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**Edgar Allan Poe and the Manipulation of the Public View**

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## *Dedication*

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents  
and my sister.

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## *Abstract*

The mysterious life of Edgar Allan Poe triggered many speculations about his personality. The belief that his psychological insecurities and his alcohol addiction improved his intellectual abilities was a misconception established in the mind of his readers through a long process of manipulation. Poe's reputation was self generated. He applied manipulative technique in all levels of his existence to improve his image and achieve the financial gain that he desperately needed.

Poe's obsession with the public perception led him to apply his mystification. In his biography, his portrait, his articles and his fiction, Poe entered his readers' psych and controlled their interpretations. After a lifetime of resistance to his detractors, Poe succeeded in created a new myth; that of the misunderstood genius.

## Résumé

La vie mystérieuse d'Edgar Allan Poe a déclenché de nombreuses spéculations sur sa personnalité. La croyance que ses insécurités psychologiques et sa dépendance à l'alcool ont amélioré ses capacités intellectuelles était une idée fausse établie dans l'esprit de ses lecteurs à travers un long processus de manipulation. La réputation de Poe était auto-générée. Il a appliqué la technique de manipulation à tous les niveaux de son existence pour améliorer son image et pour acquérir le gain financier qu'il avait désespérément besoin.

L'obsession de Poe avec la perception du public l'a amené à appliquer sa mystification. Dans sa biographie, son portrait, ses articles et ses romans, Poe est entré dans la tête de ses lecteurs et contrôlés leurs interprétations. Après une vie de résistance à ses détracteurs, Poe a réussi à créer un nouveau mythe, celui du génie incompris.

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# General Introduction

On 7 October, 1849, Edgar Allan Poe died in mysterious circumstances after a short but prolific existence. Mystery, however, does not roam around Poe's death only but also around his life which despite the availability of a biography remains partly unexplored. The available information about his life allowed the public to get a certain image of his personality. Influenced by the dark nature of many of his works, readers began to view Poe as a misunderstood genius, drowning into psychological instability. During his lifetime and after his death, there were many "rumors and misinformation about Poe, his life, death, and psychological battles" (Neimeyer, 2004: 221). Those elements made Poe a psychologically disturbed drunkard and gave him credit for holding an abnormally developed intelligence. Besides, his personal sufferings were used as an advertising tool for his literary production.

The reputation of Poe as a "tortured soul" and a "superior mind" was built up by his tormented life and mysterious works. Neimeyer notes: "Poe has largely been taken up by popular culture because of its ability to exploit his personal suffering and the sad, and sometimes strange, realities of his life as well as the even more fantastic myths that have grown up around him" (Neimeyer, 2004: 209). Nevertheless, many of those seemingly "realities" of his life were created for the single purpose of promoting Poe to the status of genius. The methods that he used to sculpt his reputation existed in all aspects of his life. The aim of this dissertation is to explore and expose those methods to prove that nowadays' Poe is the result of his miscellaneous ways of controlling the public opinion.

One of the many reasons for Poe's endeavors of forging a false image is his peer's hostility towards his literary production. Poe had many detractors among



his country's literati. Kennedy remarks: "During his turbulent professional career, Poe counted among his enemies shameless editors, exploitative publishers, hostile reviewers, hated coteries, and acquaintances who had (in his view) insulted or betrayed him in private life" (Kennedy, 2006: 157). Poe's inability to face the army of foes that blocked his way to success forced him to develop a new way to conquer the reader's admiration. He used a manipulative device called "mystification". Through his biography, his fiction and his journalistic articles, Poe puzzled his audience by blurring the line between fact and fiction. He created fictitious documents that he claimed to be true. He also wrote factual events that he asserted to be the fruit of his imagination. At many occasions, Poe duped his audience into believing his assertion in order to create the effect of confusion necessary to amaze the crowd. "Hoaxes and Masquerades" as called by Daniel Royot (Royot, 2004, 61) granted Poe an unprecedented success in a literary environment that was considered for some critics such as Charles Baudelaire as hostile to Poe;

Les États-Unis ne furent pour Poe qu'une vaste prison qu'il parcourait avec l'agitation fiévreuse d'un être fait pour respirer dans un monde plus aromal, – qu'une grande barbarie éclairée au gaz, – et que sa vie intérieure, spirituelle, de poète ou même d'ivrogne, n'était qu'un effort perpétuel pour échapper à l'influence de cette atmosphère antipathique. Impitoyable dictature que celle de l'opinion dans les sociétés démocratiques (Baudelaire, 1859 : 06).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The United States were, for Poe, only a vast prison that he traversed with the feverish agitation of a being made to breath in a more flavored world, -than a big gas-lit barbarity, -and his interior life, spiritual, of a poet or even of a drunkard, was only a perpetual effort to escape the influence of that antipathetic influence. Pitiless dictatorship of the public opinion in democratic societies.

Behind Baudelaire's exaggeration in his criticism of the American culture and its contempt for genuine artistic taste, one can sense the admiration that the French readers had. Indeed, Edgar Allan Poe had established a prestigious position across the ocean. As Hayes states "Poe had achieved a status in France equal to that of a great national author and, through his French reputation, was gaining much acceptance in other parts of Europe" (Hayes, 2004: 01).

While enjoying a great success in other parts of the world, Poe still struggled to remain well perceived among his countrymen. His "obsession with securing the admiration of his intellectual capabilities to the public" (Miller, 2009: 26) led to the beginning of his recurrent use of hoaxes and falsified document to lure his readers into believing that he was intellectually superior to the other writers.

In order to adjust his image as he wished it to be perceived, Poe aimed for acquiring the support of as many readers as possible. Such enterprise proved to be difficult for readers did not exist as a single entity. Different backgrounds and intellectual levels made the public's tastes different and diverse. However, Poe's manipulation was a double-edged device that targeted the different branches of the public. Poe's hoaxes contained two main elements. The first was the knowledge and expertise exhibited by Poe in his works, and even his hobbies (referring mainly to cryptography). Poe exhibits his knowledge by constantly quoting other writers and philosopher. Intellectuals are amazed by Poe's acquaintance with such great minds. Nevertheless, Poe's references were created by nobody but himself and attributed to well known figures to assert his knowledge of their works and philosophies. This method was used through the epigraphs that introduced many of his tales and poems where the reader admires Poe for his multisource citation. The latter were, nonetheless, Poe's own creations. Many other elements such as his reference to science add to his endeavors to gain the support of the

intellectuals. The second element was made for the common reader who has but little knowledge in philosophy and science. Here, Poe relied on mystification. By publishing fallacious documents such as “The Balloon Hoax” or the “Autography”, he tricked his readers who did not suspect the article’s authenticity. Both the literati and common man found themselves deceived and manipulated by Poe who ingeniously influenced their opinions.

Yet, many critics detected Poe’s deceptive methods and dealt with them separately and not as a lifetime process. Some critics shed the light on one or two manipulative techniques while in reality, they were related and intermingled. Sandra Tomc and Kevin Hayes, for instance, dealt with Poe’s biography which was altered and modified. Others such as John Tresch concentrated on Poe’s fictitious articles which were published as serious pieces of journalism. To expose Poe’s manipulation in his works of fiction, Richard Kopley wrote an essay entitled “Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries”, where he revealed Poe’s plagiarism to create a supposedly new literary genre. Some of the clever ways used by Poe to deceive his readers were not easily detectable. His epigraphs, for instance, could not be proved to be fallacious. For that reason, George McMichael conducted a research in the sources of Poe’s citations. In his “Anthology of American literature” (2000), McMichael explains how Poe fabricated false quotations that he attributed to famous figures.

The purpose of this dissertation is to focus on all the elements gathered by critics on Poe’s manipulative techniques to trace the way taken by Poe to achieve the immense recognition he has today. The idea of Poe being a superior mind tormented by the horrors of his life was a myth promoted by Poe to satisfy the market’s demands for scenarios of personal sufferings. Poe’s deception was particularly successful. He operated at three levels, his life (through his biography

and portrait), his journalistic career (through his articles) and his literary works. This dissertation is composed of three chapters symbolizing the three levels at which Poe controlled the public view.

The first chapter deals with Poe's personal life. Despite the availability of documents that relate the events of Poe's life, only a ray of truth is available. The reason for this ambiguity is the first published records of Poe's life, e.g., Hirst's biography. The latter was written by Henry Beck Hirst who, helped by Poe, stuffed the document with fictitious events. Poe shaped the biography to appear as he wished the public to perceive him and attributed the work to his friend Hirst to blur the evidence and add credibility to the document. The first part of this chapter will demonstrate some of the altered, modified, or added details in Poe's biography.

The second part of the chapter deals with Edgar Allan Poe's portrait. The physical appearance of an author surely influences the opinion of the public. It also creates an allusion about its bearer and cause readers to draw a mental picture of his personality. For Poe, the objective was much deeper than that. He was aware of the trends that could influence the choice of the public. One of these trends was the belief that personality and intelligence can be measured by physical appearance. Consequently, Poe modeled his portraits as to assert that his intellectual superiority can be proven by science. In this part we will deal with those beliefs, mainly "phrenology"; the study of the bumps of the skull to reveal a person's character and intelligence, and how it classifies Poe among geniuses. We will also see the process of the creation of the picture we know today. This process involves the use of an important photographic concept: the Daguerreotype.

The third part of the first chapter deals with the talents that Edgar Allan Poe claimed to possess. Indeed, he did not want to be a mere writer but multitalented genius having deep knowledge in multiple fields. Poe exhibited a strong interest in cryptography: the study of codes and the breaking of ciphers. In addition to his short stories about cryptography such as “The Gold Bug” (1843), Poe also claimed to be able to decipher any coded document sent to him. The cipher that he brilliantly broke turned to be of his own creations. This method presented him as a master in the field. Poe’s interest in Mesmerism, i.e., the study of hypnosis also allowed him to be recognized as an expert of that pseudoscience. This part of the chapter also illustrates the use of these scientific trends to build his reputation of the multitalented genius.

Edgar Allan Poe’s profession as a journalist drew him closer to his audience and to the publishers. It enabled him to exercise his manipulation at different levels. The trust that readers put in newspapers render the act of deception much easier since the doubts about the authenticity of his articles is considerably decreased.

The second chapter is dedicated to the miscellaneous methods used by Poe to dupe his readers. The first part of this chapter deals with one of Poe’s biggest deception; “The Balloon Hoax” (1844). It is true that the very title indicates that the work is fallacious. However, this title was adopted after the public’s discovery that Poe’s report of the balloon journey across the Atlantic was fictitious. The initial title was ““Postscript: Astounding Intelligence by Private Express from Charleston via Norfolk! –The Atlantic Ocean Crossed in Three Days- Arrival at Sullivan’s Island of a Steering Balloon Invented by Mr. Monck Mason!!!” (Miller, 2007: 20). It was written so as to be considered as a scoop. Even after it was discovered to be a hoax, Poe’s control over the audience allowed him to stay in

position of power. He was the only writer “capable of fooling the entire New York City” (Miller, 2009: 21).

The second part of the second chapter deals with what was considered as one of Poe’s most successful hoaxes; the Autography. In 1936, while working for *The Messenger*, Poe published a collection of letters by different figures, and planned to analyze them. He claimed to be able to expose their personalities by examining their handwriting. This method was known as “graphology” and granted Poe much admiration from his amazed audience. Nevertheless, the letters that he published were false imitations that he created. The hoax was also discovered to be fallacious. Here again, Poe kept a good reputation even after this attempt to deceive his audience. He pushed even further his capacity to outsmart his readers.

Poe’s enemies were numerous, and his task to remain at the top of the scene was difficult. This made Poe write articles that cleverly countered his detractor’s opinion. “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846) was an essay intended to be an explanation of the process of writing “The Raven” (1845). In reality, it was a manipulative device that secured his position as a superior mind. In the last part of the second chapter, we will see how this work could serve his controlling aims. We will also focus on other articles that were built in the same manner such as “Fifty Suggestions” (1849).

The final chapter deals with Poe’s fiction. His reputation was long considered as due to the complexity of his tales. Although Poe’s talent was far from being questioned, he implanted manipulative techniques even in his works. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the epigraphs. These citations serve to introduce the readers to the story’s theme. In the case of Poe, they were also used to affirm Poe’s knowledge of the quoted figures as well as his mastery of multiple foreign

languages. Guided by George McMichael's study, we will see how Poe fabricated many of his citations and once again, claimed that they were authentic.

The second part of this chapter deals with the detective story; a literary genre that was long believed to be Poe's creation. Poe's sleuth trilogy "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842-1843), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844) are considered as the genesis of the modern detective tale. Nevertheless, the successful stories of mystery were based on actual events written as works of fiction. Poe lured the public into believing that he created these complex stories while in reality, he simply wrote them in an elaborated style.

The final part of the dissertation will focus on Poe's disguised "confessions". In his short stories "How to Write a Blackwood Article" and "A Predicament" (1838) seem to be comedies. One may also detect the satire used by Poe to describe the writing techniques of the *Blackwood*; an elite British magazine. Relying on Teresa Goddu's "Poe, Sensationalism and Slavery" (Hayes, 2004), we will attempt to find out how Poe exposes some of his manipulative techniques. Poe explains how to spot the public taste and satisfy the market's demands with clever and deceptive ways.

Edgar Allan Poe's thirst for fame was a fight that cost him his own identity. He sank into his own obsession with the public opinion. Every aspect of his life was carefully crafted to build the personality of a legendary writer and an iconic poet.

## Chapter 1: Manipulation at the personal level

Literature is a door to a world of limitless imagination. A word that may seem trivial for the common reader is itself a window to another universe for that mind which sees not with its eyes but with its heart. Admirers of literature sought with eager patience the growing seeds of hands that chose the pen as their only companion.

Edgar Allan Poe was one of those dedicated intellectuals who showed through their sufferings that imagination exceeds logic and that reality is not always present in the physical world. He transported millions of readers into his dark realm. Indeed this image would suit his detractors who saw in Poe nothing but the live apparition of Charon<sup>1</sup> leading the dead souls through the river Styx<sup>2</sup>. Though his aficionados<sup>3</sup> were not literally dragged to the underworld, as the metaphor suggests, they were surely misled. The poet that readers cherished, the genius that they admired was no more than a literary creation. Edgar Allan Poe moved from flesh and blood into a creature made merely of ink. The simplest idea that we may construct about his personality is conditioned by his multiple mysterious literary productions. Indeed studies about Poe were principally based on an analysis of his fiction. The reference to his life was of course made but the focus was on his works. A psychological approach, for instance, would try to describe Poe's personality as secretly whispered by his fiction.

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology: an aged boatman who ferried the souls of the dead to the underworld. He was the personification of Darkness.

<sup>2</sup> In Greek Mythology : a river separating the world of the living from the world of the dead

<sup>3</sup> Readers who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about a particular artist (writer or else).



It is commonly known that any writer consciously or unconsciously implants elements of his personality or life in his writings. It is through those details that one can withdraw the necessary elements to build up an image about the writer's character. The use of female characters in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories and poems for example can prove this fact. First one must know that most of his female protagonists are examples of rare and pure beauty (e.g., Ligeia, Berenice, The Oval Portrait...). They are perfection itself with their mysterious airs and light steps. These angelic apparitions were drawn from one source; his young wife Virginia whose death influenced many of Poe's literary productions. She was the reason why his female characters were so perfectly painted yet who die in almost all his stories. Kenneth Silverman claims that Poe "nourished himself on a young woman's death, in the sense that art was for him a form of mourning" (Weekes, 2004: 149).

Although an approach based on literary element can prove successful to deal with a writer's personality, his life and the true facts that made this individual will remain unexplored. As it has already been mentioned, the elements implanted in fiction are sometimes intentional. In that case, the writer can add a given clue to his works to produce a particular effect on readers. Writers such as Edgar Allan Poe were aware that an attempt of psychoanalysis will follow their publications. Some of them seized the opportunity to lure the readers and critics and gently push them to believe the facts that they created. Edgar Allan Poe was a master of manipulation who filled his fiction with elements that suggested a superior intellect.

Since fiction is not sufficient to understand the personality of a writer, a shift to his biography is necessary. As a matter of fact both life and works are important. The case of Edgar Allan Poe is a perfect example of this relation between personal

life and literary creations. However, these two elements are not welded to form the truth about this poet but rather to establish the reputation that he wanted. Miler states: “Poe’s life and work engage similar manipulative devices to control how the public perceives him” (Miller, 2007: 05). The purpose of this chapter is to explore how he controlled the public view, moving from his biography to his portrait and finally to the so called talents that enforced the idea that he was a pure genius.

It is important to know that the memory of the life of a famous figure does not drown in the sands of time but floats as if carried by the wind from epoch to epoch leaving its prints on many documents relating the particulars of his existence. However, these records of fruitful lives are not carried between lovers of literature as “forgotten lore”. They are compiled into the writer’s biography. In the first part of this chapter, we will explore Edgar Allan Poe biography and attempt to locate where his manipulation resided and how he used a document that is supposed to serve as a reliable reference, to create the “superior intellect” myth.

### **a) Poe’s biography**

Any writer who wishes to conduct a sufficiently successful career is aware of the inevitability of being the subject of biographies. Indeed, the public is fond of discovering the hidden secrets of the lives of their favorite writers. Poe’s readers are motivated by their curiosity which is itself enhanced by his hypnotizing fiction to peek into the shadowy corners of his existence. They develop a keen interest about the minutest details of his personal life. With the widespread use of biographies, there was a “growing public thirst for intimate revelation” (Tomc, 2002: 33).

Poe built his life as a writer, publisher and editor<sup>4</sup>. He was conscious that sooner or later, biographers would expose the secrets of his life to the public, and that was also his wish. However, his interest was not in revealing his real life but rather in creating a new one. The memory he hoped to install in his audience mind was an improved version of his character; an image that would help him overcome the psychological unease caused by the literati of his country who denied his talent.

Poe felt the necessity of publishing an account of his personal life. To shape it according to the image he planned to project was not an easy task. As a matter of fact, the ideal way to model and manipulate such a document was for him to write an autobiography. That way he could cover up the undesirable moments of his life and replace them by more pleasant ones. This practice of adjusting his recorded life according to his fantasy rather than his memory was not altogether new. It is obvious that human nature challenges our objective side when our own existence is at stake. Complex feelings such as shame, guilt or love can penetrate our subconscious as to influence our memory itself. Instead we recall what we may call “perception”. Daniel Gilbert<sup>5</sup> says that “The brain creates an interpretation of reality, but it is so good that we do not grasp that it is only an interpretation” (Bowdon, 2007: 122). Moreover, when our memory fails “our brain does such a brilliant conjuring trick in making us believe that our interpretations are fact that we accept what it gives us without question” (idem).

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<sup>4</sup> Poe worked as an editor in many magazines and newspapers. For instance; in 1939 He was the editor of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1941 Graham's magazine and in 1945 the *Broadway Journal*. He contributed with his tales to these sources.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Gilbert is a professor of Psychology at Harvard University. He has written numerous influential articles in the social psychology field, and is the editor of *The Handbook of Social Psychology*.

Many writers are known to create autobiographies that do not seem entirely genuine; whether intentionally or through memory failure, they create fictional events to add to their life account. If we consider the fact that most authors' fiction contains biographical elements, it would not be surprising that to find fictional elements injected in a seemingly true narrative<sup>6</sup>

Poe rejected the idea of writing an autobiography for he feared a negative response among his contemporaries. Already denying his ability to become a member of the prestigious literati of the United States, it would be obvious that they would not accept such a document as a serious piece of writing. Poe had many enemies who would describe his autobiography as another wild imaginary grotesquerie influenced by his intoxication<sup>7</sup>. This fact prevented him from establishing a greater fame during his lifetime. His friend and personal biographer Henry Beck Hirst explained this difficulty stating that Poe had many enemies who prevented him from climbing the fame ladder; "he made enemies [. . .]But their number was legion – and he was only one" (Tomc, 2002: 21).

Being aware of the impossibility of writing an autobiography but the need of revealing his life to the public, Edgar Allan Poe had to find an alternative. Instead of leaving his destiny to a biographer who might destroy his reputation, Poe employed a friend to perform this task. That way he could transmit the intended message without fearing the loss of its manipulative value. The document was written by Henry Beck Hirst who undertook the task of painting Poe's life with particular details that suggested a close relation with the subject. This biography created no suspicion concerning the truth of its content. Hence, Poe could exercise

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<sup>6</sup> Example: Richard Wright's *Black Boy* which narrates events of his early childhood with astonishing details. There is no confirmation that those events were fictitious but at the same time no proof of their trustworthiness.

<sup>7</sup> Poe was believed to be an alcoholic, writing while being intoxicated (a theory not proven).

his control of the public perception although he did not write himself the document.

Poe published his biography along with a portrait in the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum Newspaper* (Hayes, 2002: 483). The public apparition of Poe was carefully crafted. He published a biography and issued a photograph at the same time to create a certain effect on readers. In fact, the public had an interest in the authors' personal life and any information could change its perception. Such a reaction is illustrated by referring to some of Poe's "foes", e.g., the transcendentalists. In order to gain more success, Walt Whitman published the letters that he shared with R.W Emerson. This revelation promoted Whitman to the rank of a "genuine" American poet. However, the negative reaction of Emerson caused him to be expelled from this prestigious circle. As Cullen remarks, "when he published Emerson's private letter along with his own response in the next edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he deeply annoyed his mentor, who viewed it as a distasteful commercial act...Emerson also omitted Whitman's work from an 1875 literary anthology he edited" (Cullen, 1996: 01). This example shows that a single element in the life of an author can play a major role in his career once it is revealed to the public. Poe took advantage of this reality and intended his biography to attract a larger audience and annihilate the claims of his detractors.

Poe did not endeavor to make his audience believe his claims; rather he employed his friend Henry Beck Hirst who served as a Trojan horse to control the readers' opinion. Nevertheless, in the same manner that the Trojan horse hid eager Greek hoplites, Hirst's biography was filled with Poe's ideas. As a matter of fact, while reading it, we should not look at the writer's name but at his puppeteer who controlled every move of his pen to draw an idealized picture of himself. Miller

states that “Poe provided Hirst with much of the material and invented outright lies to describe his past” (Miller, 2007: 02).

Edgar Allan Poe controlled what Hirst wrote and this intervention could not go unnoticed. Critics saw Poe’s hand in the process and many suspected that Poe was actually the writer of the biography. Miller notes: “Critics have questioned whether the resulting document was written by Henry B Hirst or by Poe himself” (Miller, 2007: 02). The fact of the matter is that Hirst was the actual writer of the document. The fact that Poe controlled what it contained does not make it an autobiography. Instead, Poe performed what we may call an “autobiographical act”. Such a practice consisted in providing much of the details about one’s life to a biographer whose task was to relate facts without conducting much research. The best description of the process of writing Edgar Allan Poe’s biography was provided by Kevin J. Hayes who said that “Hirst wrote the essay; Poe authored the biography” (Miller, 2007: 03).

As we have seen Edgar Allan Poe published a biography intended to create the myth of the superior mind. Indeed many believed that he was an uncommon genius as Deloche and Oguer pointed out; “Poe was a superior intellect” (Deloche and Oguer, 2003: 98). However, the biography was only one part of the manipulation process. As we will demonstrate, his life narrative changed the public perception.

## **b) The False biographical elements**

Edgar Allan Poe’s fascinating life intrigued many people who plunged into an earnest admiration of his literary production. He was a man praised for both his virtues and his flaws. His biography was different from those describing the ideal

American man. It created an extraordinary effect when compared to some of the early produced life narratives of the other literary men. While Benjamin Franklyn's autobiography dealt with success and moral values, Poe's biography was the description of a life that exhaled agony. Devaney notes: "In life, he was paranoid, unlucky, nomadic, and chronically poor" (Devaney, 2009: 01). His success was linked to his misery. Thomas Devaney asked a crucial question; "why do we find Poe so fascinating?" The particularity of this question is that it enquires about Poe not about his works; it implicitly suggests that our interest also concerns his life. Indeed, his existence of sadness and sorrow is what shapes his image of a misunderstood genius. Neimeyer states:

*Clearly, it is not only Poe's works in isolation that have fascinated generations. Poe has largely been taken up by popular culture because of its ability to exploit his personal suffering and the sad, and sometimes strange, realities of his life as well as the even more fantastic myths that have grown up around him. Poe has become the archetype of the mad genius or the tortured Romantic artist, the poet maudit crushed by a crass and insensitive world. (Neimeyer, 2002: 209).*

It is important to point out that Hirst's biography of Poe was not the only one. Many others were produced both during his lifetime and after it. However, this document is the best example to illustrate Poe's control over the information that was provided about his life. In 1844, Poe started his search for a biographer. He expressed his wish of writing his life story in a letter to James Russel Lowell<sup>8</sup> where he wrote: "My Life is not yet written, and I am at a sad loss for a

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<sup>8</sup> James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), American poet, essayist, editor, diplomat, and critic

Biographer” (quoted in Kennedy, 2006: 482). It is only with the help of Henry Hirst that he could fulfill his need of exposing his life to the public. He nonetheless altered many details to ornament his biography, as Tomc notes: “[Poe] peppered the piece with exaggerations and lies intended to stress his decadent alienation” (Tomc, 2002: 32). This was the first method used by Poe to appear as a genius; the use of alienation and suffering as characteristics of great men. Indeed, many believed that superior intellects were tortured in life. That could explain why Poe wished his life to appear as a tragedy. As for alienation, it was also a trait of geniuses as expressed by Arthur Schopenhauer<sup>9</sup> who said: “To be alone is the fate of all great minds”<sup>10</sup>.

In his study, Kevin J. Hayes borrowed some elements from Edgar Allan Poe’s biography to demonstrate their falsehood. According to Hirst’s biography Poe travelled to Russia from where he returned only with the help of the American consul; “he did manage to make his way to St Petersburg, Russia, where through deficiency of passport, he became involved in serious difficulties, from which he was finally extricated by the American consul” (Hayes, 2002: 483-484). Poe’s adventurous trip to Russia was described as one of the “false statements” found in his biography. The same information was later analyzed by Sandra M. Tomc who confirmed that this element was invented by Poe to generate a certain effect on his audience. This episode of Poe’s life was nothing but fiction for Poe “had never been to Russia” (Tomc, 2002: 32).

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), German philosopher, who is known for his philosophy of pessimism.

<sup>10</sup> Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved



Poe was also a courageous man seeking noble quests. That was what we may conclude after reading about his adventure in Greece. According to Hirst: “he went to Greece ‘with the wild design of aiding in the Revolution then taking place’” (Hayes, 2002: 483). Poe was not seen in public at that period, a fact that made his claims easier to believe. However, his trips to Europe were only the products of his imagination. Miller notes “Poe claimed to have traveled and participated in these events when in actuality he never traveled to either country” (Miller, 2007: 03).

The primary reason for Poe’s use of false biographical elements is to underline the myth of the superior intellect. However, there were more reasonable reasons for that behavior. Poe deserted the public scene on many occasions. He managed to cut all contact with his society. Miller remarks that: “Poe was able to disappear” and mislead his acquaintances as “to make his whereabouts uncertain” (Miller, 2007: 09). That way he could escape one of the most difficult issues encountered in his life i.e., debts. Miller states: “Poe was not only able to manipulate people’s knowledge or perception of him, but he also gained the practical ability to elude the various problems that arose during his life-primarily debts” (Miller, 2007: 09). Indeed Poe accumulated a huge amount of debts linked principally to gambling. It was probably the only cause that made him chronically poor. He presumably turned to those methods of manipulation when his debts were high. Mark Neimeyer describes one of Poe’s costly adventures: “Within a day of his arrival [to the University of Virginia], Poe managed to gamble away his entire term’s allowance. Just a few months later, he owed \$2,500 in gambling debts” (Neimeyer, 2002: 210).

Whether to justify his absence that saved him from his debts or to create an image of the tortured poet, Poe invented multiple events to ornament his

biography. The question of integrity can be raised claiming that a highly ranked poet has a level of respect to his art that prevents him from presenting false elements to his readers. At this point it is important to point out that Poe was not very reliable well before the establishment of his career, he “had fallen into a routine of easy lies and half truths since at least his adolescence”(Silverman, 1991: 146).

Another manipulated episode of Poe’s life was his turbulent year at the University of Virginia which he joined in February 1826, and where he studied ancient and modern languages. According to his biography, he deserted studies and perused the destructive vices that haunted his life; drinking and gambling. Tomc notes: “he had lived a wild and dissipated life at the University of Virginia” (Tomc, 2002: 32). This fact was supported by his detractors who emphasized his inability to conduct a proper way of life at university. Reverend Rufus W. Griswold was one of Poe’s most active detractors. As a matter of fact the two men “despised each other” (Kennedy, 2006: 23). Griswold underlined these events in Poe’s life. He wrote a memoir where he exposed many of Poe’s flaws. Its purpose was to destroy Poe’s reputation, he was also called “Poe’s literary executor”.<sup>11</sup> However, it unexpectedly helped shaping the myth of Poe as being a superior intellect. He even added some exaggerations, for example he maintained that Poe “managed to stay drunk for the entire semester” (Neimeyer, 2002: 210). Both Poe’s and Griswold’s claims were “essentially false” (idem). Once again, Poe exercised control over his biography influencing his readers and even his critics.

Poe’s biography swiftly drags one into a realm where the physical world disappears. It has the effect of his fiction that sadly narrates the miseries of the superior mind that loses its balance in the trifles of life. Poe’s manipulation of the

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<sup>11</sup> Term introduced by Mark Neimeyer in his essay “Poe and popular culture” (Hayes, 2002; 209).

reader's opinion exceeds his biography. His whole life was an everlasting struggle to reach the heights of the literati's hierarchy. Just like Penelope's knitting that continued restlessly until the arrival of Odysseus, Poe's works counted a thousand tales waiting for the day the world would recognize his genius.

Poe manipulated every aspect of his life even his own appearance. The portraits that are available today present only a part of the truth since he also exercised control over his image. In the next part of this chapter, we will see how Poe took advantage of Photography to create the image he wished to project to his readers.

## **1. Poe's Portrait**

### **a) Poe and Photography**

The human race needs to remember, and when a memory dies with its holder, it is carried on through ink, wood or stone. Along with sciences and arts, people tasted eternity thanks to their deeds. Their faces mutely narrate the tales of a memorable existence through multiple forms; from mighty status to dismembered busts, from wall paintings to locket portraits.

Poe saw the necessity of revealing his appearance to the world. He wished to be remembered, to be recognized on the cover of his books. However, when his own look underlined the detractors' opinion of the intoxicated fool, Poe endeavored to seize the opportunity to project a new image of himself in order not to appear as a proper gentleman but also to emphasize his neurotic traits that shaped his reputation as the misunderstood genius. At this point it is quite difficult

to understand how he could manage to alter his appearance within his portrait since the technological advancement at that period was not sufficient to exercise considerable control over the resulting pictures. However, Edgar Allan Poe was aware of all the new techniques of photography that would enable him to conduct the slightest change on his portrait.

Indeed Poe did not wish to create a new look that had no link to his actual appearance. As a matter of fact, he wanted to exaggerate some of his traits in order to suit the public standards. The word standard here does not refer to public taste but rather to the belief that moral and intellectual traits can be recognized through analysis of the facial characteristics. This belief was of course not taken into consideration by all his readers. However, it was the literati's tendency to consider all what is scientifically en vogue. Indeed, writers and scholars at that time were not satisfied with only their specialty, they ventured to study many fields, including Photography which was one of Poe's most admired scientific progresses.

Poe expressed his wish to be recognized by the public. The first step was to publish a biography, the second was his picture. As we have seen earlier, this wish to reach his audience was not to candidly share his personal life; rather he planned to alter the reader's vision by inserting false elements to his biography. However, how could he control his physical appearance?

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, considerable work has been produced in the field of photography providing a more accurate method for drawing portraits. The most revolutionary discovery was made by the French Luis Jacques Mandé Daguerre who created a new process called the Daguerreotypes. This new technique gained a widespread use and arrived at the United States of America in the 1840's, a

period when Edgar Allan Poe was struggling to contradict his detractors and establish a considerable fame and wealth. Poe showed a keen interest in this process and he described it as “the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science” (Poe, 1840: 01).

The Daguerreotype was for Poe more than a revolutionary discovery; it was a new means of exercising his control over his audience. However, what is this new technique and how did Edgar Allan Poe take advantage from it?

## **b) The Daguerreotype**

It was in France that an inventor started his researches about using light to capture a picture. That method is what influenced the creation of the word Photography which in Greek means “drawing with light”. The inventor’s name was Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833) who made the first permanent photo. However, he died before establishing a sufficiently good quality picture. It was only after his death that his experiments carried on by Luis Jacques Mandé Daguerre finally produced results. The process was named after the painter who continued the experiments and not the proprietor of the original idea. Consequently, it was named Daguerreotype at the French Academy of Sciences in Paris on January 7, 1839.

When the Daguerreotype reached the shores of the United States, it immediately drew the attention of the country’s scholars and intellectuals. Edgar Allan Poe who ranked himself among them (although not approved by the others) was a keen advocator of this new photographic technique. Whether he knew that such a discovery would help him in his manipulative methods or he only admired the

efforts of his French friend's (for he established a considerable fame in France), Poe expressed at many occasions his admiration of the process.

Poe quickly understood the way it functions and even wrote three articles about photography. The most important is the one dedicated to the Daguerreotype published in the *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* (Philadelphia) in January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1840. Within this document, Poe expressed his delight with the discovery and he also explained broadly how the process works. The reason why Poe wrote about a field that was apparently far from his knowledge was first that he wanted to appear as a multitalented genius.

As a journalist, Poe seized the opportunity to accustom his readers with the Daguerreotype. In his "The Daguerreotype" (1840), he showed his interest as well as his knowledge in the field. He also explained how the process functions;

*...a plate of silver upon copper is prepared, presenting a surface for the action of the light, of the most delicate texture conceivable. A high polish being given this plate by means of steatitic calcareous stone (called Daguerreolite) and containing equal parts of steatite and carbonate of lime, the fine surface is then iodized by being placed over a vessel containing iodine, until the whole assumes a tint of pale yellow. The plate is then deposited in a camera obscura, and the lens of this instrument directed to the object which it is required to paint. The action of the light does the rest. The length of time requisite for the operation varies according to the hour of the day, and the state of the weather—the general period being from ten to thirty*

*minutes—experience alone suggesting the proper moment  
of removal* (Poe, 1840: 01).

The purpose behind Poe's explanation was to emphasize his intelligence and ability to understand any scientific discovery. However, he did not reveal that it was possible to change the appearance of the subject light. His interest was not only in the discovery but also in the potential that it had to help him achieve his goal of writing and looking as superior intellect. Devaney explains: "In the interest of self-promotion, Poe had embraced the new technology of the daguerreotype process" (Devaney, 2009: 02).

We have seen that Poe wished to change his appearance through the use of photography. However, how can a portrait add to his image of the misunderstood genius?

## **b.1) Pseudoscience**

It is important to bear in mind that Edgar Allan Poe lived in a period where scientific research was at its golden age. It was an enlightened era characterized by many discoveries that changed the world. It was also one of the reasons that made it difficult for Poe to affirm his genius. At that period emerged many fields of study that no longer exist; some ideas offered a genesis for further successes, others died because of their irrelevance in the modern world. A theory that does not survive the test of time is called "Pseudoscience" and it offers a vivid idea about that time's society and its way of thinking. Some of those mistaken theories such as Physiognomy and Phrenology are concerned with analyzing and measuring people's intelligence by observing their physical features. The idea

gained the attention of Poe who endeavored to take advantage of those beliefs to exercise his manipulation of the public opinion.

Physiognomy is the use of facial features and characteristics to judge one's character and personality. It is true that if we consider Poe's facial features we would notice that it amazingly reflects the image that we have about him. If we plunge into the melancholic eyes in his portrait, we would feel his tortured spirit, his pale face drawing us into his realm of darkness and despair at the edge of his imaginary land of internal sufferings. A feeling such as this would prove that Poe succeeded in his task. Even if nowadays people do not judge literary figures on the basis of their appearance, at that time it was common practice.

Phrenology is the theory that maintains that a person's character and intelligence can be measured by the size and shape of his/her skull. We know that the brain is divided into many areas, each one having a specific function. According to Phrenology the outer layer of the skull or Vortex change s shape according to the area of the brain beneath it. For example; if we had a hump where the part responsible for memory is supposed to be located, it would mean that our memory is well developed.

## **b.2) Poe's Daguerreotype**

The written description of Poe's physical appearance accompanied his first published portrait called the "McKee Daguerreotype". We have seen that he delivered a portrait with his biography written to by Henry Hirst to the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum Newspaper*. The biography was carefully crafted as to suit Poe's desire, but the photograph proved to be quite unsatisfactory. In a letter to his friend James R. Lowell, Poe expressed his disappointment with his



portrait. His motive for this attitude towards it was that it was not faithful to his actual appearance; “it scarcely resembles me at all” (quoted in Kennedy, 2006: 482). In fact, it did not resemble the description presented in the accompanying document. These elements implied that one of the two objects was intentionally or unintentionally misleading.

Poe had many portraits, the reason for that was the perpetual desire to make it as deceptive as possible. The first published daguerreotype did not fully match the pseudoscientific trends that could remodel his reputation. This fact was compensated by his biography where he offered the image he wished to give.

The first element that draws one’s attention is the reference to Poe’s eyes. According to Hirst; “his eyes are grey and restless, exhibiting a marked nervousness” (Miller, 2007: 10). We can easily recognize Poe’s touch in that description. A quality that cannot be denied to Poe is that of an outstanding writer. One of his favorite techniques is the use of his characters appearances. That is to say he could hypnotize the reader by a profound description of the melancholy features of one or more of his characters. Poe created a link between himself and his fiction by giving his appearance to his favorite characters implying that they are mere reproductions of himself. Consequently, he was believed to have the personality of the tortured Roderick Usher or the clever a Chevalier Dupin.<sup>12</sup>

The second element emphasized in his biography is the shape of his head more particularly the size of his forehead. Hirst says “his forehead is extremely broad, displaying prominently the organs of ideality” (idem). This element would be clearer with reference to phrenology which explains that a broad forehead is a sign of intelligence. We have seen that this pseudoscience indicates the places of

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<sup>12</sup> Roderick Usher is the main character of *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Dupin is the detective in Poe’s trilogy starting with *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

intellectual activity in the brain. For Poe, the organ of ideality (the brain) is apparent; a fact that makes him appear as intellectually superior.

The photograph that accompanied the biography was a product of the daguerreotype process. However, Poe did not exercise much control over it as to leave it almost true to his actual physical appearance. That was the reason why he expressed his discontent in his letter to James Lowell. Poe had to replace the portrait by another using the daguerreotype at its full potential. That is to say, since he knew what the process could add to the photograph, he endeavored to create an appearance that would suit his fabricated image.

Realizing the dangers of publishing two contradictory elements about his appearance, Poe soon started the realization of multiple new portraits in which he could appear more resembling to the description given by Hirst. After sitting for his new portrait; “he came to understand that he could exercise control over the daguerreotype image on which the engravings were based” (Hayes, 2002: 486).

### **c) Modifications and Manipulations**

We come to realize at this point that a portrait gives another dimension to our appreciation of literary works. It is as if the beheaded knight that inspired so much fear in Irving’s “The Legend of the Sleepy Hollow” finally revealed his identity. Our choice was to install in ourselves an even bigger fear or to come to a conclusion that the frightening whisper was only wind through an ajar window. The moment we see the image of Edgar Allan Poe that we know today leads us to believe his claims of being a misunderstood genius. We see his pain through his feeble eyes; we sense sickness in his pale face. Suddenly, visions of his tales veil our eyes as to be no longer able to see the thin line that separates truth from

fiction. This picture that influences our opinion about the author was not a coincidence; it was a well crafted plan to project that specific image.

The first element on which Poe insisted was the use of phrenology which classified people into groups according to their appearances and more precisely the shape of their skulls. Broadly speaking, the personality and intellect of a person could be easily detected. The group that Poe wished to belong to was what phrenology calls the “nervous” type characterized by “a large brain, delicate health, and emaciation” (Miller, 2007: 05). This category of people had a more complex intellect and an active mind. It represents intellectuals in general and literary men in particular. Consequently, being classified as a nervous person by phrenology granted Poe the title of poet. It could deny the claims of his detractors who banished him from the realm of the literati and casted him to the abyss of psychological disordered people. This technique raised him to their level and permitted him to exercise his profession with more expectations from the public who would view him as a born literary genius.

In order to be classified as nervous, Poe’s daguerreotype had to show a thin sickly face with a large forehead. This description was present in the biography and that was another reason that urged him to create new photographs. In the McKee Daguerreotype the forehead was not sufficiently broad. The overall appearance did not give him a sickly air since it gave him “a plumper appearance” (Miller, 2007: 03). At this point we may wonder if that portrait did not actually resemble Poe. The question that can be raised is whether Poe’s most genuine appearance was present in the first daguerreotype or in the new presumably modified one. Kevin Hayes came to the conclusion that the McKee portrait was the more resembling to Poe and that it was unaltered, he referred to it as the “indexical” image of Poe (Hayes, 2002: 491).

Another element implanted in Poe's Portraits was ethnicity. The leading intellectuals of the United States of America belonged to the same racial category. The white Anglo-Saxon myth was still present and it offered more opportunities to that social class. Edgar Allan Poe wished to appear as a representative of this ethnic group as an attempt to be accepted by these people who constituted the elite of the country. The Daguerreotype that served this aim was entitled the "Ultima Thule"<sup>13</sup>. Curtright states: "The last photographic image of Poe offers a means to fix racial categories" (Curtright, 2010: 29). The photograph did not present much difference compared to the preceding ones. The element that changed was the color of skin and the fair complexions that gave him a white aristocratic look. Indeed it was "the Daguerreotype in which Poe appeared the whitest" (Curtright, 2010: 26-27).

The technological advancement at that time did not enable Poe to exercise freely his control over his portrait. As a result, we may wonder how Edgar Allan Poe achieved such modifications that gave birth to a new dimension in Poe's appreciation. The truth is that Poe did not need science to distort his pictures, rather he needed art. The method used was well known by painters but also by poets and writers who used it to paint some of the mysterious episodes of their fiction; it was called Chiaroscuro. Generally speaking, Chiaroscuro is the use of light and shadow to emphasize or hide some areas of a painting. The term is derived from the Italian chiaro ("light") and oscuro ("dark") and generally refers to a technique that contrasts bright illumination with areas of dense shadow. In literature, it is used to create a certain effect on readers such as mystery. Edgar Allan Poe was quite familiar with this method since he used it in many of his works. In "The Tell Tale Heart" (1843), the old man's bedroom was dark till a ray

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<sup>13</sup> The title "Ultima Thule" is itself a means of influencing the public. It is a term used by the Romans to describe the most distant country of the empire. By using this name Poe tried to emphasize his alienation promoting his image of the misunderstood genius.

of the lantern penetrated the room and reached his eye “a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye” (Poe, 2006: 189). Here, Poe used the contrast between the shadow of the room and the light upon the old man’s eyes to give them horrifying look. In the same manner, Poe employed this technique in his poems. In “The Raven” (1845), a lamplight faintly illuminated his bed to give the night described a sad, mysterious, almost mystical air;

*This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o’er,  
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating  
o’er,*

*She shall press, ah, nevermore*

(Poe, 2006: 424).

Poe had enough knowledge of the Chiaroscuro as shown in its use in his works and his studies of photography as to enable him to apply it to distort his portraits. The process of the Daguerreotype included the use of sunlight reflectors that, when directed towards a specific area, could create a unique effect of light and shadow. While posing for a daguerreotype, Poe had; “his head motionless in its stabilizing brace yet his mouth in movement whispering last-minute instructions to the cameraman regarding the placement of the sunlight reflectors” (Hayes, 2002: 486). As a result of this method Poe could concentrate the lights on his face to create the effect of whiteness and on his forehead to make it appear larger through projecting the affect of shadow.

Every aspect of Poe's existence was material for inquiry for what was recorded was particularly subjective. One can avoid the bitter criticism of Poe's contemporaries who were threatened by his unusual literary talent and who reduced his genius to mere madness. However, even if we approached the productions of Poe and his circle that may seem closer to the truth, we would discover that most of these facts were manipulated. This fact may make one conclude that what we know today about Poe was fictitious. Miller qualifies the use of the Daguerreotype to change Poe's appearance as being; "of the same order as fiction" (Miller, 2009; 15). In the same manner, all the other elements controlled by Poe could be considered as being fabricated.

Poe's aim was to be recognized and remembered as one of the most talented American literary men. A goal that he reached after a life spent manufacturing every aspect of his character. He was an uncommon genius and for that reason he had to prove that he possessed a deep knowledge in multiple fields ranging from literature to cosmology, from photography to cryptography. However, doubts may arise about the authenticity of those claims. That is to say, can we consider Poe as knowledgeable in those fields or was it only another attempt to create a false image to lure the public?

## **2. The Multitalented Poet**

Wandering in the profundity of the human psyche, Poe explored the complex realm of humanity. He surveyed most of the sciences known in his time. It was of course not only a proof of his intellectual powers but also a confirmation of his desire to be considered as multitalented genius. In order to expose his mastery of a specific field, Poe makes a recurrent mention of it in his works; fiction, articles and criticisms, he also organized lectures on some of his so-called discoveries.

Details and technical descriptions served to emphasize his knowledge. He also peppered his explanations with the use of a scientific jargon. On this latter, Poe recognized that it was used only to show a superficial and sometimes fake mastery of a field, alluding that it was a manipulative device. Royot writes: “There are people, I am aware, who busying themselves in attempts at the unattainable, acquire very easily, by dint of the jargon they emit...a kind of cuttlefish reputation for profundity: but the finest quality of thought is self cognizance” (Royot, 2002: 68). This quote is taken from “Eureka”; a prose poem that showed a self-proclaimed cosmological knowledge. By asserting that some writers tried to exhibit presumed intellectual qualities simply by their use of technical terms and elaborate language, Poe separated himself from this category. He also adds that true knowledge was self cognizance classifying himself among the geniuses who had no need to show their limitless scope of knowledge.

Within the last part of the chapter, we will consider some of the fields that granted Poe the title of multitalented genius, namely; mesmerism, cosmology and cryptography. The first one was particularly acclaimed for it was a pseudoscience known by many but mastered by only a few. Poe’s interest in mesmerism resulted in the writing of many short stories such as “The Case of Mr Valdemar”, “Mesmeric Revelation” (1844) and “Von Kempelen and His Discovery” (1849). Was Poe truly a master of hypnosis or was it another hoax to acquire new admirers?

### **a) Mesmerism**

It is important to understand that Edgar Allan Poe knew every detail about the demands of the market. That is to say, he located what the public wished to read in order to sell his works. Furthermore, he caught the admiration of his audience by

showing his interest in exotic topics such as mesmerism. He knew that he was able to “exploit colorful topics or appeal to the reader’s sense of excitement or novelty by covering exotic journeys or developments in the sciences (or pseudosciences)” (Ljunquist, 2002: 17). The topic of mesmerism was both a strange phenomenon and a scientific discovery. It drew Poe closer to his aim of controlling the public opinion.

Mesmerism is a method of hypnosis; a trancelike state used as a curative device (Encarta 2009). The field was introduced by Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer (1733–1815), an Austrian physician who “developed a therapeutic treatment for nervous disorders that relied upon “animal magnetism” to place patients in a trance” (Kennedy, 2006: 615).

Poe’s major work on this topic was the publication of “Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar” (1945), a story depicting the work of a mesmerist who kept his patient alive thanks to hypnosis. When the dying man is released from his trance, his body immediately decomposed showing that his death dated from some days. This short story is read as a work of fiction nowadays. However, Poe wrote it to acquaint the readers with this scientific method. He was able to manipulate his audience who believed in mesmerism and in Poe’s knowledge. In reality, this piece of writing: “was a hoax on mesmerism, a fad he associated with the Party of Progress in Boston” (Ljungquist, 2002: 17).

Poe’s mastery of mesmerism was made easier to believe by his perpetual mention of Mesmer and his tools and procedures. At many occasions Poe succeeded in influencing the public by his serious, scientific tone. His talents of story teller made it easier for him to take advantage of his audience to achieve financial gain and sufficient fame. Nevertheless, his over use of deception added



to his already established notoriety. Stott notes: “Poe was a hoaxer: one who took pleasure in mocking the public as believers in everything Odd” (Stott, 2009: 58). His task was not only to “mock” the public but also to lure them into a false admiration that would raise him to the level his country’s geniuses and grant him the financial prosperity that he chased in vain throughout his life.

Mesmerism was a pseudoscience that Poe supported and explained. However, it was mainly discovered through his fiction. Probably, the field that characterizes Poe the most is Cryptography. Poe was particularly proud of this skill as to challenge his readers to outwit him in reasoning games. In this part, we will see how he managed to profit from cryptography; a field that he presumably mastered.

## **b) Cryptography:**

In 1839, Edgar Allan Poe made a public claim that he was a master of cryptography, “the art and science of preparing coded or protected communications intended to be intelligible only to the person possessing a key” (Encarta 2009). In the *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger*, he impressed the public by claiming that he could decipher any cryptogram sent by his audience; “Poe issues a challenge in *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger* to solve any cryptogram submitted by readers” (Kennedy, 2006: xxxiii). By doing so, Poe showed his superiority over the public promoting the image of the superior intellect. Furthermore, it supported his argument concerning his mastery of the field. It was another technique to lure his readers and make them believe him.

Poe’s interest in cryptography went beyond *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger’s* challenge. He also wrote multiple short stories exhibiting his knowledge of that science. The most rewarded of these stories was “The Gold Bug”, a short story in

which the protagonist, William Legrand, solves a cryptogram inscribed on parchment in invisible ink, and with the help of Jupiter, a manumitted slave, performs a bizarre, Gothic ritual that enables him to locate the dazzling contents of a buried chest. In 1843, it won a \$100 prize in a literary contest sponsored by the *Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper* (Thomas and Jackson, 1987: 393).

The financial success as well as the reputation taken from the use of cryptography made it a reliable tool to exercise his control over the public. Poe's knowledge of the field was magnified by his skills of manipulator; "Poe developed a strong interest and skill in the art of cryptography (the art of encrypting and deciphering a secret code), which he would use as one of his manipulative tools" (Miller, 2007: 09). Poe's aim was not limited to showing a remarkable skill in the art of cryptography; he wished to appear intellectually superior. As a result, Poe's manipulation resided in the fact that he was presumably the only person who could decipher some codes. The breaking of unsolvable cryptograms emphasized his superiority over his contemporaries. It also granted him an unprecedented public admiration and sufficient financial gain. However, an investigation of those unsolvable documents would prove that his superiority in the field was fabricated and what amazed the audience was nothing more than one of his successful hoaxes.

The two main cryptograms that refused to reveal their secrets to anyone but Poe were sent by a certain Mr. W.B Tyler, a highly respectable gentleman who submitted his elaborated codes to Poe. The latter published them as part of his challenge claiming that no other person could decipher them (Miller, 2007: 10). Before receiving Tyler's documents, Poe was sent many cryptograms by his readers. However, the fact they were broken by many cryptographers, made it

difficult for him to claim his superiority. It was only with the submission of Tyler's codes that Poe's skills were fully shown. Nevertheless, the mysterious nature of the relationship between Poe and Tyler led to inquire about that gentleman's identity. The striking discovery made by Luis Ranza in 1985, which was confirmed by Stephen Rachman in 1997, gave another dimension to Poe's reputation: Edgar Allan Poe and W.B Tyler was the same person. The second name was one of the multiple pseudonyms used by Poe throughout his life. Miller points out: "Poe used the name W.B Tyler as a pseudonym for himself" (Miller, 2007: 10).

Poe's use of pseudonyms was well known through his life. He changed his name at many occasions for multiple reasons. As early as 1827, Poe referred to himself as "Henry Le Rennet" (Silverman, 1991: 37). He then used many pseudonyms such as "Edgar Allan Perry" in 1845 (Ibid: 273). Poe was used to the creation of new names for himself adding to the plausibility of the fact that Tyler was also a pseudonym.

Poe's unprecedented talent in cryptography is reduced to ashes by this discovery. It also explains why no other person could ever decipher those cryptograms. Indeed it was easy to decipher one's own creation even if it were made fraudulent so that nobody else could break it.

Edgar Allan Poe believed in his superiority. He was the first person under the effect of his own manipulation. As an attempt to emphasize his genius further, Poe kept challenging his readers by publishing new cryptograms. The solving of his codes was always annoying for Poe. He was "frustrated by his inability to maintain the appearance of a uniquely skilled cryptographer" (Miller, 2007: 16).

Poe used multiple methods to project his image of the superior intellect. From the false events in his biography to the modified daguerreotype, Poe created an image akin to fiction. He also nourished the public's taste for science and discovery by his claimed skills. Combining these elements, one can say that Poe's life was a well crafted work of fiction which aim was to emphasize the myth of the misunderstood genius.

In the next chapter, we will see how Poe used his talents of manipulation in his professional career. As a working journalist, he created more hoaxes and dragged the readers of his articles into the sphere of his admirers. We will also focus on how Poe managed to deal with his detractors who slowed his escape from his already established notoriety.

## **Chapter 2: Manipulation at the Professional Level**

Edgar Allan Poe created a life that was not his, a life that existed only in his books and in the hearts of millions of his readers who saw his genius in every drop of ink lying in his dusty parchments. The existence that he created through his biography, portrait and self claimed skills in cryptography and mesmerism plunged his audience into a realm where he sat on the throne of the “uncommon genius”. The efforts made by Poe to establish this reputation were not present only in his biography; he took advantage of every connection with the readers to send them tokens of his superiority. His profession, which was his closest link with the public, drew him near his aim. His difficult and tragic life helped him establish a better reputation as a journalist since the public was fond of peculiar and tragic events. Tomc explains: “Looking at Poe and other authors of his generation with similar career trajectories and economic means, I want to underline the extent to which his personal peculiarities, far from being incidental or antithetical to his career, played dynamically with a literary industry that embraced and cultivated dysfunction as a condition of authorial productivity and repute” (Tomc, 2002: 22).

Through the establishment of a reputation of a man drowning into his multiple miseries, Poe gained the attention of the public. His next step was to build even a higher status and reaching a broader audience. As already proven, Poe was skilled in modifying events and deceiving the public. His methods while working as a literary journalist were of the same nature.

Edgar Allan Poe was in a constant financial instability. He fell into many episodes of poverty broken only by instants of quick gain. His profession did not prove profitable enough to grant him with financial ease. His addictions to alcohol

and gambling made it difficult for him to establish a certain financial stability. This issue urged him into applying his manipulation to overcome the difficulties of the publishing industry. Polonsky states: “as a literary journalist [Poe] engaged in a constant struggle with extreme poverty” (Polonsky, 2002: 46). We have seen in the first chapter that in few months Poe gathered 2500 dollars in gambling debts (Neimeyer, 2002: 210), His publications being paid too little did not satisfy his need to overcome his debts. As astonishing as it may seem, even Poe’s famous and well acclaimed poem “The Raven” was a commercial failure; “the *American Review* paid Poe for “The Raven” only nine dollars” (Kopley and Hayes, 2002: 195). This episode of Poe’s life demonstrates the difficulty of fulfilling financial gain in the publishing industry. As an attempt to cope with the challenges established by the publishers, Poe had to rely on his talent of manipulation. His claimed talent of cryptography for instance granted him a 100 dollars prize for the publication of “The Gold Bug”.

In order to rival his contemporaries, Poe saw the necessity of producing sensational articles and stories which proved to be more lucrative than mere artistic and poetic works. It was an opportunity to use his manipulative methods to attract the audience and to fulfill his two aims; acquire financial gain and emphasize his reputation of the superior intellect. The first technique used by Poe to establish a reputation in journalism was to exhibit a connection with the literati of his country. Through the use of letters presumably written by a number of distinguished figures, Poe claimed that he could analyze their personalities. These documents proved to be falsified and Poe had to use other methods to keep the readers’ support and even to impress them more. These documents were called: “autography” and they are the first manipulative method we will discuss in the second chapter.

## 1. The Autography

In 1836, Poe was working at the *Southern Literary Messenger* Magazine. This period was particularly fruitful for Poe who revealed his talent as a journalist by his numerous contributions to the magazine (Hayes, 2002: 18). Poe succeeded in catching the public attention, it is only at that moment that he could use his manipulative devices to emphasize the image that he planned to install in the reader's mind.

As we have seen earlier, Poe exhibited proudly his talents in multiple fields. He created the image of a unique genius who mastered various arts and sciences. In the same manner, Poe claimed to hold another skill that he wished to demonstrate with a series of articles published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. According to those articles that he called Autography, Poe could analyze the personality of a writer simply by examining his handwriting. Kennedy notes: "His exercises in "autography" identified crucial personality traits revealed by handwritten signatures" (Kennedy, 2006: 227). Edgar Allan Poe added to his image of the superior intellect by proving that his area of expertise was almost limitless. In addition to cryptography, photography, cosmology, Poe was also proficient in another field; graphology which is the study and analysis of handwriting to assess the writer's traits or personality.

The Autography is a series of letters presumably written by a number of well known figures. It was published in two parts (1841-1842) and contained the signatures of thirty eight American figures. Silverman states: "[Poe] gathered the signatures of, thirty eight American writers" (Silverman, 1991: 116). Among

those figures appeared John Neal, William Ellery Channing, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Sprague, Bryant, Whittier, and others” (Ljungquist, 2002: 18).

The immediate purpose presented by Poe was to describe their personalities and reveal them to the readers who were eager to discover personal details about their country’s literati. Edgar Allan Poe could fulfill this task by studying the handwritings of a single author. However, Poe ventured to gather the letters of thirty eight writers to emphasize his superiority over the intellectuals of his country. Poe entertained his readers by commentaries and criticisms of both the writers’ personality and works. Ljungquist notes: “his plan was to accompany autograph signatures of the famous and obscure<sup>1</sup> literati with comments on individual character, as suggested by relevant features of penmanship. Appended to each autograph was literary gossip that spiced the critical commentary on each author’s writings” (Ljungquist, 2002: 18).

The public being interested in unusual and original works did not suspect or question the authenticity of the letters. The attention was not on the nature of the letters but on the purpose claimed by Poe. Here, he succeeded in controlling the public view drawing their attention towards the direction that he wanted. However, the genuineness of these autographs had yet to be proven.

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<sup>1</sup> The critic qualifies these writers as obscure because unlike Poe who exposed his personal life to the public, their personal details remained mostly unknown.



## **a) The revelation**

Following Poe's argument of psychoanalysis, the handwriting of an individual cannot be surveyed unless the written document is genuine. The use of graphology requires an authentic document written by the analyzed subject. Such a rule would annul the hypothesis that Poe's Autography could be falsified. However, as a skillful manipulator, Poe duped his audience into believing his claims while in reality the collected letters were of his own creation.

Poe's knowledge of the literary market led him to detect earlier successes and try to imitate them in a subtle manner. At multiple occasions, Poe followed the path of other writers and journalists who achieved the financial success aimed by him. He kept a constant eye on magazines and newspapers from many parts of the world in order to spot a potentially profitable idea. This technique of conquering the public taste granted him an unprecedented fame with his detective stories, as will be shown in chapter 3, part2. In the case of the autography, Poe took the idea from an English magazine (Miller, 2009: 22). He changed only little to the process such as the title. The fact that the act of collecting letters from well known figures to apply a graphological experiment was already well acclaimed in England made it easier for Poe to convince his readers that his series of documents were authentic. Nevertheless, the handwriting and signatures were nothing more than a fraud. Poe "invented brief letters" from those figures and he even tried to prove their authenticity by "appending to them facsimiles of the writers' actual signatures" (Silverman, 1991: 116).

Readers of a particular author can sense his presence through his works. That is to say, when a writer produces a document, he unintentionally leaves his print

through his original style. The latter could not be imitated except through a deep analysis of the author's works and an exceptional skill in imitation. Poe was a manipulator, and also had to be an imitator for many of his deceptive techniques were achieved by creating falsified documents that resembled those of well known authors. This method was used throughout his life in his epigraphs. It was also skillfully realized in the journalistic article we are discussing; the "Autography".

The Autography was a risky enterprise; with the publishing industry filled with enemies, Poe was almost sure that his plan would be uncovered. Indeed, their authenticity could easily be verified. However, Poe continued to publish his Autography by adding two more parts to it in *Graham's Magazine*. It was, as Ljungquist notes: "Developed in three installments in *Graham's Magazine* from November 1841 to January 1842" (Ljungquist, 2002: 17). Poe's confidence and persistence as a journalist and a writer prevented his detractors from banishing him from the publishing world for he was an underdog although he proved that his skills exceeded by far those of many of his contemporaries. John S. Du Solle commented on Poe's resisting his detractors in the *Spirit of the Times* saying: "If Mr. Poe had not been gifted with considerable gall, he would have been devoured long ago by the host of enemies his genius has created" (Thomas and Jackson, 1987: 613). Although it was difficult to see the Autography as a serious work that would grant Poe the success he wished, this series of letters was in reality one of the most successful pieces of journalism published by Poe. Ljungquist remarks "Of his variable successes in the American periodical milieu, the "Autography" was one venture that seemed to fulfill its promise" (Ljungquist, 2002: 17).

The first goal of the publication of the Autography was to exercise psychoanalysis over some of the countries famous figures. However, the documents were easily recognized as frauds. This discovery made it impossible

for Poe to maintain his claim of graphology. The result was that Poe did not altogether abandon his project to control the public perception through the description of his contemporaries. The tool of manipulation remained the same; the letters were not thrown into forgetfulness. Instead, Poe had to craft another plan to emphasize his genius further and climb upper the ladder of fame. The public became aware that the letters were fictitious and Poe took advantage of this fact and introduced new justifications and reasons for his venture.

## **b) Reactions**

We have seen that Poe often dwelt near the edge. That is to say, at many occasions, he almost fell into his own traps but always found a way to maintain his manipulation over the public. For example: when he published a description of his physical appearance that was not faithful to the accompanying photograph. He had then to change the whole picture to save his image. In the case of the Autography, the situation did not hold much difference for the claims were verified and proven false, his next step was to alter an element to show a level of superficial integrity.

The argument of psychoanalysis being risky, Poe had to resort to another technique: humor. He claimed that he used “the autographs of well known authors in a humorous way” (Miller, 2009: 22). It is, indeed, difficult to understand how the creation of fictitious letters could serve a humorous aim. A more appropriate expression for this behavior would be “mockery”. He attempted to use satire against the literati of his country who were “suitable aristocratic targets for mockery” (Polonsky, 2002: 47). Indeed, Poe did not hesitate to attack his detractors as form of literary vengeance. We have seen that Poe published a description of the supposed authors of the letters; within this description he

included gossip and a bitter criticism spiced with his humor. Ljungquist writes: “Poe could savor some of the best jokes in the series” (Ljungquist, 2002: 17). As a matter of fact, the analyses published by Poe included both the writers he favored and those he despised. The Autography could appear as a public announcement of Poe’s friends and enemies presented in a manner that would attract the public attention; Ljungquist goes to say: “the series allowed him some irresponsible fun at the expense of authors he disliked and flattery for those he favored” (ibid: 18).

The idea of criticizing other well known figures through humor is another attempt to shape his idealistic image. In order to appear superior, he had to belittle the others. This technique was also used in his writing where he showed an apparent superiority of the main character over readers. He used this technique “to return the narrator (or Poe) to the intellectually superior position” (Miller, 2007: 25). In the same way he created those letters to appear greater in opposition of his contemporaries.

Another apparent and easily proven purpose of using satire in the Autography is criticizing their inability to produce original works. According to Poe those well known writers could not leave an original print in their documents for they: “could not easily be distinguished from one another” (Polonsky, 2002: 47). In fact, he encountered no difficulty in proving this since the collection that he raised could not easily be proven fake. The writers could be imitated while he could not. He stood then as a true genius acclaimed for a rare originality. Furthermore, he performed the important task of establishing a line between true literary men and others. Royot notes: “Poe holds a lantern to discover a true man of letters among plagiarists, servile imitators, transcendentalist, apostles of spiritual regeneration” (Royot, 2002: 67). Here again it was a clear claim for a superiority over his

“opponents”, especially the transcendentalist who did not give him the credit he wished.

Through the use of false material presented as true, Poe could trigger the public’s curiosity to discover the truth behind the autography. Poe started by amazing his audience by his talent of graphology. He later used his humor to belittle his competitors and raise his own reputation. The Autography was a successful manipulative device that granted Poe financial gain and a prestigious status in his profession as a journalist. It also emphasized his intellectual superiority by presenting him as skillful writer who could imitate any famous figure while nobody could duplicate his own style.

Since the creation of falsified documents proved to be successful, Poe used this method again at multiple occasions, the most important one is the publication of “The Balloon Hoax”, which is the concern of the next part of this chapter.

## **2. The Balloon Hoax**

At the end of the 1800’s, the literary reality of the United States of America was at the discovery status. The authentic American style existed only in the mind of visionaries who sought to create a literary tradition. At this stage it was difficult to detach themselves from the European tradition as regards the style, themes and ideology. As a result, American readers grew an appetite for extraordinary and exotic themes. The emergence of what was called “sensationalism” was a response for the public taste for oddities of all kinds. Edgar Allan Poe detected the public preferences earlier than many of his contemporaries and amazed his audience with exquisite works of fiction depicting the wildest adventures spiced with mystery and terror. However, the success of his fiction being insufficient to create his

image of the intellectually superior poet, Poe had also to fascinate the readers with his non-fiction. As a working journalist, he seized the opportunity to intrigue the public with uncommon reports. The article that was later named “The Balloon Hoax” was one of Poe’s best acclaimed pieces of journalism. It was also one of the most well crafted manipulative devices that controlled the public perception of himself.

In 1844, moved to New York where he found a new audience keen for his sensational works. He sought new opportunities to achieve a financial stability that he lacked throughout his life. Poe was working in the *New York Sun* when he first came to realize that only an extraordinary discovery could shake the audience enough to grant him with an uncommon reputation. On April, 13<sup>th</sup>, 1844, Poe published a report “about the first transatlantic crossing of a flying machine” (Royot, 2002: 62). The article got an immediate response from the public who acclaimed it for its originality and detailed descriptions. The technical style and the scientific tone used in that document demonstrated the knowledge of the reporter who remained anonymous at the first publication of the article (Thomas and Jackson, 1987: 393). The reason for this fact might be that Poe was cautious and feared the reaction of the public and critics whose bulk were detractors. The subsequent success of his “scoop” brought him back to the public scene and he asserted that he was the writer of the article.

The title of such an extraordinary report had to be of the size of its content. We have seen that Poe was a master of manipulation; he was also a great writer. He excelled in catching the attention of his audience who found themselves hypnotized by the power of words that dragged them to read Poe’s works with extreme fascination. The first title of the article which was published in the *New York Sun* was; “Postscript: Astounding Intelligence by Private Express from

Charleston via Norfolk! –The Atlantic Ocean Crossed in Three Days- Arrival at Sullivan’s Island of a Steering Balloon Invented by Mr. Monck Mason!!” (Miller, 2007: 20). This title itself, presented as a “big story”, implied two important facts: the invention of a new flying machine (a new type of steering balloon) and the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean in a record time. Both themes fascinated his readers who rushed to buy the new edition of the *New York Sun* that contained Poe’s new report. The astonished readers created “a near-riot outside the offices of *The New York Sun*” (Tresh, 2002: 113).

The story depicts the adventures of a group of men who successfully crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a new type of steering balloon. It was written in a serious and scientific style. Poe dedicated some parts of his work to describe some elements of the trip in a very technical way. It was written like Herman Melville’s chapter on whaling in his famous novel *Moby Dick* (1851). Melville showed his knowledge of the field through an accurate description of the process, a fact that gave him public recognition. Poe created the same result by describing the new vessel in an independent part of the article. He also presented a part of the presumably travel journal. By doing so, Poe wished to exhibit certain knowledge of science and geography. It was another attempt to shape his image as a superior intellect. The work was so well crafted that the public did not question its authenticity. However, the “scoop” of the balloon travel was completely fictitious.

Poe had an absolute control over his audience who believed his claims although they were accustomed to his manipulative techniques. The myth of the misunderstood genius was maintained while Poe was manipulating his readers. Devaney remarks: “Poe was an exacting craftsman who artfully manipulated his readers. Yet, an ongoing misunderstanding that Poe was simply a “mad genius” continues” (Devaney, 2009: 04).

“The Balloon Hoax” is considered as a work of fiction. However, it is important to know that at the time of its publication nobody doubted its trustworthiness. The fact that the article was released soon after Poe’s arrival to New York was also a well considered move for he sought a new audience who would believe his claims. However, the manipulative process did not reside only in making the public believe his false claims, it also had to do with the way he could control their perception after discovering the truth.

### **a) The revelation**

In present times, journalism is infamous for reporting fallacious news and peppering political tensions and social dysfunctions. Journalists take advantage of their audience’s reactions to achieve financial gain. Edgar Allan Poe exercised that profession at a time when it had a certain level of integrity. Still, the practice of “sensationalism” already existed. Ballooning a simple fact to attract readers was a common practice but creating a purely imaginary narrative and presenting it as serious report was a manipulative technique that few dared to use. It demanded a considerable knowledge in the discussed field and sufficiently convincing style to render the document plausible. In the case of “The Balloon Hoax”, Poe mixed reality and fiction to create a report that left no room for doubt about its authenticity. The fact that this method was used while working for a well known newspaper allowed him to manipulate his audience in New York City. Ljungquist notes: “His own “Balloon Hoax” (*Extra Sun*, 13 April 1844) was composed in the style of a “scoop” or “big story” periodical writing...this story duped New Yorkers into believing that the Atlantic had been crossed in seventy-five hours” (Ljungquist, 2002: 17).



Another reason for the success of Poe's "jest" was the reference to actual names. It was made in the same way as his falsified letters that he named Autography. The reference to well known figures puts the readers in a state of trust that would lead them to believe the subsequent document. In the case of the "Balloon Hoax", Poe asserts the invention of new flying vessel to famous aviator. In the very title, Poe lures the public with the mention of Mr. Monck Mason, he also mentions other actual figures such as Mr. Robert Holland, Mr. Henson and Mr. Harrison Ainsworth. Both the technical language and the use of actual names gave "The Balloon Hoax" the instant recognition that it received. Tresh writes: "The article described in minute and technically plausible detail the flying apparatus allegedly invented and flown by well-known aviator Mr. Monck Mason. In all instances the author of the report was careful to explain the principles of aeronautics, meteorology, navigation and mechanics upon which the unexpected phenomena observed by his protagonists relied" (Tresh, 2002: 113).

Finally, Poe's choice of the newspaper also played a major role in the success of his hoaxes. Working for the *New York Sun* for instance almost guaranteed the journalist to receive a degree of trust from the public. A daily newspaper mentally prepared the readers to believe its content since its primary purpose was to inform more than to entertain. As a result, readers of "The Balloon Hoax" relied to the usual trustfulness of the Sun that enforced Poe's deceptive effect; this manipulative device "did not just require his readers to be uniformed about contemporary technology (and therefore suppose that the Atlantic could be crossed by balloon); it also relied on their presuming that newspapers could be trusted" (Stott, 2009: 58).

The discovery that such a successful article was a hoax can explain the reason the pushed Poe to remain anonymous while its first publication. It was only after

the well acceptance of the public that he finally added his name to the work. This demonstrated that Poe was cautious and aware of the risks of his quest for the control of the public perception. This could also annihilate the rumors about his mental insanity established by his detractors. Another element that exhibited his careful planning for his manipulative techniques was the fact that “The Balloon Hoax” was published soon after his arrival to New York City (Miller, 2009: 21). Here, Poe was confronting a new audience that knew little about his former deceptive methods.

We have seen the carefully crafted method to lure New Yorker into believing that a work of fiction was a real fact. Nevertheless, what may remain mysterious is the reason for this daring attempt. In many cases, Poe’s justifications for his deeds only maximized his control over the public perception. Although his Balloon narrative was proven to be a “hoax”, Poe remained in a position of force with more than convincing arguments.

## **b) Reactions**

The primary and hidden purpose of any manipulative technique endeavored by Poe leads to his two main goals; public recognition and financial stability. The latter was particularly needed before the publication of “The Balloon Hoax”. Poe stated his financial difficulties in a letter to Mrs. Clemm, his mother in law, saying: “We have now got 4 \$ and a half left. Tomorrow I am going to try & borrow 3 \$” (quoted in Kennedy, 2006: 486).

Poe arrived to New York to pursue wealth and he wished to waste no time to achieve his goal. The publication of a short story or a poem proved to be a slow process that would lead to the reception of only a portion of the public. Poe

endeavored to write a document that would receive a widespread success and consequently provide him with the needed sum of money to straighten his financial situation. The writing of a journalist scoop was then a quick and sure way to assure a good income. Miller remarks: “the plan was to use this article, “The Balloon Hoax” as a means to bet published right away, securing an income at the beginning of his family’s arrival to New York City” (Miller, 2009: 21).

Indeed, Poe published his article in no more than a week after his arrival to New York; “On 6 April Poe and his wife Virginia move to New York City. A week later his “Balloon-Hoax,” published anonymously in the *Sun*, temporarily fools New Yorkers into believing that the Atlantic has been crossed by voyagers in a balloon” (Thomas and Jackson, 1987: 394).

The second goal aimed by Poe throughout his manipulative career was public recognition. We have seen in the preceding chapter that Poe wished to be presented as an intellectual having considerable knowledge in multiple fields such as mesmerism, cryptology and graphology. “The Balloon Hoax” was designed to exhibit Poe’s presumed mastery of other scientific domains more specifically; aeronautics. It is known that the presence of detailed descriptions of a particular field within the work of a writer instantly associates him to that specific domain in which he appeared to be a specialist. The example that we may take is Stephen Crane’s novel “The Red Badge of Courage”. Stephen Crane has never been a soldier and never participated in the civil war that he paints in his novel. However, critics’ first speculation was that he was an experienced soldier (Crane, 2007;:02). In the same manner, Poe was believed to an expert of aeronautics for his remarkable description of the Balloon and flying conditions found in his “The Balloon Hoax”.

Poe aimed for greatness, being a connoisseur of a number of fields was not sufficient to project the image of the superior intellect. The success of his scoop would have turned to be momentary if readers kept their belief that the narrative was a true report. The good public reception was due to the article's novelty. The effect that Poe wished had to be greater than a mere cheer for a new discovery; he wished to be remembered for achieving an unprecedented amazement in his audience. As a result, Poe saw the necessity of revealing the truth about his travel narrative.

Not long after the publication of "The Balloon Hoax" in the *New York Sun*, the public realized that the article was fictitious. However, Edgar Allan Poe did not present an instant reaction. The uproar of the readers who felt in his trap was of considerable benefit since it only increased the sales of his article. Indeed, many New Yorkers were attracted by the report that fooled "countless unsuspecting readers" (Tresch, 2002: 113).

After a month of the first appearance of the fallacious report, Poe released another article in the *Columbia Spy* confirming that the balloon travel was only a work of fiction and explaining his reasons behind the publication of a hoax; "he published another article a month later on May 25<sup>th</sup> in the *Columbia Spy* newspaper expounding on the reaction to the fictitious report" (Miller, 2009: 21). The astonishment of the public reinforced his manipulative effect since he could control their reactions and perceptions. It proved one of the most important concepts established by Poe throughout in his career i.e., mystification. The latter is the act of puzzling a certain person and controlling their understanding of a particular matter. By creating a mystery that uncovers gradually a writer can keep the attention of his readers throughout his work. It is an important ingredient in Detective stories, a genre that was attributed to Edgar Allan Poe because of his

recurrent use of mystification in his tales of mystery starring Poe's detective character; Chevalier Auguste Dupin.

"The Balloon Hoax" as well as the numerous fallacious reports that he published were a confirmation of his mastery of mystification. Poe was encouraged by the astonishment of his audience for it was the projected effect. It confirmed his superiority and pushed him to exercise further his deceptive methods. The powerful reaction towards "The Balloon Hoax" fulfilled the task of bringing Poe the reputation of a skillful manipulator. Kennedy writes: "the uproar [after the discovery that the report was fallacious], however, only confirmed Poe's talent for what he called "mystification" and excited his creativity" (Kennedy, 2006: 24-25).

### **3. Justifications**

#### **a) Surviving the public opinion**

The publishing industry is a battlefield where writers are continuously struggling to reach their audiences. As artists, they relied much on the public opinion. A writer who acquires the support of the public has more chances to publish his works and achieves more financial gain than the underdogs. The recurrent methods of manipulation used by Edgar Allan Poe were an ultimate means of gaining the public support, a task made more difficult by the multiple rumors displayed by his detractors who saw in his literary talents a threat that has to vanish.

Edgar Allan Poe was aware of the rumors and gossip that had for aim to destroy his career. In the same way that he detected the public taste and the demands of the market, he was also able to distinguish the trait that caused him to lose some of the public support. His harsh, often satirical style of criticism was one of the reasons that triggered the war with many known figures, “and his caustic and satirical critical style won him many enemies” (Ljungquist, 2004: 07).

The numerous enemies that Poe collected is the main reason that led to the fact that he had less success during his lifetime than he has nowadays. The nature of these detractors is an important element since Poe’s foes were not common authors but important figures who controlled the publishing industry. Poe’s literary executor Reverend Rufus Wilmot Griswold was an important source of the rumors that circulated around Poe. Neimeyer notes: “the tradition of distortions begun by Griswold” (Neimeyer, 2004: 221). He, as explained by Tomc: “advertised himself as Poe’s detractor” (Tomc, 2004: 38)

The fact that Griswold was close to Poe gave credibility to his assertions. One of the descriptions given by Griswold is the belief that Poe was an alcoholic. This rumor still established today was initiated by Griswold; he claimed that he usually fell into ““a condition of brutish drunkenness” (Neimeyer, 2004: 210). One can easily identify Griswold as Poe’s worst enemy since he established a tradition of considering Poe as a madman. The best example that illustrates Griswold attempts to reduce Poe into the state of insanity is the description that he wrote in the Southern Literary Messenger:

*He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips  
moving in indistinct curses . . . or, with glances introverted  
to a heart gnawed with anguish, and with face shrouded in*

*gloom, he would brave the wildest storms; and all night, with drenched garments and arms beating the winds and rain, would speak as if to spirits.* (Neimeyer, 2004: 210).

The exaggerated description in the report was a clear claim to Poe's insanity. Griswold compared Poe to his disturbed and melancholic characters asserting that Poe's literary talent was derived from insanity. Griswold started the myth of the madman who wrote with the wild energy of intoxication to expose his inner anguish. In addition to Griswold, Poe gained other powerful enemies that added to the difficulties he encountered to affirm his position as a leading literary figure.

Willis Gaylord Clark editor of *the Philadelphia Gazette* was also the author of harsh criticisms; "characterizing Poe not just as an outsider but as a misfit" (Tomc, 2004: 30). Poe's answers to his detractors were also a reason for their recurrent attacks. As an answer to Clark's criticism for instance he belittled his enemy asserting that he held no literary talents. Poe wrote: "Mr. Clark once did me the honor to review my poems, and — I forgive him. . . . He is noticeable for nothing in the world except for the markedness by which he is noticeable for nothing," (quoted in Quinn, 1941: 502).

The number of enemies made by Poe during his career prevented him from climbing the fame's ladder with mere literary talent. Henry Beck Hirst, the writer of Poe's biography described his detractors as "Muckworms in the barnyard" (Tomc, 2004: 21). They led to a series of erroneous descriptions of Poe's character. Manipulative methods proved indispensable to remain on the scene. He started a series of works that furtively corrected the misconceptions built by his foes.

Although he endeavored to deny his enemies' claims, his reputation was not completely restored and many of the exaggerated bad traits of his personality are still considered as truth. His drinking problems, for instances, were exposed to the public as a major issue that was responsible for his lack of success among his contemporaries. The fact that Poe mentions his drinking habits in his letters enforce the hypothesis that he was an alcoholic. In April 1841, for example, he writes to Joseph Evans Snodgrass claiming that he stopped drinking for a period of four years: "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" (quoted in Kennedy, 2006: 469). The lines in Poe's letter denied the fact that he was an alcoholic but also demonstrate that he formerly suffered from drinking problems. Whether Poe was a victim of alcoholic or not could not be confirmed. However, the way he fought his "addiction" shows that he was far from the ever intoxicated madman exhibited by his enemies.

The first essay that served to counter the rumors around Poe's life was written in the style of a literary criticism. "*The Philosophy of Composition*" (1846) was believed to be a mere evaluation and explanation of *the Raven*, a poem that he published a year earlier. Surprisingly, his so called critical essay was no more than another hoax (Polonsky, 2004: 45). Poe led the readers to think that it was a description of one of his work while in reality. It was a defense against the rumors that nearly destroyed his career.

## **b) The Philosophy of Composition**

In January 1845, Edgar Allan Poe composed his most successful poem: "*The Raven*". The verse of story of the encounter between the grief-tortured man and the ominous bird granted Poe a recognition unseen throughout his career: "The



Raven” is read, analyzed, and discussed in middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities, and elderhostels. In myriad translations, it is studied around the world” (Kopley and Hayes, 2004: 191). The reason for this unprecedented success in that Poe had finally understood the demands of the public and written a work that would suit their taste; it was, as he states in “The Philosophy of Composition”: “a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste” (Poe “Philosophy”, 2006: 545).

Poe’s production of a sensational poem did not save him from his detractor’s gossip. It was also a feeble source of income though its fame. The two major problems that Poe suffered from were prevailing even with the publication of his “hit”. Financially, “*The Raven*” was an utter disappointment because “the *American Review* paid Poe for “The Raven” only nine dollars” (Kopley and Hayes; 2004: 195). Poe’s next step was to exhibit his poetic and intellectual capabilities further by proving that “*The Raven*” was more of a masterpiece than readers think. He had to write an essay that would increase his poems appreciation and at the same time arrange his reputation and counter his enemies’ assertion. A year after the publication of “*The Raven*”, Poe releases “*The Philosophy of Composition*”, the essay that would change his image and affirm his assertion of being a superior mind.

The apparent goal of writing “Philosophy of Composition” is to explain the process of composing “The Raven”. However, Poe also uses this document to exercise his usual manipulative methods. The first aim was to separate himself from the other “average” poets. This method was used at many occasions when he spoke of others as if inferior. One can see the technique of “othering” in his Autography when he asserted that his contemporaries were easily imitated. In “*The Philosophy of Composition*”, Poe claimed that poets duped their readers into

believing that their works were a result of a burst of inspiration rather than a technical work. He also stated that they had a fear of revealing their writing techniques. Poe wrote: “Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes” (Poe “Philosophy”, 2006: 544). These statements separated Poe from the category he described implying that he was an analytic thinker who dared revealing the secrets of his complex works.

The idea of being aware of the process of writing “*The Raven*” also implied that Poe was sober while composing his poem; a clear denial of his reputation of being an alcoholic. Indeed, a man drowned in his drinking habits would be incapable of composing such a detailed work. It is even less probable that such a man recalls with precision the steps that he undertook to produce his masterpiece. Poe said that he had not “at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of [his] compositions” (Poe “Philosophy”, 2006: 544).

With “*The Philosophy of Composition*” Poe could promote his image of the analytic thinker by glorifying rational thinking. He also counters his detractor’s rumors of being a drunkard. Poe’s critical essay swiftly places him at the top of the scene despite of the difficulties he had.

In addition to “*The Philosophy of Composition*”, Poe wrote other critical essays that had for aim to restore his reputation. Although he rejected some of concocted bad traits of his personality, Poe was still considered as a madman. To justify his “insane” character, Poe dedicated an essay to deal with this topic of genius to change his position from a madman to a superior intellect.

### c) Fifty Suggestions

In June, 1849, Poe publishes for the *Graham's Magazine* a critical essay entitled "*Fifty Suggestions*". The work discusses the concept of Genius and intelligence explaining that the true intellect lies in the ability of keeping one's complete mental abilities while exhibiting extraordinary mental features. That is to say; being an analytic thinker excludes the idea of being insane. Kennedy remarks:

*He distinguishes between genius in the popular sense, which arises from the abnormal development of one "predominant faculty," and that highest, most irresistible form of genius, which derives from a huge intelligence whose faculties are all in "absolute proportion (Kennedy, 2006: 574).*

The statement clearly rejects the myth that Poe's intelligence emerged from his mental instability. He alludes to the fact that he has a "huge intelligence"; an image that adds to his manipulative techniques aiming to demonstrate him as a superior intellect. Furthermore, Poe explains that his recurrent melancholy and intense grief at the death of his wife was not obsessive behavior elevated to poetical works by the influence of alcohol. His depression bouts were explained to be "poetical irritability". Poe wrote:

*An artist is an artist only by dint of his exquisite sense of Beauty—a sense affording him rapturous enjoyment, but at the same time implying, or involving, an equally exquisite sense of Deformity of disproportion. Thus a wrong—an*

*injustice—done a poet who is really a poet, excites him to a degree which, to ordinary apprehension, appears disproportionate with the wrong* (Poe “Poetical Irritability”, 2006; 587).

Poe’s statements suggested two elements. The first was the explanation that the anguish shown in his works was not produced out of insanity. It was due to the fact that he is a “true” poet. By doing so, Poe controlled the public’s opinion that started to view him as a genuine artist. The second element was a disguised attack of his enemies. He said that a man who views deformity in his poetical deeds is a man of common intellect. This idea implies that his detractors, who misunderstood his views, were no poets. By belittling his competition, Poe once again confirmed his superior position in the literary realm.

Poe’s essays were meant to help him overcome the difficulties that he encountered in his profession. Despite of Poe’s many attempts to restore a proper reputation, many of the erroneous rumors still exist nowadays. Nevertheless, Poe’s manipulation methods were sufficient to change the public opinion about him. He became from mere madman to one of the best writers and poets that the American continent ever bore.

In the third and final chapter, we will consider how Poe applied his deceptive methods in his fiction. Since many readers have their first contact with Poe through his tales, he made sure to control their perceptions of the stories and the writer. His successful use of mystification granted him many successes such as the world recognition that followed his presumably invention of the detective story.

## **Chapter 3: Manipulation at the literary level**

The most distant parts of the literary kingdom present a ray of truth. Fiction dwells at the edge of reality and no writer can stand out of the reach of his own existence. The actual aspects of the life of an author force their way through his fiction to leave his name on his parchments. As if encrypted, the personal touch of a writer uncovers only for keen readers and critics whose piercing views seek the truth with the minutest interest. Edgar Allan Poe escaped many of his fiction's diagnoses that were considered either as works of genius or acts of folly. However, only a few detected the clever ways of controlling the public's opinion which were hidden in the hazy lines on his sensational tales. A close analysis of his narratives would expose his manipulative devices brilliantly used in his fiction. The third and final chapter of this dissertation will explore Poe's deceptive methods in his literary works.

An important element about Poe's fiction compared to his journalistic articles was that they are long term manipulative devices. Indeed an article published for a local newspaper would be read and judged for a certain period close to the date of its publication. It is the work of only critics and students of literature to clean the dust out of all any of his written documents and bring them back to life. Controlling the public perception, however, is not concerned with that particular branch of readers for those could easily detect Poe's attempts to influence his audience's opinion. To exercise his manipulation, Poe aimed mere readers. This category showing only a slight interest in details behind the publication of their favorite short stories are susceptible to Poe's influence. For contemporary readers, Poe's articles are almost unknown or uninteresting. Short stories and poems, on the other hand promote Poe's deceptive aims with their immortality. Poe's fiction

continued to create an unprecedented impact on the public even centuries after his death.

The extremely elaborated prose created by Poe in his fiction left an extraordinary effect on readers. As a matter of fact, his talent as a story teller was far from being questioned. His choice of words, his recurrent references to ancient books and his technical explanations of scientific concepts promoted his image of the intellectually superior poet. However, many believed that Poe's sophisticated style was a reason for his financial misfortune; the fact that the level of Poe's writings was far over that of the public, created a disconnection between the writer and his readers, emphasizing Edgar Allan Poe's alienation. His follow author Nathaniel Parker Willis confirmed this fact saying that Poe's style was "too much above the popular level to be well paid" (Tomc, 2002: 21).

Poe was aware of the inability of his fiction to bring him the necessary financial gain. Consequently, Poe's main manipulative techniques had to turn to his second goal; the image of the superior mind. As a matter of fact, Poe was obsessed with the public perception that most of his manipulation was established to satisfy. Poe had, as noted by Miller an "obsession of securing the admiration of his intellectual capabilities among the public" (Miller, 2009: 26). In order to fulfill this task, Poe used multiple methods to create that particular effect of "intellectual capabilities"; a manipulative technique that still works nowadays.

In the first part of this chapter, we will consider the introductory citations called Epigraphs and try to verify their authenticity. The second part will be dedicated to the detective story which we may believe it was created by Poe; was it a contribution to the literary world or just another attempt to shape an image and appear as the literary giant we know today. Finally, we will discover Poe's

revelation of some manipulative devices in his short stories starring his female protagonist: Signora Psyche Zenobia.

## **1. The Epigraphs**

### **a) The technique**

Quoting a writer is a simple task presently; it only requires some clicks on a computer to obtain any quote from any famous figure. However, at the time where books were the main source of knowledge, a deep study or a close reading was the only way to obtain a citation that best suits our purpose. Finding a link between a topic under discussion and the wise lines penned by a great philosopher was even more difficult a challenge. However, when achieved, this undertaking would grant a considerable respect to its author. For that reason, writers and Poets emphasize their ideologies by relating them to a great man's thoughts; a method of giving immortality to their ideas claiming that it existed since the beginning of times, or endow their writings with credibility when the public looks at their words with a questioning gaze.

The practice of seeking support for our ideas was criticized by many American intellectuals who saw in it a form of imitation resulting in the consumption of their literary talent. That branch of literati was led by the transcendentalist who, with the aim of establishing an American literary tradition characterized by its originality, rejected the use of citations to prove or emphasize a concept. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the predominant figure of this literary movement advocated the exposure of our own thoughts with assurance instead of relying on the recognized

wisdom of others. Emerson writes: “A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages” (Emerson, 2001: 27). Emerson also condemns imitating the works of others, claiming that an educated man must realize that “envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide” (Idem).

At a time where Poe strived to establish a reputation, intellectuals were drawn into the transcendentalist philosophy. A fact that made Poe’s task even more difficult for those transcendentalists saw his penchant for the classical as a lack of competence. That is to say, Poe’s constant reference to others (epigraphs, quotes...) was opposing the spirit of self reliance brought to light by the transcendentalist intellect. It cast Poe further into public distaste and consequently, financial instability. At this point, we shall come back to the idea of his fiction’s immortality. The fact that his short stories for instance are so well perceived nowadays is due to the fact that the concept of “mainstream” in literature is no longer present in our time. People are not influenced by a single movement that leads the country’s literature. It is individual taste that predominates leading to an appreciation that holds a minimum of external influence; though the presence of trends, a reader can enjoy his favorite novel without the interference of norms established by the country’s intellectuals. Poe’s use of epigraphs for instance is no longer considered as a lack of self reliance. One must also know that despite the fact that most of his contemporaries were against his methods, there were still advocates who accepted his epigraphs as well as his other literary methods as a work of genius.



## **b) Poe's Epigraphs**

Poe's genius, whether as it is commonly considered today or as it existed within his contemporary's minority, was derived on one part from his wide knowledge of world's literature and philosophy. This intellectual superiority was demonstrated by his miscellaneous methods of linking his ideas to the great minds that preceded him. This practice is best illustrated by the use of epigraphs.

Epigraphs are introductory citations that introduce us to the theme of the story. Its main objective is to prepare us for the journey that we are about to undertake into the writer's realm. It often gives hints concerning the denouement or clues to the mystery build up in a narrative. These quotations are used at the beginning of a book, a chapter, or a section of a book. They can be used for both prose and poetry. Epigraphs can be taken from novels, poems and even religious sources such as holy books (Quran, bible...).

Poe was quite aware of the esteem that he would acquire if he quoted from different sources; it would enforce his position as a respected intellectual and confirm his expertise in multiple fields. Furthermore, he used different languages; Latin, French and German which would only grant him more respect especially from the intellectuals of his country. For that reason most of his works start with an Epigraph. He quoted ancient dramatists as the Greek Sophocles (496-406 BC) or Euripides (480-406 BC), English poets such as William Cowper (1731-1800), and philosophers such as the Spanish Raymond Lully (1233-1315). Poe also quoted from multiple sources including old sayings and proverbs.

The first goal of using those citations is immediately reached since we admire the writer for his wide knowledge in world literature before even reading his

work. It leads us to go further into the story and even to search for the link between the narrative and the epigraph. It serves then as an introduction but also as an advertisement to the writer who seeks for keen readers. That is of course not the only purpose for using the epigraphs. As the other tools he used before, Poe could prove once again that he could outwit his audience. Indeed, without suspicion readers of Poe do not question the authenticity of the epigraphs while in many cases, they are imitations created by Poe.

### **c) Authenticity Vs Manipulation**

Poe relied much on others to create a sense of credibility to his works. The reference to well known figures would associate him to them and consequently to their public. However, it was difficult to find an appropriate quotation that suits best the theme of his stories. That was why, when a citation was lacking, Poe simply created one of his own and attributed it to a particular author or philosopher. Indeed, in many cases; “Poe chooses to invent the citation rather than search for one that illustrates his theme” (Miller, 2009: 19). With an exceptional skill of imitation, his epigraphs could go unnoticed and rare are the readers who questioned the authenticity of his introductory citations.

As a tentative to verify the authenticity of Poe’s epigraphs, a study was conducted by George McMichael, editor of the Anthology of American Literature who endeavored to discover the truth by following the sources of Poe’s quotes. He provided some examples that he searched within the original documents. The result was that the citations were not available in any of the authors’ writings. It was the proof that Poe was in reality their only author. Based on McMichael’s research, we will see some of the fallacious epigraphs that helped shaping Poe’s reputation.

The first epigraph presented on McMichael's study is a segment of a soliloquy that served to introduce Poe's short story "William Wilson". It says; "What say of it? What say of CONSCIENCE grim, That spectre in my path?"(Poe, 2009: 591). The story introduced by this quote is a mysterious tale of doubling. The main character named William Wilson discovers the existence of a man who resembles him in every way, even his very name. The two characters engage a mirror-like chain of events that result in the main character's death and his discovery that his doppelganger, a person who closely resembles him in every aspect, existed within him and not in the physical world. Readers can hardly guess at any point of the story who is the real William Wilson or if they were in reality two individuals or only one with a bi-part soul.

The link between the narrative and the epigraph is immediately recognized. It ushers the way to the mood of the stories by mainly two elements. The first one is "the spectre in my path". It is indeed astonishing how the connection can be made between the narrative and the quote that seems to be taken from within the story. Wilson's counterpart is a haunting vision that is only half real, it is indeed a specter. The second and most important element is the theme of conscience. In the epigraphs, the word is entirely capitalized as to give it a particular importance. It gives a clue to the denouement of the story; "this subtle form of manipulation directs the reader's interpretation of the story" (Miller, 2009: 18); the emphasis on conscious implements that the problem in the story happens at the level of the mind. It was Wilson's conscious that created as well as killed the double. The epigraph attached to "William Wilson" served perfectly its aim. Along with Poe's exceptional narration skill, it controlled the reader's attention who did not suspect the trustworthiness of the quote.

William Wilson's epigraph was attributed to William Chamberlayne (1619-1689). According to Poe, it was taken from a poem entitled *Pharronida* (1659). The latter was published in five books; a fact that renders the research more difficult. However, George McMichael's study covered all of Chamberlayne's writings. Even though it was written using the style of the original poet, it was not authentic for its existence could not be proved. Despite Poe's claims, "the lines quoted by Poe do not appear in the poem" (McMichael, 2000: 749). The citation's unavailability in Chamberlayne's work leads to think that Poe created the quote and exposed it as an original source in the same way that he published "The Balloon Hoax" and his Autography.

The well use of the epigraphs and their importance to the theme of the story is an important element that led to the fact that the quote's credibility was rarely questioned. In another short story, "The Purloined Letter", Poe uses the same technique to impress his audience with a falsified quote that introduces the story's theme. "The Purloined Letter" was introduced by the following lines; "Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio" i.e., "nothing is more odious to good sense than great cunning" (Poe, 2009: 432). Written in the original language (Latin), the quote gives credit for Poe's mastery of foreign languages, a quality that he emphasizes with his recurrent use of many languages within his works. Here again, Poe's epigraph served as the best introduction for his narrative.

"The Purloined Letter" narrates the clever method used by the detective Auguste Dupin to retrieve a stolen letter. He also outsmarts the thief, a minister, by replacing the letter by a copy that he created. The antagonist, Minister D--- is a man of common sense and great wit, and his plan could be destroyed only by the detective's cunning; a situation that is perfectly summarized in the epigraph. The quote introducing "The purloined Letter" was attributed to Seneca (4BC-65AD),

but the link between the poet and the famous roman philosopher cannot be established since “the quotation has not been found in Seneca’s work” (McMichael, 2000: 780).

Realizing that this control strategy was successful, Poe continued his use of fallacious quotations. In his short story “Ligeia”, the writer chose some lines that’s expressive character reveals much about the story and a trait of Poe’s personal life. “Ligeia” is a story about what Poe calls the most poetical topic; the death of a beautiful woman (Poe, 2006: 548). The story relates the illness of the main character’s fragile wife. It ends with the death of his second wife Rowena and his constant vision of his eternal love; Ligeia. This female character is a perfect representation of Poe’s wife Virginia who died out of tuberculosis at a young age. The thin line that separates the main character from Poe nearly vanishes, allowing the poet to pour swiftly his heart through the melancholy words of his protagonist; it “allows him to insert his own identity into that of the narrator which allows his to flush out his own emotional issues through the guise of his characters” (Miller, 2009: 25). As an introduction to “Ligeia”, Poe quotes Joseph Glanvill (1639-1680):

*And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth  
the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a  
great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness.  
Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death  
utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will*  
(Poe, 2009: 224).

Built up as a clue to the sad denouement of his story, Poe used the repeated word “will” to focus on the woman’s desire to live that vanishes as her end approaches and as her illness increases. The effect of the quote is immediate for it puts the reader into a certain mood that would enhance the quality of the piece of writing. As for the authenticity of the epigraph, no record of the availability of these lines has been found in Glansvill’s works; “the quotation has not been found in his writings. It was, perhaps, contrived by Poe” (McMichael, 2000: 738).

The study that was conducted by George McMichael reveals a number of epigraphs that did not exist in the source texts. He assumes that Poe created those citations and falsely attributes them to those famous figures. One more example of fallacious quotation that has not been included in McMichael’s research may enforce the hypothesis that Poe’s introductions were a part of his manipulative techniques.

In his Poem “Israfel”, Poe introduces the poem by a note quoted from the Koran. This citation is actually not an epigraph but it serves the same aim and it is contrived in the same manner as the fallacious citations. Poe’s quote says; “and the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice of all God’s creatures”. This note was attached to the title as an explanation of that name uncommon to Poe’s audience. The lines chosen by Poe do not exist in the Koran. This venture promotes his image of the superior mind that holds a considerable knowledge in all fields. Once again, he could control the public opinion who acclaimed his genius without doubting the trustworthiness of his claims.

Poe’s mystification relied much on the interchangeability of reality and fiction in his writings. While in most cases, he offered false elements that he claimed are

true, Poe also used the reverse. That is to say, he could model real events to create works of fiction that he declares emerging merely from his imagination. This method was used in his works that are under the sphere of a literary genre that many consider as Poe's original creation; the detective story. Poe's stories of reasoning and wit are known for their complexity. As mentioned earlier, Poe's writing skill is far from being questioned. However, the common belief that Poe's detective stories are an ingenious creation raises some doubts about the matter. We have seen that Poe implants his manipulative techniques in most of his successful works, and that public's admiration was primarily withdrawn from his use of mystification. For these reasons, a brief analysis of Poe's detective narratives and their sources can prove helpful to settle the question; did Poe invent the detective story?

## **2. The Detective Story**

### **a) The Literary Genre**

Endowed by an extraordinary power of deduction, detective characters have always filled their audience with awe and admiration. Readers would find themselves following every bit of the story to collect the clues and solve their favorite cases before the denouement of the stories; an unintentional attempt to match their wit with that of their favorite sleuths.

The detective story is a literary genre that emphasizes on the search for a solution to a mystery, usually the commission of a crime. The events are the collection of elements that lead to the stories climax; the solution of the puzzle

(Encarta 2009). The protagonist is usually a detective or a man of good sense who always outsmarts the antagonist, usually a thief or a criminal:

*In the world of detective fiction, the investigator is the one character who usually profits from a crime. Typically, the criminal is caught and the victim suffers, but the investigator flourishes, acquiring (as the example of Dupin illustrates) pleasure from the hunt and both egotistical and financial gratification from the solution* (Thoms, 2004: 141).

It is commonly known that the most successful sleuth of all times is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Many of his tales moved from books to the screen expanding even further the character's reputation. Although exclusively complex and knotty, Conan Doyle's detective narratives were not acclaimed for their originality. Sherlock Holmes intelligent conclusions and series of solved cases followed a tradition of fictional detectives that made the genre enjoyable for the public before Conan Doyle's writings. Although there is no actual record of the first detective story, many attribute this genre to Edgar Allan Poe; "Poe invented the detective story" (Thoms, 2004: 133). On the other hand, some critics such as Kevin Hayes consider Poe's tales as a "contribution to the detective story" (Hayes, 2004: 04) rather than its genesis. After a considerable amount of research on the matter, critics agreed that Poe's detective fiction was not an invention of the genre but rather an establishment its new and final norms. J. Gerald Kennedy qualifies Poe's first sleuth story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as "the first modern detective story" (Kennedy, 2006: XX).



Unlike Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who engaged his investigator in a several short stories and novels, Edgar Allan Poe wrote only three detective stories. Much of the praise of those tales is linked to the fact that Poe did not have much material to base his stories on. That is to say, while some writers were influenced by other detective stories, Poe seemed to hold an unusual imagination to set up such complex tales. The admiration was due to “his creation *ex nihilo* of detective fiction” (Tresch, 2004: 113), or so it was believed. In 2008, Richard Kopley conducted a research on Poe’s detective stories in his book entitled “*Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries*”. Within his research, Kopley reveals the mystery around Poe’s sources to his successful sleuth tales; it was another successful deceptive method employed by Poe.

An important element before examining Edgar Allan Poe’s manipulation is getting acquainted with his Dupin tales. The next part of the chapter will introduce Poe’s detective trilogy. Then, based on Kopley’s discovery, we will explore how Poe’s mystification allowed his tales to acquire the public’s admiration despite their suspicious origin.

## **b) Poe’s Analytic Detective**

Edgar Allan Poe excelled in writing short stories, the effect that a narrative would produce while read in one setting (as explained in his “The Philosophy of Composition”) pushed him to produce his detective fiction using the same technique. As mentioned earlier, only three works are considered as detective stories. Although some other tales present elements of analytic thinking and solving mysteries, the “Tales of Ratiocination” as called by Poe include only the three cases solved by Poe’s famous sleuth; Auguste Dupin.

The first detective tale and probably the most successful is “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (*Graham’s magazine*; 1841). The story narrates the brutal murder of two women; a mother and a daughter, and the rational investigation led by the analytic detective. The solution to the puzzle added the element of surprise since the murder was discovered to be committed by an ape. The events happened in a confined area; a literary method called the locked-room case attributed to Edgar Allan Poe (Encarta2009).

The success of this story was generated by Poe’s skills of conquering the public’s taste. First, Poe used the public’s need for stories of agony and distress. Indeed, many of his other successful tales like “The Pit and the Pendulum” contained such elements. His focus on violence was not due to psychological insecurities as falsely believed by his detractors but to the “popular voyeuristic taste for scenarios of sufferings” (Goddu, 2004: 92). The second element that promoted the success of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is Poe’s concept of the exotic. Poe’s story takes place in France, a culture that is quite different from that of his audience. Creating a distance between his stories and his readers triggers their curiosity. The reason that led Poe to choose France as a scene is believed to be due to his influence by the work of French detectives who were the pioneers of this profession. More specifically, Poe was influenced by François Eugene Vidocq as explained by Kennedy: “he also encountered in translation the serialized memoirs of Vi-docq, a French criminal-turned-detective, whose exploits aroused his interest in criminal investigation” (Kennedy, 2006: 227). Poe was also influenced by other French detective stories such as Voltaire (1694-1778). Deloche and Oguer note: “the central character of *Zadig ou la Destinée* has the “quasi-divinatory skills” that Poe gives to Dupin. Moreover, Poe is generally thought to have been influenced by the *Mémoires* of François Eugène Vidocq,

who in 1817 founded the world's first detective bureau, in Paris" (Deloche and Oguer, 2006: 97).

The second detective story "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" was considered as a sequel of to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", it was published in two installments for the *Graham's* (1842) and the *Ladies' companion* (1843). The story relates how Dupin solves the case of a young beautiful woman who disappeared and was later found in a river. The man character discovers that she was killed in an inn by a sailor who threw her dead body into the river. The third and final part of Poe's stories of ratiocination appeared in the *New York Evening Mirror* (1844). The tale is the only detective story that does not involve a murder. The analytic detective has to retrieve a royal lady's letter and cleverly duplicates the document to trick the burglar. The similarities between the criminal and the detective create an effect of "doubling" which initiates a game-like war of wit. Poe exposed "Dupin as "the double of the criminal"" (Thoms, 2004; 147) who could mirror his thinking and eventually outsmarts him.

Throughout his three tales, Poe inserted some elements that would influence the public to accept the image he wanted to project. The most important of those controlling devices was the constant reference and promotion of the analytic thinking. Miller remarks: "Poe begins the glorification of the analytic mind-one that enjoys such activities as enigmas, conundrums, hieroglyphics, and, in the case of Poe, cryptograms" (Miller, 2009: 29). Such an emphasis on these traits does not serve only to put the main character in a superior position that allows the readers to admire him and consequently enjoy the story, but also to promote the writer to the prestigious position acquired by his imaginative detective. Indeed, Poe's interest in mysteries and cryptology as seen in the preceding chapters transformed him into a real life thinking machine; the actual double of the analytic detective.

In order to enforce his image of the superior intellect, Poe had to highlight his similarities with his main character. After reading the tales of ratiocination, one can recognize many of Poe's traits in the mysterious detective. Poe and Dupin are shown to be one person. Kopley states: "Dupin, Poe's detective figure in the earlier "Murders in the Rue Morgue," becomes a barely disguised figure of Poe himself" (Kopley, 2008: 264).

### **b.1) Auguste C. Dupin**

Endowed by a strong power of deduction, Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin was Poe's powerful tool to exhibit his own mental abilities. The first similarity between the writer and his imaginary double is their superior mental capabilities. The narrator who is a close friend of Dupin describes his intelligence with awe and admiration, belittling himself a little as to put himself at the level of the audience who are intellectually inferior than the analytic detective, and thus than Poe himself.

Dupin has also a quality that is usually associated to Poe. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the narrator mentions the hero's double personality; "I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin --- the creative and the resolvent" (Poe, 2006: 321). Poe nourished this belief and even advocated it since he endeavored to be seen as such. He was a romantic poet and a man of science; "it is this Bi-Part soul that he believes separates himself from the others whether than be through analytical genius or poetic superiority" (Miller, 2009: 30).

One of the most important criteria given to Dupin is that he was, like Poe, a manipulator. The character's very name implied the deceptive dimension. According to Benjamin Franklin Fisher, Dupin is a frenchification of the word "duping"; the practice that allowed Poe to gain a prestigious rank: "a sleuth named Dupin – in which, pronounced as someone with a southern background as Poe had might have spelled, to "English" it, as Duping" (Fisher, 2004: 88). This hypothesis was enforced by Peter Thoms who says: "Dupin (whose name reflects his acts of duping)" (Thoms, 2004: 135)

Whether the explanation that the name Dupin was derived from "duping" was true or fabricated by the critics, the character does act as deceiver in situations such as the stealing of the document in "The Purloined Letter". In that episode, Dupin steals the letter from the criminal and replaces it by a fact copy that he created. This practice of exhibiting a falsified element and claiming its authenticity is a familiar aspect of Poe's manipulative techniques as shown earlier. John Irwin describes Dupin and the minister as being both "deceivers and manipulators" (Irwin, 1995: 153).

In order to defend himself before being attacked, Poe used another known practice which is denial. Poe put himself in a safe position by whether pointing at others or denying a quality that he can be accused of. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the narrator claims that Dupin was not a deceiver: "there was not a particle of charlatantry about Dupin" (Poe, 2006: 322) asserting that the main character (or Poe) was a true genius and not an ordinary man who tried to appear superior by use of manipulation.

Poe's main character was an ingeniously crafted double and his stories were a proof of his intellectual dominance. However, as mentioned earlier, Poe's detective stories did not emerge merely from his imagination. In the same manner that he transformed fictitious elements into truths, Poe presented actual events that he claimed to be completely fictitious. The tales of ratiocination were facts skillfully narrated as to trick the public to believe in Poe's outstanding imagination.

### **c) Revelations**

Edgar Allan Poe's detective tales were acclaimed for their novelty. The details of the murders and the detective's reasoning could not be drawn from an ordinary man's imagination. For Poe, imagination was needed to convince his audience rather than to create the stories since the events narrated in his tales were facts instead of fictional happenings.

Edgar Allan Poe was constantly plunging into multiple newspapers and books from around the world. His sources were several and unknown to the majority of the public, a fact that made his manipulative enterprise more successful. Poe was able to literally plagiarize some documents without being noticed. If we take his Dupin stories into consideration, we will discover that they lack the newness applauded for. A research conducted by Richard Kopley reveals Poe's secret sources that allowed him to be considered as the founding father of the detective story.

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was the first of Poe's sleuth tales. It contained complex details about the murder of the two ladies and an astonishing

ending relating the discovery that the murderer was an ape. According to Kopley, Poe withdrew all the elements of his complex plot from one source: “a long-neglected newspaper, *The Philadelphia Saturday News and Literary Gazette*” (Kopley, 2008: 29). The newspaper contained the reports of actual murders, and Poe’s first tale of ratiocination was available among those forgotten cases. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” was then a collection of different factual events ingeniously combined to form a masterpiece.

The first element that fed this hypothesis was the newspaper’s report of a murder committed in a similar manner as that of Poe’s story: “a black man named Coleman is reported to have killed his wife with a razor in much the same gruesome way that Poe’s ape kills Madame L’Espanaye” (Kopley, 2008: 31). Poe replaces the black man with an ape. At this point, one must know that Poe had the tendency to exhibit racist humor by comparing blacks to animals. He associates them to apes and dogs but his control over the public allows him out of the racists’ sphere.

Poe did not invent the unusual circumstances of the brutal murder of the two women in his tales. However, he could still be considered as man of great imagination if we look at the story’s murderer. The tale’s originality also resided in the fact that the criminal was an animal. Besides, Poe used an exotic species of apes; the Orang Outang (orangutan). The fact that this animal was unknown to the public emphasizes his position of the multi field expert. However, Poe knowledge of these apes and their abilities such as their climbing capacity (entering from the window of the apartment) and their human-like behaviors (their very name means; man of the jungle) was also discovered in the newspaper. One of the article entitled “Orang Outang” dealing with this topic was also discovered in the *Philadelphia Saturday News and literary Gazette* (Kopley, 2008: 31).

The elements gathered in the neglected newspaper formed enough data to create an original short story. Through his control of the audience's view, Poe could receive much praise for his first detective tale without fearing the public's suspicion over its originality. The short story's success enabled Poe to write a sequel "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". In the same way as the first, Poe based his work on actual events.

The story of the young lady's murder was based entirely on an actual case. Kopley notes: "Using actual newspaper reports about a then very sensational crime, the murder of a cigar-store worker in New York City named Mary Rogers" (Kopley, 2008: 264). The first attempt to blur the evidence is the frenchification of the name; the American Mary Rogers became the French Marie Rogêt. Poe was known for creating French versions of American names. In his youth, Poe had a pseudonym derived from his brother's name; he was "referring to himself as "Henry Le Rennet" a frenchified version of Henry Leonard, his brother's middle names" (Miller, 2009: 08). He used the same method in his works as the case of Mary Rogers demonstrates.

The actual murder of Mary Rogers was known to the public and Poe's attempt to assert that it is drawn entirely from his imagination was useless. Instead, Poe takes advantage of the fact that his audience was aware of the actual murder to establish another manipulative method. Poe claimed to write the story to demonstrate how he could solve the puzzle that even the police could not break "Due to the police inability to solve the mysterious murder, Poe was keen, after reading about it in newspapers, to try to solve what seemed to be an insolvable murder" (Miller, 2007: 30). Since Auguste Dupin and Edgar Allan Poe is the same person, the writer could present himself as a superior mind that could solve



impossible cases. The process was made in the same manner as his claims to break unsolvable cryptograms as shown in the first chapter.

In the case of “The Murders of Marie Rogêt”, Poe could operate his control over the public at two levels represented by two classes of readers. For those whose intelligence or area of interest allows them to recognize the actual murder, Poe was the brilliant detective who compensated the police’s incompetence. On the other hand, readers who see the tales as merely fiction would praise Poe for his remarkable imagination. In both cases, Poe succeeded in maintaining his image of the absolute genius.

There are no elements relating to the sources of Poe’s third detective story in Richard Kopley’s investigation. There is no element that denies the idea that “The Purloined Letter” was entirely Poe’s creation. However, the two preceding stories were the only Detective stories per se. that is to say, the inquiry about the two first tales demonstrate that Poe was wrongly credited the invention of the genre. Indeed, the third narrative does not contain a murder case, and lacks considerably the gothic elements that constitute a detective story. However, the mental image already established about Dupin made the public predisposed to accept it as a great sleuth story. Though his deceiving methods, Poe remained considered as the father of the detective story genre.

Poe’s manipulation was manifold. In some cases, it is easy to detect it while in others; only a deep research can reveal his secrets. He nevertheless gave his readers hints of the methods his used under the guise of one of his rare female main characters: Zenobia Psyche. These methods were cleverly embedded in two satirical short stories. Behind Poe’s comedy and criticism of others, one can easily

detect, within those stories, the description of some of the successful ways used to control the public view.

### **3. Confessions**

Edgar Allan Poe was an explorer of the publishing marketplace. He seized every opportunity to conquer the public admiration by providing his audience with the topics that suit its tastes. His choice of characters, settings and themes was made as to fit the trends and development of the publishing industry. The readers, who find in Poe's writings their full enjoyment, give him the credit of being an uncommon genius, while in reality; he used their preferences to control their interpretations.

In a series of short stories, Poe reveals how the sensational themes that the public craved were used to manipulate their opinion. Within his tales "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838) and "A Predicament" (1838), he explains the methods of writing a story that would amaze the readers without being a great writer. The stories were written in a humorous and satirical way that would exclude Poe from the stories. Consequently, he alluded that those deceptive methods were used by other rival writers, who unlike himself, took advantage of their readers to reach their goals.

#### **a) Drawing the distance**

In 1838, Edgar Allan Poe contributes two linked short stories to the *Baltimore American Museum*: "How to Write a Blackwood Article" and "A Predicament". The tales initially entitled "The Zenobia Psyche" and "The Scythe of Time" narrate the adventure of his female protagonist Zenobia Psyche who aspires to

become a famous writer. In the first story, she collects information from Mr. Blackwood on how to produce a successful article. In the second tales, she successfully creates a sensational story characterized by horror, violence and racism; the elements that attract the public. In her sensational tale, she climbs a clock tower with her dog and her black servant. Trying to enjoy the view, she found her head stuck by the clocks hand that slowly decapitates her. She turns to a headless body that discovers that her dog was eaten by a rat and her servant, who helped her reach the clock, had escaped.

Initially, the stories seemed like comedies written for entertainment sake. Nevertheless, the mention of the Blackwood magazine and the assertion that such “*reductio ad absurdum*” are the magazine’s usual methods turns the stories into a satire. This satire was also a disguise to Poe’s routine of “othering” and excluding himself from the described category. That is to say, Poe produced the same kind of sensational fiction as criticized in his tales which were also a self satire. However, in order to establish a distance between his person and the stories, he directed the public’s attention towards one of his rivals; the *Blackwood’s* magazine.

The *Blackwood’s Edinburgh magazine* was a prestigious magazine edited by John Wilson. It was celebrated for its sensational narratives. Poe’s use of horror and suspense in his tales was influenced by Blackwood’s publications. Goddu notes: “Poe was indebted to *Blackwood’s* for his sensational style as well as his understanding of how to write serious literature and still attract a popular audience” (Goddu, 2004: 96). By writing satires directed towards the famous British magazine, Poe can reveal the secrets behind the success of some of his sensational tales without being recognized by his readers. The first step to draw a distance between himself and the Zenobia Psyche’s tales is to make the public

believe that Blackwood's deception and mystification is criticized and consequently condemned by Poe.

The most important element that Poe used to detach his person from the satirical sequel was his main character: Zenobia Psyche. Controlling the public also means leading their interpretations of the stories. Considering the usual practice of relating the writer to his protagonists, Poe influenced the readers to link him to the characters he wanted to resemble, and detach him from the other characters that reveal a trait that he wished to hide.

The link made between Poe and the fictional detective August Dupin for example was influenced by the writer who endowed the character with the physical appearance, habits and fields of interest that would enable the comparison. Richard Kopley qualifies Dupin as a "barely disguised figure of Poe himself (Kopley, 2008: 265). Poe's aim was to be associated with his fictional genius. He wished to be seen as a puzzle cracker since, in his detective stories, "if Dupin solves the case, Poe solves the case" (Miller, 2009: 30).

The comparison between Zenobia Psyche and Edgar Allan Poe would place the writer in a position of "accomplice" with Blackwood's. It would lead the reader to recognize Poe's mystification used in his tales. For that reason, Poe's female protagonist was created in such a manner as to exclude any link between her and the writer.

## **b) Zenobia Psyche**

"My name is Signora Psyche Zenobia" (Poe, 2006: 189), says the protagonist at the beginning of "How to Write a Blackwood Article". The writer initiated an

early attempt to establish “foreignism” in his character by giving her an Italian form of title; “Signora”. Furthermore, the name Zenobia Psyche is also a combination of two different cultures. Zenobia, derived from the famous queen Zenobia of Tadmur, Syria, gives the character the “exotic” effect that public wants. Poe emphasizes this effect with the “sky-blue Arabia *mantelet*” that she wears (Poe, 2006; 189). The name Psyche generates a different effect since it is a Greek word that means, according to Poe, “soul” or “butterfly” (Idem). This was, according to Goddu, an attempt to “spiritualize” her name (Goddu, 2004; 97). The “exotic” mood given to the story is highlighted by the epigraph: "In the name of the Prophet --- figs!!" --- *Cry of the Turkish fig-peddler*" (Poe, 2006: 189). The multicultural allusions made by Poe control how the reader interprets the story. It makes him predisposed to catch the comic satirical sense of the tales, and consequently refute any link between the main character and the author.

The careful choice of characters is an element that added to Poe’s manipulative techniques. While most of Poe’s stories star a male protagonist, the two satirical tales saw the arrival of a rare female main character. While the public see no link between the author and the story, he could easily display his manipulative techniques without being noticed. Goddu explains: “in using a rare female narrator to create an obvious distance between his own persona and that of his narrator, Poe simultaneously flaunts the conventions of the marketplace and exposes his own technique” (Goddu, 2004: 98). Furthermore, Zenobia Psyche is described as lacking intelligence; she was “ambitious” but “brainless” (Royot, 2004: 69). This description goes in contrast with his usual “doomed” but “genius” characters usually associated with Poe.

It is true that similarities can be discovered between Zenobia Psyche and Poe. Their interest in attracting the public with sensational tales exhibits some of the

writer's hidden self satires. She is "an aspiring writer of tales of grisly death and premature burials much like Poe's own tales of horror" (Polonsky, 2004: 54). Moreover, Zenobia Psyches shows an interest in raising her image to a more prestigious level; "she elevates her class status to that of her namesake, Queen Zenobia" (Goddu, 2004: 97). It was made in the same manner that Poe's attempts to appear superior by linking his image to famous writers and philosopher with the use of the epigraphs and the autography.

After securing the public's interpretation which excludes him from the stories, Poe was able to expose the deceptive techniques demanded by the marketplace included some of his own methods.

### **c) Sensationalism and Mystification**

The mysterious and violent nature of Poe's literary productions created myths around his personality. His stories were considered by his detractors as a proof of his disturbing peculiarities. The Blackwood Magazine for instance published some harsh criticisms of Poe's unusual tales. In 1847, the magazine a critique of some American figures including Poe who was the subject of much disapproval. The report condemned Poe's tales' oddity in an exaggerated manner:

*Commonplace is the last epithet that can be applied to them. They are strange — powerful — more strange than pleasing . . . . In fine, one is not sorry to have read these tales; one has no desire to read them twice...His analytic observation has led him, he thinks, to detect in men's minds an absolute spirit of "perversity," prompting them to do the very opposite of what reason and mankind pronounce to be*

*right, simply because they do pronounce it to be right. The punishment of this sort of diabolic spirit of perversity, he brings about by a train of circumstances as hideous, incongruous, and absurd, as the sentiment itself* (Thomas and Jackson, 1987: 635).

The two linked tales “How to Write a Blackwood Article” and “A Predicament” demonstrate that the violence and darkness of Poe’s tales were not a personal peculiarity but an established tradition of creating sensational tales that attract the public. In the first story, the narrator explained that the success of Blackwood’s publication (in the same manner as Poe’s) lies in their oddity; “But the chief merit of the Magazine lies in its miscellaneous articles; and the best of these come under the head of what Dr. Money Penny calls the *bizarreries* (whatever that may mean) and what everybody else calls the *intensities*” (Poe, 2006: 190). The statement shows that strange reports have an extraordinary success. It also implies that it deceives the public who, represented by Zenobia, does not understand the “Bizarrerie” but sees it as “Intensity”. The idea is stated by a certain Dr. Money Penny, Zenobia’s market advisor. His name suggests that his primary task is financial gain covered by an “intellectual” guise presented by the title “Dr.”

The elements that would create a successful tale are horror, sufferings as shown in the first story, but also racism and slavery as demonstrated in the second tale. In “How to Write a Blackwood Article”, the Signora Zenobia Psyche collects instructions from Mr. Blackwood on how to create an article that would grant her an unprecedented success. Mr. Blackwood’s answers present the first “confessions” on how Poe took advantage of the market conventions to attract his readers. Scenarios of horror and anguish are the first step to create a sensational

tale. While mentioning some examples of previous successes, Mr. Blackwood mentions “The Dead Alive”, a story that reminds us of Poe’s “The Premature Burials” (1844):

*There was 'The Dead Alive,' a capital thing! --- the record of a gentleman's sensations when entombed before the breath was out of his body --- full of tastes, terror, sentiment, metaphysics, and erudition. You would have sworn that the writer had been born and brought up in a coffin (Poe, 2006: 191).*

The example shows how the subjects of terror suits the public demands. It also presents the writer as an expert of the field. Poe’s control of the public was also demonstrated in the fact that although the story of an early entombment was mentioned in his story published in 1838; Poe was acclaimed for his “Premature Burial” which appeared six years later. The quoted lines also prove that sensationalism described in his satire is not only used by rival magazine but also by Poe himself.

The idea of writing sensational horror tales as a means to attract the audience was developed more within the story. Mr. Blackwood explains to Zenobia how her misfortunes can bring her wealth if well painted; “Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations --- they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet” (Idem). This explanation is made as a “confession” that Poe’s miserable life episode (poverty, death of his wife...) could turn to his favor. In the story:



*Psyche Zenobia learns that the proper sensational subject (getting baked in an oven, stuck fast in a chimney, or choked to death by a chicken bone) and manner of narration (metaphysical, transcendental) can earn her a literary reputation and make her money (Goddu, 2004: 96-97).*

The short story “How to write a Blackwood Article” was an explanation of Poe’s use of violence and sufferings. It shows, under the guise of humor, that Poe was a manipulator of the public view who was also bound by the conventions of the marketplace. In “A Predicament”, Zenobia Psyche produces a story with the elements dictated by Mr. Blackwood. She demonstrates violence in the way that the clock hand decapitates her and in the astonishing death of her dog that was eaten by a rat. The use of mystification to appear intellectually superior was also a part of her story. In a manner similar to that used by Poe, she creates fictitious elements that she claims to be true to demonstrate her “fake” intelligence; “Touching circumstances! which cannot fail to bring to the recollection of the classical reader that exquisite passage in relation to the fitness of things, which is to be found in the commencement of the third volume of that admirable and venerable Chinese novel the Jo-Go-Slow” (Poe, 2006; 415). Here, she alludes to be a connoisseur of world’s literature by mentioning Chinese literature even if the work stated has no existence in reality. She also mentions the classical reader to associate herself with that category in the same way that Poe mentions analytic thinkers to be considered as one.

The Zenobia Psyche stories undertook similar methods to expose the deception hidden behind sensational literature. Poe cleverly explored the ingredients that

constitute a successful tales. His control over the readers' interpretations allowed him not to be detected. He directed their attention towards the criticized magazine and towards the comic touch of his tales to safely produce his hidden self satire.

## General Conclusion

Considering only one aspect of Edgar Allan Poe's life such as his works proves to be insufficient to get an idea about his personality. However, his readers fell blindly into the rumors and preconceived ideas that describe that mysterious figure. Many characteristics were generated by Poe himself to project a certain image that would guarantee him an everlasting prestigious position. In every aspect of his life, Poe controlled the public view with miscellaneous manipulative methods.

The style used by Poe in his stories seemed to be of a complex nature that prevented him from reaching a large audience. Besides, his rivalry with many important figures reduced his reputation to that of an alcoholic madman unable to produce serious pieces of literature. It caused Poe to continuously struggle to maintain his place among the leading American authors.

The constant financial difficulties encountered by Poe urged him to find ways to achieve quick gain. His gambling habits made his position even worse and serious measures had to be taken to grant him the necessary amounts of money. Edgar Allan Poe had financial difficulties, powerful enemies and a need for public recognition. In the main, Poe's literary talent was not sufficient to grant him the success that he wished to obtain.

Poe's jobs as a journalist, an editor and a publisher drew him closer to the public allowing him to detect the readers' tastes. He also recognized the two major branches of the public: the intellectuals and the common readers. Poe then initiated a series of manipulative techniques to control the public's view and interpretation.

Poe's most used method was mystification. As its name indicates, its aim is to puzzle the readers and to attract them to the writers trap. The act of mystification consisted mainly in controlling reality and fiction and blurring the line that separates the two elements. Poe's goal was to interchangeably use fact and fiction until his readers would not differentiate between the two. Poe wrote fictitious documents that he claimed to be true and in the same manner published actual facts and pretended that they were of his own imagination. By constantly duping the public, Poe maintained a position of power; he was the man who could outsmart all his contemporaries with a single hoax.

The reputation established by Poe during his lifetime was only a part of his plan, since he wanted to establish a recognition that would survive the test of time. His first step was to modify his biography as to be considered as a genius.

Poe's biography was first written by Henry Beck Hirst. His task was to provide readers with a detailed account of Poe's existence. However, Hirst was under Poe's command who provided him with most of the material to be contained in the biography. Most of those elements given by Poe were fictitious, created in such a way as to fix his reputation and present him as a great thinker. Poe's description was not crafted to present the truth but to project the image that Poe wanted to install in his audience's mind. That way, Poe controlled the public view and lured them into believing his claims.

Poe's portrait is a proof that his manipulation was applied at all levels. His daguerreotype image was modified and modeled to create a certain effect on readers. In fact, Poe had a considerable knowledge in the technological advancements of his time. The creation of the daguerreotype excited his interest

since that photographic process enabled a certain control on the portraits. Poe seized the opportunity to use the Daguerreotype process as another manipulative method. With the help of light and shadow effects, Poe modeled his photographs to suit the established beliefs that intelligence and character could be measured by physical features. Relying mainly on phrenology, Poe highlighted the areas of his skull that would give him the appearance of a poet. He also affirmed his racial position by filling the white Anglo-Saxon “standards”.

To highlight his position as a multitalented intellectual, Poe proudly exhibited his abilities to the public. Claiming a notable mastery of the art of cryptology, he challenged his contemporaries to solve any coded document he was sent. He achieved a certain financial gain and a good reputation with his deciphering abilities. Nevertheless, some of his victories were not the result of a ‘fair play’. Poe took up the identity of a mysterious man who presumably wrote complicated cryptograms. By doing so, Poe could easily solve his own puzzles and claimed that he was a master in the field. In the same manner, Poe intrigued his readers by his unusual knowledge of mesmerism. His tales of mysterious mesmeric episodes added to his image of a man with limitless knowledge.

Poe’s profession as a journalist was a means to reaching the public easily. His contact with readers led him to exercise his manipulation at will. Hence, he gained his reputation of a hoaxer. On many occasions, Poe published fallacious documents; letters and report that he claimed to be true.

The readers’ penchant for new discoveries led to the publication of one of Poe’s most famous hoaxes: “The Balloon Hoax”. Written in a serious and scientific tone, the article was immediately accepted by the public who considered it as an enormous “scoop”. Poe’s mention of scientific concepts and the attribution

of the fake discovery to a famous aeronaut added to the story's believability. Nevertheless, the report of the Balloon that crossed the Atlantic Ocean was nothing more than fiction. Poe took advantage of the surprise of the readers to claim that the effect attained was planned by the use of "Mystification".

Mystification was also used in the series of letters presumably written by a number of famous figures. The letters were intended to demonstrate Poe's talent of graphology. Poe analyzed the figures' character and wrote criticisms and gossip about them. Nevertheless, the letters used as a material for his study were fallacious. Once again, Poe attempted to dupe his audience and maintained his position of the superior intellect who easily outsmarts his contemporaries.

Poe's profession caused him to encounter a number of authors and editors who disliked him. He gained many enemies who were determined to ruin his reputation. Poe's answer was to write essays that denied his detractors' claim and restore his image of the analytic thinker. "The Philosophy of Composition" which was considered as only a description of the process of writing "The Raven" contained many elements that control the public interpretation. Other essays such as "Fifty Suggestions" also concealed manipulative methods used to defend the writer from his enemies' attacks and eventually counterattacking them by belittling their writing skills. Through his "justifications", Poe was able to remain on the scene and maintain his place among the greatest American Writers.

Poe implanted his deceptive techniques in his fiction as a means of establishing an everlasting reputation. His expertise in multiple fields, his analytic thinking and his scientific method were all present in his works. To demonstrate his wide knowledge in world's literature and philosophy, Poe started his writings with epigraphs. The citations accompanying his narratives and poems are derived from

miscellaneous sources, written in different languages. However, many of those introductory quotations were created by Poe who, imitating the writers' styles, duped the readers into believing in their authenticity.

In his acclaimed detective stories, Poe shifted from fallacious documents to real facts that he published under the guise of fiction. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", Poe bases his tales on the reports found in the *Philadelphia Saturday News and Literary Gazette*. He cleverly puts the true murders in a fictitious setting to pretend that the events were of his own creation. In "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", Poe presumably solved a case that the police were incapable of closing. With the distortion of true happenings, Poe established a considerable fame and was even considered as the father of the detective story.

The multiple methods of creating a sensational story made specifically for the market's demands were used by many writers. In an attempt to exclude himself from this category, Poe wrote two satirical tales that exposed some of his manipulative methods. His short stories "How to Write a Blackwood Article" and "A Predicament" turned the attention towards the mystification used by the Blackwood Edinburgh magazine to explain how sensationalism worked and how the public could easily be controlled to accept and acclaim the tales that suit their tastes. In the two tales, Poe applies a self satire but blurs the link between his person and his fiction by creating a main character that seems to be void of Poe's characteristics.

Throughout his life, Edgar Allan Poe exhibited a control over the public view. The image that he has today is the result of a series of manipulative techniques that created the myth of the misunderstood genius.

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**V. Software:**

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