

The Magazinish

Edgar Allan Poe, Magazines, and the Invention of the Short Story

Although the act of story-telling is as old as language itself, the short story is a relatively new invention—"the most recent of recognized literary forms," according to one literary reference guide. (Perkins, 969) American magazines played a catalytic role in creating and shaping the form, and one man, Edgar Allan Poe, did more to define the modern short story than anyone else. The tale of Poe and his relationship to both the short story and the magazine business is a fascinating chapter in the history of American publishing.

The obvious irony in representing the short story as a recent form is that there have been stories for as long as there have been humans. Television producer Don Hewitt once said that four words every child around the world knows are "Tell me a story." American author Reynolds Price wrote that stories are more important to our species than love or shelter:

Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives, from the small accounts of our day's events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths. (3)

Stories are narratives in which a single scheme of events is presented in a length short enough to be recounted in one telling and recollected easily. This facilitates accurate transmission without the need for writing. Stories from folklore are usually called tales, and many tales such as myths, fables, heroic exploits, and so forth, passed from person to person, generation to generation, and culture to culture for centuries before they were ever written down. Some of Western culture's foundational literature, including the epic of Gilgamesh, the story of the creation and Great Flood, myths of the Classical gods and goddesses, and legends of northern Europe like Beowulf or the Ring Sagas (Nibelungenlied) originated as tales from an oral tradition.

Sometimes a collection of tales from folklore is credited to the compiler: a few diverse examples include Aesop's fables, the Grimm fairy tales, Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, and Harris's *Tales of Uncle Remus*. It may be worth mentioning that many of these tales are didactic; that is, they teach about human nature, morality, religion, and so forth. Didactic tales such as fables, myths, parables, or pericopes can provide a lesson that's quickly learned and long remembered.

For centuries tales were pretty much the only form fictional prose took. This is why many of the oldest extended fictional works can be seen as separate stories tied together by an overarching plot device, often a journey or quest, as in the *Odyssey*, the *Aeniad*, or the *Morte d'Arthur*. Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Arabian Nights*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are collections of short tales wrapped in a meta-story.

History can be told as a series of stories, and Herodotus was neither the first nor the last to fortify his history with fiction. In the early 19th century Sir Walter Scott became a favorite on both sides of the Atlantic with his collected historical tales. Several of the earliest American magazines published histories in serial form.

In the British journals and essay-papers of the early 18th century, writers like Addison and Steele often wrote fables and allegories. Addison employed a cast of recurring fictional characters to illustrate various human foibles. His writing was popular in America and provided a model for many American journalists: probably the best was Joseph Dennie. Addisonian essayists followed ancient paradigms, but the medium in which they worked—journals and magazines—was new. And it was the new medium that provided a critical turning point in the development of the short story.

Short Stories and Magazines

Short stories suit periodicals particularly well because they run complete in a single issue and engage readers in a unique way. Of course, essays, criticism, travel tales, and biography also run complete in a single issue, but nonfiction doesn't exercise the imagination quite like a short story. And while novels certainly work the imagination, and can be accommodated in magazines by being run serially, the cliffhanger's concluding phrase, "To be continued..." disconnects

the reader from the next installment and leaves the reading experience incomplete. A short story, in contrast, serves the full meal in one sitting—which makes short stories especially appropriate for magazines.

The affinity between magazines and short stories is so close that it would be hard to find an American short story written before magazines began publishing them in the late 18th century. One scholar has identified two of the earliest American short stories as “The Story of the Captain’s Wife and an Aged Woman,” published in the *Gentlemen and Lady’s Town and Country Magazine* and “Azakia: A Canadian Story,” from the *Monthly Miscellany and Vermont Magazine*, both in 1789. (Plath)

Magazine historian Frank L. Mott (I, 42ff) wrote that most American magazine stories of the late 18th century fell into three categories: character sketches, which were sometimes lampoons of real people; sentimental tales or “fragments,” often maudlin; and “oriental” and Gothic tales, many of which were clipped from European periodicals. These remained staples well into the 19th century as the market for magazine stories continued to expand, leading to what Mott referred to as a “large body of vapid and sentimental writing.” (I, 502)

Ever since the days of Franklin and Bradford, magazine editors complained about the difficulty of obtaining material, and in the first half of the 19th century demand for all types of magazine writing continued to rise. The cause of this was dramatic market growth. The number of literate Americans tripled between 1800 and 1840 from 1.8 million to 6.2 million, at an accelerating rate of growth: the literate populace grew 15 percent between 1800 and 1810, and 48 percent between 1830 and 1840. This brought more and more magazines, as launches proliferated. Providing content to a market that was expanding so rapidly became a significant challenge for the publishers of general interest magazines. Many lifted their content from British books and magazines: lack of an international copyright law allowed wholesale plundering. But the British material was a finite resource, and some publishers adopted a different strategy, one that would have shocked publishers of the previous generation: they began to pay writers for submissions.

Among the first to take this step were the *Christian Spectator* in 1819, the *Atlantic*¹ in 1824, and the *North American Review* in 1825, all of which offered writers \$1.00 per page. They were pioneers and outliers, but as they led the way the trend gathered momentum. By 1835 the *New-England Magazine* had set a rate per page of \$1.00 for prose and \$2.00 per page for poetry. In 1840 the *Southern Literary Messenger* was offering \$1.50 per page, while the *Democratic Review* and the *Whig Review*, printed in larger formats, paid \$2.00 per page across the board. (Mott I, 197f, 504f) In 1844 most Philadelphia magazines were paying \$2.00 per page for prose and \$5.00 per poem. (Tassin, 91) The popular *Knickerbocker* paid as much as \$5.00 per page on occasion. (Tebbel, 70)

In 1842 George Graham, publisher of *Graham’s* magazine, implemented a policy which came “like a sunrise,” as one writer phrased it. (Mott I, 506) Graham discovered that generosity could be a good investment. He began paying between \$4.00 and \$12.00 per page, depending on author and whim. He bought poems from James Russell Lowell for \$30.00, and from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow for \$50.00. Nathaniel Hawthorne earned \$5.00 per page. Graham paid James Fenimore Cooper \$7.20 per page for a novel and \$10.00 per page for a biographical series. In return Graham received publicity and prestige. He learned, like many publishers who followed his lead, that a well-known author’s name on the cover attracted interest and sold magazines. As Mott said, “His magazine quickly attained great popularity; his liberality was profitable.” (I, 508) Several of Graham’s competitors responded in kind, especially Louis Godey, publisher of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, whose generous spending bought his magazine a corps of distinguished contributors. (Mott I, 351)

It began to be possible, for the first time in American literary history, for an author to earn a respectable living by writing. N. P. Willis, one of the most successful magazine writers of the early 1840s, earned about \$1,500 per year and wrote for only four magazines: *Graham’s*, *Godey’s*, the *Mirror*, and *Snowden’s Ladies’ Companion*. (Mott I, 495) At a time when skilled tradesmen earned about \$500 per year, this was good money. Others known for their magazine writing and paid in the same ballpark included Park Benjamin, Lydia Sigourney, Ann S. Stephens, John Neal, Frances Sargent Osgood, and Charles Fenno Hoffman. (Mott I, 408f) There were many others. Their names are little noted nor long remembered now, but in the 1840s and ’50s many were popular, prolific, and paid well by the standards of the day.

People who earned their living by writing for magazines came to be called magazinists, a sobriquet that reflected the growing popularity of magazines and the boom in magazine launches in the 1830s and ’40s. One magazinist whose

¹ The New York *Atlantic* of 1824, not the *Atlantic Monthly* founded in Boston in 1857 and still current.

name is still remembered, and whose reputation is still rising two centuries after his birth, was Edgar Allan Poe, who spent his adult career writing for and working at magazines.

Poe and the Southern Literary Messenger

Poe was born in Boston in 1809, orphaned at three, and taken in as a foster child (although never formally adopted) by a childless couple in Richmond, VA, John and Frances Allan, from whom Poe took his middle name. His foster father was a prosperous merchant, and Poe was educated at the Manor House School in England, the University of Virginia, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Poe never received a degree. Unhappily, the relationship between Poe and John Allan deteriorated as Poe grew older, leaving Poe too indebted to continue college and possessed of a lifelong propensity to bite the hand that fed him—a recurring tendency both to antagonize benefactors and portray himself, often overdramatically, as their victim.

While still in his teens Poe self-published two books of poetry: *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827) and *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* (1829). These were followed by a third collection, *Poems*, in 1831. None sold well, despite a positive review for *Al Aaraaf* by John Neal. In 1831 Poe submitted five stories to a contest held by the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier*; he didn't win a prize, but the magazine eventually published all five of the stories. In 1833 he took first place in a fiction-writing contest held by the weekly *Baltimore Saturday Visitor* for his story "Ms. Found in a Bottle." This provided Poe with a bit of recognition and publicity which expanded when his story "The Visionary" was published in the January, 1834 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*. (Thompson, 1473ff)

In 1835 a judge in the *Saturday Visitor* contest, John P. Kennedy, recommended Poe to Thomas Willys White, publisher of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and, after using Poe as a contributor, White eventually hired him. Thus began the first of Poe's magazine engagements. (Thompson, 1473)

One year earlier, in August, 1834, White had begun publishing the monthly *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond, VA. He was a champion for Southern culture in general and the city of Richmond in particular, and, as a printer by trade, had the advantage of being able to launch a periodical on limited capital. The *Literary Messenger* was neither the South's first nor its only literary magazine—among its contemporaries were the *Southern Literary Journal* and the *Southern Rosebud*, both of Charleston, SC, and the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor* mentioned earlier—but it turned out to be the most successful and longest-lived of the antebellum Southern literary magazines. (Mott I, 629ff, 800ff)

The *Literary Messenger's* first editor was James E. Heath, who worked on the magazine in his spare time, as he put it, "at a considerable sacrifice of ease and leisure." (in Mott I, 631) Under his direction the magazine published travel articles, some science, and quite a bit of poetry. The *Literary Messenger* also became the journal of the Virginia Historical and Philosophical Society.

The March, 1835 issue contained Poe's first contribution, "Berenice—A Tale," followed in successive issues by "Morella" in April and "Lion-izing" in May. Heath, who resigned after the April, 1835 issue was completed, left at just about the same time that Poe began to contribute. In June White hired Poe as assistant editor and book reviewer, and in December he appointed Poe chief editor, at a salary of \$15.00 per week. (Mott I, 634f; Thompson, 1475f)

While employed at the *Southern Literary Messenger* Poe contributed seven short stories and several poems, but at the time, and throughout his career, he was noted more for his reviews than for his fiction. In his lifetime Poe wrote more nonfiction than fiction, and his collected essays and reviews exceed 1,400 pages. Literary historian Van Wyck Brooks described Poe's approach to criticism as a "systematic" interest in American literature and authors, with no fear of literary god or devil. (WI, 347)

Some of his reviews were very caustic and earned Poe a reputation as "Tomahawk Man." One of the first to feel the hatchet was Theodore S. Fay who had written a popular novel based on a sensational New York murder. Poe said Fay's style was "unworthy of a school-boy," that the plot was "a monstrous piece of absurdity and incongruity," that "the characters *have no character*," and that each page was flawed by "some two or three most egregious sins against common-sense." (Thompson, 546f) This was harsh for an American critic. American reviewers in the early 19th century tended to praise American writers; to do so was considered a kind of patriotic duty. (Mott I, 635)

Poe later admitted to “a somewhat overdone causticity” in his criticism (Thompson, 1024), but he always maintained that the gentle approach was counterproductive:

...We get up a hue and cry about the necessity of encouraging native writers of merit—we blindly fancy that we can accomplish this by indiscriminate puffing of good, bad, and indifferent, without taking the trouble to consider that what we choose to denominate encouragement is thus, by its general application, precisely the reverse. (in Thompson, 546f)

Poe also pointed out accurately that his positive reviews outnumbered the negative. Less accurately, he claimed on more than one occasion that the *Southern Literary Messenger's* circulation increased from 700 to 5,500 during his year at the magazine. The truth was less dramatic: when Poe was hired the magazine had 1,300 subscribers and it had 1,800 when he left. (Lepore) It continued to grow after his departure: in 1843 independent sources put the magazine's circulation at about 4,000. (Mott I, 638)

Poe left the *Literary Messenger* in December, 1836. He was unhappy with his salary and lack of editorial independence. (Thompson, 1476) For his part, White had expressed concern about Poe's drinking habits, and since the issues for October and November, 1836 were late and the December issue never came out at all, it may indeed be true that Poe's job performance was affected by bibulosity. Nevertheless, the two men maintained a cordial respect following their parting: Poe apparently assisted White with several issues in 1837 and for his part White continued to praise Poe's literary talents, at least in print. (Mott I, 639) Farther down the road, Poe contributed the story “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.” to the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1844 and several reviews and critiques in 1848 and 1849. (Mott I, 651)

The *Southern Literary Messenger* remained in publication for almost three decades after Poe's 1836 departure, and it took four years of war and the Siege of Richmond to close the doors. White died in January, 1843, following a stroke, and the magazine passed first to Benjamin Blake Minor in 1843, then to John Reuben Thompson in 1847. Both men were lawyers with an interest in Southern history. Thompson sold the magazine to its printers, Macfarlane & Ferguson, in 1853, but he continued as editor until 1860, when he was succeeded by Dr. George William Bagby. The *Literary Messenger* was sold again in December, 1863 to a group of young investors, and the fortunes of war put an end to the publication in June, 1864. Like so many other magazines throughout the country, the *Literary Messenger* suffered for years from the cost of unpaid subscriptions, and delinquency had brought it to the brink of insolvency several times in the early 1850s. (Mott I, 629ff)

Contributors to the *Literary Messenger* were an eclectic lot—many Northern writers were represented, including Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Lydia Sigourney. But the magazine's primary goal was to promote Southern literature (“Lyre of the sunny South, awake!” exhorted the March, 1843 issue) (Mott I, 645), and the magazine published several of the South's best authors, including William Gilmore Simms. Over its 30-year lifespan the *Literary Messenger* offered a broad range of editorial content encompassing history, travel, oratory, serial and nonserial fiction, and poetry, and the magazine included woodcuts and engravings until the very end.

The Philadelphia Magazines

Poe married his young cousin, Virginia Clemm, in 1836. After leaving the *Southern Literary Messenger* in December of that year, he moved initially to New York, where his arrival coincided with the Panic of 1837. He met with a number of New York writers, including Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant (Brooks WI, 347), but was unable to find steady work. He and the family then settled in Philadelphia in 1838.

Between 1837 and 1839 Poe eked out a living by writing, mostly for magazines, but was often flat broke. In this period he had a few short stories published, including “Ligeia” in the *American Museum* for 1838, and he continued to work on *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a novella whose early chapters had run in installments in the *Southern Literary Messenger* before he left. For all his talent, Poe never wrote a true novel, and novels were what book publishers thought the public wanted. “Readers in this country have a decided and strong preference for works... in which a single and connected story occupies the whole volume,” wrote Harper & Brothers, who rejected his short stories (“too learned and mystical”) but published *Pym* in July, 1838. (Spiller, 329 ; Thompson, 1476)

The Poes (along with Maria Clemm, Poe's mother-in-law and aunt, and a cat named Catterina) lived in Philadelphia for about six years. There Poe was able to pick up a variety of assignments, including writing the introduction to *The Conchologist's First Book*, a handbook for seashell collectors. He persuaded Lea & Blanchard to publish a collection of his stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, produced in two volumes in late 1839, but relinquished all profits to the publisher (Spiller, 329)

And during this time he began a series of cryptograms—puzzles based on codes—for *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*. (Thompson, 1476) Poe was intrigued by codes and ciphers, which figured in several of his stories, most notably in "The Gold Bug." Fascination with codes reflected his interest in the process of logic. He was a talented cryptologist and proud of his abilities: he once tried to obtain an appointment from the Tyler administration as a government cryptographer. (Lepore) The process of ratiocination, or deductive reasoning, came to be a hallmark not only of Poe's fiction, but of the reputation he hoped to build for himself. As a kind of publicity stunt he once wrote an article for the *Saturday Evening Post* in which he predicted the solution of Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* before the final installment was published. He turned out to be partially correct. (Thompson, 1477)

In July, 1839 Poe found full-time employment at *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. The magazine's founder was William E. Burton, a London native whose father was a printer. Although Burton made his fortune as an actor, first in Britain and then America, he had always wanted to start a magazine, a feat he attempted unsuccessfully at the age of 18 and finally accomplished as an adult in 1837 with the monthly *Gentleman's Magazine*. (Mott I, 673ff) As magazine historian Algernon Tassin noted, Burton seems to have undertaken the project "with no more serious purpose than taking a fling with his literary tastes and his own pleasant but occasional pen." (89) Initially Burton served as editor and his partner, Charles Alexander (of *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*), was publisher.

With a masculine focus encompassing wines, cigars, sports, and drama, the magazine was not unlike today's *Esquire*. According to Mott (I, 674), "It had a large, beautifully printed page, and the contents were light and entertaining." A contemporary editor commended the *Gentleman's Magazine* for its "raciness, humor, tact, and taste." (in Mott I, 676)

Shortly before Poe signed on, the *Gentleman's Magazine* had run a biographical series on Eugene Francois Vidocq, the criminal-turned-detective who founded France's Surete Nationale.² In 1833 Vidocq opened what was probably the world's first private detective agency, and Poe, drawing on the *Gentleman's Magazine's* profile, later used Vidocq as the model for his character C. Auguste Dupin, protagonist of the world's first detective stories. (Mott I, 675)

Poe joined the *Gentleman's Magazine* as assisting editor, at a salary of \$10 a week, and occasionally helped edit the sister publication, *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*. (EAP Society) To the *Gentleman's Magazine* he contributed reviews and seven stories, including "The Fall of the House of Usher," which appeared in the September, 1839 issue, and the unfinished serial, "The Journal of Julius Rodman," which began in January, 1840. As at the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe's reviews were unsparring. Burton thought they were overly harsh. Their differences of temperament and of opinion precluded a long relationship, and in June, 1840 Poe left the staff. Poe accused Burton of dishonesty and Burton accused Poe of drunkenness (Mott I, 675).

Burton may also have felt that Poe had divided loyalties. Despite having twice seen the sausage-making up close, Poe was anxious to try his hand at magazine ownership. "As soon as Fate allows, I will have a Magazine of my own—and will endeavor to kick up a dust," he wrote in 1839. (in Lepore) He proposed a periodical to be titled *The Penn Magazine*, for which he wrote a prospectus in 1840. "Experience has rendered obvious what indeed might have been demonstrated *a priori*," wrote Poe. "That in founding a Magazine of my own lies my sole chance of carrying out to completion whatever peculiar intentions I might have entertained." (Thompson, 1024)

A central point in *The Penn's* prospectus was the goal of publishing reviews with the "calmest yet sternest sense of justice." And, looking beyond the reviews, Poe said the magazine's aims "chiefly shall be to please; and this through means of versatility, originality, and pungency." (Thompson, 1025) Poe announced that *The Penn* would publish its first issue in January, 1841. Among the prospective investors Poe approached was Nicholas Biddle, former editor of the venerable *Port-Folio* magazine and former head of the Bank of the United States, recently closed amid hubbub by the Jackson administration. (Lepore) As of the fall of 1840 no investment had materialized.

² Vidocq's fascinating life encompassed various careers as a thief, forger, duellist, soldier, police informant, plainclothes investigator, and self-taught criminologist. He is said to have inspired Balzac and Hugo along with Poe.

While Poe's enthusiasm for running a magazine waxed, Burton's waned, and in November, 1840 the *Gentleman's Magazine* was sold to George Graham, who had recently purchased a magazine called the *Casket*, a monthly founded in 1826 as a counterpart to the weekly *Saturday Evening Post*—in which Graham had also obtained a part interest. (Mott I, 545f) Graham bought the *Gentleman's Magazine* for \$3,500, one dollar per subscriber (Mott I, 676), and after merging the *Gentleman's Magazine* with the *Casket*, renamed the combined properties *Graham's Magazine*.

Graham seems to have been born with a natural gift for magazine management. He was only 26 when he purchased the *Gentleman's Magazine*, with a background in cabinet-making and law (Mott I, 545), but he had what Mott called "less of real literary appreciation than of shrewd publisher's sense." (I, 548) We noted earlier that Graham believed in the promotional value of using well-known contributors, and paid top dollar to get good writers. Tassin wrote, "Though he was not the first editor to pay as much as he could afford, he soon became the first to make a habit of paying well." (91)

Within two years of starting his magazine, Graham had published William Cullen Bryant, Cooper, Richard Henry Dana, Longfellow, and Lowell, along with a number of well-known magazinists, including Benjamin, Hoffman, Neal, Osgood, Sigourney, Stephens, and Willis. His list of authors paid off and his circulation took off. Starting with 5,000 subscribers, *Graham's* reached 8,000 by the end of its first year and 40,000 by the end of its second, a remarkable achievement for the times. (Mott I, 552).

Graham's editorial assistant in the magazine's early days was Charles J. Peterson, who later wrote about Graham and his strategy for the magazine:

No sooner were Longfellow, Bryant, Cooper discovered to be permanent contributors than thousands who had heretofore looked with contempt on American monthlies hastened to subscribe. The benefit thus done to popular literature cannot be calculated. It will be long, perhaps, before any one man will have it in his power to do again as much. (in Tassin, 100)

Tassin and Tebbel have pointed out (Tassin, 95f, 120 ; Tebbel, 70) that it was his investment in content that led Graham, and then Godey and other magazine publishers, to begin copyrighting contents. This was a break with tradition. Periodicals around the country had clipped from one another freely since the press came to America. It was considered good manners to attribute the original source, but the appropriation itself was too common to be considered... until editors began paying real money. On magazine copyrights, Poe wrote later:

It is really difficult to see how anyone can, in conscience, object to such a course on the part of Messrs. Godey and Graham. It has long been the custom among newspapers, the weeklies especially, to copy magazine articles in full and circulate them all over the country—sometimes in advance of the magazines themselves. To such an extent had their piracy been carried that many magazine subscribers had ceased to be such, because they could procure all that was valuable from the newspapers very little later, and often at less cost. (in Tassin, 96)

Mott described a typical issue of *Graham's Magazine* as containing "...three or four short stories, a light essay on manners, a biographical sketch, a literary article, a considerable amount of poetry... an out-door sketch by 'Frank Forester,'³ a travel article, fine arts and book-review departments, and a chat with the editor." (I, 547) The illustrations were noteworthy, and like the articles were commissioned from respected engravers who helped boost sales, such as John Sartain.⁴ Initially each issue contained one plate devoted to fashion and a second mezzotint of some other subject ; after a year a third plate was added. Tassin (102) says that *Graham's* and *Godey's* were associated in the public's mind because of the similarity of their illustrations.

Peterson left in 1842, around the same time Rufus Griswold joined the staff. Griswold was a confident young editor who had worked on two magazines in New York, *Brother Jonathan* and Horace Greeley's *New-Yorker*, and had recently

³ Nom de plume of Henry William Herbert, a prolific author and editor of the *American Monthly* magazine. Proving that real life can be just as horrifying as anything in Poe, Herbert committed suicide in front of a roomful of startled dinner guests in 1858 (Tassin, 125)

⁴ Both Sartain and Peterson ended up with eponymous magazines. *Peterson's Magazine* (1842) became a strong competitor to Godey's. Sartain bought the *Union Magazine* in 1848 and renamed it *Sartain's Union Magazine*.

published a well-received anthology (still respected) called *Poets and Poetry of America*. Griswold and Poe had met during Poe's brief stay in New York (Lepore), and Griswold was later to play a meaningful and unhappy role as Poe's literary executor.

Graham's most famous hire was, of course, Poe, who signed on as literary editor in 1841 at \$800 per year. He was paid extra for stories, at \$4.00 per page (Mott I, 549). This was fair compensation by the standards of the 1840s, and may have been the highest rate of pay Poe ever received: his entire literary earnings have been estimated at only \$6,200 across a two-decade career. (in Hutchisson, 186)

Several of Poe's most popular stories were written while he was at *Graham's*, including "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "A Descent Into The Maelström," "The Mask of the Red Death," and his satire on the Transcendentalists, "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."

The Theory of the Tale

One of the most important pieces Poe published in *Graham's* was his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in May, 1842. Poe had a high regard for Hawthorne—"The style is purity itself. Force abounds. High imagination gleams from every page..." (Thompson, 577)

But beyond praising Hawthorne, Poe also used the review as a platform to explain in some detail what he believed constituted a good story. Poe said that next to poetry the prose tale offered the most "advantageous employment of the highest genius" because its length ensured the reader's undivided attention.

We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one to two hours in its perusal... The author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption. (Thompson, 572)

Poe said that in order for the author to unfold the whole story in a single sitting, a skillful short story writer will first decide on a "unique or single effect," and then invent incidents which establish this effect; in other words, building the tale around the effect.

If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design... Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided. (Thompson, 572)

This meant that a work's unity should be its predominant element—that every part of a story or poem should contribute to the piece's unique effect, with what Poe called "keeping," or the "subordination of the parts to the whole." (Spiller, 328) Poe also believed that a good story should embody human truth, not state it. He was opposed to the "heresy of the Didactic," ("Poe" in BRC) and said that the purpose of a tale should be the expression of artistic truth through ratiocination, irony, humor, sarcasm, or some other mode—but not direct explication. (Thompson, 573)

It isn't difficult to see that what captivated Poe when he read Hawthorne's tales was artistry uncommon to stories of the time: unusual and nondidactic plots, powerful mood and atmosphere, effective characterization, emotional and psychological complexity, and depth of meaning—artistry that Poe himself displayed in many of his own stories. It's true that behind Poe's philosophy is a certain amount of self-promotion: he implied that only an equal craftsman could analyze Hawthorne's craftsmanship. But the fact remains that no critic prior to Poe had defined a successful short story in these terms, and his analysis has remained definitive for two centuries since.

This new genre that Poe described and practiced was fueled almost exclusively by the boom in magazines—which is why Poe devoted his career to the magazine business and so much of his writing to magazine genres: reviews, essays, poems, and stories. He simply went where the opportunity was.

As critic Jill Lepore wrote, "What Poe sensed was the commercial and stylistic ascendancy of magazine literature, despite the morbid financial times. The era of the magazine, with its clipped prose, relentless currency, and swift circulation, had arrived."

Brooks pointed out that the "poor-devil author" had very little choice in those times when it came to income.

With the spread of popular education, multitudes had begun to read, and they welcomed the more ephemeral forms of writing, while magazines were almost the sole recourse of American authors at a time when the copyright laws did not protect them. Many of the best of them were forced to write for the magazines, for they could not earn a living writing books, and this was one reason why the short story became a favoured American form. (W, 347)

The same thing held true for Hawthorne no less than anyone else. Critic Norman Holmes Pearson wrote:

That Hawthorne should have turned from the writing of novels to a shorter form is not strange, for though he was not destitute, he still had to sell in order to live; and in an age when only the newspaper, the magazine, and the annual flourished vigorously enough to support a native literature, a writer could not choose his form. It was thrust upon him. (ix)

Magazine publishers were aware of the writer's lack of options, a fact Editor Crab made clear in Poe's 1844 story "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.:"

"Touching this matter of compensation, what you observe is very just,—in fact it is excessively so. But ah—ah—the first contribution—the first, I say—it is never the Magazine custom to pay for,—you comprehend, eh? The truth is, we are usually the recipients in such case." [Mr. Crab smiled blandly as he emphasized the word "recipients."] "for the most part, we are paid for the insertion of a maiden attempt—especially in verse. In the second place, Mr. Bob, the Magazine rule is never to disburse what we term in France the *argent comptant*—I have no doubt you understand. In a quarter or two after publication of the article—or in a year or two—we make no objection to giving our note at nine months; provided, always, that we can so arrange our affairs as to be quite certain of a 'burst up' in six. I really do hope, Mr. Bob, that you will look upon this explanation as satisfactory." Here Mr. Crab concluded, and the tears stood in his eyes.

Or, as Poe concluded wryly, in his essay "Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House:"

That Magazines can live, and not only live but thrive, and not only thrive but afford to disburse money for original contributions, are facts which can only be solved, under the circumstances, by the really fanciful but still agreeable supposition, that there is somewhere still existing an ember not altogether quenched among the fires of good feeling for letters and literary men, that once animated the American bosom. (Thompson, 1036)

By May, 1842 Poe had tired of the "prison-house" at *Graham's* and resigned, and Griswold took his place. Poe continued to search for investors for his proposed magazine, which he had by now renamed the *Stylus*, but the project came no closer to fruition under the new name.

When Poe left, he predicted that *Graham's* would close within three years. (Tassin, 98) Instead, the magazine continued along to higher levels of success and popularity, and ran almost until the eve of the Civil War. Graham's taste in art and writing proved broadly popular. In its first decade it was probably the country's best-read magazine, "diverse and intelligent... lively and fresh." (Chielens, 157) After 1850 *Harper's* and other, newer magazines began to make inroads on *Graham's* audience. Near the end Graham's reached what must be a milepost in bucking the tide of popular opinion—the magazine reviewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* unfavorably, an error in judgment compounded by Graham's insistence on continuing to criticize the book and its supporters. This coincided with a financial depression in 1857, and the issue of December, 1858, was *Graham's* last. (Chielens, 159) Poe's prediction was off by a decade.

Poe in New York

In early 1843 James Russell Lowell invited Poe to contribute to the *Pioneer*, Lowell's new magazine, offering free rein to send whatever he chose. Poe provided "The Tell-Tale Heart" for the premier issue, "Lenore" for the second, and then an essay on poetry. Third time was not the charm for Poe or for Lowell; the *Pioneer* closed after three issues.

Poe had better luck in a literary contest held by Philadelphia's *Dollar Newspaper*. In June 1843 he submitted "The Gold Bug" and won first prize, \$100. It proved to be one of his most popular tales. Early in the following year Poe moved to New York and earned further notoriety with his hoax story of a transatlantic balloon journey, published in the *Sun* on April 13, 1844.

Having joined the *Evening Mirror* in the fall of 1844 as literary critic, Poe achieved at last something that approached the widespread popular and critical success he had been pursuing when "The Raven" was published in early 1845.⁵ "The Raven's" popularity boosted attendance on the lecture circuit and also provided some leverage in negotiating with publishers Wiley & Putnam, who in July, 1845 published 12 of his stories in a collection entitled *Tales*, part of their "Library of American Books" series, and later in the same year brought out *The Raven and Other Poems*.

At around this time Lowell recommended Poe to a young friend in New York, Charles F. Briggs, editor of a new weekly launched in January, 1845, entitled the *Broadway Journal*. Briggs's goal was to encourage a national American literature that was nonsectional and apolitical. His business partner was John Bisco, former publisher of the *Knickerbocker* magazine, and his assisting editor was Henry C. Watson, former music critic of the *New York World*. Among the subjects covered by the new magazine were books, painting, music, and drama. Briggs published contributions from Poe in the *Broadway Journal's* first two issues, and invited him onto the staff in February. In lieu of salary, Poe was to receive one third of future profits.

As often happens in new and undercapitalized publishing ventures, things went south. By mid-1845 Briggs on one side, and Poe and Bisco on the other, had serious differences regarding the magazine's editorial direction. Briggs hoped to buy out Bisco, find a new publisher, and take full control of the business; Bisco demanded a higher price for his share of the enterprise than Briggs was willing to pay. In the stalemate, the *Broadway Journal* continued to publish under the management of Bisco and Poe.

One of the areas of disagreement between Briggs and Poe was the magazine's position on slavery. Briggs was as dogmatically opposed to slavery as Poe was in favor of it. Briggs was also alienated by what he termed Poe's "monomaniacal" focus on plagiarism, a subject that Poe had begun flogging back at *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* and again at the *Mirror*. It may have been a genuine obsession, or perhaps Poe was simply milking controversy for all the publicity he could get. Maybe both. Between January and August Poe conducted the "Longfellow War," in which he accused the well-known poet of plagiarism and in the process alienated most of the acquaintances he and Longfellow had in common, among them Lowell. (Mott I, 759)

In October of 1845 Bisco decided to cut his losses, and sold the magazine to Poe for \$50.00, which Poe borrowed from Greeley.⁶ (Mott I, 761f) Proprietorship may have been a long-sought ambition realized at last for Poe—but it did not play out in his favor. He continued to borrow money to keep the *Journal* afloat, a hopeless task made harder by illness and depression on Poe's part, and the worsening health of his wife Virginia, who suffered from tuberculosis. (Thompson, 1479) The *Broadway Journal* ceased publication after the January 3, 1846 issue.

Though the *Journal* is remembered mostly because of Poe's connection to it, in its single year of life the magazine published contributions from a number of other excellent writers, including Benjamin, Dana, Evert Duyckinck, Margaret Fuller, and Simms. Watson was well-regarded for his reviews, and Mott said the magazine's woodcuts were also noteworthy. (Mott I, 758, 760) If it had been properly capitalized and managed with less tumult, it might have been as successful as *Graham's* or *Godey's*... but the graveyard of American magazines is full of *ifs*.

⁵ Graham's turned down "The Raven," and it was sold to the *American Review*—some sources say for \$10, others \$15. The *American Review* published the poem in February, 1845. It was almost immediately republished by a number of magazines associated with Poe, including the *Evening Mirror*, *Broadway Journal*, and *Southern Literary Messenger*. (EAP)

⁶ Greeley kept Poe's signed IOU after Poe's death as a kind of souvenir, and once offered to sell it to a youthful autograph collector for half of its face value—considerably more than he received for it from Poe. (196)

Finis

The next three years were a time of increasing unhappiness in Poe's life, although he remained as prolific as ever, producing a baker's dozen short stories between 1845 and 1849 including "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Imp of the Perverse," along with his unique look at cosmology, *Eureka* (published by Putnam in 1848), several poems including "Ulalume" and "Annabel Lee," and numerous reviews and essays. In addition he contracted for several series: epigrammatic "Marginalia" for *Graham's* and the *Democratic Review*, and, for *Godey's* "The Literati of New York City," which predictably managed to offend a number of its subjects. The first installment of "Literati" in *Godey's* was so popular (or notorious) that it was reprinted in the next issue (*Literati* was published in book form posthumously in 1850 by JS Redfield.) (Tassin, 106 ; Thompson, 1479f)

He was impoverished and desperate, and increasingly inclined to melancholy and binge drinking. Poor Virginia died in January, 1847, on a straw mattress in a shabby cottage in the Bronx, wrapped in Poe's old army cloak and hugging the cat to keep warm. (Brooks WI, 357) Brooks described Poe's life as a chaos of "neurotic and erratic movements."

He had developed many of the symptoms of madness ; his nervous instability increased with every year and he made enemies everywhere and quarrelled with his friends (WI, 356)

But this is really just another way of saying that Poe's typical behavior grew more intense.

Through all this, and despite his cautionary experience with the *Broadway Journal*, Poe remained fixated on launching the *Stylus*. In 1848 he undertook a tour of lectures and readings to raise money.

And Poe courted more than investors. In a short time following Virginia's death he developed serious relationships with a surprisingly large number of women, including Marie Louise Shew, who had helped nurse Virginia ; Mrs. Nancy Richmond ; Sarah Helen Whitman, a poet to whom he was briefly engaged ; and his boyhood sweetheart, Elmira Royster Shelton, recently widowed.

In the fall of 1849 Poe found his two great goals within reach. He had located a potential investor, Edward H. N. Patterson, a 21 year-old newspaper publisher from Oquawka, IL. Patterson and Poe corresponded between April and June of 1849, with Poe agreeing to make a trip south to find prospective subscribers, and Patterson agreeing to meet in Poe later in the year to complete business arrangements. They scheduled their first issue for January, 1850. (Hutchisson, 237ff) Poe was also successful in obtaining Elmira Royster Shelton's consent to marry. Although she took several weeks to make her mind up, affection triumphed over reservations and she accepted his proposal on September 22, 1849, in Richmond. (Hutchisson, 244f)

The next week Poe left on a steamer, planning to travel on to New York and return with his aunt, Maria Clemm. He was found unconscious and ill outside Gunner's Hall tavern in Baltimore. He never recovered, and died delirious on October 7 of "congestion of the brain." His final days and the real cause of death remain mysteries.

As Poe's literary executor, Griswold managed to poison Poe's reputation for decades. In a venomous obituary, Griswold claimed that the depraved and deviant characters in Poe's fiction were a reflection of the author's own mental condition, and he later forged letters from Poe to support his accusations. ("Poe" in BRC) As a result, Poe was dismissed by many American critics, defended reflexively by others, and to some extent marginalized in his own country in the process. European writers embraced Poe more widely than his countrymen: Alfred Tennyson called him a genius, and Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, among many others, acknowledged his influence. But Ralph Waldo Emerson called him the "jingle man." (Spiller, 321).

Poe was a literary innovator in so many ways that almost every assessment overlooks one or another of his achievements. He is best-known for his tales of horror and suspense, and the intriguing psychological component in his stories gives them a fresh, frightening, and enduring relevance. Some critics have suggested that Poe appreciated Hawthorne so much because both men shared recognition of the underlying strain of evil in the American psyche. (Spiller, 330)

Although master of the horror story, Poe didn't invent the genre ; gothic tales were a staple long before he began to write. (Lepore) But he did originate two other story types that have proven every bit as longlasting: detective mysteries and science fiction. M. Dupin, protagonist in three Poe stories, is the progenitor of Sherlock Holmes and, by extension,

dozens of derivative characters such as Hercule Poirot, Nick Charles, or V.I. Warshawski. It's not a stretch to say that Poe developed this durable genre out of whole cloth. Poe's fascination with deductive logic is also central to the story that sold best in his own lifetime, "The Gold Bug." Complementing Poe's interest in ratiocination was his interest in science, and several Poe stories (including "Hans Phall—A Tale" and "Mellonta Tauta") anticipate the futuristic science fiction of Jules Verne and similar writers.

Poe's first love was poetry, and today "The Raven," "Annabel Lee," and "The Bells" are staples of every middle school English curriculum and widely enjoyed. It's safe to say that Poe is the only poet to have a professional football team named for one of his works.⁷

Poe's nonfiction isn't read as broadly as his stories and poems, but his criticism and author profiles are fascinating for anyone interested in early 19th-century American literature, and a handful of his essays remain definitive, including "The Philosophy of Composition" and the Hawthorne review.

By defining the successful story as a unified artistic work seeking a single effect, Poe articulated an entirely new way of looking at tales. He's better known today for his practice than his preaching—for writing stories, not criticism—and he was certainly not the only American writer of the early 19th century who took a new approach to storytelling. But it's Poe's theory that all major short story writers have since embraced—his recipe they follow.

While Poe shaped the short story, the magazine industry shaped Poe. If it weren't for the rapid growth of the American magazine business during Poe's life, it's doubtful that he would be known today for his short stories—or for anything. The proliferation of magazines and the resulting demand for short fiction allowed—forced—writers like Poe, Hawthorne, and subsequently many others to explore new ways of writing tales. Poe certainly deserves full credit for defining the form in his review of Hawthorne. But it was the growth of American magazines that shaped the development of the short story, and it was the periodical press that allowed short stories to flourish well into the next century. And thus it isn't stretching the truth too far to say that the American magazine invented the short story as we know the form today.

The periodicals that published Poe may not have been the best of their time, but they certainly reflected popular taste. It was in Poe's financial interest to write for the broadest cross-section of the reading public, and as a result he wrote prolifically and with consideration for what would sell to the largest audience—or would stir up the greatest controversy, which may be saying the same thing. It may be worth noting that the magazines Poe wrote for reflected the demands of a rapidly expanding, dramatically changing literary market, which means that we can see how the magazine business was evolving by looking at what Poe wrote and where he was published.

Magazine historian James Playsted Wood pointed out that Poe himself could see where the business was headed. In "Marginalia" Poe wrote:

The whole tendency of the age is Magazineward. The magazine in the end will be the most influential of all departments of letters... In a few years its importance will be found to have increased in geometrical ratio.

We now demand the light artillery of the intellect ; we need the curt, the condensed, the readily diffused—in place of the verbose, the detailed, the voluminous, the inaccessible. On the other hand, the lightness of the artillery should not degenerate into pop-gunners—by which we may designate the character of the greater portion of the newspaper press—their sole legitimate object being the discussion of ephemeral matters in an ephemeral way. (42f)

It's interesting to look back in hindsight at the various components of Poe's observation. On the continued growth of magazines and of their importance, he obviously made the right call: over the next decades magazines did become the most influential medium... although in ways that Poe may not have foreseen. He was also prescient about the direction prose style took: curt and condensed was the way it went and is still going. As to whether magazines as a whole became more ephemeral or less ephemeral—some did and some didn't. Purpose can be served in both directions, and we can learn from history on both sides of the ledger.

⁷ Baltimore hosts the Ravens despite the fact that Poe published "The Raven" in New York and began the poem in Philadelphia. (EAP)

A Magazinish's Resume: A quick recap.

Poe worked at the following periodicals—the only places he ever found full-time employment.

- *The Southern Literary Messenger*, 1835-1836
- *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, 1839-1840
- *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*, 1839-1840
- *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, 1841-1842
- *New York Evening Mirror* and *Weekly Mirror*, 1844
- *The Broadway Journal*, 1845-1846

Poe contributed to more than thirty periodicals. (Tebbel, 68) Many of his short stories were published in more than one magazine. They had their first publication in the following:

- *American Monthly Magazine*
- *American Museum*
- *American Review*
- *Arthur's Ladies' Magazine*
- *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*
- *Columbian Magazine*
- *Democratic Review*
- *Dollar Newspaper*
- *Flag of Our Union*
- *Godey's Lady's Book*
- *Ladies' Companion*
- *Pioneer*
- *Saturday Courier*
- *Saturday Evening Post*
- *United States Saturday Post*

Gift books were popular in the early 19th century. They were annuals with an assortment of content, bound lavishly and designed as Christmas presents. During his lifetime Poe contributed to several:

- *The Baltimore Book*, 1838
- *The Gift*, 1836, 1840, 1842, 1843, and 1845
- *The May Flower*, 1846
- *The Missionary Memorial*, 1846. Reprinted as *Christ's Messengers*, 1847 and 1848
- *The Opal*, 1844 and 1845

(EAP)

Poe on the Periodicals

The March 11, 1843 edition of the *New World*, Park Benjamin's literary weekly, contained sketches of a few popular American magazines. Signed "L," the article has been attributed to Poe by several critics and historians, the first of whom was William M. Griswold, son of Poe's literary executor, Rufus Wilmot Griswold. He made the claim in 1898. The style does bear some resemblance to Poe's.

However, at least one contemporary critic (the "Editor's Table" of *Snowden's Ladies' Companion* for April, 1843)

attributed the article to Charles Lanman. Lanman was an author, journalist, and diplomat, who three years had earlier published a somewhat similar article in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The "L" attribution supports the Lanman theory.

Among magazine historians, Mott believed the writer was Lanman ; Tassin believed it was Poe.

Whether genuine Poe or not, the piece is interesting as a contemporary description of the antebellum American magazines. Here are some excerpts (boldface added):

Were it not for its ultraism in politics, we should consider the **Democratic Review** the most valuable journal of the day. Its editor, John L. O'Sullivan, is a man of fine matter-of-fact talents, and a good political writer, though not a brilliant one. The principal contributors to the work are Brownson, the new-light philosopher, Bancroft, Whittier, Bryant, Hawthorne, and Miss Sedgwick. Now the productions of such minds are always worth reading...

The glory of the **Knickerbocker** is for ever departed. Once, it was a thrice welcome messenger of intellectual entertainment to everybody, ladies, gentlemen and all. Nearly all our distinguished literary men have at times, made it the medium of their communication to the public. But, alas! the good names now connected with it are few and far between, and its subscription list is rapidly dwindling away. A secondary reason for this, we imagine, is in the bad management of its pecuniary affairs; as it has been sold to a Boston publisher, and, being printed there, is a Boston magazine, and no more the *Knickerbocker*...

The most popular of all the magazines is that published by Mr. **Graham**, who is a practical business man and a friend to men of talents of every cast. Every article which he prints is liberally paid for, and he has the honor of patronizing a large number of eminent writers in prose and verse, than any other publisher in the country. Can we say more in his favor or in favor of his magazine? But a word or two on the other side... Mr. Rufus W. Griswold is wholly unfit, either by intellect or character, to occupy the editorial chair of *Graham's Magazine*...

[**Godey's**] **Lady's Book**, edited by Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Sigourney, is upon the whole a clever magazine for the entertainment of ladies. We should like it better if the productions of gentlemen were excluded altogether, for it would then be a unique affair. A lady's book should be supported by ladies alone. Some of the stories published in this periodical are exceedingly good, but the majority of them are "stale, flat and unprofitable." A certain portion of sentimental nonsense is quite indispensable, but it would be well to make this portion as small as possible...

As yet, we have not made use of that modern but most expressive word humbug, but now we are compelled to do so. **Sargent's Magazine** is a perfect literary humbug...

A little more than a year ago, a very good magazine, entitled the **Boston Miscellany**, was started, edited by Nathan Hale, Jr. It was supported by some of the ablest literary men of Boston, and gave token of a goodly promise...

On a hint from Hale, Lowell the poet started a new periodical, called the **Pioneer**, in opposition to the *Miscellany*. As the case now stands, the latter is dead, very dead, and the former in the full tide of successful operation. It is printed in beautiful style, edited with great ability, and supported by a number of our most classical writers...

The **Lady's Companion** is a milk and water concern, edited by penny-a-liner and a foreigner named Hamilton. It is a receptacle of nonsense from first to last... It is a work of no beneficial influence whatever, and ought to be annihilated...

Last, but not least, we come now to speak of the **Southern Literary Messenger**, which has probably diffused more valuable information throughout the Union than any other literary work, for the past five years... Many able productions in the departments of tales, essays, and poetry, have appeared in the pages of the *Messenger*...

(EAP)

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