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THE MAN THAT WASN'T USED UP

Although biographers and critics have often mined Poe's poetry and fiction for autobiographical traces, I know of no autobiographical readings of Poe's 1839 story "The Man That Was Used Up." Readers have generally assumed that this grotesque little anecdote, which tells the story of Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, a war hero of the Bugaboo and Kickapoo campaign, has been based on the life of Gen. Winfield Scott, a hero of the War of 1812 and the Seminole and Creek Indian removal campaigns with political ambitions that would ultimately lead him to an unsuccessful presidential bid in 1852. General Smith fascinates the anonymous author who makes his acquaintance because of the combination of his personal fame, the sensational but hazy rumors that swirl around him as "the man —" (309) whose unique personal distinction is never specified, and a personal reticence so extreme that when he is asked about his personal exploits, he changes the subject to the marvelous technological advances of the age. At length the narrator calls on the General to "demand, in explicit terms, a solution of this abominable piece of mystery" (314), and finds in his bedroom not the General but "a large and exceedingly odd looking bundle of something which lay close by my feet on the floor" (314). When he kicks the bundle, it shocks him by remonstrating with him. As Pompey, the General's valet, goes about fastening prosthetic arms and legs onto the bundle, eventually adding teeth and a tongue to his mouth, the bundle, now rapidly turning into the General, recalls what "a bloody action it *was*... but then one mustn't fight with the Bugaboos and Kickapoos, and think of coming off with a mere scratch" (315). As the General stands before him completely reassembled, the narrator reflects that "Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith was the man — was *the man that was used up*" (316).

A more precise title for the story might be “The Man Who Consisted Entirely of Replacement Parts,” or, to use the term introduced to scholarly discourse by Donna Haraway, “The Cyborg General.” Yet General Smith doesn’t come across as a cyborg, or as anything less than unified, until the narrator discovers the truth about him at the end of the story. Even then he doesn’t seem like a man who’s been used up, but rather as a man who’s been made up, a man whose organic unity is only an illusion, neither organic nor unified — a man whose identity hasn’t been conferred at birth or developed through a process of maturation and acculturation, but has instead been incrementally reconstructed and reasserted. Nor is the truth of his identity a secret; everyone who refers to him knowingly as “the man —” but does not finish the reference seems to know what sort of man he is — everyone but the narrator.

Despite the dearth of autobiographical readings of this story, I’d like in this essay to consider the aptness of its central figure to Poe himself, and in particular its relation to cinematic representations of Poe. Although “The Man That Was Used Up” has never, as far as I can tell, been filmed outside of the obligatory YouTube videos, its title character provides some highly suggestive ways of thinking about its author’s own presence in the cinema. Indeed the figure of Poe that emerges from the cinema is quite as distinctive, indeed as extraordinary, as that of Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, though clearly not in quite the same way.

The best place to look for the cinematic figure of Poe is not in biopics of the author. Poe’s stories and poems have been adapted some three hundred times for feature films, short films, and television segments. But most filmgoers would be hard-pressed to name a single film biography of Poe. Nor would viewers know how extraordinary Poe’s career as what John Orr calls “a matrix-figure” (8) of cinema and popular culture has been if they focused on these film biographies.

The reasons why cinematic biographies are so tangential to the cinematic figure of Poe are clear from even a cursory examination of the most elaborate of them, *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* (Fox, 1942), a lightly fictionalized biography that is in its way a prophecy of the hour-long biographies on the History Channel aimed at students and autodidacts. Like these later biographies, this one deploys a voiceover narrator who helpfully identifies the two-year-old orphan who appears in the film’s opening scene as “the author of ‘The Raven,’ ‘The Bells,’ and ‘Annabel Lee.’” When he grows old enough to be played by future soap-opera stalwart Shepperd Strudwick, here billed as John Shepperd, Poe embarks on a series of increasingly bitter quarrels with John Allan (Frank Conroy), the Richmond merchant who has taken him in as a foster son at the behest of his wife Frances (Mary Howard). Despite the film’s rather sensationalistic title, the loves in question are a series of aspiring redemptive figures beginning with Frances Allan, who remained devoted to Poe until her death. Later she will be replaced by Poe’s youthful sweetheart Elmira Royster (Virginia Gilmore), who marries Alexander Shelton (Hardie Albright)

when Poe leaves Richmond to attend the University of Virginia; Poe's aunt, Mariah Clemm (Jane Darwell), who takes in Poe after he is dismissed from West Point for missing class, chapel, and roll call; and Mariah's daughter Virginia (Linda Darnell), the cousin Poe marries five years after they first meet in her mother's home.

Although all these female characters are based on the real women to whom Poe was closest, the film treats his relationships to them selectively and fictionalizes them strategically. It passes over Poe's rumored engagement to Elmira Royster Shelton shortly before his death, and top-billed Linda Darnell, when she first appears, seems to be playing considerably older than thirteen, Virginia Clemm's age when she married Poe. The film is equally selective in other details. It focuses on Poe's gambling debts as leading to his quarrels with John Allan and the death of Frances Allan as deepening these quarrels but never mentions the detail Poe's biographers agree precipitated their final break: a letter Allan read in which Poe observed that "Mr. A. was not very often sober" (Allen 213). The film adds a scene in which the widowed Elmira visits the dying Virginia but is gently rebuffed by the author's wife, who tells her, "You belong to Eddie's past. I belong to his present and his future."

In perhaps its single most florid invention, the film devises a scene in which Thomas Jefferson, the founding president of the University of Virginia, calls Poe to his office, gently reproves him for his gambling, admiringly acknowledges that Poe's story "The Gold-Bug" kept him up late the night before, and gives him some avuncular and ultimately unheeded advice about how to handle John Allan more diplomatically. Since Poe arrived at the university in February 1826, five months before Jefferson's death, such a meeting could have taken place, but there is no record that it did. The scene as the film presents it, drawing on a long Hollywood tradition of devising fictional meetings between contemporaneous historical figures, is impossible because Poe did not write "The Gold-Bug" until 1842, sixteen years after he left the University of Virginia. It was presumably devised to disarm suspicions that Poe, hopelessly devoted to a series of quasi-redemptive females, was unable to accept male authority.

Like all Poe biographies, *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* emphasizes the poignant contrast between Poe's literary genius and his short and unhappy life, and like most of them, it rationalizes this contrast by painting Poe as tragically self-destructive. All its major episodes follow the same pattern. Poe, angry at some perceived slight, lashes out at his oppressor: first John Allan, then Turner Dixon (Frank Melton), a fellow gambler at the University of Virginia who refuses to accept a manuscript of one of Poe's poems in settlement of Poe's debt, then Alexander Shelton after Poe realizes that Elmira never answered his letters from college because her father intercepted them and that she still loves him, and finally Mr. Graham (Morris Ankrum), the editor to whom Poe, urged by Charles Dickens (Morton Lowry), vigorously defends copyright laws that will prevent publishers from stealing authors' work.

Whether or not these adversaries retaliate, Poe, stricken by remorse at his intemperate behavior, drinks heavily for several days, making it impossible for him to carry on his studies or his job, and then gets tossed out of school, job, or home. So the film balances its assessment of Poe between admiration for his fierce ability to love, eventually supplemented by his principled defense of copyright, and his refusal to be diplomatic and his regrettable tendency to drink, in order to package an informational biography of a canonical American author as a conventionally heart-rending love story. Along the way it adds one notable feature to its portrait of Poe: the middle name “Allan.” Unlike the historical Poe, who hated his foster-father so much that he never used his name, instead adopting a series of pseudonyms or signing himself “Edgar A. Poe,” the film’s hero is constantly referred to as “Edgar Allan Poe” by other characters and himself.

In addition, there is one notable omission: the stories and poems that made Poe famous. Since, as Thomas Mallon points out, “no one wants to watch somebody typing,” Hollywood biographies of famous writers rarely show them at work even though their work is what makes their story worth telling. Film biographies of Poe, like all biopics of authors, must surmount two challenges: how to establish a meaningful relation between the author’s professional and personal life, and how to make his professional life interesting. Poe presents a less difficult case than many authors for several reasons. His stories and poems are so dramatic that viewers expect them to flavor cinematic biographies of him and would be disappointed if they did not. His own life partook of so many of the same elements of his stories and poems that it has come to seem natural to cast adaptations of his life in terms of adaptations of his work. And he was professionally not only an author but an editor whose career was marked by a series of conflicts with the publishers who hired him, watched the material he solicited and his often scathing book reviews raise their profile and boost their circulation, and then fired him over his dissipation or his intemperate championing of copyright. So it is hardly surprising that *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* devotes more screen time to Poe the editor than to Poe the writer. Apart from “The Gold-Bug,” the film never mentions, even in passing, any of Poe’s stories but treats him exclusively as a poet, relying on a series of strategic encomiums on a very small sample of his work. Although there is no indication that either of Poe’s biggest boosters, Mariah Clemm or Virginia, ever reads any of his stories or poems, the film emphasizes Thomas Jefferson’s anachronistic praise of “The Gold-Bug” and the tremulous appreciation of “The Raven” by Timothy (Leon Tyler), the printer’s devil who tells the author, “Excuse me, sir, I thought it was wonderful,” even though it leaves both Mr. Griswold (Arthur Shields), editor of the *Broadway Journal*, and his printers unmoved.

The story’s factual basis is obscured by several changes. Poe had offered “The Raven” to George Rex Graham, the editor of *Graham’s Magazine*, who declined to publish it but offered Poe fifteen dollars in charity. The owner of the *Broad-*

way *Journal* in 1845 was Poe himself, who purchased an interest in the short-lived journal that year. Moving the site of this anecdote from *Graham's Magazine* to the *Broadway Journal* and replacing Graham and Poe with the kindly though ultimately unsupportive figure invokes Poe's long-standing antagonism with the editor and anthologist Rufus Griswold, who replaced Poe as the editor of *Graham's Magazine* but whose connection with the *Broadway Journal* was limited to a single contribution of fifty dollars that kept the magazine afloat for a short time before its demise in 1846, while softening their conflict and changing its terms. In fact, the sequence that intercuts Elmira's visit to the dying Virginia, the scene in which Poe, desperate to raise money for his ailing wife, reads "The Raven" aloud to Griswold and the printers whose verdict the editor has sought with the scene in which the dying Virginia receives Elmira Royster Shelton marks the climax of the film.

Although Poe does not sell "The Raven" to Griswold, Timothy persuades the printers to take up a charitable collection for him, and Poe, returning home, tells Virginia that the fifteen dollars he has received is only an advance, and that twenty-five more dollars will be paid to him on the poem's publication. Her faith in her husband apparently confirmed, Virginia dies in his arms as the candle at her bedside gutters out and bells toll. Poe, leaving her bedside, goes to the window and stares out as his voice recites the climactic lines of "Annabel Lee" in voiceover. At this point the narrator resumes control of Poe's story, winding it up briskly with the news that after Virginia's death, "he sank lower and lower." On his own deathbed in Baltimore, Poe unites his love and his work — "I have genius, Virginia. Sometimes a man must shout it out so that the world will hear him. Virginia — dearer to me than life," before reciting two lines from his poem "A Dream within a Dream." After his death, the film, in its final shot, slowly tracks in to a bust of the author as the narrator announces that the contemporaries who spurned or ignored Poe could never have predicted that a collector would purchase the manuscript of "The Raven," which Poe was unable to sell for twenty-five dollars, for \$17,000, and adds: "The gods laugh, and Poe laughs with them."

It is no wonder that *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* is little known, for it is utterly conventional in its tailoring of biographical facts to tear-jerking entertainment with a retrospectively triumphal edge. The film's Poe is a deeply flawed, ultimately pathetic figure whose genius, powerless to prevent his wife's death or keep his self-destructive urges at bay, renders him immortal only after he has died. Authorship, in this account, is not an activity defined by its products and their effects, but a condition, a romantic malady that renders the author at once admirable and ineffectual.

This romantic, pathetic model of authorship, common to so many film portraits of so many writers, is behind the very first film to focus on Poe's life, D.W. Griffith's 1909 *Edgar Allen Poe*. This six-minute short, whose misspelling of its subject's name in its title was overlooked in the rush to release it in time for the centennial

anniversary of Poe's birth, restricts itself to a fictionalization of the composition of "The Raven." The film begins with Virginia Poe (Linda Arvidson) thrashing in her bed in obvious discomfort. When her husband (Barry O'Moore) enters, he wrings his hands helplessly over her, then notices a raven perched above the door, and, inspired, sits down, takes up a quill pen, and feverishly begins to write. Once he has finished, the scene shifts to a magazine office where three different readers reject the poem before a fourth expresses enthusiasm and gives Poe enough money to rush home with a basket of food for Virginia. But it is too late; she has died in his absence.

Both films revise Poe's biography by linking "The Raven" to the imminent death of Virginia, even though she actually died two years after the poem was published. *Edgar Allen Poe* presents Poe as inspired by something he sees as Virginia is on her deathbed; *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* crosscuts repeatedly between Virginia's final decline and Poe's reading of the poem to his editor and his printers at the *Broadway Journal*. Both change the facts of Poe's life in order to motivate an unabashedly tragic, romantic view of authorship. The emphasis in both cases is on pathos rather than action: Poe's energetic authorship changes nothing about his life and fails to prevent his wife's death. Apart from their very different scope, the most obvious way in which the films differ is the role they assign the author of "The Raven." *Edgar Allen Poe* romanticizes the circumstances of the poem's composition, *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* of its declamation, recasting Poe the writer as Poe the performer.

The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe's emphasis on Poe the editor as well as Poe the performer suggests a second point to be made about the cinematic presence of Poe: Poe is ubiquitous largely because there are so many Poes for movies to draw on. In addition to Poe the writer, Poe the performer, and Poe the editor, *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* presents Poe the lover, Poe the struggling artist, Poe the drunkard, Poe the crusader for copyright, Poe the figure of pathos dead before his time, Poe the immortal, and Poe the posthumously valuable literary commodity. Although each of them obviously offers only a partial view of Poe, together, like the different parts of Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, they constitute a familiar whole, even though this whole, as in General Smith's case, may be a cyborg rather than an organic compound.

But this list only hints at the dazzling range of Poes who have been identified and pressed into service outside biopics of the author. These Poes are not aspects of the biographical Poe, but functions of his status as a matrix-figure. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock has discussed the ways cult films from *Danza macabra* to *Torture Garden* employ a "textualization of Poe" whereby "Poe, the author, through voodoo rituals and the magic of narrative, is summoned from the afterlife, reembodied — zombified — and compelled to keep creating even after his death" (14). Kyle Dawson Edwards has argued more generally that adaptations of Poe's work take

their cue less from “the so-called textual source” than from “a broad assemblage, encompassing not only a literary text but also previously produced films, contemporaneous commercial and aesthetic trends, the current and future objectives of the film producer, as well the accumulated textual corpus that has gathered around the recognized literary work” (117). Tracing the conflation of Poe’s fiction and Poe’s biography to produce “the Poe discourse” (119) to the notorious biographical memoir of Poe published by his longtime antagonist Rufus Griswold, Edwards argues that this discourse, rather than any specific tales, poems, or biographical data, animates and informs Poe’s cinematic avatars, whether or not they present the author in corporeal form.

Blurring the boundaries between the world of Poe and the world of Poe’s fiction has unleashed a wide variety of Poes across an equally wide range of media. Edwards has investigated the way the Poe discourse shaped the 1935 Universal film *The Raven*, in which the villainous Dr. Richard Vollin (Bela Lugosi), a Poe collector so immersed in his subject that he confidently offers an autobiographical reading of “The Raven” as an expression of the author’s own grief-maddened search for vengeance against those who deprived him of his beloved Lenore, turns his basement into a torture chamber complete with devices inspired by Poe’s stories, and seems intent on merging his own identity with Poe’s, until “while Poe, long dead, is unable to exact his revenge on the individuals who betrayed him or impeded his wishes, Vollin can and, by so doing, satisfy the author’s intentions” (130).

A simpler, more limited, but still instructive example of the way the Poe discourse can blur the boundaries among figures and areas that might seem distinct is provided by *An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe*. The film, ostensibly a series of staged readings of four Poe stories, consistently works to break down the distinction between the past-tense events recounted in the stories and the present-tense action of reading them, and through this blurring to a secondary, incomplete, subtle blurring of the boundary between Poe’s status as author and Vincent Price’s status as narrator.

By 1970, when *An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe* was released, Price’s leading roles in the Roger Corman films *House of Usher* (1960), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), *Tales of Terror* (1962), *The Raven* (1963), *The Haunted Palace* (1963), *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), and *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1964) had already been anointed as the preeminent Hollywood interpreter of Poe’s tormented heroes. So it was only natural to cast him in a one-man anthology in which he gave dramatic readings of four stories, with limited movement and accompaniment, presenting himself generally not as Poe or as any fictional characters, but as a series of first-person narrators who all just happened to be Vincent Price. Nonetheless, all four segments deliberately obscure the boundaries between the characters, the narrator, and the performer. At the climax of the first story, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” for example, the narrator, recalling the way he became obsessed, as police officers questioned him, by the persistently beating heart of the old man he had killed, scrabbles be-

neath the floorboards of the room in which he is telling the story, unaccompanied by anyone else, and comes up with something clearly meant to be the old man's heart, which has evidently burst the boundaries of the diegetic world to enter the narrator's world directly. Just before the reassuring epilogue of the second story, "The Sphinx," convinces the narrator that the monstrous creature he has beheld scurrying across a distant landscape is actually a tiny insect a fraction of an inch from his eye, a 180° camera roll dramatizes the narrator's feverish disorientation by turning his head upside down in the visual field.

The third story, "The Cask of Amontillado," works more persistently and disruptively to break down the distinction between the narrator's world and the narrated world. This segment begins with a closeup of Price's hand grasping a chalice, raising it to an absent guest at the formal table at which the narrator, shortly identified as Montresor, is seated while he recounts his revenge against the hapless Fortunato. As the narrative moves from summary to dramatized incident with the line "It was toward dusk," the film abruptly cuts to an extreme closeup of a burning candle against a black background that is initially and disturbingly uncontextualized, as if the narrative were leaving the table and entering the diegetic space of the story Montresor were telling. Price uses the narrator's customary voice for his own dialogue but exaggerates his delivery for the crabbed, shrill Fortunato. At the climactic dialogue between Montresor and Fortunato, as they address each other through the only small opening yet unfilled in the wall Montresor has erected to keep Fortunato chained in his catacombs until he dies, the camera cuts between alternating profiles of Price as Montresor on the right hand side of the screen, facing left, and Price as Fortunato on the left hand side of the screen, facing right. The shots of Fortunato are presented, appropriately but illogically, against a black background representing the inside of the tomb in which he has been chained.

The final story, "The Pit and the Pendulum," is the only one of the four to have been seriously abridged, emphasizing the visceral menace of the pendulum over the pit's more philosophical invitation to despair. This segment goes further than any of the others in blurring the lines between narrating present and narrated past. The desperate-seeming narrator tells his story in what looks like the story's own dungeonlike setting. Several early moments in the narration are illustrated by indistinct but recognizable background shadows of the unspeaking inquisitors who will arrange the torments to come. At the moment when the narrator recalls almost falling into the pit, a cut reframes his talking head along the top of the frame, looking down. Later, when he describes awakening strapped to a table, another presents his head along the bottom of frame, looking up. As the pendulum the inquisitors intend to slash the narrator to death begins its descent toward his body, the narration is interrupted by occasional glimpses of the pendulum and more frequent shots of the rats who throng the narrator's torture chamber and who will incongruously prove

his salvation. After the narrator frees himself by rubbing the remnants of his food on the straps binding him so that the rats will chew them to shreds, the pendulum is withdrawn to a ceiling “thirty or forty feet” high — a detail not given in Poe — and a high-angle zoom-out from the narrator implies its distance in the present tense. And it is in the present, not the past, tense that the narrator makes his final exultant announcement: “The Inquisition is in the hands of its enemies!”

Because the Poe discourse relies on entangling rather than distinguishing Poe the author, Poe the historical figure, Poe’s narrators, and Poe’s characters, it operates much more powerfully and characteristically in adaptations of Poe’s fiction than in Poe biographies. To put it more precisely, the Poe discourse treats the author’s biography as material for adaptation, just like (and often along with) his stories and poems. *The Raven* and *An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe* can blur the lines between character, narrator, performer, and author because the Poe discourse has long drawn on all these figures and shaped them into a cyborg assemblage which, like Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, presents itself as a unified totality. But the number of Poes available to later authors and adapters encompasses a much wider range of modalities.

There is, to begin with, the recited Poe, whose stories provide scripts for many a filmed performance. The UPA animated film *The Tell-Tale Heart* is essentially an illustrated version of James Mason’s voiceover narration, which follows the story verbatim. Colin Izod’s 2002 adaptation of the same story follows *An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe* in providing minimal staging for Joss Ackland’s dramatic reading but adds two complications: an intermittent and very limited dramatization of the story’s events, and a series of three interruptions by filmmaker Neil Jordan recalling his early experience of the story, describing his memories of it now, and offering his ideas about “what I would do if I were making a film of this story.” The result is to expand an apparently straightforward presentation of the story into a palimpsest of three layers: a recitation, a dramatization, and a discussion of the story. This multi-laminated Poe survives in a typically characteristic fragmentation in Rocket Chair Media’s iPhone app *The Tell Tale Heart*.

In addition, there is the authorial Poe, the Poe of the imprimatur, who provides aesthetic and commercial cachet to cinematic adaptations like *The Haunted Palace*, even though this particular film, for example, is on the whole an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft’s story “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” with just enough Poe touches, from its title to its strategic but limited quotations of the eponymous poem, to warrant its inclusion in Roger Corman’s Poe franchise. There is the quasi-biographical Poe, who continues to enjoy many alternative realities. This Poe was resurrected to solve mysteries as far back as Manly Wade Wellman’s “When It Was Moonlight” and John Dickson Carr’s “The Gentleman from Paris.” Harold Schechter has paired him with a series of unlikely allies: Davy Crockett in *Nevermore*, P.T. Barnum in *The Hum Bug*, Kit Carson in *Mask of the Red Death*, and

Louisa May Alcott in *The Tell-Tale Corpse*. Poe has teamed up with Batman to solve a series of murders in the five issues of the comic book *Batman: Nevermore*. He has served as a variously romantic lead in novels from John May's *Poe and Fanny* to Matthew Pearl's *The Poe Shadow* to Lynn Cullen's *Mrs. Poe*. He has been pressed into service in children's novels like Harriet Eager Davis's *Elmira: The Girl Who Loved Edgar Allan Poe* and Scott Gustafson's *Eddie: The Lost Youth of Edgar Allan Poe*. Even after he has died, his specter continues to haunt the fictional worlds of later authors, inspiring the leading figures of William Hjortsberg's *Nevermore*, Linda Fairstein's *Entombed*, and Robert Poe's *Return to the House of Usher* and *The Black Cat*.

The confusion fostered by the bylines of these last two examples, both written by a distant relative of Poe's, is deepened still further in George Egon Hatvary's *The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe*, which is solved by the author's fictional detective, the Chevalier Auguste Dupin, and Avi's children's book *The Man Who Was Poe*, which melds the author with both his fictional alter ego Dupin and Edmund, the boy whose missing relatives provide the tale with its mystery. But perhaps the most hydra-headed offspring of the Poe discourse, the one that brings together the broadest range of different Poes, is James McTeigue's 2012 film *The Raven*.

The film begins by indicating its status as quasi-biographical speculation with a screen announcing, "On October 7, 1849, Edgar Allan Poe was found near death on a park bench in Baltimore, Maryland. His last days remain a mystery." Once it has established its credentials as biographical speculation, it swiftly proceeds to a shot of a raven, another of Poe looking up, a third of the moon, and then a scream, binding itself to other traditions, from Jack the Ripper to Universal horror films to *Se7en*. When Poe (John Cusack), thirsty for public recognition, offers to buy a drink for any bar patron who can finish the line, "Quoth the raven —" he foreshadows the film's copycat plot, in which Poe's stories are treated as unfinished works whose completion requires literal staging.

The killer, a devoted fan of Poe, begins by staging tableaux of death borrowed from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Pit and the Pendulum." Because real-life damage on his enemy after Poe had died, Inspector Fields (Luke Evans), initially regards Poe as a suspect. But Fields, employing the logic peculiar to tales that mix fictionalized biography with tribute fiction, decides that he might have some insight into a copycat he thinks is "taunting us, telling us he'll kill again." In other words, Poe is assumed to have the power to predict the criminal's actions because he has provided the template for the crimes, even though viewers might reasonably ascribe that power to anyone who owned a copy of Poe's tales. Fields's faith in Poe does not prevent the murderer from kidnapping Emily Hamilton (Alice Eve), Poe's forbidden love, from a masked ball given by her overbearing father, Capt. Charles Hamilton (Brendan Gleeson), and burying her alive.

Urged by Fields, Poe embarks on a new set of stories inspired by these latest murders, closing the loop even more tightly than Dr. Vollin does in the 1935 *The Raven* by establishing the author and his works as a function of the adaptation. No wonder this Poe tells Fields, "I feel as if I've gone from author to character in one of my tales." When Poe, who has taken poison at the killer's command as the price of learning where he has hidden Emily, finally rescues her from her premature burial, their passionate embrace and exchange of lovers' vows essentializes Poe's well-known ideal of love-in-death while updating it, since now it is the author, not the beautiful woman, who is dying. An epilogue in which Fields confronts the killer, newly arrived in Paris, and shoots him using state-of-the-art bullet-time visual effects jerks the final frames of the film into a postmodern present, confirmed by the sudden eruption of aggressive pop music and abstract, shifting designs of magnetized silvery particles as the closing credits roll.

The film is over before the audience can realize that there has been no notable raven to warrant its title, which merely places one more marker of the Poe discourse, linked associatively rather than logically to all the others. Poe's stories here function as both the cause of a fictional character's murder spree and its effect. The murderer is expressing his admiration for Poe's work by attacking and ultimately destroying its author. Poe works through a series of fictional obstacles, most notably his determination to rescue a lover who has no historical counterpart, in order to reach his historically ordained death. More generally, the film freely invents motivations and incidents in order to lay the groundwork for a series of Poesque tableaux that are exactly what the audience expects — obligatory scenes that, requiring no motivation, come off as heavily overdetermined by forces that are both arbitrary and inevitable.

The most remarkable aspect of the gallimaufry of *The Raven* is that it is utterly unremarkable. Whether the film is accounted a success or a failure, no one would describe its amalgam of Poes — the doomed young man, the pathetically failed lover, the inspiration to killers, the writer inspired in turn by horrifying crimes, the brilliant amateur sleuth, the future immortal — as in any way exceptional. What is exceptional is the figure of Poe himself as he is refracted, inflated, fragmented, and reassembled by the Poe discourse. It is clear that such a discourse has gathered around some authors but not others, and that the presence of an authorial discourse bears no relation to the canonical reputation of the author. Specialists aside, there is no Tolstoy discourse, no Baudelaire discourse, no Goethe discourse, no Chaucer discourse. There are hints of a T.S. Eliot discourse, but no George Eliot discourse. In fact, apart from the oft-invoked triumvirate of Shakespeare, Austen, and Dickens, there are very few authors — Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll, Mary Shelley — around whom Hollywood has generated a multi-media, multi-modal discourse that melds life and work in order

to generate a broad range of avatars that can be deployed in many different ways — except of course for Poe.

One obvious question to ask about this phenomenon is why some authors seem to generate biographies and others a more general discursive field that melds adaptations of their fiction with adaptations of their biography. To recast this question more provocatively: What do authors around whom a popular discourse grows have in common that distinguishes them from other authors? “Popular” is clearly the key word here. Oprah’s Book Club put *Anna Karenina* on the bestseller list. Jane Austen did not become the center of her own multimedia discourse until the success of two 1995 adaptations, the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* and *Clueless*, the hilarious update of *Emma*, enshrined her in the Anglophone popular imagination and retrospectively made her life, her two-hundred-year-old backlist, and her discourse into hot properties that could spawn films as different as *Becoming Jane*, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, and *Austenland*. The Dickens discourse has always depended disproportionately on the autobiographical opening chapters of *David Copperfield* and the fable *A Christmas Carol*, the first linking his life and his work in ways that look forward, in a very different key, to *The Invisible Woman* (2013), the second providing both an entrée to the Dickens world and a seasonal institution that can be counted on to furnish reliable family entertainment every Christmas. And Shakespeare, perhaps the least widely read of the triumvirate outside school assignments, has the advantages of providing both an endlessly adaptable oeuvre that has generated films from *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996) to *Scotland, PA* (2001) and the canonical figure, refreshed most recently by *Shakespeare in Love* (1997), whose cultural ubiquity has left him the Last Classic Standing.

Poe, less distinguished as a writer than any of these three, has flourished because he is universally regarded, accurately or not, as more distinctive. Shakespeare, as Coleridge famously said, is myriad-minded; Austen is the patron saint of romantic comedy; Dickens is the ultimate Victorian. Poe is both typical and aberrant. He is the ultimate explorer of human aberration, less profound than Dostoevsky but more accessible, more obviously dramatic and scenic, and potent in much smaller doses. The language of his poetry and prose may be less distinguished, but it is more distinctive as well, and its mournful cadences offer adapters of his life and work an instantly recognizable model for dialogue and voiceover that they can readily borrow, transmute, or ignore.

In addition, Poe’s biography has the advantage of fitting his fiction seamlessly. Left without parents at an early age, he grew up willful, headstrong, and prone to conflict. Unlucky in his first love, he married a cousin ten years younger than himself only to see her die when she was barely an adult. A passionate critic and a gifted editor, he never reached his professional dream of a stable editorship at a well-established journal. Even before he invented the modern detective story with “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” he posed as a detective himself when

he predicted the ending of *Barnaby Rudge*, and the sequel to his first detective story, "The Mystery of Marie Rôget," methodically second-guesses the investigators of an unsolved real-life murder for which he also poses as sleuth. Tossed from America to England and back as a child, then up and down the literary centers of America as an adult, he died young under circumstances that remain mysterious to this day. He continues to present himself to biographers as a dreamer, a loner, an ineffectual spirit defeated in the end by the demands of the flesh. His life is not only a plausible blueprint for his work; it is an irresistible adjunct to his work.

In the end, what is most remarkable about the Poe discourse is not that it exists alongside the Shakespeare discourse and the Austen discourse and the Dickens discourse, but that it is more powerful, pervasive, and universally recognized than any of the others. Like Alfred Hitchcock, whose relatively uneventful and deeply private life has done nothing to discourage biographical speculation across media, Poe has achieved this success through identification with a popular genre. Unlike Hitchcock, however, Poe has the unique advantage of close identification with "a number of genres that, in part, still exist in the form they do because of his enormous influence": "psychological horror," "ghost stories," "haunted house stories," "graphic slasher stories," and "urban horror stories" (Perry and Sederholm vii). To these genres may be added the detective story, which Poe is widely acknowledged to have founded. Nor is the Poe discourse weakened by the many ways in which these genres overlap, for their intimate relationship allows his spectral figure to pass easily from one to the next and folds them all into a gothic amalgamation that seems both extensive and unified. Indeed, because Poe is the only author powerfully associated with all these genres, his preeminence becomes a trope of appealing undecidability for readers who wonder, for example, whether a given tale in the Poe tradition will ultimately turn out to conclude with the rational explanation of a detective story, the psychological explanation of a horror story, or the otherworldly explanation of a ghost story.

Poe would doubtless have been chagrined to learn that posterity has largely dismissed his contributions to still another popular genre: the burlesque of horror, which Poe himself labeled tales of the grotesque like "A Predicament," "The Spectacles," and "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." Commentators almost without exception have agreed that Poe's horror parodies are nowhere near as effective as what he called his tales of the arabesque, horror stories that succeed from their opening words in creating a single mood of foreboding and dread they never break. Yet at least one of Poe's despised grotesques contains the key to the Poe discourse that has kept the figure of the author, his work, and his world evergreen as it continues to undergo one adaptation, one transformation, after another. Whether or not it is true, as Haraway contends, that "we are cyborgs... . The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality" (292), it is certainly true that Poe, more than anyone else in the world, is the author who has never been used up.

THE MAN WHO WASN'T USED UP

Summary

Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, the cyborg hero of Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Man Who Was Used Up," offers an apt figure for Poe himself as he and his fiction have been used (but never used up) by adapters. Like his eponymous hero, the biographical figure of Poe turns out to be constructed for particular ends rather than simply observed; as the myth Gen. Smith provides a stellar example of the power of military mythmaking, Poe has been pressed into service to illustrate a series of Romantic myths about authors and authorship; and both figures make more powerful impressions in their constructed avatars — in Poe's case, in what has been called the Poe discourse — than in avowedly biographical accounts. This essay considers some of the many uses to which adaptations have put Poe the storyteller, Poe the poet, Poe the detective, Poe the doomed lover, and Poe the suffering author, while consistently blurring the lines between the biographical Poe and the stories and poems he created and ultimately ascribing to the adaptations themselves the exclusive power to embody and complete the fictional worlds he adumbrated. It concludes by asking what distinguishes the few authors like Shakespeare, Austen, and Poe from the many oft-adapted authors who have never become mythic figures.

CZŁOWIEK, KTÓRY SIĘ NIE ZUŻYŁ

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy filmowej figury Edgara Allana Poe'go, jest esejem naukowym na temat tego, jak kino i szerzej, kultura popularna przywoływały postać wybitnego pisarza nie zawsze wprost, odwołując się do formy klasycznej biografii, lecz za pomocą różnych form, adaptujących jego twórczość, czasem w sposób pozornie swobodny. Za punkt wyjścia autor przyjmuje utwór *The Man That Was Used Up*, zwracając uwagę, że mimo braku autobiograficznych referencji główną postacią tego utworu można odnieść do samego Poe'go, jak również do jego filmowych reprezentacji. To istotna wskazówka dotycząca tego, gdzie i jak szukać tych reprezentacji (bo nie tylko wizerunków). Rozróżnienie między postacią a figurą ma dla pracy podstawowe znaczenie. Autor ukazuje, jak figura może wpłynąć na narrację czy gatunki, niekoniecznie związane z adaptacjami utworów pisarza, choć mają one oczywiście pierwszorzędne znaczenie.

Thumaczył Sławomir Bobowski

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