Poe's Poisoned Pen: A Study in Fiction as Vendetta

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To Poe aficionados everywhere, who have not given up appreciation of the greatest writer in American literature.

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Chapter 1

"Genius involves in its very essence a scorn of chicanery:"

Poe's Beginnings

Edgar Allan Poe was more than just a creative crafter of horror stories, he was more than a short story writer, and he was more than a crazy drunkard, who lived out his stories. He was a crafter of words and worlds, a critic of the written word, and a keen and creative thinker who wanted to excel in the world of literature. Because of his desire for perfection in the written word, Poe was sometimes disregarded as being too harsh—though people did listen to his criticism. Poe's literary criticism is indeed harsh—note his comments to American author William M. Lord: "But enough of this folly. We are heartily tired of the book, and thoroughly disgusted with the impudence of the parties who have been aiding and abetting in thrusting it before the public. To the poet himself we have only to say—from any farther specimens of your stupidity, good Lord deliver us!" (*Essays and Reviews* 808). However, Poe's comments were not derived from a vindictive nature, but rather a desire to improve the quality of American literature. Although biting, his comments are preceded by a thorough analysis and critique of the author's work.

Poe's criticism, of course, did not go unnoticed by others. Sometimes grudgingly, and sometimes in awe, other literary critics comment on Poe's value. Henry James writes about Poe as a critic that "Edgar Poe perhaps held the scales the highest. He, at any rate, rattled them loudest, and pretended, more than any one else, to conduct the weighing process on scientific principles. Very remarkable was this process of Edgar Poe's, and very extraordinary were his principles; but he had the advantage of being a man of genius, and his intelligence was great" (Carlson 66). Henry James' mixed review, that, in essence, Poe was loud but smart, is a

response typical of Poe critics. Others, though, like dramatist George Bernard Shaw, are more glowing in their praise: "He was the greatest journalistic critic of his time, placing good European work at sight when the European critics were waiting for somebody to tell them what to say" (Carlson 98). These two reviews of Poe's criticism are indicative of the mixed sentiments expressed by other members of the literary community.

While Poe's criticism is harsh, and while others may have had problems with it, Poe did have reason—beside his great intellect—for being as exacting a critic as he was. Sidney Moss writes in his book *Poe's Literary Battles: The Critic in the Context of His Literary Milieu* that Poe's "literary battles" were based on the ideas that "literary cliques…in Boston and New York City" should be destroyed and that "men of creative power" have an advantageous environment in which they could write (4). Poe's objective, then, in his criticism, far from being derogatory and entirely negative, was to improve the conditions of literature in America. In a prospectus for the literary magazine *The Stylus*, Poe wrote of the need for a good literary journal, which would contain good literature and good criticism:

> It has become obvious, indeed, to even the most unthinking, that the period has at length arrived when a journal of the character here proposed, is demanded and will be sustained. The late movements on the great question of International Copy-Right, are but an index of the universal *disgust* excited by what is quaintly termed the *cheap* literature of the day:—as if that which is utterly worthless in itself can be cheap at any price under the sun. (*Essays and Reviews* 1033)

For Poe, starting a good literary magazine would be beginning to improve the quality of American literature. According to Poe, "the *chief purpose* of 'The Stylus' [is] to become known as a journal wherein may be found, at all times… a sincere and fearless opinion. It shall be a

leading object to assert in precept, and to maintain in practice…an absolutely independent criticism—a criticism self-sustained; guiding itself only by the purest rules of Art" (*Essays and Reviews* 1035). Knowing the reasons for Poe's harsh criticism, the reader can see that Poe was not out to destroy bad people—no, he wanted to destroy bad writing and the club mentality of writing circles in his time. His criticism—while scathing at times—was not vindictive, but rather a harsh fire that would burn the dross from the gold.

Poe needed to develop his criticism because of the conditions of the literary field in America. It is widely acknowledged that Poe wanted to establish himself as a professional American author. However, he could not be a renegade writer; he needed to operate within the system to improve literature. To work in the system, Poe gave many speeches to editors and publishers about the need for improvement in literature, and he tried (albeit unsuccessfully because of monetary concerns) to establish two new literary magazines. In the process of writing and speaking, Poe embarked on a series of skirmishes that marked his life as a literary critic. In a letter to the editor of the *Broadway Journal*, Poe writes of a recent speaking engagement to a group of "editors and their connexions": "I told these gentlemen to their teeth that, with a *very* few noble exceptions, they had been engaged for many years in a system of indiscriminate laudation of American books—a system which, more than any other one thing in the world, had tended to the depression of that 'American Literature' whose elevation it was designed to effect" (*Essays and Reviews* 1065). Poe began his attacks with criticizing editors and then spread outward from there.

Unfortunately, the editors were not the only stumbling blocks. Poe's lack of money also contributed to his hardships in publishing. At the time, American publishers were required neither to pay out profits to writers nor to buy copyrights—Moss writes that to correct such

practices would have been fiscally unsound (5). It cost more to buy an American copyright for a book (which could still be pirated by British printers, because international copyrights had not yet been established) than to force the author to pay the bulk of the cost and then let the British pirate the publication. Poe lamented this state of affairs in a letter to Frederick Thomas: "Without an international copyright law, American authors may well cut their throats. A good magazine, of the true stamp, would do wonders in the way of a general revivification of the letters, or the law" (*Letters* 210). Additionally, publishing companies required their writers to pay in advance against any possible losses—something Poe refused to do, resulting in several failed attempts to publish his first collection of short stories. Only after he was a critic of some acclaim did the publishing company agree to publish the book, and Moss relates that Poe never saw a penny of the profit (6-7).

Though there were difficulties in actually getting books published, other hardships arose relating to copyright problems. Philip V. Allingham explains that America's refusal to participate in international copyright laws exacerbated the problem. Because American printers viewed European novels as "common law," they did not need a copyright to publish them, and pirated copies of English novels were easy to procure and cheap to purchase. If American authors wanted to be famous for their work, they almost had to become famous in England first so that their work could then be transported overseas to America. British copyright law would protect their work, but American law would not. The International Copyright Law helped to solve some of the problems with copyrights, but in the face of easily pirated books, a public hungry for inexpensive reading materials, and formidable publishing problems made American authorship next to impossible as a way of earning income.

It is in the face of these conditions—unsatisfactory editing and publication practices and

a non-existent international copyright system—that Edgar Allan Poe begins his literary war—and he does not stop with the editors and publishers. If American literature is going to be great, then men must not only be able to be published, but they also must be able to break into the literary circle. While America does not profess royalty, there is clearly a hierarchy established around the world—he who holds the purse strings gets what he wants. American literature in the 19th century was no exception to this rule: enter the Literati, a glittering group of writers and friends of writers who dominated the American literary scene in Boston and New York City. Of these writers, Poe opined that "[t]he most 'popular,' the most 'successful' writers among us, (for a brief period, at least,) are, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, persons of mere address, perseverance, effrontery—in a word, busy-bodies, toadies, quacks" (*Essays and Reviews* 1118). Against these toadies and quacks, considered the literary elite, Poe must fight—not just for his reputation as a critic, but also for his reputation and success as a writer. He claims that "men of genius will not resort to these manœvres [ignoring bad writing], because genius involves in its very essence a scorn of chicanery; and thus for a time the quack always gets the advantage of them, both in respect to pecuniary profit and what *appears* to be public esteem." Thus begin Poe's critical attacks on the Literati in New York City, a group that Poe feels to be "representati[ve]…of the country at large" (*Essays and Reviews* 1118). Poe, being an outsider because of his poverty and unpopular opinions on the Literati, uses his status as a good literary editor to comment on the writing of the Literati. His criticism of the literary elite in New York forms a good cross-section of the problems in the literary movement of America because of their connections to publishing and their club mentality.

Nor is the Literati the only group that Poe chose to bring into his crosshairs as he sought to correct the literary movement in America. He also chose to attack the Transcendentalists,

writers like Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson. As Poe writes in a letter to Thomas Chivers, he has a problem with "the pretenders and sophists among them" (*Letters* 259). Other critics have noted in Poe an unsteady relationship with the Transcendentalists. Ottavio Casale notes Poe's lampoonery of poet Carlyle in short stories as well as Poe's "Marginalia," but questions if Poe only had issues with Carlyle's transcendental style, an exaggerated way of writing that, to Poe, had no logical value. Perhaps Poe also resented the Scottish poet's influence on American poetry (91). Poe's criticism is harsh, and his references to Carlyle in his literature are especially vindictive—at one point he calls Carlye an "ass," and in his story "Never Bet the Devil Your Head," one of his characters comments that "the best pigeon-winger over all kinds of style, was my friend Carlyle" (*The Unabridged Edgar Allan Poe* 717). This narrator in this story comments on the character Mr. Dammit, a mystic with tendencies to over-exaggeration, that there was "something in his *manner* of enunciation… which Mr. Coleridge would have called mystical, Mr. Kant, Mr. Carlyle twistical, and Mr. Emerson hyper-fizzistical" (715). In that particular passage, Poe mocks other notable Transcendentalists—both writers and philosophers.

Poe's criticism of the Transcendentalists was not a result of what they believed—instead, he criticized their style. He believed it to be "an assumption of airs or *tricks* which have no basis in common sense" (qtd. in Casale 89). While Poe admired and exhorted originality, he did not laud the Transcendentalists' theme of over-exaggerating the goodness of man. Leonard J. Deutsch notes that "[f]or Poe the Ideal could be glimpsed only in and through Art—and it was not an Ideal for the masses. It follows that the Transcendentalists' indiscriminate optimism was inimical to Poe" (20). Poe's satire in "How to Write a Blackwood Article" gives a concrete example of how Poe disliked the style of the Transcendentalists, a style based on exaggeration and over-pronounced writing. Mr. Blackwood, in relating to the main character Psyche Zenobia,

proclaims "the tone elevated, diffusive, and interjected. Some of our best novelists patronize this tone. The words must be all in a whirl, like a humming-top, and make a noise very similar, which answers remarkably well instead of meaning. This is the best of all possible styles where the writer is in too great a hurry to think" (*The Unabridged Edgar Allan Poe* 502). Here, Poe satirizes the writing style of the Transcendentalists. In his criticism, Poe describes Tennyson and Carlyle's writing as having "an opinion of the sublimity of every thing odd, and of the profundity of every thing meaningless" (*Essays and Reviews* 461). Their elevated tone describing the most mystic of elements without actually meaning anything receives Poe's ire.

While Poe's literary criticism was harsh, his portrayal of Transcendentalists' writing style critical, and his tone everywhere less than benevolent, almost nowhere is Poe as incensed as when he attacks the plagiarists. Poe wrote of plagiarism as "belong[ing] to the most barbarous class of literary robbery; that class in which, while the words of the wronged author are avoided, his most intangible, and therefore his least defensible and least reclaimable property, is purloined" (*Essays and Reviews* 678). He equates plagiarism with crimes like petty larceny, thievery, and to those who have sympathy for plagiarism, Poe asks, "Is not sympathy for the plagiarist, then, about as sagacious and about as generous as would be sympathy for the murderer whose exultant escape from the noose of the hangman should be the cause of an innocent man being hung?" (*Essays and Reviews* 717). No matter which metaphor Poe uses to describe plagiarism, each one depicts a violent and personal attack on an author. In a literary field where America was struggling to survive and when the most famous of men could easily skirt the charges of plagiarism, Poe performs his duty as a night watchman, constantly on the prowl for writers who commit this most heinous of literary crimes.

Perhaps the most notable accusations of plagiarism were leveled at Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow, who at one time Poe wrote of as being "a poet of high genius" (*Essays and Reviews* 671). While Poe's criticism of those who could not write is contemptuous, his criticism of Longfellow's plagiarism is beyond cutting. After he criticizes Longfellow's writing, Poe writes that he "ha[s] to adduce against the poet a charge of much more serious character" (*Essays and Reviews* 675). In a review of Longfellow's poem "Waif," Poe reproduces another poem by Hood, and, noting the similarities between the two poems, concludes "that *somebody is a thief*" (*Essays and Reviews* 702). So begins the first volley in a battle that lasted for months, with Poe answering charges from Outis, an anonymous defender of Longfellow. It is interesting to note that Longfellow's defenders first attacked Poe's literary criticism, accusing him of being a deficient critic, of "not seem[ing] to be aware of the distinction between rhythm and metre, and from not heeding that distinction has tried the poem in question by a false standard." According to the anonymous writer, though, the charge of plagiarism is "the sting in the tail" (*Essays and Reviews* 703). Poe and Outis continued to write back and forth, answering the charges of plagiarism with point and counterpoint.

While some critics have supposed Poe was actually the unnamed Outis, Kent Ljundquist and Buford Jones contend that Outis was not an invention of Poe—"a literary 'nobody' who quickly became a 'somebody'" (403). While Poe was more than capable of the "use of assumed identity for histrionic affect" (403), Ljundquist and Jones do not believe that he did so in this case, which is important, because had Poe created this character to bring him more notoriety, some of his reliability as an editor and critic might have been lost. Eventually, Poe rethought his accusations, reducing the charges from "willful plagiarism" to "unconscious plagiarism" (Moss 180). According to Moss, Poe explains away the plagiarism by writing that "the poetic sentiment and the poetic power…compel the poet, all unawares, to reproduce reproductions of

such visions [of beauty]…which, again by definition, are unoriginal" (180). However, Poe's original charges still bear much heat, leveled against a prolific and prominent American poet, one whom Poe at times felt to be a good poet, and at times deficient.

It is into this background that the analysis of Poe's short stories begins, and while Poe clearly has moments of stinging vitriol in his literary criticism, and while he lampoons ideals (and sometimes people) in certain of his short stories, these accusations and lampoons are blunt, mentioning people and ideas by name. Other instances exist in Poe's works, too, but these instances are more veiled than those seen in "The Signora Psyche Zenobia" or "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." Poe, while never afraid of attacking in his criticism, did not always travel the path of calling out detractors by name, lining them against the wall, and methodically eliminating them one by one. Sometimes Poe employed more artful ways of denouncing those whom he held in displeasure.

What is not always clear in analyzing Poe's literature is if he was satirizing, lampooning, or writing a story simply for the purpose of getting published. Critic Stephen L. Mooney, in his article "The Comic in Poe's Fiction," notes that "Poe's comedy…is directed to the exposure of a society in which heroes and rulers are shown to be deluded or irresponsible and their subjects a dehumanized, sycophantic mass" (433). Others have noted satire dripping from the pen of Poe in many short stories; others have noted the lampooning in certain short stories; but not as many have examined Poe's motives for attacks on the specific groups of the Literati, the Transcendentalists, and the plagiarists (most notably Longfellow). While Poe made clear his distaste for the writing and style of authors, and while he directly tried to subvert and destroy the literary cliques in Boston and New York City, Poe also conducted a second subtler attack in his short stories.

Ultimately, then, this thesis will be examining Poe's short stories in light of the hypothesis above mentioned, that in addition to their literary merit, Poe's stories also have a rhetorical element of argument and attack. As well as using a close reading of the text, applying Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm will provide an important tool for analyzing and understand Poe's motives. Other forms of criticism, such as psychological and archetypal, rely too heavily on the assumed nature of the mind of the writer; Fisher's paradigm allows for generalizations to be made about the writer based on the evidence of good reasons (personal motivation) seen in the text. Fisher's paradigm, though constructed for the field of communication, works well in the literary field as well. Fisher contends that "some dramatic and literary works do, in fact, argue[,] if that term [argument] is given its conventional broad meaning: to show, prove, or imply" (158). Since Poe is arguing against the authorities—the literary cliques, the Transcendentalists, and the like—Fisher's paradigm is perfectly appropriate for this study.

For Fisher, the two components for analysis of every communication (and all communication, to Fisher, is a narrative, composed of "symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" [58]) are narrative fidelity (correspondence with logic and values), and narrative probability (coherence of the story). Narrative fidelity refers to the notion that the story or argument aligns with what the audience knows to be true about their experiences. Audience, in this sense, can refer only to Poe, if necessary, because he would be one of the audiences of his stories; however, an external audience can also resonate with the ideas in Poe's stories about the police and oppression from authorities. Narrative probability refers to the idea that the story "hangs together," or has coherence. That is, the story must also be rational. Fisher suggests that "[b]eing rational… implies not only that one respects reasoning, it also indicates that one knows their [sic] nature of

argumentative issues, the forms of arguments and their tests, and the rules that govern the particular kind of argumentative interaction in which one may be an actor" (115). Poe is definitely able to construct a rational story; his knowledge of how stories work together as seen in his literary criticism and his following of certain elements of classical rhetorical tropes illustrate his command of not only knowing what he is arguing, but also how to express his argument.

Poe's detective stories provide fertile ground for analysis, as an amateur detective always acts contrary to the will of the police, subverting their official attempts to solve a crime. Poe's short story "The Gold-Bug," written at the beginning of Poe's literary career, is the first of his detective stories, and the character shows initiative in solving a mystery—not a crime—as Poe may be doing in his first attempts to critique the writing of others at the beginning of his career. Poe's character the Chevalier Auguste Dupin functions as the voice of Poe in arguing against the name of the authority of his time. The very nature of the detective stories in which Dupin appears ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter") provides a field for analysis that should resoundingly support the hypothesis that Poe's stories were sometimes more than a story, and sometimes more than a satire. In his short stories, Poe could attack without naming the victims of his ire, and could doubly reinforce his ideas about literature and writing. After examining the Dupin stories, the final story for analysis will be "Hop-Frog, or The Eight Chained Ourangutans," which was written near the end of Poe's career and life, and possibly one of the most blatantly critical and vitriolic of all his short stories. This story reinforces the idea that Poe was disgusted with the clubhouse mentality of and lack of quality in the American literary field. Therefore, at the end of the analysis, the evidence may be combined together to form a more complete picture of Poe's intentions in his short stories.

Chapter 2

"The solution is by no means so difficult as you might be led to imagine:"

The Gold Bug

Many of Poe's detective stories involve the process of ratiocination—logical, ordered thought. This kind of logical thinking is the basis for the analytical detective story. The process of ratiocination can be seen in all of the stories where some kind of detecting takes place, be it "Man of the Crowd" or "The Purloined Letter." J. Gerald Kennedy, writing about Poe's detectives, notes that Poe's "detective hero…restores…order to the world of mundane human affairs; he also explains the seemingly inexplicable, thereby demonstrating the ultimate comprehensibility of the world beyond the self…[T]he ratiocinator discerns the causes behind effects, proving that nature's laws are accessible to the man of reason" (185). For Poe, a man so steeped in analytic thinking, the process of ratiocination as described in his writing provides a base for examining the rest of Poe's detective stories: ordered, rational thought demonstrates purpose and intent beyond some kind of emotion (like what is seen in Poe's more Gothic tales). Showing the order and process makes the idea that Poe was arguing in his stories more believable. His short stories are more than simply artistic expression; they are intricate arguments that can be unraveled in much the same way Legrand solves the mystery of "The Gold Bug."

Because of his love for rational thought and methodical, reasoned writing, Poe was fascinated with cryptography. He believed that reason could overcome any mystery. In an article in *Graham's Magazine*, he claimed "it may be roundly asserted that human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve." Poe even suggested that because it helped to utilize "analytical ability," cryptography "might with great propriety be

introduced into academies, as the means of giving tone to the most important of the powers of mind" (*Essays and Reviews* 1278). This article in *Graham's Magazine* gave rise, according to Arthur Quinn, "to the writing of 'The Gold Bug'" (328). In this article, Poe described several methods of creating cryptograms beginning with a description of an ancient cipher machine called a *scytala* and describing other modern ciphers using some outside mechanism—such as using a pack of cards keyed to certain letters, or two people sharing the same book—and how to solve some of them. He spends some time with simple substitution cryptograms, and then focuses on a *key cryptogram* (the Berryer form), in which a phrase forms the key to solve a cipher.

Because "The Gold Bug" is a story about solving a cryptogram, it is important to understand Poe's ability in cryptography. If Poe was unable to solve cryptograms, then readers could call into question the narrative fidelity (logic and values) of the story. Poe's confidence in his cryptographic abilities can be seen in an article he wrote for a magazine challenging his readers to deliver a cryptogram that he could not solve. W. K. Wimsatt's article "What Poe Knew About Cryptography" describes the challenge: "[T]hey [the editor] pledged themselves to read any specimen [of cryptogram] which might be addressed to them" (754). Wimsatt explains that Poe solved and published solutions for these cryptograms over the course of a few months (755). Poe reissued this challenge to his readers in *Graham's*, focusing on the Berryer form of cryptograms : "[A]ny one who will take the trouble may address us a note, in the same manner as here proposed; and the key-phrase may be either in French, Italian, Spanish, German, Latin, or Greek, (or in any of the dialects of these languages,) and we pledge ourselves for the solution of the riddle" (*Essays and Reviews* 1284). One reader answered Poe's response, and sent him two cryptograms to solve. In the remainder of *Graham's* article, Poe illustrates how to construct the

cipher. He does so in a methodical way, charting how someone else can create the Berryer cryptogram. The explanation he gives in the *Graham's* article is similar to what he does in the story "The Gold Bug," with an important difference: Wimsatt explains that Poe "surrender[s] the secret," (779) walking the reader through the process of the solution. This story is Poe writing more than how to create a particular cryptogram; Poe describes how he was able to solve the cryptograms presented to him in the magazine.

Though Poe spent considerable time and money on his foray into the world of cryptography, some critics disagree on his level of proficiency. William F. Friedman, in his article "Edgar Allan Poe, Cryptographer," asserts that in two magazine articles that Poe wrote on cryptography and in the short story "The Gold Bug" "[i]n none of them can the serious student of the subject [cryptography] find any evidence that Poe was more than a tyro either in the art of cryptography or in its handmaid, the science of cryptographic analysis" (268). Friedman believes that Poe's proficiency was largely based on showmanship and appearing to be great rather than having a true grasp of cryptography (269). Wimsatt's opinion on Poe's ability mirrors Friedman's. These two scholars, then, think of Poe as a showman more than an actual cryptographer; however, Poe did have some latent ability in cryptography, as other scholars have noted.

The other view of Poe's ability in cryptography is more positive. Edward Wagenknecht, in his book *Edgar Allan Poe: The Man Behind the Legend*, seems to agree with Friedman, though he does temper his agreement with the statement that Friedman's "judgment [is] made from the vantage point of modern expert cryptographic knowledge, none of which was available to Poe" (103). Although Poe was only an amateur cryptographer, Quinn notes in his critical biography that "Poe was consulted by the Land Office of the United States, through Dr. Frailey,

who sent him a writing in cipher for solution" (327). Even Wimsatt, though he questions what Poe really knew about cryptography, still finishes his article with this statement: "It is true that Poe's skill as a cryptanalyst was not that of a professional, yet his native power was far beyond the ordinary" (778). Poe's proficiency, self-inflated or not, should not negatively influence readings of stories where he used his skill in cryptography.

Poe's interest in and use of cryptography establishes a significant note about the authorial voice in his writing. "The Gold Bug," written for a contest in the *Philadelphia Dollar*, exemplifies Poe's love of cryptography, a passion that he used in his fiction. "The Gold Bug" was written after he published his story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and the subsequent influence of the ciphers and puzzle-solving that Poe loved can be seen in the other stories involving Auguste Dupin, especially in "The Purloined Letter." Because Poe chose to reveal his methodology in solving cryptograms in this story, significant conclusions can be drawn regarding Poe's analytic writing and can form a bridge between Poe the cryptographer and Poe the writer. Wimsatt writes of "The Gold Bug," "Legrand's explanation of how he solved the cipher is a fine feat of exposition-as anybody will realize who undertakes to write a few paragraphs about ciphers…The writing of this kind of prose was, as I see it, one of Poe's most impressive gifts," and declares it a feat of marketing genius (779). Poe's feat of marketing genius, though, was almost ruined by a libelous charge of plagiarism.

As has been established, Poe was ever vigilant in his search for and prosecution of plagiarists. For Poe, plagiarism seems to be the ultimate sin: a lack of creativity and stealing from authors with originality. However, though Poe continually fought against plagiarism, sometimes others brought accusations against him, and "The Gold Bug" received much attention from one such accuser, Miss Sherburne. William Henry Gravely, in a short article in *Modern*

Language Notes, explains the incident: "Poe was accused of having stolen the plot of his story ["The Gold Bug"] from a tale by Miss Sherburne, entitled *Imogene, or The Pirate's Treasure*… [and] the charge gained currency for at least a short while" (309). Even after the newspapers that published the charges eventually dropped them (except for the New York *Herald*), one man continued to pursue the controversy: "The libeler was one Francis H. Duffee. His communication clearly insinuated that the publishers of *The Dollar Newspaper*, the committee appointed to award the prizes, and Poe had all connived with one another in a plan to defraud the public" (Gravely 309). Poe did sue for libel, but he dropped the suit eventually. Two years after this incident, Poe began his major attacks on plagiarism, with his vendetta against Longfellow in January 1845. In spite of the controversy—and adding fuel to Poe's furnace against plagiarism—"The Gold Bug" still survives as one of Poe's more famous short stories.

Poe had to buy back this story from the original publisher in order to enter it in the contest where he won first prize (Whalen 36). Poe clearly valued this story, commenting that it was one of his most famous stories (*Essays and Reviews* 869). However, Poe wrote this story for a greater reason than to tickle the public's ear and generate revenue for himself—though Poe also claimed that this was part of the motivation for him to write "The Gold Bug" (*Essays and Reviews* 869). One of Poe's main concerns in writing was to overcome the overwhelming popularity of British literature in America: "Hence it is, that we are chained down to a wheel, which ever monotonously revolves around a fixed centre, progressing without progress. Yet that we are beginning to emancipate ourselves from this thralldom, is seen in the book before us, and in the general appreciation of its merits, on both sides of the Atlantic" (*Essays and Reviews* 868). In Poe's editorial review of the book in which "The Gold Bug" appears, he writes, "[H]e endeavored to carry out his idea of the perfection of the plot, which he defines as—that, in which

nothing can be disarranged, or from which nothing can be removed, without ruin to the mass—as that, in which we are never able to determine whether any one point depends upon or sustains any one other" (*Essays and Reviews* 869). Poe's intent in writing, then, beyond simply writing a piece readable by the masses, was also to write a tale in which the plot worked to perfection, each part interlocking perfectly with the next. Poe's implied argument in the story seems to be that he is capable of such writing as will be popular with the masses and yet be of literary merit—when the narrator discovers Legrand's sanity is not in question,[1] Legrand replies "Why, to be frank, I felt somewhat annoyed by your evident suspicions touching my sanity, and so resolved to punish you quietly, in my own way, by a bit of sober mystification" (*Selected Tales* 229). While characters are not always speaking with the voice of the author, Legrand's final statement concerning the case parallels Poe's attitudes toward America's literary climate.

"The Gold Bug" begins with a short description of the main character, a Mr. William Legrand. Understanding Legrand's character is important in establishing the narrative fidelity (logic and values) of the story. The detective must be established as an authority on solving mysteries using ratiocinative powers, or the story will not only lack logic, but it will also lack coherence. As seen in other Poe stories, a certain amount of autobiographical information appears in "The Gold Bug." Legrand, after "a series of misfortunes… [t]o avoid the mortification consequent upon his disasters… left New Orleans, the city of his forefathers, and took up his residence at Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina " (*Selected Tales* 198). Quinn reports that Poe took a similar journey; after being court-martialed from West Point, Poe moved to New York City, living the life of a starving artist. Because Poe did not want to be in West Point due to a lack of money, and effected his court-martial by "disobedience of

[1] Legrand, after obsessing for weeks over the mystery of the gold bug, led the narrator on a wild chase throughout the woods to try and find the treasure, muttering to himself and wandering in circles all the while. The narrator has originally planned to attempt to confine Legrand to his room until he was healed.

orders" and "gross neglect of duty" (Quinn 173), perhaps he did not necessarily leave West Point in mortification. Like Legrand, who, according to Michael Williams in an article on "The Language of the Cipher," is "arrogan[t] about his skills" (646), Poe has supreme confidence in his role as a cryptographer. Legrand is also "well educated, with unusual powers of the mind, but infected with misanthropy, and subject to perverse moods of alternative enthusiasm and melancholy" (*Selected Tales* 198). Wagenknecht asks if "[b]esides being sensitive, was Poe also melancholy…?" (50). Because of the complexities surrounding Poe's life, Wagenknecht warns against giving too much credence to the similarities between Poe and possible autobiographical elements of his story, suggesting that "Poe himself would have no truck with such [pseudo-psychological] interpretations" (56). However, similarities do exist between his writing and his life.

Again, with many other Poe stories, this story has a first person narrator. Following Fisher's advice that "the first inference a reader must make is one concerning the narrator's reliability" (171), careful attention to the narrator should be established to determine the fidelity of the story. A first-person narrator excludes some information that may be included with an omniscient narrator, making the first-person narration ideal for a detective story. In two Poe tales where the narrator himself is the detective, questions arise about the reliability of the narrator. Kennedy suggests that in Poe's first tale of ratiocination, "Man of the Crowd," the detective fails "to grasp the 'principles of investigation' later used by Dupin . This failure occurs primarily because the narrator cannot maintain a critical detachment" (188). The story cannot be trusted because the detective reveals, unashamedly, his own foibles, casting into doubt his abilities. Kennedy continues, remarking on the character's self-revelation, "While the narrator's account of his nocturnal adventure draws attention to the stranger's peculiar and seemingly

perverse actions, it simultaneously reveals, on another level of understanding, the egotism and self-deception of the narrator" (188-9). Thus, seeing the problems inherent in all humanity coming from the person who attempts to solve a mystery causes doubt concerning the reliability and accuracy of the story and takes away from the "whodunit" aspect—viewing the story through the eyes of the detective, the reader does not attempt to solve the mystery; rather, he passively allows the mystery to be solved for him via the narrator. For the argument of the story to be presented in an objective fashion, untainted by the biases of the detective, the narrator needs to be someone different from the detective.

The narrator in "The Gold Bug" is a reliable narrator, allowing the audience to embrace the idea that the story will have narrative fidelity. Similar to "The Murders at the Rue Morgue," the narrator meets the detective "by mere accident" (*Selected Tales* 198). The narrator's description of Legrand allows the reader to see the detective from an outside perspective, creating a more reliable picture of Legrand. Additionally, viewing the detective through the lens of the narrator contributes to the mystery of the story. Because "The Gold Bug" deals with how Legrand solves the mystery, the audience must remain ignorant of the inner workings of his mind to fully appreciate the solution when it is explained via the detective. The narrator, being concerned about Legrand as he seems to stumble into madness, demonstrates a logic of good reasons: his interest in and care for Legrand's well being contribute to his system of values. It is relevant that the narrator remarks that he "dreaded lest the continual pressure of misfortune had, at length, fairly unsettled the reason of [his] friend" (*Selected Tales* 204). He serves as the bridge between the ultra-rationality of a third-person omniscient narrator (who might make the story unbelievable due to announcing everything that occurs) and the too close first person narrator who actually solves the mystery.

Likewise must Legrand contribute to the narrative fidelity of "The Gold Bug." The detective, the man of logic and reason, must have good faculties so the audience will trust his solution. Like the magician employing sleight-of-hand so that his trick will not be discovered, Poe creates in the audience doubt regarding the stability of the detective in two instances: the dialogue exchange between the narrator and Legrand's personal servant, Jupiter, and the search wherein Legrand, Jupiter, and the narrator tramp through the woods hunting for the supposed treasure that, as Legrand has discovered, exists on the island. The narrator raises these doubts, commenting on Legrand's eccentric behavior: "[M]y friend, about whose madness I now saw, or fancied that I saw, certain indications of method" (*Selected Tales* 213). Thus the narrator believes that the detective might be crazy, informing part of the mystery. However, though both the narrator and Jupiter believe Legrand to be crazy, he proves he is not, by finding the treasure he seeks. He even exacts a small revenge on the narrator, remarking that he "resolved to punish [the narrator] quietly, in [his] own way, by a little bit of sober mystification" (*Selected Tales* 229). This final statement rationalizes the detective's eccentric behavior and restores any doubts the narrator raised in his description of certain behaviors of the detective.

To receive a complete picture of the narrative fidelity, the reader must also examine the logic of reasons. The values in the story have already been established, both from the narrator, who is motivated and moved by his concern for Legrand, and by Legrand, whose values concern discovering the treasure he knows is on the island. However, values without logic are incomplete in constructing a good argument. The detective's unique process of discovery informs the logic of reasons (sound reason by way of formal and informal logic). Poe's use of formal and informal logic is evident in the description Legrand gives of his journey to the solution. In his explanation, Legrand comments, "I say the singularity of this coincidence

absolutely stupefied me for a time. This is the usual effect of such coincidences. The mind struggles to establish a connexion—a sequence of cause and effect—and, being unable to do so, suffers a temporary paralysis… When you had gone… I betook myself to a more methodical investigation of the affair" (*Selected Tales* 217). What follows this comment is an explanation of his methodology, a methodology that carries through to the rest of the tale.

Because Poe's methods of solving cryptograms are integral to understanding both the narrative fidelity (logic and values) and the narrative probability (coherence), a short description of the methods in Poe's article "A Few Words on Secret Writing" and the technique of Legrand in "The Gold Bug" should illustrate that Poe's proficiency in solving cryptograms for fun in a magazine translates to how he writes the solution of his short story. Poe begins his discussion in "Secret Writing" by showing how people "totally unpractised in cryptography" might set up a cryptogram, illustrating a simple substitution cipher where one letter stands for another (*Essays and Reviews* 1278-9). He follows this description with two more complicated types of ciphers, tantalizing the audience by writing that to those with skill, ciphers are solved easily. However, he never explains how a skilled cryptographer can solve the cipher. The construction of the ciphers that he uses is solid, the mystery of solving the cryptogram is established, and then Poe leaves the readers with a firm understanding of how to construct a cipher, but not how to solve one.

To understand how to solve ciphers, readers must turn to Poe's story "The Gold Bug." Through Legrand, Poe demonstrates his capability in solving cryptograms. Using logical thinking, Legrand is able to figure out the mystery behind the gold-colored bug that he discovers. The detective, responding to a negative critique of the drawing he made of the gold-bug, notices a similarity in his drawing and the bug—but then he realizes that he never drew a skull on the

parchment. The skull was there, on the paper, even before he drew the *scarabeus*. From this coincidence (and, for Poe, it is important to note that he does not believe in coincidences, which will be discussed in the chapter on "The Mystery of Marie Roget"), Legrand discovers the key to the mystery. In Poe's article on secret writing, he explains that for the cryptogram to make any sense, the decipherer must discover the key. Here, Legrand does just that, as he determines that the skull is a symbol of a pirate, which leads him to believe that the parchment is a scrap of a treasure map.

Legrand also discovered that the parchment had a special invisible ink on it—and in this ink was written a long cipher, a string of unintelligible numbers and symbols. Legrand is not put off the scent by this cipher, though; echoing Poe's words in "Secret Writing," Legrand comments, "Circumstances, and a certain bias of mind have led me to take an interest in riddles, and it may well be doubted whether human ingenuity can construct an enigma of the kind which human ingenuity may not, by proper application, resolve" (*Selected Tales* 222). The detective deciphers the cryptogram using logic: he first counted the frequency of the symbols and compared that with the letters in the English language that occur most often. From there, he establishes letter pairs (like "ee" and "th") and starts to put together words, following that with the process of breaking apart the string of words into its individual components. The process of solving the cipher is the method Poe uses to solve the puzzles his readers send to him when he issues the challenge in *Graham's*. The method of logical and analytical thinking are sound, and the reader can easily follow Poe's explanation of how to solve this type of cipher. The solid methodology is important for establishing the narrative probability (or coherence) of "The Gold Bug"

The second half of the paradigm concerns coherence—if the story "hangs together" and if

the plot is free of contradictions. Listening to Poe in his commentary on the short story reveals that to him, there are no holes. Poe's explanation of exactly how to solve the cipher in the story is not entirely correct, but his methodology is sound. Legrand traces the mystery to its logical conclusion and ends up with the treasure, explaining along the way about Kidd, the scrap of vellum, and his discovery of the skull in the tree that marked where the treasure was buried. The audience clearly resonated with the story, and "The Gold Bug" sold over 300,000 copies, making it one of Poe's most popular stories (Whalen 37). Because Poe writes a story that is popular with the public, but also precise in its development and delivery, he asserts himself as an important and valuable writer in American literature with sufficient authority in his position as a literary critic, and part of that authority concerns his dexterity with language, as seen in his puns.

As with other stories, Poe uses his extensive knowledge of the English language to create a series of puns that contribute to the meaning of the story and serve as a showcase for Poe's mastery of language, giving him the authority to make the statements about writing that he does in his literary criticism. Richard Hull, in his article "Puns in 'The Gold Bug': You Gotta Be Kidding," asserts that "'The Gold Bug' rests on the overarching pun of its title. Supporting this arch is an abundance of other puns, such as those on Kidd, antennae, and gold/ghoul" (1). Hull further suggests that the point of the puns is to "exacerbate the unlikelihood of the train of events in the story" (3). Intertwining the plot with puns in the story (as in Poe using an "obsession with wealth [getting bitten by the gold bug] [and] having a gold-colored bug bite Legrand" [Hull 1]), reveals a command of language. Poe is able to make the language of the story mirror the literal meaning of the obsession for wealth, tying meaning and symbol together in "The Gold Bug."

Poe uses this same mastery of language in his literary criticism. In his article "About Critics and Criticism," Poe analyzes another literary critic's paragraph of analysis, stripping it

down to appropriate word choice and sentence style:

> Let us now look at the first of these paragraphs. The opening sentence is inaccurate at all points. The word "government" does not give the author's idea with sufficient definitiveness; for the term is *more* frequently applied to the *system* by which the affairs of a nation are regulated than to the act of regulating. "The government," we say, for example, "does so and so"—meaning those who govern. But Macauly intends simply the act or acts called "governing," and this word should have been used, as a matter of course… "Southey," too, being the principal subject of the paragraph, should precede "government," which is mentioned only in its relation to Southey. (*Essays and Reviews* 1042)

For such a meticulous writer, then, the use of puns in his story constitutes a powerful understanding of how language works, how words fit together, and how they may be used to contribute to meaningful literature. Thus, tangentially, Poe mocks his contemporaries further in his writing by demonstrating a capability to use language powerfully to reinforce the plot of a story. When Poe writes of Ann S. Stephens that "[h]er style… lacks real power through its verboseness and floridity. It is, in fact, generally turgid—even bombastic—involved, needlessly parenthetical, and super-abundant in epithets… her sentences are, also, for the most part too long" (*Essays and Reviews* 1160) he does not do so out of ignorance or high-mindedness, but out of his grasp of language.

"The Gold Bug" was one of Poe's most popular stories. He calls this story his "most successful tale" (*Letters* 253). In an article by Terence Whalen, called "The Code for Gold: Edgar Allan Poe and Cryptography," Whalen writes of the banking problems during Poe's time and the influence on Poe: "When Poe published 'The Gold Bug' in 1843, he no doubt felt disdain

toward the debates over national monetary policy that had raged since Jackson's election in 1828… instead of intervening on behalf of neoclassical economic prudence, Poe capitalized on the crisis by selling a 'money tale' to the masses" (36). Poe's sensitivity to his surroundings clearly informed part of his writing. He writes that himself in his critique of his story: "The intent of the author was evidently to write a popular tale: money, and the finding of money being chosen as the most popular thesis" (*Essays and Reviews* 869). As discussed in the previous chapter, with Poe's ambitions of establishing himself in American literature and clearing the way for good American authors, it is not surprising that he wrote a tale for the masses, one that they would appreciate. By writing this story, not only could Poe showcase his extraordinary talent as a writer, but he could garner public support for his plans for American literature and his future. "The Gold Bug" is a highlight in Poe's career, illustrating his talent with words, his methodical and logical thought processes, and his self-perceived superiority to the other writers in the field of American literature.

Chapter 3

"The *Truly* Imaginative are Never Less than Analytic:"

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

After having previously established the various voices of Poe in one of his short stories, this chapter will begin an exploration in the series of mystery stories featuring the detective Chevalier Auguste Dupin. Dupin interacts with the police and with the crime scenes in a unique way: as a private detective—a detective who only engages the scene of the crime because of personal interest, instead of a detective who must be there because of public duty, like the police detective. Because he is not a member of the elite detecting force of the police, he is able to circumvent certain channels that they must use. Dupin's *modus operandi* is significant because Poe operates much the same way in his work at various literary journals. Poe is not a member of the literary elite and he mocks them in several stories as well as in his criticism. Instead of joining the forces of the Literati and reaping the benefits of being a member of that group (public support, financial soundness, and almost guaranteed publication), he works to open the field of American literature to good authors. Poe makes an argument in the story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" that a good detective—and by extrapolation, a good writer—is profound (not "too cunning…in his wisdom no *stamen*…[not] all head and no body" [*Selected Tales* 122]), and this argument (from the words of Dupin on the prefect of the police) leads to his attack on the literary elite of his time through the means of Dupin's commentary on the police.

In keeping with the order of analysis employed in the previous chapter, the first part examined is the narrator. If the narrator is not a reliable one, then the story raises doubts as to its fidelity and probability. The narrator of this story remains the same narrator throughout the body of mystery stories involving Dupin, an unnamed man who narrates in first person. This style of

narration allows the reader to enter the story and identify with the characters. However, because the narrator tells the story from the first person perspective, he is not omniscient, and thus the reader can experience the mystery as the narrator experiences it, not knowing all that happens until Dupin chooses to reveal his methodology. Fisher suggests that an audience who can trust the narrator and identify with him or her can move to the next step of analyzing how "the narrator convey[s] his conclusions and his reasons for them" (172). In this particular story, the narrator shows his conclusions and his reasons for those conclusions through relating the story of Auguste Dupin.

The narrator's commentary on Dupin allows readers to understand him from a rational point of view. Because the narrator is only a rational observer of the action, rather than a character who takes part in the detective work, the audience will be more likely to believe what he relates about Dupin. If Dupin were to laud his own works, they could be dismissed as egoistic, given his incredible capacity for detection. However, because the narrator reveals details, the audience can accept Dupin's discoveries as legitimate. The narrator chooses to reveal potential flaws in Dupin's character, to make him more human: "What I have described in the Frenchman was merely the result of an excited, or perhaps a diseased intelligence. But of the character of his remarks at the periods in question an example will best convey the idea" (*Selected Tales* 96). The narrator then goes on to relate how Dupin deduces what the narrator is thinking about based on his location and facial expressions. While the narrator is astonished by Dupin's deductions, he nonetheless admits that Dupin is correct, and then traces for the reader the method of the deduction. In so doing, the narrator prepares the reader to believe Dupin's remarkable ability. This is important because the audience must believe that Dupin is capable of such deductive powers in order to establish any sense of reasonability or fidelity. If the audience

does not trust Dupin, the story will not be viewed as coherent, and the argument will be lost.

Through the narrator the audience may also enter the story and identify with the sense of wonder at the brilliance of Msr. Dupin. This element is important—if Poe is going to make a commentary through Dupin, the audience must believe and identify with Dupin's extraordinary methods, and the narrator provides the bridge from the audience to Dupin. Initially, the narrator brings Dupin to a human level by revealing some of his possible frailties. The narrator also draws the audience to Dupin by explaining the sheer impossibility of the case Dupin must solve. He notes that he "could merely agree with all Paris in considering them [the murders] an insoluble mystery. [He] saw no means by which it would be possible to trace the murderer" (*Selected Tales* 105). By showing the difficulty of the case, the narrator invites the audience to accept Dupin as the only one able to solve the crime. The narrator's use of first person reinforces this idea; the audience, viewing the scene from the outside, cannot know precisely what Dupin is thinking, and thus may react in wonder, with the narrator, when his methods are revealed. Again, the narrator serves as a vehicle for the reasonability of the story.

To begin to apply the narrative fidelity—the logic and values—at work in this story, the reader needs to understand the players in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." The protagonist is the inimitable Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, "of an excellent—indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events…reduced to…poverty" (*Selected Tales* 94). Several parallels exist between Dupin and Poe from the first line of description of Dupin, for, like Dupin, the members of Poe's family did have an illustrious career, his mother and father being involved in theater. While Quinn notes in *A Critical Biography* that the theater profession was widely regarded as "the resort of the vicious and the extravagant" (1), the fact remains that Poe's family did well in the theater. While his parents were never rich, their career as theatricals was, no

doubt, illustrious. Mrs. Poe's career claimed 201 roles (Quinn 46). After Poe's parents died, he moved to Richmond with his new caretakers, John and Frances Allan. Though the Allans were somewhat prosperous, they refused to support him while at the University of Virginia—probably due to his gambling debts (Quinn 112). However, Quinn also records that Allan sent Poe to UVA without the minimum amount of money required to live, thus rendering Poe financially insolvent and forced to leave his life at UVA and to try to find work on his own (113). It seems, then, that Poe's background coincides nicely with Dupin's.

Besides a similarity in background, Poe and Dupin share a love of ratiocination. The narrator comments that Dupin "seemed, too, to take an eager delight in its [analytical] exercise—if not exactly its display—and did not hesitate to confess the pleasure thus derived" (*Selected Tales* 96). As seen in the chapter on "The Gold Bug," Poe had a deep interest in cryptography, a field that requires analytical thinking to be successful. Commenting on Poe's love of analysis, Terry J. Martin, in his article "Detection, Imagination, and the Introduction to 'The Murders at the Rue Morgue,'" explains that Poe valued analysis above what he referred to as calculation—mere mathematical ways of solving equations (31). For Poe, the act of analyzing a situation, discovering its particulars and how they work together, was more important than just using strategy to understand what happens in the world. Martin also ascribes to Poe a sense of morality in analysis, explaining that Poe "implies that analysis has more consequential objects than just winning at cards and flexing one's mental muscles. He invests the act at once with a moral imperative and moral consequences" (32). Dupin's method of analysis serves a moral purpose: he is not just exercising his mind, he is solving a crime and bringing justice to the victims. So, too, is Poe's method in writing, which was extremely analytical. He was not just writing to prove that he was a better writer—he was writing to open the field of literature to

others who were good writers. Thus, both Poe and Dupin use their analytical powers to better others, whereas the police and the members of the New York Literati, as will be shown, never quite make it beyond the level of calculation for their personal benefit.

Poe's method of reasoning is also key to understanding the reasonability of the story. Fisher's paradigm contends that the speaker must have logic of good reasons—as seen in the narrator and Dupin's consistency of values, and Poe's, as concerns his value system in place with his beliefs on analytic reasoning—and the speaker must have logic of reasons—that is, the speaker must use standards of formal and informal logic (115-8). That Poe—and Dupin—exhibit the quality of the logic of reasons is evident in the story. According to John T. Irwin, in his article "Reading Poe's Mind: Politics, Mathematics, and the Association of Ideas in 'the Murders at the Rue Morgue,'" when Poe writes the account of Dupin appearing to read the mind of the narrator, he is using "actual associations existing in [his] mind that led him to create this particular sequence of thoughts as an example of associative logic" (188). Thus, at least in the first example of the logic of reasons, Poe's writing passes a crucial test: he is following a pattern of formal logic. Irwin also asserts that when Poe uses the word "stereotomy" as he does in the passage where Dupin reveals his line of reasoning[2], "[b]y calling attention to the affected use of the word stereotomy, Poe seems to be encouraging the reader to inquire into its more normal use." Poe uses stereotomy to refer to a special branch of mathematics, called "polytechniques," that he learned while a cadet at West Point (199). The rest of the passage also shows how the ideas associate in Poe's mind: the name of the alley corresponds with a poet that Poe thought "a bore," the poet appeared in a review of a book that was in the same issue as "The Murders at the Rue Morgue," and the poet was also associated with a mathematician who was a careful student

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[2] "I could not doubt that you murmured the word 'stereotomy,' a term very affectedly applied to this species of pavement. I knew that you could not say to yourself 'stereotomy' without being brought to think of atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus" (*Selected Stories* 98).

of polytechnique (Irwin 200). Poe's method of thinking, then, is reasonable, based on his logic of and his logic of reasons (logical processes) and good reasons (motivations).

For the second component of the paradigm, the probability of the story, Fisher would ask if the story "hangs together"—if it does not, then the argument cannot convince the audience, and Poe's meaning might be lost. The story must make sense to the reader; it must be probable. Poe paves the way for the probability (coherence) of the story in the introduction. Martin contends that the introduction begins the discussion of detection and imagination as seen in the story (33). For an audience to identify with the story and apply it to situations in the lives of its members, the story must resonate with the reader via probability. Martin writes of "Poe's awareness of the need for the ideal meaning actively to be called up or evoked by the reader—a meaning which otherwise would remain hidden, as it were, deep beneath the literal sense" as being a key element of the story. Poe also "suggests elsewhere that the full effect of a piece of fiction ultimately depends on the reader's reciprocal effort in producing it" (36). While this comment by Poe is possibly an early suggestion of reader-response criticism, it also speaks to the nature of the story. A detective story is interactive; the reader engages with the story and tries to figure out the crime along with the sleuth—or sometimes, apart from the sleuth. If the story does not make sense and the reader cannot at least try to figure out the mystery, he will be frustrated and stop reading, or find the story improbable. Either problem thwarts the efforts of the author to make a good argument.

The narrator continues the process of making the story probable in the initial description of Dupin and his first encounter with Dupin's remarkable talent for deduction. Dupin, though a paupered noble, is well read; the narrator comments that "[b]ooks, indeed, were [Dupin's] sole luxuries" and that their "first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where

the accident of [their] both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume brought [them] into closer communion" (*Selected Tales* 95). An avid reader in search of a rare book is an educated person, and an educated person is believable as a detective. Furthermore, Dupin's peculiar show of talent makes the rest of the story believable. Because Dupin is able to deduce what the narrator is thinking, a feat on a small scale, and because Dupin is correct in all of his deductions and his process of reasoning, it seems reasonable that he would be able to apply this ability on a larger scale where he has more evidence than just facial expressions and street signs.

The story's probability is reinforced as the narrator and Dupin discover the crime. If Dupin had ambled into the police station and demanded to know about a leading case, the reader might be inclined to disregard the set-up for the story. However, Dupin discovers the case in the newspaper. Surely, a case of this magnitude would appear in a newspaper. The narrator writes that the "paragraphs arrested our attention" (99). The pun evident in this sentence—arresting attention—links the case to a crime even before the reader sees the crime's description, thus peripherally establishing the connection to a crime and an eventual solution.

Even Dupin's piecing together the clues is probable and believable to an audience. Dupin walks the reader through the solution to the problem, leaving no stone unturned. He remarks of the clue in the voices that people reported hearing: "But in regard to the shrill voice, the peculiarity is…each one spoke of it as that of a foreigner…No words—no sounds resembling words—were by any witness mentioned as distinguishable" (*Selected Tales* 108-9). When it is revealed that the perpetrator is, in fact, an orangutan, the sounds make sense and the pieces fall into place. Additionally, Dupin eliminates any possible alternatives as he continues to reveal the solution of the mystery: "Fortunately, there is but one mode of reasoning upon the point, and that

mode *must* lead us to a definite decision.—Let us examine, each by each, the possible means of egress" (*Selected Tales* 109). As Dupin ticks off the "possible means of egress," he eliminates each one as impossible, until he arrives at the only logical conclusion. The reader can easily follow the reasoning of Dupin as he makes his deductions, and because they can follow Dupin, when he reveals that a broken nail hid the fact that the window that was opened, a condition that let the orangutan escape, the reader understands that this is a plausible end to the trail of clues. Because Dupin has been introduced as an intelligent man, and because an example of his detective skills has been brought forth within a few paragraphs of this description, his subsequent mystery-solving ability is believable; the audience can identify with the story and apply it to times in their lives when they piece together clues to solve some minor mystery.

One potential problem with the probability in Poe's story concerns a piece of evidence. Sylvester Ryan, in his article "A Poe Oversight," notes that Poe never accounts for the enormous amounts of blood that should be in the room after the orangutan killed Mme. L'Espanye. Ryan contends that "[f]ew of the problems which confronted the police would have existed. The presence of blood would have led the police to discover all the facts that Dupin revealed, except, perhaps, the fact that the killer was an animal" (408). On the surface, this does pose a problem to the probability of the story. The police should have noticed the amounts of blood associated with someone's head being severed from the body. However, Ryan does not read the story closely enough, for while neither Dupin nor the police officer directly address the issue of blood, neither Dupin nor the police officer directly witness and report on the crime. All details are related through a medium. The initial account of the story is in a newspaper, and while newspapers are semi-sensational, accounts of buckets of blood decorating the room of a deceased woman and her daughter seem unpalatable for the newspaper's intended audience. Furthermore,

Dupin specifically mentions that the police had noted the windows, which appeared to be nailed shut, and did not consider there might be additional evidence that could be gathered from them. A lack of the description of blood in the story is not enough to make the story unbelievable.

Because Poe's story follows logical patterns (fidelity) and conforms to ideas about reality (probability), Poe's argument—and his attack—are doubly reinforced throughout the story. Dupin's commentary on police work establishes another avenue of the argument and attack that Poe is making in this story, that of Poe's strike against the elite literary community. The accepted authority presiding over criminal cases, the French police force arrive first at the scene of the crime to establish its authority. However, though they arrive first, they are initially unable to solve any particulars, and the newspaper article wherein Dupin discovers the case notes that "to this horrible mystery there is not as yet, we believe, the slightest clew [*sic*]" (*Selected Tales* 100). Even after they begin to gather clues, the police force still fails to solve the crime. Again, the newspaper notes that "[t]he police are entirely at fault—an unusual occurrence in affairs of this nature. There is not, however, the shadow of a clew apparent" (*Selected Tales* 104). The police, arriving first, and having the best access to the crime scene, should be able to solve this mystery, but they cannot; thus begins the first part of Poe's attack.

As before mentioned, Poe's intent in his literary criticism was to establish an area in which competent writers could compete with the club mentality of most literature publishers. Comparing the actions of the police in the story to this club mentality reveals some interesting similarities that provide yet more evidence of Poe's attacks. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin, referring to the police, notes they are "much extolled for *acumen*[; they] are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment" (*Selected Tales* 105). His comments via Dupin are similar to comments that Poe

makes in his literary criticism. In a short article on George H. Colton, a member of the New York Literati, Poe writes "I cannot conscientiously call Mr. Colton a good editor, although I think that he will finally be so. He improves wonderfully with experience. His present defects are timidity and a lurking taint of partiality, amounting to positive prejudice…for the literature of the Puritans" (*Essays and Reviews* 1122-3). This mixture of praise and appraisal is similar to how Dupin comments on the police. Both forms of commentary combine a positive remark that is overridden, ultimately, by a negative remark about the person in question.

Furthermore, Dupin notes that the police "err continually by the very intensity of [their] investigations." In seeking too closely the solution, the police miss the "matter as a whole" (*Selected Tales* 105). Likewise does Poe comment on one Charles Anthon, another member of the New York Literati, noting, "[h]is accuracy is very remarkable…even in his MS., which is a model of neatness and symmetry… It is somewhat *too* neat, perhaps, and *too* regular, as well as diminutive, to be called beautiful" (*Essays and Reviews* 1142). Here, Poe again comments on being so concerned with particulars that one misses the big picture—the beauty of a piece of writing. Like the police, who miss the ultimate goal of solving the crime, certain members of the Literati miss the ultimate goal of creating good literature. Through Dupin's commentary on the police, Poe reinforces his opinion of the Literati in a way that is subtle and sophisticated.

Poe's use of puns—not only in this piece, but also in others—is another way he attacks the literary elite. One important pun in "Murders at the Rue Morgue" is the use of the word "clew"—the police could not find any "clews" to solve the crime. Laurence Howe, in his article "Poe and the Critical Pun," explains that some of the puns Poe uses are macaronic, that is, "puns whose method of operation is veiled behind what appears to be a meaning in another language" (189). While Dupin examines the crime scene, he discovers a nail, and the rest of his deductions

center around the position of the nail: "I had traced the secret to its ultimate result,—and that result was *the nail*" (*Selected Tales* 111). Howe explains that "the nail determines, or hyperdetermines, the solution by the homophony between the English word 'clew' (as Poe spells it) and the word for nail, "*clou,*" in Dupin's native language" (191). Furthermore, the pun, according to Howe, also serves as a "physical pun…when the nail's broken condition embodies the fate of Madame L'Espanaye" (191). Both Madame L'Espanye and the nail are broken when the crime occurred. Furthermore, Madame L'Espanye, whose body is broken as the nail is, initially indicates the crime occurring, and the nail, serves as the final piece in the puzzle to solve the crime of Madame L'Espanye's murder. While the nail is not an obvious clue, Dupin tells the unnamed narrator that "[t]he police… thought [it] a matter of supererogation to withdraw the nails and open the windows" (*Selected Tales* 110). The police, then, not only missed an important piece of the puzzle necessary to solve the crime, but also destroyed the integrity of the crime scene, rendering the rest of their investigations irrelevant. Poe shows problem this using a clever pun.

Another interesting, though more minor, pun is the name of the man initially accused of the crime. The police arrest a man named "Le Bon" on suspicions. Le bon, of course, means "the good." The police twice make a mistake, at first not noting the nail and its significance, and second in arresting a man whose name means good—and who is, in fact, innocent. Again, caught up in the particulars of the case, they arrested a man "although nothing appeared to incriminate him" (*Selected Tales* 105). This story has several other puns poking fun at the police and their inability to do their job properly, another way that Poe can attack in the story.

In his criticism of British writer Thomas Hood, Poe wrote some scathing commentary on Hood's overuse of puns. He writes of Hood: "In fact, he was a literary merchant whose principal stock

in trade was littleness—for during the larger part of his life he seemed to breathe only for the purpose of perpetrating puns—things of such despicable platitude, that the man who is capable of habitually committing them, is very seldom capable of anything else" (*Essays and Reviews* 274). Poe does not decry all use of puns—otherwise he would not use them as he does in his stories. However, he suggests that "the combination of the pun be unexpected and secondly…the most entire unexpectedness in the pun *per se*" (*Essays and Reviews* 274). Poe's primary problem with Hood was his use of "*mere* puns for the pun's sake" (*Essays and Reviews* 276). Poe wanted the use of puns to be subtle, unexpected, and significant. To use a pun to illustrate the police's deficiency shows that the police are incapable of recognizing the subtle, unexpected, and significant, unable to complete their duties as police. So are the literary elite. Though they have the tools of literature at their disposal, Poe might contend that they use them as broadswords, hacking away at a stump to create a grotesque sculpture, whereas Poe uses a chisel to chip away at a piece of wood to create an elaborate and sophisticated work of art.

Poe's main argument in "Murders at the Rue Morgue" supports his ideas about literature and how it should be written. Becoming mired in the details of something without considering the larger view is problematic for Poe, and while he is extremely analytic in this story, he does not get bogged down in the details—for example, in describing the copious amounts of blood in the room. Rather, Poe weaves together an intricate story that sacrifices little in making this important argument. Furthermore, Poe is able to comment on literary figures again in this story. The similarities between Poe and Dupin, and the commentary from Dupin on the police and Poe on his literary contemporaries leaves an image of a veiled attack on the Literati. Like his puns, which are subtle and unexpected, Poe's attack is cloak and dagger—unexpected when revealed for its sharpness and wit. Dupin's commentary on the police in this story is not just an

observation of the police, and he is not just solving a crime in which he has some morbid sense of curiosity. Poe uses the words of Dupin to slip in yet another barb toward the Literati, at times seeming to echo comments he has made in his literary criticism, but covering up the blatant attack with his fiction and the story in which the comments hide.

Chapter 4

“This depicting of character constituted my design:”

The Mystery of Marie Roget

“The Mystery of Marie Roget” is a failed attempt to solve a real crime via a short story. Differing from the other two stories involving Auguste Dupin, “The Mystery of Marie Roget” concerns less of the action of the story and details more of an intricate pattern of thought culminating in the solving of a crime. Richard P. Benton, in an essay defending the story, suggests that not enough positive critical attention is focused on this story because it is such an “intellectual” tale (144). Acknowledging the differences from the other Dupin stories, Benton suggests that “The Mystery of Marie Roget” may be a better example of Poe’s work because of the intellectual intricacy of the tale (145). Additionally, the story is yet another example of Poe’s written argument and attacks against the Literati and the Transcendentalists.

As a literary critic, Poe tried to ferret out the problems in literature. However, this role was not his only role: as seen in the chapter on “The Gold-Bug,” Poe loved to figure out puzzles and codes. This story is an example of another extended showcase of Poe’s ratiocinative powers. Additionally, like in any other detective story, Dupin, the private detective, is able to best the police at their work, using “amateur” means to solve a crime that the police, with their authority and means, are unable to solve. Again, Poe’s main argument and attack against the literary figures of his time seems to be against the mundane quality of their writing, and their inability to produce good literature despite all of their resources.

The narrator for this story is again the unnamed narrator who follows Dupin through his adventures in solving crime. The narrator’s reliability changes very little in “The Mystery of Marie Roget.” He still notes personality problems in Dupin, recording that after “the winding up

of the tragedy involved in the deaths of the Madame L'Espanye and her daughter, the Chevalier dismissed the affair at once from his attention, and relapsed into his old habits of moody reverie" (*Selected Tales* 150). The narrator also comments that Dupin's "indolent humor forbade all farther agitation of a topic whose interest to himself had long ceased" (150-1), implying that Dupin tends towards laziness when a topic does not directly capture his interest. In bringing to light negative aspects of Dupin, he preserves his position as an objective observer who notes both the benefits and detriments of Dupin's personality and practices. The narrator also serves as a foil for the detective, asking questions at the right times that allow Dupin to reveal his line of thinking. Moreover, he remains in awe of Dupin's mental prowess, inviting the audience to marvel at Dupin's line of reasoning that leads to the crime's solution. The narrator has one important distinction which sets him apart in this story, though, and that is his function as clue-gatherer and recorder. He reveals several times that he does the initial legwork for the case, gathering evidence from the police and reports from the newspapers to compile into reports for Dupin. Thus, while the narrator still allows the audience to be in awe of Dupin's proficiency, he reveals some of the drudgery of the crime-solving process, thus again giving a sense of realism to the process, and allowing for expository material to be introduced in conjunction with the storyline, rather than being stated obtusely. The audience, reading the narrator's work, can enter the scene as one almost able to solve the crime, thus engaging them more in the story.

Dupin's reliability is also present in "The Mystery of Marie Roget." As with the other crime at the Rue Morgue, Dupin uses the newspaper as an important source of information for discovering the details and clues that lead him to solve the crime, making one essential distinction: "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" (*Selected Tales* 162).

Dupin, then, acknowledges the flaws of the newspaper, and he introduces his motivation for solving the crime: seeking the truth of the matter instead of promoting a sensational explanation or a self-aggrandizing exercise in detection. Additionally, Dupin comments on his motivation when he remarks that the identity of the dead body of the girl must be discovered "for the purpose of justice" (*Selected Tales* 162). This allows for narrative fidelity in the story, for Dupin must use not only his powers of detection but also his motivation to find the truth to solve the crime.

Poe, too, had to use the newspaper as his main means of discovering the details of the real mystery of Mary Rogers, a New Jersey cigar girl. Unfortunately for both detectives, newspapers are limited in what they can print about crimes, and for Poe, this meant that his solution to the crime was flawed. Instead of being the perfect true crime story, in which the writer actually does solve a crime in the process of writing the story, which may seem to take away from the coherence of the story—the story itself does have a contradiction, in that the crime solved is not the solution to the true crime. Poe fails to create the perfect solution for the crime committed in New Jersey, due to lack of knowledge regarding accurate information about Mary Rogers' murder. Poe himself admits the potential problems in the story. However, far from denouncing his work, in a footnote to the story, he instead claims that "all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth: and the investigation of the truth was the object" (*Selected Tales* 149). Thus, though Poe does not actually solve the crime that captured the public's attention in New Jersey, he nonetheless creates the perfect solution for the crime Dupin solves in the story. Using his powers of ratiocination, Poe takes Dupin, and the audience through Dupin, to the logical solution of the crime. Along the way, Dupin proves that the police are incapable of solving the crime that they should be able to solve. (Ironically, the police do

solve the crime in real life, given adequate access to the clues and necessary evidence. Fortunately, Poe was not attacking the police—he was attacking another group of people entirely.) Through certain comments from Dupin, a clear case against unoriginality and a case for logical thought may be established that gives more voice to Poe's vehement displeasure against the literary elite.

Unlike the previous story, Dupin hears first word of the crime from the Prefect of the Police. The Prefect and the Parisian police department have been working on the crime for over three weeks with no success in solving the mystery of the murdered match girl. Part of the coherence of the story concerns how Dupin discovers the crime. Because Dupin is an amateur detective, that the Prefect of the police brings him news of this baffling murder may seem incongruous. However, since Dupin solved the other equally heinous murder (in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") in quicker fashion than the police could, his public reputation for detection was well-established ("[T]he name of Dupin had grown into a household word" [*Selected Tales* 150]). Given the detective's ability and reputation, then, it is reasonable that the Prefect would approach Dupin to solve this crime.

Poe's method of commentary on other writers can be seen in this story, beginning with the first comments by the narrator on the Prefect. The narrator remarks that the Prefect "discoursed much, and without doubt, learnedly" (*Selected Tales* 153). However, an implied insult accompanies this compliment, for while the Prefect may discourse much, he is unable to solve the crime. With all of his power and supposed ability, the Prefect is incapable of fulfilling his duties when he is called to solve a much-publicized murder. Poe makes similar comments to members of the literary elite in his criticism, alternately praising and then abusing the object of his criticism. Commenting on one member of the New York Literati, Thomas Dunn English,

Poe writes, “I learn that Mr. E. is not without talent; but the fate of ‘The Aristidean’ should indicate to him the necessity of applying himself to study” (*Essays and Reviews* 1166). Here Poe applies the same principle that he did in the story—alternately complimenting and then taking away that compliment. Remarks in this same vein are seen throughout his commentary on the Literati, showing a parallel in thinking and writing between Poe the critical editor and Poe the attacking author.

Additionally, this one instance is not the only place in “Marie Roget” where Poe uses an underhanded method of cutting down the methods of the police in the story. Remarking on the circumstances surrounding the case, Dupin mentions to the narrator, “You will observe that…the mystery has been considered easy, when… it should have been considered difficult, of solution” (*Selected Tales* 161). The police, looking at the obvious nature of the crime (a murder with an abundance of evidence and a primary suspect should be easy to solve), concluded that their solution would be arrived at easily and quickly, but their arrogance concerning the case clouded their ability to work properly. They begin the case incorrectly, approaching it in a fashion that suggests solving the complicated mystery of Marie Roget is effortless and within grasp. Dupin offers his opinion of how the case should be approached shortly after showing the police’s incorrect thinking: “I have before observed that it is by prominences above the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels her way, if at all, in her search for the true, and that the proper question in cases such as this is not so much ‘what has occurred’ as ‘what has occurred that has never occurred before?’” (*Selected Tales* 161). The police begin the process of their investigation erroneously, looking for all of the obvious answers and engaging none of the creative thinking involved in detective work. Poe, in writing about writing, likewise concludes that most authors approach the task of writing mistakenly:

> There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis—or one is suggested by an incident of the day—or, at best, the author set himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative—designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or autorial [sic] comment, whatever crevices of the fact, or action, may, from page to page, render themselves apparent.
>
> I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects…what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" (*Essays and Reviews* 13).

The beginning thoughts concerning writing a story are no less important than the initial steps in solving a crime, a process that Poe the author and Dupin the detective claim to understand. However, the authors of Poe's time and the police of Dupin's work do not grasp this concept—the former begin writing their stories incorrectly, and the latter begin their investigation with the wrong assumptions.

The importance of this story and argument rests in the process of thinking in which Dupin engages in order to solve the crime. Much like "The Gold Bug," here the mystery lies not in the crime itself, but in how the crime is to be solved. "The Mystery of Marie Roget" is a showcase example of Poe's powers of ratiocination, powers that are redolent with order, precision, and dignity. This story, in the process through which Dupin solves the murder of Marie Roget, shows the love that Poe had for ordered thinking and rational prose, even in the midst of scandal and sensationalism that seemed to sell books best.

Poe speaks of coincidences at the beginning and end of his novel, coincidences that point out similarities between real life and the life taken on in the short story. For Poe, coincidences are not just random events strung together in life. He equates them with a certain precision, "the Calculus of Probabilities" (*Selected Tales* 150). The only problem with the rational mind is that it does not immediately order together correctly these seemingly haphazard circumstances. Poe argues that some people are "startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural, by *coincidences* of so seemingly a marvelous character that… the intellect has been unable to receive them" (149). According to Poe, then, that "the calmest thinkers" (149) should be tricked into believing in supernatural and "præter-natur[al]" (191) is a slight against the rationality of the world and of man's mind. Thus, a random collection of activities is not just a haphazard smattering of actions, but instead a chain of events, linked together by a silver cord, however fine that cord might be.

This line of thinking is in great opposition to the thinking of the Transcendentalists, those "Frogpondians" Poe derided in many of his works. Poe disapproved of the excess of emotion he saw in Transcendentalist work. He objected to the ideas of Transcendentalism that intuition and free-thinking could replace the processes of rational thought. Poe also had a problem with the mysticism he sees in Transcendental thinking and writing. Leonard J. Deutsch writes in an article on satire in the story "Ligeia" that Poe "did not believe that the spiritual force of the universe was accessible and immanent… [T]he Ideal could be glimpsed only in and through Art," not through man's mystical powers, as the Transcendentalists suggested (20). An argument against Transcendentalism, then, can be drawn from the remainder of the discussion of "The Mystery of Marie Roget." Parts of Poe's commentaries on Transcendentalists and evidence from "Marie Roget" show a clear contempt for certain of the ideals and practices of

Transcendentalism, both in thought and in writing.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, a poet Poe identifies with other Transcendentalists (in criticism of William Cullen Bryant, Poe writes, "[W]e should, of course, pause long before assigning him [Bryant] a place with the spiritual Shelleys, or Coleriges, or Wordsworths, or with Keats, or even Tennyson" [*Essays and Reviews* 441], and again, in criticism of William Ellery Channing, Poe links Tennyson and Carlyle [*Essays and Reviews* 461]), receives some second-hand criticism from Poe on his works for the same reasons that Poe hated transcendental thought. To Poe, Transcendentalism suffered from "continual and obstrusive excess [of affectation]" (*Essays and Reviews* 460). Poe allowed for a poet to be moved by his work; he contends that "[n]o true poet…will deny that he feels impressed, sometimes even to tears, by many of those affectations which he is impelled by the prejudice of his education , or by the cant of his reason, to condemn" (461).[3] For Poe, then, the danger lies not in feeling the emotion of the work, but rather too strongly feeling an emotion, and seeing the emotion gush upon the page like a cut and spurting artery. Poe also condemns Tennyson for having "an opinion of the sublimity of everything odd" (461). This sentiment of Tennyson, which echoes the Transcendentalists' near worship of everything sublime, runs counter to Poe's assertion that the "odd"—like the coincidences he references in his story—can be explained and is not something to be promoted to a position of awe. This idea helps explain Poe remained at odds with Transcendentalism, given its lavish excess of emotion and its tendencies to paint every single instance with such deep inspirational or super-spiritual tones that overwhelm the rationality that Poe sees in the world.

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[3] This may also be a pun against Kant, a philosopher Poe credited with originating a special kind of Transcendentalism. He makes a similar note in his work on the nature of the universe, *Eureka*, when he writes that he acquires his fame through first "his demonstration that sneezing is a natural provision, by means of which over-profound thinkers are enabled to expel superfluous ideas through the nose" and then through the notion of *a priori* thinking, whereby "self-evident truths" lead to results. This, of course, is in direct opposition to Poe's notion that truth is found in details and side-discoveries. Poe then goes on to write that Aristotle's "most illustrious disciples were one Tuclid, a geometrician, [meaning Euclid] and one Kant, a Dutchman, the originator of that species of Transcendentalism which, with the change merely of a C for a K, now bears his peculiar name" (*Eureka* 9).

The overly lavish nature of Transcendentalism Poe also finds fault with in his work "The Philosophy of Composition." He writes that "we are too fond of confounding [the *richness*] with *the ideal*" (*Essays and Reviews* 24). All writing does have some kind of "under current," some "suggestiveness," but the Transcendentalists go overboard in their zeal to make an "*excess* of the suggested meaning" (24). This is why Poe emphasizes at the end of "The Mystery of Marie Roget" that the story is not meant to be an exact parallel of what followed in the real mystery of Mary Rogers. That he could solve, in a story that takes place in France, a mystery that has an infinite number of possibilities that are different from those in his stories is close to impossible, and definitely implausible. He seeks to show the path by which truth may be found rather than showing "the fact of sixes having been thrown twice in succession by a player at dice is sufficient cause for betting the largest odds that the sixes will not be thrown in the third attempt" (*Selected Tales* 192). Logic suggests that "[t]he chance for throwing sixes seems to be precisely as it was any ordinary time—that is to say, subject only to the influence of the various other throws which may be made by the dice" (192). Transcendentalists would not see this scenario likewise, and might have concluded that the logic of nature does not preclude a mysterious element of fate and the supernatural that overthrows everything. For Poe, this is anathema.

Dupin also comments on the mathematical and calculable nature of life, as it applies to solving crimes. Where the Transcendentalists magnify and glorify the unforeseen and the goodness and power of man, Dupin suggests "that modern science has resolved to *calculate upon the unforeseen*" (*Selected Tales* 174). Those seeming coincidences in the world lead from and to new discoveries possibly only by observing and calculating the scientific and practical nature of odd happenings. The Transcendentalists might take odd coincidences and attach some kind of overly spiritual significance to them, but to Poe there is no spiritual significance: "Accident is

admitted as a portion of the substructure. We make chance a matter of absolute calculation. We subject the unlooked for and unimagined, to the mathematical *formulae* of the schools" (174). Here is no Romantic view of the wheel of fate, here is no Transcendentalist view of man's spiritualization of the "accident," here is a pragmatic and mathematical view of the accidents—they are merely subsumed into the calculations of what life is. There is no magical and sublime unseen; there is only the calculable and the means of calculation.

Moreover, Dupin believes that Truth can be found in details. Transcendentalism tends to take a mystical view of life—events and circumstances are supernatural, and thus investigating their inner workings becomes superfluous in understanding how the event itself is a work of wonder and awe. Poe defended Coleridge, a poet who seems to have Transcendentalist thought in his writing, saying that a certain letter by Coleridge that was never printed in a biography of Coleridge should be printed "to do away with the generally received impression here entertained [in America] of the *mysticism* of the writer." According to Poe, Coleridge could have great influence on "psychological science" (188). This defense of Coleridge's practical and methodical nature echoes what Dupin has to say about the discovery of truth. For Dupin, truth is not a mystical thing, but rather something "sprung from the collateral" (*Selected Tales* 174). It is in the gritty details, the seeming coincidences surrounding Marie Roget's death, that the truth may be found, and it is in the gritty details that Dupin must plow in order to discover the truth of the matter. Solving the crime will not result from a mystical experience in which all details fall into place upon some revelation from a Sublime Deity, but rather from an examination of the collateral evidence that leads to truth.

Thus, in "Marie Roget," the reader finds a compelling argument by Poe against Transcendentalism. The detective does not solve the mystery by working from overarching

truths to some kind of result, but rather from understanding the details and clues that line the path to the truth. In contrast, the Transcendentalist's rebellion against detailed, unemotional writing is noncompliant with reality and the discovery of truth. For Poe, truth is an end, not a means to an end, or a mystical force knowable only by connection with an Oversoul, as Emerson suggests. Truth does not change because of the past's influence on the future; it exists because events enacted in the past led to experiences in the present. Mysteries, then, are not truly mysterious; rather, they were knowable, even mathematically solvable. Operating from a Transcendentalist mindset would render solving a mystery nearly impossible, as the Transcendentalist would be so overwhelmed with understanding the mystery of the mystery that they would never reach a conclusion.

In this story, too, is the ever-present condemnation of the Literati as seen elsewhere in Poe's works. Poe frames yet another argument against the literary cliques, demonstrating through Dupin's interaction and the narrator's comments on the Prefect of the Police the breakdown of the literary elite: the power to write does not indicate the ability to write well, and beginning by thinking incorrectly about writing leads to poor results. For the police, incorrect thinking leads to befuddlement and crimes remaining unsolved, and for the writer, incorrect thinking leads to prose that is not fit to be read. Poe skillfully keeps his view of American literature and his determination to break through the literary strongholds that confines American literature behind almost impenetrable walls even as he crafts a story to demonstrate the capabilities of truly good writing.

Chapter 5

"Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain:"

The Purloined Letter

The last of Poe's stories with the character Auguste Dupin, "The Purloined Letter" is a tale of a detective's revenge against the police. "The Purloined Letter" shows a detective motivated by revenge solving a crime of revenge. Dupin's motivation in this story differs from the other stories in which his motivation springs from intellectual curiosity. Poe's personal vendetta against the plagiarists and literary elite can be seen in this story as Dupin plays mind games with the police force, specifically with the police chief, Prefect G---[4]. Where Dupin uses his creativity in detective work to solve the crime and condemn the police as uncreative, Poe uses his command of the English language and the words of those he criticizes to condemn their writing as unfit for publication.

As with the other stories involving Dupin and his unnamed friend, the story hinges around a crime—this time, not of violence, but of revenge against a figure high in the ranks of French political circles. Dupin asks for the reward for solving this mystery, whereas in previous stories, he sought no reward, calling into question his motivation for solving this particular crime. Because the Prefect offers a monetary reward for solving the mystery, and Dupin takes it, grinning all the while, he has effectively taken from the coffers of the police to improve his situation, which could be his motivation. The other reward is Dupin's revenge against the police force who come to him only when they need him and who are unable to function on their own, being tied to their uncreative crime-solving practices. This time, as with "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Dupin does not discover the crime from the newspaper, but rather learns of the crime, having already proved his worth in his work on previous crimes, through the Prefect of the police

[4] The Prefect is never assigned a first name in any of the Dupin stories.

himself. However, unlike the previous stories, Dupin does not rely on the newspaper as a major source of information for the mystery at hand. The current mystery does not even ask the question "whodunit?" (since the police know who committed the crime of purloining the letter) but rather "how'd he do it?" (since the police do not know the location of the purloined letter). Thus, as the story has a different premise upon which it rests and different circumstances under which Dupin operates, "The Purloined Letter" provides a unique platform for observing Poe's argument and attack, even though the story has the same basic plot structure and characters as the other stories involving Dupin.

Once again, in analyzing the story, the reader needs to understand the narrator as one character providing the basis for the narrative fidelity (logic and values) of the story. Similar to the other stories involving Dupin, the narrator holds Dupin's prowess in awe as he unfolds Dupin's explanation of the solution to the crime. After Dupin produces the purloined letter, the narrator comments that he "was astounded [and t]he Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken" (*Selected Tales* 256). He still makes remarks about Dupin's frailties, questioning Dupin's line of reasoning at one part of the story: "You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as *the* reason *par excellence*" (258). This allows the reader to trust the narrator as an objective viewer of the story. By clarifying Dupin's thoughts on mathematical thinking, a concept he touts in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" as being extremely important in solving crimes[5], the narrator provides a vehicle for the reader to understand that Dupin is not contradicting himself, but rather building on his argument toward a logical conclusion.

Two small comments by the narrator may slightly muddy the waters concerning his

[5] See the discussion of "coincidences" in the chapter on "The Mystery of Marie Roget."

reporting the events in the story objectively.[6] The narrator usually does not editorialize on the police in the Dupin stories; however, this story is the exception to the rule. At the beginning of the story, the narrator makes two slightly sarcastic remarks about the Prefect of the police that could call into question the impartiality of the narrator. When the Prefect first arrives, the narrator notes that he and Dupin greet the Prefect warmly, "for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as the contemptible about the man." A few lines down from this comment, when the Prefect broaches the mystery to Dupin, the narrator observes that the Prefect "had a fashion of calling everything 'odd' that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived among an absolute legion of 'oddities'" (*Selected Tales* 249). These two small comments show that the narrator is not the perfectly unbiased narrator the audience may wish him to be, making it important that he balance his comments against the Prefect with comments "against" Dupin, to preserve the image of the reliable narrator. Without the comments questioning Dupin, the narrator could easily be seen as biased and partial, revoking the right to reliability he gained in previous Dupin stories.

In addition to the narrator, Dupin is an important character to understand in analyzing the fidelity of the story. While Dupin uses the same methods of ratiocination,[7] or deductive reasoning, as in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget," his motivation differs slightly in "The Purloined Letter." Whereas before it has been established that Dupin solves the crimes for the purpose of finding the truth of the matter, in this story he

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[6] The narrator makes one other odd comment, referring to the Prefect as being "fond of the cant of diplomacy" (*Selected Tales* 250). Given Poe's mockery of Kant with "cant" (see discussion in chapter on "Marie Roget"), there may be a connection here, as well, with Poe using the cant of diplomacy—meaning the Prefect refuses to speak clearly and straightforward on the subject—to mock Kant and Transcendentalists who do not speak clearly in their writing. In a selection of criticism called "Exordium to Critical Notices," Poe also comments on a major danger in criticism, "the cant of *generality*," which Poe attributes to "the onward and tumultuous spirit of the age" (*Essays and Reviews* 1028). Poe blames dependence on British quarterlies for this trouble in American literary criticism.

[7] In a letter to James Lowell, Poe wrote that he considered this story "the best of [his] tales of ratiocination" (*Letters, Vol. II* 258).

diverges from that motivation. Dupin enacts a form of revenge on the criminal in this case, the Monsieur D---. Dupin reveals that "D---, at Vienna once, did [him] an evil turn, which [Dupin] told him, quite good humoredly, that [he] should remember" (*Selected Tales* 265). Charles Rzepka comments on this attack by Dupin that his "motives, unlike those of the official police, are personal… [his] revenge is a kind of dueling with verbal weapons" (76). Dupin also seeks the reward for this case, expressing great interest in the reward, in essence asking the Prefect to see the color of his money before revealing the missing letter (*Selected Tales* 256). Thus, Dupin's motivation has changed. While he may still be interested in the truth, in this mystery his motivations seem more concerned with revenge and monetary profit than solely a search for truth. This takes away some credibility from the logic of good reasons discussed in previous chapters, for once the personal element of revenge enters, an audience might view Dupin in a slightly less favorable light. However, this motivation is not made explicit—it is implied in the text, making it easier for the audience to gloss over this aspect of the mystery and still rely on Dupin as a "good" detective—one trying to discover truth or simply solve a crime.

Like Dupin, Poe also has a personal motive in attacking writers and employs methods of ridicule, usually in the form of advanced rhetorical skills, to make his point about what he thinks about the writing in question. According to Brett Zimmerman, "The linguistic weaponry that Poe sometimes resorted to entailed much more than merely vulgar name-calling—although he did stoop to *that* now and then" (87). A literary critic does not necessarily need to resort to name-calling, yet Poe does. Perhaps, as Zimmerman suggests, Poe "feel[s] like a man of genius surrounded by dolts, boors, pretenders, toadies, sycophants" (91). In his "Prospectus of *The Penn Magazine*," Poe confirms his opinion of the state of affairs in literary magazines, writing that his magazine will, in contrast to other literary magazines, "[yield] no point…to the

assumptions of the antique prejudice, or to the involute and anonymous cant of the Quarterlies, or to the arrogance of those organized *cliques* which, hanging like nightmares upon American literature, manufacture, at the nod of our principle booksellers, a pseudo-public-opinion by wholesale" (*Essays and Reviews* 1025). Poe feels frustrated enough by the lesser men who surround him and make money from their incompetence to try to form a new magazine where he can correct the problems he sees in other periodicals. Because of this frustration, his attacks on incompetent writers and editors are an understandable, if childish, response. Perhaps this attitude seen in Poe is further motivation for Dupin: in attacking the police, those who clearly lack the creativity and intelligence needed to do a good job, Dupin, as the better man for solving the crime, castigates the police. Like Poe, Dupin's attack is not just a reflection of his intelligence, but is also lashing out against those who survive even though they do not deserve their success.

In addition to similar motives, important to note are other parallels between Dupin and Poe brought to light in this particular story. Certainly, the connection to pedigree and love of logic exists in "The Purloined Letter" as do exist in the previous Dupin detective stories, but here Dupin discloses more information about himself that is reminiscent of Poe. In a discussion with the Prefect, the narrator confirms that Msr. D--- (the one who committed the crime) has been searched, and the letter not found upon his person. The Prefect confirms this notion, and Dupin comments that the suspect is not a fool, and thus the police wasted their time trying to discover the letter on Msr. D---. The Prefect replies, "'Not *altogether* a fool…but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool.'" In answer, Dupin reveals that he "ha[s] been guilty of certain doggerel [sic] [him]self" (*Selected Tales* 253). Doggerel, that is, crude verse, may be a way for Poe to wryly comment on his poetry, and while his poetry is far from crude or rudimentary, one critic commented on Poe's early poetry, "If E. A. P. of Baltimore—whose lines

about 'Heaven,' though he professes to regard them as altogether superior to anything in the whole range of American poetry, save two or three trifles referred to, are, though nonsense, rather exquisite nonsense—would do himself justice [he] might make a beautiful and perhaps a magnificent poem" (Carlson 3). Others disagreed with this critic, commenting that Poe's early poetry "show[s] that he could see through the verse to the spirit beneath, and that he already had a feeling that all the life and grace of the one must depend on and be modulated by the will of the other" (9). Later on in Poe's poetic life, other critics commented on the beauty in Poe's poetry, noting its beauty and mastery of the English language, as in the case of Poe's contemporary critic P. Pendleton Cooke critiquing "The Raven": "The rhythm of this poems is exquisite, its phraseology is in the highest degree musical and apt, the tone of the whole is wonderfully sustained and appropriate to the subject, which, full as it is of a wild and tender melancholy, is admirably well chosen" (23). If Dupin's doggerel is anything like Poe's, then it is not doggerel at all, but rather great poetry, possibly foreshadowing Dupin's ability to outwit Msr. D---. Dupin, then, is similar to Poe, not only in a pedigreed and ratiocinative sense, but also in a poetic sense.

As for the probability, or coherence, of the story, which is the second half of the narrative paradigm, "The Purloined Letter" does "hang together." The revelation of the mystery, once again brought to Dupin by the prefect of the police, makes sense given Dupin's previous interactions with the French police force; indeed, the narrator notes that he and Dupin greeted the Prefect with "a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him in years" (*Selected Tales* 249). The Prefect once again must go to Dupin for a crime that seems unsolvable. The mystery unfolds from the Prefect's mouth as he describes the very simplicity of the case, foreshadowing the

simplicity of the solution. However, because it is so simple, the police are unable to solve the mystery, and Dupin must step in to save not only the police but also a woman in the royal house of France. After producing the purloined letter, Dupin walks the reader through the solution in a logical fashion until the end of the story. Thus, the story is one the reader can follow. The mystery unraveled is no mystery, but simply a tangled knot unknotted by Dupin's skillful mind. Thus, the reader can trust the frame of the story, as well as the actors, giving force to the argument and attack implicit in "The Purloined Letter."

The main area of attack, similar to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," concerns Dupin and the police. However, Dupin's criticisms are harsher in this story than in the previous one, and his attacks blunter. Dupin replies to the Prefect, "Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the [mystery] which puts you at fault… Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain… A little *too* self-evident" (*Selected Tales* 250). Three times Dupin condemns the Prefect for being unable to solve the most simple of mysteries—like the man who searches in vain for the glasses that sit on his face, the police search in vain for a solution that rests on a table, right under their noses. Dupin uses two important rhetorical devices to highlight the importance of this idea of police ineptitude: *amplificatio* and *anaphora*. Zimmerman defines *amplificatio* as "the expansion, elaboration, extension of an idea, a sentence" (119), and it is important that Poe uses this device, because, as Dupriez notes, "Classical rhetoricians applied the term to the treatment of the whole discourse. Amplification to them implied the art of finding the best arguments and of exploiting them in accordance with a logical and persuasive plan, preferably based on their mounting intensity" (qtd. in Zimmerman 120). *Anaphora* is, according to Zimmerman, the "repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses or verses, usually in a parallel series" (127). The purpose of this device, according to Corbett, "is reserved for those

passages where the author wants to produce a strong emotional effect" (qtd. in Zimmerman 127). In this threefold attack by Dupin, then, the intended effect is, primarily, to elaborate on the idea that the police are too stupid to solve the crime and, secondarily, to create similar sympathies in the audience.

Poe uses similar rhetorical devices in his literary criticism, in attacks that build on phrases and clauses used before to create an emotional effect on the reader. In a piece of criticism of Longfellow, Poe writes, "His invention, his imagery, his all, is made subservient to the elucidation of some one or more points (but rarely of more than one) which he looks upon as truth." Poe repeats this *anaphora* further on, with stronger effect, commenting, "There are men who will scramble on all fours through the muddiest sloughs of vice to pick up a single apple of virtue. There are these things called men who…will greet with snuffling huzzas every figure that takes upon itself the semblance of truth," and again, "[W]e would limit, in many respects, its [truth] modes of inculcation. We would limit to enforce them. We would not render them impotent by dissipation" (*Essays and Reviews* 684). Designed to create a strong emotional response to the disrespect of truth as seen in Longfellow's poetry, Poe's use of these rhetorical strategies effectively brings across the idea that he is disgusted with this particular piece of Longfellow's poetry without clubbing the reader over the head with this idea. Like Dupin, when Poe feels strongly about an idea, he elaborates for effect.

After attacking the police's inability to solve a crime that appears to be too simple for them, Dupin begins his analysis of the solution by complimenting the police—a compliment that soon seems as empty as the police's hands are in the matter. Dupin comments, "'The Parisian police…are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand'" (*Selected Tales*

256). This compliment contains a barb, though, because Dupin suggests that the police's excellent work is only good for one thing, hard work, and is not good for solving the crime. Dupin goes on to say, "The measures…were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man" (257). Thus, the police are great at doing mundane work like searching houses. However, asking them to solve a crime involving daring and unconventional criminals reveals that the police lack the skills necessary to accomplish this task. Their hard work is all for naught if they are unable to protect and defend those under their care, especially a member of the royal family. Therefore, Dupin's initial compliment is exposed for the insult it is—the police are incapable of doing their job.

Poe uses a similar tactic of the veiled compliment in some of his attacks on the Literati. For example, in a section of commentary on Mr. Henry Cary, Poe writes, "These essays [by Cary] have merit, unquestionably, but some person…has gone to the extreme of toadyism in their praise…The truth seems to be that Mr. Cary is a vivacious, fanciful, entertaining essayist—a fifth or sixth rate one—with a style that…may be termed respectable, and no more" (*Essays and Reviews* 1167). Poe begins by expressing there is some value in Cary's writing, but he is certainly not worthy of the praise accorded him. He then compliments Cary, *a la* Dupin,[8] and finishes by criticizing the skills Cary possesses. The felling blow from Poe occurs at the end of the article, when Poe writes, "Mr. Cary, in fact, abounds *very especially* in superfluities…and, to speak the truth, is continually guilty of all kinds of grammatical improprieties. I repeat that, in this respect, he is decent, and no more" (1168). After the compliment, Poe is likely to deflate the author's ego with an honest opinion based on the shortfallings of the author—where the author may have one ability, that ability is not the one needed to write well; therefore, Cary can write

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[8] Dupin make a similar comment on the police, describing them as "persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand" (*Selected Tales* 256).

well, but not well enough to create a truly memorable or masterful piece.

To emphasize further his attack on the lack of capability of the police, Dupin uses puns throughout the story. Laurence Howe notes that Dupin uses puns throughout his detective adventures, but asserts that in “The Purloined Letter,” Dupin uses puns “for the purpose of personal revenge” (197). Dupin comments to Prefect G---, the chief of police, that he should “re-search the premises” (*Selected Tales* 255). In doing this, Dupin insults the chief of police by playing on the pun of the sounds of the word “re-search” and the French word *recherché*—“mere affectation without analytical substance” (Howe 199). This comment on the Prefect’s inability to conduct adequately a search of the premises and the additional commentary on the police’s affective approach to work are remarkably similar to a problem Poe has with his fellow authors—they lack substance.

Repeatedly in his criticism, Poe writes about the issue of substance in writing; he views many authors as using pretty words and fancy stories but not contributing to the effect of the story, an idea that Poe regarded as integral to the writing process. In essence, Poe believed that many writers were simply full of hot air. Commenting on one author’s work, Poe writes, “[T]he whole story ends judiciously, and just as it ought to do, and with a very excellent quotation from one of the very best ‘late writers’” (*Essays and Reviews* 866). By itself, this commentary seems a fair commentary on a solid work, but Poe follows his statement with “Humph! and [sic] this is the ‘Swiss Heiress,’ to say nothing of the ‘bride of Destiny.’ However—it is a valuable ‘work’—and now, in the name of ‘fate, fore-knowledge, and free will,’ we solemnly consign it to the fire” (866). Poe’s rather harsh condemnation of this author relegates the work to the fireplace, hardly the place for a work that bears merit. Poe also appears reluctant to call it a work, enclosing the word in quotation marks to indicate that the word may or may not actually

apply to the writing in question. Poe criticizes the Transcendentalists' lack of substance, too, describing in a review of Christopher Pease Cranch, one of the New York Literati, "the word-compounders and quibble concoctors of Frogpondium [Boston litterateurs] having inoculated him with a preference for Imagination's half-sister, the Cinderella, Fancy" (1169). The Transcendentalists, then, prefer Fancy to Imagination—Imagination touted as the better of the two, and having substance (it is not the "half-sister")—and their writing is "flat." Flat writing lacks substance, a deflated piece of writing parading as a full and significant piece of literature. Poe has no time for this insubstantial writing, as Dupin has no time for the Prefect's whole-heartedly ineffective modes of detection.

In addition to the lack of substance of the police work that Dupin comments on "The Purloined Letter," he also contrasts the police's potential and their ability. The detective attributes the police force's inability to solve crimes to the police's attitudes about crime: "They consider only their *own* ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, avert only to the modes in which *they* would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representation of that of *the mass*; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course" (*Selected Tales* 258). The police fail, in a sense, because they are unable to be creative: they can think only from their perspective; they are incapable of stepping outside themselves to think like an individual. Additionally, their thinking is generally right, but when it differs from that of an individual who does not fit the norm, their "ingenuity" fails them. Their Achilles' heel is their inability to think and work creatively, from a perspective outside their own.

Like Dupin, Poe accuses the litterateurs of a lack of creativity, in his criticism. Poe's assessment of the creativity of writers of his time has the double edge of being able to

compliment some and castigate others. Commenting on a work by Cornelius Mathews, Poe writes, "This is by all means an original book, original in conception, conduct, and tone… The most obvious design is to gossip… A less superficial purpose is that of contrasting the present condition with the aboriginal dynasty" (*Essays and Reviews* 834). Poe then proceeds to laud the book, remarking repeatedly on the originality and the complexity of the book, concepts that not all writers use in their works. His tone is quite different when discussing a work he perceives as less than creative: "His [William Ellery Channing Jr.'s] book contains about sixty-three things, which he calls poems, and which no doubt he seriously supposes them to be…Mr. Channing must be hung, that's true… Mr. Channing… appears to have been inoculated, at the same moment, with *virus* from Tennyson" (460). Poe derides Channing's dull and repetitive word choice, commenting that "[o]ur author is quite enamored of the word 'sumptuous,' and talks about 'sumptuous trees' and 'sumptuous girls,' with no other object, we think, than to employ the epithet at all hazards and upon all occasions" (*Essays and Reviews* 466). Poe continues to mock the rest of Channing's poetry as dull, unimaginative, and unintelligent. This criticism hurts the critiqued even more when the critiqued realizes that Poe is more creative in a few derogatory sentences than the writer is in an entire book.

Poe's emphasis on creativity could be a commentary springing from his desire to create something the American public will want to consume—though he abhors the "materialistic, profit-motivated middle-class" (Rzepka 78). A main problem he had with the American public was that "[t]he mass of American readers have been, hitherto, in no frame of mind to view with calmness, and to discuss with discrimination, the true claims of the few who were *first* in convincing the mother country that her sons were not all brainless" (*Essays and Reviews* 404). Given his less than flattering view of the American public, a more likely scenario is that Poe

wants truly creative material to combat the influence of British literature in America. In an article titled "Exordium to Critical Notices," Poe remarks that "[f]or 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…the watchword now was, 'a national literature!'" (1028). While Poe believes a national literature at the expense of good writing is undesirable, he notes that American literature has been improving—and it should continue to improve because of good, creative writing—and good criticism. Thus, for American literature to continue to succeed, authors need to have creative thought and skilled execution, traits the Poe finds dead by the wayside, sacrificed for the consumption of the masses.

In addition to objecting to the masses who were more content with junk-food reading, Poe also railed against authors who were too lazy to create good literature. For Poe, one of the most serious crimes an author could commit, beyond butchering good literature, beyond grievous grammatical mistakes, even beyond awkward wording, was that of plagiarism. Poe accuses several people of the crime of plagiarism, but one of the most famous cases involves Longfellow and Poe, an episode wherein Poe accuses Longfellow of plagiarizing in his poetry. Poe describes a plagiarist as a thief:

> For the plagiarist is either a man of no note or a man of note. In the first case, he is usually an ignoramus, and getting possession of a rather rare book, plunders it without scruple, on the ground that nobody has ever seen a copy of it except himself. In the second case (which is a more general one by far) he pilfers from some poverty-stricken, and therefore neglected man of genius, on the reasonable supposition that this neglected man of genius will very soon cut his throat, or die of starvation, (the sooner the better, no doubt,) and that in the mean time he will

> be too busy in keeping the wolf from the door to look after the purloiners of his property—and too poor, and too cowed, and for these reasons too contemptible, under any circumstances, to dare accuse of so base a thing as theft, the wealthy and triumphant gentleman of elegant leisure who has only done the vagabond too much honor in knocking him down and robbing him upon the highway. (*Essays and Reviews* 720).

Since Poe was attempting to break down the barriers of the Literati and the club mentality in the world of publication, for him, it would be a major crime to plagiarize someone who wrote something well but was not rich and could not get his work published. Longfellow, a prominent and successful professor and poet, should not be stealing from anyone, but because he is successful, the charges seem all the worse: Longfellow is profiting as well as causing another man to fail. Additionally, in this passage describing a plagiarist, any reader can see Poe's scorn for plagiarists: he calls them "ignoramus[es]" and describes their actions as "pilfer[ing]." He compares the plagiarist's actions to a man who has stolen a "sky-blue dress coat and…yellow plaid pantaloons" and then expects to be able to walk down the street with this ensemble, and nobody will notice him (*Essays and Reviews* 720-1). That the plagiarists do not have a clear idea in their heads and must resort to stealing works from another is a creative failure (not to mention demonstrates a lack of common sense and decency), a characteristic that Poe detests. The sense here is that like Dupin, Poe ferrets out this crime of stealing from another to right a wrong and to bring order back to the victim.

Like Poe, Dupin attacks the problems of stealing, in a literal sense, in his role as a detective. Most blatant in "The Purloined Letter," he addresses the mystery of a stolen secret letter, which could lead to great distress on the part of the Queen of France. Ironically, Dupin's

treatment of the event in question involves stealing the letter back from the Minister and replacing it with a false one. When Dupin steals from the Minister, though, he is employing a technique he loves well: “most men, in respect to himself, [wear] windows in their bosoms,” (*Selected Tales* 96) and Dupin loves looking in those windows. He enters the mind of the thief Minister to solve the crime, and then uses the Minister’s own technique to recover the lost letter. Dupin underscores the humiliation of the eventually discovered letter by leaving in the Minister’s fake letter a line from a poem with his signature. This implies that the Minister should not only be punished for stealing the letter, but should also be humiliated for stealing, as well.

Dupin’s punishment of the dishonest Minister, leaving him humiliated upon the eventual public discovery of his guilt, mirrors Poe’s recommendation for punishing a plagiarist is to “sympathize rather with him upon whom the plagiarism has been committed. Not only is he robbed of his property -- of his fame -- of that which, if he be a man of genius, is more to him than life; but he is rendered liable by the crime of the plagiarist to *the suspicion of being a plagiarist himself*” (*Essays and Reviews* 2). However, for Poe, the attention needs to be focused away from the plagiarist and rather directed toward the victim—doubly ignoring the plagiarist and heaping ignominy on his head by extending sympathy to the victim. Poe recommends leaving a type of planted purloined letter when he exposes Longfellow’s plagiarism by printing side-by-side copies of the material Longfellow wrote and (in Poe’s opinion) the original source, baring the shame of the plagiarism for all to see. Like the Minister whose duplicity will be revealed when the original letter and the fake copy are seen side by side, the plagiarist’s duplicity will also be revealed when his copy is compared to the original author’s writing, leaving no doubt as to the crime that has been committed.

Thus, in “The Purloined Letter,” Poe attacks on three fronts: effect, substance, and creativity. Dupin, in attacking the police, jabs at the lack of ability to solve unique crimes. He accuses the police of thinking like the masses, who are simple in their thinking, instead of thinking as an individual criminal does. This lack of creativity in approaching detective work renders the police useless when a serious crime against royalty occurs. Likewise, Poe accuses writers in his time of a lack of creativity—illustrated most vehemently by the crime of plagiarism—and of a lack of substance. Instead of thinking and writing creatively and as an individual, certain writers chose to appeal to the masses and write material that was popular but not good, a problem Poe attributes to a crazed fervor for “national literature.” For Poe, the solution to this crime would be to find good authors and writers and allow them to publish, breaking the barriers of the club mentality of publishers in his time. Only then could the “purloined letter” of literature be returned to its rightful place—out of the hands of the criminals and into the hands of the true owners of the literature, the good authors.

Chapter 6

"I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester—and *this is my last jest*:"

Hop-Frog (Or, The Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs)

Poe's last tale, "Hop-Frog" was written in 1849, just a few months before he died. A violent tale of revenge, this story represents the culmination of his written arguments against the literary elite as seen in his previous stories. Poe's life was a cycle of fighting against the literary powers, struggling to survive, and trying to be an American author. Amidst his fighting for survival, he was alternately mocked and praised for his follies and accomplishments, and when he died, people accused him of being a drunkard or worse. It seems fitting, then, that his last story is as full of vitriol as it is—Poe's last statement against the Literati, the Transcendentalists, and even the public.

Criticism of this story varies from noting themes of toppled tyrants to arguments against slavery. Katrina Bachinger, in her essay "Together (or Not Together) Against Tyranny: Poe, Byron, and Napoleon Upside Down in 'Hop-Frog,'" describes the characters' serving a symbolic role in the story as the "bizarrely disguised contemporary (Poe) and recently deceased public figures" (374). For Bachinger, Hop-Frog overturning the courtiers is symbolic of the common-folk overthrowing the powers of tyranny; she also declares this story an allegory "of the Napoleonic challenge to monarchic tyrannic rule" (374). While she uses an interesting Marxist interpretation of the story, the far-reaching allegory she detects may not be the best interpretation. Poe uses this story as a final stab at the Literati and Transcendentalists—of course, he did not know it would be his last. In his final days of championing several magazine prospectuses that never quite made it, and with Poe's vitriol waxing, that his last tale appears to be a violent reprisal against the power figures of the literary community should not be a surprise.

Other scholars point to this story as an explanation of Poe's attitude toward slavery. Some critics believe Poe to be racist, equating the orangutan's crime in "Murders at the Rue Morgue" with a black man's violating a white man, or reading "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" as "a description of Southern fears of slave revolt in which the natural order is overturned and the masters become slaves," Paul Christian Jones' article "The Danger of Sympathy: Edgar Allan Poe's 'Hop-Frog' and the Abolitionist Rhetoric of Pathos" suggests that Poe may not be racist, but that he draws on fears about slavery in this story by "creat[ing] sympathy" for the oppressed slave to show the dangers of siding with black slaves over white masters (239-40). Jones argues that Hop-Frog is a slave based on his actions, the abuse from others, and even the name that is bestowed to him: "The name, Hop-Frog, is not his birth name…He is expected to be ready at a moment's notice to entertain his master" (244). While this reading of the story does share interesting parallels with antebellum abolitionist literature, another reading is equally possible, and maybe more so, given the themes examined in many of Poe's other works. The problem with criticism like this (about Poe's supposed racism) is that this kind of criticism is too one-sided, focusing on only one aspect of Poe's life. The possibility exists that Poe's writing consisted of more than veiled threats of racism. Once again, in "Hop Frog," Poe is writing against an authority figure, an established presence in the land, and based on analysis of other stories, that authority can be read as the glittering Literati, against whom Poe battled for a significant portion of his career.

As with the previous stories, this analysis starts with the narrator. Like many other Poe stories, the narration is in first person. However, unlike other stories where the first-person narrator is involved in some fashion in the action of the story, the narrator in "Hop-Frog" is an observer only. He never participates in what happens, whereas in "The Gold Bug" and the

detective stories involving Auguste Dupin, the narrator takes an active role, walking beside the main actor and describing the actions of the detective while acting himself. Not so in "Hop Frog," though—in Maura Grace Harrington's article "'My Narrative': The Story of the Non-Disinterested Narrator in Poe's 'Hop-Frog,'" Harrington writes that "[i]t is unusual for one of Poe's short stories not to be narrated by someone who is a participant in the action of the story or at least an observer of the action." Though the narrator is not present in the action, he still "projects his own consciousness and judgments into the story at every available opportunity" (91). For example, when describing the king and the ministers as fat, the narrator remarks, "Whether people grow fat by joking, or whether there is something in fat itself which predisposes to a joke, I have never been quite able to determine; but it is certain that a lean joker is a *rara avis in terries*" (*Selected Tales* 311). This narrator, then, is not a disinterested narrator—he is a narrator who wants to manipulate the audience to believe a certain idea.

The narrator's editorializing throughout the story casts some doubts upon his reliability. Heavily biased against the king and his ministers—describing them as "large, corpulent, oily men" and insulting their intelligence, as when he remarks that "the refinements, or, as [the king] called them, the 'ghosts' of wit, troubled [him] very little…He would have preferred Rabelais's 'Gargantua,' to the 'Zadig' of Voltaire: and, upon the whole, practical jokes suited his taste far better than verbal ones" (*Selected Tales* 311)—the narrator loses some reliability in the bias he presents against the king and his ministers. However, this bias is necessary for the coherence of the story. If the king and his ministers are not really that bad, or not really that stupid, Hop-Frog's actions might not be justified. But given that the oppressors act in an oppressive manner, Hop-Frog's actions "hang together" for the reader. Thus, the narrator who might initially be perceived as unreliable becomes an asset to the story, rather than a liability.

The narrator's potential flaw in reliability transfers to a potential flaw in the fidelity of the story—if the narrator is as biased as he seems to be in the story, the question arises whether he will be able to approach his story with the logic of reasons (following normal logical patterns of thinking) and the logic of good reasons (motivations) necessary for Fisher's paradigm to work in this story. Furthermore, as Harrington notes in her article, the narrator never makes it clear that he is present at any of the points of action (91-2), further muddying his reliability and the logic with which he may approach the story. If all he knows is second-hand knowledge—or, if the reader has to trust that the narrator knows exactly the events of the story, the fidelity may not be as strong.[9] However, the narrator never claims to know everything—he is not presented as an omniscient narrator. He speculates about many things, including how Hop-Frog got his name, noting, "I believe the name 'Hop-Frog' was *not* that given to the dwarf by his sponsors at his baptism, but it was conferred upon him, by general consent of the seven ministers." He does not know the origin of Hop-Frog: "I am not able to say, with precision, from what country Hop-Frog originally came." The narrator even admits that he does not remember the occasions where Hop-Frog's services were needed: "On some grand state occasion—I forget what—the king determined to have a masquerade" (*Selected Tales* 312). Because the narrator admits that he does not know everything, the audience may be more likely to accept his fidelity: he is admitting his flaws and not trying to hide them.

What of the narrator's logic of good reasons, then? Does the narrator have consistent values present in his narration? Harrington notes that by referring to the king as "our king" instead of "the king" or "a king," the narration "has the effect of uniting the narrator with the audience and of insinuating the power of the king over the audience. Setting up the power of the

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[9] One other story where the first-person narrator is not present in the action of the story is "King Pest the First." This story does not contain as much editorializing as Hop-Frog, however. "Metzengerstein" uses a narrator absent from the action, as well, but he uses first person only in the first and eighth paragraphs, and does not editorialize.

corrupt king over the audience has the rhetorical effect of forcing the audience to side with those oppressed by the king. It increases indignation more than if the audience were to hear about the subjugation of more distant people" (92). Thus, the narrator's values may be seen in his portrayal of a barbaric and oppressive king. Furthermore, how the narrator treats Hop-Frog's actions is indicative of his values. The narrator clearly judges the king and his ministers, but against Hop-Frog's violent actions Harrington asserts the narrator makes no judgments. Harrington suggests, too, that Hop-Frog's actions are in a sense justified by how the narrator describes them—as an inversion of authority (97). The narrator's values—consistent and supporting the oppressed—allow for narrative fidelity even in the face of a clear bias.

The narrator, then, relating the story, can capture the audience through the narrative fidelity of his tale. The coherence of the story—if the story hangs together—depends on the actions of the characters, actions that shed light on Poe's attack in this story. Because this story is not a detective story, the ultimate logical and rational nature seems subsumed in fits of emotion. However, the logic of the actions is not completely lost, and the story does hang together, reinforcing Poe's attack on the literary elite, as he has done in other stories.

Hop-Frog's character and the torment he endures contribute to the narrative coherence of the story. Normally, a story ending in murder would be met with some measure of revulsion; however, in this story the only ending that can justify the actions against Hop-Frog is the ending that Poe has written. The beginning of the story sets up the reader for the ending. Even before Hop-Frog enters the story, the description of the king and his thinking portrays an unhappy situation for the kingdom in general. According to the narrator, "The king seemed to live only for joking. To tell a good story of the joke kind, and to tell it well, was the surest road to his favor" (*Selected Tales* 310). Given that the king places great importance on joking, and the

reader is not told if the king tends to any of his other duties as monarch, the reader may be predisposed to doubt the king's effectiveness as a ruler.

Furthermore, the king's actions against Hop-Frog and Tripetta (a female dwarf also serving in the castle) cause the reader to view the king unfavorably. The story's first detailed mention of abuse against Hop-Frog occurs when the king calls Hop-Frog and Tripetta to help his ministers and himself find costumes for a large masquerade. The monarch, "in a very ill humor," calls on Hop-Frog to drink wine to his "absent friends" and then forces Hop-Frog to continue drinking. The king then slaps Tripetta to the floor and dashes wine in her face. While Hop-Frog has become used to the behavior towards him ("Hop-Frog endeavored, as usual, to get up a jest in reply to these advances from the king" [*Selected Tales* 312]), perhaps he is not prepared to accept the rough treatment of Tripetta.

With this background of violence and mockery to Hop-Frog, and now against Tripetta (who, "on account of her grace and exquisite beauty[,]…was universally admired and petted" [*Selected Tales* 311]), the coming acts of violence stand out, of course, but they are not the clashes of red and orange that jar the eyes, but rather a vibrant red against a black backdrop. The audience is more inclined to view the actions of Hop-Frog as a justifiable response to the violence against Tripetta. Hop-Frog prepares the audience for his violence too, by his initial reaction to the king's slapping Tripetta—he emits "a low, but harsh and protracted *grating* sound which seemed to come at once from every corner of the room" (*Selected Tales* 313). The harsh sound coming from Hop-Frog and the sense that the sound surrounds the king and his ministers prepare the reader for Hop-Frog's later violence. That Hop-Frog is capable of deceiving the king's ears and that the sound of Hop-Frog's voice is everywhere indicates that Hop-Frog will overcome the king and his ministers even as his voice overcomes the room.

The foreshadowing of violence still contributes to the coherence of the story—the reader is expecting something bad to happen. However, one action by the king seems incoherent, causing the reader to momentarily question if the story "hangs together." When Hop-Frog begins to tell the king of his plan for the *role* the king will play in the masquerade, he advises the king and seven men be chained together and dressed as ourang-outangs. This seems like a ludicrous idea—to entrust to a dwarf the safety of their lives under such an odd costume is foolish, yet the king agrees, most emphatically, even agreeing to dumping tar and flax over themselves to complete the effect. However, as has been established from the beginning, the king's devotion is to jokes, at any expense. Therefore, though the decision to trust Hop-Frog's suggestion makes no sense in a vacuum, taking into account the king's obtuse proclivity for jokes, that he would agree to this odd costume, arranged by Hop-Frog, the master costumer and inventor, should come as no surprise to the reader.

The character Tripetta, the female dwarf captured from the same land as Hop-Frog, is a character that contributes to the coherence of the story. Hop-Frog cannot attack the king simply because the king makes fun of him—he needs more motivation for plotting his revenge, and that motivation appears in the character of Tripetta. Unlike Hop-Frog, Tripetta is beautiful, even though she is a dwarf. Moreover, Tripetta is admired by all in the court. She also shares some of Hop-Frog's proclivities for creativity, though Hop-Frog, according to the narrator, is "especial[ly]…inventive" (*Selected Tales* 311). Her importance lies in the fact that she is the catalyst for Hop-Frog's revenge. After Tripetta attempts to defend Hop-Frog, she is thrown to the ground by the king. When the king asks Hop-Frog if he has come up with a jest yet, he tells the king, "'I cannot tell what was the association of the idea… but *just after* your majesty had struck the girl and thrown the wine in her face—*just after* your majesty had done this, and while

the parrot was making that odd noise outside the window, there came into my mind a capital diversion" (*Selected Tales* 314). Violence toward himself Hop-Frog can handle—he is used to it. But exposed to violence toward Tripetta, Hop-Frog reacts negatively, growling and plotting for the destruction of the king.

Similar in nature is Poe's reaction to the abuse of literature, where his strongest reactions appear. In response to a work he perceives as less than creative, Poe writes, "His [William Ellery Channing Jr.'s] book contains about sixty-three things, which he calls poems, and which no doubt he seriously supposes them to be…Mr. Channing must be hung, that's true… Mr. Channing… appears to have been inoculated, at the same moment, with *virus* from Tennyson" (*Essays and Reviews* 460). Critiquing a work by American author Susan Rigby Morgan, Poe remarks, "Humph! and [sic] this is the 'Swiss Heiress,' to say nothing of the 'bride of Destiny.' However—it is a valuable 'work'—and now, in the name of 'fate, fore-knowledge, and free will,' we solemnly consign it to the fire" (*Essays and Reviews* 866). Poe's violent reactions to literature that has been battered by incompetent writers echo Hop-Frog's violent plan—Poe would destroy the ones who ruin literature even as Hop-Frog would destroy the ones who hurt Tripetta.

What remains to be said about coherence concerns the ending. Hop-Frog's violent solution to his problem jars the reader, certainly, but this ending has been alluded to from the beginning of the story. Hop-Frog has been portrayed sometimes as an animal, one who growls and stumbles along, bound to his master. The king has been portrayed as cruel and willing to go to any lengths to discover a new joke. Therefore, the role reversal at the end, where Hop-Frog exacts his revenge, is only fitting. The king must assume the role of a tortured animal and Hop-Frog must assume the role of a cruel master. The coherence of the story stands, then, even in the

face of the violent image left to the reader: the king and his ministers suspended from the ceiling, burning and wailing in agony, and Hop-Frog escaping through the sky-light to his freedom (presumably with Tripetta).

To understand the connection between Poe the writer and critic and Poe the poisoned pen-wielder, the reader needs to understand the characters in the story and their actions. The protagonist is Hop-Frog, an initially innocent but then disturbing character in this story. His innocence and vulnerability can be seen in the circumstances that brought him to the country where he now lives. The narrator notes that Hop-Frog was "forcibly carried off from [his] home… and sent as [a] present to the king by one of his ever-victorious generals." Hop-Frog, a captive in an alien land, is then forced to perform for the king's amusement, because of Hop-Frog's unusual deformity: "Hop-Frog could only get along by a sort of interjectional gait—something between a leap and a wriggle" (*Selected Tales* 311). However, this innocence and vulnerability also contribute to his disturbing nature. He is described as a grotesque thing, "a dwarf and a cripple" (*Selected Tales* 310), though the audience may still sympathize with him as he is at the king's beck and call, forced to humiliate himself for the pleasure of the king. The audience needs to sympathize with the jester, or his horrific actions at the end of the story only condemn him, creating a contradiction in the way the narrator portrays him: as an abused victim of a king's oppression.

As with many other characters in Poe stories, at least one character seems to be autobiographic in nature, and in "Hop-Frog," the title character seems to have certain parallels with Poe. The dwarf does not deal well with alcohol: "Hop-Frog was not fond of wine, for it excited the poor cripple almost to madness, and madness is no comfortable feeling" (*Selected Tales* 312). Poe also has trouble with alcohol, though unlike Hop-Frog, Poe chooses to turn to

alcohol. Quinn notes in his critical biography, citing a letter from Poe's roommate at the University of Virginia, Miles George that "[t]o calm and quiet the excessive nervous excitability under which he [Poe] labored, he would too often put himself under the influence of that 'Invisible Spirit of Wine'" (108). The problem here is that like Hop-Frog, the influence of alcohol turned Poe into a different person. Apparently, Poe used alcohol too freely. Poe's early college years, like many new college students', did involve alcohol, and perhaps involved overindulgence. However, toward the end of his life, Poe repeatedly abstained from alcohol. In a letter to Dr. J. Evans Snodgrass, Poe writes about his use of alcohol:

> My sensitive temperament could not stand an excitement which was an everyday matter to my companions. In short, it sometimes happened that I was completely intoxicated. For some days after each excess I was invariably confined to bed. But it is now quite four years since I have abandoned every kind of alcoholic drink — four years, with the exception of a single deviation . . . when I was induced to resort to the occasional use of cider, with the hope of relieving a nervous attack. (*Letters* 157)

Poe did resort to alcohol as a solution to problems, but he must have had a reason for quitting the drink, probably the fact that it confined him to bed and he was easily made drunk. Otherwise, he would not have abstained for four years—excepting, of course, his "single deviation." Though Hop-Frog is incited to madness, and Poe just incited to drunkenness, some aversion to alcohol can be seen in both characters, and that it drives them to be giddy—something the self-contained Poe must not have liked, given his choice to refrain from drinking—shows a parallel between Hop-Frog and Poe.

Additionally, both Hop-Frog and Poe are oppressed by the authorities in their respective

settings. For Hop-Frog, oppression comes from a king and his ministers who are driven by their love of a good (cheap and dull) joke. For Poe, oppression comes from critics and writers who love a good (cheap and dull) story. The narrator notes that "Hop-Frog, in especial, was so inventive in the way of getting up pageants, suggesting novel characters, and arranging costumes, for masked balls, that nothing could be done, it seems, without his assistance" (*Selected Tales* 311). The dwarf is valued for his creativity in addition to his funny walk and the inability to contain himself under the influence of alcohol. Like the king in "Hop-Frog," critics valued Poe for his creativity. A note in the New York *Mirror*, by Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, written in 1839, declares of Poe's work *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*:

> [T]here is scarcely one of the tales published in the two volumes before us, in which we do not find the development of great intellectual capacity, with a power for vivid description, an opulence of imagination, a fecundity of invention, and a command over the elegance of diction which have seldom been displayed, even by writers who have acquired the greatest distinction in the republic of letters. (Carlson 4)

Yet another review of Poe's work praises him for being a refreshing tale-writer in an age where "[n]o form of literary activity has been so terribly degenerated among us as the tale" (Carlson 17). Poe's contribution to the literary world was seen by some as being necessary for American literature, and needed for literature in general.

Finally, like Poe, though he was admired for his creativity, Hop-Frog was also mocked for his deformities. Rufus Griswold, publisher of *The Prose Authors of America and their Works*, attempted to mock Poe through a series of forged letters while Poe was working with him to have work submitted to Griswold's book. Quinn remarks that in Griswold's forgeries of

letters by Poe, the "changes not only represent[ed] Poe in a fawning attitude to a man he wishe[d] to please, but they portray[ed] him as conceited and Griswold a fine critic" (448). While Poe wanted his work published, and attempted to work with Griswold to this end, Quinn suggests that Griswold's "[a]lteration of the manly and self-respecting attempt of Poe to meet Griswold's advances into fawning, sycophantic overtures to a critic whose good word was valuable, is unforgiveable" (450). This mockery of Poe, playing on Poe's reputation for being proud and unyielding, and doing what he needed to get his work published, was a clear attempt by Griswold to elevate himself by debasing another, tickling his publisher's pride by perverting an honest attempt at work by Poe, similar to the king tickling his royal pride and sense of humor by humiliating Hop-Frog.

Because the story has both fidelity and coherence, as demonstrated by the narrator, the characters, and their actions, Poe's attack comes through clearly—but also subtly. The last complete short story by Poe seems to have many interpretations based on the content. As before mentioned, some view it as a commentary on abolitionist literature, some view it as a commentary on Poe's experience with Napoleonic history, and some view it as a statement the author makes about his neuroses. Bachinger's article suggests that the "story is easily read as the wish fulfillment of a macabre *jester*, a near-suicidal author who portrays himself departing this life victoriously after having appropriately reduced the tasteless critics who had attacked him to a 'fetid, blackened, hideous and indistinguishable mass'" (392). An article by J. Gerald Kennedy, "The Violence of Melancholy: Poe against Himself," asserts that Poe wrote this story as an exploration into his tormented psyche, explaining that the story demonstrates an unfounded assault on enemies that may or may not actually be real (541). However, though these interpretations bear some merit, they seem to lean too heavily on psychological interpretations of

Poe's work, emphasizing one aspect of Poe's life (his personal traumas) at the expense of others—like his love for logic and rationality.

Noticing Poe's argument and attack in this story has support from other scholars, who have agreed that this story appears to be an attack, but no consensus has been reached as to who Poe is attacking, whether critics, the public, or himself. Based on the evidence seen in this story and the writing from Poe himself, this story can also be read as an attack on the Transcendentalists, against whom Poe battled for most of his life. The initial description of the king, who parallels aspects of the Transcendentalists reveals that his taste is for vulgar (in the sense of common, not perverted) and low humor—practical jokes, especially. The narrator comments, "practical jokes suited his [the king's] taste far better than verbal ones" (*Selected Tales* 310). Here, Poe implies that practical jokes are less sophisticated than verbal ones. Thus, the king's taste is questioned, both in subject and content. Poe makes a similar statement about the Transcendentalists in a section of *Graham's Magazine*, where he notes, "The taste manifested by our Transcendental poets, *is* to be treated 'reverentially,' beyond doubt, as one of Mr. Emerson's friends suggests—for the fact is, it is Taste on her deathbed—Taste kicking in *in articulo mortis*" (*Essays and Reviews* 1303). The Transcendentalists, in effect, have killed taste in their preference for work that Poe suggests is inferior.

The narrator's comments on the king's reaction to the proposed joke by Hop-Frog mirror in sentiment, if not in exact words, what Poe wrote about authors and writers who appealed only to the public, and denied true artistry in writing. Critiquing Grant, author of "Walks and Wanderings," Poe comments, "His mind—granting him any—is essentially at home in little statistics, twaddling gossip, and maudlin commentaries, fashioned to look profound; but the idea of his attempting original composition is fantastic" (*Essays and Reviews* 1315). Hop-Frog has

the same idea about the king, creating jokes and jests for him that he is not able to create himself. The king likes to hear witticisms, but only in that they serve to harm someone else. His ability for profound and wise thinking, mentioned in passing ("The fact is, he *required* something in the way of folly—if only to counter-balance the heavy wisdom of the seven wise men who were his ministers—not to mention himself") does nothing to assist his decision making when faced with the biggest masquerade of the year; the narrator reveals that "[m]any [in the kingdom] had made up their minds (as to what *rôles* they should assume) a week, or even a month, in advance; and in fact, there was not a particle of indecision anywhere—except in the case of the king and his seven ministers" (*Selected Tales* 310, 312). Thus the king commits similar errors to those of authors that Poe decided did not meet high standards: his shallow thought contributed to general helplessness in creating anything truly original and worthwhile. The king must rely on Hop-Frog to create an original costume, and thus contribute to the general gaiety of the party; likewise, uncreative authors must rely on other's creativity to write a good story that positively contributes to American literature—the difference being that the authors continue writing drivel instead of accepting Poe's suggestions on how to write better.

Poe goes beyond commenting on poor taste, attributing more problems in American literature to the laziness of some authors. For example, he writes of William W. Lord, an American author, "Mr. Lord is never elevated above the dead level of his habitual platitude, by even the happiest thesis in the world. That any man could, at one and the same time, fancy himself a poet and string together as many pitiable inanities as we see here…is to our apprehension a miracle of miracles" (*Essays and Reviews* 802). Poe, here, makes a connection between a profound idea (like the costume for the masquerade) and an utter inability to deliver anything worthwhile on that subject. In "Hop-Frog," the narrator has a similar comment to make

about the king: "Why *they* hesitated I never could tell, unless they did it by way of a joke. More probably, they found it difficult, on account of being so fat, to make up their minds" (*Selected Tales* 312). In both instances, laziness contributes to someone else having to take care of a problem; in the case of Mr. Lord, laziness in thought led to a book of platitudes that Poe suggests needs to be taken away, and in the case of the king, laziness in thought led to a missing costume that had to be devised by Hop-Frog.

Hop-Frog's last words to the court and to the king, who, with his ministers, is blazing away, suspended from the ceiling, bear special note in the analysis of Poe's attack. Hop-Frog announces, after the crowd stares in horror at the (apparent) travesty before it, "'I now see *distinctly*…what manner of people these maskers are. They are a great king and his seven privy-councillors—a king who does not scruple to strike a defenceless girl, and his seven councilors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester—and *this is my last jest*" (*Selected Tales* 318). This speech is not strictly symbolic, for Poe hated the idea of allegory[10]—a one-to-one ratio—however, the words themselves are indicative of what Poe does in his criticism. Though the other critics of his day choose to puff up bad writing simply to elevate an idea of American literature, or popular literature, or what they view as good, they are merely supporting a rather bad joke, a tragic and perpetual practical joke on the good person of literature. Poe, in his criticism, is revealing their travesty for what it is: a mockery of literature, a slap in the face of good writing, and a combined effort from many to ruin what might be a good American literary movement but for their efforts. In a sense, his criticism becomes Poe's final jest, soaking the elite in tar and lighting them ablaze as they willingly set themselves up for his

[10] In criticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Poe notes that "[i]n defence of allegory…there is scarecely one respectable word to be said…The deepest emotion aroused within us by the happiest allegory…is a very, very imperfectly satisfied sense of the writer's ingenuity in overcoming a difficulty we should have preferred his not having attempted to overcome" (*Essays and Reviews* 582).

criticism.

Most obvious in this story is the clear attack on authority. Hop-Frog, the lowly and ridiculed servant of the king openly defies and destroys him. Many Poe stories deal with the theme of defying authority, giving life to the idea that Poe was using this idea deliberately, but not as an attack on himself and his "dual nature," but on the authority of the literary elite. This group of people, as explained in the first chapter, kept the literary world in a kind of oppression, forming a club mentality, and excluding those who did not have the means to enter the world of publication. In his work on Poe's literary battle, Moss notes that "Poe… decided to level his charges against the cliquish practice of puffing works into reputation, however undeserving such books might be, and to rationalize…his principles of critical judgment to indicate that he was not malicious, but simply just" (46). Poe clearly expresses his opinion on the state of critics and literature in the club mentality of his time in a critique of Morris Mattson:

> The book is despicable in every respect. Such are the works which bring daily discredit upon our national literature. We have no right to complain of being laughed at abroad when so villainous a compound, as the thing we hold in our hand, of incongruous folly, plagiarism, immorality, inanity, and bombast, can command at any moment both a puff and a publisher. (*Essays and Reviews* 860)

Thus, his criticism definitely had the object of tumbling the towers of the literary elite and eliminating the authority they had to promote and publish bad literature—authority by virtue of title, and through no real merit, like the king of the distant land where "Hop-Frog" occurs.

In his criticism, though he is harsh, Poe seeks to bring down the high places of publication—and in his works, he can use any malice he may have felt toward his opponents in a forum where he could cause his audience to agree with him without entirely realizing that they

were. Because his works employ fidelity (logic and values) and probability (coherence), the audience can accept the argument in his stories.

Chapter 7

"There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story:"

Conclusion

Edgar Allan Poe's short stories are more than short stories. They are sophisticated arguments and vicious attacks on the members of the literary community. However, Poe is able to couch these arguments and attacks in the form of a short story. Poe wrote that when he approached writing, he differed from most authors: where they chose to begin with narrative and historical influences, Poe began with effect (*Essays and Reviews* 13). He wanted to have an effect—an original effect—that would impress his audience. While perhaps not everyone understood Poe's writing, or read his intentions, for the discerning reader, the underlying intended effect is present in the story, waiting to be read and discovered by the reader.

One part of the intended effect is a love of order. Poe's love of cryptography expands into his writing, especially in his detective stories. His analytical approach to cryptography and ciphering expanded to his writing. Everything, from poetry to short stories to criticism, exhibits his analytical prowess. "The Gold Bug," one of Poe's most successful short stories, has the clearest example of this analytical process in his works. The story functions as a "how-to" for Poe's readers, illustrating how Poe managed to decipher so many codes and ciphers during the period of time he issued the challenge to his readers in *Graham's* magazine. This love for order and analysis was in opposition to the prevailing Transcendentalist thought, which promoted the spirit of man and how he connects with the Oversoul (in the words of Emerson). This love of ordered thought and rebellion against Transcendentalism's exaggerated emotionalism can also be seen in Poe's short story "The Mystery of Marie Roget." Poe chose to use his powers of analytic thought to attempt to solve a real murder, and though he was not successful in solving the

murder, he was successful in transmitting his argument about the Transcendentalists. Where they rely on excessive emotion, which was, in Poe's opinion, utterly disgusting to read, Poe relies on accurate thinking and explaining so-called coincidences that justify the order in the universe rather than point to the existence of some spiritual experience. Furthermore, this story attacks the Transcendentalists, many of whom were seen as authorities in the literary field, by presenting the police, who were the authorities in the world of crime prevention and detection, as incapable of solving so intricate a murder that was full of coincidences. Thus, Poe's analytical ability and aversion to the Transcendentalist thought are clearly represented in "The Gold Bug" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget."

Two more of Poe's detective stories make use of the way in which a private detective can undermine the authority of the police to illustrate a problem Poe had with the Literati: "The Murders at the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter." Though each has a different focus regarding the mystery at hand, both demonstrate how Dupin challenges the police's authority by doing creative detective work. Poe, too, wanted to undermine the literary authorities of his time, barraging them with criticism that exposed their weaknesses and showed his great facility with language and story. Attacking the literary elite in his short stories further expanded his attacks in his literary criticism by providing another outlet for his criticism, this time in the form of a short story. This intended effect, more than just a showcase of how a crime was solved, reaches from the beginning of the two stories all the way to the end, following Dupin and his unnamed narrator from receiving news—delivered by newspaper in one instance and the Prefect himself in the other—to searching for and discovering clues, to piecing together those clues to discover the solution to the crime. The common thread in both stories is the emphasis on creativity—an element of writing that Poe highly valued. This love of creativity may contribute to his hatred of

plagiarism, an act that robs the original author of his creativity and rewards the writer who is incapable of creating good literature.

This parallel of Poe the literary crime fighter can be seen in Dupin's detection in "The Purloined Letter:" the detective discovers what was once stolen, returns the item to its owner, and mocks the thief afterward. Poe engages in this same process in his literary criticism, discovering instances where plagiarism might have occurred, exposing it and attributing the source to the original author, and then publicly condemning the plagiarist. And, like Dupin who might have suffered from his attack on a minster in the royal cabinet, though Poe may suffer some from his attacks on high-profile authors, both are firm in their resolve to solve the crime and restore the owner to his property.

Finally, Poe's dislike for the literary elite can be seen in all of his stories, but especially in "Hop-Frog." The last complete short story written by Poe, "Hop-Frog" illustrates a life burdened by the sometimes praise and sometimes mockery of the literary establishment. Hop-Frog, the deformed but truly creative slave of the king, endures much hardship until the king pushes him too far. Like Poe, who attacks when people abuse literature, Hop-Frog finally engages in an attack on those who have abused his dwarf friend Tripetta. This story is especially vindictive in nature, drawing commentary from many on the excessive violence and vitriol therein, but the story, like Poe wanted, is written to achieve a certain effect, and Poe brings this effect across clearly in his writing. Poe's extreme dislike of the literary elite, who blocked publication abilities from those who could not pay to join the club, runs rampant through the pages of "Hop-Frog," exhibiting itself in the growls of the oppressed, in the infernal destruction of the king and his councilors, and the triumphant final speech by Hop-Frog. If Poe could have lived longer and seen through his prospectus for a new literary magazine, perhaps his revenge

would have had as dramatic an effect as Hop-Frog's, but even in its own way, the story conveys Poe's message in a form with which an audience can identify—the readers understand the general concepts of overthrowing power.

Any reader beginning to analyze Poe's short stories must remember that almost all of them are in some way autobiographical. Open to any section of his stories, and almost immediately a character bearing some shade of Poe will leap from the page. This is a deliberate aspect of his writing, supported by his assertion that "[t]he supposition that the book of an author is a thing apart from the author's self is… ill-founded…[W]ith him who has written much…we get, from his books, not merely a just, but the most just representation" (*Essays and Reviews* 1178). In Poe's opinion, then, the books and poems an author produces are an extension and expression of the writer himself, more personal "than in his most elaborate or intimate personalities" (1179). Given this outlook on the involvement of the author with his work, it is reasonable and expected that Poe would invest much of his views and much of himself in his writing. Because of this statement, the main idea of this thesis can be proven by examining Poe's works. His most intimate feelings about the literary scene, people he disliked, bad writers, and the state of literature in America are exposed on the page for anyone to see. Poe might be proud to know that people were willing to look for his person in his works.

However, this statement by Poe does not mean that all of his worst feelings and psychological troubles only are to be found in the pages of his short stories. While Poe would not deny that his deepest feelings are on the page, he might also point out that that aspect of his life is not the only element present in his writing. A man of such diverse genius, with his widespread interest in areas like cryptography, handwriting, even the nature of the universe, might be insulted that one of the most studied aspects concerns the sensational pieces of Poe's

life, with an apparent disregard for the deep genius behind the man. Hopefully, this study has served perhaps not to correct all of the misconceptions regarding Poe, but at least it will shed new light on the subject of his writing.

The stories examined in this thesis are not the only ones where Poe's vitriol appears. He incorporates in all of his stories some aspect of argument and attack, and further study in this vein might reveal a connecting thread in all of Poe's writing. Certainly, this theme is present in his detective stories, and in the story involving Hop-Frog, but there is not enough room in a thesis to explore fully the implications of this theme. However, expanding research to all genres of Poe's writing could establish a solid link and a new area for research in Poe studies.

Additionally, expanding research into the rhetorical aspects of Poe's writing may help lessen or eliminate certain negative associations with Poe—that he was a drunkard who wrote depressing and macabre stories. Drawing attention to the rhetorical side of Poe's writing sheds new light on this writer who was so influential in American literature. And while this study will never fully take away the delicious shiver people feel when they read "The Raven," or the shudder of revulsion when they read "The Tell-Tale Heart," knowing the rhetorical side of Poe may add a new appreciation to his literary genius, and open up new venues for study, both of which are important to keep interest in Poe relevant to the literary community.

While a famous poet wrote that to name a thing is to destroy it (referring to his poetry), in this case the opposite is true. The spirit of Poe's writing must be named by his audience so that a greater appreciation for Poe may develop. Far from killing the appreciation of Poe, a better understanding of his writing should foster increased interest in and study of his works, from the lesser known to the widely studied. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to a revival in Poe studies so that he may be accorded the recognition and appreciation he rightly deserves.

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