

Collecting Poe

R. Eden Martin

I

Edgar Poe was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, the son of David and Eliza Poe.* The two young parents at that time were barely scratching out a living as actors. Eliza had first married (in 1802 at the age of 15) an actor named Hopkins, who died some three years after the marriage. Shortly thereafter, in March 1806, she married an aspiring actor in the same company — David Poe, the 22-year-old son of a Baltimore Revolutionary War hero.

* For basic biographic details on Poe's life, I rely primarily on Hervey Allen, *Israfel*, New York, 1934 (my grandfather I.J. Martin's copy); Arthur Hobson Quinn's extraordinarily-detailed *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, New York, 1941; and Kenneth Silverman's *Edgar A. Poe, Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*, New York, 1991.

For facts relating to first or early editions of Poe's books, we have, in addition to the biographies, Killis Campbell's "Poe Canon" in *The Mind of Poe*, New York, 1962 (reprint), the fascinating Heartman and Canny *Bibliography*, Hattiesburg, 1943, and BAL. Also, I have greatly benefited from the generous help of the



From *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1850. All images in this article are from the collection of R. Eden Martin.

distinguished Poe scholar, Professor Burton Pollin of Bronxville, NY, particularly with respect to the 1831 edition of Poe's *Poems*. Professor Pollin is editor of four volumes of the *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*.

The Poes had performed on stage in several Eastern cities, but by the time their second son, Edgar, was born in 1809, they had settled in Boston. David Poe was evidently an actor of modest talents, whose shyness and oddness of speech led to his occasionally being hissed by spectators and criticized in the press. Eliza was more talented, both as an actress and singer. After Edgar was born, Eliza resumed her acting career. But David's soon collapsed — due in part to lack of talent and in part to his periodic intoxication. Within months of Edgar's birth, David disappeared, abandoning his wife and children. A contemporary account stated that they "quarreled and parted." (Quinn, 44) As a result, Eliza, age 22, was left in a state of semi-impoverishment to support her small family.

In the fall of 1811, while she was performing in Richmond, VA, Eliza became seriously ill with an infectious fever. When she died in December 1811, Edgar was not quite three years old.

One of the Richmond ladies who had offered charitable help during Eliza's last illness was Frances Allan, the wife of a local businessman, John Allan. After Eliza's death, Frances took young Edgar into the Allan home and raised him.



Musings...

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When I worked as an archeologist at the Smithsonian Institution many years ago, I learned an important principle: the greatest discovery possible in archeology is that of an ancient city. The city, you see, contained the most complete representation of the civilization. Digging an ancient city-site provided the unveiling of the most comprehensive record of the people who built the city. In this regard, I think of Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890), the German archeologist who discovered and then excavated the ancient urban sites of Troy and Mycenae. His story is told in two fine historical novels, *Finding the Wall of Troy* by Susan Heuck Allen and *Greek Treasure* by Irving Stone.

But today, I am interested in the *living city*, where I find the archeological principle applicable: the greatest achievements of a people are concentrated in our urban centers. The city is home to the greatest art, the finest musical and theatrical performances, the most ambitious manufacturing and technological achievements, the most sophisticated architecture — both sacred and secular — the most important colleges and universities, the most complex and successful governments, and the most vital neighborhoods, where, if harmony fails, chaos reigns.

The future of a civilization depends on the health and progress of its cities. It is in the city where the rule of law, the hallmark of a constitutional government and the keystone for longevity for the American form of democracy, is most urgently tested. In an important new book, *Dark Age Ahead*, Jane Jacobs presents an important and compelling argument for the health and welfare of our cities, for the survival of civilization itself. The prospect is both “gloomy and hopeful,” she says.

A “Dark Age” is a “culture’s dead end,” Jacobs observes. It means the end of cultural and social patterns as known to the people who shaped their lives around these patterns. But it also constitutes a form of “mass amnesia,” as well, through which the culture and its meanings are lost to all but archeologists — and understood only in a limited way by them. Jacobs says it so well: “in North America we live in a graveyard of lost aboriginal cultures, many of which were decisively finished off by mass amnesia in which even the memory of what was lost was also

lost.” Jacobs’ concern is that, in our day “we show signs of rushing headlong into a Dark Age.”

It is instructive that the word “citizen,” a person, as my dictionary defines it, “owing loyalty to and entitled by birth or naturalization to the protection of a given state,” comes to us through Middle English and Norman French from the Old French word *cite*, meaning *city*. Citizenship is best defined and demonstrated as we live in peace, kindness, and mutual respect in the confines of the urban environment. It is obvious we must go to the Greek language to understand fully the meanings and close relationships of *city*, *citizen*, *civil*, and *civilization*. The words are bound in root meaning to that which serves as a buffer against any impending Dark Age — *civility*, public courtesy and private politeness binding a people in the spirit of community.

The greatest enemy of civility is — here I must use another Greek word — *hubris*, overbearing spiritual pride of individuals or groups of people. We see the *insolence*, the *outrage* (original Greek meanings) of *hubris* in unwise political, corporate, and religious leaders, in the inflated egos of entertainment and media personalities, in the pride of many in the intellectual community, among all drug lords and gang members, and in religious sects who proclaim truth singularly theirs.

I am a citizen of my city, Chicago. I accept all associated responsibilities that such citizenship brings. In so claiming and so fulfilling my citizenship with like-minded fellow citizens, I grasp what is greatest in American culture — protecting it, preserving it, enlarging it, and making it indelible in our common memory.

Robert Cotner
Editor

Beginning at the age of five, Edgar was sent to local Richmond schoolteachers. Then, in 1815, John Allan decided to open a branch of his commercial business in London. Thus, when young Edgar was seven, he began to attend boarding schools in or near London. In these schools, he studied Latin, became familiar with English literature, and visited the Allans on weekends and vacations. Young Edgar was close to Frances, but John Allan's regard for him was apparently more charitable than parental.

In the summer of 1819, caught in a general economic slump, Allan's trading firm collapsed, unable to pay its debts. The family returned to Richmond in 1820.

During the next several unsettled years, young Edgar continued his schooling at local private academies in Richmond. With other boys his age, he swam, skated, and, on at least one occasion, shot geese or ducks on the estate of Justice Bushrod Washington. By the age of 13, he was reading Latin and French texts. His schoolmaster later reported that his class was "reading Horace and Cicero's Orations in Latin and Homer in Greek." (Quinn, 83) He also took his initial steps in writing English verse. Indeed, he stated later that some of the poems in his first book had been composed at the age of 14. At one point, Mr. Allan showed a manuscript of Edgar's verses to his schoolmaster, apparently seeking his judgment as to the advisability of publication. Edgar was said by his classmates to have been highly competitive and eager for distinction. It was also said that he "hated a rival" — a characteristic evident in some of his later reviews of poetry written by notable American authors, such as Longfellow.

Although his new family never formally adopted him, young Edgar had so far been treated well by the Allans. Frances Allan loved him, and John Allan had provided him the necessities of life and seen to it that he had what passed for a good education. Yet as time passed, the relationship between Edgar and John Allan, a strict, self-made Scotsman, became what could most charitably be described as contentious. Edgar chose to go by the name "Poe," and often clashed with Allan, who in turn regarded him as ungrateful and sometimes untruthful.

Through one of his childhood friends, Rob Stanard, Edgar met Stanard's mother — Mrs. Jane Stanard, a woman of great beauty and warm disposition. Edgar came to idolize her, and she later became the inspiration for his great

poem, "To Helen." When she died at an early age in 1824 after a struggle with mental illness, he was heartbroken.

In February 1826, Edgar, aged 17, enrolled in the new University of Virginia, which had opened its doors one year earlier. He studied ancient and modern languages, excelling in Latin and French. His classics Professor required "during each period one hundred lines from Virgil or Thucydides to be read, followed by translations from Horace or some other author, Greek or Latin." (Quinn, 98) Edgar also read English poetry, as well as histories of the ancient world and of America. However, his financial problems, compounded by gambling debts and drinking, aggravated the already difficult relations between Edgar and John Allan. Hervey Allen, one of Poe's better biographers, excused the gambling by blaming Allan for inadequate support: "To pay his way, and even at various times to obtain food and fuel, Poe was thus reduced to the necessity of exploiting his credit in Charlottesville, and to playing cards for what he could make out of them." (Allen, 135-136, 144) By this time, Allen points out, John Allan had inherited a great deal of money and property, and could easily have afforded to support Edgar's continued education.

On the other hand, Edgar, according to one companion, "plunged [into gambling at cards] with a recklessness of nature which acknowledged no restraint...." Moreover, he did not tell Allan about the debts; and, indeed, he apparently tried to mislead Allan by causing tailors to issue bills for fictitious orders so that Edgar could then use the proceeds to reduce the debts. In any event, by the end of his first year, Edgar was about \$2,500 in debt. (Allen, 140-148)

Whether the fault was Allan's miserliness or Poe's dissipation, John Allan's patience was exhausted, and he refused to pay Poe's debts, thus pulling the financial plug on Edgar's university education. This led to further recriminations and estrangement. It also exposed Edgar to civil claims and the risk of imprisonment for unpaid debts. Allan might have been willing to support Edgar if he had been willing to enter a profession such as law, or engage in some other occupation deemed worthy by the tough Scottish businessman. But Poe wanted a literary career, and was unable or unwilling to bend his pride to the will of his no-

nonsense guardian. Following a violent quarrel and exchange of harsh letters with Allan, without money and lacking a job or any reason to remain in Virginia — and, indeed, risking service of process and further embarrassment if he did remain in Virginia — the 18-year-old Edgar Poe, using the alias Henri Le Rennet, in late March or early April 1827, managed to obtain passage on a sailing ship to Boston, the place of his birth. He took with him a few books and manuscripts.

II

During his academy years in Virginia before entering the university at Charlottesville, Edgar had devoted some of his spare time to writing verses. Apart from the manuscript of poems seen by his Richmond schoolmaster, other fragments of poetry from his academy years survived in John Allan's files and elsewhere. Also, Poe certainly continued to write during his year at the university in Charlottesville. Hervey Allen believed that "Tamerlane" took shape during that year.

Arriving in Boston in April 1827, without regular employment and with time on his hands, Edgar took a manuscript of his old poems to a young printer and new acquaintance named Calvin F.S. Thomas, who operated a small job printing shop on the corner of Washington and State Streets. It was probably in early May that Edgar arranged for him to print a 40-page booklet in drab yellow paper wrappers, entitled *Tamerlane and Other Poems*.

This first (and only) edition of *Tamerlane* was cheaply printed. The price of the pamphlet was set at 12½ cents, but few if any were sold. A few copies were sent to reviewers. Hervey Allen, whose biography was first published in 1926, writes that there were "said to have been forty or fifty copies at most." (Allen, 164) Heartman/Canny, in their *Bibliography*, published in 1943, write that there were "perhaps, two hundred copies." (Heartman/Canny, 14)

"Tamerlane," the title poem, was 406 lines long and purported to be about the ambitions and career of the warrior who was descended from the minister of the son of Genghis Khan. There were also nine much shorter poems. Poe kept his name off the title page, identifying himself only as "a Bostonian." Perhaps to help ward off possible criticism, he explained in a preface that most of the poems had been

written in 1821-22, “when the author had not completed his fourteenth year.”

None of the poems appearing in *Tamerlane* is among those on which Poe’s later reputation depends. Not surprisingly, these youthful works are largely imitative, reflecting the fascination with Byron then surging through the English-reading world. Allen opines that these poems “show us a sensitive boy with an innate sense of melody, [and] a surprising order of technique for one so young” (Allen, 65-66) If Poe was concerned about the possibly adverse reception of newspaper critics, he needn’t have worried. *Tamerlane* was mentioned without comment in a couple of literary magazines, but attracted no attention whatever from reviewers. It did, however, earn Poe his first mention in an anthology of American verse — Samuel Kettell’s *Specimens of American Poetry*, 1829.

In 1943 when their bibliography was published, Heartman/Canny believed there were only 12 copies still in existence. (Interestingly, half of those 12 copies had surfaced in the wake of an article by Vincent Starrett, “Have You a *Tamerlane* in Your Attic?” published in 1925.) Evidently no new copies turned up from 1943 to 1990, when Sotheby’s sold the Bradley Martin Library. The catalogue for the Martin library stated that only 12 copies were then known, and that the Martin copy was one of only two then in private hands; it also describes the book as “the most celebrated rarity in American literature.” (Item 2191) The Bradley Martin copy went for \$150,000 (not counting the charges of the auction house).

One of the 12 known copies was stolen from the University of Virginia library about 1974 and has not resurfaced.

One year after the Bradley Martin sale, Sotheby’s handled the sale of the Library of Richard Manney, in October 1991. This sale likewise included a copy of the first edition of *Tamerlane*, which sold for \$130,000.

The noted book dealer, Kevin MacDonald, of Austin, TX, believes that all 11 known copies (not counting the stolen copy) of the first edition are in institutional hands.

One would like to hope that another copy might someday appear. The trouble is that if it did, the odds of finding it in a dusty bookseller’s



bin somewhere are about the same as winning two multi-million dollar lotteries back to back.

The greater probability is that the copy you found would turn out to be a fake. A facsimile reprint produced in London in 1931 has led to all sorts of trouble in the book trade, in part because it contains no written indication on any of the pages stating that it is a reprint; instead, it contains only a number impressed on a page — but the number can be deleted with a moist forefinger. A few years later, another batch of facsimile copies was produced, which copies do not even contain the impressed number. (Heartman/Canny, 17-18)

So if you see what looks like a first edition of *Tamerlane* in a dustbin or the vault of a friendly bookseller, and it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

III

By the time *Tamerlane* appeared in May 1827, Edgar had enlisted in the army for a five-year term under the name “Edgar A. Perry.” It was a way to obtain shelter, clothing, and food. He was 18 years old, though he gave his age as 22.

For two years, Edgar served in the artillery — first, in Boston, and later at Fort Moultrie, Charleston Harbor, SC, and Fortress Monroe, VA. He then decided that, rather than continue his enlistment, he would apply for admission to West Point. This required that he hire an acceptable substitute without expense to the army.

In the meantime, Frances Allan’s health was failing. After extracting a promise of some kind from her husband to take care of Edgar, she died in late February 1829. Whether it was because of this promise or for some other reason, Allan gave his permission for Edgar to apply to West Point. With some fabrication of biographical details, Edgar, now 20, submitted his application in May 1829. By this time, his relationship with John Allan had become even further strained by the fact that the debts he had incurred at the university were now being presented to Allan for payment. Mrs. Allan’s death put the nail in the coffin of their relationship.

While awaiting admission to the Academy, Edgar polished up a long poem he had written some time earlier, probably during his stay at Fort Moultrie, and sent it to a leading Philadelphia publishing firm. Poe told the publishers that the poem, entitled “Al Aaraaf,” was a meditation on an Arabian purgatory between Heaven and Hell, “where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil & even happiness which they suppose to be the characteristic of heavenly enjoyment,” and he located this fictional place on a star discovered by Tycho Brahe in 1572, which had disappeared as suddenly as it appeared. (Quinn, 142) Allen summarizes the plot and architecture of the poem as “negligible, although the conception is poetic.” In his view, Poe poured into it “a wealth of imagination, lovely sound, and airy fancy that entitle the work, for such it is, to a higher consideration than it has ever received.” (Allen, 180)

The Philadelphia publisher rejected it (in part because John Allan refused to guarantee them against any loss); but in November 1829, Edgar persuaded a Baltimore firm, Hatch & Dunning, to print a pamphlet featuring the new poem.

Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems appeared in December 1829. A slender volume, it consisted of 72 pages. “*Tamerlane*” was substantially reworked and considerably shortened; and five of the other shorter poems, which had appeared in the earlier volume, were revised and included in this new book. “Al Aaraaf” appeared for the first time (though portions had previously been published in a Baltimore newspaper). And there were five new poems, including a “preface” which later

became "Romance," and also "Fairyland." Poe noted that "Tamerlane" had been printed in an earlier volume but wrote that it had been "suppressed through circumstances of a private nature," presumably referring to his own lack of resources and his inability to make arrangements for anyone to sell it. This time, he personally sent copies to editors for notice and possible review, and also took copies to at least one bookstore for sale to customers.

In contrast with *Tamerlane*, Edgar now allowed his name to appear on the title page as "Edgar A. Poe" — the "A." amounting to a grudging acknowledgment of his debt to, or at least continuing dependence on, John Allan.

Edgar's efforts were repaid by a few reviews. John Neal, in the *Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette* for December 1829, had read only extracts supplied by Poe in a pre-publication letter, but wrote that "with all their faults, if the remainder of *Al Aaraaf* and *Tamerlane* are as good as the body of the extracts here given, to say nothing of the more extraordinary parts, he will deserve to stand high — very high..." And a review in the *Ladies' Magazine*, published in Boston, said that, "A part are exceedingly boyish, feeble, and altogether deficient in the common characteristics of poetry; but then we have parts, and parts too, of considerable length, which remind us of no less a poet than Shelly (sic). The author, who appears to be very young, is evidently a fine genius, but he wants judgment, experience, tact."

The number of copies of *Al Aaraaf* is not known for sure; perhaps there were 250 copies. (Heartman/Canny, 25) It is known that Poe gave copies to old Richmond friends and college classmates. In 1933, a noted Poe scholar wrote that, "At present perhaps a score of copies are known. In addition to copies at Harvard, Yale, Peabody Institute, New York Public Library, Huntington Library, and the Poe Shrine, Messrs. Heartmann and Rede list a half dozen privately-owned copies in their recent census, and others unlocated." (Mabbott, Thomas Ollive, Bibliographical Note, in Edgar Allan Poe, *Al Aaraaf*, Facsimile Text Society, New York, 1933.)

The Bradley Martin Collection sold by Sotheby's in 1990 had a copy of *Al Aaraaf* as well as *Tamerlane*. It sold for \$55,000. Sotheby's reported then that there were "only

about twenty copies known." (item 2192) It did not provide a census.

IV

In the spring of 1830, Poe, age 21, succeeded in gaining admission to West Point. The story of his years at the Point is told by J. Thomas Russell, Associate Librarian of the Library at West Point, in "Edgar Allan Poe, The Army Years," USMA Library Bulletin No. 10, 1972. Older than most of his classmates, Edgar adapted well to academic life as a cadet and performed well in his classes. However, in other respects, his life was turbulent. The Librarian of West Point, in a foreword to Russell's study, summarized Poe's cadetship, from July 1830 to February 1831, as "short, yet tumultuous": "His emotional instability, coupled with deep personal problems, such as his constant need for funds and a lack of time to devote to poetry, more than his deficiency in military aptitude, cut short his cadetship." (Egon Weiss, Foreword, USMA LB No. 10)

West Point in 1830 was a small place — only six buildings facing the parade grounds. The Superintendent of the Academy at the time was Lt. Colonel Sylvanus Thayer. The cadet corps numbered only 232. Of the 67 members in his class, Poe ranked third in French at the end of the first semester, and 17th in math.

Frances Allan's death a year earlier now led to a complete severance of relations between Edgar and John Allan. With his wife gone and no legitimate children, John Allan acknowledged responsibility for new-born twins born to another woman. This meant he now had heirs. To make matters even worse (from Edgar's standpoint), in October 1830, when Edgar was in his first fall at West Point, John Allan remarried. (The woman was not the mother of his twins.) Allan went so far as to designate the twins as recipients of not-otherwise-committed funds in his estate. The birth of the twins and Allan's remarriage seem to have eliminated any remaining doubt from Edgar's mind as to whether he would inherit anything from Allan. From now on, Edgar "Allan" Poe was financially on his own.

In early January 1831, Edgar wrote Allan a bitter letter complaining of lack of support and other mistreatment, and notifying Allan of his intent to resign from the Academy. In order to

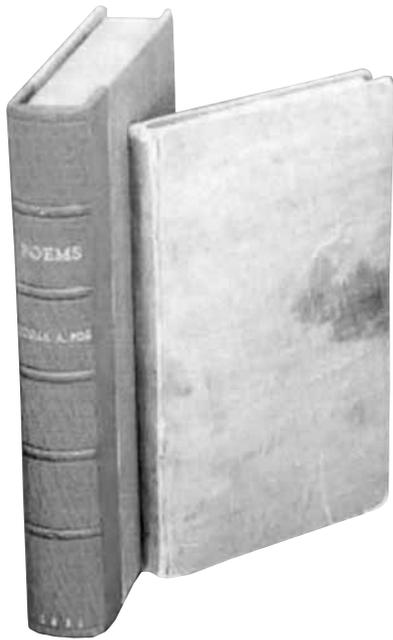
receive some remaining pay due him, he needed Allan's permission as his nominal guardian. Allan declined to send his permission or respond in any way, noting on the back of the letter that, "I do not think the Boy has one good quality," and, "I cannot believe a word he writes. His letter is the most barefaced one sided statement."

Despairing of any future help from Allan and faced with expenses he could not cover, Edgar Poe found himself on the West Point infractions list with increasing regularity. By the beginning of 1831, he had more offenses than any other cadet and was subjected to a general courtmartial for neglect of duty (unexcused absences) and disobedience of orders. Poe did not try to defend himself — and, indeed, he probably committed at least some of the offenses in order to get himself dismissed. In any event, he was found guilty and dismissed from the Academy as of March 6, 1831. He was a few days short of 22 years old.

Although the court martial occurred at the end of January 1831, Edgar's dismissal did not take effect for over a month. During that interval, Poe persuaded 131 of the 232 cadets to put up \$.75 each to subscribe to a new book of his poems. The money was withheld from the cadets' paychecks by the Treasurer of the Academy. Cadet Poe had in the past amused his colleagues by issuing "pasquinades and diatribes in rhyme upon the officers and faculty which were clever enough both to amuse and to annoy." (Allen, 228) The cadets evidently expected more of the same in return for their subscriptions.

In mid-February 1831, with the subscription money in hand, Poe headed for New York. Poe had no job and no other resources; it is not known how he survived. He wrote a remarkable letter to the Superintendent of West Point (who had just discharged him) saying that he intended to go to Paris with the intention of obtaining the Marquis de La Fayette's help in obtaining an appointment to the Polish Army; and he [Poe] wanted the Superintendent to give him a certificate of "standing" that would help him receive such an appointment. The Superintendent apparently never responded.

But somehow Poe did make arrangements for a New York publisher, Elam Bliss, to print this third volume of his poems, which he dedicated "To the U.S. Corps of Cadets."



then known. (Heartman/Canny, 36) Because the two earlier volumes are so scarce and because most surviving copies of those two volumes are owned by institutions, this may be the earliest volume of Poe's work it is now possible for a collector to acquire.

Entitled simply *Poems* but labeled "second edition," this new volume appeared in April 1831 and was essentially a new collection. It was a small duodecimo, 6 ¾ by 3 ¾ inches, consisting of 124 pages, bound in green cloth, and contained 11 poems: (a) a further revised version of "Tamerlane"; (b) a revised version of "Al Aaraaf," as well as three other poems from the 1829 volume; and (c) six altogether new poems — including an early version of one of his masterpieces, "To Helen," written not to a girl friend but to the memory of the mother of his childhood friend:

*Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfum'd sea,
The weary way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.*

*On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the beauty of fair Greece
And the grandeur of old Rome.*

These latter two lines were later semi-perfected to:

*To the glory that was Greece
To the grandeur that was Rome.*

Still later, the last line was finally perfected to:

And the grandeur that was Rome.

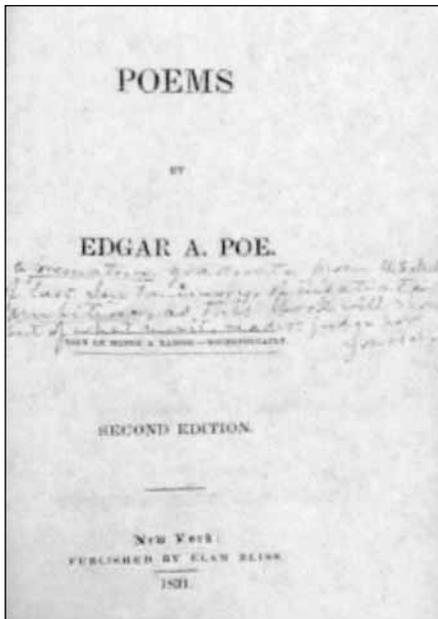
Quinn calls the final version a "magnificent phrase" that has "become an ornament to the language." (Quinn, 178)

The 1831 *Poems* also included "Israfel," "The Doomed City" (an early version of "The City in the Sea"), "Irene" (an early version of "The Sleeper"), and "The Valley Nis" (an early version of "The Valley of Unrest"). These poems are as fine as any Poe ever wrote.

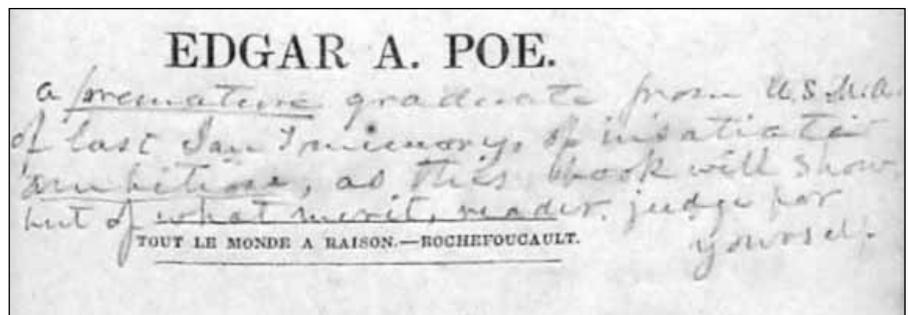
The volume also contains a prefatory letter to Mr. ___ (addressed as "Dear B.," perhaps Elam Bliss, the publisher) setting forth an early version of Poe's theory of poetry, in which he adopted the Coleridgean view that the object of poetry is beauty and pleasure, achieved through the creation of "indefinite sensations," rather than moral instruction ("So live that when thy summons comes to join the innumerable caravan ..."). It is the earliest of his critical prose pieces to be printed.

Why did he call this little volume a "second edition"? It did reprint two poems that had appeared earlier (albeit in revised form). But the second volume, *Al Aaraaf*, had also included the prior poem, "Tamerlane," and he had seen no need to label it a "second edition." Poe himself had earlier referred to the fact that "Tamerlane" had been "suppressed" by circumstances. Probably, as Sotheby's speculated in their Bradley Martin catalogue, Poe considered the "suppressed" first book (unlike the second) to have been "printed but not published." (See also Heartman/Canny, 35)

In any event, this third volume included the six new poems, and also the new critical essay, as well as revisions of the earlier material — which makes it, in Heartman/Canny's opinion, "a true first edition" (p. 35), and, "in many respects ... his first of literary value." (p. 36) Poe's biographer, Silverman, likewise points out that this new volume "marks a new self-consciousness and heightened power of imagination and language." (Silverman, 69)



Although 131 cadets had subscribed, the number of copies actually printed is not recorded. Heartman/Canny believed in 1943 that "probably not more than 500 were printed," and that about a dozen copies were



The West Point librarian reports a tradition that, when Poe's fellow cadets received their copies in the spring of 1831, many of them felt duped by their subscription, having expected humorous poems at the expense of their officers or fellow cadets, and that many hurled their thin volumes into the Hudson River. If true, this helps explain why so few apparently survived.

My copy was apparently given at the time to a non-contributing cadet, an upper classman named Daniel Powers Whiting, of New York. He in turn presented it to "Mr. and Mrs. Whiting" with his "greeting." Probably these were his parents. He wrote on one of the inside pages the following note: "This thing may afford you some amusement. It was a present to me, but the price was ten shillings." (Underscoring in the original.) Cadet Whiting was clearly not one of the admirers of Poe's work.

On the title page, Cadet Whiting made a further notation under the name "Edgar A. Poe": "a premature graduate from U.S. M.A. of last Jan. Testimony [?] of insatiable ambition, as this book will show, but of what merit, reader, judge for yourself." Fortunately, Poe's classmate did not consign his copy to the Hudson, but contented himself with these unfriendly allusions to Poe's "thing" and to his "insatiable ambition."

Poe's biographer Quinn reports that there was only one contemporary written description of Poe by a West Point colleague, who wrote a letter to his mother about Poe. (Quinn, 171) Cadet Whiting's contemporary notations on Poe's volume of poetry, although brief, are thus a remarkably early reference both to Poe, then 22, and to his book by one who knew him well enough to know of his "insatiable ambition" and the circumstances of his "premature" departure from West Point.

This third volume attracted only slightly more attention than his two earlier books. The *New York Mirror* gave it a one-page notice in early May 1831; and the *Philadelphia Casket* gave it similarly short shrift a week later. (Campbell, Killis, *The Mind of Poe and Other Studies*, New York, 1961, p. 39; Heartman/Canny, 36) The anonymous reviewer in the *Mirror* opined that "everything in the language betokens poetic inspiration," though he also remarked on its "general indefiniteness" and its "numerous obscurities."

This is not the place for a summary of the way modern critics have appraised Poe's 1831 volume. Suffice it to say that they have been far more generous than Poe's West Point classmates. Quinn concludes that "the volume of 1831 gave us in 'To Helen,' 'Israfel,' 'The Doomed City,' 'The Valley Nis,' and 'Irene,' poetry of a kind that had not yet been written in the English language."

V

Shortly after his new volume was published in New York in the spring of 1831, Edgar left for Baltimore, the original home of his real father (whom he had never known). Proving the aptness of Frost's later aphorism, it turned out to be the only place where they "had to take him in." He stayed initially with his Aunt Maria Clemm, the sister of his deceased father, who barely supported herself by sewing. Aunt Maria also had a daughter who lived with her, Virginia Clemm, then age 9.

As Poe's biographers have pointed out, the picture of how Poe spent the three-and-one-half years following the appearance of *Poems* is almost blank. (Allen, 258-277, 299; Silverman, 85) His poverty was extreme. His biographer, Allen, says that he used opium from time to time but probably abstained from liquor. At one point, he was arrested for debt. We know he continued to write poems because a few appeared in the newspapers and others were written in the albums of young women in Baltimore.

He also turned to writing short stories for newspapers and magazines, no doubt believing they would pay better than poems. Verses paid nothing, or next to it. American novels were almost driven from the market by the ability of American publishers to publish English books, or translations of French or German works, without having to pay for copyrights.

Hoping to win \$100 in contest prize money for the best short story, Edgar submitted five of his stories to the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*. Although none of his stories won the prize, the newspaper published them all. The first that is definitely known to be Edgar's, "Metzengerstein," appeared in January 1832, shortly before his 23rd birthday.

By the spring of 1833, he had gathered enough of these stories to think about publishing them in a volume he tentatively

called "Eleven Tales of the Arabesque." (A fragment of this title survives in what later turned out to be his first book of short stories.) He submitted six of these tales in a contest sponsored by a Baltimore newspaper, calling the complete group "The Tales of the Folio Club." One of these, "MS. Found in a Bottle," won a prize of \$50, and appeared in the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*, October 19, 1833. (Its first appearance in a book occurred two years later, in E.L. Carey's *The Gift* for 1836, which earned him about \$2 per page.) The three judges rendered their judgment that the several tales submitted by Poe "are eminently distinguished by a wild, vigorous, and poetical imagination, a rich style, a fertile invention, and varied and curious learning." (Allen, 282) One of the judges was a Baltimore author named John P. Kennedy, who became a friend and important supporter of Poe.

In August 1834, Thomas W. White started a new literary magazine in Richmond, called the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Poe's new friend Kennedy provided a reference to White. By early 1835, White was receiving literary advice from Poe, along with manuscripts of tales and book reviews. The reviews were generally harsh critical attacks. The stories were sensational stuff, lurid and grotesque, bearing some resemblance to German romantic fiction, with its emphasis on the horrible or the supernatural — just what the public of the day wanted. They include "Berenice" (the first to appear in the *Messenger*), "King Pest the First," "Lionizing," and "Morella." Silverman observes that in these tales, Poe showed a talent for technical innovation, the use of alliteration and rhythm, and was "becoming the first writer in English, or perhaps in any modern literature, to consistently apply to prose fiction some of the techniques of poetry." (Silverman, 113) By the fall of 1835, Poe was in Richmond working for the magazine as a junior staff member. He was also drinking.

In September 1835, Poe seems to have married his first cousin, Virginia Clemm, the 13-year-old daughter of the Aunt Maria, with whom he had lived for a time in Baltimore. I say "seems to have" because one of Poe's leading biographers, Arthur Quinn, believes it never happened. However, other biographers believe it did. One of the early biographers even identified the date of the marriage, the church, and the preacher who united them. (Quinn,

228) More important, even Quinn acknowledges that a license was issued in Maryland for Poe's marriage to Virginia.

A second wedding ceremony with Virginia (who was now three months shy of 14) took place in May 1836, in Richmond. Allen thinks that Poe had been soliciting aid for Virginia and her mother from Poe relatives, and had done so without telling the relatives that he and Virginia were married (which would have made him, not them, responsible for providing support); and he now needed a way to disclose the marriage relationship without admitting that his earlier solicitations had been based on less than full disclosure.

Poe's work as writer and assistant editor must have been one of the causes for the expansion of the circulation of the *Messenger*. During 1835 alone, he contributed nine tales, four poems, and dozens of reviews. Indeed, it was as a critic and reviewer that Poe was most widely read and best-known among literate readers of the decades of the 30s and 40s. But his work habits and his alcoholism, compounded perhaps by illness, led to a rupture with White. In the fall of 1836, Poe's contributions fell off sharply. By the end of the year, White had decided he would have to let Poe go. The January 1837, issue of the *Messenger* contained an announcement that Poe had "retired" as editor. A few years later, Poe explained that as his career at the *Messenger* was coming to a close, he had "given way, at long intervals, to the temptation held out on all sides by the spirit of Southern conviviality." (Allen, 329)

During 1836, while Poe's job at the *Messenger* was becoming steadily shakier, he had begun working on a novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Though founded on fact, this was Poe's first long story, and became his first book of fiction. Like the earlier short stories, it was a sensational stew — full of catastrophe, cannibalism, and horror. The long title as it later appeared on the title page constitutes a fair advertisement for the work: "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym ... comprising the details of a mutiny and atrocious butchery on board the American Brig *Grampus* ... with an account of the recapture of the vessel by the survivors, their shipwreck and subsequent horrible sufferings ... their deliverance ... and [then the subsequent] capture, and the massacre of her crew ...

together with the incredible adventures and discoveries still farther south to which that distressing calamity gave rise."

Silverman picks out one nice episode to illustrate the content and style. Pym is on a boat in the ocean, starving. He sees a distant ship, which may save him. As the ship approaches, the hero sees sailors on the deck who seem to offer cheer and hope. But as the ship comes closer, he sees a deck full of corpses. The sailor who seemed to be offering encouraging nods is a corpse draped over the rail, with a sea-gull gorging on its back, causing the nodding motions: "The eyes were gone, and the whole flesh around the mouth, leaving the teeth utterly naked. This, then, was the smile which had cheered us on to hope!"

As Poe was departing from, or being fired from, the *Messenger* in late 1836, the owner, White, agreed to publish the Pym narrative in the magazine by installments. He paid Poe \$3 per page for the installments that appeared in the January and February 1837 issues.

During the following two years, Poe again drops almost entirely out of sight. We know that he took his young wife and her mother off to live in New York, where they remained perhaps a little over a year. While he was there, he finished *Pym* and arranged for Harpers to publish it as a book.

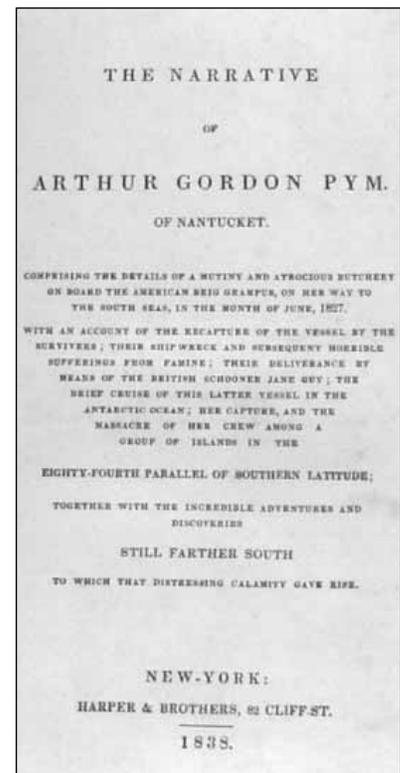
We also know he continued to write, publishing a couple of tales in literary magazines. Sometime in the summer of the next year, 1838, the little group moved to Philadelphia, where he somehow continued to eke out a living. He also made the final revisions to the *Pym* narrative, and edited the proofs.

Not long after the Poe family moved to Philadelphia, probably in late July 1838, *The Narrative Of Arthur Gordon Pym* appeared in book form, bound in black and dark blue cloth with a printed paper label on the spine. The number of copies printed is not known. My copy is missing the paper spine label. An English edition was published later in the year. The English publisher evidently found the ending too incredible, and simply ended the book by noting that it was here that the fictitious narrative had "broken off." (For information about *Pym* and its background, see Burton R. Pollin, editor, Vol. I of *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, The Imaginary*

Voyage: The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Boston, 1981.)

Poe's name did not appear on the title page, though his name was mentioned in the Preface as having edited the manuscript. Some of the reviewers were not sure what this meant. Was the manuscript legitimate? Did it record real events? And was Poe's role limited to editing the manuscript? Or, on the other hand, was the entire text a work of Poe's imagination? And if the latter, was the form of the work, including the Preface, an artistic device — or was it intended to deceive readers into thinking that the manuscript and story were real?

Reviewers were all over the lot. At least one thought Poe had edited a real manuscript. A few others thought he had perpetrated a hoax.



But most treated the work as one of fiction, and were complimentary. The *New-Yorker* called it "a work of extraordinary, freezing interest beyond anything we have read" Because Poe's name didn't appear on the title page, and because of the confusion over whether the book was a work of fiction, Poe probably didn't receive as much personal credit as he might otherwise. It is certain that he made little money

on the project. He later brushed it off as “a very silly book.” (Allen, 379)

VI

Through the remainder of 1838 and into 1839, Poe continued to struggle to make enough through literary odd jobs in Philadelphia to support Virginia and her mother (his aunt). It may have been during this period that he tried to learn lithography. He also continued to submit literary filler to magazines.

One very odd project that Edgar undertook was to help Thomas Wyatt compile *The Conchologist's First Book*, a text book on various families and types of shell fish, complete with page after page of detailed descriptions and pictures. Poe's principal role was to serve as a front for Wyatt, the author of an earlier similar book on conchology, published by Harper's, which refused to give him permission to publish a cheap (\$1.75) edition that would compete with their more expensive version. Wyatt avoided the effect of Harper's refusal by adapting a text originally written by a Thomas Brown and published in Glasgow in 1833. He tried to cover his tracks by identifying Poe as the author and stating on the title page that the

shell animals were “arranged ... according to Cuvier ...” Poe's bibliographers describe the new text as “largely stolen” from Brown's earlier book. (Heartman/Canny, 43) Poe's recent biographer Silverman defended Poe, calling the plagiarism attack an “empty charge.” (Silverman, 334) However, Silverman did not mention the Brown book, from which pictures were copied and part of the text was taken verbatim.

The Wyatt/Poe “adaptation” was printed by the Philadelphia firm of Haswell, Barrington, and Haswell, “for the author ... for sale by the principal booksellers in the United States.” The book appeared in April 1839. The number of copies of the first edition is unknown. The first edition had three variants: one in vari-colored boards with plates in colors; one like the first except with plain plates; and a third like the second except with larger page size. Mine is the first of these variants.

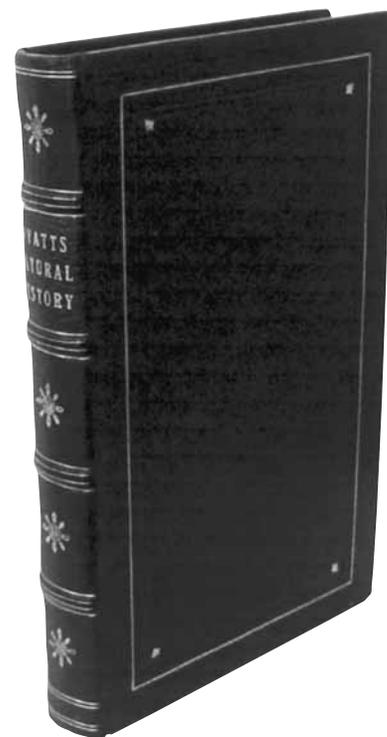
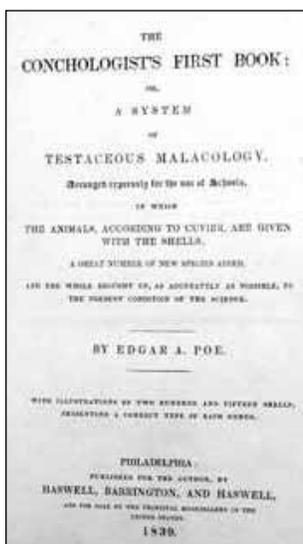
Poe's name appeared on the title page as the author, and he contributed a two-page preface, in which he acknowledged his “many obligations” to Thomas Wyatt and his earlier work. For helping Wyatt publish this book — and avoid his copyright problems — Poe reportedly received \$50. (BAL 16131; see Ostrom, *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1948, 343)

Years later, *The Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post* accused Poe of plagiarism in connection with this work. When Poe was told about the charge by a friend, he responded by letter that it was “totally false”: “I assure you it is totally false ... I wrote the Preface and Introduction and translated from Cuvier, the accounts of the animals, etc. All

schoolbooks are necessarily made in a similar way. The very title-page acknowledges that the animals are given ‘according to Cuvier.’ This charge is infamous and I shall prosecute for it as soon as I settle my accounts with the ‘Mirror.’” (Heartman/Canny, 44) However, he never prosecuted the case. Silverman says (p. 335) that he “decided the matter was not actionable.”

It seems ironic that the first book of prose in which Poe's name appears on the title page as author is a textbook on conchology. It is doubly ironic that this is the only volume of Poe's that went into a second edition in the United States during his lifetime. The irony is further compounded when one remembers that one of Poe's favorite critical arrows aimed at authors he did not like, such as Longfellow, was the accusation of plagiarism.

Within about three months of the appearance of the conchology text, another book appeared, in which Poe almost certainly had a hand, but was not identified as the author. Entitled *A Synopsis of Natural History*,

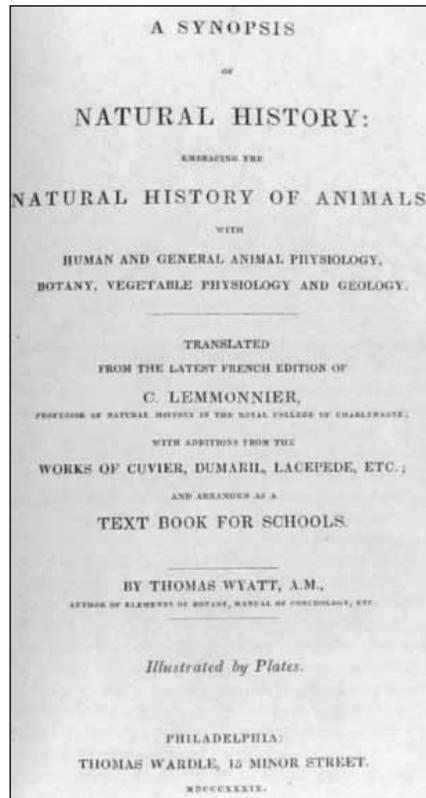


the title page said it was translated from the French edition of "C. Lemmonnier, by Thomas Wyatt." This is, of course, the same Thomas Wyatt whom Poe helped with respect to the conchology text. The title page adds that in addition to "Lemmonnier," this new "Synopsis" included additions from "Works of Cuvier" and others (the same Cuvier whom Poe used to defend himself against plagiarism in the case of the conchology text). This second natural history text was also printed in Philadelphia. Some copies had colored plates; others were plain. My copy has the colored plates, but is rebound.

Poe's name nowhere appears on the title page or anywhere else. Yet he later allowed statements to appear in biographical sketches of his life to the effect that he was "the author ... of a digest and translation of Lemmonnier's Natural History." He also wrote a book notice of the work, in which he said it preserved the spirit of the original "and this we say from personal knowledge, and the closest inspection and collation." Wyatt himself later stated that he had engaged Poe to assist in the compilation of "several works" on natural history. Heartmann/Canny conclude (p. 46) that, "From all this it seems clear that Poe was what we should now call the ghost writer of Wyatt's Natural History, probably having as much to do with it as with the *Conchologist's Book*, to which his name is attached." (Emphasis supplied.) They add that he had "probably the lion's share" in writing the book. Interestingly, however, Heartmann/Canny appear not to have made the "Wyatt connection" between the conchology text and the Natural History, a connection which strengthens even further the inference that Poe worked on the latter as well as the former, where he was shown as the author.

Oddly, though BAL relies on Heartman/Canny, it does not include or notice this *Synopsis of Natural History* in the section on Poe's works. Neither Quinn nor Silverman even mentions it in their biographies.

Allen in *Israfil* does mention it. Allen quotes a letter from Poe to a friend saying that he had "two important affairs" underway in September 1838. Allen identifies one of them as *The Conchologist's First Book*. He also says that the other "important affair" cannot "be definitely stated." (Allen, 355) He then



goes on to refer to the fact that Poe had been credited elsewhere with the translation and digest of Lemmonnier's *Natural History* that was published in the Spring of 1839 under Wyatt's name, but brushes such crediting aside. As to Poe's later statement in which he refers to his "personal knowledge" based on "the closest inspection and criticism," Allen concludes: "This simply means that, at the time, he and Wyatt were working on the *Conchology*, the latter was also translating Lemmonnier, and Poe perhaps occasionally helped." (Allen, 357)

But why could he not have provided more than "occasional" help? Would Poe have regarded "occasional" help in editing or translating the *Natural History* text as an "important affair" – in the same class as his work on *Conchology*? Why could this not have been the second of the two "important affairs" Poe had underway in September 1838? When Wyatt referred later to having engaged Poe to work on "several works" of natural history, why could this not have been one of them? And if it wasn't, to what other work of natural history could he have been referring?

VII

In June 1839, Poe's fortunes took a turn for the better. He began to work for an Englishman, a Philadelphia theater manager and publisher named William Evans Burton, who in 1838 had

begun to publish *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. Poe's role was to serve as an "assistant editor." This gave him a modest steady income as well as the chance to publish critical reviews and various literary ephemera. In addition, he contributed to *Burton's* two of his great horror tales, "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson."

Allen writes that, "To come across Poe's work suddenly in *Burton's* is like finding a sonnet by Michelangelo in a bizarre scrapbook." (Allen, 364)

Working for Burton left Poe time to bring out the collection of tales on which he had been working since 1834. He arranged for publication by the Philadelphia firm of Lea and Blanchard, and called the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. The 25 tales, including some published years earlier in journals, gift books or newspapers, as well as some published more recently, comprised 500 pages in two volumes bound in purple cloth. The two volumes appeared in the late fall of 1839, but with an 1840 date on the title page. The publisher's records indicate that there were only 750 copies. (BAL, 16133. But see Quinn, 287-88, where he says there were 1750 copies.) Poe's only compensation was the receipt of a "few copies for distribution among [his] friends."

Silverman calls this collection, with the exception of Hawthorne's earlier *Twice-Told Tales*, "The most powerfully imagined and technically adroit collection of short fiction ever published by an American writer." (Silverman, 154) Reviewers at the time were similarly enthusiastic. (Campbell, 49-50) Silverman counts 20 reviews; and although there were a few bad ones, mostly from Boston, reviewers generally found the tales well written and entertaining. One typical example: "To say we have read this production attentively is not enough. We have studied it ... He has placed himself in the foremost rank of American writers." (Silverman, 155)

VIII

Despite his relative success with *Burton's* through 1839 and the publication of his first book of tales at the end of that year, Poe was not satisfied. Perhaps he couldn't stand success. By the spring of 1840, Poe was

planning to publish a rival magazine to compete with *Burton's*. Burton found out about it, which led to a rupture in their relationship.

In June 1840, Poe issued a "prospectus" seeking capital for the proposed new magazine, to be called "The Penn Magazine." This prospectus appears as a separate item for Poe in BAL, 16134. Heartman/Canny knew of only one copy of this prospectus in 1943 (p. 57). There were also later versions, slightly changed. In his prospectus, Poe makes it clear that his subject would be literature, and his aim would not be to teach, but "to please; and this through means of versatility, originality and pungency."

Unfortunately, Poe never raised the needed capital. The combination of illness and periodic intoxication evidently got in the way. At one point, in the fall of 1840, Poe paid a visit to Nicholas Biddle, former president of the Second Bank of the United States and a distinguished civic leader of Philadelphia, asking for his help. At that time, he gave Biddle a presentation copy of the recently published *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. (I had a chance to buy that copy in 1992 for \$65,000 and turned it down. Big mistake.)

In 1840 Burton sold his magazine to a young Philadelphian named George Graham, who merged it with a magazine he already published, calling the new magazine *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*. Having failed to get his own new magazine off the ground, and badly in need of money, Poe went to work for Graham in February 1841 as an editor and critic. He also submitted occasional stories, for which he was paid extra. Graham started with about 5,000 subscribers. Within a few months, his circulation had increased to over 37,000 — no doubt in part due to Poe's editorial and writing talents — making his magazine the largest monthly in the world. As Allen concludes, "It was then an unprecedented triumph in the field of journalism." (Allen, 384, 388)

In his reviews of works of eminent authors such as Hawthorne and Longfellow, Poe developed more fully the critical theory he had initially laid out a decade earlier in his 1831 *Poems*. He also published a few poems. Far more important, in the April 1841 issue of *Graham's*, he published "The Murders in the

Rue Morgue," the first of his "stories of ratiocination," as Poe called them. It was one of his most famous short stories; and although it was not the first "detective story" (as is sometimes asserted), it was apparently the first where the detective solved the crime by analysis rather than guessing. Here is a picture of the first page of the story in *Graham's*.

Two years later, Poe republished "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," together with "The Man That Was Used Up," in a little pamphlet entitled *The Prose Romances*, "No. 1," Philadelphia, 1843. This was to have been the first in a series of inexpensive numbers of Poe's prose tales, but the project failed because of lack of sales. Poe sold this first and only pamphlet for 12 ½ cents. It is thus the first separate edition of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Only 14 copies are known today — of which only three survive in the original printed wrappers. (Sotheby's Bradley Martin Catalogue, 2204) I must be content with the version as it first appeared in print, in *Graham's* in April 1841.

Poe liked working for Graham somewhat better than he had for his predecessor, Burton. The problem was that he didn't really like working for anybody. He did not like the constraints, and he didn't believe he was paid enough. So, after 13 months on Graham's staff, he resigned in April 1842. There was a certain imprudence in this, since he did not have another position, and the prospects for the new

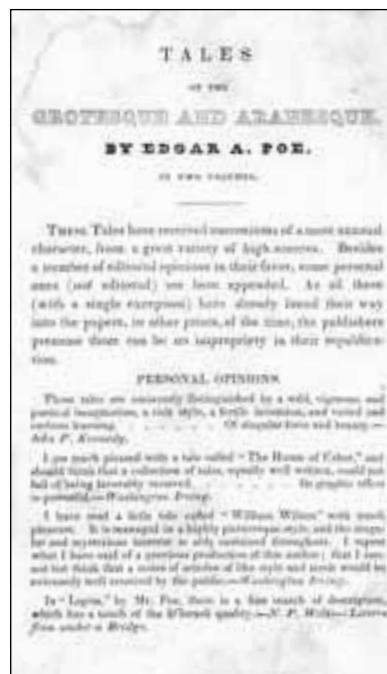
magazine he still hoped to publish were slight. Worse, his young wife Virginia had begun to show early signs of tuberculosis.

Poe spent the remainder of 1842 and much of 1843 worrying about his wife. He also experienced illness or the after-effects of intoxication much of the time, and tried sporadically to start up his new magazine or get a government sinecure. Neither of these latter efforts was successful. He published a few pieces in Philadelphia magazines and newspapers, and a few more in a new Boston literary magazine published by the young James Russell Lowell, including "The Tell-Tale Heart," in January 1843. But Lowell's magazine was soon out of business, the victim of too much competition and too much debt. Poe also won \$100 in a contest for "The Gold-Bug," a story about the decoding of a cipher, which leads to the discovery of a great treasure buried by Captain Kidd. The newspaper, which sponsored the contest, ran extra printings to meet the demands of its readers.

In April 1844, Poe and his wife moved to New York City. He churned out unimaginative pieces for newspapers, along with items of "Marginalia," mostly comments on books or articles he had read. He also got a part-time job working for the *New York Evening Mirror*, in which he managed to get printed some of the short stories and one or two poems he had written earlier in Philadelphia. Some were written after the move, such as "The Oblong Box" and "The Purloined Letter." However, Poe — who was now living on the economic edge and whose wife was seriously ill — had become more despondent than ever about his future.

IX

On January 29, 1845, a publishing event occurred which changed all that. The *Evening Mirror* printed on its back page Poe's new poem, "The Raven." Poe, now 36, had been working on it for years, though it had not taken final form until after the move to New York. Silverman writes that its reception might be compared today to that of an "uproariously successful hit song." (Silverman, 237) Newspaper after newspaper republished it. This is one time that immediate critical acclaim and popular success went hand in hand.



Where and when “The Raven” first appeared is subject to debate. There is no doubt that it appeared in the *Evening Mirror* on January 29, 1845. Poe’s name appeared on that version. But the poem also appeared in the 2nd issue of *The American Review*, about the same time. During this period of late January and early February, Poe was still making changes to the text. In *The American Review* issue, Poe used the pseudonym “Quarles,” in keeping with the practice of the magazine’s editors to publish poems either anonymously or with pseudonyms. The issue in question was set in type in January. It bore the month “February 1845,” but a notice to subscribers to the *Review* stated that it would in fact “be issued early in January.” But was it? A notice stating that it was intended to be issued in January does not mean that it actually was. And when it was set in type is not controlling. What is important is when it first appeared. A note in the *Evening Mirror* of January 29 says, “We are permitted to copy (in advance of publication) from the 2d No. of *The American Review*” Poe’s poem. Book dealers tend to argue the case depending on which version they have for sale at the moment.

In February 1845, not long after the appearance of “The Raven,” Poe — never one to stay in one place too long — left Willis’ *Mirror* to work for a new weekly, the *Broadway Journal*. Within the first few months of his employment, he not only assisted in editing the issues and writing new reviews, but reprinted about 40 of his previously-written stories, often with revisions. In some cases, these publications represented not just second, but third or fourth appearances of the stories. He also carried on his critical attacks on Longfellow’s poetry. Longfellow declined to respond publicly.

Longfellow did not take Poe’s criticism personally. He had responded generously to a letter from Poe in May 1841, saying: “[A]ll that I have read from your pen has inspired me with a high idea of your power; and I think you are destined to stand among the first romance-writers of the country, if such be your aim.” (Quinn, 317) Eight years later, after Poe’s death, Longfellow wrote to a friend of his “high appreciation of [Poe’s] powers as a

prose-writer and a poet... The harshness of his criticisms, I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature, chafed by some indefinite sense of wrong.” (Quinn, 655)

By October, as a result of a net of tangled circumstances, Poe managed to take control of the *Broadway Journal*. The total cost was little — some \$50 up front, and a note to pay \$100 in the future. Poe hoped that this magazine might become the place where the best American writing might appear. But with no capital and little help, the venture was doomed. Within three months, the magazine was dead.

However, the year 1845 was far from a total loss. Perhaps encouraged by the reception of “The Raven,” Poe sought to arrange for publication of separate collections of his stories and his poems.

The stories were the first to appear. Working with an editor, Evert Duyckinck, who represented the New York publishers, Wiley and Putnam, Poe agreed to the publication of a dozen of the 70 or so stories that had previously appeared in journals or newspapers. Unlike the earlier *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, which had focused on his horror stories, this

selection focused on Poe’s psychological and detective tales, and included such classics as “The Black Cat,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Gold Bug,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “Mystery of Marie Roget,” and “The Purloined Letter.”

The book, entitled simply *Tales*, was part of Wiley and Putnam’s “Library of American Books.” It appeared in June 1845, and copies

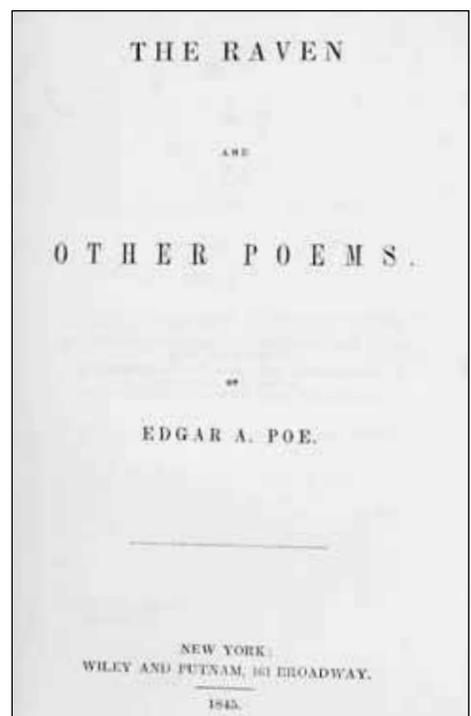
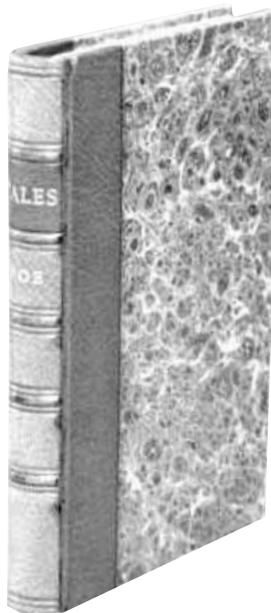
exist in several variants: black or greenish cloth, printed wrappers, and bound with a volume of

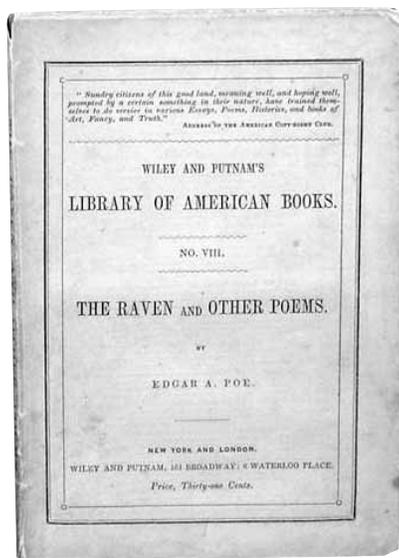
poems that appeared slightly later (of which, more later). The wrappers version sold for 50 cents.

Poe claimed afterward that about 1,500 copies sold within four months, earning him a royalty of eight cents each, or \$120. The reviews and notices were mostly favorable, including those appearing in London, Edinburgh, and Paris. *The American Review*, for example, called it “one of the most original and peculiar ever published in the United States and eminently worthy of an extensive circulation.” Poe’s principal regret seems to be that the collection included so few of his stories.

Apparently only five copies of the first edition of *Tales* in original wrappers are known, only one in private hands. (Sortheby’s Bradley Martin Catalogue, 2210) My copy, unhappily, is not that one. It is rebound, without wrappers.

Only a few months later, Wiley and Putnam published as part of the same series a collection of Poe’s poems. Entitled *The Raven and Other Poems*, the 100-page little volume, containing 30 poems, appeared in November





1845 and sold for 31 cents. (BAL, 16147) As in the case of *Tales*, copies appeared in three variants: green cloth binding, original printed wrappers, and cloth bound together with *Tales*. This also consisted entirely of works which had previously appeared in Poe's earlier volumes of poetry, or in journals or newspapers.

Poe, in his Preface, referred to his poems as "trifles," and added, "I think nothing in this volume of much value to the public, or very creditable to myself." The reviews at the time were so-so. But Allen calls it "the most important volume of poetry that had been issued up until that time in America." (Allen, 667) Here is a picture of my copy, in the original tan wrappers.

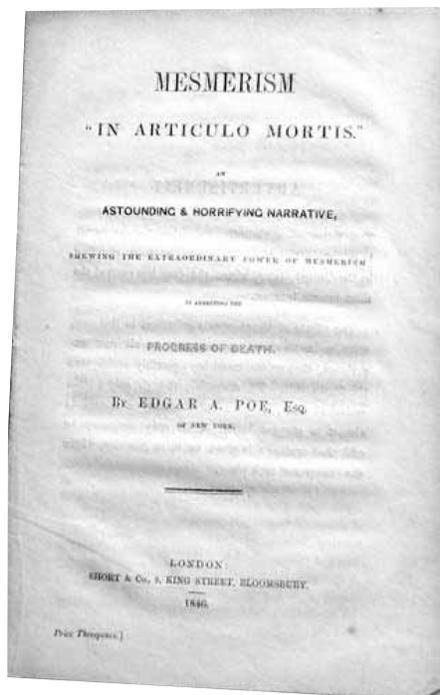
Copies of the sheets of the first edition of *The Raven* were also issued by Wiley and Putnam in London with a cancel title leaf in January or early February 1846, bound in green cloth. This is technically still part of the first American edition, but the "English issue."

Poe wrapped up the year 1845 with the publication in December of a horror story in *The American Review* entitled "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." This disgusting story centered on the "mesmerism" of a man about to die, whose life was thereby preserved for six months, at which time — released from hypnosis — he falls into a state of decay of a man six-months dead. Compared to the appearance of *The Raven*, the publication of this story was not a remarkable event. But it

did lead to the appearance in book form of the only one of his short stories to appear as a separate book or pamphlet during his lifetime. What makes this publication even more surprising is that it appeared in London, rather than the United States. Entitled *Mesmerism "In Articulo Mortis,"* this little 16-page self-wrapped pamphlet was published by Short & Co., in London, in early 1846, where it sold for "three pence." Oddly, it is not a very rare book today. Apparently, it did not initially sell well, but the remaindered copies were kept, and they appeared in the American market in the 1920's.

X

In the spring of 1846, Poe and his family moved out of New York City — first to Turtle Bay, on the East River, and later to the village of Fordham. Perhaps the purpose was to seek a healthier environment for Poe's young wife Virginia. Perhaps it was because of Poe's own health, or his drinking, or their poverty. The places he rented were certainly cheap. He managed to continue to write, producing a number of critical or sneering sketches of literary figures, which were published in a Philadelphia magazine. When one of these brought forth a bitter reply, Poe sued for libel the newspaper that had printed



the reply. (He won \$225 in damages.) These sketches were interpreted at the time — probably correctly — as reflecting on the state of Poe's mental stability.

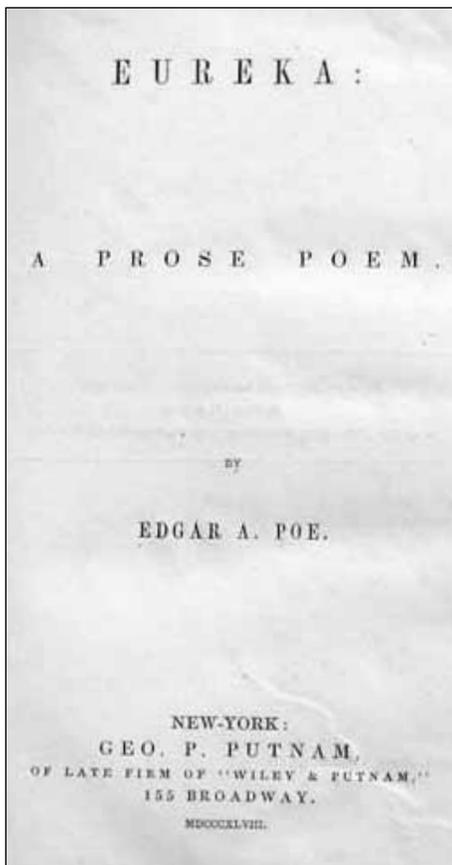
By the end of 1846, the family was in a desperate condition. Virginia was dying. A New York newspaper carried an article reporting that both Poe and his wife were dangerously ill with consumption, and "they are so far reduced as to be barely able to obtain the necessaries of life." The newspaper invited friends and readers of Poe to come to his financial aid. Other newspapers published similar appeals, resulting in a few contributions, which may have blunted a bit the sharpness of the family's need.

Early in the next year, in late January 1847, Virginia died at the age of 25. Poe was 38.

Perhaps her death marked a sort of turning point, at least in the short run. As the year wore on, Poe's own health improved. He told friends that his health and even his sanity had been impaired by his concern for Virginia's health. He now took more regular exercise, appeared more frequently in New York City and was better dressed (perhaps the result of his lawsuit victory). At the end of 1847, he arranged for anonymous publication in *The American Review* of "Ulalume," which commences: *The skies they were ashen and sober; The leaves they were crisped and sere – The leaves they were withering and sere; It was night in the lonesome October Of my most immemorial year....*

The poem was well-sprinkled with sibilants, repeated phrases, heavy doses of l's and r's, and strange place names — the "dank tarn of Auber," and the "ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir." Poe arranged for the poem to appear without his name on it in order to excite interest in who might be the author, and he then arranged for the answer to be published. (Silverman, 335-336)

One evening in January 1847, a month or so after "Ulalume" appeared, Poe was wandering around outside in the chilly night air of Fordham, contemplating the stars. An idea struck him, which, he later wrote, would "revolutionize" the world of physical science. Poe proceeded to flesh out this idea into a lecture on the origin and destination of the universe, which he delivered in early February 1848 to an audience of a few dozen people in a



New York library. Poe's friend Duyckinck described it as a "mountainous piece of absurdity."

Poe then proceeded to expand his lecture into a book of 150 pages, *Eureka: A Prose Poem*, New York, 1848. He explained in the "Preface" that he offered the work not as a scientific work, but "for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth...as an Art-Product alone...as a Poem." Considering the work his *magnum opus*, he asked the Putnam firm to publish an edition of 50,000 copies. He was lucky that they agreed to print up 500 copies. The book was completed in the spring and issued in July 1848 — some in cloth, some in boards, both priced at 75 cents. It was to be his last book, and it did not sell well at the time.

Reviews naturally varied. Some viewed it ecstatically. One reviewer thought it was "arrant fudge." Heartman/Canny say the book brought forward "many — more or less violent — discussions and reviews, the repercussions of which are still with us." (Heartman/Canny, 124)

Modern readers find it difficult to treat it entirely as a work of art. One bookseller who has a copy for sale for \$3200 as I am writing this describes *Eureka* as "a remarkable precursor of several modern theories of physics and a powerful essay on the material and spiritual

universe." Another dealer with a copy for \$4500 says that it "heralds, in an intuitive way, many of the modern themes of cosmology and astrophysics, including the 'Big Bang' theory, the 'Anthropic Principle,' and the large-scale structure of the universe...." Silverman describes it as presenting "a stupendous spectacle of rejuvenescence, an infinitude of pulsating universes alternately willed into orbic systems and reactively condensed into primary particles by an infinitude of gods." (Silverman, 339) I find it unreadable.

XI

A year after Virginia's death, a widow living in Providence, RI, Sarah Helen Whitman, wrote a poetic tribute to Poe, which was published in a New York journal in the spring. They met in Providence in September 1848. Poe gave her gift copies of his books, and they took walks and talked about literature. After a couple of days, Poe proposed marriage. Helen asked for time. During the coming weeks, they exchanged letters.

Helen explained her concerns about marrying; and Poe wrote his reply briefs. They met again in November. Before the meeting occurred, Poe became distraught and apparently tried to commit suicide by taking laudanum (powdered opium in alcohol). He recovered sufficiently to meet Helen; but the meeting was, needless to say, unsatisfactory. Whether due to the effects of the laudanum or to alcohol compounded by nervousness, Poe behaved badly.

Remarkably, however, Helen consented a few days later to a "conditional" engagement. Perhaps she feared that an outright refusal would lead to a further attempt at suicide. In the coming weeks, Poe tried to persuade Helen to remove the "condition," but was unsuccessful. Matters were not helped when Helen's mother insisted that he sign away any claim he might have after the marriage to Helen's estate. They got close enough to publicly announce their intention to marry, and the news appeared in at least one newspaper in early January 1849. But by late December, Helen had heard so much about Poe and his drinking that she called it off. Shortly after, Poe celebrated his 40th birthday.

XII

The spring of 1849 brought a few more poems and articles, and a futuristic satire set 1000 years in the future, with hundreds of passengers transported at 150 miles per hour in mile-high balloons.

Despite his personal difficulties, Poe's creative juices were still flowing strongly. "Annabel Lee" ("I was a child and she was a child, In this kingdom by the sea;") was written that spring, and was published in the *New York Tribune* in the fall. "Eldorado" ("Gaily bedight, A gallant knight ...") appeared about the same time. And one of his most famous, "The Bells," on which he had worked for over a year, appeared in November. He was able to deliver a few lectures. Yet Poe's health and mental stability remained unsteady. He lost items of personal property. At times he suffered hallucinations, and he told friends about conspiracies to kill him. He even toyed with the idea of marrying a former childhood sweetheart.

In early October 1849, an acquaintance saw him in a Baltimore tavern heavily intoxicated and suffering from exposure to the weather. He was taken to a local hospital, where he died a few days later, on October 7, at the age of 40. He was buried the next day. Fewer than a double handful of people attended the service.

A few days later, Poe's aunt (and the mother of his wife Virginia) gave Poe's acquaintance, Rufus Griswold, a power of attorney authorizing him to bring out a new collected edition of Poe's poetry and prose. She hoped to make a little money from the publication. The decision was not entirely hers, as Poe had inexplicably asked Griswold to superintend the collection of his works in the event of his death.

Griswold was a licensed Baptist clergyman. Poe had met him in 1841 when he was working on an important anthology, *The Poets and Poetry of America* (1842), in which he had included three of Poe's poems, but sandwiched them in at the end of the volume. (Later editions contained a few more poems, including "The Raven.") Poe felt he had been given short shrift and had written a lukewarm review of the anthology, even though Griswold had paid for the review. Poe had been still more critical of Griswold in one of his public lectures. As summarized by Silverman, Poe described Griswold as "a tasteless New Englander, unashamed puffer, and follower of the herd." (Silverman, 218) They had also crossed sharp swords in print on other occasions.

Adler Planetarium opens new manuscript and rare book exhibits

Special to the Caxtonian

Indeed, Griswold had replaced Poe as editor of *Graham's Magazine* — which had not endeared him to Poe. So Griswold was no friend of Poe. Giving Griswold the rights to edit Poe's collected works was like handing an electric cattle prod to one's worst enemy.

The initial two-volume collection, including "notices" of his work by Griswold, James Russell Lowell, and Nathaniel Willis, was published as a set by J.S. Redfield in New York, in April 1850, bearing the title *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, and included most of his fiction and poetry. These volumes contain many significant short stories and



poems that had not previously appeared in book form. The first volume, for example, contained the first book appearance of "The Mask of Amontillado," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Masque of the Red Death." The retail price was set at \$3.75.

Later, third (1850) and fourth (1856) volumes were separately published in different bindings, containing his magazine articles and reviews. (The binding on the fourth volume had been designed to match those on later editions of the first three volumes.) The third volume contained Poe's criticism and also included a lengthy "sketch" of Poe by Griswold savagely attacking him on moral as well as artistic

The Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum's History of Astronomy Department announces a new program of regularly changing exhibits. Visitors will find new displays of rarely-seen materials each time they visit the museum. The small exhibits — highlighting gems of the Adler Planetarium's collection of over 2000 rare books and manuscripts — will delight bibliophiles and the general public alike.

Handwriting through History will be on display late April through May 30. Highlights include: a 13th Century illuminated copy of Johannes Sacrobosco's *Sphaera*; autographed presentation copies of Johannes Kepler's *Rudolphine Tables* (1627) and Johannes Hevelius's *Machina Coelestis* (1672); personal letters from the Alvan Clark family (a prominent American telescope-maker from

grounds. Many of his statements about Poe's life — for example, that he had been expelled from the University of Virginia — were not true. Moreover, Griswold simply made up some of the passages that he quoted from Poe's letters. (The particulars are set forth in gruesome detail in Quinn's biography, 646 et seq.; see also Campbell, 84-98)

Poe's aunt/mother-in-law received no money from the sales — only a few sets for her own use or resale. She was also greatly distressed by the Griswold "Memoir," with its attacks and falsehoods.

Perhaps Poe's spirit got even with the Reverend Griswold. Whatever the causation, the rest of the Reverend's life reads like a Poe short story. As Silverman tells it in 1849, while taking the ferry to Brooklyn, Griswold suffered an epileptic fit, and sank in the water twice before being rescued. In 1853, his 15-year-old daughter was on a train that crashed through an open drawbridge into a river; Griswold found her in a New York morgue. In that same year, he was burned in a gas fire in his New York home. In 1857, his dormant case of tuberculosis became active, and he died a painful, lingering death. (Silverman, 441)

Poe would have been pleased. ❖

the 19th Century); and over 20 other items related to the history of astronomy and scientific instruments, including several volvelles.

Historical Discussions of Life on Other Worlds continues through May 30. Highlights include: John Wilkins's *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638), the first printed book to discuss the likelihood of an inhabited lunar world; Thomas Dick's *The Sidereal Heavens* (1855), which declares the certainty of life on other worlds; and Giovanni Schiaparelli's *Memoires of the Academy of Linxes* (1910), which describes "canals" on Mars.

Chasing the Goddess of Love Across the Sun will be on view from June 4 through September 5. This selection of historical books and maps documents the history of the twice-in-a-lifetime phenomenon, a transit of Venus, in which Venus visibly passes in front of the Sun; the first transit of Venus visible in over 120 years will occur on June 8. Highlights include: Johannes Hevelius's 1662 publication of the first observations of any transit of Venus in history (by Jeremiah Horrocks in 1639); a collected volume of the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (1769) with an account of the transit that year by the eminent early American astronomer David Rittenhouse; and many other fascinating popular and scholarly works from the 18th and 19th Centuries.

The Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum houses one of the world's greatest collections of material pertaining to the history of astronomy and related sciences. For more information about upcoming history exhibits, please contact the History of Astronomy Department at (312) 322-0594 or astrohistory@adlernet.org. Past exhibits featuring the History of Astronomy Collection can be viewed at <http://www.adlerplanetarium.org/history/exhibits/index.shtml>. ❖

Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program

June 11, 2004

Robert Williams

"The Second 'R'; American Manual & Copy Books"

Caxtonian Robert Williams will add to your basic understanding of learning as he elaborates on the second "R." Since the early days of the American republic, the teaching of "readin', writin', and rithmetic" has been of major importance. Robert's illustrated talk will be about some of the significant contributions American authors made to the teaching of handwriting as seen in the writing manuals and copybooks they published between 1791 and 1850.

Robert, recently retired as assistant manager of design at the University of Chicago Press, is a well-known calligrapher and teacher. Over the years he has collected American and European writing manuals from the 16th Century to the 20th Century. ❖

Next Caxton programs set for September

There will be no luncheon or dinner programs during the months of July and August. We'll see you in September. Have a great summer!

He currently teaches the history of the book at Columbia College's Center for Book & Paper Arts.

Join your friends as we close out a most successful year studying the book and all that it means to our society.

Edward Quattrocchi
Chair

A special thank you

Sixty years ago, on June 6, 1944, our Sown Hayward Blake was one of the young men who stormed Normandy at Utah Beach. Fortunately for us, he survived and brought home with him his lovely French bride Simone. Both are unwell these days, and we send our best wishes to our dear friends. Certainly our thanks and appreciation go out to Hayward for his heroic performance in France these many years ago — and to all the heroes who indeed did save the world and Western Civilization from a fate worse than anything we can dream of. ❖

Dinner Program

June 16, 2004

Ralph Ehrenberg

*"Collecting Maps at the
Library of Congress"*

Ralph Ehrenberg, until recently the director of the map division of the Library of Congress, will discuss the acquisition process at the Library. Among the stories he will tell is that of the effort to acquire the Martin Waldseemuller map of the world — a process that took five curators over the course of 50 years.

During Ehrenberg's distinguished federal career, he directed two of the most important map collections in the world. He was an aerial photographer during active military duty with the U.S. Navy, and a cartographer and photogrammetrist with the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center.

The focus of his talk, a wood block map by Martin Waldseemuller, printed in Germany in 1507, was the first to include the name *America*, based on Amerigo Vespucci's reports. The map remained in a German family for 300 years. It took the efforts of five map-division directors and a substantial fund-raising effort to secure it.

As supervisor of the Library's map division, Ehrenberg was responsible for a collection of more than 4.6 million cartographic items. This program is an opportunity for Caxtonians to learn about the enviable task of acquiring maps for one of America's premier collections.

Join your friends in this final dinner meeting of the 2003-2004 Caxton year. ❖

Robert McCamant
Vice President and Program Chair

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of BankOne, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon: 12:00 noon. Dinner meetings: spirits at 5pm, dinner at 6pm, lecture at 7:30pm. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org. Members and guests: Lunch \$25, Dinner \$45. Discount parking available for evening meetings, with a stamped ticket, at Standard Self-Park, 172 W. Madison.