and style—in a review which declares an utter lack of faith in the “notion of *character*” at stake in *Autography* appears in Snodgrass’s remark on Poe’s own MS: “His own MS., being exceedingly neat and unvaried, refutes his theory—for a more excentric genius cannot be found in a search of half a dozen months” (ibid.). Snodgrass purports to refute Poe’s theory of autography here, noting characteristics of Poe’s handwriting supposedly at odds with his character; yet, as we shall see repeatedly in Part III: “The Signature-Architecture of Autography,” this is precisely the sort of remark that one finds in *Autography*, where at every turn Poe admits exceptions to, exemptions from, and conditions of that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character.” How to refute a theory that not just anticipates all sorts of refutations of it but at every turn refutes itself? Such a question neither invalidates nor forecloses Snodgrass’s remark on Poe’s MS., his turning the theory of autography on the autographer; rather such a question may be seen as the very impetus of this ambivalent gesture. After all, in refuting Poe’s theory of autography

Snodgrass means precisely to pay him a compliment, to affirm Poe's unique genius (supposedly at odds with his "exceedingly neat and unvaried" MS.: more autography even just here). Even the character of the character supposed by Snodgrass to be indiscernible in Poe's MS. is absolutely suggested by the design of *Autography*. The characterization of Poe as an "excentric genius" could have no better illustration than the titular status of his own facsimile signature as it appears in *Autography*, in precisely the installment of the series that Snodgrass is reviewing here: boldly heading the collection of autographs but separate from it, removed from the assemblage of "*the most noted among the living literati of the country*" but still just below the title "A Chapter on Autography": uniquely apart, uniquely a part.

Then, more remarkably still, Snodgrass's bemused belief—his repeatedly engaging Poe's notion of autography to dismiss it—all these mysterious regurgitations of the design of *Autography* in one of the few reviews which tried to at least establish some degree of critical distance and perspective on what Poe was up to in *Autography* was soon to be followed by a most "indignant denial" of same from an anonymous reviewer writing out of Boston. Like Poe, the author of this review would later achieve distinction as one of the most prolific and respected literary critics of his day, and the review itself is one of the most comprehensive if venomous commentaries ever written about *Autography*. Moreover, *Autography* occasioned the only remarks our anonymous reviewer ever ventured about Poe in Poe's lifetime, and what he would say about Poe after his death would faintly echo the unfavorable impression of him suggested by *Autography*. Poe wrote about our anonymous reviewer only once, too, but he did so with some respect: "Our most analytic, if not altogether our best critic (Mr. [Anonymous]),

perhaps, expected,) is [...]” (ER 1039). Poe’s complimentary account of Mr. Anonymous’s critical prowess and correctness (recall that for Poe “the analytic” is to be appreciated), years before that reputation solidified on a national level, was only published after Poe’s death but written well after their wrangle over *Autography*. We will not be able to keep the secret of the name for but another moment. Let us just say that between Snodgrass’s bemused belief and Mr. Anonymous’s “indignant denial” these are the only two reviews of *Autography* from Poe’s contemporaries that do not qualify as “puffs.” Two (and only two) critical reviews: one penned in bemused belief in the other in “indignant denial” of *Autography*. Do they not seem to have been suggested by Poe’s treatment of the “double audience” of the hoax in the preface to *Autography*’s revival, as if be-mirroring the be-mirroring of W. E. Channing and W. L. Stone? Can it be mere coincidence, moreover, that the one “in on it” is one in *Autography* and the one “out of it” is one out of *Autography*?

### **December 1841:**

*Autography* 2.2—Edwin Percy Whipple’s “indignant denial” of *Autography*—  
 “Dogmatism, egotism, and other *isms* equally offensive”—Whipple’s quarantine and the impossible immunity to *Autography*—The *Autography* wrangle—The shell-game of *Autography* and an innocent belief in autographs—The who and the what of the literary circle of *Autography*

Edwin Percy Whipple was more deeply impressed than anyone by the performance of Poe’s titular signature in *Autography*, but his review for the December

1841 number of the *Boston Notion* (a reprint from the same magazine-house's daily edition, the *Boston Daily Times*) pronounced a forceful dissention among a readership that largely acclaimed Poe's enterprise. From the start Whipple mocks the popularity of *Autography*, leaving apparently little hope for any other potentially redeeming quality of the series.

The last number of Graham's Gentlemen's Magazine contains a chapter on autography, by Edgar A. Poe. As all the world, however, is probably aware of this fact, we must beg the pardon of that large portion of it which it is presumed reads the Times, for tacitly taking it for granted that they are ignorant of so important an intellectual phenomenon. In this "chapter" facsimiles of the autographs of many great and small American authors are given, and an attempt is made to trace a connection between their mental character and the character of the chirography—damnation being dealt out liberally to all whose penmanship displays no genius, and praise awarded to those whose hand-writing pleases the said Mr. Poe. (Gerber 111)

There is no doubt a deal of personal enmity leveled at Poe in Whipple's criticism of *Autography*. The subjective basis for Poe's inferences of character from handwriting, which Snodgrass humors to an extent, registers for Whipple as a sort of wildly perverse narcissism saturating every cell of *Autography*: "It is certainly a colossal [*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" (ibid. 111-112, emphasis added). Interrogating by what god-given right or "merit" of his own Poe is qualified to issue judgments about "the most prominent of American authors"—"Whence



derived he this absolute power? Has he by any merit of his own qualified himself to be the Sylla of the Republic of Letters? What credentials from Apollo does he show to sustain his decisions?”—Whipple finds that “[t]hese questions give back echoes, not replies” (ibid. 112). Poe ultimately lacks the “mental constitution” that could substantiate his work in *Autography*: “Indeed this gentleman is singularly disqualified for a general critic. 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” (ibid.). Whipple even sneaks in a veiled reference to Poe’s notorious bouts of drunkenness in dubbing him “the Sylla of the Republic of Letters.”

This *ad hominem* attempt to discredit *Autography* by denigrating Poe is, for Whipple, precisely to the point. *Autography*, as one interpretation of the title could suggest, is just Poe self-writing. The “opinions” registered about the “great and small American authors” whose signatures are printed in facsimile and handwriting analyzed over the course of the series reveal less about these individual characters than they do about Poe and “the manner his own particular feelings are affected.” Whipple, like Snodgrass, saw Poe to be merely “carried away” with his own interests in *Autography*; however, Whipple was unwilling to believe that in this Poe was at all “innocent.” What is pitched as so many attempts to afford a sketch of character from a sample of handwriting are really more like so many self-portraits of Poe: caricatures that reveal more about the character of the person composing the sketch than even the appearance of his subjects. This is the source of Whipple’s incredulity toward the “intellectual phenomenon” of *Autography*: the widespread popularity of the series did not speak to the public’s

susceptibility to “literary gossip” or even to Poe’s ideas as much as it spoke to their susceptibility to the person of Poe.

Just to be sure, however, Whipple is no less dismissive of the very premise of *Autography* than he is of Poe. He writes, “It is bad enough for an author to be dogmatically condemned by the phrenologist or physiognomist for the shape of his head, or expression of his face, but to carry the same ‘spirit of enquiry’ into his pot hooks and trammels, is a refinement of the art of tormenting” (ibid. 111). Like Snodgrass, Whipple completely writes off Poe’s working theory of autography that “a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and his character”; both appear unmoved by a notion of “character” indicated by the mere “scratchings of an author.” Although Poe’s plan to sketch the character of over one hundred of the American *litterati* by analyzing their handwriting certainly seems at odds with Whipple’s notion of character, it is not certain that this enterprise alone would have even warranted review. Whipple seems satisfied that the ineffectual nature of Poe’s declared aims in *Autography* is self-evident enough, given its indebtedness to the pseudo-scientific discourses of physiognomy and phrenology. He never even mentions the analogy between handwriting and character after the first paragraph of his review.

What really troubles Whipple is the enterprise for which Poe’s theory and practice of autography serves as a sort of pretext or alibi. Beneath the mask of the autographer’s impudent “dogmatism” he uncovers yet another more insidious pose, that of a “literary dictator” “dogmatically deciding upon the merits of a whole literature” (ibid. 112). “Such a task as that,” Whipple goes on, “could hardly be well performed by a man of infinitely more catholic spirit and correct taste, than nature has seen fit to bestow on Mr. Edgar A.

Poe” (ibid.). For Whipple, the “general critic” who could legitimately and faithfully undertake the task of “deciding upon the merits of a whole literature” has a moral imperative to maintain an “impersonal” appreciation for all manner of literary work: an imperative “morally impossible” for Poe to obey, “as by his mental constitution he can only appreciate a certain kind of literature” (ibid.). Whipple does not specify which kind of literature is the one (the only one) that Poe can appreciate, and it is ultimately unclear whether the fatal evidence against his pretensions as a “general critic”—or, rather, in support of the alleged “impertinence” of his undertaking a task for which he is so “singularly disqualified”—is the “style and manner” of his own literary productions or that of his criticisms themselves. Whipple’s point may be that the difficulty we encounter in trying to clearly distinguish between the two is what proves that Poe’s is always a pose.

What is clear is that, for Whipple, *Autography* should not be credited with any significance beyond the starved regions of Poe’s “egotism” (ibid. 111). In the early stages of his review (which is, you may have guessed by now, quite lengthy compared to those of his contemporaries), Whipple’s disgust on this score leads him to assert *Autography*’s unsuitability for its own print context. “In the article which we have under consideration, there are manifested many qualities of disposition which reflect little credit upon the author, and which are certainly out of place in a ‘Gentleman’s Magazine.’ We refer to the dogmatism, egotism, and other *isms* equally offensive, from which a good portion of the production appears to spring” (ibid.). This one passage embraces all the difficulties of Whipple’s review of *Autography*. On the one hand, the criticism is plainly guided by the notion that the only character faithfully illustrated in *Autography* is that of Edgar A. Poe

and that the “qualities of disposition” thus “manifested” — “the dogmatism, egotism, and other *isms* equally offensive” — “reflect little credit upon the author.” On the other hand, the criticism also repeatedly attests to the impossibility of confining this deplorable character to the pages of *Autography* or even to Poe himself, just as here it is said to violate, pervert, or infect the sanctity of its context in a “[Lady’s and] Gentleman’s Magazine.” *Autography* is “out of place” precisely in its place, takes its own proper context out of context. The character of Whipple’s “indignant denial” of *Autography* is informed by a double proposition, two coincident and incommensurate positions: 1) that *Autography* only has reference to the character of Poe, and 2) that this character infects or perverts everything and everyone connected with it.

Whipple’s is torn, then, when it comes to the undeniable popularity of *Autography*. From the opening lines of his review and at nearly every turn, his relentless character-attack on Poe proceeds via a determination to circumscribe the import of *Autography* within the narrow confines of an impertinent “egotism.” It is as though Whipple is resolved to quarantine the infectious perversity of *Autography*, and it is thus crucial that the source of this perversity is Poe himself, that the pathology of the “intellectual phenomenon” of *Autography* has its origin in Poe’s own perverse character and does not arise from any necessary relation of the public to Poe or, what would be worse (just imagine!), from the public itself. At once point in the review Whipple exploits the geographic remoteness of New Zealand from the United States (indeed, a supposed cultural, moral, and spiritual remoteness) as if to maroon Poe as an island unto himself, his “opinions,” “particular feelings,” personal “likes and dislikes” arriving on the American scene as though from across a vast, oceanic space by way of an “MS. found in

a bottle”: “It would seem morally impossible for him to give a sensible criticism on any form of literature, or manner of composition, which clashes with his own style and manner of thinking.— We would as soon go to a New Zealander for correct views of Christianity as to Mr. Poe for correct criticism on certain authors” (ibid. 112).

On the other hand, Whipple’s quarantine of the infectious perversity of *Autography* cannot apply just to Poe. He is all too painfully aware of the fact that a successful quarantine depends on drawing a line that establishes and requires to be maintained not one but at least two circles: (at least) one for the infected and infectious and (at least) one for the uninfected. It is no mere coincidence that Whipple’s review commences not just by sarcastically avowing-denying *Autography*’s popular influence but also by begging the pardon of his audience (“that large portion of [the world] which it is presumed reads the Times”) for “tacitly taking it for granted that they are ignorant of so important an intellectual phenomenon” as *Autography*. Whipple may indeed be “taking it for granted” that his audience is “ignorant of so important an intellectual phenomenon” as *Autography*, if only in the sense that every review to some extent presumes its audience’s ignorance of the work reviewed, as the very pretext or precondition of the genre of the review, but he is certainly not doing so “tacitly,” silently or even quietly. Rather he declares it outright, from the very beginning, as if setting the tone of the criticism to follow.

It is as though Whipple can only begin his review by preparing a specific context for it, projecting an audience for it that will only be introduced to and affected by *Autography* through the medium of the review itself, which designs at nearly every turn to denigrate Poe and diminish the influence of *Autography*. The “affinity” between the

two gestures in the opening of Whipple's review—on the one hand, mocking the undeniable popularity of Poe's enterprise, admitting the influence of *Autography* among the American readership to dismiss it, indeed, exaggerating it to diminish it; on the other hand, taking it for granted that the audience of his review is ignorant of "so important an intellectual phenomenon" (which, of course, in keeping with the sarcastic tone in which these lines are penned, we understand to mean, "ignorant of so [unimportant, minor, or irrelevant] an [un-intellectual, irrational, or silly] [anticlimax, nonevent, or chimera]")—may thus be understood in the term's properly biological sense, as the path of attraction from antigen to antibody, the complex origin of an immunity. He means to review *Autography* in such a way that its baleful influence is at least mitigated, perhaps even inoculated. However, this also means that there will already have been an influence of *Autography*, not just on the reviewer himself (whatever prompted Whipple to review *Autography* in the first place, what was it by the way?) and on the American readership more generally but on the "ignorant" audience to which the review is addressed. By the time his audience reached the second sentence of his review it would have found itself anticipated, prejudged by one of what is in fact a double audiences projected by Whipple: on the one hand, we have that audience already acquainted with *Autography* (being perhaps readers of the times in addition to, perhaps even prior to or irrespective of, their being readers of the *Times*), those whose pardon he begs for taking its ignorance for granted; on the other hand, that audience indeed ignorant of *Autography*, which might have found itself a bit affronted by his presumption that it should have already been acquainted with *Autography* and only thereby deserving of his begging their pardon. For both these audiences projected by the review, however, just prior to the moment in which

Whipple would have either succeeded at or failed to anticipate them, the influence of *Autography* will have been undeniable, a bare fact, from the very beginning: “The last number of Graham’s Gentlemen’s Magazine contains a chapter on autography, by Edgar A. Poe.” Immunity from this bare fact comes a sentence too late. Whipple does deign to review *Autography*, after all.

But why? Whipple’s disgust with *Autography* is so comprehensive and profound that it is hard to *tell* what (if anything) he finds redeemable about Poe’s enterprise; he certainly never directly compliments or valorizes anything about it. Yet, in a more lucid moment, later in the review, Whipple relaxes somewhat his determination to quarantine the infectious perversity of character in *Autography*. He concedes that Poe is “a man,” a member of a certain “species,” moreover, an inhabitant of the United States—in short, a character with a context—whose “influence” perhaps cannot be so forcibly marooned as though to a desert island; here he simply “[puts] it to Mr. Poe” to modify his aberrant “opinions,” “particular feelings,” personal “likes and dislikes,” as they are evidently forced on public credulity in *Autography*: “Now we would put it to Mr. Poe, as a man who has no cureless hatred for his species, if he can have the heart to use what influence he may have to deprive the people of these United States, already sufficiently afflicted with many troubles, of their best authors, and substitute in their place the ‘heaven-born’ geniuses which he is endeavoring to lift to the pinnacles of fame” (ibid.). This meager concession—that Poe’s “hatred for his species” is not “cureless,” that his perversity of character is not a necessary but rather a conditional feature of his humanity<sup>109</sup>—is as

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<sup>109</sup> In a similar if somewhat opposite vein, Whipple would later write of Poe: “The immediate recognition as positive additions to our literature of such poems as ‘The Raven,’ ‘Annabel Lee,’ and ‘The Bells,’ and of such prose stories as ‘The Gold Bug,’ ‘The Purloined Letter,’ ‘The

much a request or plea for Poe to second-guess his presumptuous decisions as to who deserves to be ranked among “*the most noted among the living literati of the country*” (as Poe puts the matter in *Autography*) as it is a polite suggestion for how Poe may go about curing his “hatred for his species.” It is a rare moment in which Whipple intimates that there might be something salvageable about the utter wreck of *Autography*. Before venturing a speculation as to what about *Autography* brings even its most vehement critic under its spell, we will do well to reflect that Poe and *Autography* were not without their defenders from what Whipple himself would come to refer to as his “rather savage article on [Poe’s] impertinence” (ibid. 110).

John S. Du Solle, editor of the *Spirit of the Times* out of Philadelphia, issued a defense of *Autography* in which he teased that Whipple was just in a rage over his own autograph not appearing among the some one hundred and nine autographs gathered in the November and December numbers of *Graham’s*, calling him an “afflicted genius” (cf. Du Solle in PL 356, and Whipple in Ljungquist [1992] 56-57). Then, on 23 December another defense of *Autography* and of Poe appeared in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* making an elaborate case that Poe had long since been an object of persecution for the editorial office of the Boston *Times* and *Notion*. In addition to salvaging this latter article itself from anonymity, Kent Ljungquist has offered a persuasive argument that Poe himself either ghostwrote the piece on “Mr. Poe’s *Autography*” or had a hand in furnishing the bulk of its (mis)information (cf. Ljungquist [1992] 51-63). One possible trace of Poe’s pen in this article not mentioned by Ljungquist can be discerned in one of the less fact-based arguments advanced in *Ledger*,

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Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’ indicates that the public was not responsible for the misfortunes of his life” (Whipple [1886] 86).



which casts Whipple in almost precisely the same mold as was W. L. Stone for his “indignant denial” of Poe’s early experiments in autography for the *Messenger* in 1836. Whipple, it is said, just cannot take a joke, or rather “takes in sober earnest what every body else but [himself] has understood to be at least half in jest—we mean the idea of deducing character from penmanship” (Ljungquist [1992] 54).

The defense mounted by Du Solle and the unsigned article from the *Ledger* (which Whipple recognized at once and rightly as an advertisement: a spot paid for by the writer(s) of the piece<sup>110</sup>), were not left unchallenged. Whipple retorted that Du Solle’s rush to come to the aid of Poe, especially in defense of his “critical *impartiality*,” was itself partial since Du Solle had been favorably written up in *Autography*: “It is very natural that the *Spirit of the Times* should contend for the critical infallibility of Mr. Poe, as its own reputation rests upon the acknowledgment” (ibid. 57). Du Solle’s retort would have to wait until the New Year. In the *Spirit of the Times* for January 10, 1842, he countered that the “few words of commendation” he received in *Autography* “(which assuredly do not amount to much, and would seem insufficient to drive any man mad through vanity)” were hardly his “*motive* in this matter,” and puts to Whipple what is to our mind a fair question: “But, we may well ask—is it permitted to *no one* of the numerous individuals who happen to have been favorably noticed in these articles, to rebut the malignant and ignorant slanders of the ‘Times,’ lest, peradventure, that print should accuse him of interested motive?” (PL 357). We say this question is fair without entirely agreeing with Du Solle’s characterization of Whipple’s review as “malignant,” “ignorant,” and slanderous. As was pointed out by almost every party to the wrangle over

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Ljungquist [1992] 56 and PL 367.

*Autography* during the Holiday Season of 1841-1842, the nature of the opinions being contested here was a matter of opinion. Whipple was certainly ungenial, even “savage” to Poe, but it is the generally principled rather than “ignorant” character of Whipple’s criticism giving it interest.

Whipple’s principles do seem to falter, however, at one point in his review of *Autography* and in a fashion that echoes the question put to him by Du Solle a month later. In one of the rare, brief lapses in his character-attack on Poe, Whipple vents some spleen on some of the “authors themselves” represented in *Autography*: “—And for some of the authors themselves, whom we take to be modest men,—at last [*sic*] we have seen nothing in their writings likely to make sensible men vain—must it not be disagreeable to them to be lifted to such painful eminence?” (Gerber 112). Du Solle asks the fair question of whether or not anyone “favorably noticed” in *Autography* can come to Poe’s defense without their reasons for doing so being faulted in advance by virtue of their having been “favorably noticed” in *Autography*, but Whipple’s question here goes even farther afield, faulting the audience that was also object of *Autography*. He suggests that those authors not even “favorably noticed” but just included in *Autography* (of course, this remark pertains only to those who by Whipple’s count do not deserve to be ranked among “the most prominent of American authors”) should feel ashamed for having been “lifted [by Poe!] to such painful eminence,” that this “eminence” ought to be “painful” for them in the first place because they do not deserve to be “placed among the glorious company of authors who glitter in the ‘Chapter on Autography’” (that’s Whipple talking) (Ljungquist [1992] 58). Whipple seems to verge on paranoia—as if, just by virtue of someone’s appearance in *Autography*, he or she is “in on it” and ought to have a share in the

disagreeableness of Poe's "colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence." We would suggest that nowhere than in this most concerted effort on the part of any one of Poe's contemporaries to de-legitimize *Autography*, to expose its utter unmeaningness is more significance and weight afforded Poe's enterprise. Nowhere than in the place where we might expect to be least likely to find a hoax-effect of *Autography*—in the words of the great dissenter from the very general public consensus about the "food for merriment" to be had in it—is there more evidence of a hoax-effect of *Autography*, not just when it comes to Poe's later articles of *Autography* but for both series in the series.

As we have seen, in nearly every case the first readers of *Autography* were not readers at all but were more in the way of customers, the vast majority of whom confined themselves to favorably recommending the "food for merriment" to be had in it to public taste. By contrast, Whipple seems so violently disgusted with *Autography* as to almost compensate the seemingly easy digestibility of Poe's enterprise, as if he had taken it upon himself to vomit out what had been so unwittingly swallowed up by the rest of his fellows. At the same time, like Snodgrass, Whipple shows how difficult it was for Poe's contemporaries to maintain critical distance from *Autography*. Even in Whipple's review there seems to be some hocus-pocus at work. "We are favored with the autographs of men of inferior talent," he writes, "while we look in vain for some of the most prominent authors" (Gerber 112). If *Autography* is such "a colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence," why then does Whipple expect to find his own "enlarged principles of taste" reflected in it? If Poe so utterly perverts the concepts of literary talent and reputation in his tasteless assemblage of "*the most noted among the living literati of the country*," why then is Whipple looking there for his own personal Parnassus in the first place, knowing his

search to be “in vain”? In that one more lucid moment in his review, briefly discussed above, the magic of *Autography* seems all but undeniable: “Now we would put it to Mr. Poe, as a man who has no cureless hatred for his species, if he can have the heart to deprive the people of the United States, already sufficiently afflicted with many troubles, of their best authors, and substitute in their place the ‘heaven-born’ geniuses which he is endeavoring to lift to the pinnacles of fame.” Implicit in this request or plea is that Poe was not just “endeavoring to lift to the pinnacles of fame” the authors included in *Autography* but actually doing so. The absence from *Autography* of the “best authors” in the United States is a deprivation for “the people of the United States, already sufficiently afflicted with many troubles.”

So what does Whipple find redeemable about *Autography*, what makes it warrant review in the first place? The solution to this mystery is to be sought in the direction of who or what Whipple perceives as the “authors themselves” (whether “the most prominent” or “best authors” or the “men of inferior talent”) gathered in *Autography*, authors apart from Poe, that is. If Poe’s individual autographic analyses are purely subjective, if “[h]e does not [...] form his opinions on enlarged principles of taste, but judges of an author by the manner his own particular feelings are affected,” then it surely cannot be by virtue of these unsustainable “opinions” that the authors they are ostensibly about are included in *Autography*.<sup>111</sup> In the editorial commentary of *Autography* we

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<sup>111</sup> Consider *The Literati of New York City*; the controversy surrounding this later series of Poe’s makes the wrangle over *Autography* between December 1841 and January 1842 seem almost mundane by comparison. However, in all the writs, suits and counter-suits that followed in the wake of Poe’s vituperative character-sketch of Thomas Dunn English and the slanderous character-sketch of Poe English issued in response, it never would have occurred to anyone that English’s “appearance” in *The Literati* made him in any way culpable in what Poe was up to there. Far from being “in on it,” from the very beginning, English was not even plaintiff or defendant but evidence in the legal battle Poe waged against the editors and publishers who were

remain, according to Whipple, within those starved regions of Poe's "egotism." It seems the only thing that would *tell* who is in or who is out of *Autography*, are the autographs themselves; all the regrettable deprivations, substitutions, or omissions Whipple remarks in *Autography* hinge on an investment in these autographs as a material presence of the "authors themselves." Does this investment on Whipple's part not precisely confirm, indeed, over-invest in the notion of autography by which Poe finds himself "confident of its interest for all lovers of literature": "Next to the person of a distinguished man-of-letters, we desire to see his portrait—next to his portrait, his autograph. In the latter, especially, there is something which seems to bring him before us in his true idiosyncrasy—in his character of *scribe*" (GLG 19.5, 225)? This curious, wondrous "something" in an autograph, for Whipple, does not bring "the distinguished man-of-letters [...] before us in his true idiosyncrasy—in his character of *scribe*"; such a "spirit of enquiry" is but "a refinement of the art of tormenting" already turning itself around in the popular discourses of phrenology and physiognomy. For Whipple, this curious, wondrous "something" just brings us "the distinguished man-of-letters" himself, in his

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ultimately found guilty of libel for having printed English's piece on Poe and *The Literati*. The only possible reason Whipple might have for faulting the people who "appear" in *Autography* would be that he supposed them all to have been really "in on it," that Poe had written to all these persons individually, described his intentions for *Autography*, and requested their autographs. Though Poe is known to have corresponded with some people to gather his collection of autographs for *Graham's*—among them, H. Hastings Weld, Charles J. Peterson, and Frederick W. Thomas—in every case in which Poe is known to have done so, he wrote to persons he thought could afford him multiple autographs of the American *literati*. Weld, Peterson, and Thomas all had their autographs appear in *Autography*, but through them it is possible that Poe obtained the autographs of Rufus Dawes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Fenno Hoffman, Richard Adams Locke, James Russell Lowell, Charles Sprague, John Greenleaf Whittier... and more from more sources no doubt unknown, unknowable. For Poe's correspondence with Horatio Hastings Weld from August 1841 cf., Ostrom 1:179-180; for his correspondence with F. W. Thomas cf., PL 342-343; for the Charles J. Peterson connection cf. Peterson to Lowell, PL 344-345.

actual “person.”<sup>112</sup> Otherwise, why complain about who is in and who is out of *Autography*?

We must allow Whipple his pronounced lack of faith in Poe’s theory of autography; in fact, like Snodgrass, his refusal unwittingly to swallow what Poe serves up in *Autography* is what makes him one of the first readers of this most unread of works. However, while bemoaning Poe’s belief in the “science” or “pseudo-science” of autography, whether as “innocent” or depraved and torturous, Snodgrass and Whipple both in their own unique ways register an innocent belief in autographs. For his part, Poe certainly plays up the magical aura of the autograph in his editorial preface to *Autography*’s revival, as having that certain special “something which seems to bring [the distinguished man-of-letters] before us in his true idiosyncrasy.” However, for Poe, the autographs collected in *Autography* are ultimately only exemplary samples of the handwriting of the *literati* more generally. In fact, Poe regularly remarks in *Autography* how a given signature either does or does not conform to a “general hand,” it being in the latter that one must search out indications of the character writer in question. In other words, the exemplarity of a signature is no so much a given for Poe as it is a task, an open question for his theory and practice of autography: another point which will be considered in greater detail in Part III: “The Signature-Architecture of *Autography*.”

This finer point of Poe’s theory and practice of autography is only evident, however, in the individual editorial commentaries appended to each autograph in *Autography*, the broken running commentary that is both theory and practice of autography, which Poe reflects back on as the “principal feature” of his early articles of

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<sup>112</sup> For “character” as “the expression, and the only expression, of the man,—the person,” cf. Whipple, “Character,” *Character and Characteristic Men*, p. 3.

*Autography* for the *Messenger* and offers refinements on for the present. His renewed claims to take this “feature” more seriously in his revival of the series for *Graham’s*— “[i]n the first place, seriously to illustrate [his] position that the mental features are indicated (with certain exceptions) by the handwriting”— suggests that the theory and practice of autography may figure principally in the later articles as well, at least as one of those three-folds of the “three-fold” design of the remodeled façade of *Autography*. Then, in that unsigned advertisement from the Philadelphia *Ledger* Ljungquist attributes to Poe, it is put forward that Whipple “takes in sober earnest what every body else but [himself] has understood to be at least half in jest— we mean the idea of deducing character from penmanship.” Odd thing is, this is not a very faithful characterization of Whipple’s criticism of *Autography*. Far from taking in “sober earnest” “the idea of deducing character from penmanship”—or, in the terms of *Autography*, that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character”— Whipple dismisses “the idea” outright, right out of the blocks and says nothing more about “the idea.” What Whipple “takes in sober earnest” is the collection of autographs, as if they truly succeeded in conjuring the “authors themselves,” in person. It is perhaps another ghost-signature of Poe’s in the paid-for advertisement on “Mr. Poe’s Autography” from the Philadelphia *Ledger* that Whipple is not disabused of this notion, though the anonymous writer comes close: “It charges Mr. P., also, with attempting to assume a censorship over all American literature. How a man can *attempt to assume* a censorship of this kind, we are at a loss to understand” (Ljungquist [1992] 54). We will consider the issue of Poe’s tenuous place in relation to the literary circle of *Autography* in detail below, where we will see how Poe himself negotiates Whipple’s charge that

*Autography*'s "sins of commission" were "nearly overbalanced by the sins of omission" (Gerber 112) and will have to negotiate for ourselves the overtly politicized dimensions of the *Autography* wrangle, where the stakes will appear to have been raised on what sometimes seem just funny little moments that passed.

For instance, when John S. Du Solle repeats his *bon mot* about Whipple not being in *Autography*, what makes it funny the second time, the third time, the fourth time...

The question then, upon this point, resolves itself into a nut-shell. It is nothing more than opinion against opinion—Mr. Poe against the "Times." Now Mr. Poe is well known and appreciated. At all events, he is no anonymous and skulking defamer. The editor of the "Boston Times"! Who, in the name of Beelzebub, *is* the editor of the "Boston Times"? Who, or what, even is the "Boston Times" itself?—and of what possible consequence, to any living being, can be the *opinion* of the "Boston Times," except to the "Boston Times" in its own individuality?  
(PL 357)

In the vein of a "Joe Miller," the jest here is given to not joking. Let us say that the various opinions about "opinion" in the *Autography* wrangle all fall, as Du Solle puts it, into "a nut-shell" whose integrity is the irresolute semi-seriousness of an earnest promise on Poe's part "seriously to illustrate [his] position that the mental features are indicated (with certain exceptions) by the hand-writing," a "position" which does not preclude it from being defended as "half in jest." Recall, though, that another "nut-shell" is on the table: Poe's indulgence "in a little literary gossip." Then another still, Poe's aim "to furnish [his] readers with a more accurate and at the same time more general collection of autographs of our literati than is to be found elsewhere." Neither of the latter two is being



directly cited or sighted on the table, while the hoax-effect of *Autography* is like the little red ball, passing in and out from under these three “nut-shells”: the three-fold design of the remodeled façade of *Autography*. The December 1841—January 1842 *Autography* wrangle certainly showed a marked capacity for keeping its eye on *one* ball (and perhaps Poe moved to keep it so), but, as anyone would now sense, the *jeu d’esprit* spans the table, all three shells, the “person” behind the table, and the (double) audience gathered, “who, or what, even” these all may be. While certain movements provoked cries of “Hoax!” on the “nut-shell” of Poe’s opinions (both Poe’s opinions themselves and the opinions reflected in his decisions as to who or what to include in his literary circle, Whipple), and other movements redrew the *jeu d’esprit* under the “nut-shell” of gossip (Du Solle), everyone (Poe included), seemed to some extent “in on it,” co-conspiratorially duped, when it came to the “nut-shell” of the autographs, in the sense of never capturing and discovering therein the little red ball of the hoax-effect of *Autography*. As promised, the “nut-shell” of autographs proved “its interest for all lovers of literature.”<sup>113</sup>

Though falling under its spell in the process, Edwin Percy Whipple nevertheless exposes a certain liability in the design of *Autography* with his “rather savage on [Poe’s] impertinence.” Arguably what troubled Whipple most about *Autography* was not the opinions registered therein on the American *literati*, Poe’s periodic allusions to their

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<sup>113</sup> Notably, of all features of the design of *Autography*, the autographs are what most indelibly, materially bind the two series within the series in a common *jeu d’esprit*. No less than thirty-three of the one hundred and twenty-seven autographs collected in *Autography*’s revival are reused from the “used up” hoax of 1836. Poe had a few woodcuts refashioned to accommodate better sample-signatures, but almost a fourth of the autograph collection in the 1841/2-series is appropriated from the 1836-series. Indeed, nowhere more than by *Autography* is there given such a concrete, objective demonstration of the grafting of hoax onto hoax in Poe. This will prove of further interest below when we consider another afterlife of the *jeu d’esprit* of *Autography* in the shape of how it began, as a kind of appropriation, theft, or plagiarism.

writerly pursuits and ambitions and his broken running commentary on their handwriting as indicative of character, but the opinions reflected in his decisions as to who to count among “*the most noted among the living literati of the country*” in the first place. As Whipple saw it, Poe had artificially if effectively written himself into a “position as censor general of American authors” (Gerber 113). Asking “Whence derived he this absolute power?” Whipple is right that *Autography* gives no definitive reply to this question, but echoes of an answer do reverberate throughout its design. While for Whipple the question only registers in terms of who is in and who is out of the literary circle of *Autography*, as if it concerns only the “authors themselves,” we suggest exploring this question in view of a somewhat faded aura of the autographs, in terms of who or what is included in (or who or what is excluded from) the literary circle of *Autography*, in order to address the ways in which Poe’s “position” in relation to this circle is informed by a heightened sensitivity to an irreducible ambiguity between the who and the what in *Autography*.

Now, in his review of *Autography* Whipple never mentions by name any one author whom he faults for Poe for either including in or excluding from *Autography*, neither those “best” or “most prominent American authors” of whom the good people of the United States are deprived (as if solely by virtue of the absence of their autographs from *Autography*) nor those “‘heaven-born’ geniuses which [Poe] is endeavoring to lift to the pinnacles of fame” (as if solely by virtue of the “presence” of their autographs in *Autography*). In a private letter sent to Rufus W. Griswold shortly after the publication of his review, however, Whipple was much more forthcoming about his particular reservations and about allowing Poe a certain degree of critical license in *Autography*.

Notably, it was this bit of correspondence between Whipple and Griswold that allowed Gerald Gerber to put Whipple's review of *Autography* back on public record in *American Literature* in 1981, this time, with Whipple's name affixed to it:

I perceive that Poe did you justice in the Chapter on Autography, published in Graham's Magazine, although he was unjust to others. If you see the Notion, you will perceive a rather savage article on his impertinence. You are no particular friend of his, I believe, and therefore it can hardly shock you. How he cuts up Tuckerman! *That* set my pen in motion. He does not mention Sprague, Holmes, Sargent, and many other "good poets and true" but finds space for Johnny M'Jilton, Dr. Snodgrass, *Pliny Earl*, and other lights of the age. (Gerber 110-111)

Whipple could not have known that even as he penned his letter to Griswold on 20 December 1841 Poe had already wrapped up a final installment of *Autography* for print in the January 1842 number of *Graham's*. In this "Appendix of Autographs" Charles Sprague, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Epes Sargent are among nineteen writers whose signatures, as Poe conveys in his editorial remarks, were impossible to procure "at a period sufficiently early for the immense edition of December" (GLG 20.1, 44). In fact, Poe goes on to say that their absence "obliged [him] to introduce this Appendix" (ibid.). The fortuitous anticipation of who or what Whipple (privately) identified as missing from its place in *Autography* by the final installment of the series is not, however, a simple triumph of Poe's design over Whipple's reservations, as if the literary archive of *Autography* had answered in advance his disappointed search in it for his own personal Parnassus. It was intimated in that unsigned advertisement on "Mr. Poe's Autography" for the Philadelphia *Ledger* from 23 December 1841 (for Ljungquist, this is another

ghost-signature of Poe's, for its foreknowledge of and its evocation of the language of the "Appendix of Autographs" due out the following month) that Whipple was just a bit too hasty or impatient with his review: "[The *Times*] accuses Mr. Poe of omitting sundry names, when it is obviously impossible that it should know whether it was in Mr. Poe's power *to procure* those names, and when, moreover, it has evidently not seen a chapter on the subject, in which the missing names may, perhaps, be discovered" (Ljungquist [1992] 54). Yet, the fact is, Whipple not only could not have known but perhaps should not have even had to think that more *Autography* was to come.

Whipple's review was issued after "the immense edition of December," 1841, where Poe had punctuated his enterprise with the following *zeugma* (Zimmerman 324-325): "In this, our second 'Chapter on Autography,' we conclude the article and the year together" (GLG 19.6, 273). In the November 1841 "Chapter on Autography" Poe had promised that between the November and December editions there would be "found to include *one hundred autographs*," a promise he over-delivered on by eight or nine (depending on whether or not Poe's is counted among them). With the nineteen autographs given in the Appendix, the grand total of who or what is included in *Autography*'s revival is one hundred and twenty-eight. The numbers are significant here, because in addition to having reservations about the quality of Poe's decisions as to who or what to include in (or who or what to exclude from) the literary circle *Autography*, Whipple had reservations about the sheer quantity of decisions. Evidently the many "lights of the age" unduly included in the literary circle of *Autography*, taken together, add up to a considerable mass: Whipple says, "Parnassus, says Goethe, has a broad top, but still we hardly think it will hold them all" (Gerber 112). The literary circle of

*Autography* is in Whipple's view one not concentric with the prevailing standards of "taste" and "literary reputation" in America, one top-heavy with "lights of the age" and lacking the ballast of those "'heaven-born' geniuses" properly at home in "the pinnacles of fame": imbalanced, topsy-turvy, warped. Yet, his account of the failings of the literary circle of *Autography* (not least for the fact that he (privately) admits that it did not fail in every single case, as he perceives "that Poe did [Griswold] justice," at least, and, moreover, when this person was "no particular friend of his"), is torn between, on the one hand, a sense of Poe's design as a sort of literary dictatorship and, on the other hand, a sense that it was just too democratic.

**January 1842:**

*Autography* 2.3—Accounting for Poe in the literary circle of *Autography*—"An echo [...] in the vast heart of the world at large": giving voice to the democratic achievement of *Autography*— The "literary *histrion*" on the stage of *Autography*—The freewheeling Edgar Allan Poe— Excentric, eccentric: the law and lawlessness of the literary circle— Literary ones, political ones, living ones, dead ones, and the one that never was— *Autography's* election

If not already in 1836, then certainly by 1842 Poe undoubtedly had a legitimate claim for inclusion among "*the most noted among the living literati of the country.*" Two pages of Rufus W. Griswold's popular anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America* were given over to Poe in 1842, and while it has been said that Poe had "puffed" Griswold in *Autography* in order to secure that scant privilege, there is no doubt that by this time Poe

had already made a name for himself on the American literary scene that could only be further appreciated or depreciated, not won or lost, in Griswold's hands. In the April 1841 number of *Graham's*, seven months prior to the appearance of Poe's revival of *Autography*, George Rex Graham announced Poe's acquisition to the editorial chair of his "Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine" with the following remark: "Mr. POE is too well known in the literary world to require a word of commendation" (PL 320). Yet, just as we may be reasonably suspicious of such an unqualified "commendation" of Poe—because it is given by the proprietor and namesake of *Graham's*, because it comes from inside a circle delimited by the self-interest of *Graham's Magazine*, which can claim the authority of the whole "literary world" only provisionally, which is qualified to speak only on the authority of its own institutional identity precisely by virtue of its institutional identity—so too would Poe including himself in *Autography* in a fashion identical to that of every other person ranked among "*the most noted among the living literati of the country*" perhaps inevitably be construed as an imprudent, immodest act of self-aggrandizement. In this view, with the performance of his titular facsimile signature heading the revival the series in 1841, Poe remains prudently-, even modestly-seeming apart from the literary circle of *Autography* but still a part of the enterprise, and not just one part among others but a part of considerable importance: what Snodgrass called the "talented collator," Whipple the "author," Poe the "compiler" and the "writer," and what we would call the architect of *Autography*. The lack of one *bon mot* with which to describe the singular authorial agency of *Autography* only underscores the import of question to be explored here. We will be asking nothing else than how to account for Poe in relation to the literary circle of *Autography*.

On the one hand, the matter seems a relatively simple one of counting. By Poe's own count in the "Appendix of Autographs" from January 1842, the final installment of the *Autography* series, his own titular signature is included among the "*fac-simile* signatures of no less than *one hundred and nine* of the most distinguished American *literati*" said to have been given in the two Chapters on Autography from the previous year (GLG 20.1, 44). (Although there are, strictly speaking, two separate performances of Poe's titular signature in 1841, he only counts it once.). It stands to reason that this count would also apply to Poe's design "to furnish the readers of the Magazine with a *complete* series of Autographs, embracing a specimen of *each of the most noted among our living male and female writers*" (ibid.). On the other hand, facsimile signature, autograph, or both, this thing by virtue of which we are to account for Poe (and to account for Poe counting himself) among his assemblage of "*the most noted among the living literati of the country*" is not handled in fashion identical or even identical-seeming to every other facsimile signature or autograph in *Autography*. Below this specimen of specimens we do not find the customary block of editorial commentary but *Autography* itself: its editorial prefaces, its collection of facsimile signatures or autographs, and the whole broken running commentary on the latter.

By contrast, William Maginn had more "equitably" included himself among the British *literati* supposedly duped into corresponding with the Reverend George Miller in "The Miller Correspondence," that is to say, he included himself in the article in a fashion identical-seeming to how everyone else who was included in it was included in it. As the architect of the hoax, it does not surprise to find "the gruff Standard-bearing LL.D. [coming] most milky fashion out of this affair" (MC 631). Maginn's letter is "really a

good-natured effusion” (ibid.). Echoing the bulk of Miller’s correspondents, he suggests “there must be a mistake somewhere” in reference to the character of a certain “imaginary reporter O’Hoolahan” and begs Miller’s pardon for the “hasty note”: “I happen to be very busy just now” (MC 631-632). In the vein of a “Joe Miller,” the jest here is given to not joking. Of course, what Maginn was “very busy” with just then was fashioning “The Miller Correspondence” out of the Miller Correspondence.

Like their British precedent, Poe’s early articles of *Autography* were published pseudonymously, more precisely, their “authorship” is wrapped up in an editorio-literary vizard-effect between an imaginary autograph hound and an editorial persona (for Maginn, Rev. George Miller and Oliver Yorke; for Poe, the resurrected Joseph Miller and Mr. Messenger). As such it is not difficult to imagine Poe including his own autograph among the thirty-eight others collected in the first series within the series. Although this would have left him in the funny position of not only having to pen a fictive letter in his own name but also having to perform an autographical self-analysis,<sup>114</sup> no doubt Poe could have pulled this off, and, as in the case of Maginn in “The Miller Correspondence,” such a gesture might have even added to the potential hoax-effect of “Autography”: the best place if not the only place for a hoaxer to hide or to withdraw being in the hoax itself, being the last place (at least for a spell) one expects to find the person “in on it” or behind it.

The fact is, however, Poe did not write himself into the early articles of *Autography* from 1836 as Maginn wrote himself into “The Miller Correspondence,” and

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<sup>114</sup> Poe never discusses much less expressly prohibits in his theory of autography one’s capacity to discern the indication of his or her own character in his or own handwriting, but we might liken the situation here to the taboo against self-analysis in Freudian psychoanalysis. Of course, it is no mere coincidence that a violation of this taboo produced one of the founding documents of Freudian psychoanalysis: *The Interpretation of Dreams*.



he wrote himself into the articles from 1841-2 differently still. Yet, it is a point of small significance that the titular signature heading the revival of *Autography* for *Graham's* is an authorial claim to both series within the series: "Under this head," Poe starts out, just beneath his facsimile signature or autograph, "some years ago, there appeared, in the Southern Literary Messenger [...]" (GLG 19.5, 224). Accounting for Poe as the architect of *Autography* is complicated for its being, unlike "The Miller Correspondence," not just a series but doubly so. In view of the revolution in design between the two series within the series—variously remarked by Poe scholars: by Mabbott as a turn from a work with a "fictional setting" and "fictional nature" to a "purely factual and critical" work, and by Meredith McGill as a turn from a "hoax" to "more serious attempts at criticism," for instance—an unthinkable weight bears down on, deepening the impression of that claim to authorship so boldly, even madly performed in *Autography's* revival between the title "A Chapter on Autography" and the article's first words. Even if Poe had not later counted the performance of his titular signature among the literary circle of *Autography*, inasmuch as this performance takes the shape of a facsimile signature and/or is imbued with the magical aura of an autograph, inevitably it will not *tell* the difference here between another subject and object of *Autography* and the subjective and objective reality of the person behind *Autography*. This is all the more paradoxical since one of the ways in which Poe's facsimile signature or autograph is uniquely set apart is its not being submitted to the theory and practice of autography.

Reading *Autography*, we would submit, involves not only considering who or what is included in (or who or what is excluded from) Poe's literary circle but also, already implicit in this idea, interpreting the place of Poe's titular signature in relation to

the literary circle for the way it remains irresolutely both uniquely apart and uniquely a part of it. Judging from the editorial preface to the “Appendix of Autographs” from January 1842, where Poe himself is, in effect, reading *Autography*, reflecting on its popular success with the American readership, one would have the impression that Poe not only believed himself to have successfully negotiated his precarious place in relation to the literary circle of *Autography* but had surprised himself by surpassing his own anticipations of success.

It was with great pleasure that we have found our anticipations fulfilled, in respect to the *popularity* of these chapters—our individual claim to merit is so trivial that we may be permitted to say so much—but we confess it was with no less surprise than pleasure that we observed so little discrepancy of opinion manifested in relation to the hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures. Where the subject was so wide and so necessarily *personal*—where the claims of more than one hundred *literati*, summarily disposed of, were turned over for re-adjudication to a press so intricately bound up in their interest as is ours—it is really surprising how little of dissent was mingled with so much general comment. The fact, however, speaks loudly to one point:—to the *unity of truth*. It assures us that the differences which exist among us, are differences not of real, but of affected opinion, and that the voice of him who maintains fearlessly what he believes honestly, is pretty sure to find an echo (if the speaker be not mad) in the vast heart of the world at large. (GLG 20.1, 44)

One of the most remarkable features of this, one of the most remarkable passages in *Autography*, is the shift in voice it captures from the editorial “we” speaking at the

commencement of the preface—“we gave *fac-simile* signatures of no less than *one hundred and nine* of the most distinguished American *literati*”; “Our design was to furnish the readers of the Magazine with a *complete* series of Autographs”; “we made no attempt at classification or arrangement”; etc.—to an other, much more indefinite first person plural. The editorial “we” is carried through to the start of the passage above, speaking to “anticipations fulfilled” and “so trivial” an “individual claim to merit” and confessing “with no less surprise than pleasure” to having “observed so little discrepancy of opinion manifested in relation to the hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures.” However, beginning with the mention of a certain wager, turning *Autography* over “for re-adjudication to a press so intricately bound up in [the interest of the American *literati*] as is ours,” the first person plural is no longer circumscribed by the editorial “we” of *Graham’s Magazine* in January 1842 but begins to address a larger and more general body. Who or what would *tell* where it begins or ends, why, when, or how it may cease to “echo [...] in the vast heart of the world at large,” “the people” given voice to here?

The design of *Autography* certainly gives ample evidence to consider the “us” assured here “that the differences which exist among us, are differences not of real, but of affected opinion,” as a nationally inflected “us,” speaking on behalf of the US, both series within the series having a national even nationalistic program and scope, or a nationalist character. We saw above, in consideration of Jonathan Elmer’s claim to a democratic significance of Poe’s early articles of “Autography,” that there the question of the American-ness of *Autography* remains, by design, avowedly and indelibly haunted by its British precedent in “The Miller Correspondence,” and in view of Poe’s scrupulously

documented effort to strip down the design of *Autography* to just those signature features he brought to the *jeu d'esprit* in 1836 (namely, the facsimile signatures themselves and the editorial commentary exploring the efficacy of that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character”), the nationalist character of *Autography* seems to be all the more palpably urged on by Poe’s revival of the series in 1841. It provoked, after all, that vague generalization of Joseph Evans Snodgrass’s we considered above: “No pen but Mr. P.’s, could probably have afforded so general a sketch of American literary character.”

Yet, in the very same number of *Graham’s Magazine* in which Poe concluded the *Autography* series with his “Appendix of Autographs” there also appeared his famous “Exordium” to *Graham’s* department “of Reviews, or, as we should prefer calling them,” Poe says, “of Critical Notices” (ER 1027): one of the most frequently referenced texts when it comes to addressing Poe’s highly ambivalent attitude toward the feverish literary nationalism of the antebellum period and the text that most readily supports a characterization of Poe as generally critical of this trend. Though the *topos* of the “Exordium” is more the state of American literary criticism than the state of American literature, the point here is that thinking one is unthinkable without thinking the other. James Lowell Russell’s remarks on the anomalous situation of American literature and American criticism in his sketch of Poe for the *Graham’s* “Our Contributors” series from 1845, the very resolve of his dictum “before we have an American literature, we must have an American criticism” (Lowell [1845] 49), is both bolstered and somewhat undercut by the way it echoes Poe’s remarks on the “anomalous” situation of American literature from three years previously (ER 1028):

Time was when we imported our critical decisions from the mother country. For many years we enacted a perfect farce of subserviency to the *dicta* of Great Britain. At last a revulsion of feeling, with self-disgust, necessarily ensued. Urged by these, we plunged into the opposite extreme. In throwing *totally* off that “authority,” whose voice had been so sacred, we even surpassed, and by much, our original folly. But the watchword now was, “a national literature!”—as if any true literature *could be* “national”—as if the world at large were not the only proper stage for the literary *histrion*. We became, suddenly, the merest and maddest *partizans* in letters. Our papers spoke of “tariffs” and “protection.” Our Magazines had habitual passages about the “truly native novelist, Mr. Cooper,” or that “staunch American genius, Mr. Paulding.” Unmindful of the spirit of the axioms that “a prophet has no honor in his own land” and that “a hero is never a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*”—axioms founded in reason and in truth—our reviews urged the propriety—our booksellers the necessity, of strictly “American” themes. A foreign subject, at this epoch, was a weight more than enough to drag down into the very depths of critical damnation the finest writer owning nativity in the States; while, on the reverse, we found ourselves daily in the paradoxical dilemma of liking, or pretending to like, a stupid book the better because (sure enough) its stupidity was of our own growth, and discussed our own affairs. (ER 1027-1028)

It is not a little disarming to have Poe in the very same issue of a magazine he edited, on the one hand, professing that “the watchword” of “a national literature!” had for some time past turned an emerging generation of literary critics into “the merest and maddest

*partizans* in letters,” that “this anomalous state of feeling” had only “very lately [...] shown any signs of subsidence,” and that he is content and relieved that “it *is* subsiding” (ER 1028), then, on other hand, concluding a series whose design so overtly tapped into, appropriated, even exploited his epoch’s feverish literary nationalism and, moreover, punctuating the series with an optimistic, hyperbolic, almost unqualified claim to the achievement of the series among the American readership. Does the “*unity of truth*” attested to by the popular success of *Autography* among the American readership not seem rather to beg than to dismiss the question of whether or not “any true literature *could be* ‘national’”?

There is, however, a certain resonance between Poe’s reflection on the popular success of *Autography* in the “Appendix of Autographs” and the “Exordium,” the most pronounced instance of which is the appearance in both of the apostrophe “the world at large.” In the “Exordium” “the world at large” is set as “the only proper stage for the literary *histrion* [player or actor, especially of farces],” and in *Autography* it is “the world at large” in whose “vast heart” “the voice of him who maintains fearlessly what he believes honestly” does seem “pretty sure” to have found an echo at last in *Autography*. After all, in American literary history the case of Edgar Allan Poe does seem to afford a profound illustration of the “reason” and the “truth” at stake in the axiom “‘a prophet has no honor in his own land,’” Poe having found a home in the literature of “the world at large” always just prior it seems to having found a home in the literature of “‘his own land.’” And, we maintain, nowhere is the much rehearsed “problem of Poe” in American literary history given a more profound illustration *in Poe* than in *Autography*, not least for the fact that *Autography* too in some ways seems to have found a home in “the world at

large” prior to finding a home in the annals of American literary history but not solely for this fact. Even if he had not expressly counted his own titular signature among the “no less than *one hundred and nine* [facsimile signatures] of the most distinguished American *literati*” gathered in the November and December issues of *Graham’s* from 1841, Poe is quite candidly and generally preoccupied in the editorial preface to the “Appendix of Autographs” with a sense of his own belonging to “the literary world” reflected in the popular success of the *Autography* series among the American readership. The question remains: What is the idea of “the literary world” given voice to here and how is it given voice to in *Autography*, when its design is so definitively circumscribed by a nationalist character?

Keeping in view the worldly character of “the literary *histrion*,” the first person plural speaking by the end of Poe’s preface to the “Appendix of Autographs”—“the people” circuited by that fragile “echo [...] in the vast heart of the world at large”—cannot be too narrowly confined to a nationally inflected “us,” to the US. At the same time, the question of *Autography*’s nationalist character can never be abandoned for being integral to the achievement it lays claim to here: we will call it the democratic achievement of *Autography*. We cannot begin to address the question of who or what is given voice to in this democratically inflected “we”—“the people” addressed in Poe’s remarks here as those of the “literary *histrion*,” whose “only proper stage” is “the world at large”—without acknowledging precisely a certain staging, a certain play-acting implicit in these words, where the nationalist character of *Autography* is a kind of platform whereupon the “literary *histrion*” makes himself visible as such and the democratic

achievement of *Autography* plays itself out as sort of farce or, in the vein of a “Joe Miller,” a joke given to not joking.

Of course, the idea that *Autography* came out of the “re-adjudication” of the American press with nary a scratch—where the scope and “*personal*” nature of its “subject” risked so much on this front and precisely for that feverish nationalistic climate of the state of American letters bemoaned in the “Exordium”—seems somewhat laughable given Edwin Percy Whipple’s “rather savage article on [Poe’s] impertinence” from the previous month, that one notable instance in which the “re-adjudication” of the American press found him not just wanting for one opinion or another (like Snodgrass thinking Poe “carried away with an innocent belief in the science of autography”) but culpable in a sort literary crime for the very pretense of *Autography*. “It is certainly a colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence,” Whipple had said, “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” (Gerber 111-112). However, Poe had already prepared the January 1842 number of *Graham’s* for print when Whipple’s review made its appearance. Although the “Appendix of Autographs” was published in the very midst of the *Autography* wrangle from December 1841 to January 1842, its composition predates the dispute (undoubtedly one of the reasons why Poe would later prove quite haunted by Whipple’s words).

Still, even bracketing Whipple’s review (which we will not do for long), when it comes to *Autography*, Poe seems quite at his ease with capitalizing on if not over-investing in that trend of “puffing” works solely by virtue for their American-ness that he was simultaneously decrying in the “Exordium”: as if there being so “little of dissent [...]



mingled with so much general comment” in the buzz *Autography* educed in the American readership necessarily signified “so little discrepancy of opinion” about it (If there was indeed “so little discrepancy of opinion” when it came to *Autography*, then it was undoubtedly owing in no small part to the nationalist character of Poe’s enterprise.), as if this particular lack of “critical notice” (to use Poe’s preferred term) was a good thing, something he confesses to having observed “with no less surprise than pleasure.”

The democratic achievement of *Autography* seems all the more laughable from the point of view of current historical perspectives on antebellum America. Indeed, the more one considers the historical context of the performance of “the literary *histrion*” on the stage *Autography* the more farcical it seems. We will confine ourselves to registering a few simple facts. Not long after *Autography* had finished its run through the press, in 1842, Frederick Douglass commenced a lecture tour of the Northeastern United States that would soon situate his stories of survival and escape and his powerful articulation of the failures of the institution of slavery at the forefront the abolitionist movement; William Wells Brown would commence his lecture tour the following year. Brown’s successful bid for freedom occurred just a few years prior to the appearance of Poe’s early articles of *Autography* and Douglass’s in the years between the two series within the series. Of course, like Griswold’s popular anthologies from the 1840s, the most direct representation given in *Autography* of the sea change underway at this period in African-American (literary) history is the absence from it of any autographs but those of white people. When it came to women writers, *Autography* was more inclusive but only just. Poe at least did not quarantine the women to a separate volume as Griswold had done with his *Gems from American Female Poets* from 1842 and the later expanded edition of

*Female Poets of America* from 1848. Yet, out of the one-hundred-and-twenty-eight autographs in *Autography*'s revival only a dozen or so "belong" to women, and even then Poe has the unfortunate habit of devaluing the handwriting where it appears too feminine and appreciating it where it appears masculine.

Following Terence Whalen, we may chalk up what appear by today's standards liabilities, even injustices in the design of *Autography* to an "average racism" and/or an average sexism<sup>115</sup>, as if the democratic achievement of *Autography* need not be wholly discounted or laughed off for reflecting some of the more undemocratic features of life in antebellum America. Even more generously, we might look upon the prevailing inequalities and injustices of the antebellum period as "differences not of real but affected opinion." Douglass's critique of the institution of slavery, for instance, is not so wholly different from this notion of Poe's with which he trumpets the democratic achievement of *Autography*. From *My Bondage and My Freedom*: "A man that does not recognize and approve for himself the rights and privileges contended for, in behalf of the American slave, has not yet been found. In whatever else men may differ, they are alike in the apprehension of their natural and personal rights. The difference between abolitionists and those by whom they are opposed, is not as to principles. All are agreed in respect to these. The manner of applying them is the point of difference" (Douglass [1855] 460). Of course, in Poe's day, the women's suffrage movement and (intimately related to it) the critique of the institution of slavery also powerfully articulated some very real, all too real effects of "affected opinion." Ultimately, the "*unity of truth*" given voice to in *Autography* must remain profoundly divided faced with questions of race and of sexual

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, 111-146.

difference. We would note that we draw the comparison between *Autography* and *My Bondage and My Freedom* not by the words “real,” “opinion,” “fear,” or “honesty,” but by way of “*difference*.”

Yet, *Autography*'s democratic achievement would be much more laughable and condemnable had it been left unqualified as such. Poe is certainly optimistic and triumphant, even hyperbolically so, reflecting back on the popularity of *Autography* among the American readership, but there are shadows of doubt. “[T]he voice of him who maintains fearlessly what he believes honestly,” Poe had said, “is pretty sure to find an echo (if the speaker be not mad) in the vast heart of the world at large.” As Jonathan Auerbach notes in a brief gloss on this line in *The Romance of Failure*, “Puncturing the ostensible optimism of the passage, that parenthetical aside about madness remains a cynical reminder for Poe that [...] the response he hears from ‘the world at large’ may be of his own contriving” (Auerbach 62). Poe’s “parenthetical aside about madness” is not the only “cynical reminder” in *Autography* that its democratic achievement will remain unthinkable without certain “contriving.” There is a veritable legion of such reminders in *Autography*, remainders of the constitutive liability or injustice of its design, though “madness” may well serve as a general index in which to consider these diverse effects of what we will call the freewheeling of Edgar Allan Poe in *Autography*.

A hyperbolic optimism and triumphalism like that with which Poe reflects back on the public reception of *Autography* in January 1842 was already in play upon his revival of the series for *Graham's* in November 1841, especially in this highly stylized account of the editorial labor that went into the enterprise:

The writer of this article has had opportunities [...] enjoyed by few. The MSS. now lying before him are a motley mass indeed. Here are letters, or other compositions, from every individual in America who has the slightest pretension to literary celebrity. From these we propose to select the most eminent names—as to give *all* would be a work of supererogation. Unquestionably, among those whose claims we are forced to postpone, are several whose high *merit* might justly demand a different treatment; but the rule applicable in a case like this seems to be that of celebrity, rather than that of true worth. It will be understood that, in the necessity of selection which circumstances impose on us, we confine ourselves *to the most noted of the living literati of the country*. The article above alluded to [“Autography” of 1836], embraced, as we have already stated, only twenty-six names, and was not occupied *exclusively* either with living persons, or, properly speaking, with literary ones. In fact the whole paper seemed to acknowledge no law beyond that of whim. Our present essay will be found to include *one hundred autographs*. We have thought it unnecessary to preserve any particular order in their arrangement. (GLG 19.5, 225)

By this account, Poe’s facsimile signature heading the “Chapter on Autography” inaugurating *Autography*’s revival may be seen to speak boldly to role, the authority and agency of the “author,” “talented collator,” “compiler,” “writer,” editor, or architect of *Autography* as that of a decider, a characterization consonant with Snodgrass’s deference to Poe’s “excentric genius.” Poe seems to want to have it that he presides on the very margin of his literary circle, just beyond its proper circumference but giving it its “axis” and “point of support” from the outside, as a circle unto itself, the localization of the

literary circle's very locomotion by a center always "[r]emote from the center," "out of the way" (*OED*, "eccentric"). In this view, Poe is "excentric" in relation to the literary circle of *Autography* in the purely mechanical sense of a circle unto itself traveling along the path of a larger circle, "working freely in a ring" by way of some artificial force (*ibid.*). As the trains of Poe's day were propelled forward by means of such an eccentric wheel engaged by the burning of coal or the compression of steam, *Autography* is set in motion by the artificial force of a decision as to "the rule [...] of celebrity" (which will not, Poe tells us, necessarily conform to a judgment as to "true worth"). In this way Poe's titular signature may be thought to countersign every other facsimile signature printed in *Autography*, traveling along the circumference of his literary circle and assuring the reader at every turn that the very appearance of a facsimile signature in *Autography* attests to a decision made solely in accordance with the "the rule [...] of celebrity" and with regard to no extraneous criterion of selection.

Yet, Poe's relation to the literary circle of *Autography* cannot be so readily explained by a pure mechanics of decision. The "circumstances" of its design undoubtedly "impose" on him a "necessity of selection," but, all told, Poe qualifies his criterion of selection in at least five different ways in the span of five sentences. Even if we take him at his word that his decisions as to who or what to include in (or who or what to exclude from) *Autography* were never made in accordance with "the rule [...] of true worth," or with regard to a writer's "merit," we are left to assume that "*the most noted among the living literati of the country*," this criterion of "*the most noted*" itself is entirely consistent with that of "the most eminent names" and that both of these are entirely consistent with "the rule [...] of celebrity." Then, there is the more troubling fact

that in Poe's embellished account of the editorial labor that went into the design of *Autography*, that "motley mass" of MSS. piled high on his editorial desk is said to have been collected in accordance with a certain rule of celebrity: "Here are letters, or other compositions, from every individual in America who has the slightest pretension to literary celebrity." This "motley mass" to which Poe claims to apply "the rule applicable in a case like this [...] that of celebrity" in order to delimit the literary circle of *Autography*, since "to give *all* would be a work of supererogation," is said to have been editorialized in advance in accordance by a rule of "literary celebrity." If an MS. has already been collected by virtue of its writer having even "the slightest pretension to literary celebrity," then how can this same MS., along with its writer, be excluded from the literary circle of *Autography*, consigned to the editorial fire, in accordance with "the rule [...] of celebrity"? Might not those extraneous criteria of selection Poe mentions as if only to show that they are not applicable "in a case like this," those of "true worth" and "merit," have interceded somewhere in order to negotiate the rule of celebrity called upon to edit the findings of this other rule of celebrity?

Then, the "Appendix of Autographs" from January 1842 seems to introduce yet another criterion of selection, indeed, less a criterion than a contingency of selection informing Poe's decisions as to who or what to include in (or who or what to exclude from) *Autography*, which in a way subverts the very idea that it is "decisions" at stake here. We mentioned above that in the November 1841 "Chapter on Autography" Poe had promised to give "*one hundred autographs*" and that even in the "immense edition of December," where Poe over-delivers on this number by eight or (counting his own) nine, every indication is that this is to be it: "In this, our second 'Chapter on Autography,' we

conclude the article and the year together.” When Poe introduces his “Appendix of Autographs” the following month, the New Year seems to bring with it an entirely different view of the editorial labor that went into the design of *Autography*: “The impossibility of procuring the signatures now given, at a period sufficiently early for the immense edition of December, has obliged us to introduce this Appendix” (GLG 20.1, 44). The very impetus of the “Appendix of Autographs,” what has “obliged” Poe to introduce this just amendment, is also what most positively undermines the representations of his editorial labors from the 1841 Chapters on Autography. Apparently, there never were “letters, or other compositions, from every individual in America who has the slightest pretension to literary celebrity” piled up on Poe’s editorial desk, not even, it seems, the possibility of such a “motley mass” but, according to the “Appendix,” an “impossibility of procuring [certain] signatures at a period sufficiently early” for preparing the 1841 articles of *Autography* for print. Even if it had never breathed a word about procuring signatures, the “Appendix of Autographs” would still have represented an entire article of the *Autography* series rehearsing the more general problem of thinking Poe’s relation to his literary circle we are exploring here, as something uniquely apart and uniquely a part. Yet, on top of adding another article to an already concluded article, adding to the confusion, the “Appendix” talks of *procuring* signatures rather than prepossessing them.

This issue of procurement had already briefly reared its head in the *Autography* wrangle from December 1841. Another ghost-signature of Poe’s in that unsigned advertisement from the Philadelphia *Ledger* may be discerned in the defense mounted against the *Boston Times* (a.k.a. Edwin Percy Whipple) that we considered in another

context above: “It accuses Mr. Poe of omitting sundry names, when it is obviously impossible that it should know whether it was in Mr. P’s power *to procure* those names, and when, moreover, it has evidently not seen a chapter on the subject, in which the missing names may, perhaps, be discovered.” So, Ljungquist would ask, is it not obvious why Mr. Anonymous is so attuned to what might or might not have been out of Mr. P.’s “power *to procure*” and knows that “the missing names may, perhaps, be discovered” in another “chapter on the subject” yet to appear, when *Autography* and the year 1841 were supposed to have concluded together? In any event, the defense is rather weak. If it is Poe’s, it is next to suicidal or perhaps just not in the least concerned with being consistent in how he represents his justifications for who or what is included in (or who or what is excluded from) *Autography*. Indeed, if this is Poe’s defense against the charge “of omitting sundry names”—what Whipple had called *Autography*’s “sins of commission” being “nearly overbalanced” by its “sins omission”—it seems much less a defense than another example of what Whipple is on about.

Whipple does charge Poe with “omitting sundry names,” but he also charges him with unduly admitting sundry names. There was, of course, that happy accident of Poe having his “Appendix of Autographs” prepared to supply the only names ever singled out as missing from their place in *Autography*, but the “Appendix” certainly did nothing to respond to the second charge. Already in December 1841 Whipple had bemoaned the toppling of Parnassus with the weight of all those “lights of the age” Poe counted among the ranks of the most noted among the living *literati* in America, before the nineteen additional autographs were supplied in January 1842. In a more general way, though, Whipple is troubled by the absence of any consistent principles in *Autography* that could



be called upon to sustain Poe's decisions as to who or what is included in (or who or what is excluded from) his literary circle. Indeed, in Whipple's view, the very idea of decision is so utterly corrupted in *Autography* that it probably would never have occurred to him to even conceive it as a circle.

Rather than perceive Poe as "excentric" in relation to the literary circle of *Autography*, in the sense of just beyond its proper circumference but giving it its "axis" and "point of support" from the outside, as a circle unto itself, "[r]emote from the center," "out of the way," Whipple perceives Poe's relation to his literary circle as "eccentric" in the sense of what is "[r]egulated by no central control," "irregular, anomalous, proceeding by no known method, capricious" (*OED*). In fact, the *OED* specifies that the variant of the word "eccentric" employed by Snodgrass, "excentric," appears "in contexts where a writer wishes to avoid the associations" of "eccentric" as something or someone "deviating from usual methods, odd, whimsical" (*ibid.*). At stake here between the first readers of *Autography* is nothing less than the law of the literary circle, something Poe expressly discusses in *Autography* only not to situate it simply in *Autography* but between the two series within the series. The 1841 revival of *Autography* for *Graham's* does, as has been duly pointed out, profess to a revolution in design, to inaugurate not an addition to or expansion on a previously successful work but a distinctly new work, one acknowledging a new law or being new for acknowledging a law at all. Whereas the early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger*, Poe writes, "seemed to acknowledge no law beyond that of whim," a trifling law or a law of lawlessness, the later articles for *Graham's*, we are led to believe, are coordinated by a principled law, a newly legitimated consolidation of authority and influence in the enforcement of a rule or system of rules.

In other words, Poe himself acknowledges a certain eccentricity in the design of *Autography*, but only, it seems, to relegate it to *Autography*'s past. The freewheeling “law [...] of whim” which characterized his previous experiments in autography is said to have been given up for an other, supposedly more rigorously delimited literary circle, one “occupied *exclusively* [...] with living persons [and], properly speaking, with literary ones.” So Poe’s emphasis on the revolution in the design of *Autography* between 1836 and 1841—and this event of editorial re-vision presents itself precisely as a revolution, since it claims to obey a new law coincident with a new state, a frontier which delimits the literary circle “properly speaking,” one supposedly not intruded on by non-literary persons, and one corresponding, moreover, somewhat inexplicably, to a strict division between the living and the dead, all of which presupposes a new intention and independence of the “author,” “talented collator,” “compiler,” “writer,” editor, or architect to re-describe his literary circle, to mark this frontier as new—the effectivity of this editorio-rhetorical event ought to be reflected in the differences between who or what is included in (or who or what is excluded from) the literary circle of *Autography* as it appeared in 1836 and then again, differently, in 1841. Yet, nothing Poe offers up in re-describing his literary circle seems to offer a clear point of distinction between the early and late articles of *Autography*.

Among the facsimile signatures gathered in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836, only two “belonged” to people who died prior to Poe’s preparing the articles of *Autography* for print: William Wirt, pioneer Attorney General of the United States, who made the case for Native American sovereignty in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, and who died in 1834; and Chief Justice John Marshall, prominent Federalist delegate in the

convention to ratify the United States Constitution in 1788, who served on the United States Supreme Court from 1801 to his death in 1835.<sup>116</sup> Attorney General Wirt and Chief Justice Marshall also stand out in “Autography” for being primarily identified with politico-judicial institutions and not immediately recommending themselves as literary persons, to say nothing of literary persons “properly speaking.” On the other hand, Marshall’s five-volume *Life of Washington* (1805-1807<sup>117</sup>) certainly gives cause to reconsider any strict circumscription of his character in a purely political or juridical sphere, as Wirt’s *Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (1817) does for his own character, and as the very genre of politico-historical biography gives cause to reconsider the very distinction between politics and literature in the antebellum period, and (not by chance) often precisely by way of the notion of character. Washington Irving, whose facsimile signature appeared in the same article of *Autography* in which those of Marshall and Wirt appeared, had already established himself as a writer in the genre of historical romance (now known as historical fiction) in 1828 with *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* and became almost exclusively occupied with the genre of politico-historical biography after 1836 (his own five-volume *Life of George Washington* was published from 1855 to the year of his death, 1859). Do these works, which represent only a few of the popular biographical romances of the antebellum period (with which we may also class works in the genre of campaign literature, of which Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Life*

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<sup>116</sup> Poe both humorously memorialized Chief Justice Marshall’s tireless service to his countrymen and State and darkly made light of the revered judge’s death the previous year when he attributed the following indecorous letter to his name in 1836: “*Dear Sir,—*I have received your polite letter of the —, and will have no objection to aid you in your enterprise by such information as I can afford. There are many others, however, who would be much better able to assist you in this matter than myself. When I get a little leisure you shall hear from me again” (SLM 2.3, 210).

<sup>117</sup> An abridged, two-volume edition of Marshall’s *Life of Washington* appeared in print more proximate to the publication of “Autography,” in 1832.

of *Franklin Pierce* (1852) is one of the most famous examples), attest to an expansion of the literary field into the fields of politics and jurisprudence or rather a structural appropriation of literature by the fields of politics and law, as a sort of prosthetic? Does the long history of the popular influence of the genres of politico-historical biography, biographical romance, historical and campaign fiction attest to an incidental, purely utilitarian use of literary forms and tropes in the annals of history, politics and law or rather to an intrinsic necessity of literature within each of these respective, self-respecting fields? These questions are as crucial and as riddled with complexity for our own day as they were for the antebellum period, and they are questions powerfully (though ambiguously) articulated by Poe's design in *Autography*.

Despite the indications in the editorial preface to the 1841 revival of *Autography* for *Graham's* that the law of Poe's literary circle has been revised, redefined, re-described so as to be "occupied *exclusively* [...] with living persons [and], properly speaking, with literary ones," the remodeled façade of *Autography* houses a similarly diverse range of literary interests and values as the articles that appeared five years earlier in the *Messenger*. The category of the, "properly speaking, literary [person]" plays host to not only poets, playwrights, tale-writers, and novelists but also lyricists, translators, many editors, even a few publishers, magazine proprietors, and, as Whipple had incredulously emphasized to Griswold, *Pliny Earle*, who had published a little volume of verse in 1841 but was more well-known as a physician and psychiatrist whose writerly career was devoted mainly to investigations of the asylum, the institution and the curability of the insane. Thus, as Poe emphasizes the proper literary character of the remodeled façade of *Autography*, the class of literature itself, the character-type of the "distinguished man-of-

letters” and the field of the literary “properly speaking,” must be understood here in the context of a quotidian business of writing in which literature could be anyone’s business, even if theirs was primarily another business, because literature was everyone’s business.<sup>118</sup> Just as literature is invariably called upon to do the good work of politics and law, in *Autography* political and legal institutions, offices, and characters are called upon, apparently from beyond a strict demarcation of the literary field “properly speaking,” to do the good work of literature: the population and popularization of the literary field itself, in the interest of “all lovers of literature.” Thus, among the persons represented in the re-described literary circle of *Autography*, those who would most stand out for not belonging to what would generally be understood as the literary field “properly speaking” are nonetheless persons who Poe had just cause for including among “*the most noted among the living literati of the country.*”

For example, Joseph Hopkinson, a well-known jurist of Poe’s day, who argued the defense against Daniel Webster before the US Supreme Court in *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), was also a contributor to American letters. He is reputed to have edited the first volume of Shakespeare’s works published in America (now known as *The 1795*

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<sup>118</sup> While this general historical situation of American literature in the antebellum period is only implicitly dealt with in *Autography*, it was explicitly addressed in other, more conventional representations of the literary field, notably in Rufus Griswold’s *The Poets and Poetry of America*, the first printing of which appeared just two months after Poe released his final installment of *Autography* in 1842: “There is in all this nation hardly a native inhabitant of Saxon origin who cannot read and write. Every house has its book-closet, and every town its public library. The universal prevalence of intelligence, and that self-respect which is imparted by the democratic principle, have caused a great increase in writers. Yet, owing to the absence of a just system of copyright, the rewards of literary exertion are so precarious, that but a small number devote to letters their entire attention. A high degree of excellence, especially in poetry, can be attained only by constant and quiet study and cultivation. With multitudes of verse-writers, we have few poets” (Griswold [1842] vi).

Hopkinson Edition),<sup>119</sup> and he composed the lyrics to “Hail, Columbia,” which served as the unofficial national anthem of the United States until 1913 when it was formally supplanted by “The Star-Spangled Banner.”<sup>120</sup> An even better case for the influence of notable politico-juridical characters on the field of American literature in the antebellum period can be made for Joseph Story, “whose various literary and political labors,” Poe writes in *Autography*, “are too well known to require comment” (GLG 19.6, 287). Most well known today for his three-volume *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* from 1833, his *Commentaries on the Conflict of Laws* from 1834, and his rulings in *Martin v. Hunter’s Lessee* and *United States v. The Amistad*, Story’s volume of *Miscellaneous Writings* from 1835, which includes a collection of his “Literary Discourses,” was quite popular with the American readership of Poe’s day. Story’s collection of lectures and speeches traverses an impressive range of subject matter, from the archaeology of the founding of the Puritan colonies, “the science of government,” and the history of American technological innovation to religio-biographical eulogies of notable American scholars and statesmen; the collection even includes some poetic “Lines, Written on the Death of a Daughter.” However, what seems to unite these various “Discourses” as “literary” is Story’s persistent advocacy for the equal access to information in the form of books, periodicals, and public lectures, and (presumed by these) the freedom of American men and women to pursue their literary labors: nothing

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<sup>119</sup> Hopkinson is reputed to have edited *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare: Corrected from the latest and best London editions*, printed and sold by Bioren and Madan out of Philadelphia in 1795, but his official status as editor is far from certain, though there is evidence that he did write the volume’s “Preface” and “Life of Shakespeare.” Cf. “Shakespeare in Philadelphia,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 76, no. 6 (1936), 719-729, and Andrew Murphey, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145-147.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Burton Alva Konkle, *Joseph Hopkinson, 1770-1842: Jurist, Scholar, Inspirer of the Arts, Author of ‘Hail, Columbia’* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania, 1931).

less than the democratization of the American literary field itself.<sup>121</sup> Story certainly had cause for thinking, as he expressed in a “Literary Discourse” from 1826, “[t]he rewards of authorship are now [in America] almost as sure and regular, as those of any other profession” (Story 9). By 1845, the royalties for his own book publications amounted to more than double his annual salary as an Associate Justice on the US Supreme Court.<sup>122</sup>

The situation we are trying to frame here is perhaps best summed up by the fact that those autographs that most stand out in the remodeled façade of *Autography* as belonging to persons more readily identifiable with the fields of politics and law than the field of literature—John Quincy Adams, Joseph Hopkinson, Mordecai Manuel Noah, and Joseph Story—all make an appearance in both the early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger* and the later articles for *Graham’s*. Despite espousing an aim to occupy himself “*exclusively*” with “properly speaking” literary persons in the re-described literary circle of *Autography*, Poe was not at all hesitant to reuse his woodcuts where he knew that the appearance of these autographs would command public interest. We have tried to show that there is some justification for counting these persons as “literary ones,” but are they really, “properly speaking, literary ones”? If John Quincy Adams can be counted among “*the most noted of the living literati of the country*” solely by virtue of his

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<sup>121</sup> Story’s “Phi Beta Kappa Discourse” which heads the collection of “Literary Discourses” in *The Miscellaneous Writings* touches on many of the issues gathered here under the heading of democratization, containing a stirring account of the potency of “the republic of letters” before the “grave judges” of an international “tribunal of letters” comprised by the established literary traditions of Europe (Story 26-29); a brief mention of the rise of periodical literature (ibid. 16-17) which bears more fruit when read in conjunction with his remarks on “the general diffusion of knowledge” in America, an “age of reading,” founded in “the freedom of the press, or rather in this, cooperating with the cheapness of the press” (ibid. 6-9); and, following this idealistic promotion of the democratic access to reading and writing in America, a condensed reflection on the intellectual and cultural equality of women (ibid. 9-11).

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Ronald D. Rotunda and John E. Nowak, “Introduction,” *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), xxiv.

fugitive verses on “The Wants of Man,” then what statesman, jurist, or judge could not be called upon to populate the literary field of the antebellum period?

The fact that Chief Justice Marshall and William Wirt do not make an appearance in the remodeled façade of *Autography* does lend some support to the idea that Poe took seriously his commitment to occupy himself here “*exclusively* [...] with living persons,” but even in following this seemingly straightforward rule informing the re-described literary circle of *Autography*, Poe was not without fault. In fact, by committing himself to printing the facsimile signatures of only living persons, Poe had opened up the design of *Autography* to a contingency he could not have controlled even if he wanted to. The only dead man whose facsimile signature appeared in the remodeled façade of *Autography* was Grenville Mellen, and Poe explains this unfortunate circumstance with a footnote attached to the editorial commentary devoted to Mellen: “Since this article was prepared for the press, we have been grieved to hear of the death of Mr. Mellen” (GLG 19.5, 227). The point here is that anyone could have died in the span of time it took Poe to procure signatures, prepare his articles of *Autography* for print, and have them appear in print.

Yet, if Poe was really so concerned about a strict demarcation between the living and the dead he probably would not have included the facsimile signature of one Jack Downing in the remodeled façade of *Autography*, since it does not trace back to a person at all but to a literary persona. Poe jocularly announces the inclusion of Jack Downing among “*the most noted of the living literati of the country*” as follows: “we now present our readers with a fac-simile signature of the ‘*veritable Jack*’ himself, written by him individually in our own bodily presence” (GLG 19.6, 285). Poe speculates that Seba Smith and James Brooks were behind the original Jack Downing Letters, a widely



popular series with the American readership in the mid-1830s (when Jack Downing made his first appearance in the early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger*), and recommends a comparison of the handwriting specimens of Smith, Brooks, and Downing, all given in *Autography*, in confirmation of this fact. But what makes Jack Downing such a fascinating figure, in *Autography* and in general, is that, while originally coined by Smith, the persona was picked up, appropriated or stolen, by a slew of writers from the 1830s until the Civil War (in his editorial commentary on Smith's MS., Poe called them "a host of brainless imitators" (GLG 19.5, 232)), often as a means of anonymously publishing satirical sketches of American political life.<sup>123</sup> Thus while the occasion of printing the facsimile signature of Jack Downing in *Autography* does offer an unmasking of this popular literary persona, it is also the occasion of Poe putting his own unique signature on the long history of appropriating this signature in order to poke fun at prominent political names of the day. Poe concludes his editorial commentary on the MS. of Jack Downing thus: "The chirography of the 'the veritable Jack' is a very good, honest, sensible hand, and not very dissimilar to that of Ex-President Adams" (GLG 19.6, 285).

In fact, the specimen of Jack Downing, of all the who or what included in *Autography*, this facsimile signature or autograph of a character without person, is enough to illustrate that none of the ways in which Poe qualifies *Autography*'s revolution in design, re-describes his literary circle, nor any of the ways in its revolution in design has been subsequently re-described by Poe scholars, is without exception. With Downing,

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<sup>123</sup> For a comprehensive study of the raucous history of Jack Downing, cf. Mary Alice Wyman, *Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), especially 32-93 and 151-166.

Poe is “not occupied *exclusively* either with living persons, or, properly speaking, with literary ones”; Downing is very much alive and precisely in literature, but, as person, he is not one but several. Mabbott’s contention that *Autography*’s revolution in design represents a turn from a work with a “fictional setting” and a “fictional nature” to a “purely factual and critical work” finds a glaring exception in the shape of Downing’s autograph and Poe’s claim to having seen it “written by him individually in our own bodily presence.” The specimen of Jack Downing even challenges, we would suggest, Ljungquist’s notion that there is the appearance of “a more factual and critical” work in the remodeled façade of *Autography*. We would suggest, also, that Meredith McGill’s claim, following Harrison, that *Autography*’s revolution in design represents a turn from a “hoax” to “more serious attempts at criticism” seems at least questionable when it comes to “the ‘*veritable Jack*’ himself,” in whose name Poe had signed off on a little epistle in 1836 that ended thus: “Your letter’s no go. I’m up to a thing or two—or else my name isn’t [autograph – Jack Downing]” (SLM 2.9, 604). We would suggest that Poe is still “up to a thing or two” in *Autography*’s revival, and really the only person who has ever seemed to register a similar suspicion is Edwin Percy Whipple.

It is ultimately that most vocal of dissenters from the popularity of *Autography* among the American readership who evinces the most sensitivity to the eccentricity of Poe’s design. We have shown that in spite of all appearances to the contrary, Poe appears to be freewheeling throughout *Autography*. Whipple saw directly past Poe’s claims “seriously to illustrate [the] position that the mental features are indicated (with certain exceptions) by the hand-writing,” the talk of “the rule [...] of celebrity” and its distinctions from “true worth” and “*merit*,” the promises of “living ones” and “literary

ones,” neither of which can be said to have been kept without acknowledging that there are never such simple distinctions as “living” and “literary” ones, Poe’s suggestion that he is obeying some other law besides that of whim, when there is, strictly speaking, no law given voice to in and as *Autography*’s revolution in design besides that of whim, hardly a law at all. Whipple knew that whatever Poe was up to in *Autography* it was, in itself, more or less baseless. *Autography*’s effectivity derived from its popularity, and Whipple recognized that Poe could have only presumed, anticipated this popularity (and Poe says repeatedly that he did), that without it *Autography* would have been, in a word, nothing. The question then becomes can Whipple still expose *Autography* as baseless after it had proved so popular, so he asks: “Whence derived he this absolute power? Has he by any merit of his own qualified himself to be the Sylla of the Republic of Letters? What credentials from Apollo does he show to sustain his decisions? These questions give back echoes, not replies” (Gerber 112), Whipple says, and he is right, so long as the questions are put to *Autography*. However, the object and audience of these questions, “the people” also object and audience of *Autography* is their answer. The “colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence”—we would say, the hoax-effect—of *Autography* ultimately traces back to the paradox of a self-exalted “literary dictator,” who has been democratically elected.

### **February 1842:**

A great divide in the American mind: Whipple and Poe—The little civil war of *Autography*—The “literary Mohawk” and the claims of the “iron pen”—Eccentricity and

“the democracy of reason”—Assimilation, Dissemination, and the democratic accident of *Autography*

Edwin Percy Whipple’s 1866-volume *Character and Characteristic Men* is a compelling companion-piece to *Autography*, not least for the fact that between them two of the most powerful voices in nineteenth-century American literary criticism lend themselves to radically different but all compelling work on the notion of character. Throughout Whipple’s collection essays, “all more or less [illustrating] one idea of the nature, growth and influence of character” (Whipple [1866] v), manifold reasons present themselves as to why he would have found *Autography* “tormenting.”

For instance, the “intrinsic nature” of character consists, for Whipple, in “the embodiment of things in persons”; as such, “Persistency,” “constancy and continuousness of effort” in pursuance of a certain object, idea, or line work is the mark of great men (ibid. 13, 14). One of the most basic premises of *Autography*, by contrast, is to treat character as an embodiment of persons in things, like an MS., facsimile signature, or autograph (or a skull or facial expression, if we broaden our interest to the “spirit of enquiry” autography shares with phrenology and physiognomy, whose “art of tormenting” it refines). Although Poe certainly explores the notion autography persistently, the inconstant and discontinuous “nature, growth, and life” of the theory and practice of autography does not meet the demands of Whipple’s notion of “Persistency.” Indeed, if Poe had earned a place among Whipple’s Characteristic Men, he may well have been right at home with what Whipple classes as “counterfeits” of character (ibid. 31): the dalliers in “separate conceptions” (ibid. 20), the pursuers of “enticing images”

(*ibid.*), the persons “enticed out of the strongholds of their character” (by which Whipple means their careers or even former jurisdictions, among other things) and lured into “unaccustomed fields of exertion” (*ibid.* 9), the “men of passions” (*ibid.* 13); the “youthful *blasé*” (*ibid.* 30), “that large and constantly-increasing class of our fellow-citizens who are commonly included in the genus ‘sponge’” (*ibid.* 22). The nearsightedness of the point of view from which Whipple looks down on these counterfeit characters, the nearsightedness of his idea of “Persistency” and even of “work,” comes clearly into focus when he lists “voyages to the moon” among the stupid and “ruinous speculations” entered into (*ibid.* 11) when men swallow the lure of “unaccustomed fields of exertion.” Hoaxes or not, Poe and Richard Adams Locke sent men to the moon over a century before NASA did.

Yet, even accepting the “tenacity of hold,” all the work and “power to continue in it,” necessary to realize our fantasy of voyaging to the moon as an unforeseeable event, for Whipple, he endorses a generally chaste, if not sterile, conception of “creative thought”: “Indeed, in all departments of creative thought,” he writes, “fertility is a temptation to be resisted before inventions and discoveries are possible. The artist who dallies with his separate conceptions as they throng into his mind, produces no statue or picture, for that depends on austere dismissing the most enticing images, provided they do not serve his particular purpose at the time. The same truth holds in the inventive arts and science” (*ibid.* 20). Poe likely would have been as disgusted with this pronouncement as Whipple was with *Autography*. Still, the great divide between Whipple and Poe that may be discerned in their thinking about thought, creativity, art, work, artwork, of course

character, and almost any other imaginable subject does beg the question of what about *Autography* made this rare point of contact between Whipple and Poe possible.

Undoubtedly, the footbridge thrown over the great divide in the American mind which would seem to have Whipple on one side and Poe on the other was built in no small part upon the nationalist character of *Autography*. The idea of “national character” resounds in *Character and Characteristic Men*, although Whipple cautions in his preface that the bulk of these collected essays were written prior to “the Rebellion,” by which he means The Civil War, and as such may appear in some respects not quite *au courant*. “This is particularly true,” Whipple says, “of the discourse on the American Mind, which is now only reprinted because it contains some remarks on national character that could not well be omitted” (ibid. v-iv). Indeed, turning to Whipple’s thoughts on the American mind, the following words do seem somewhat outmoded by the profound civil discord and divisiveness of 1860s America: “[T]he thoughts, acts, and characters of Plymouth Puritan and Virginia Cavalier, through two centuries of active existence, have been fused into a mass of national thought, character, and life; and that this national life has sufficient energy and pliancy to assimilate foreign nature incessantly pouring into it, and to grow, through this process of assimilation, into a comprehensive national mind” (ibid. 132). Reprinted the year after The Civil War formally ended, these words seem imbued with a wish that the American mind could yet be “fused into a mass of national thought, character, and life,” if not once more then for a time to come; “it is no so much in the present,” Whipple later says, “as in the future that we have the grandest vision of the American mind” (ibid. 163).

Two decades prior to the outbreak of The Civil War, however, *Autography* seemed to have posed something of a challenge (albeit a minor challenge by comparison) to the idea of “assimilation” constitutive of Whipple’s notion of national character as character in general: the “process of assimilation” Whipple champions on the national level as a means of incorporating foreign influence without losing a sense of national identity being the same process advocated on the level of the individual for rendering character coextensive and conterminous with experience without losing a sense of self (ibid. 6, 7). This “process of assimilation,” whose importance Whipple frequently underscores in the case of literary men, seemed to have found in *Autography* something that just could not be assimilated, swallowed or incorporated—a “colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence”—in spite of all its American-ness something foreign about *Autography* Whipple could not stomach, which we only know because there was also something about *Autography* that would not be denied.

On the one hand, the sort of little civil war that plays itself out uniquely in Whipple’s criticism of *Autography* has every appearance of a battle between Whipple and Poe over the state of American literature. As we have seen, Whipple charges Poe with omitting sundry names from and unduly admitting sundry names into his collection of “*the most noted among the living literati of the country*,” and yet, in his review Whipple does not identify any particular name unduly given place or missing from its place in *Autography*. Here, any particular reservations about the opinions reflected in Poe’s decisions as to who or what to include in (or who or what to exclude from) the literary circle of *Autography* are subordinate to a more general reservation about Poe’s unsuitability for undertaking the “task” of “deciding upon the merits of a whole

literature” (Gerber 112). The “position” of “censor general of American authors” into which Poe so presumptuously and impertinently writes himself in *Autography* is one for which he “singularly disqualified” (ibid. 113, 112).

On the other hand, Whipple cannot mount this criticism without tacitly acknowledging that Poe had effectively, if presumptuously and impertinently, written himself into the “position” of “censor general of American authors.” There would have been no cause for decrying Poe’s unsuitability for this “position” unless it had not in some way appeared to suit him in the first place. Thus the little civil war that gives every appearance of a battle between Whipple and Poe over the state of American literature is perhaps primarily a battle being waged internally to Whipple’s own critical posture in relation to *Autography*. We have duly registered our suspicions that it is the imposture of the autographs that compels Whipple to see so much at stake in Poe’s unique representation of the state of American literature. While Whipple seems to eschew the fact that Poe favors “the movement of the pen rather than what flows from it” (Gerber 111), the dogged urgency of Whipple’s criticism of *Autography* seems to afford it just as much effectivity as a representation of the state of American literature as, say, Rufus Griswold’s popular anthologies of American literature from the same epoch.

The general picture of Whipple’s critical posture in relation to *Autography* is enhanced by contrast with a later view he takes on Poe in his massive survey of “American Literature: 1776-1876.”

Edgar Allan Poe [...] adopted, or was forced into, literature as a profession. He was a man of rare original capacity, cursed by an incurable perversity of character. It cannot be said that he failed of success. The immediate recognition as



positive additions to our literature of such poems as “The Raven,” “Annabel Lee,” and “The Bells,” and of such prose stories as “The Gold Bug,” “The Purloined Letter,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” indicates that the public was not responsible for the misfortunes of his life. He also assumed the position of general censor and supervisor of American letters, and in this he also measurably succeeded; for his critical power, when not biased by his caprices, was extraordinarily acute, and during the period of his domination no critic’s praise was more coveted than his, and no critic’s blame more dreaded. [...] One of two things was necessary to quicken his mind into full activity. The first was animosity against an individual; the second was some chance suggestion which awakened and tasked all the resources of his intellectual ingenuity. The wild, weird, unearthly, *under*-natural, as distinguished from supernatural, element in his most popular poems and stories is always accompanied by an imagination which not only spiritually discerns but relentlessly dissects. The morbid element, directing his powers, came from his character; the perfection of his analysis came from an intellect as fertile as it was calm, and as delicate in selecting every minute thread of thought as seizing every evanescent shade of feeling. (Whipple [1886] 86-87)

We will only make note of the generally genial tone in which Whipple gives notice of Poe here. Though certainly a stark contrast with the “rather savage” tone of his review of *Autography*, the context of Whipple’s remarks is likely what makes the difference. Surveying a hundred years of American literary history Whipple cannot deny the influence of Poe and the “immediate recognition as positive additions to our literature” of

many of his works; while such a survey is not the place for polemic, the occasion of reviewing *Autography* draws from him a much more pointed response to Poe. One point shared by both the review of *Autography* and this later summation of Poe's writerly career, however, concerns Whipple's thought of Poe as a "general censor or supervisor of American letters"; indeed, the idea seems carried over here from the review of *Autography*.

In "American Literature" Whipple is clearly situating Poe's censure and supervision of American literature in his reputation for severe criticism. Various titles conferred on Poe by his contemporaries—the "literary Mohawk," the "tomahawk man," the "broad-axe man," the "American Radamanthus"—similarly reflect the fact that his individual character was often eclipsed by or wholly identified with the mechanical fashion in which he seemed to level the strictures of that notorious implement "of an absolutely independent criticism" memorialized in Poe's abstract of *The Stylus*, that "antique *iron pen*" (ER 1035, 1033): "during the period of his domination," Whipple says, "no critic's praise was more coveted than his, and no critic's blame more dreaded." There are certainly indications that Whipple discerned some traces of Poe's *iron pen* in *Autography*. At one point in his review, Whipple generalizes Poe theory and practice of autography as "damnation being dealt out liberally to all whose penmanship displays no genius, and praise awarded to those whose handwriting pleases the said Mr. Poe" (Gerber 111): a remark which also reflects something of the bias Whipple suggests informed Poe's critical writing more generally. In the letter to Griswold from 23 December 1841, he intimates that the "literary Mohawk" had not spared one of his fellow "Frongpondians" (Poe's word for Bostonians) in *Autography* thus compelling him to

write, to right Poe's wrong: "How he cuts up Tuckerman! *That* set my pen in motion" (Gerber 111). Indeed, there is something of conspiratorial jubilation in this missive, suggesting that the "rather savage" tone in which Whipple pens his review of *Autography* was a purposeful critical (im)posture, a conscious effort to beat Poe at his own game, to fight fire with fire, to match spleen with spleen.

The cultural mythos of the "literary Mohawk" may certainly be read into *Autography* but only obliquely; it evinces little of the "cutting up," at least in the sense of the excessive critical severity for which Poe was known, if for no other reason than Poe's editorial commentary on an individual author only occasionally amounts to more than four or five sentences. Poe's sketch of Tuckerman, which Whipple singles out as the one that "set [his] pen in motion," is mild even by the standards of *Autography*, to say nothing of the rigorous spleen characteristic of some of Poe's more "elaborate criticisms" (Ostrom 2:331-333).<sup>124</sup> At one point in his review of *Autography* Whipple himself seems to admit that here Poe's position as "general censor or supervisor of American letters" is lacking in that force of "domination" that made "no critic's praise [...] more coveted than his, and no critic's blame more dreaded": "These ["men of inferior talent and reputation"] who are thus exalted [in our being "favored" with their autographs], are praised at the expense of their betters,—their productions are recommended to public attention, and their 'unwritten' genius, if we may so express it, is lauded in a style which makes the

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<sup>124</sup> Consider as a point of contrast, and proximate to the early articles of *Autography* from 1836, Poe's review of Theodore S. Fay's *Norman Leslie*, wherein Poe and his contemporaries found "much matter for 'cutting up'" (PL 187): "severe to a fault," *Norman Leslie* is "utterly torn to pieces in a long and detailed Review of the most bitter and unsparing sarcasm"; "amusing [...] in bad taste [...] [t]he author is flayed"; "Such reviews as that [...] will be read [...] Men—and Women likewise—will always be attracted in crowds [...] to see a fellow creature flayed alive"; "We have rarely read a review more caustic or more called for than the *flaying* which the new editor of the Messenger has so judiciously given Mr. Fay's 'bepuffed, beplastered and be-Mirrored' novel" (PL 186-188).

reader wonder how the critic can ever write severely” (Gerber 112). If we had to choose between the only “two things,” according to Whipple, “necessary to quicken [Poe’s] mind into full activity,” in *Autography* it would not be “animosity against an individual” but “some chance suggestion which awakened and tasked all the resources of his intellectual ingenuity.”

In pursuing the “minute thread” (Whipple) of that “strong analogy” (Poe) said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character” and in “seizing” upon the “evanescent shade of feeling” (Whipple) “which prompts to the collection of autographs” (Poe) as “a natural and rational one,” Poe does not, however, embody the character of heroic “Persistency,” as “the quality which most distinguishes men of character from men of passions and opinions” (Whipple [1886] 13). While Whipple affixes the stamp of “Persistency” to a diverse company of Characteristic Men—Kepler, Newton, Hannibal, Caesar, Shakespeare, Scott (ibid. 14), even the “Puritan Englishman” (ibid. 133)—this company would never be so inclusive as to count Poe among its number. In that “wild, weird, unearthly, *under-natural*” way in which Poe’s “incurable perversity of character” coexists with an “intellect as fertile as it was calm,” in which a “morbid element” endures in “the perfection of his analysis,” Poe embodies, if not “an anarchy of faculties” which Whipple saw as the mark of the “mental *roué*” (ibid. 19), then, in a word, “Eccentricity.”

Whipple defines “Eccentricity” as deviation from the “established order” of common sense, as an affront to what he calls “the democracy of reason” (Notably, this is the only instance in which the word democracy appears in *Character and Characteristic Men.*) (ibid. 35-37).

The great office of common sense is to set up the general wisdom and the general will against the caprices of individual opinion and the excesses of self-will. [...] Eccentricity is the disturbance of the relations enjoined by common sense, and the habit of looking at things, not in their relation to each other, but in their relations to the dominant willfulness of the individual. [...] When this proceeds on any grounds of original disposition, it soon exalts caprice into a principle and organizes crochets into character. Men of this stamp, in whose huddled minds disorder is welded together by a crazy force of individuality, commonly pass for more than they are worth. Their self-will, the parent of boundless impudence and furious self-assertion, gives audacity to intellectual littleness, raciness to intellectual anarchy, and a certain flash to and sparkle to meanness and malice. [...] Yet through all the jar, and discord, and fussy miscreativity of such chaotic minds there runs an unmistakable individuality, by which you can discriminate one crazy head from another, and refer the excesses of each to their roots in character.

It is only, however, when eccentricity connects itself with genius that we have its raciest and most riotous disregard of the restraints of custom and the maxims of experience. Sane and healthy genius, it is true, is often at war with recognized principles without being eccentric. If it violates the conventional order, and disturbs the practical relations of things, it is because it discerns a higher order, and discovers relations more essential. Eccentricity views things in relation to its own crotchet; genius, in relation to a new idea. [...] But genius itself sometimes

falls under the dominion of willfulness and whim, and it then creates magnificent crotchets of its own. (ibid. 37-39)

Trouble comes not necessarily from eccentric deviations from “the democracy of reason”—some of which are readily recognizable and condemnable, for instance, drunkenness—but from the difficulty of the distinguishing good, productive eccentricity from bad, destructive eccentricity. On the one hand, “the democracy of reason” is set up as an “office of common sense,” which “destroys pretence and quackery, and tests genius and heroism”; on the other hand, it “would decay and die out were it not continually nourished by the new and freshening life poured into it by the creative thinkers whom it denounces as unpractical visionaries” (ibid. 36). So eccentric deviation could never destroy “the democracy of reason” except by never occurring. Not only does Whipple describe the chief purpose of “the great office of common sense” as protection “against the caprices of individual opinion and the excesses of self-will,” begging the question of what the “office of common sense” would have to do on a daily basis if not weeding out “fussy miscreativity,” but the very life-blood of common sense, what prevents it from imprisoning itself and dying out in “the restraints of custom and the maxims of experience,” what gives it nourishment, “new and freshening life,” is a more rare type of eccentric deviation: new ideas and new “relations of things” given “by the creative thinkers whom it denounces as unpractical visionaries.” Genius, to be good genius, does not have to be eccentric. (Whipple does not go so far as to call Martin Luther eccentric, for instance, though he did assail “established order” (ibid. 39); there is “[s]ane and healthy genius [...] often at war with recognized principles.”) Eccentricity, to be good eccentricity, however, has to be genius.

It would seem that, for Whipple, Poe had failed in *Autography* to achieve this “slippery, elastic, and elusive” point of distinction between good eccentricity and bad eccentricity (ibid. 64). The “egotism” that Whipple relentlessly charges to Poe’s account in his review of *Autography* is a character trait that frequently appears in reference to the Eccentric Characters collected among Whipple’s Characteristic Men. “Men of this stamp, in whose huddled minds disorder is welded together by a crazy force of individuality, commonly pass for more than they are worth.” This seems to be precisely the sort of situation Whipple is trying to expose in the popular election of *Autography*. “It is certainly a colossal [*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. Whence derived he this absolute power? Has he by any merit of his own qualified himself to be the Sylla of the Republic of Letters? What credentials from Apollo does he show to sustain his decisions?” Whipple wants to have it that he is asking these questions on behalf of “the democracy of reason,” as if common sense would have it that “[t]hese questions give back echoes, not replies.” Yet, the fact is, Whipple was the only person asking these questions. (The faintest echo of them is discernable in Joseph Evans Snodgrass’s pronounced lack of faith in “the notion of *character*” at stake in *Autography*; but, then, Snodgrass is one of those names Whipple identifies as “exalted [...] praised at the expense of [its] betters” in *Autography*, so perhaps we should be cautious about trusting in his ideas on “American literary character.”) Certainly Whipple alone represents *Autography* as one of those “follies so cross and crimes so enormous, that their actors seem to have escaped from their humanity into brutes or demons” (ibid. 64). In the absence of his “rather savage article on [Poe’s] impertinence” *Autography* would have

achieved precisely the sort of vague distinction of eccentric genius (a character-type Whipple liberally peoples with literary men, “from Aristophanes down to Thackeray”), whereby “whims, caprices, crotchets, ruling passions, intrusive egotisms, which make their possessors butts or bores to common sense, are by the man of mirthful genius so brightened, interpreted, softened, and humanized, and made to glide into such ludicrous forms of grotesque character, that they are converted into attractive boon companions in the festivities of the mind” (ibid. 58). Without Whipple’s dogged refusal to swallow what Poe serves up in *Autography*, it would have been all but universally recognized as “food for merriment” among the American readership.

Thus, while Whipple, better than perhaps any reader of *Autography* in history, recognized the eccentricity of Poe’s design, in the sense of something “[r]egulated by no central control,” “irregular, anomalous, proceeding by no known method, capricious,” “deviating from usual methods, odd, whimsical” (*OED*), in putting this reading forward, he had to deviate from the common sense understanding of *Autography*. What “the democracy of reason” seemed to have “converted into [an] attractive boon [companion] in the festivities of the mind,” Whipple took it upon himself savagely to renounce. In short, in order to expose the eccentricity of Poe’s design in *Autography* Whipple had to play the eccentric. Remarkably, it seems both Poe and Whipple tried publicly and anonymously to play up the other’s eccentricity. First there appeared Whipple’s unsigned review in the *Boston Times*, sarcastically taking for granted his audience’s ignorance “of so important an intellectual phenomenon” in order to reintroduce *Autography* to the American readership as a first introduction to it as “a colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence.” Later that same month, there appeared that unsigned defense of “Mr.



Poe's *Autography*" issued out of Philadelphia (also the seat of *Graham's Magazine*), suggesting that Whipple just failed to get the joke: "The *Times* takes in sober earnest what every body else but itself has understood to be at least half meant in jest" (Ljungquist [1992] 54). Both Mr. Anonymous and Mr. Anonymous manage in their own unique ways to speak for "every body else."

More remarkably still, both Whipple and Poe privately acknowledged that there was more at stake in their differing perspectives on *Autography* than a bad joke. In that letter to Rufus Griswold that would, over a century later, allow Gerald E. Gerber to put Whipple's anonymous review of *Autography* back on record, Whipple admits that Poe "did [Griswold] justice in the Chapter on *Autography*" (Gerber 110). Though this seems a minor concession, it expressly contradicts Whipple's claim in his review that is "morally impossible for [Poe] to give sensible criticism on any form of literature, or manner of composition, which clashes with his own style and manner of thinking" (ibid. 112). If Poe was capable of doing justice to "no particular friend of his" (ibid. 110)—the man who would take over the editorial chair at *Graham's Magazine* not five months after Poe wrapped up the *Autography* series, and not a month after the publication of his own representation of the Republic of Letters in the shape of *The Poets and Poetry of America*—then it would seem at least possible that he could do justice to the enterprise of *Autography* itself, for which Whipple claims in his review Poe is "singularly disqualified."

Then, on 3 February 1842, Poe wrote a letter to Frederick W. Thomas, registering the impression made on him by Whipple's review<sup>125</sup> (an impression that could not have registered in that hyperbolically optimistic preface to the "Appendix of Autographs," recall, for its having been prepared in advance of Whipple's review). What haunted Poe about Whipple's review of *Autography* was not his complaints about the names unduly given place or missing from their place there, not his contemptuous out-of-hand rejection of Poe's theory of autography, not the "rather savage" character-attack leveled at him as one as incapable of "correct criticism" as a New Zealander of "correct views of Christianity," but this parting shot, Whipple's final words on *Autography*: "One peculiarity of [Poe's] article is, that the contributors to Graham's Magazine, from the proprietor downwards, or from the proprietor upwards, are praised with singular benevolence. As long as Mr. Poe is allowed to retain his position as censor general of American authors, it is well to know that the path to immortality lies through Graham's Magazine" (ibid. 113). Turns out, what may well seem the charge least likely to touch Poe, whose reputation (for better or worse) was that of a critic who maintained fearlessly what he believed honestly, was what hit closest to home. Moreover, of Whipple's laundry

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<sup>125</sup> Gerald Gerber, who restored Whipple's review of *Autography* to public record in 1981, concludes the presentation of his discovery by referencing this piece of Poe's correspondence. We are indebted to Gerber for originally bringing it our attention; however, that attention also confirmed for us in a much more decided way than it did for Gerber the impression made on Poe by Whipple's "rather savage article on his impertinence." "Although Poe was acquainted with the *Notion*," Gerber writes, "I can find no conclusive evidence that he was aware of the unsigned review. But Poe was clearly was aware that someone had question his 'critical impartiality' in the autography series in *Graham's*" (Gerber 113). Gerber goes on to quote from Poe's letter to Thomas, wherein we find precisely the sort of "conclusive evidence" that Poe was not just "aware of" but profoundly affected by Whipple's review of *Autography*. Even if somebody apart from Whipple had questioned his "critical impartiality," and no one apart from Whipple did, we would still be sure that Poe read (and reread) the review.

list of Poe's failings in *Autography*, this one "peculiarity" happens to be the only appearance of a consistent application of a certain rule in the design of *Autography*.

In response to a letter from Thomas of 13 January wherein Thomas thanks Poe for his "kind notice" in *Autography*—"Many thanks to you for your kind notice of me among your autographs—I owe you one" (PL 358)—Poe writes:

You are quizzing me about the autographs. I was afraid to say more than one half of what I really thought of you, lest it should be attributed to personal friendship. Those articles have had a great run—have done wonders for the Journal—but I fear have also done me, personally, much injury. I was weak enough to permit Graham to modify my opinions (or at least their expression) in many of the notices. In the case of Conrad, for example; he insisted upon *praise* and worried me into speaking well of such ninnies as Holden, Peterson, Spear, &c., &c. I would not have yielded had I thought it made much difference what one said of such puppets as these, but it seems the error has been made to count against my critical impartiality. Know better next time. Let no man accuse me of leniency again. (Ostrom 1:192-193)

Whereas Whipple's letter to Griswold puts his signature forevermore on *Autography*, and uniquely so since his signature does not appear in *Autography*, Poe's letter to Thomas has him losing his signature, which appears like none other in *Autography* but is lost in a fashion not unlike every other that appears there, by virtue of a kind of appropriation or theft. With Poe's acknowledgment of George Rex Graham's influence over him in the composition of *Autography*—ironically, it was "the *energy* which particularly distinguishes him as a man" that Poe discerned in the "very bad, or at least very

illegible,” MS. of his proprietor in the editorial commentary affixed to his autograph in the December 1841 “Chapter on Autography”—one can almost hear that hyperbolic optimism of the preface to the “Appendix of Autographs” deflate like a balloon. There, Poe registers “no less surprise than pleasure” upon finding “so little discrepancy of opinion manifested in relation to the hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures” (GLG 20.1, 44). “The fact, however, speaks loudly to one point,” Poe had said, “to the *unity of truth*. It assures us that differences which exist among us, are differences not of real but of affected opinion” (ibid.). We later learn that these “hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures” were neither maintained fearlessly nor believed honestly but were themselves “affected” opinions: perhaps not altogether “affected,” but who’s to say where or when George Rex Graham might not hold sway? For his part, Poe leaves the matter rather open-ended: “In the case of Conrad, for example; he insisted upon *praise* and worried me into speaking well of such ninnies as Holden, Peterson, Spear, &c., &c.” There is certainly a sense in which that world-stage whereupon we situated the democratic achievement of *Autography* as a performance of the “literary *histrion*” is reduced here not even so much as to a nationalist character as to a platform of the institutional character of *Graham’s Magazine*. This is Whipple’s point precisely when he jocularly suggests “the path to immortality lies through Graham’s Magazine.”

While the democratic achievement of *Autography* is rendered, once more, laughable to the point of unmeaningness, we would maintain fearlessly what we believe honestly that nowhere, at no time in *Autography* series history, does it appear more democratic. Only here it appears democratic not in the sense of an achievement that can

be claimed by any body in particular but as a circumstance, a sort of accident, which has it that no body will remain the King of American Autography.

Up to this point, our reading of Whipple's review of *Autography* has considered mainly his profound reservations about the titular status of Poe's signature in relation to the literary circle of *Autography*, and this remains as crucial a question for our understanding of *Autography* as for Whipple's interpretation of Poe's place in relation to it as that of a "literary dictator." There is, however, another way in which Whipple remarks Poe's signature in *Autography*, and it is one which uncannily recalls the place of Joseph A. B. C... Miller in the 1836 articles of *Autography* for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, where Miller's name appears, each time uniquely, signing off on or counter-signing every entry in *Autography* with his middle initial rotating sequentially through the alphabet. Whipple writes, "When we first read the 'Chapter on Autography,' and discovered the small writers who were suddenly exalted into greatness, our first impulse was to issue an extra with the news, but we found that the pronunciation of Mr. Poe's name at the end of each of his criticisms, effectively quieted our first feelings of alarm and astonishment" (Gerber 112). As with the whole of Whipple's review, the effect here depends on sarcasm. Whipple feigns having been duped for a spell by *Autography*, as if his "first impulse was to issue an extra with the news" of what makes for "greatness" in American literature, only to say that its was "the pronunciation of Mr. Poe's name at the end of each of his criticisms"—a recognition of the machinations of this "literary dictator" in precisely that place formerly occupied by the name(s) of the Ghost-King of American Autography, Joseph A. B. C... Miller—which "effectively quieted [these] first feelings of alarm and astonishment." In other words, Whipple wants to have it that Poe's

signature dispelled the hoax-effect of *Autography*. Yet, at the same time, Whipple's review does nothing to convince us that "[these] first feelings of alarm and astonishment" were so "effectively quieted." In fact, quite the reverse; there is almost nothing given voice to in Whipple's review of *Autography* except for "alarm and astonishment": "It is certainly a colossal [*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." While Whipple remarks Poe's signature *both* as what assures him that there is nothing believably new or newsworthy about *Autography* and what makes it "a colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence" warranting a "rather savage" setting down, it was neither of these claims that troubled Poe but Whipple's recognition that Poe's signature in *Autography* was not altogether his own, that he had let his hand be guided by George Rex Graham.

However, the recognition of Graham as ghostwriter of *Autography* (or, keeping up the trace of Joseph A. B. C... Miller and the evocative coincidence of Graham's middle name, as the newly installed Ghost-King of American Autography), does not belong solely to Whipple or to Poe. Poe certainly would never have confessed to his hand having been guided by Graham had Whipple not leveled that penetrating observation of the "singular benevolence" with which the subscribers of *Graham's* are praised in *Autography*, but Whipple leaves it decidedly ambiguous whether or not he saw Graham himself behind the trend: "the contributors to *Graham's Magazine*, from the proprietor downwards, or from the proprietor upwards, are praised." In fact, he comes much closer to attributing this "peculiarity" directly to Poe: "*As long as Mr. Poe is allowed to retain his position as censor general of American authors*, it is well to know that the path to

immortality lies through Graham's Magazine." What seems to have so troubled Poe, what did him "much injury, personally," is that Whipple could not have made more of an effort to have Poe's signature appear everywhere signing off on "the colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence" of *Autography*, while also drawing notice to those "affected" opinions that reduce it to a mere vehicle of self-promotion for *Graham's Magazine*. It is as if Whipple is suggesting that without Poe *Graham's Magazine* would not be given to such petty self-aggrandizement and that without *Graham's Magazine* Poe would no longer have occasion to indulge in such petty efforts "to retain his position as censor general of American authors." When Poe privately registers the impression made on him by Whipple's review, the "error" he confesses to does not consist in a failure to do justice to the design of *Autography* but in a failure to do justice to his own name; "much injury" Poe feels "personally," courtesy of Whipple, not for his "error" having been made to count against a "critical impartiality" that should have characterized the opinions given voice to in *Autography* but for its having "been made to count," Poe says, "against my critical impartiality." Poe informs Thomas that he would not even have "yielded" to Graham in the first place "had [he] thought it made much difference what one said of such puppets as [Conrad, [...] Holden, Peterson, Spear, &c., &c.]." Poe privately admits what he did not have to admit, that Whipple taught him a lesson, and, as was his right, Poe privately reclaims his signature: "Know better next time. Let no man accuse me of leniency again." Notably, Poe's seems to interpret the reclamation of his signature as a demand to live up to the claims of his iron pen, when now man has accused him of leniency in the first place. But our question is, what is left behind in *Autography*?

What difference does it make for reading *Autography* that the authorship and authority over it so dramatically expressed in the shape of that titular facsimile signature or autograph of one Edgar A. Poe cannot be read as purely Poe's signature (nor even as a faithful representation of it) but one in some part given over, over-written or overridden, by another or others (that of George Rex Graham certainly but perhaps also that of Edwin Percy Whipple, since it was he who made this issue count), moreover, when Poe himself says that he had not thought it would or should make a difference that he let it be so given over, over-written or overridden, in the case of *Autography*?

Though *uniquely apart and uniquely a part*, Poe's signature ultimately proves equal to every other represented in *Autography*, every one is arrested in a overriding current of dissemination that, we would suggest, is the very character of character in *Autography*. What if what spurred Whipple to write about *Autography* was also what he could not assimilate, what was just not right about *Autography*? What if what "set [his] pen in motion" was not just Poe's "cutting up" of Tuckerman (as he claims in his letter to Griswold) but the "cutting up" at the very heart of Poe's design of *Autography*: as a counter-current to Whipple's favorite notion of "assimilation" whereby he measures character (individually, nationally, and universally), a tide of dissemination? There is no autography much less *Autography* without dissemination: all those errant MSS. from various known and various unknown sources with their signatures cut out, the woodcuts Poe commissioned to have these specimens appear in print, the idea underwriting the bulk of Poe's editorial commentary in *Autography* that people had left something of themselves behind in all these missives no one ever seemed to miss, the printing of the magazines in which *Autography* appeared, the seemingly irresistible way *Autography* ran



through the American press, whether engaging a desire to reprint it or merely to puff it up, even through to Whipple, prompting him to issue the most comprehensive statement of his career about Edgar Allan Poe (that Poe lived to read, that is).

In this little literary circle, comprised of ones “in on it” and of one “out of it” — primarily, Poe, Graham, and Whipple, but also Thomas and Griswold, whose receipt of certain letters makes the impression possible—do we not find a democratic consensus about the irresolute semi-seriousness of *Autography*? Poe is taking it seriously enough to not say “more than one half of what [he] really thought of [Thomas],” for instance, “lest it should be attributed to personal friendship,” but even barring this as mere politesse and in a much more general way we may take him at his word when he writes, “The diligence required in getting together these autographs has been a matter of no little moment, and the expense of the whole undertaking will be at once comprehended” (GLG 19.6, 273). Poe took *Autography* seriously enough to undertake its considerable if not always consistent work. At the same time, he didn’t take it so seriously as to not let Graham “[worry him] into speaking well of [certain] ninnies”; he had not thought it would make much difference to puff up “such puppets as these.” Graham, for his part, took *Autography* seriously enough to recognize its potential as a vehicle for the self-promotion and self-interest of *Graham’s Magazine*; at the same time, he did not take it so seriously as to think himself presumptuously intruding on the sanctity of some profound work of genius. There is no sense in which his interrupting the performance of the “literary *histrion*” was in any way inappropriate or in violation of the rules of its theater. Then, there’s Whipple taking *Autography* just seriously enough to write about just how seriously unprincipled, contrived, eccentric Poe’s performance in *Autography* really is.

The moment of this literary circle, this most democratic moment of all of *Autography* series history does afford a certain impression of consensus, but it is an anomalous sort of consensus for being anonymous, something accidental.

No one party to this literary circle knows what any other might know. Whipple would never know that he managed to teach Poe anything, would never know that Poe took seriously what he had said about *Autography*. Graham would never know that Poe's deference to his propriety caused him "personally, much injury," injury more appreciable in the knowledge that a few short months after confessing his "error" to Thomas Poe would quit the editorial seat of *Graham's Magazine*, declaring a new independence in the shape of the ultimately failed prospect of *The Stylus*. Poe would never know that Whipple acknowledged that he was not only capable of but actually managed to do some good work in *Autography*—work which would a year later model an entire department of Poe's dream-magazine, whose efficacy Poe also tested in *The Literati of New York City*—nor that (what would have probably pleased Poe more) *Autography* had managed to anticipate (if only accidentally) the desires of its staunchest critic. The real democratic achievement of *Autography* was, for "the people" to whom it belonged, kept a perfect secret. Accordingly, we would forever keep this secret as the very moment when the proper hoax-effect of *Autography* receded into memory, when its spell became past, arrested in the very indistinct difference between the hoax and the hoax which is not one—"Those articles," Poe said, "have had a great run."

## September 1852

Coming full circle—The turn in *Autography* series history—The original sin of commission-omission—The host-text of *Autography* and Wm. Edward Knowles’s “Autographs and Autography”—Poe’s freewheeling *jeu d’esprit*

It would seem we’ve come full circle.

In a way, the chronicle of the hoax-effect of *Autography* ends where we started out this dissertation, with the story of “The Purloined Letter of *Autography*.” Not eight years after concluding the *Autography* series Poe would deacease, and, as we previously showed, the history of Poe’s Collected Works proves a particularly troubled history when it comes to the (mis)handling of *Autography*. Beginning with Rufus Griswold’s decision to omit it from *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, we turned to John Henry Ingram’s decision to collect at least one series within the series in his edition of the *Works* but in a significantly altered form. We gave particular attention to the tensions between him and Griswold played out in the appropriated, stolen, or purloined letter of *Autography*, tensions that would echo (somewhat unwittingly) in subsequent reprintings of the Ingram-edition of the “Chapter on Autography” throughout the rest of nineteenth century until James Albert Harrison’s unprecedented archivization of the series (both series in the series) in 1902. Here we may appreciate this troubled history from the perspective of thinking the character of character in *Autography* as a thought of dissemination. While *Autography* certainly did not cease to disseminate after Poe’s death, there is no doubt that there is a significant alteration of its legacy which takes place upon this curious collection, this literary archive becoming itself an object of collection,

canonization, and archivization. In order to appreciate its “great run” through the American press we have had to consider the hoax-effect of *Autography* as an all but irresistible impression, even (and perhaps especially) where the “food for merriment” to be had in it proved “indigestible aliment.” Later, as if in confirmation of Poe’s sense that *Autography*’s “great run” had run its course, its legacy becomes more predominately characterized by such manifold forms of suppression that we have had occasion to speak of a repression of *Autography*.

By chance, Poe himself can serve as the herald for this momentous turn in *Autography* series history, echoing a remnant from one epoch as if to carry it over into the next. In November 1842, Poe’s review of Rufus Griswold’s popular anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America* made its appearance in the pages of the *Boston Miscellany*. Griswold had commissioned the review in July of that year, in the same month he was announced as the newly installed editor of *Graham’s Magazine* (PL 372), and, although he would register some displeasure with it, Poe is generally thought to have been quite fair and balanced in his assessment of *Poets*: he had concluded, after all, that “[t]he book should be regarded as *the most important addition which our literature has for many years received*” (ER 556). Still, Poe did not deign merely to puff *Poets*. Of greater interest here than the few specific reservations Poe has about Griswold’s volume are the first few pages of the review where Griswold is not even named and Poe offers a critical meditation on the history of the American literary anthology, on the “*desideratum*” of “a more distinct view of our poetical literature than the scattered effusions of our bards and the random criticisms of our periodicals, could afford” (ER 550). While Poe sees Griswold’s volume as having great potential to meet the demand of this “*desideratum*,”

he ultimately defers the assessment of the achievement of *The Poets and Poetry of America* to “the public voice”: “It is, in fact, by the criticism of the work, that the public voice will, in the end, decide upon its merits. In proportion to the ability or incapacity here displayed, will it, be sooner or later, be approved or condemned” (ER 553). This can seem a rather cagey remark from a critic supposed to be charged with deciding upon the merits or demerits of a work. While Poe offers some few brief assessments of *Poets* that he says hold true for “the writer of this article, individually,” and others that he characterizes “in the way of fault-finding” (ER 555, 556), he expressly refuses to make any general claims to the volume’s success or failure or to Griswold’s “ability or incapacity” as its compiler. He suspends its approval or condemnation to some future judgment of “the public voice” that will come “sooner or later.” Could Poe be more democratic?

Far from evading critical responsibility in deferring the achievement of Griswold’s *Poets* to popular election, Poe gives his readers an uncannily familiar parameter in which to judge for themselves how Griswold measures up to his task.

Of the two classes of sins—the negative and the positive—those of omission and those of commission—obvious those of the former class are, beyond doubt, the more unpardonable. It is better to introduce half a dozen “great unknowns,” than to give the “cut direct” to a single individual who has been fairly acknowledged as known. The public, in short, seem to demand *such a compendium of our poetical literature as shall embrace specimens from those works alone, of our recognized poets; which, either through accident, or by dint of merit, have been most particularly the subjects of public discussion. We wish this, that we may be put in*

condition to decide for ourselves upon the justice or injustice of the reputation attained. In critical opinion much diversity exists; and, although there is but one true and tenable critical opinion, there are still a thousand, upon all topics, which, being only the shadows, have all the outlines, and assume all the movements, of the substance, of truth. Thus any critic who should exclude from the compendium all which tallied not with his individual ideas of the Muse, would be found to exclude nine hundred and ninety-nine thousandths of that which the public at large, embracing *all* varieties of opinion, has been accustomed to acknowledge as poesy. (ER 552)

In other words, whether preparing a work “professing to compile or select from the productions of our native bards” or judging the merit of a work characterized thus (ER 550), better, Poe says, to think too democratically than “to give the ‘cut direct’ to a single individual” who may have somehow or someway distinguished his or herself to another. There are no few echoes of Poe’s work in *Autography* here. Consider, for instance, that vague “rule [...] of celebrity” that he said had informed his decisions as to who or what to include in (or who or what to exclude from) his literary circle, which will not necessarily conform to a judgment as to “*merit*” or “true worth” but, as Poe intimates here, is left open to even “accidental” notoriety. However, the most profoundly resonate echo of *Autography* here is not Poe echoing Poe but Poe echoing Edwin Percy Whipple, appropriating, stealing, even plagiarizing the distinction Whipple so mercilessly leveled against his critical (im)posture in *Autography*: “two classes of sins [...] those of omission and those of commission.” Poe adopts what was for Whipple a sort of epigram of “the colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence” of *Autography*—that in it “the sins of commission

are nearly overbalanced by the sins of omission”—as a general rule for “every compilation of the character now discussed” (ER 551).

The compilations of this character Poe mentions in addition to Griswold’s *The Poets and Poetry of America* are Samuel Kettell’s *Specimens of American Poetry* (1829), George B. Cheever’s *The American Common-Place Book of Poetry* (1832), John Keese’s *The Poets of America* (1840), William Cullen Bryant’s *Selections from the American Poets* (1840), and George Pope Morris’s *American Melodies* (1841). Morris, Bryant, and Griswold would all go on to undertake even more extensive compilations of American literature. Morris collaborated with Nathaniel Parker Willis on *The Prose and Poetry of Europe and America* in the early 1850s, and Bryant’s *Library of Poetry and Song* would go through several editions beginning in the 1870s. For his part, Griswold’s published several compilations throughout the 1840s: notably, the first edition of *The Prose Writers of America* appeared in 1847, setting in motion a rather heated rivalry between him and Evert A. Duyckinck, whose collaboration with brother George on *The Cyclopædia of American Literature* would appear less than a decade later<sup>126</sup>; *The Female Poets of America* appeared in 1848. One characteristic that all these works share—and share with any work which would tailor a compilation to an individual author, delimit a literary circle to the space of an individual signature as it were, like Griswold’s *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, and with a more “hoaxy” compilation like *Autography*, whose literary circle is drawn as a collection of signatures—is an economy of commission and omission. Sinning on the side of one is not necessarily more pardonable than sinning on the side of the other. Poe, for his part, recommends erring on the side of a too democratic

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: the Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 121-124.

inclusivity rather than on the side of a too dictatorial exclusivity. However, any work of a compilatory character, the very founding of its editorial authority, whether posture or imposture, will depend for its effectivity on some original sin of commission-omission. In one way or another, a line is drawn which decides more less imperatively, with more or less enforced and enforceable rules and interdictions, who or what is in and who or what is out of the literary circle.

So, it would seem we've come full circle.

Yet, in another way, if we would want to impart any single, lasting impression with this chronicle of the hoax-effect of *Autography*, it would be that *the circle will be broken*, by and by, will ultimately never have contained what it would circumscribe. In literary circles of every description there is a chink of de-scription. Despite all the self-described generality, naturalness, and rationality of *Autography's* revolution in design, there remains an inescapable escaping impression of a conditional contrivance or artificiality, if it be not madness, an inescapably uncontainable and unaccountable character of dissemination, eccentricity, or freewheeling about *Autography's* design. It seems only fitting that we come full circle, that we end where we began; indeed, we would want to come just to the verge of an uncanny almost mechanical repetition. However, we would do so just for the sake of glimpsing an emerging-vanishing horizon, the passing opportunity of an untoward voyage already underfoot. We would leave suspended here as a moment of in-decision the sort of event that prompts the crew of the *Victoria* to democratic election in "The Balloon-Hoax."

Hardly, however, had we done with our rejoicings, when an unforeseen accident occurred which discouraged us to no little degree. The steel rod connecting the



spring with the propeller was suddenly jerked out of place, at the car end, (by a swaying of the car through some movement of one of the two seamen we had taken up,) and in an instant hung dangling out of reach, from the pivot of the axis of the screw. While we were endeavoring to regain it, our attention being completely absorbed, we became involved in a strong current of wind from the East, which bore us, with rapidly increasing force, towards the Atlantic. We soon found ourselves driving out to sea at the rate not less, certainly, than 50 or 60 miles an hour, so that we came up with cape Clear, at some 40 miles to our North, before we had secured the rod, and had time to think what we were about. It was now that Mr. Ainsworth made an extraordinary, but to my fancy, a by no means unreasonable or chimerical proposition, in which he was instantly seconded by Mr. Holland—viz.: that we should take advantage of the strong gale that bore us on, and in place of beating back to Paris, make an attempt to reach the coast of North America. After slight reflection I gave a willing assent to this bold proposition, which (strange to say) met with objection from the two seamen only. As the stronger party, however, we overruled their fears, and kept resolutely on our course. (UP 891-892)

Now, at this moment in our chronicle of the hoax-effect of *Autography*, at issue is an event that did not come, as to the crew of the *Victoria*, as “an unforeseen accident.” We saw it coming. We knew that if we followed the chronicle of the hoax-effect of *Autography* it would seem to have brought us full circle, ending up where we began, while knowing we could have done nothing more to get somewhere. We saw it coming, but we’re lost. One the one hand, we feel a bit like Mr. Ainsworth, wanting excitedly to

welcome the uncharted course; we, too, “can conceive nothing more sublimating than the strange peril and novelty of an adventure such as this” (UP 892). On the other hand, “(strange to say)” we’re feeling a bit like those hapless seamen, for whom the momentousness of the voyage is one of not so much a new, uncharted course as an entirely new perspective on a well-worn path. Our poor minority of two only feels the spirit of the voyage after the *Victoria* loses the coast, passes over “innumerable vessels of all kinds,” occasioning “the greatest excitement on board all”; only then are “our two men [...] now under the influence of a dram of Geneva, [...] resolved to give all scruple, or fear, to the wind” (UP 892). Let us hope the wind keeps up. We’ll try to remain with Mr. Monck Mason, somewhere between Mr. Ainsworth’s rapturous sublime and the seamen’s incautious drunk: “We have an abundance of gas to take us across this small pond, even should the voyage last 3 weeks. I have not the slightest fear for the result. The difficulty has been strangely exaggerated and misapprehended. I can choose my current, and should I find *all* currents against me, I can make very tolerable headway with the propeller. We have no incidents worth recording. The night promises fair” (UP 893). Let us hope, then, that “steel rod connecting the spring with the propeller” stays (back) in its proper place.

In September 1852, not three years after Poe’s death, his *Autography* series was plagiarized. The magnitude of this event is readily brought into perspective by registering a few simple facts. Of the some one hundred autographs collected in this series of thirteen articles by one Wm. Edward Knowles, “Autographs and Autography,” from *Gleason’s Pictorial*, September-November 1852, well over half “belong” to persons counted among “*the most of the living literati of the country*” in Poe’s revival of *Autography* for

*Graham's*. It is clear not just from this fact but from the very appearance of this new series on the page or screen that the later series within the *Autography* series plays host-text to this other hoax which is not one; it looks almost exactly like the remodeled façade of *Autography*, save for here the editorial commentary below each autograph appears in a single column rather than two. Yet, upon closer inspection, one does find some significant differences between *Autography* and “Autographs and Autography,” the most notable and least noticeable difference being that none of the facsimile signatures seem to have been cut from the same mold as the ones printed in *Autography*. (We have compared the facsimiles to the best of our ability and found them uniformly different specimens, but who’s to say what marvelous history might not lie buried between Poe’s series and that of Knowles’s?) There are some other notable and more noticeable differences as well. For instance, “Autographs and Autography” does not occupy itself exclusively with living persons or with American ones. There are no few autographs of dead people in these pages (there is one that especially interests us); those of the “distinguished individuals” who hail from across the “small pond” that stand out in the collection are: Émile de Girardin, Charles Dickens, Jenny Lind, Otto Goldschmidt, and Victor Hugo (GP 3.16, 254, GP 3.18, 286, GP 3.13, 206).

Now, we will not be taking it upon ourselves to address the manifold ways in which this utterly unheard-of Autography-series could have all the arguments and speculations we ventured above with regard to Poe’s *Autography* start repeating themselves with some very significant differences. We will only remark that neither of these two series are one. When Knowles wraps up his final article of “Autographs and Autography” on November 27, 1852, he promises that the New Year will bring with it, in

the pages of the *Pictorial*, a new Autography-series: “It will be conducted by one who has made the subject a study, and who is amply able to do it full justice, besides holding in his possession nearly every autograph of interest that can be obtained. We have found that this feature of the Pictorial has given great pleasure in certain quarters, and therefore mention our purpose of resuming the subject in our next volume, that there may be no disappointment in the matter. Our new series will be more elaborate and more finished than the one herewith completed” (GP 3.22, 350). Knowles’s promise was not an empty one. On January 1, 1853, Ben Perley Poole’s new Autography-series started its four-month-, eleven-article-run in the pages of *Gleason’s Pictorial*. Whether nor not this “new series” is “more finished” than its predecessor is to be seen, but there is no doubt that it is “more elaborate.” Poore’s *Types of Mind, or, Delineations of the Character of Notable Persons in Specimens of their Hand-writing, Illustrated by Fac-Similes of Autographs* makes Poe’s *Autography* seem easy of description.

In the beginning, we remarked that hoaxes begin as parasitism, which therefore means that hoaxes simply never begin for never beginning simply. As Joseph Riddell says, “[t]he notions of originality and invention are made to tremble, reverberate; and the law or laws of genre are violated. ‘Hoax’ acts—that is, mimicks, parodies, repeats, transposes—by a kind of theft” (Riddell 149). We would add that, by necessity, “‘Hoax’ acts” have this character as much in ending as in beginning; the notions of end, finality, conclusion, too, are made to tremble, reverberate. On these very shaky grounds, we shall steal a page from the book of all those brave voyagers of the early twentieth century who started investing in the business of hoaxing in Poe, who never offered any revelations or drew any conclusions for themselves but just gave to others a potential beginning of

revelations and conclusions to come. So, let it be known that in spite of the revolutions in design between Poe's *Autography* and Knowles's "Autographs and Autography" and between Knowles's "Autographs and Autography" and Poore's *Types of Mind, Autography*, the freewheeling mimicries, parodies, repetitions, and transpositions constitutive of this chain of inheritance are built, in fact, on certain theft. Poe's *Autography* was plagiarized.

Here is Knowles stealing from Poe's editorial preface to his revival of *Autography* for *Graham's* in order to introduce his series:

With a view to indulging in a little literary gossip, and at the same time to furnish the numerous readers of the Pictorial with a large number of autographs, some of which have not yet appeared, we have undertaken to present those which are now in our possession. We shall not give them in any regular order, but merely as they come to hand from our portfolio. (GP 3.10, 158)

Many of these words are Poe's.

Our design is three-fold: —In the first place to, seriously to illustrate our position that the mental features are indicated (with certain exceptions) by the handwriting; secondly, to indulge in a little literary gossip; and, thirdly, to furnish our readers with a more accurate and at the same time more general collection of the autographs of our *literati* than is to be found elsewhere. [...] We have thought it unnecessary to preserve any particular order in their arrangement. (GLG 19.5, 225)

Plagiarism abounds in the editorial commentary of Knowles's "Autographs and Autography." We will cite a few of the more striking examples, of which there are no few others and many much more subtle than this:

#### **Knowles on Griswold**

Rufus W. Griswold is a fine writer, though mostly in the editorial way. He is unquestionably a man of genius and thoroughly versed in the literature of America. As a prose-writer, he is polished and entertaining; and as a poet, graceful in the extreme. The signature is rather better than most of his manuscript. (GP 3.11, 174)

#### **Poe on Griswold**

Griswold has written much, but chiefly in the editorial way, whether for the papers, or in books. He is a gentleman of fine taste and sound judgment. His knowledge of American literature, in all its details, is not exceeded by that of any man among us. He is not only a polished prose-writer, but a poet of no ordinary power. [...] His MS. is by no means a good one. (GLG 19.6, 275)

#### **Knowles on G. R. Graham**

Geo. R. Graham is well known to the literary world as editor of "Graham's Magazine." He has contributed considerably to this periodical, and written it *well*. His manuscript is extremely illegible, and shockingly *scratchy*. Yet it plainly indicates more than ordinary *energy*, a quality which he possesses in abundance. (GP 3.17, 270)

### **Poe on G. R. Graham**

Mr. Graham is known to the literary world as the editor and proprietor of “Graham’s Magazine,” the most popular periodical in America [...] For [which] he was written much and well. His MS. generally, is very bad, or at least illegible. At times it is sufficiently distinct, and has force and picturesqueness, speaking plainly of the *energy* which particularly distinguishes him as a man. The signature is more scratchy than usual. (GLG 19.6, 27)

### **Knowles on Eliza Leslie**

Eliza Leslie has written much for the different magazines and publications of the day. Her handwriting, we think, is rather over-effeminate. It is extremely diminutive, and letters as separate from each other, as the different sentences. Her manuscript is extremely neat and legible, the words ending with an inward twirl. (GP 3.12, 190)

### **Poe on Eliza Leslie**

Miss Leslie is celebrated for the homely naturalness of her stories and for the broad satire of her comic style. She has written much for the Magazines. Her chirography is distinguished for neatness and finish, without over-effeminacy. It is rotund, and somewhat diminutive; the letters being separate, and the words always finished with an inward twirl. (GLG 19.5, 231)

There is also, however, a passage in Knowles’s “Autographs and Autography” that we may be sure was not plagiarized but written originally for this new Autography-series: on that very desk littered with Poe’s articles of *Autography*, in who knows what state. We suppose this is as good a place as any to let down our balloon. Prior to discovering

Knowles's Autography-series, we always wondered how Poe's place in *Autography* would have read differently had he been in a position to be included in its literary circle equal to every other who or what included in it. Thanks to his freewheeling *jeu d'esprit*, we know it would have had to read something like this:

The late Edgar A. Poe was, indeed, a strange genius. His whole writings read like the wild imaginings of a mind diseased. As an author, he is without an equal. No brainless imitators rise up to mutilate the thoughts he has left behind him. He stands before us, unapproachable. He seemed born to misfortune, and the knowledge of it cast around him the gloom of melancholy. His chirography is decidedly picturesque, and evinces a mind wild and visionary. It gives evidence of *indefatigability*—a quality which he possessed in an eminent degree. The signature is heavier than the majority of his manuscript.

(GP 3.20, 318)



Part III

**The Signature-Architecture of *Autography***

“Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe—you always get  
what you aim at, your *unity of effect*.”  
- Daniel Hoffman

Every epoch of Poe’s literary legacy has had something to say, perhaps has had to say something, touching on the concept he dubbed the “unity of effect.” For well over a century it has been repeatedly invoked as a sort of crucible through which to work through how Poe worked through his ideas about literature and literary criticism. It has been called “the most significant phrase that [he] ever used” (Smith 171). Yet, one cannot even stress the eminence or immanence of the “unity of effect” in Poe’s writing without immediately falling into certain trouble. For a concept whose very name beckons us to think of something unified (to say nothing here of effect), it appears quite divided: divided between the Romantic tradition from which Poe gleaned the concept and the uniquely modern mode in which he is supposed to have put it to work,<sup>127</sup> divided in its

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<sup>127</sup> Poe’s relationship with Romanticism is exceedingly more complicated, of course, than is acknowledged by this formulation, which is only meant to reflect a general trend in Poe scholarship to acknowledge Poe’s indebtedness to Romanticism only so as to show how he distances himself from it, even if the distance or the difference is as insubstantial as a shadow (i.e., Dark Romanticism). This trend is relatively young, however, and it took no small amount of time for Poe scholarship to acknowledge Poe’s indebtedness to Romanticism in the first place. Indispensable works on Poe’s romantic underpinnings like Edd Winfield Parks’s *Edgar Allan Poe as Literary Critic* (1964), G. R. Thompson’s *Poe’s Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) and, to a lesser extent, Robert D. Jacobs’s *Poe: Journalist and Critic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), cf., especially, 111-117 and 315-328, should be consulted before appreciating the following sorts of treatments of Poe’s romanticism. For a study interested in playing up rather than downplaying Poe’s relationship to Romanticism, for the “Romantic irony” that “more than anything else [...] makes our antebellum American authors Romantics,” which still notes some “contradictory impulses” in “Poe’s aesthetic theory,” cf. Michael West, *Transcendental Wordplay: America’s Romantic Pundsters and the Search for the Language of Nature* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), xi-xiv, 303-315. For Poe’s “residual romanticism” and his “prosthetic modernism,” cf. Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge:

apparent translatability into diverse genres of writing (namely, poetry, fiction, and criticism, between which Poe sometimes maintained dogged distinctions), divided even in its very name. Poe variously referred to the “unity of effect” as the “*unity or totality of interest*,” “the beauty of Unity, Totality, and Truth,” and, the variation that will be of particular interest here, the “unity of impression.”<sup>128</sup> Even if these different articulations of the “unity of effect” are taken to be synonymous, they are not for all that the same. Thus when it comes to the “unity of effect” at issue is not one phrase but phrases, perhaps even phases, given that Poe deferred to the concept throughout a career in which his views of literary meaning must be seen to have adapted to changing conditions, whether those of his own making or those of the American literary marketplace more generally, even if they never fully “matured.” And it makes a world of difference whether what is understood by “unity of effect” refers to “the most significant phrase that Poe ever used” or the most significant phrases that he ever used. Tracking all the potential traces of this concept in Poe would lead one from his earliest literary criticism and

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Cambridge University Press, 1998), 93-95. For a more recent discussion of Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” as “bravura post-Romantic manifesto,” cf. Michael O’Neill, “Mournful Ditties and Merry Measures: Feeling and Form in the Romantic Short Lyric and Song,” *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. Charles Mahoney (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 13. One of the most sustained and reliable studies on these matters is A. Robert Lee’s *Edgar Allan Poe: The Design of Order* (London: Vision, 1987), cf., especially, 147-151.

<sup>128</sup> The phrase “*unity or totality of interest*” is widely held to be Poe’s earliest articulation of his signature-concept of the “unity of effect,” and in both the 1836 “Sigourney—Gould—Ellet,” where the phrase first appeared, (see ER 877) and the April 1842 review of Longfellow’s *Ballads* (see ER 691) Poe attributes the phrase to August Wilhelm von Schlegel. The phrase “beauty of Unity, Totality, and Truth” is one of the more unique of Poe’s many variations on the “unity of effect” for the way it marks a coincidence of the literary aims of Truth and Beauty so often forcibly distinguished in Poe. It appears in reference to “the stern demands of high art” in the unfavorable review of Longfellow’s *Hyperion* for *Burton’s Gentlemen’s Magazine* from 1839 (ER 670). (Much will be said about this coincidence of Truth and Beauty in the reading of *Autography* below.) The phrase “unity of impression” appears as a variation on the “unity of effect” as regularly as any articulation of this concept in Poe: see, in particular, the May 1842 of Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* (ER 571), and the December 1844 installment of *Marginalia* (ER 1355). It is also given particular prominence in “The Philosophy of Composition” from 1846.

reviews to his self-proclaimed masterpiece *Eureka*, from seemingly minor matters like “the effect derivable from well-managed rhyme” (ER 1380-1381) to the origin and end of the material Universe in “Unity” as “Nothingness.”<sup>129</sup>

Given that there is every justification for thinking of the “unity of effect” as something like Poe’s signature-concept—as the concept he frequently claims to have had in view in designing his own literary productions, as the concept frequently called upon to explain his own views on the “Poetic Principle” and the “Philosophy of Composition” as well as to judge the literary productions of others as a critic—reading *Autography* in terms of this signature-concept of Poe’s should not come, at least not initially, as a particularly surprising or particularly novel idea. *Autography* does nonetheless afford a unique context in which to take a novel view on Poe’s signature-concept, not least for the fact that here Poe is *both* issuing judgments about the literary character of well over a hundred of his contemporaries *and*, as will be argued here, engaged in fashioning out of this multitude of character-sketches a literary production of his own. However, the most surprising aspect of *Autography*, when considered from the perspective of the “unity of effect,” is the uncanny way in which the publication history of this most anomalous work

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<sup>129</sup> This formulation of the subject of *Eureka* is derived from the “Abstract” to the work Poe sent to George W. Eveleth in a letter from February 29, 1848, shortly after delivering a portion of the canonized text as a lecture to the New York Society Library on February 3. In the last two points enumerated in the Abstract, nos. 6-7, we read: “Matter, springing from Unity, sprang from Nothingness:—i.e, was *created*. [...] All will return in Nothingness, in returning to Unity” (Ostrom 2:362). As Poe puts the matter more bluntly at the close of point 5: “Thus Unity is *Nothingness*” (Ostrom 2:361). In the text of *Eureka* Poe does not so starkly equate “Unity” with “Nothingness”; however, it is clear which points of the work he had in mind when penning this Abstract, namely, its beginning and end. Near the beginning of *Eureka* appears Poe’s often-cited thesis of this work: “My general proposition, then, is this:—*In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation*” (H 16:185-186). Then, again, near the end, we find a restatement of this point that more clearly resonates with the language of the Abstract: “*Matter no more*. In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all Finite Perception, Unity must be—into that Material Nihilicity from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked—to have been *created* by the Volition of God” (H 16:311).

of Poe's corresponds with landmark dates in the history of his writing about the "unity of effect."

The "L. H. Sigourney—H. F. Gould—E. F. Ellett" review from January 1836, widely thought to contain Poe's first articulation of his signature-concept, was composed precisely in the midst of his earliest ventures in autography. Poe's first article of *Autography* was published in the February 1836 number of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, thus seeming to have immediately followed the appearance of the "Sigourney—Gould—Ellett" review the previous month. However, it is known that Poe had prepared an article of *Autography* for print as early as September 1835, from a letter by T. W. White informing Poe of his decision to "omit" the work from the pages of the *Messenger* "in its present dress" (PL 172). Thus Poe's earliest work for *Autography* appears to have led into his earliest articulation of the "unity of effect" as much as the former appears to grow out of the latter from the perspective of their dates of publication and public reception. Then, in the months immediately following the publication of the final article of *Autography* for *Graham's Magazine* in January 1842, Poe composed a series of reviews containing some of his most important work on the "unity of effect." In his two-part reviews of Longfellow's *Ballads* and Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, which appeared in consecutive numbers of *Graham's* from March to May 1842, many now famous passages made their initial entry into Poe's written record that would later return, some slightly revised and others quoted verbatim, in the more autotelic treatments of his signature-concept in "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle." With the publication of the "Sigourney—Gould—Ellett" review preceding the publication of the first article of *Autography* by one month, and the reviews of Hawthorne and

Longfellow following the final article in the series by a just greater margin of two months, *Autography* is unequivocally framed by Poe's writing on the "unity of effect," suggesting that this editorialized collection of autographs itself possibly contains some decided illustration of Poe's signature-concept.

The uncanny coincidence of *Autography*'s publication history with the history of Poe's writing on the "unity of effect" is brought into greatest relief by that five-year span separating his early articles of *Autography* for the *Messenger* from his later articles for *Graham's*. In this five-year span the idea of the "unity of effect" does not appear in Poe's critical writings with anything near the frequency and force it appears in *Autography*'s midst. One reason for this undoubtedly has to do with the fact that Poe published *Autography* during his two longest and most successful terms as an editor of magazines. Edd Winfield Parks makes the case "that Poe's critical theories were mainly formed by his work as a magazine editor and critic," that his "innate liking for a literature suitable for magazine publication [...] fitted hand-in-glove with [...] his search for an ideal unity in literature" (Parks 6, 2). One may at least be sure that Poe's editorial duties meant he was regularly reviewing the new publications of his contemporaries, if he was not necessarily always wanting to do so, and there is no doubt that this practice was formative for Poe's "critical theories" about literature. Along the same lines, however, one could suggest that something about the design of *Autography* was also right at home, in perfect keeping with Poe's editorial duties. Although he was certainly not without reason in anticipating the popularity of his renewed ventures in autography in 1841, given the popular success of the 1836 series, the time and energy Poe periodically reminds his reader was necessitated by *Autography*'s design was not sacrificed solely in the hopes of

producing a popular work. *Autography* was a unique vehicle for surveying the “wide field” of the American literary landscape about which, as an editor, Poe was expected to be in the know and to keep his readers in the know.

It is possible, merely possible, given that scant bit of evidence that Poe’s work for *Autography* was well on its way prior to September 1835 that this work almost naturally led into his writing on the “unity of effect.” If one imagines Poe at a desk scattered with specimens of the handwriting of his contemporaries—devising his editorial commentary for *Autography*, writing it all out by hand—seeing his own MSS. and those exemplary signatures excised from the MSS. of his fellows to the printer’s office, with a stop at the woodcut-shop along the way—the impression becomes all but irresistible that this extensive and multilayered work in this very material order of impression necessitated by *Autography*’s unique design was in some way formative of his thinking on that signature-concept he was also wont to call the “unity of impression.” There is only the scantest bit of evidence to support such an aesthetico-temporal priority and precedence of *Autography* in relation to the “unity of effect.”

Poe frequently deploys the word “impression” in proximity to the word “effect,” treating them almost synonymously, as if they have equivalent, substitutive value. A striking instance of this is found in “The Poetic Principle,” where, in fact, Poe is found downplaying the issues of time and energy that are being played up here: “It is to be hoped that common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deciding upon a work of art, rather by the impression it makes, by the effect it produces, than by the time it took to impress the effect, or by the amount of ‘sustained effort which had been found necessary in effecting the impression. The fact is, that perseverance is one thing, and genius quite

another” (ER 7273). The seeming equivalency of “effect” and “impression” evident here is also repeatedly suggested by Poe’s plotting the compositional history of “The Raven” in “The Philosophy of Composition” in terms of building the poem’s “impression” (ER 15-17). However, in one notable instance, there is the subtlest distance and difference maintained between “impression” and “effect,” a momentary aesthetico-temporal privilege of “impression” in relation to “effect.” Poe speaks of “the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression” (ER 15). Here that “immensely important effect” is capable of being derived from or given by, certainly, but also thus contingent on, hanging in the balance of, wagered by, a “unity of impression.” What follows holds to a very narrow and precarious way between *Autography*’s “unity of effect” as distinct from its “unity of impression”; however, the mere possibility of thinking of *Autography* as a privileged work in the history of Poe’s signature-concept is ultimately of much less interest than the wondrous effects which necessarily follow from reading them in each other’s midst.

#### The “Unity of Effect” and the Architecture of Poe’s Writing

Given that the “unity of effect” seems to be both everywhere and nowhere in Poe, whether nowhere because everywhere or everywhere because nowhere, it is strange but perhaps ultimately fitting that Poe’s signature-concept often figures prominently as such in critical readings of Poe that think of his writing as (or as having) a certain architecture. Of course, architectural tropes are well fitted to address a concept so reputedly central to the Poe universe, but not just because the “unity of effect” affords a promise of a hidden architecture uniting all his writings. Insofar as addressing this concept that is both

everywhere and nowhere in Poe presupposes a complex, even impossible performance of contextualization, the architectures repeatedly built up on or around the “unity of effect” also monumentalize scenes of reading which reveal as much if not more about the writing being done on Poe than they do about Poe’s writing itself. In other words, Poe’s signature-concept is a privileged site where his signature and that of his reader meet, where the inexplicable privilege he affords the “unity of effect” is made, each time uniquely, the reader’s own.

In a speech delivered at the University of Virginia’s commemoration of the Poe Centenary in 1909, Dr. C. Alphonso Smith made one of the earliest claims to the centrality of the “unity of effect” for the critical assessment of Poe’s literary legacy. Opposing a traditional view of Poe “as the great *déclassé* of American literature, a solitary figure, denationalized and almost dehumanized,” Smith portrays him as the most profound influence on “the literary craftsmanship of his own period” and his work as the summation of “the tendencies of his age,” taken together: “the greatest constructive force in American literature” (Smith 161, 163). The case for Poe’s vital role in the genesis of American literature is, for Smith, inseparable from the development of the concept of “unity of effect,” what he calls “[t]he growth of Poe’s constructive sense” (ibid. 168). In what is widely held to be Poe’s earliest articulation of the concept of “unity of effect,” in his review of some poetic volumes by Lydia H. Sigourney, H. F. Gould and Elizabeth F. Ellet in the January 1836 *Southern Literary Messenger*, Smith sees Poe as having “first found himself structurally” (ibid. 171). By this Smith seems to mean that in 1836 Poe had discovered, perhaps without being fully aware of the implications of the discovery, the germ of what would later prove “his profoundest conviction about the architecture of



literature” (ibid. 172). Smith, like many readers of Poe after him, identifies the landmark review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* from 1842, “The Philosophy of Composition” from 1846, and the posthumously published lecture “The Poetic Principle” (1850) as Poe’s more mature articulations of the “unity of effect.”

Throughout his speech Smith’s language is dominated by a metaphoric of material construction, a “constructive sense” of its own, apropos his declared intention to edify “The Americanism of Poe” for and against a tradition that had all but given up on the possibility of relating Poe’s work “historically to antecedent condition,” which believed it “detached [...] almost completely from the time and place in which it made its appearance” (Hamilton W. Mabie quoted in Smith 161), or, as Vernon Louis Parrington would famously put the matter two decades later, parroting Poe, ““out of place, out of time”” (Parrington 56). As already intimated, Smith’s house of Poe is built decidedly on the “unity of effect.” He writes, “[Poe’s] poems, his stories and his criticisms cannot be thoroughly understood without constant reference to this criterion of craftsmanship. It became the foundation stone on which he built his own work and the touchstone by which he tested the work of others” (Smith 164). Yet, like so many architectural tropes and models, and especially those found in writings from the mid-nineteenth century (Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*, Melville’s *Bell-Tower*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), Smith’s house of Poe soon proves itself shaken, compromised, haunted, in a word, troubled. Despite his apparent distaste for the idea that Poe’s work “sprang suddenly and mysteriously from a soil that had never borne its like before” (Mabie quoted in Smith, 161), he nonetheless maintains that the architecture of Poe’s writing is unique, original and unprecedented, in the history of American literature. Indeed his

conviction that Poe's "constructive sense" shows signs of growth and maturation at all may be read as an overcompensation for the fact that in one of the earliest articulations of the "unity of effect" Poe claims to have derived the concept from the Romantic tradition.

In the "Sigourney—Gould—Ellet" review from 1836 Poe attributes the phrase "*unity or totality of interest*" to August Wilhelm von Schlegel. Now Smith claims that "the phrase is not found in Schlegel" and, remarking in passing that in other contexts Poe accurately quotes from the *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, attempts to prove that Schlegel "could not have exerted a lasting influence upon Poe" (ibid. 171, 173). Even if Smith were right to point out that the phrase "*unity or totality of interest*" does not appear in Schlegel—which, of course, he is not, it does<sup>130</sup>—his own interpretation of Poe's supposedly faulty citation of German Romanticism undermines his edification of Poe's "Americanism" and proves the "Americanism" at stake here to be his own. Admitting the possibility that Poe was merely "depending upon a faulty memory" in citing Schlegel, Smith finds it "more probable" that Poe "was invoking the prestige of the great German to give currency and authority to a phrase which he himself coined and which, more than any other phrase that he ever used, expressed his profoundest conviction about the architecture of literature" (ibid. 172). Thus either way one looks at the matter—whether Poe accurately acknowledges a debt to Schlegel in his earliest articulation of the "unity of effect" or does so only in order to artificially buttress the "currency and authority" of "a phrase which he himself coined"—Poe originally and

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<sup>130</sup> In John Black's 1815 translation of Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy), the edition Poe most likely had to hand in 1836, one finds the following remark, which notably further extends the cosmopolitan vogue of the "unity of effect" from Germany to France: "*De la Motte*, a French author, who wrote against the whole of the unities, wishes, in place of action, to substitute the words, *unity of interest*. If the expression is not confined to the interest in the fate of a single person, but is used to signify in general the direction of the mind during the aspect of an event, I should then consider it, so understood, as the most satisfactory and the nearest to the truth" (336).

decidedly situates his signature-concept in an economy of indebtedness to German Romanticism, in an indelibly Romantic vein.

What Smith calls “The Americanism of Poe” most blatantly reveals itself to be the “Americanism” of Smith as he forcibly strips the “unity of effect” of all foreign currency and, most paradoxical of all, does so in order to adapt this concept to an American literary context, which, at the time Poe was writing, according to Smith, could not even be properly called a tradition: a “formless” national literature, without currency or economy of its own. “The origin of the phrase [“unity of effect”] is to be sought not in borrowing but rather in the nature of Poe’s genius and in the formlessness of the contemporary literature upon which as a critic he was called upon to pass judgment” (ibid.). Similarly, though even Smith cannot deny Poe’s indebtedness to the aesthetics of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an “influence” which he says “grew upon Poe steadily,” even in this Poe “is not the less American because representatively Southern” (ibid. 173, 175). In the logic of Smith’s argument, Poe’s genius, which he earlier characterizes as “essentially structural,” a “constructive genius” (ibid. 163, 167), cannot proceed from a debt precisely because it is such a precious gift. The growing “constructive sense” that Smith claims unifies Poe’s diverse body of writings, schematized as it were in the development of the concept the “unity of effect,” is believed to have also given form and structure to American literature as a whole.

Nothing less than a Genesis-like narrative of the founding of American literature in the “unity of effect,” Smith’s representation of Poe as “the greatest constructive force” in American literary history is not a far cry from James Russell Lowell’s famous character-sketch of Poe for *Graham’s American Monthly*’s “Our Contributors” series in

1845, nor from Joseph N. Riddel's remark at the opening of "The 'Crypt' of Edgar Poe" that "[i]f Poe did not exist, he would have had to be invented" (Riddel 121). However, unlike Smith, both Lowell and Riddel acknowledge, indeed, monumentalize certain faults in the architecture of Poe's writing rather than plastering over them with an appealing (or a peeling) veneer of mythological proportions. Lowell famously begins his portrait of Poe by reflecting precisely on the "formlessness" of American literature in the antebellum period that over half a century later Smith would intone in his speech for the Poe Centenary. While the axiom "before we can have an American literature, we must have an American criticism" prepares the reader to accept Poe, one of the most prolific literary critics of his day, as the figure who meets this demand, the one that peoples the void, Lowell quickly shows Poe to be another symptom of rather than the cure for the "anomalous situation" of American literature (Lowell [1845] 49).

We were very naturally led into some remarks on American criticism by the subject of the present sketch. 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 remarks a little, and say that he *might be*, rather than that he always *is*, for he sometimes seems to mistake his phial of prussic-acid for his inkstand. [...] We do not know him personally, but we suspect him for a man who has one or two pet prejudices on which he prides himself. These sometimes allure him out of the strict path of criticism, but, where they do not interfere, we would put almost entire confidence in his judgments. [...] As it is, he has squared out blocks enough to build an enduring pyramid, but has left them lying carelessly and unclaimed in many different quarries.

(ibid. 49-50)

This passage is so widely known as to hardly warrant introductory comment; the aim here is merely to underline a few key features of Lowell's character-sketch as they contrast with Smith's presentation of the "unity of effect" in "The Americanism of Poe." While both texts were designed to bolster Poe's notoriety as an American writer, Lowell is ultimately suspicious of the manner in which popularity and literary reputation in general is often conferred. Though he does credit Poe for possessing that "indescribable something which men have agreed to call *genius*," he also reflects that the title is more often than not too freely bestowed. "If we may believe the Longinuses and Aristotles of our newspapers, we have quite too many geniuses of the loftiest order to render a place among them at all desirable [...] There is scarce a gentleman or lady of respectable moral character to whom these liberal dispensers of the laurel have not given a ticket to that once sacred privacy, where they may elbow Shakespeare and Milton at leisure" (ibid. 51). A disdain for the "liberal" population of the American Parnassus with men and women who "achieve the proudest triumphs and greenest laurels" merely by virtue of their "zeal, industry, and reverence for the trust reposed in them" was something Lowell shared with Poe (ibid.). However, Lowell is no more critical of instances where "[t]he critic's ink [suffers] from too large an infusion of nutgalls or of sugar" (ibid. 49) than he is of Poe sometimes mistaking his "phial of prussic-acid for his inkstand." Lowell could honestly say that he was "*very naturally* led into some remarks on American criticism by the subject of the present sketch," because Poe had long-since made a name for himself as the most severe literary critic writing in America. (Few other American writers in the 1840s were so "discriminating" or so "fearless" as to describe Poe thus, at least publicly.)

Lowell's estimation of Poe's achievements as a literary critic shows that he frowned upon winning fame through scandal and controversy as much as he did undeserved laudation. Though the character-sketch concludes with a professed hope for Poe's critical writings—"As a critic, he has shown so superior an ability that we cannot but hope that he will collect his essays of this kind and give them a more durable form" (ibid. 53).—ultimately, in Lowell's view, they amount to nothing more than so many "squared out blocks [...] left [...] lying carelessly and unclaimed in many different quarries."

So, in contrast to Smith's conception of the architecture of Poe's writing, which is erected securely on the "foundation stone" of the "unity of effect," Lowell's house of Poe clearly lacks any such continuity or stability. In fact, the "unity of effect" and the myriad concerns indexed under the heading of this concept in Poe—the persistent criticism of didacticism in poetry, stemming from the conviction that Beauty is the proper province of the poem rather than Truth, which is more readily attainable in prose; the necessity of brevity in both poetry and fiction, which renders the long poem a contradiction in terms and the novel an inherently failed genre<sup>131</sup>—may be the most unassailable of those "pet prejudices" on which Poe prided himself but which, for Lowell, ultimately "interfere" with the proper trajectory of his writing, "[alluring] him out of the strict path of

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<sup>131</sup> Poe did make some notable exceptions to this general contention of his about the novel, especially when it came to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and to Charles Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*. Cf. Poe's review of Defoe for the January 1836 number of the *Southern Literary Messenger* (ER 201-203); his (later) review of *Barnaby Rudge* for the February 1842 number of *Graham's Magazine* (ER 224-244); and Terence Whalen's astute reading of the considerable challenge Dickens's novel posed to Poe's signature-concept in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses*, 91-105. Remark, too, once more, how the publication dates of these texts crucial for an understanding of the "unity of effect" (except for Whalen's, of course) are framing the publication dates of *Autography*, the review of Defoe appearing the month prior to the first article of *Autography*, the (later) review of *Barnaby Rudge* appearing the month after the final article of the (later) *Autography* series works for *Graham's*.

criticism.” In this view, the “unity of effect” is more of a stumbling block than a “foundation stone” of Poe’s literary legacy.

Nevertheless, Lowell does concede that Poe’s writing could amount to an “enduring pyramid,” aligning him more closely with Smith than Riddel, who views every apparently stable structure in Poe, “whether library, labyrinth, pyramid, tomb, or house,” as inherently divided against itself, riddled with an indelible flaw (Riddel 127). The architecture of Poe’s writing was for Lowell something that could be unified and made more durable given certain conditions; accordingly, his critical-sketch of Poe suspends its assessments of the liabilities of Poe’s style in the name of a future for which the indisputable potential of his writing will have been fully realized. “Mr. Poe is still in the prime of life, being about thirty-two years of age,” Lowell writes (four years before Poe’s death<sup>132</sup>), “and has probably as yet given but an earnest of his power” (Lowell [1845] 53). Rather than measuring Poe’s literary legacy against the promise of an “as yet” unassembled architecture amid the scatter of “squared out blocks [...] left [...] lying carelessly and unclaimed in many different quarries,” Riddel interrupts the teleological orientation of the promise and hope Lowell maintains for Poe’s writing. In short, both Lowell and Riddel imagine a ruin where the house of Poe would stand, but the former sees it as “as yet” unbuilt and the latter as always already fallen.

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<sup>132</sup> At the time Lowell penned his character-sketch of Poe for *Graham’s* “Our Contributors” series, Poe’s age was 36 years, not 32. Poe might have purposefully lied to Lowell about his age to make himself appear younger, but Poe lied so frequently about his age and date-of-birth as to suggest that if ever he knew these facts about himself, he may have at some point forgotten them through misuse. As ever, T. O. Mabbott admirably sums up the matter: “It should be recalled that Poe whimsically regarded his birth date as a movable feast. When he enlisted in the Army, he made himself older; when we went to West Point, he grew younger (on this occasion with more motive than whim); and in the last year of his life, Poe, again ‘younger,’ wrote to Griswold that he had been born in 1813. A tradition reaches me from Baltimore that a lady of that city insisted that Poe was misdated in biographies, for she had met him, and her birth date was mentioned. Poe said that was the very day he was born!” (M 1:165n3)

In “The ‘Crypt’ of Edgar Poe” Riddel treats the debates, delays, and deferrals that have always beset the edification of Poe in American literary history (such as those in which both Smith and Lowell profess to intervene but also ultimately repeat) not as obstacles to be overcome in the construction of Poe’s literary legacy, but rather as necessary features of the structure of this legacy. Hence the exemplary status of the “*House of Usher*” in Riddel’s reading of the “de-constructed architecture” of Poe’s writing (Riddel 129), whose eventual fall into “a black and lurid tarn” is prefigured at the very title of the tale, not as destination or end in the sense of a teleological orientation toward a final solution, but rather as an inmitigable fact mitigating every event in the narrative from the very beginning (UP 533). “Everything in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’” Riddel says, “is a metaphorical detour, a delay in the course of the narrative that pushes toward its own tautological conclusion” (Riddel 134). The paradoxes and incongruities of this formulation only underscore Riddel’s reading of Poe. How can “everything” in a tale comprise “a delay in the course of [its] narrative”? What is “the course of a narrative” if not part and parcel of its “everything”? How can “the course of a narrative” be missing from its place? When faced with a text comprised entirely of “metaphorical detour,” what “course” is left to its reader? For Riddel, such questions are precisely what one is left with in reading Poe. Like “The Fall of the House of Usher” and the “*House of Usher*” itself, Poe’s writing more generally only ever amounts to a “specious totality”: “a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the utterly porous, and evidently decayed condition of the individual stones” (UP 534).

Building on the tale’s own pronounced preoccupation with “the perfect keeping of the character of [its] premises with the accredited character of [its] people,” its



interminable speculations on “the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other” (ibid.), Riddel reads the plot of “The Fall of the House of Usher” as a series of repetitions of the initial impression the melancholy aspect of the Usher family mansion imposes on the narrator. It is sufficient to quote Riddel at length to convey at least the rough lines of Poe’s own articulation of this impression; indeed, it is a point of no little significance that Riddel recreates and repeats the plot and general effect of the tale as he reads it:

As the narrator approaches the “House of Usher,” he feels himself engulfed in its “melancholy” and “insufferable gloom.” The natural order of things is inverted: day seems like night, and the house reflects “a wild inconsistency between the still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones.” The house is a “specious totality,” an “extraordinary dilapidation,” marked by a “barely perceptible fissure” that runs “zigzag direction” down its exterior to disappear in the “sullen waters of the tarn.” The origin of the fissure is erased in a series of reflections that has no scrutable beginning or end. The narrator is disorientated and overcome with a “melancholy” that is “unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible” (III, 273). Everything is a “scene” or “picture” but not a coherent representation. It is like the “after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into common life—the hideous dropping off of the veil.” The primary inversion at the beginning of “The Fall of the House of Usher” lies in the beginning of the narrative itself, a grotesque “lapse” or fall into a world of images where words

and things no longer coincide. The narrator ponders a failure of creative perception, of poetic images, to mediate a scene of vacant nature: “I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond a doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the reason, and the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression” (III, 274). Nature, it seems, is either a text or a chaos. Double like an afterdream. As problematic as language. (Riddell 129-130)

The initial “failure of creative perception” that Riddell remarks in the beginning of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the “fall into a world of images where words and things no longer coincide,” effects a series of repetitions, the first of which is the narrator’s second look upon the melancholy aspect of the Usher mansion, this time through its “remodeled and inverted” reflection in “the sullen waters of the tarn” (UP 534, 535). Though intended “to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression,” the narrator’s double take (as the literal sense of this phrase would suggest) only manages “to deepen the first singular impression” (UP 534). This failure of what the narrator describes as his “childish experiment [...] of looking down within the tarn” is followed by similar failures throughout the tale, notably that of the intention that brings the narrator to the House of Usher in the first place: a sort of automatic compact forged between the narrator and Roderick Usher by a letter which effects the very impetus of the plot of the tale by way of autography.

A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country—a letter from him—which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness—of a pitiable mental idiosyncrasy which oppressed him—and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. (UP 533)

Of course, in spite of the “[cheerful] society” the narrator is expected to bring with him to the House of Usher, his presence affords no remedy to the “malady” of the house and its inhabitants. “I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend,” the narrator reports midway through the tale:

We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom. (UP 538)

The narrator’s “earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of [his] friend”—encouraging Usher in his painting and his composition of poetry and music and reading to him from the Usher family library—spawn a series of interiors within “The Fall of the House of Usher,” all of which Riddel reads as inhering the “malady,” or structural flaw, the narrator first remarks upon close inspection of the façade of the Usher mansion at the

beginning of the tale. Each time uniquely, “[t]he interior of the Usher house repeats its exterior” (Riddel 131).

Usher’s allegorical art becomes the phantasmagoria of a desire, an “incoherence—an inconsistency” (like the house) that reflects at the same time an unseen but recoverable unity and the lawlessness of life. Each of his works, however, is inadequate: they render a desire without an object. The “wild fantasies” of his music shatter the norms of harmony but recuperate no sensible structure. His poem [that is, “Poe’s poem, previously published” (Riddel 133): “The Haunted Palace”] repeats the allegory of a green world or happy consciousness, figured in the metaphor of the “stately palace” of “Thought’s dominion” situated in a “happy valley” that is suddenly afflicted by motion, time, and decay, the exhaustion of its radiance and the denigration of its “well-tuned law” into “discordant melody” [...] Despite the narrator’s concern over their perverse and wild air, each of Usher’s works represents a rather ordinary desire for a self-sustaining, self-present inside, an inexhaustible presence that can distribute itself effectively through every outside or image. But each can render the idea only by suggesting its opposite, that the artist can only fictionalize this center as provisional loss [...] In Usher’s art, every sign indicates a radical secondariness, a discontinuity between image and imaged. [...] Nothing in Usher’s house, however, is more inappropriate than his very exclusive library, a bibliography largely made up of an authentic list of pseudoscientific, mystical and quasi-theological texts, each in one way or another devoted to the idea of “the sentience of all vegetable things” (III, 286). Usher’s paintings and writings are

repeated by his library, in which each text betokens an animistically centered or unified world, a unity reflected in all the stable differences of a natural world. [...] Yet rather than alleviating Usher's hypochondria, his art and study aggravate his neurosis. [...] The obsession of the family with its destiny has generated a sterile fiction, of which the library with its single idea is the primary metaphor. The library reduplicates the "specious totality" and "wild inconsistency" of the "house"—an outside of disrelated stones repeated in an inside that is a specious totality of texts. Moreover, the library is not only a central room, but another closure that stands outside or over the central tomb. The texts that stand for one idea signify its absence. They are signs of death. (ibid. 132-133)

In Roderick Usher's music, painting, poetry, and, above all, in his inherited library Riddell reads a series of failed attempts to signify a unity or totality. Every documented effort in "The Fall of the House of Usher" to present a singular idea "can render the idea only by suggesting its opposite," the absence of idea. The narrator's professed inability "to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which [Usher] involved [him], or led [him] the way" (UP 538), only underscores, deepens the impression of that initial "failure of creative perception, of poetic images, to mediate a scene of vacant nature" which he confronts upon (doubly) taking in the melancholy aspect of the House of Usher at the beginning of the tale. "When the narrator and Usher turn as a last resort to a hope that through art they may delay, if not reverse, the degeneration, they resort inevitably to the very metaphors or debris in which they are entombed" (Riddell 131). In Poe's writing everything appears oriented toward the "crypt" because built up out of, "outside or over" the "crypt," even the "closure" of the "crypt"

itself. “The metaphors of ‘family,’ ‘house,’ and ‘library,’ or of art as the rendering or expression of ‘idea,’ are all figures concealing a tomb at the center,” “without the sustaining center of the crypt” (ibid. 135). “Metaphors or debris”: what we are left with in Poe are not so much metaphors of debris, or even “signs of death,” but metaphors *as* debris, signs *as* death, effecting a paradoxical performance, repeatedly played out in Poe’s writing, of simultaneous closure and opening. The “mausoleum (text)” Poe compulsively builds “to contain his sign of Beauty/Death” is “erected upon a ‘hollow coffin’ that must be protected even as it is ultimately opened and revealed as the place of just another missing body” (ibid. 129, 135).

In this view, the “unity of effect” and the central, coordinating function the concept has been traditionally thought to perform in the architecture of Poe’s writing is marked for failure in only being able to be marked (or remarked) as a sort of death. “Poe’s renowned aesthetic ideal of a ‘unity of effect’ is itself a metaphor,” Riddel writes, “of an architecture elaborately constructed upon a zero metaphor, the arche that is neither present nor absent” (ibid. 135). In other words, as a metaphor, the “unity of effect” never really appears in Poe otherwise than as what it is not: an effect of disunity, ruination, or debris. As such this signature-concept is no more or less flawed than any other metaphorical structure in Poe, “whether library, labyrinth, pyramid, tomb, or house,” no more or less determined or divided in advance by that “zero metaphor” said to underwrite and override Poe’s text: “the arche that is neither present nor absent.” How, then, does Riddel account for Poe’s own undeniable privilege of the “unity of effect” in his “Philosophy of Composition,” the aesthetico-temporal privilege of “the consideration of

an *effect*” in the order of composition as the point at which the literary work must begin, which is to say, at its end (ER 13)?

On the one hand, Riddel seems to suggest that beginnings and ends are the most unlikely places to uncover any “unity” of design in Poe. At the opening of the tautological narrative trajectory of “The Fall of the House of Usher” he remarks “a series of reflections that has no scrutable beginning or end” (Riddel 129) and at the close of the tale “an infinitely refracted series of fictions without origin or end” (ibid. 135), seeming to suggest that any observable “unity” in Poe’s text will be troubled in advance by a sort of interminable repetition of its failure to signify a simple “unity.” On the other hand, it is as though the unplotable plot of the “missing body” or “zero metaphor” of Poe’s *corpus*—the “neither present nor absent” arche of the architecture of his writing—may only fall in/to/as writing by projecting what is lost in advance, namely its “unity,” before itself in hallucinatory fashion, much in the way Riddel systematically recreates the plot of “The Fall of the House of Usher” only to illustrate that the tale is all about division, disunity, debris, in a word, “fragments” (ibid.).

After all, it is not a little remarkable that Riddel’s reading of the tale begins precisely where Poe’s narrative begins (with the narrator’s doubly taking in the melancholy aspect of the House of Usher, that initial “failure of creative perception, of poetic images, to mediate a scene of vacant nature”) and ends precisely where Poe’s narrative ends (with the opening of the “barely perceptible fissure” so ambiguously marked out at the start of the tale, what Riddel calls “[t]he airing of the crypt” and of “the secret that sustains all such structures of difference, including narratives” (ibid.)). His scene of reading corresponds almost point-by-point with the order of the events recounted

by the tale. What might this almost mechanical reiteration of Poe's plot mean, now doubly tautological? Does the fact that this supposedly "post-structural" account of the "de-constructed architecture" of Poe's writing writes itself by building a high-fidelity copy of "The Fall of the House of Usher" on the vanished remains of the "*House of Usher*" as an exemplary house of Poe, another simulacrum of "another simulacrum of a simulacrum" (ibid.), not attest to a sort of spectral survival of the tale's "unity of effect" (in the sense of that "old ideal," perhaps an archaic ideal, "of art as 'unity,' 'oneness,')"? Does Riddel's deconstruction of the architecture of Poe's writing not reassert the originality of Poe's design and, perhaps, reassert the originality of Poe himself as the prime, primary and primordial, builder—architect or arche-text—of literary modernity? Perhaps, like Poe, Riddel "needed to reinscribe the old ideal of art as 'unity,' 'oneness,' a transumption of temporality [...] within an entirely new and proleptic configuration, a 'possibility' as he would call it in his greatest 'hoax'" (ibid. 150).

#### On Approaching *Autography*

Between "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Poe's late essay "Landor's Cottage: A Pendant to 'The Domain of Arnheim'" (1849) there is a similarity of approach. The narrators of both pieces are introduced, precisely, in approach: one on horseback and the other on foot, each making his way to a certain house. Both of these approaches are crepuscular, taking place as day becomes night, and both narrators are led to "precipitous" bodies of water as they near their destinations. Here the similarities of "Usher" and "Landor's Cottage" cease. In fact, as whole compositions of Poe's, they could hardly be more different. They are similar only, precisely, in the approach. The



impressions made upon the narrators at the moment their respective destinations come into view brings the radical and chasmal difference between the two into striking relief.

When it comes to the “melancholy House of Usher,” “with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom” pervades the “spirit” of the narrator; he calls the impression “insufferable,” because “the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible” (UP 532). Now, Riddel remarks this impression as if it were a pervasive one in Poe, as a general “failure of creative perception, of poetic images, to mediate a scene of vacant nature.” Yet, the impression made upon the narrator of “Landor’s Cottage” when Landor’s Cottage finally comes into view is of an entirely different character. Here the ““scene”” or ““picture”” is not incoherent and chaotic but uniformly serene. In stark contrast to the noted absence of “any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment” effected by the “sorrowful impression” of the House of Usher, the impression made upon the fancy of the narrator by Landor’s Cottage is one of, well, “in a word, of *poetry*”:

At the *turn*, the stream, sweeping backwards, made an almost circular *loop*, so as to form a peninsula which was *very* nearly an island, and which included about the sixteenth of an acre. On this peninsula stood a dwelling-house—and when I say that this house, like the infernal terrace seen by Vathek, “*était d’une architecture inconnue dans les annales de la terre*,” I mean merely, that its *tout ensemble* struck me with the keenest sense of combined novelty and propriety—in a word, of *poetry*—(for, than in the words just employed, I could scarcely give, of

poetry in the abstract, a more rigorous definition)—and I do *not* mean that the merely *outré* was perceptible in any respect.

In fact, nothing could well be more simple—more utterly unpretending than this cottage. Its marvellous *effect* lay altogether in its artistic arrangement *as a picture*. I could have fancied, while I looked at it, that some eminent landscape-painter had built it with his brush. (UP 1142)

The “marvellous *effect*” of Landor’s Cottage, which affords a markedly different impression from the architectures of Poe’s writing discussed thus far, is of interest to an appreciation of *Autography* for several reasons. Firstly, perhaps no better epitaph for the anomalous situation of *Autography* in relation to the Poe canon and in the American literary archive generally could be imagined than the line Poe cribs from William Beckford’s *Valtheke*. Of all of Poe’s works, the architecture of *Autography* is the most unknown if not unknowable “in the annals of the Earth.” One would do well to picture *Autography* installed on “a peninsula,” “*very* nearly an island,” surrounded by “an almost circular *loop*” of perfect anonymity. At the same time, the line from *Valtheke* appears in the context of a description of a certain “*effect*” absolutely pervasive in Poe, so much everywhere as to appear nowhere in particular, thus, in this sense, too, appearing as an unknown or unknowable architecture. In general, the aim here is to familiarize the reader with the unknown and unknowable architecture of *Autography* precisely as the unknown and unknowable architecture of Poe’s writing generally, so well known to readers of Poe. The approach to meeting this aim is two-fold, presents two paths orienting this study in two very different directions, whose possible convergence is the object of this study.

One path leads to a consideration of *Autography* itself as having or as having had a “unity of effect,” just as one might reasonably expect of a poem or tale of Poe’s: a severe demand indeed. Of course, there is an immediate suggestiveness about the idea that *Autography* might afford some decided illustration of Poe’s signature-concept, since, even if read no further than the optical impression it fashions on the page or screen, this work is (generally speaking) all about signatures. Yet, just to take in or be taken in by the alluring presence of these signatures one must have already acknowledged certain divisions in *Autography*. Simply no other work of Poe’s appears more fragmented. The appearance of these signatures in print breaks up the customarily continuous mass of typeface in such a way that anyone who would happen upon *Autography*, thumbing through an edition of Poe’s *Works* or clicking haphazardly through a database into which it has been scanned, would surely be given cause to stop and consider this unlikely façade, even if just to marvel at the wealth of white-space preserved upon the page.

Complicating this general picture still further, however, is the fact that throughout *Autography* Poe is clearly judging individual specimens of handwriting for a “unity of effect,” that is, judging them as he might a poem or tale. Then, the samples of handwriting or MSS. that Poe takes as the objects of his judgments are only represented in *Autography*, exemplified (speaking more precisely now) in the shape of a facsimile signature or autograph. Thus, one path lying before the traveler that would approach *Autography* leads inexorably to the idea that the work as a whole has or had a “unity of effect,” manifests in some way, in its overall impression, this signature-concept of Poe’s in as and by the signature-architecture of Poe’s writing. At the same time, another path lying before the traveler that would approach *Autography* leads inexorably through the

little blocks of text scattered throughout this work, where Poe may be found, each time uniquely, like so many stepping stones, reading for a “unity of effect,” which suggests that each exemplary object of *Autography* (facsimile signature or autograph) may be viewed in terms of his signature-concept, putting in play another sort of signature-architecture at stake in *Autography* in as and by the architecture of a signature.

No one acquainted with Poe’s “Poetic Principle” and “Philosophy of Composition” will be surprised to find these two paths identified here, like separate billets nailed up on a signpost at the trailhead, with those painted words: “Truth” and “Beauty.” They are clear and distinct indicators insofar as there are clear and distinct indications that when it comes to the “unity of effect” of *Autography* itself a certain truth is at stake and when it comes to the “unity of effect” of individual specimens of handwriting a certain beauty is at stake. Reflecting back on the popular success of his ventures in autography in his final article of *Autography* for *Graham’s*, in January 1842, Poe remarks a “*unity of truth*” in the public reception of *Autography* that will orient the later section entitled “The Truth of *Autography*,” which follows on the subsequent section entitled “The Beauty of *Autography*.” However, each of these sections will have to reckon with the fact that there is a remarkable coincidence of truth and beauty in *Autography*, despite the fact that Poe often maintained rigid distinctions between his two principle literary aims. For now it will be enough to remark that between the House of Usher and Landor’s Cottage there are two architectural models, two exemplary architectures that should be kept in view when approaching *Autography*; the former more aptly models the truth of *Autography* and the latter, the beauty of autography. The trouble and the challenge will come in the shape of a question as to how the radical and chasmal

differences between the impressions wrought by these façades might be thought together as a singular if not single “unity of effect.”

### The Beauty of Autography

The passage from “Landor’s Cottage” cited above is of interest for appreciating the art of *Autography* beyond the suggestiveness “*d’une architecture inconnue dans les annales de la terre.*” It is also a perfect model for the type of beauty at stake in *Autography*. In “The Poetic Principle” Poe identifies “various modes” in which the “Poetic Sentiment” of beauty “may develop itself”: “in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance—very especially in Music—and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden” (ER 77). The whole of “Landor’s Cottage” is a sustained mediation on the beauty to be had in landscape, whose “peculiar” type of beauty may be appreciated for the fact that Poe repeatedly compares it to the beauty of painting, as happens the moment that “simple,” “utterly unpretending” cottage comes into view: “Its marvellous *effect* lay altogether in its artistic arrangement *as a picture*. I could have fancied, while I looked at it, that some eminent landscape-painter had built it with his brush.” A similar account of the beauty of landscape as a sort of painted construction occurs toward the beginning of “Landor’s Cottage.” The beauty of the road leading the narrator to his destination compels him to stop and wonder at the scene. “[G]rass such as we seldom see out of England—so short, so thick, so even, and so vivid in color”—a wholly unimpeded “wheel-route,” where “not even a chip or a dead twig” is to be seen—“stones that once obstructed the way [...] carefully *placed*—not

thrown—along the side of the lane, so as to define its boundaries”—“[c]lumps of wildflowers” growing “luxuriantly, in the interspaces”:

What to make of all this, of course I knew not. Here was *art* undoubtedly—*that* did not surprise me—all roads, in the ordinary sense, are works of art; nor can I say that there was much to wonder at in the mere *excess* of art manifested; all that seemed to have been done, might have been done *here*—with such natural “capabilities” (as they have it in the books on Landscape Gardening)—with very little labor and expense. No; it was not the amount but the *character* of the art which caused me to take a seat on one of the blossomy stones and gaze up and down this fairy-like avenue for half an hour or more in bewildered admiration. One thing became more and more evident the longer I gazed: an artist, and one with a most scrupulous eye for form, had superintended all these arrangements. The greatest care had been taken to preserve a due medium between the neat and graceful on the one hand, and the *pittoresque*, in the true sense of the Italian term, on the other. (UP 1137)

The narrator’s “bewildered admiration” of the beauty of landscape presents a situation in which the presence of art is undeniable—“Here was *art* undoubtedly,” Poe says—but the precise “*character* of the art” in the landscape is much more difficult to determine. The narrator just does not know “[w]hat to make of all this” obvious beauty at first, and invariably in “Landor’s Cottage” analogies to painting appear to help develop the “Poetic Sentiment” manifest in that very “wide field.” A similar situation occurs with respect to the beauty of autography in *Autography*. If one is going to appreciate the manifold ways in which here, too, is “*art* undoubtedly,” it may do as well “to take a seat [...] for half an

hour or more” and take in the “wide field” of the everyday beauty of autography, what will be more commonly referred to here as handwriting, Poe’s specimens of which are identified with the abbreviation, MS., or MSS., if he’s comparing manuscripts.

As in Poe’s writing on the beauty of landscape, throughout *Autography* analogies to painting are made to color the everyday beauty of autography. In fact, the very words called upon to mediate the “peculiar” beauty of landscape as a painted construction in “Landor’s Cottage”—“*tout ensemble*,” “*picturesque*,” and, of course, “*effect*”—are words that frequently appear in Poe’s judgments on the beauty (or lack thereof) of individual specimens of handwriting in *Autography*. For example, in a remark comparing the MS. of James Kirke Paulding with that of Lydia H. Sigourney, Poe writes, “In both MSS. perfect uniformity and regularity exist, and in both, the character of the writing is *formed*—that is to say, *decided*. Both are beautiful, and, at a casual glance, both have a somewhat similar *effect*. But Mrs. Sigourney’s MS. is one of the most legible, and Mr. Paulding’s one of the most illegible in the world” (SLM 2.3, 207). Poe’s signature-concept is evident here not only in the word “*effect*” itself, but also in the mention of form, “uniformity,” and beauty in relation to the “somewhat similar *effect*” attributed to Sigourney and Paulding’s MSS., which, notably, is said to occur irrespective of the legibility of their handwriting. The MS. of Charles Anthon, which Poe claims to be “the most regularly beautiful of any in [his] collection,” is judged to have “the most scrupulous precision, finish, neatness about every portion of it—in the formation of the individual letters, as well as in the *tout-ensemble*” (GLG 19.5, 225). The overall effect of the perfect adaptation of constituent parts to the whole in Anthon’s handwriting is evidently helped along by its general lack of “superfluidity, in the way of flourish or otherwise, with the exception of the twirl in

the C of the signature,” as well as by the fact that its “lines are quite straight, and at exact equal distances, yet are written without black rules, or other artificial aid” (ibid.).

Similarly, in the autographic analysis of John P. Kennedy, where Poe claims to have found his “*beau ideal* of penmanship,” Kennedy is judged “to have the eye of a painter [...]—to have refined tastes generally—to be exquisitely alive to the proprieties of life—to possess energy, decision, and great talent—to have a penchant also for the *bizarre*” (SLM 2.3, 210). All of this is supposedly indicated by the “prevailing [*picturesque*] character” of Kennedy’s handwriting: his “terminating every letter abruptly, without *tapering*,” “using no perfect angles, and none at all which are not spherical”; not to mention, Poe adds, “[t]he long letters do not rise and fall in an undue degree above the line” (ibid.).

Conversely, other MSS. are charged with certain deficiencies in “the sense of the beautiful,” found lacking in proper *effect* (e.g., “unpicturesque”) or, Poe sometimes says (and with something more of disdain), “straining after effect.” One the most prominent aesthetic failures of a specimen of handwriting remarked by Poe in *Autography* concerns John Gorham Palfrey, editor of the *North American Review*. His MS. “shows a total deficiency in the sense of the beautiful. It has great pretension—great straining after effect; but it is altogether one of the most miserable MSS. in the world—forceless, graceless, tawdry, vacillating and unpicturesque. The signature conveys but a faint idea of its extravagance” (GLG 19.5, 234). Poe’s characterization of this MS. as “extravagant” ties together various threads of the word’s etymological meaning. Palfrey’s handwriting strays beyond the bounds of what is proper and becoming in its variance from Poe’s picturesque “sense of the beautiful,” of course, but it also indicates a certain excess, a



“pretension” to something beyond it, improper to itself: a “great straining after effect.” Palfrey’s “tawdry” hand gropes clumsily in a domain to which it has no claim, expends itself beyond what it can afford, and in this desperate grasping for an “effect” beyond its reach, the “extravagance” of Palfrey’s MS.—“one of the most miserable [...] in the world” and of which his “signature conveys but a faint idea”—resolves Poe’s characterization of the man as ultimately trapped inside his own mind. Palfrey, it is admitted, on the one hand, “has a reputation for scholarship; and many of the articles which are attributed to his pen evince that this reputation is well based, so far as the common notion of scholarship extends”; on the other hand, “[f]or the rest, he seems to dwell altogether within the narrow confines of his *own* conceptions; imprisoning them by the very barrier which he has erected against the conceptions of others” (ibid.). It is characteristic of Poe to worry less for the character of the man supposedly isolated from external influence, dwelling altogether apart from others, than for the spoiled potential of the ideas which have been put into the service of erecting the walls of his self-fashioned prison. As for Palfrey’s “reputation for scholarship,” however far to Poe’s mind “the common notion of scholarship extends,” we may be sure that it does not amount to much more than a stroll around the yard, maybe a stint on the chain-gang. Still, Palfrey is not so hermetically sealed behind this “barrier” as to prevent Poe from confining others to his cell.

In the installment of *Autography* immediately following the one in which this punitive autographical analysis appears, Poe twice defers to the “narrow confines” of Palfrey’s character to accommodate other “miserable” MSS. that fall before his judgment. (Poe may be exploiting the name “Palfrey” here as that of a horse for everyday

riding.) Firstly, the resemblance of the MS. of Hugh Swinton Legaré to that of Palfrey is evidently so exact that Poe does not venture any particular remark on the former aside from an erroneous claim that “[t]he name of H. S. Legare is written without an accent on the final *e*”<sup>133</sup>; he goes on: “[Legaré’s] MS. resembles that of Mr. Palfrey [...] and their mental features appear to us identical. What we have said in regard to the chirography of Mr. Palfrey will apply with equal force to the present Secretary<sup>134</sup>” (GLG 19.6, 275).

Secondly, in the autographic analysis of Richard Henry Wilde, Poe writes: “His MS. has all the peculiar sprawling and elaborate tastelessness of Mr. Palfrey’s, to which it altogether bears a marked resemblance. The love of effect, however, is more perceptible in Mr. Wilde’s than even in Mr. Palfrey’s” (ibid. 285). A comparison of the facsimile signatures of Palfrey and Wilde collected in *Autography* suggests this “love of effect [...] more perceptible in Mr. Wilde’s [MS.] than even in Mr. Palfrey’s” to be indicated by elaborate flourishes in the capital and terminal letters of Wilde’s signature (more modestly present in Palfrey’s J., G., and P., though here too they rise and fall well outside of the lines), as well as by an embellished underline, which makes it appear as though a bow that had once crowned the signature has just been cut. An even more ornate underline, which has every appearance of a scrupulously fashioned bow, appears below the facsimile signature of Joseph Evan Snodgrass collected in the same installment of *Autography* as that of Legaré and that of Wilde. The “sprawling” character of handwriting remarked by Poe in his autographic analysis of Palfrey and Wilde is also

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<sup>133</sup> An accent which, even in the facsimile of Legaré’s signature Poe himself provides in *Autography*, may be seen making its way, if not all the way, above the terminal “e” in such a pointedly sinistral arch that it is surprising Poe could have mistaken it for a flourish.

<sup>134</sup> At the time this remark appeared in print, in December 1841, Legaré was in fact serving under President Tyler as Attorney General of the United States, but, by chance, Tyler appointed him interim Secretary of State a few months before his death in 1843.

remarked in that of Snodgrass, whose signature, Poe writes, “betrays a meretricious love of effect” (ibid. 280). That Poe repeatedly characterizes the “straining after effect” evinced in the handwriting of the American literati as a kind of “love,” inscribes this undesirous impression received from a sample of handwriting in an economy of desire, is significant for the fact that his writing on the “unity of effect” so often indicates that this signature-concept has reference to a sort of pleasure principle underwriting all literary writing, a pleasure of the text to which every literary production does or should aspire.

In the “Letter to B—,” published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in the summer of 1836, precisely between the publication dates of the first two articles of *Autography*, Poe writes, “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 *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *indefinite* sensations” (ER 11). The germ of Poe’s more canonical articulations of the “unity of effect” is certainly evident here; however, he later revises this distinction between “pleasure” and “truth” as the respective domains of literature and science to maintain, from the 1842 reviews of Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* and Longfellow’s *Ballads* to “The Poetic Principle,” that what ultimately distinguishes poetry from prose is that the former takes, for its “immediate object,” Beauty, and the latter, Truth. This distinction famously leads Poe to his dogged criticism of what he called the “conventional prejudice” of didacticism in poetry, which finds its most glaring exemplar in the shape of Longfellow: “His invention, his imagery, his all,” Poe writes, “is made subservient to the elucidation of some one or more points (but rarely of more than one) which he looks

upon as *truth*” (ER 684). The distinction between the literary aims of Beauty and Truth also leads Poe to a similar critique of “the strain of allegory” in Hawthorne’s tales, “which completely overwhelms the greater number of his subjects, and which in some measure interferes with the direct conduct of absolutely all,” insofar as they purvey “[t]he fallacy of the idea that allegory, in any of its moods, can be made to enforce a truth” (ER 582). Yet, what remains consistent across Poe’s many variations on his signature-concept of the “unity of effect” is the pleasure, or excitement, it is said to afford. Irrespective of the distinctions Poe sometimes wants to maintain between poetry and prose, both aim to excite or to please; they merely do so differently. In “The Philosophy of Composition” Poe rations out the pleasure of the text as follows:

Now the object, Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable, to a certain extent, in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion, a *homeliness* (the truly passionate will comprehend me) which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. (ER 16)

Despite the appealing idea that the pleasure to be had in a written work can be localized to one of these three readerly erogenous zones—intellect, heart, or soul—depending solely on the genre of writing under consideration in this tri-partite schema of the literary “object” or effect—Truth, Passion, Beauty—the economy of desire underwriting Poe’s aesthetics is much more fluid and complex. “It by no means follows from any thing here said,” Poe adds in “The Philosophy of Composition,”

that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced, into a poem—for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast—but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominate aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem. (ER 16-17)

In a similar fashion, in his critique of the “strain of allegory” in Hawthorne’s tales, Poe does admit that allegory may be introduced, “even profitably introduced,” into a “fictitious narrative” in instances “[w]here the suggested meaning runs through the obvious one in a *very* profound undercurrent, so as to never interfere with the upper one without our own volition, so as never to show itself unless *called* to the surface” (ER 582-583). Thus, for Poe, the means and ends of poetry and prose are not wholly distinct; they cannot be forcibly separated nor even, it seems, thought separately. However, in both poetry and prose, the effect proper to each of these types of writing is maintained when their respective “modes of inculcation” appear in “proper subservience” to one another. In poetry, the objects of “passion, or even truth” must be “[toned] into proper subservience to the predominate aim [...] Beauty” if they are to merely “serve in elucidation, or aid in the general effect.” Similarly, in prose, one finds exceptions to “the fallacy of the idea [...] that metaphor, for example, may illustrate as well as embellish an argument” only in instances where it is “properly handled, judiciously subdued,” so that it is “seen only as a shadow or by suggestive glimpses, and making its nearest approach to truth in a not obtrusive and therefore not unpleasant *appositeness*” (ER 582, 583). In cases where the “modes of inculcation” proper to poetry and prose are improperly

handled, improperly subordinated to one another, Poe remarks a sort of prostitution of literary effect:

The demands of truth are severe. She has no sympathy for the myrtles. All that is indispensable in song is all with which she has nothing to do. To deck her in gay robes is to render her a harlot. It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreath her in gems and flowers. Even in stating this our present position, we verify our words—we feel the necessity, in enforcing this *truth*, of descending from metaphor. Let us then be simple and distinct. To convey “the true” we are required to dismiss from the attention all inessentials. We must be perspicuous, precise, terse. We need concentration rather than expansion of mind. We must be calm, unimpassioned, unexcited—in a word, we must be in that peculiar mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who cannot perceive the radical and chasmal difference between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. (ER 684-685)

Here Poe is writing ostensibly *about* poetry—Longfellow’s poetry, to be precise—forcibly bringing home his argument for the inappropriate preponderance of didacticism in poetry by representing it as a badly disguised truth rather than a badly dressed poem. The “inculcation of a *moral*” in poetry is so invasive and at odds with “the poetical” that the truth the poem is thus forced to convey becomes the body of the poem, while what is supposed to be the body of the poem, poetry, is made merely accessory to this truth: like “gay robes,” “gems and flowers.” In this way, what violates the purity of poetry in Longfellow, namely truth, is made to appear as that which violates the purity of truth, “[rendering] her a harlot [...] making her a flaunting paradox,” namely, poetry.

Then, in the middle of this passage, Poe reveals that while he is arguing a point about truthful “modes of inculcation” improper to poetry, he is at the same performing an illustration of poetical “modes of inculcation” improper to prose. After all, to personify truth as a woman, even in order to illustrate how she is forced to play the harlot in poetry, is to again “deck her in gay robes [...] to wreath her in gems and flowers,” with which “she,” that is to say, it “has nothing to do.” In order to properly illustrate his point, “in enforcing this *truth*” of the “modes of inculcation” proper to poetry and prose, Poe “[feels] the necessity [...] of descending from metaphor. Let us then be simple and distinct,” he says, and so may he do. Yet, the fact that in order to “verify [his] words” Poe ascends to metaphor in the first place is not for all that annulled or insignificant. His illustration of the conveyance of truth in poetry as “a flaunting paradox” by “flaunting [the] paradox” in his own right in the beautiful metaphors of his prose also underlines the fact that “the radical and chasmal difference between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation” is only perceptible in their infinitesimal proximity to one another in language. As is so often the case in the discourse on the “unity of effect,” the crucial factor appears to be one of extent; so long as Poe does not overdo the figural embellishment of the truth of his prose, so long as he keeps his metaphors brief—so long as they are seen, as it were, “only as a shadow”—he will avoid prostituting the effect of the unity of this truth. To defer to a metaphor to which Poe himself immediately turns after supposedly “descending from metaphor”: “the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth” (ER 685) are only recognizable as such in repeated attempts to mix what is ultimately unmixable. Much in the way one didactically pours oil onto water to illustrate basic principles of physics and molecular biology, or to confirm the devastating effects of

oil spills, the unity of this pedagogical performance each time hangs on the promise of an impossible reconciliation.

Poe is not at all far from this sort of pedagogical effectivity in the 1842 review of Longfellow's *Ballads*. Indeed, nearly all his literary criticism and reviews, even as they compulsively criticize the “conventional prejudice” of didacticism in literature, prove forcibly, sometimes violently, didactic and prescriptive in their own right: a quality of his critical writings for which Poe himself, of course, has long been criticized. It was a point of great contention among his contemporaries and has remained so for subsequent generations of readers of Poe, and these qualms with his characteristic spleen as a critic invariably return to the “unity of effect.” Now, while the aesthetics Poe built up around his signature-concept are safeguarded from these accusations of improper didacticism in a very general way—the aim of any prose writing being, after all, according to Poe, a certain Truth, and therefore entirely befitting a didactic tone—*Autography* is uniquely vulnerable in the aesthetic judgments it purveys.

Throughout *Autography* Poe treats handwriting as a class of aesthetic objects, regularly remarking how an individual MS. succeeds or fails at effecting a beautiful impression. In this way, given his conception of Beauty (his most rigorously defined and most staunchly defended aesthetic criterion), one might imagine Poe to be reading for a kind of poetry in handwriting. Invariably, the handwriting valued most highly in *Autography* is the most uniformly beautiful, like that of John P. Kennedy, Poe's “*beau ideal* of penmanship,” and that of Charles Anthon, “the most regularly beautiful of [his] collection.” Likewise, the handwriting that most displeases Poe is invariably the most wanting in a proper “sense of the beautiful”; the MS. of John G. Palfrey, “one of the most



miserable [...] in the world,” is said to “[show] a total deficiency” in this respect. Still, the many variations on the “straining after effect” remarked by Poe throughout *Autography*—“an undue straining after effect,” “great straining after effect,” “love of effect,” etc.—all of this maintains beauty as the province of the aesthetic object of handwriting, even as it shows this beauty to have been corrupted by a certain excess, by an artificially forced “love of the beautiful” (GLG 20.1, 45). Thus the manner in which Poe treats handwriting as a class of aesthetic objects in *Autography* is not wholly different from his defense of poetry in the review of Longfellow’s *Ballads*, composed just months after concluding the series for *Graham’s* in January 1842. Similar to the way in which Longfellow is said to prostitute Truth, “to render her a harlot” by dressing her “in [the] gay robes” of poetry, precisely in forcibly prostrating the aims of his poetry to truth, the epithet of “straining after effect” which Poe frequently applies to the handwriting of the American literati signals a sort of prostitution of effect in the economy of pleasure underwriting his autographic analyses. He explicitly alludes to such an event in *Autography* when he qualifies the “love of effect” betrayed by the signature of Joseph Evans Snodgrass as “meretricious.”

Yet, in the Longfellow review, Poe’s criticism of the prostitution of Truth in poetry, this “flaunting paradox” of didacticism, is ultimately only tenable given Poe’s own dogged distinction between the literary aims of Beauty and Truth. Only because here Poe himself obstinately upholds “the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth,” does he say (and only insofar as he judiciously handles the “modes of inculcation” proper to poetry and prose, can he say), “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” (ER 683). In *Autography*, on the other hand, there is no such operative genre distinction to support Poe’s judgments as to the beauty of a given sample of handwriting. Not only are these judgments themselves neither reviews nor criticisms (nor even perhaps prose) in any usual sense, but also the objects of these judgments all partake in the same genre, if it can be called a genre at all, handwriting. Put simply, no individual sample of handwriting is faulted by Poe for having an aim apart from beauty—an aim to truth, for instance.

On the contrary, in *Autography*, at the same time that Poe is reading handwriting for its beauty of impression, he is doing so to illustrate a certain truth: that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character,” which “will be denied by none but the unreflecting” (GLG 19.5, 225). Moreover, it is invariably the handwriting judged the most beautiful which most clearly illustrates this truth. For example, elaborating on “the most regularly beautiful [handwriting] of [his] collection,” Poe writes,

It is in the chirography of such men as Professor Anthon that we look with certainty for indication of character. The life of a scholar is mostly undisturbed by those adventitious events which distort the natural disposition of the man of the world, preventing his real nature from manifesting itself in his MS. [...] In the case of literary men generally, we may expect some decisive token of the mental influence upon the MS., and in the instance of a classical devotee we may look with *especial* certainty for such token. (ibid. 225-226)

Similarly, in Poe’s autographic analysis of John P. Kennedy, his “*beau ideal* of penmanship,” he writes,

Mr. Kennedy is well to do in the world, and has always taken the world easily.

We may therefore expect to find in his chirography, if ever in any, a full indication of the chief feature of his literary style—especially as this chief feature is so remarkably prominent. A glance at his signature will convince any one that this indication *is* to be found. A painter called upon to designate the main peculiarity of this MS. would speak at once of the *picturesque*. (ibid. 227)

This coincidence of truth and beauty in *Autography*—the fact that Poe finds his theory “that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character” most readily confirmed as true in instances where the handwriting is judged most beautiful—while seeming to contradict the obstinate manner with which he upheld the mutual exclusivity of the literary aims of Truth and Beauty as a literary critic, especially in his reviews of poetry, is more in keeping with another custom in Poe’s writing according to which these desirous effects are wholly indissociable.

This custom is exemplified, for example, in *Eureka*, a work perhaps most famous for the fact that Poe classes it as a hybrid of genres that he made a career rigidly distinguishing between as a literary critic: the “Art-Product” of *Eureka* is at once a “Romance,” a “Poem,” and/or, if we follow the title page, “a Prose Poem” (H 16:183). This hybridization of genre also notably corresponds with a hybridization of the effects of Truth and Beauty, whose difference and mutual autonomy Poe so often urged his contemporaries to respect. *Eureka* is described as a “Book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true” (ibid.). Yet, the “Beauty” and the “Truth” constituted by it in *Eureka* still more closely resemble the Beauty and Truth of Poe’s critical writings than the truth-beauty hybrid in

*Autography*. Indeed the whole of *Eureka* can read as a literal rendering of what Poe was wont to call “Supernal Beauty,” which he defines in the April 1842 review of Longfellow as follows, waxing poetic:

This burning thirst belongs to the *immortal* essence of man’s nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of his perennial life. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is not the mere appreciation of the beauty before us. It is a wild effort to reach the beauty above. It is a forethought of the loveliness to come. It is a passion to be satiated by no sublunary sights or sounds, or sentiments, and the soul thus athirst strives to allay its fever in futile efforts at *creation*. (ER 686)

Few will argue the point that *Eureka* evinces, at the very least, a “burning thirst” for “Supernal Beauty,” if only in the sense of the “burning” that so often punctuates “the desire of the moth for the star.” Whether or not Poe managed to “allay [his] fever” in proclaiming *Eureka* his masterpiece, it has left much to be thought in terms of its “wild,” “futile efforts at *creation*,” and, no doubt, much of it remains a mere “forethought of [a] loveliness to come.” The value of this embellished account of “Supernal Beauty” for a reading of *Autography*, however, lies mostly in what Poe says it is not: “It is not the mere appreciation of the beauty before us.”

In *Autography*, the sort of beauty at stake should be understood precisely in this “sublunary” sense. At the opening of the paragraph we have just cited, Poe offers another heuristic caveat on his notion of Beauty, which could very well read as a summation of the work for *Autography* he had concluded just a few months prior to penning these lines:

An important condition of man’s immortal nature is thus, plainly, the sense of the Beautiful. This it is which ministers to his delight in the manifold forms and

colors and sounds and sentiments amid which he exists. And, just as the eyes of Amaryllis are repeated in the mirror, or the living lily in the lake, so is the mere *record* of these forms and colors and sounds and sentiments—so is their mere oral or written repetition a duplicate source of delight. But this repetition is not Poesy. (ER 685)

The beauty to be had in handwriting is not a “condition of man’s immortal nature” but merely a transient feature of his mortal, earthly existence, “[ministering] to his delight in the manifold forms and colors and sounds and sentiments amid which he exists” every day. Poe explicitly singles out this quotidian character of handwriting in the November 1844 installment of *Marginalia* in which he underscores the truth of the “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between chirography and character”: “I am far more than half serious in all that I have ever said about manuscript, as affording indication of character,” Poe starts out this note, adding farther on, in the same vein, “For my own part, I by no means shrink from acknowledging that I act, hourly, upon estimates of character derived from chirography” (ER 1323). Of course, *Autography* is uniquely situated with respect to this quotidian character of handwriting and the “general proposition [...] that the mental qualities will have a *tendency* to impress the MS.”; for here Poe not only records his various impressions on the handwriting of the American literati, but also furnishes exemplary samples of handwriting in printing a collection of facsimile signatures, making them available for immediate public consideration and for posterity. The work of *Autography* may be seen as an effort to make more durable “the mere *record*” of handwritten impressions: both handwriting itself and the usually transient ministrations of handwriting of the kind upon which Poe claims to “act, hourly,”

comprising the literary archive of *Autography*. And the popularity of *Autography* among his contemporaries no doubt in part confirmed for Poe that the “mere oral or written repetition” of the kind of everyday beauty to be had in handwriting “could be a duplicate source of delight” as the immortal “sense of the Beautiful.” Yet, this “delight” in repetition, in “the mere *record* of [everyday] forms and colors and sounds and sentiments,” Poe says in the Longfellow review, “is not Poesy”; he says it again, slightly modified, in “The Poetic Principle”: “[T]his mere repetition is not poetry” (ER 77). Of course, handwriting is neither Poesy nor poetry, even if poetry was then and can be still handwritten; this does not mean, however, that handwriting cannot be “poetic.”

In a review of John G. C. Brainard for *Graham's* in February 1842, published just one month after the final installment of *Autography*, Poe, in the midst of a general dismissal of the “merely humorous pieces” scattered throughout Brainard’s collected poems (“Such things,” Poe says, “are not *poetry*.”) makes an exception for a “brief composition” entitled “The Tree Toad,” which illuminates the type of beauty at stake in *Autography* for several reasons. Firstly, Poe’s remarks on Brainard’s “Tree Toad” occasion another strained union of the literary aims of Truth and Beauty that he so often forcibly distinguished between as a critic. Despite his contention that in the vast majority of cases “[h]umor [...] is directly antagonistical to that which is the soul of the Muse proper” and “the higher manifestations of the beautiful,” Poe exempts “The Tree Toad” from this general rule, characterizing it as “one of the *truest poems* ever written by Brainard” (ER 411). Secondly, the coincidence of truth and beauty in “The Tree Toad” is more consonant with that of *Autography* than that found in *Eureka* because it marks an inversion of the “Supernal” order which so often characterizes Poe’s conception of

Beauty-proper. The poem does not exemplify “a wild effort to reach the beauty above [...] the desire of the moth for the star,” but rather shows a descent of heavenly bodies to the transient, earthly realm, the “Supernal” turned “sublunary,” as the “Tree Toad” sings:

The harvest moon hangs over me, and smiles upon the streams;

The lights dance upward from the north, and cheer me with their beams;

The dew of heaven, it comes to me as sweet as beauty’s tear;

The stars themselves shoot down to see what music we have here. (Brainard 24)

Thirdly, *Autography* clearly resonates with the humor of Brainard’s “Tree Toad,” which perhaps most effectively exempts itself from the usual “antagonistical” relation of humor to “the higher manifestations of beauty”—“an omni-prevalent belief” that Poe says “is not without a firm basis in nature and in reason” (ER 410)—in having an animal voice ape the voice of reason (not, by the way, very unlike the aping of “The Raven”). The song of the “Tree Toad” concludes:

Ye caty-dids and whip-poor-wills, come listen to me now;

I am a jolly tree toad upon a chestnut bough;

I chirp because I know the night was made for me—

And I close my proposition with a Q. E. D. (ibid.)

The “proposition” of “The Tree Toad,” the rendering of a quaint, sing-song beauty as sort of cold logic, typifies, according to Poe, “an individual branch of humor which blends so happily with the ideal, that from the union result some of the finest efforts of legitimate poesy”: in other words, a “unity of effect” (ER 411). Now, Poe’s voice in *Autography* is not chirping precisely in the natural way of a tree toad, but more in the way of Evans, a Cambro-Briton clerk in Charles Lamb’s “South-Sea House”: “How would he chirp, and

expand, over a muffin! How would he dilate into secret history!” (Lamb 7; cf. *OED*, “chirp”). The tone of *Autography* is sprightly, lively, and pert. So much so, in fact, that as Poe repeatedly claims a natural and rational basis for his work in *Autography*—“that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character,” he says, “will be denied by none but the unreflecting”; and, he says, “[t]he feeling which prompts us to the collection of autographs is a natural and rational one”—it is easy to forget that no autograph collection, so-called, could be more unnatural or more irrational than *Autography*.

After all, the handwriting samples which comprise the objects of Poe’s autographical discourse were not necessarily intended to be either beautiful or truthful in the sense given to them in *Autography*, but were indited merely to submit writing for publication, to make payment for a magazine subscription, to correspond with a personal or professional acquaintance, and no doubt scores of other everyday reasons unknown. Every signature that appears in *Autography*, save for Poe’s own, was reprinted without the signatory’s consent, and Poe’s is the only specimen of handwriting he does not read for its beauty and/or truth. The situation of handwriting as a class of aesthetic objects in *Autography* thus involves an utter effacement of the concepts of intentionality and design in which Poe often situated his “Philosophy of Composition.” Thus the “unity of effect,” in the way it is frequently applied with reference to the beauty or lack thereof of a given specimen of handwriting and invoked in Poe’s claim to a “unity of truth” for *Autography* as a whole (considered below), is just not at home in *Autography*, even though one can repeatedly see it “straining after [the] effect” of “*homeliness*” in *Autography*. In this way, the correspondence of the publication history of *Autography* and landmark dates in Poe’s



writing on the “unity of effect” in his literary criticism and reviews is uncanny in the strict Freudian sense. It is as though, like every other signature collected in *Autography*, Poe’s signature-concept is wrenched from an intended, stable, and historically determined context and put to service in the architecture of another context. It is, finally, in this downright roguish design, impishly posing as a “natural” and “rational” “proposition,” that *Autography*, in its own unique way, exemplifies the branch of humor whose “union” with “the ideal” Poe remarks in Brainard’s “Tree Toad,” and which results in “some of the finest efforts of legitimate poesy”: “We allude,” Poe writes, “to what is termed ‘archness’—a trait with which popular feeling, which is unfailingly poetic, has invested, for example, the whole character of the fairy” (ER 411). Apart from this enigmatic reference, the word “archness” appears only one other time in Poe’s writings, in the March 1846 review of Frances Sargent Osgood’s *A Wreath of Wild Flowers for Godey’s Lady’s Book*, where it is glossed with other equally obscure terms: Osgood is said to be “particularly at home” in “lines of *badinage*, or, more properly, of archness or *espieglerie*” (Poe [1846] 137). The obscurity of these words—“*badinage*,” “archness,” and “*espieglerie*”—and the rarity with which they occur in Poe absolutely suit the relative anonymity of *Autography* to American literary history; on the other hand, their etymologies, connotations, and literary associations are “particularly at home” with respect to a certain character long-since identified with, indeed, indissociable from Poe as a writer.

The word “*espieglerie*,” with which Poe explicitly identifies his sense of “archness” in the review of Osgood’s collection of poetry from 1846, comes to English (notably, beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century), from the French *espiègle*, meaning

“frolicsome, sprightly, roguish,”<sup>135</sup> which the *OED* (somewhat inaccurately) identifies as a “corruption” of the German *Eulenspiegel*. The word in German is a proper name and originates from legends built up around a popular figure of German folklore, Till Eulenspiegel, a wandering trickster whose roguish exploits (often hinging on puns and other language games) in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century first appeared in printed narrative form in the early 1500s. The name “Eulenspiegel,” rendered literally, means “owl-mirror,” or “Owlglass” as the trickster’s name was Anglicized in early English translations of the German legends, most notably in Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie’s edition from 1860, *The Marvellous Adventures and Rare Conceits of Master Tyll Owlglass*, the title-page of which features an owl facing a mirror reflecting its gaze to the reader. Early German editions of the tales often featured woodcuts in which Till Eulenspiegel appears with an owl and a looking glass. In the most famous of these (Hans Baldung Grien’s woodcut for Johannes Grüninger’s 1515-edition) he appears on horseback with an owl perched on his right hand and a looking glass held aloft in his left. An owl and a mirror are also engraved on the headstone marking the site where, legend has it, Till Eulenspiegel was buried standing upright. Also, more relevant to the association being forged here between this old-time rogue and *Autography*, in one of Till Eulenspiegel’s “marvellous adventures” recounting his beguilement of a knavish blacksmith, it is said that the trickster was wont to fashion the images of an owl and a mirror above doorways in order to mark the sites of his roguish exploits: “Then said the maid: ‘Before he departed, he wrote something over the door.’ Then went the smith and beheld that

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<sup>135</sup> Burton R. Pollin and Joseph V. Ridgely have pointed out this much in *The Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. V: Non-Fictional Writings in the Southern Literary Messenger* (New York: Gordian Press, 1997), 392h.

Owlglass had, as his fashion was, painted over the door an owl and a glass, the which signified his name” (K. R. H. Mackenzie 84). So “Owlglass” is Till Eulenspiegel’s very signature, not just his name.

However, Ruth Michaelis-Jena has pointed out that the name “Eulenspiegel” may have cruder origins than the rather innocuous ideas traditionally associated with the symbolism of the “owl-glass” (the wisdom of mankind help up to a mirror by the rogue, the wisdom of this distorted reflection itself, etc.) would suggest. She writes: “In the language of hunters *Spiegel* is the rump of an animal, while in Low German *ulen* means to clean. The meaning then is quite clear and well in keeping with Eulenspiegel’s reported habit of exposing his bare backside to the people he wanted to defy” (Michaelis-Jena 103). In addition to his penchant for mooning victims of his games, Eulenspiegel is known for tricking people “into eating, or otherwise involving themselves with, [his] bowel-movements” (cf. *Wikipedia*, “Till Eulenspiegel”). Whether the signature of this merry rogue of German folklore is thought in terms of his keen exposure of the conventional wisdom of his contemporaries as susceptibly naïve, faulty, and vain, or thought in terms of his wiping his ass on their behalf, the figure of Eulenspiegel, and his association with rogues of all ages (Nasreddin, Hitar Petar, Robin Goodfellow, Baron Münchhausen, Hershele Ostropoler), certainly finds another bedfellow, ever standing upright in his grave, in the shape of Edgar Allan Poe.

In Part II of this dissertation a considerable amount of attention was devoted to the manifold ways in which Poe’s inveterate hoaxing, his penchant for literary trickery or “*espieglerie*”—noted to some extent in the majority of his fictional prose, from his early Gothic tales to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, in his inexplicable masterpiece,

*Eureka*, and in his most famous of poems, “The Raven”—is essential to an appreciation of *Autography*. Even after Poe himself systematically demystifies the early articles of *Autography* published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* as a *jeu d’esprit* upon reviving the series for *Graham’s* in 1841, the later articles of *Autography* still exhibit many tokens of this characteristically shifty genre of writing and indeed make an even better case for the hoax-status of *Autography* in terms of their public reception. The very “arche” of the literary archive that is *Autography*, and that of the architecture of this archive, is unthinkable without some reference to the notion of “archness”: a certain roguery in the State of literature patently modeled in *Autography*.

Yet, the words “*badinage*,” “archness” and “*espieglerie*” only ever appear in Poe in reference to poetry, and *Autography* does not immediately suggest itself as “poetic” in any obvious sense. As will be discussed in detail just below (and seemingly consistent with Poe’s usual allocation of the propriety of poetry and prose to the mutually exclusive literary aims of Beauty and Truth, respectively), the matter of truth appears much more central to Poe’s design in *Autography* than the beautiful. However, in his brief remarks on Brainard’s “Tree Toad” Poe makes one other obscure claim that might illuminate an independent significance of beauty in the *Autography* series (which he had concluded, by the way, just a month prior to composing this gloss on the word “archness”). That is, a significance of beauty not merely accessory to truth, such as might be thought along the following lines: “The individual samples of handwriting that most clearly illustrate the truth of the ‘strong analogy’ said to ‘generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character’ are also judged the most beautiful precisely because they so clearly illustrate this truth; insofar as they illustrate the truth Poe wants to enforce in

*Autography* they are beautiful.” For there is nothing preventing us from matching this line of thought with its exact converse: “The individual samples of handwriting that are judged the most beautiful also most clearly illustrate the truth of the ‘strong analogy’ said to ‘generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character’ precisely because they are beautiful; insofar as they exemplify the sort of beauty Poe wants to enforce in *Autography* they are truthful.” If beauty is accessory to truth in *Autography*, then it is so not in the sense of merely “[serving] in elucidation” or “[aiding] the general effect” of truth (“as do discords in music, by contrast”), but more in the way of an accomplice.

The pillars of truth and beauty, so often kept apart in Poe while running parallel in their edification of his aesthetics, are in *Autography* strained into union, bridged by an arch, an arche of archness or an archness of arche, whereby the “*picturesque*” will have been always to some extent *picaresque*<sup>136</sup> and every semblance of the “*tout ensemble*” the trick of a *Till Eulenspiegel*. Whereas the “legitimate poesy” of Brainard’s “Tree Toad” is given solely by that arch “branch of humor which blends so happily with the ideal,” the archness of Poe’s autographic discourse does not in itself constitute handwriting as poetic. Rather, it is in the “unfailingly poetic” character of “popular feeling,” which, Poe says, has invested, “for example, the whole character of the fairy” with the “trait” of archness, that the beauty of *Autography* is to be had. Thus, the poetry of handwriting, as it finds expression in *Autography*, is the popularity of autography, but when Poe

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<sup>136</sup> This term is meant here in its looser, adjectival sense, as opposed to its more formal association with the *picaresco* narrative genre of classic Spanish literature, the etymological root of this word in Spanish, “*pícaro*”—meaning “rogue” or “knave,” and connoting similar characteristics as these words in English, “merry, mischievous, malicious, vile, and low”—is still crucial to associating it with Poe’s “archness.”

remarked on the popularity of *Autography* among the American readership he took it as evidence of not a unity of beauty but a “*unity of truth.*”

### The Truth of *Autography*

As emphasized above and throughout this dissertation, in various ways, one of the most important features of *Autography*'s design is the “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and his character” (GLG 19.5, 225). This is one of only a few brief statements regarding the speculative theory of autography furnished by Poe in *Autography* outside of his “practical application” of the theory to the handwriting of over one hundred and fifty of his fellow American literati; Poe is content that “[t]he practical application of the theory will [...] go hand-in-hand with the theory itself” (ibid.). In a way, this “strong analogy” between handwriting and character is even illustrated by the immediate, striking contrast fashioned by *Autography* on the page or screen: the customary mass of printer’s typeface set apart at varying intervals by, but “[going] hand-in-hand with,” a collection of facsimile signatures. The very optical impression effected by *Autography* suggests that the facsimile signatures are meant to exemplify handwriting while it is in the typescript that Poe’s revelations of character are to be sought. In this way, the analogic relation between handwriting and character also extends analogically to the supplementary relationship of manuscript to print Poe stages in *Autography*. Given that this analogy carries so much weight—being one of the few articulations of the theory of autography in *Autography*, which at once serves as the basis for each of Poe’s individual character-sketches and is supposed to unite them into one

enterprise, one design, all the while mediating between the two dominant mediums represented in the text, manuscript and print—it is no wonder that it has to be “strong.”

The situation becomes all the more weighty after Poe’s remarks on the public reception of his later *Autography* series for *Graham’s* in the “Appendix of Autographs” from January 1842. In Part II, with the hoax as the constantly inconstant (con)text, this remarkable piece of editorial writing of Poe’s was considered for its nationalist and potentially democratic significance, wherein giving voice to the character of *Autography’s* reception among the antebellum American readership both supported and challenged the very sense of its “national character” and democratic significance. With the import of this passage for understanding the aesthetic dimension of *Autography* now more decidedly in view, the suggestion is *both* that its national and potentially democratic (con)texts are aestheticized (as was already implied in Part II by the performance of the “literary *histrion*”) *and* that the present aesthetic (con)text under consideration is politicized. Here is the passage in question, once more:

It is with great pleasure that we have found our anticipations fulfilled, in respect to the *popularity* of these chapters—our individual claim to merit is so trivial that we may be permitted to say so much—but we confess it was with no less surprise than pleasure that we observed so little discrepancy of opinion in relation to the hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures. Where the subject was so wide and so necessarily *personal*—where the claims of more than one hundred *literati*, summarily disposed of, were turned over for re-adjudication to a press so intricately bound up in their interest as is ours—it is really surprising how little of dissent was mingled with so much general

comment. The fact, however, speaks loudly to one point: —to the *unity of truth*. It assures us that the differences which exist among us are differences not of real, but of affected opinion, and that the voice of him who maintains fearlessly what he believes honestly, is pretty sure to find an echo (if the speaker be not mad) in the vast heart of the world at large. (GLG 20.1, 44)

So “the *unity of truth*” remarked by Poe here in as and by this speculation on the character of public spectacle of his ventures in autography will be considered here as a claim to *Autography*’s “unity of effect,” the literary aim of Truth in Poe being absolutely integral to any appreciation of his signature-concept, as illustrated above. Searching out a statement of the truth at stake here, in *Autography*, invariably leads one back to Poe’s “Chapter on Autography” from two months previous: “that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character, will be denied by none but the unreflecting” (GLG 19.5, 225). Poe certainly seems to believe this theory “honestly,” and there is no doubt that he “maintains [it] fearlessly” at several points in *Autography*.

Now, in the survey of the public reception of *Autography* among the American readership in Part II of this dissertation, there were noted some very notable exceptions to Poe’s claim in the “Appendix of Autographs” that there was “little of dissent [...] mingled with so much general comment” on the subject of his ventures in autography. The reviews of *Autography* by Joseph Evans Snodgrass and Edwin Percy Whipple proved of particular interest there, and they are of further interest here, for their issuing pronounced rejections of Poe’s theory that “that a strong analogy *does* generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character.” Snodgrass described



Poe as “carried away with an innocent belief in the science of autography,” and claimed to have “no faith in the notion of *character* being denoted by the scratchings of an author” (PL 351). Whipple more forcibly condemned Poe’s theory and practice of autography as a “refinement of the art of tormenting” already circulating in the popular discourses of phrenology and physiognomy (Gerber 111). For Whipple, Poe was merely taking up “the same ‘spirit of enquiry’” which would condemn an author “for the shape of his head, or the expression of his face” and carrying it over into his “pot hooks and trammels” (ibid.). These out-of-hand rejections of what Poe serves up in *Autography* are, on the one hand, vital points in public reception of this work among the American readership; they signal a critical distance from *Autography* on the part of both Snodgrass and Whipple, which led to the characterization of them as the first readers of this work of Poe’s, which the vast majority of the American readership merely “puffed up” for the “food for merriment” to be had in it. On the other hand, the reviews of *Autography* by Snodgrass and Whipple were also of interest in Part II for some more subtle ways in which even these first readers of *Autography* may be seen as having swallowed its lure. After considering the matter of truth in *Autography* in greater detail just below, the question will be two-fold: 1) How might the beauty of autography and the truth of *Autography* be thought together as having wrought the singular *effect* of this work on the American readership of its day? 2) What might the coincidence of truth and beauty in *Autography* mean for *Autography* series history today, when the character of this most anomalous work of Poe’s is considered not from the perspective of its all but unanimous popularity in its own day but from the perspective of its all but perfect anonymity to American literary history?

For now, suffice it to say that when Poe penned his editorial preface to the “Appendix of Autographs” in early December 1841, he had just cause for remarking “little of dissent [...] mingled with so much general comment” in the public reception of *Autography* among the American readership. Whipple’s anonymously published “rather savage article on [Poe’s] impertinence” (Gerber 110) would not make its appearance until just after the final article of *Autography* had been prepared for print, but even after Whipple’s review, the vast majority of the American readership, far from having anything bad to say about *Autography* had almost nothing to say about it except for innocuously recommending it to public taste. Poe is undoubtedly straining a point, however, in representing this absence of overwhelming dissent to his work in *Autography* as “so little discrepancy of opinion in relation to the hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures.” Just because not many people went out of their way to dissent from Poe’s “hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations” in *Autography*, does not necessarily mean that there was “little discrepancy of opinion in relation” to them. That Poe is found straining this point in the same breath that he gives voice to *Autography*’s “unity of truth” is all the more relevant for the fact that upon turning to the editorial commentary devoted to exploring the efficacy of that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character” one finds the truth of this truth of *Autography*—this point that “will be denied by none but the unreflecting”—not infrequently strained.

Certainly, in many instances, Poe’s individual autographic analyses decidedly confirm the strength of the analogy between handwriting and character. As in the case of his remarks on the MS. of Catherine Maria Sedgwick: “The penmanship of Miss

Sedgwick is excellent. The characters are well-sized, distinct, elegantly but not ostentatiously formed, and with perfect freedom of manner, are still sufficiently feminine [...] Miss Sedgwick's hand-writing points unequivocally to the traits of her literary style—which are strong common sense, and a masculine disdain of mere ornament. The signature conveys the general chirography” (GLG 19.5, 233). Poe notes a similarly unequivocal relation between handwriting and “literary style” (what he calls elsewhere in *Autography* “literary character”) in the MS. of James Russell Lowell: “His MS. is strongly indicative of the vigor and precision of his poetical thought. The man who writes thus, for example, will never be guilty of metaphorical extravagance, and there will be found *terseness* as well as strength in all that he does” (GLG 19.6, 284). Yet, the strength of the analogy between handwriting and character appears not infrequently tested in *Autography*; in fact, at many points Poe resolves that a given MS. “has about it nothing strongly indicative of character” (ibid. 281).

Often, the failings of Poe's working hypothesis are attributed to circumstantial affectations in the handwriting under consideration. For example, owing to “the necessity of writing much and hastily,” the MSS. of those persons belonging to the “editorial corps”—among them, Park Benjamin, Joseph R. Chandler, John S. Du Solle, Samuel Daly Langtree, Robert Morris, Joseph C. Neal—are affected in such a way that “it would not be just to suppose that any deductions, in respect to character, could be gleaned from [them]” (GLG 19.5, 226; 231). Poe makes a similar concession with regard to the handwriting of David Paul Brown, Esq.: “His chirography has no doubt been strongly modified by the circumstances of his position. No one can expect a lawyer in full practice to give in his MS. any true indication of his intellect or character” (GLG 19.6, 287). In

other cases, circumstantial affectations of handwriting may arise from training or (what is ultimately an oxymoron for Poe) conventional style. The “fair, neat and legible” MS. of Rebecca S. Nichols, for example, is “formed somewhat too much upon the ordinary boarding-school model to afford any indication of character” (GLG 20.1, 48).

Then there is the intolerable but ubiquitous “clerk’s hand,” the style of handwriting (or lack thereof) “met with more frequently than any other” (GLG 19.5, 230), and which, Poe writes in his note on autography in the November 1844 *Marginalia*, “seems to appertain, as if by prescriptive right, to the blockhead, and which has been employed by every donkey since the days of Cadmus” (ER 1323). In *Autography* Poe regularly remarks the “clerk’s hand” (with varying degrees of clerky-ness) in the handwriting of the American literati, and in most cases this quality of the MS. indicates a character of the species ass: chief among them, T. S. Arthur, whose “common-place clerk’s hand” manifests what “we might expect him to write” given his “rich talent for description of scenes in low life,” but which is in perfect keeping with his lack of education and fondness for “mere vulgarities”: two characteristics that cannot but offend whatever Poe means by “refined taste” (GLG 19.6, 284). In both *Marginalia* and *Autography* Poe confidently asserts that the “clerk’s hand” is one “which no man of talent ever did or could indite, unless compelled by circumstances of more than ordinary force” (GLG 19.6, 279). In *Marginalia* (the later work) Poe removes even that last qualification, while in *Autography* the “prescriptive right” of blockheadedness, given by the “clerk’s hand” as a sort of autographical a priori (a right before the writing, as it were, via a tradition as old as the alphabet), does find one glaring exception or exemption in the shape of William Cullen Bryant.

Mr. BRYANT's MS. puts us entirely at fault. It is one of the most common-place clerk's hands which we ever encountered, and has no character about it beyond that of the day-book and ledger. He writes, in short, what mercantile men and professional penmen call a fair hand, but what artists would term an abominable one. Among its regular up and down strokes, waving lines and hair-lines, systematic taperings and flourishes, we look in vain for the force, polish, and decision of the poet. (GLG 19.5, 228)

Aside from his being exempted from the character ass automatically indicated by the "clerk's hand," Bryant's place in *Autography* is remarkable for the fact that it signals a complete failure of that "strong analogy" which, it is said, "does generally and naturally exist between every man's chirography and his character." Here what Poe knows about handwriting seems completely at odds with what he knows about character. "[W]e look in vain," Poe says, "for the force, polish, and decision of the poet." What this statement lacks with regard to the "polish" of Poe's stated aims in *Autography* it makes up for in "force" and "decision." Although, "[a]mong its regular up and down strokes, waving lines and hair-lines, systematic taperings and flourishes," Bryant's MS. unmistakably betrays the "clerk's hand," Poe cannot deny that Bryant's is a truly poetic talent. Indeed Poe's autographic analysis of Bryant, like that of T. S. Arthur, evinces a complete reversal of his stated aims in *Autography*, as he seems to be looking to the handwriting less for the character indicated by it than its degree of accord with a known quality of character. Whereas in the case of Arthur the rigor of Poe's stated aims is favored by his finding in the handwriting what "we might expect him to write"—namely, a "clerk's hand"—given what is known of his character, "Mr. Bryant's MS.," Poe admits, "puts us

entirely at fault.” In the spirit of the character of “the day-book and ledger” indicated by Bryant’s MS., this very characterization may be recorded as a certain debt of Poe’s to his own declared intentions in the “day-book and ledger” of *Autography* more generally, as though in triumphal return of the “clerk’s hand.” Of course, such a record would depend entirely on and would thus be indebted in turn to Poe’s own candid, almost casual, exposure of this “fault” in *Autography*. Thus where one would mark one sort of “ledger” in *Autography*—an epitaph written as it were in stone of that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character”—will always be another “ledger” of *Autography*, another piece of the framework or architecture of Poe’s writing.

As with the ruined façade of the melancholy House of Usher, divided by that “barely perceptible fissure [...] extending from the roof of the building in front [...] down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn” (UP 535), the “fault” exposed in Poe’s treatment of Bryant’s MS. betokens a veritable network of faults in the architecture of *Autography*. Among the “certain exceptions” to Poe’s “position that the mental features are indicated [...] by the hand-writing” (GLG 19.5, 225) are not only cases where “adventitious circumstances” have so modified a person’s handwriting that “it would be impossible to predicate anything respecting it” (GLG 20.1, 49). The fragility of that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character” also extends to the exemplarity of the signature.

On the one hand, Poe makes a point to underscore the singularity of the signature in the theory and practice of *Autography*, stating that in it “there is something which

seems to bring him [the “distinguished man-of-letters”] before us in his true idiosyncrasy—in his character of *scribe*” (GLG 19.5, 225). On the other hand, in his individual autographic analyses Poe does not infrequently remark that a facsimile signature printed in *Autography* “fails in giving a correct idea of the general hand” (GLG 20.1, 45). For example, the signature of Albert Pike “fails to convey the entire MS. which depends upon masses for its peculiar character” (ibid. 47) and that of John S. Du Solle “shows rather how he can write, than how he does” (GLG 19.6, 276). In one notable case, that of Lambert A. Wilmer, Poe remarks, “the signature does not convey the print-like appearance of the MS.” (ibid. 280). This instance of the fragile exemplarity of the signature brings into striking relief a more general limitation of Poe’s illustration of his theory of autography, one which can be easily overlooked in that “natural and rational” “feeling” which, it is said, draws people to the signatures of illustrious personages (GLG 19.5, 225): the fact that what Poe comments on with the greatest frequency in *Autography* are MSS. of the American literati, but all that the reader is given is a facsimile signature. The characteristic “print-like appearance” of Wilmer’s MS., like all qualities of the MSS. considered by Poe in *Autography*, is conveyed only in print, save for the facsimile signature, which in the case of Wilmer, as with many other signatures collected in *Autography*, does not indicate the “general hand.” With even the relation between manuscript and print thus fractured by the contingent exemplarity of the signature, the impression given by *Autography* is that of another “specious totality” in the architecture of Poe’s writing: “a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the utterly porous, and evidently decayed condition of the individual stones.”

Now, given the “utterly porous” nature of Poe’s working hypothesis in *Autography*, the many exceptions to and exemptions from the theory of autography admitted in the practical application of this theory to the handwriting of the American literati, it may reasonably be seen as odd if not downright disingenuous that Poe confidently anticipates upon his revival of *Autography* for *Graham’s* in November 1841, that the “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character, *will be denied by none but the unreflecting*” (GLG 19.5, 225, emphasis added). While this “strong analogy” between handwriting and character may be self-evident in theory, Poe’s own practical application of the theory frequently reveals the strength of this analogy to be highly contingent on the MS. under consideration. Some MSS. offer no indication of character whatever, while others seem to offer easy illustrations of Poe’s theory of autography.

As mentioned above, perhaps the strongest case made in *Autography* for the strong analogy said to exist between handwriting and character concerns the MS. of Charles Anthon. “It is in the chirography of such men as Professor Anthon,” Poe writes, “that we look with certainty for indication of character. The life of a scholar is mostly undisturbed by those adventitious events which distort the natural disposition of the man of the world, preventing his real nature from manifesting itself in his MS.” (ibid.). Recall that for Poe certain occupations, in especial those of the lawyer and the literary editor, affect a person’s handwriting to such an extent that the character or “real nature” of “the man of the world” is rendered all but illegible in his MS. Though Poe contends that “[i]n the case of literary men generally, we may expect some decisive token of the mental



influence upon the MS.," sometimes even "literary men" have their handwriting altered by "adventitious events," such as fame. For one, Washington Irving:

The MS. of Mr. Irving has little about it indicative of his genius. [...] The letters now before us vary remarkably in appearance; and those of late date are not nearly so well written as the more antique. Mr. Irving has travelled much, has seen many vicissitudes, and has been so thoroughly satiated with fame as to grow slovenly in the performance of his literary tasks. This slovenliness has affected his hand-writing. (ibid. 226)

The handwriting of another famous writer of the same generation to which Irving belongs, James Fenimore Cooper, is also said to manifest variance owing to certain "vicissitudes" and is characterized by a lack of form, similar to Irving's supposed lack of "any nice finish" (ibid. 232, 225). Yet, Poe does not similarly deduce that Cooper has grown fat on fame as Irving is said to have done. Between Irving and Cooper transatlantic travel is the common circumstance that may have given rise to "affectations" in their handwriting.

Yet, as with Bryant, whatever the indications of Cooper's MS., which seems to have "little of distinctive character about it," "his genius cannot be doubted"; so, Poe speculates: "it is probable that he has not always written thus" (ibid. 232). In *Autography* even "[t]he life of a scholar" sometimes proves not "undisturbed by those adventitious events which distort the natural disposition of the man of the world" and prevent "his real nature from manifesting itself in his MS." Such is the case of Jared Sparks, "Professor of History at Harvard":

In all his letters now before us, the lines are as close together as possible, giving the idea of irretrievable confusion; still none of them are illegible upon close inspection. We can form no guess in regard to any mental peculiarities from Mr. Sparks' MS., which has been no doubt modified by the hurrying and intricate nature of his researches. We might imagine such epistles as these to have been written in extreme haste by a man exceedingly busy among great piles of books and papers, huddled up around him like the chaotic tomes of Magliabechi. (GLG 19.6, 275)

Here, as in so many of his illustrations of that "strong analogy" said to "generally and naturally exist between every man's chirography and character," Poe underscores the fact that his theory of autography is not only contingent on the MS. under consideration but that handwriting itself is contingent on a flux of circumstance that can only be provisionally and artificially, if not arbitrarily, delimited as a "general hand." As Poe remarks in his particularly nuanced treatment of Charles Anthon's autography, "men who pass through many striking vicissitudes of life, acquire in each change of circumstance a temporary inflection of the hand-writing; the whole resulting, after many years, in an unformed or variable MS., scarcely to be recognized by themselves from one day to the other" (GLG 19.5, 226). The MS. of Jared Sparks is a case in point, since in it even the secluded habits of the scholar prove susceptible to "vicissitudes": not necessarily those arriving unexpectedly from the outside (as a visitor to the labyrinthine book and manuscript museum which was home to the reclusive Magliabechi) but also those manifest in the "irretrievable confusion" of the private library itself, the latent chaos "among great piles of books and papers."

Of course, it is possible for an MS. to evince a lack of modification and disturbance, like that of Anthon, which does seem to afford a “decisive token” of “each and all of the known idiosyncrasies of his taste and intellect” (ibid.). Poe goes on, “We recognize at once the scrupulous precision and finish of his scholarship and of his style—the love of elegance which prompts him to surround himself, in his private study, with gems of sculptural art, and beautifully bound volumes, all arranged with elaborate attention to form, and in the very pedantry of neatness” (ibid.). Both the “neatness” of Anthon’s “private study” and the “chaotic tomes” of Jared Sparks signal (ala the House of Usher) a “perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people”; however, the latter is inferred from the “irretrievable confusion” of Sparks’ MS., while the former is a known quality Poe brings to his analysis of Anthon’s handwriting. Thus both these illustrations of character evince a disruptive intrusion of circumstance into that “strong analogy” said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character.” Further, it is not unlikely that Anthon at one time or another passed through one of those “striking vicissitudes of life” manifesting as disturbances or affectations in handwriting. Perhaps he occasionally faltered in the “elaborate attention to form” that usually characterized the neat arrangement of his “private study,” or, more to the point, the unlikely disrepair of his “gems of sculptural art” and his “beautifully bound volumes” perhaps will have been a symptom, like that that may manifest in an MS., of other, less definite “vicissitudes”: e.g., illness, loss, or mere ennui.

Still in perfect keeping with the architecture of *Autography*, one may always wonder, in cases where Poe’s illustration of the analogy between handwriting and

character appears quite strong and in those where it appears quite weak, and in every one in between, to what extent each MS. under his consideration indicates merely “a temporary inflection of the hand-writing.” The malleability of handwriting itself—as an order of impression that is itself impressed by a flux of circumstance, the innumerable “striking vicissitudes of life”—effects a contingency in Poe’s theory of autography that renders it all but negligible, as in the autographical analysis of Rufus Dawes where Poe neglects to comment on the MS. all together. Following the narrative thrust of “The Fall of the House of Usher” we may consign the “web-work” of faults in the façade of *Autography* to another “‘crypt’ of Edgar Poe,” reading in the place of the “sullen waters of the tarn” what Poe dubbed in his very first installment of *Autography* “the ever open grave of deferred duties” (SLM 2.3, 207).

Yet, just as the narrative of “The Fall of the House of Usher” occupies a delay or deferral of the dissolution or literal deconstruction prefigured in the very title of the tale, in order for the House of Usher itself to remain briefly standing after the fact of its ruination, so too does the façade of *Autography* maintain a “specious totality,” a “still perfect adaptation of parts,” in spite of its “extraordinary dilapidation.” This “wild inconsistency” is most evident in Poe’s overt naturalization of the “strong analogy” said to “exist between every man’s chirography and character”; that this analogy “*does* generally and naturally exist,” Poe says, “will be denied by none but the unreflecting.” Notably, Poe’s naturalization of his theory of autography also extends to the exemplary objects of this theory: the collection of facsimile signatures or autographs. He writes, “The feeling which prompts to the collection of autographs is a natural and rational one” (GLG 19.5, 225). Of course, these remarks are designed to artificially buttress the

architecture of *Autography*, to generalize, naturalize, and rationalize, what is in fact a wish for the text's public enfranchisement, its popularity. At the same time, Poe specifically declines opportunities to make a more "rational" case for the "subject" of *Autography*: "It is not our purpose," he writes, "to enter into a *philosophy* of this subject, either in this portion of the present paper, or in the abstract. What we may have to say will be introduced elsewhere, and in connection with particular MSS." (ibid.). Also, nowhere does Poe mention that he derives much of the analytic framework for *Autography* from Johann Kaspar Lavater's *Physiognomy* (though, admittedly, in this case the omission may have enhanced the effect of the supposed "natural" and "rational" basis for his enterprise). Ultimately, Poe's "purpose" is neither to pursue a science nor a philosophy of autography; he contents himself with a "practical application of [a] theory that will go hand in hand with the theory itself."

Given the profound fragility of that "strong analogy" said to "generally and naturally exist between every man's chirography and character"—the many exceptions to, exemptions from, and conditions of Poe's theory of autography admitted at every turn in its "practical application" to the handwriting of the American literati in *Autography*—one might liken Poe's naturalizations and rationalizations of his theory of autography to the "[m]inute fungi" said to "overspread the whole exterior" of the House of Usher (UP 534). In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the concept of "nature" is cut off from its root as setting, environment, and context and put into the service of maintaining the "specious totality" of an artificial interiority, as a bubble waiting to pop: a façade of a façade, a space of literature. The architecture of *Autography* is similarly underwritten by a *techne* of literary design. With regard to his aim "to furnish [his] readers with a more accurate

and at the same time more general collection of the autographs of our *literati* than is to be found elsewhere,” Poe is at least “confident of its interest for all lovers of literature” (GLG 19.5, 225). Even that crucial relation said to “generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character,” the very pretext of Poe’s “practical application” of his theory of autography, is given a specifically literary character, being, after all, merely an analogy, however strong or weak.

It should hardly come as a surprise, the suggestion that *Autography* is a literary production of Poe’s. One could make the case, indeed the case has been made, that Poe’s early articles of *Autography* are primarily literary productions, since in them each facsimile signature or autograph is accompanied by a fictive letter Poe penned in the name of a member of the American *literati* and the collection as a whole is prefaced with patently fictitious narratives. At many a point in this dissertation there has been cause to reconsider and to challenge T. O. Mabbott’s suggestion that the revolution in *Autography*’s design between its first run in the *Messenger* in 1836 and its later run in *Graham’s* in 1841-2 turns Poe’s work from a “fictional setting” and a “fictional nature” to a “purely factual and critical” work (M 2:259). There is certainly an element of criticism about *Autography*, but far from being a point of distinction between the two series in the series, it is one of the surest points of commonality between the two, in addition to the facsimile signatures or autographs. Reading *Autography* for the truth of that “strong analogy” between handwriting and character and its remarkable coincidence with the beauty to be had in autography, one may pass freely between the early and late articles, as has been done here, without ever having to breathe a word about the radical and chasmal differences between the two series in the series. The critical dimension of

*Autography* is unthinkable without a certain literariness: the arch Poetic Sentiment of the “popular feeling” which prompts the collecting of autographs as it relates to that “strong analogy” between handwriting and character. That the truth of *Autography* so often coincides with the beauty of autography is a remarkable proof of the fact that *Autography* is a literary archive not just by virtue of being a collection of impressions about literature but by virtue of being a collection of literary impressions. While this may be said of any work in the vein of the character-sketch, the history of this critical genre in Poe shows how unique *Autography* is in this respect.

Four years after publishing the final article of *Autography* for *Graham's* in 1842, Poe commenced publishing a series of character-sketches much more well-known to readers of Poe than *Autography*, even though in many respects *Autography* may be seen as a forerunner to the work he entitled *The Literati of New York City*. Poe's “honest opinions at random on [the] autorial merits” of a sampling of the New York literary elite, “with occasional words of personality,” effected one of the most controversial and devastating periods of Poe's literary career, culminating in Poe's abandonment of the design and a legal suit, which Sidney P. Moss has deftly archived under the heading “Poe's Major Crisis.”

Although *The Literati* has been widely researched and thoroughly documented in American literary history, it is a seldom-remarked fact that Poe originally planned to have facsimile signatures heading each character-sketch in the series. In a letter to Louis A. Godey, of *Godey's Lady's Book* in which *The Literati* appeared from May to October of 1846, dated late April of that year, Poe provides a list of over 100 names, “a list of the whole series of authors to come,” 47 of which appear with checks by their side,

indicating the persons whose autographs are enclosed with the letter (Ostrom “Supplement” 529). Poe goes on in the letter to inform Godey that of those *Literati* sketches to be included in the May *Lady’s Book*, only one autograph is wanting, that of John W. Francis, which he says he will send the following day, and, of those to appear in the June issue, three autographs are wanting: those of Piero Maroncelli, Gulian C. Verplank, and George B. Cheever. “[A]nd unless,” Poe adds, “you have these, or can get them at once, perhaps it will be better to leave out these names for the present” (ibid. 530). After promising more character-sketches to come, Poe instructs Godey, “put them in as you get the autographs. done” (ibid. 531). Godey certainly did not take Poe’s instructions for gospel, as was his privilege, and the autographs that were meant to head each character-sketch of the famous *Literati of NYC* were almost totally suppressed from the series. Only a trace of Poe’s design remained in the shape of a mass of facsimile signatures huddled together and filling out the final page of Godey’s June 1846 recap of the series, all of which correspond with subjects of Poe’s character-sketches. One cannot help but wonder how the absence of these impressions, as they were intended to appear, may have affected the effect of *The Literati* on the American readership, which if it had any unity was that of a uniform disaster. One cannot help but wonder whether, as Poe thought, it would have been better, after all, to include the autographs. Perhaps the “truth” of “Poe’s Major Crisis,” which scholars have worked so long and hard to excavate from beneath layers of rumor, misinformation, legal documents, etc., would have been easier to come by to begin with, if coupled with the happy effect of the everyday beauty to be had in autography.



Long before his “Major Crisis,” however, certainly by 1842, Poe had learned that popularity could thrive as well on dismissal and disgust as on praise and admiration; thus it was the resolutely neutral quality of the public’s avid consumption of *Autography* that intrigued him upon wrapping up the series in January 1842. Here was *popularity*, undoubtedly, but the *character* of the popularity was cause for wonder. Just as surely as the conventions of the literary society of his day seemed to guarantee the popularity of *Autography*, it seemed to Poe, “the hasty critical, or rather gossiping observations which accompanied the signatures” ought to have occasioned more public outcry. He viewed the public reception of *Autography* as antithetical to the historical moment in which the series was published and contrary to the habits of the literary society that comprised both audience and object of *Autography*. Indeed, Poe seems to have expected the public reception of *Autography* to be more of the character of the public reception of the *Literati* series: “Where the subject was so wide and so necessarily *personal*—where the claims of more than one hundred *literati*, summarily disposed of, were turned over for re-adjudication to a press so intricately bound up in their interest as is ours—it is really surprising,” Poe says, “how little of dissent was mingled with so much of general comment.” Poe was right to remark this general character of the public reception of *Autography*, and to remark it as remarkable. Though one must always keep in view those crucial dissensions from the popular election of *Autography* among the American readership, and especially that most pronounced dissension of Edwin Percy Whipple, generally speaking, *Autography* merely inspired scores of brief, laudatory reviews, or “puffs.” Almost none of Poe’s contemporaries ventured any further remark on *Autography* than terse public recommendations of the “food for merriment” to be had in

it. In some ways, as Poe comments on the public reception of *Autography* in the final installment series, he may be seen to be reading *Autography* precisely where his fellows were not.

How uncanny, how “really surprising,” but in a way it makes perfect sense, that in this most anomalous of works by a writer most famous for his anomalous place in American literary history we find Poe identifying with, indeed speaking on behalf of, the dominant literary conventions of his day, briefly giving voice to an opposition that never materialized on a large scale. Whipple certainly does his best to perform a single-handed “re-adjudication” of *Autography* on the word of an anonymous condemnation of Poe’s “colossal [*sic*] piece of impertinence” (Gerber 111). However, there was never the movement of any assembled literary body or clique to perform *Autography*’s “re-adjudication,” as happened in the case of *The Literati of NYC*, nothing which threatened to dispel the magical aura of the “colossal” literary body or clique assembled in *Autography* (of which Whipple, recall, was not a member): the literary circle of *Autography*. This was owing in no small part to the fact that no one subject of Poe’s character-sketches in *Autography* stood out from the rest, as was the case with “Thomas Dunn English” in 1846, the character-sketch which set-off “Poe’s Major Crisis.” Of course, Poe does not draw attention to the lack of a “re-adjudication” in the case of *Autography*—which one might generally, naturally, even reasonably expect to have been mounted against a work with “so wide and so necessarily *personal*” a “subject”—without registering an impression on the significance of this fact. Indeed, he may only briefly give voice to *Autography*’s forestalled “re-adjudication” in the first place precisely in order to note its “effect.” “The fact, however, speaks loudly to one point:—to the *unity of truth*. It

assures us that the differences which exist among us are differences not of real, but of affected opinion, and that the voice of him who maintains fearlessly what he believes honestly, is pretty sure to find an echo (if the speaker be not mad) in the vast heart of the world at large.” In the midst of this characterization of the public reception of *Autography* as an unanimous and uncharacteristically unpartisan popularity, suddenly, a work that appears to be all about singularity and difference—individual character as manifested in handwriting, a “practical application of [a] theory that will [...] go hand-in-hand with the theory itself,” uniquely tailored to every one of its specimens, many of which defy the theory—appears to be all about just one thing: “the *unity of truth*.”

Now, one may be sure that no one has ever read *Autography* closely enough to appreciate how the unity of the truth of *Autography* is maintained only as a very “specious totality.” Never has been “scanned more narrowly the real aspect” of the façade of *Autography* as it has been here. “Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure,” foretelling of *Autography*’s inevitable ruination, its bitter lapse into anonymity as if “lost in the sullen waters of the tarn” (UP 535). But perhaps one might also entertain the notion that the anomalous character of *Autography*’s popularity, the very occasion of Poe’s laying claim to its “*unity of truth*,” had nothing whatever to do with the truth of *Autography*, but rather with precisely that “popular feeling” imbuing *Autography* with Poetic Sentiment through the beauty of the autographs themselves, given through their mechanical iteration as facsimile signatures. It is the beauty of autography as impression, the manifold disseminatory order of impression in *Autography* that affords “its still perfect adaptation of parts” in spite of a “wild

inconsistency” with “the utterly porous and evidently decayed condition of the individual stones.”

Perhaps it is ultimately fitting, then, that *Autography* has always been kept at such a distance in American literary history, never closely read. Its beauty of impression is maintained only in not approaching too near, only in keeping it in a “wide field” of view, “like some eminent landscape-painter had built it with its brush.” Perhaps the very thing about *Autography* that made it popular in its day rendered it a monument “on a peninsula,” “very nearly an island,” surrounded by “an almost circular loop” of almost perfect anonymity: “*une architecture inconnue dans les annales de la terre.*” A land-bridge remains, however, to the traveler to *Autography*, a way, if followed, which eventually leads to what turns out to be no picturesque cottage but a “hideous dropping of the veil”: a melancholy, “sorrowful impression,” like “the after-dream of the reveller upon opium” (UP 532). One might imagine this path to pass directly between those parentheses in which Poe gives voice to the possibility of madness in *Autography*. Take it on the word of a traveler who’s been there, thinking to bring some “cheerfulness of [...] society” to the place only to find that there is no possible “alleviation of [its] malady,” only to have his words die out “sullenly and silently” with its vanished remains, as but another signature-architecture of Poe’s.

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