"Truth Itself in the Supremeness of Its Perfection": The Influence of Photography on Edgar Allan Poe's Writing

Tiffanie M. Itsou
University of Connecticut, Tiffanie.Itsou@gmail.com

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Tiffanie May Itsou, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2014

Edgar Allan Poe's literary successes in the late 1830's and early 1840's coincided with the invention and remarkable popularity of the daguerreotype. In this study I examine the profound impact the advent of photography had on Poe's writing. In an 1840 article for *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* Poe called photography "the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science." Through a close study of selected fiction, essays, and letters I argue that Poe was the first writer to explore the myriad possibilities of the newly emergent photographic world.
"Truth Itself in the Supremeness of Its Perfection":

The Influence of Photography on Edgar Allan Poe's Writing

Tiffanie May Itsou

B.A., University of Connecticut, 2001

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"Truth Itself in the Supremeness of Its Perfection":
The Influence of Photography on Edgar Allan Poe's Writing

Presented by
Tiffanie May Itsou, B.A., M.A.

Major Advisor________________________________________________
Robert Tilton

Associate Advisor______________________________________________
Raymond Anselment

Associate Advisor______________________________________________
Katherine Capshaw Smith

University of Connecticut
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I dedicate this project to my darling daughters Esme and Mina.
# Table of Contents

Introduction.................................................................................................................1

Chapter I: The Daguerreotype in America.................................................................13

Chapter II: Pre-Photography Tales and the Visual.................................................43

Chapter III: “The Daguerreotype” Essays, Poe’s Philosophy, and
the Earliest Post-Photography Tales.................................................................74

Chapter IV: The Detective Tales.............................................................................119

Chapter V: The Later Post-Photography Tales.......................................................142

Appendix: Poe as Photographic Subject.................................................................168

Notes............................................................................................................................181

Works Cited...............................................................................................................188
In the first of three essays he would write about the invention of photography for *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*, Edgar Allan Poe called the daguerreotype (the earliest form of the photograph) "the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science." Poe did not make that declaration without due consideration. Living in Philadelphia at the time, he spent many of his free hours at the city's Academy of Natural Sciences where he associated with some of the most prominent figures in the scientific community, among them Dr. John Kearsley Mitchell, Joseph Leidy, and Paul Beck Goddard. Poe regularly wrote about many of the inventions and breakthroughs of his day, from advances in weaponry to the development of fire alarms and new types of steam engines. It becomes clear just how affected Poe was by photography, however, when the tales he composed before 1839 are compared to those he wrote after the daguerreotype was revealed to the world in January of that year.

In fact, many of Poe’s most successful works were composed in the daguerrean era of the 1840’s, when the novelty of photography was at its height. Poe’s untimely death came before photography was largely de-mystified; it was de rigueur by the 1850’s in the United States. In many
ways, Poe’s writings from the 1840’s can be read as his reflections on this brief but transformative moment in American history. As Poe was composing some of his most brilliant fiction, much of it concerning the hidden aspects of a person’s character, photography appeared with its ability to uncannily capture and make visible one’s natural, and thus—it was thought—truest self. Photography was seen as a science that could objectively reveal who we really were.

Poe subtly but distinctly incorporates this revelation into his writing. His post-photography tales are characterized by a new premium on capturing affective truths rather than on crafting tales around particular, desired effects. This new photographic aesthetic manifests primarily in the way that many of Poe’s most successful works, such as "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and the Dupin tales—all of which are written in this daguerrean era of the 1840's—can be read as writerly versions of Poe's understanding of the source of photography's wonder, the fact that the subject seemed to draw itself. Poe's most important subject in these stories is the human mind.

After the invention of photography Poe’s fiction demonstrates a new photographic aesthetic. Poe's role as author becomes closely aligned with the daguerreotypist. He conceals his authorial techniques after January 1839, allowing his subject—the psyche—to "draw itself" as the
subject of a daguerreotype was thought to do. In order for his work to express the most timeless and universal of truths, Poe believed an author needed to eliminate his biased, fallible self from his work as a photographer seemed to do. This was not realism, something Poe eschewed as inevitably artificial; rather, it allowed reality to show itself in its own beautiful, grotesque, and often surprising ways. Poe's post-photography works became self-contained pictures of truth for a reader to discover. This is in contrast to his pre-1839 writing in which the onus is clearly on the author to reach out and affect the reader through particular devices and techniques. After photography, Poe realized that his all-important effects are best evoked not through a tale designed around their achievement as an end, but in an effort to capture the most "affective" device of all—truth, which, itself, would have the most profound effect on the audience. He saw this process as akin to the effects he had both observed and felt in response to the mesmerizing photograph. Poe's writing after 1839 attempts to locate truths in the ultimate home of all creative experiences, the human mind.

The advent of photography brought with it an ironic freedom for the artist seeking to convey truth in his work: in a photographic world, the artist can and ideally should make himself invisible. Like a daguerreotypist was thought to do, the writer can disappear behind the
truth of his achievement. His genius lies in his knowledge of precisely when to "remove the plate" from the light. The fact that the audience immediately divorced the creator from the images he produced can be seen as an opportunity for the artist, particularly for the writer. The zeitgeist of the daguerrean era solved the problem of authorial bias in the endeavor to reveal truths of life through artistic expression, which was something that American writers were struggling with at this moment. Unlike their European counterparts, American authors in the 1830's and 40's were striving to establish a unique national literature. As conduits of truth, rather than manipulators of it, American writers gained a heretofore elusive artistic authority.

In Chapter I of this project I recount the cultural milieu of the daguerrean era in the United States as well as describe some key technical elements of this earliest form of photography. While the daguerreotype all but disappeared from the scene by 1850, replaced by more easily produced and reproduced photographic media such as the calotype, the ambrotype, the tintype, and the carte de visite, the daguerreotype's impact on American art and culture cannot be minimized.¹

I examine three of Poe's pre-photography tales in Chapter II to establish his early approaches to visual representation and make evident his developing use of affective writerly devices. In "Metzengerstein,"
The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and "Ligeia" Poe focuses on predicting and affecting an observer's point of view in order to achieve a particular, sustained effect. Published in the autumn of 1838, just a few months before the invention of photography is announced to the world in January of 1839, "Ligeia" stands as a particularly interesting illustration of the profound ways photography would change Poe's approach to his art. Exactly one year after publishing "Ligeia" Poe will lament that he did not conclude this favorite tale differently. Echoing what was technical terminology, he complains in a letter to his friend Phillip Cooke that he wished that he had described his heroine's final appearance to the narrator as "having gradually faded away," an idea that failed to occur to him before the advent of the photographic process.

Poe writes this letter to Cooke as he is finishing some of his earliest post-photography tales: "William Wilson," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Man of the Crowd," which I discuss at length in Chapter III. All three of these tales depict very real projections of the psyche onto the outer world. We begin to see how Poe’s tales become photograph-like: the desired “effect” on the reader is a more holistic one, developed over the course of the work so that the ultimate meaning, or truth, of each tale emerges only as the reader—simultaneously with the
various characters—realizes that the object of his contemplation is
ultimately a reflection of himself.

Poe's tales after 1839 become objects unto themselves, inviting
scrutiny as conveyances of truths that emerge as a result of an imaginative
mind encountering its version of reality, much like a daguerreotype
reflected a true depiction of the subject and, when viewed from a slightly
different angle, of the viewer as well. Shortly after publishing these
initial post-photography tales in the fall of 1839, Poe published three
essays on daguerreotypy the following winter and spring. I open Chapter
III by examining the significance of how, through these essays, Poe
marvels not only at the beauty and accuracy of daguerreotype images, but
also at the potential the invention of photography has for future scientific
endeavors and discoveries. Subsequently, I discuss the ways that
photography begins to help shape Poe's philosophy regarding literature. I
conclude Chapter III with a brief discussion of an interesting,
transitionally photographic tale, “The Oval Portrait,” as a segue into both
the detective tales and the later post-photography stories.

In Chapter IV I make the case that the genre of detective fiction is
only possible in a photographic world by examining Poe's Dupin tales as
extended considerations of photography's revelations regarding how
individuals do—and do not—see reality. This becomes particularly
apparent in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." "The Mystery of Marie Roget" is an experiment in which Poe “photographically” depicts reality under the guise of fiction in an attempt to solve a real life murder. In "The Purloined Letter" Poe explores the potential loss of privacy and personal autonomy as a consequence of photographic duplication.

Some of Poe's later post-photography tales convey more outright photographic themes as will be discussed in Chapter V. In "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" we see explorations of anxieties regarding surveillance. This concern is extended in "The Imp of the Perverse" with a contemplation of the threat to privacy that the invention of photography poses. I conclude Chapter V with a brief consideration of how Poe’s enigmatic “prose poem” Eureka reflects a photographic influence in its driving theme of “the unity of all” (Eureka 136). Poe’s theory regarding the universe echoes the generally accepted idea that a daguerreotype image was thought to spring from its subject by natural means.

Unlike such works as The House of Seven Gables by his contemporary Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was arguably as fascinated by daguerreotypy in the 1840's as was Poe, there are no daguerreotypists, cameras, or daguerreotype images anywhere in Poe's writings. To explain this, one need only note the fact that while Poe was keenly interested in science and technology throughout his life, specific
inventions and breakthroughs are hardly ever mentioned in any of his work. Photography was no exception. Poe took great pains to keep his tales largely timeless and placeless—the use of particular names is even a rarity—because his subject matter is ultimately the realm of the mind. This is not to say that scientific innovations had no effect on his approach to his art—this is precisely the argument driving this project—but to literally write a particular invention into a tale would, in Poe's view, be both inelegant and unduly limiting.

As a devotee of science, Poe recognized the amazing potential inherent in contemporary innovations. As he contends in his first essay on the daguerreotype: "the results of the invention cannot, even remotely, be seen—but all experience, in matters of philosophical discovery, teaches us that, in such discovery, it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely." Were Poe to include a particular invention—the most recent incarnation of the camera, for instance—in a tale, by the time he was able to get his work published that technology would probably be obsolete, thus profoundly limiting the relevance of his art. Poe reported on the seemingly endless series of improvements in daguerreoty, not to mention the development of myriad other technologies, during the early 1840's in Burton's Gentleman's Magazine; he saw the essay rather than the tale as the place for such speculations.
Science inspired Poe, and it is in this indirect way that he incorporates it into his fiction. This is a notion he expressed early in his writing career in his "Sonnet–To Science":

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise?
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jeweled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

Science removes elements of mystery from the natural world and returns the delightfully solipsistic poet to the external reality of the world outside of his mind. And yet, though the sonnet is apparently an extended grievance against science, the fact that the poet makes science the subject
of a poem subverts the message contained in the sonnet. The poem is ultimately a complicated homage. It is in a similarly indirect way that we can discern the profound influence the invention of photography has on Poe's aesthetic.

Poe's own photographic portraits became (and arguably remain) the most iconic images of any American writer. His immediately recognizable face—that "dark" physiognomy that seems to reveal a tormented soul—remains a ubiquitous presence in our culture. His image and his works uniquely inform each other in both scholarly circles and broader, mainstream culture. It was in the contemplation of this distinctive place that Poe occupies in American literary history that the germ of this project was formed. I sought to investigate the fact that Poe's literary success coincided with the invention of and subsequent mania for photography in the United States in the 1840's. Was his image, which one scholar argues Poe consciously created through his manipulation of posture and facial expression, the ultimate cryptogram left by the puzzle master for his audience to solve? After all, Poe begins to demonstrate his uncanny talent for solving ciphers and cryptograms in the fall of 1839, at the very moment he published his first post-photography tales. Has the endurance of Poe's daguerreotyped likeness been an inadvertent clue to a previously unrecognized aspect of his
writing? This project confirms a relationship through close readings of Poe's letters, fiction, literary criticism, and essays as well as through a study of the socio-cultural moment. The height of Poe's literary successes as author, critic, and editor spanned the daguerrean era. By 1850 both he and the technology that would propel him to iconic status were dead. The daguerreotype, a beautiful, one-of-a-kind object that simultaneously embodied the heights of both art and science, was replaced by more readily reproduced but visually inferior photographic image technology. Ironically, the most valuable and treasured American daguerreotypes to have survived are those that were taken of Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe was profoundly affected by the invention of photography, as evidenced by its clear influence upon his writing as well as his three laudatory essays on the topic. Given this, along with the fact that his photographic images maintain the iconic status they soon achieved, it is surprising that very little has been written about this rich topic. After all, as Susan S. Williams points out, “[r]ather than dwelling on the ability of the daguerreotype to replace verbal description, . . . many writers used the daguerreotype to encourage readers to explore the ‘dark chamber’ of the mind” (“Inconstant Daguerreotype” 162). Given that the ultimate subject of nearly all of Poe’s fiction is the “dark chamber of the mind” it is not surprising that he would be one of those writers who would be fascinated
with and inspired by the daguerreotype. Like the "purloined letter" of the
eponymous tale, Poe's own photographic images have remained with us all
along, yet almost no one has seen them as potentially meaningful clues to
hidden dimensions of his work.
Chapter I

The Daguerreotype in America

The first person to appear in a photograph was an anonymous Parisian man who happened to be having his shoes shined along the Boulevard du Temple on a sunny day in 1839. The shoeshine does not show up in this photograph, nor does any other person on the street. The Boulevard appears deserted except for the single shadowy figure at the shoeshine stand. The exposure time for this early photograph—a daguerreotype—was anywhere from ten to twenty minutes; thus, the busy boulevard, which would have been bustling with crowds of people and carriages at that particular moment, is recorded as nearly devoid of life. Anything or anyone that was moving along that street during those few minutes in 1839 could not appear in the photograph. Life, through its very dynamism, eluded the camera's lens. The very nature of photography would raise uncomfortable distinctions between the real and the appearance of the real, and between literal reproduction and imaginative recreation; photography would even blur the line between life and death.

In the endeavor to accurately record the world pictorially, the earliest photographers quickly discovered the surprisingly untruthful appearance of perfect representation. Akin to the literal lifelessness of the earliest street photographs, the work of photographic portraitists also seemed oddly artificial. In capturing a person's true form, photographs
seemed to obscure the essence of the individual. To see oneself—or any living person—frozen in a particular moment was an uncanny and even off-putting experience. Not surprisingly, some of the most beautiful daguerreotypes were post-mortem portraits, often of infants and children. The daguerreotype image of a corpse appears to be that of a sleeping person rather than a dead body. It quickly became apparent that even "perfect likenesses" were not always what they seemed to be. Yet, photographs would still be considered inarguably "true": they were "'fact[s]' acquired without a perceiving subject" (Shloss 33).

Before the advent of photography in January, 1839, all visual representations were human renderings of the world: sketched or painted or sculpted depictions, of human hand and borne of human mind. Visual representation was an art, and its creators were artists. As a scientific discovery of a natural phenomenon that produced visual marvels unlike anything artists had ever achieved, photography profoundly destabilized centuries-old notions of visual representation. In fact, many mid-nineteenth century observers worried that photography would render the traditional artist obsolete. The earliest photographs were valued as much for their aesthetic qualities as they were for their practical representational potential. Photographs were thought to be nature's self-portraits and were therefore "true." They were dazzlingly beautiful objects that showed us our world—and ourselves—as we had never seen them before.
Photography’s invention came at a time when, as Carol Shloss points out, “truth” was recognized as fitting into “a certain style of nonsubjective vision” (33). Contemporary science put a premium on the objective, detached views of the observer; photography seemed to “intuitive[ly] align” (Shloss 33) with and perhaps even demonstrate the very zeitgeist into which it was born.

It is fitting, then, that Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre would present his daguerreotype at the Academy of Sciences in Paris rather than The Louvre or one of the renowned salons of the city. Like his contemporaries, Daguerre saw photography initially as a scientific invention rather than as an innovative visual art form, even though he was already a highly acclaimed master of visual arts by 1839. In fact, Daguerre's earliest claims to have "fixed" an image by means of sunlight were met with skepticism. The presumption was that photography was just another of Daguerre's mesmerizing illusions akin to the trompe l'oeil effects of his famous Dioramas. And yet, in a way, these skeptics were correct. Daguerreotypes were affectively as illusory as they were factual: they made real places, objects, and, later, people uncannily appear in the palm of one's hand. Then, with the slightest change of angle, the image would suddenly flicker and disappear, leaving nothing but the reflection of the viewer upon the mirrored plate.

Daguerre had opened his first state-of-the-art Diorama in Paris in 1822; this display showcased his unique mastery of trompe l'oeil effects.
In his theater the audience was surrounded by huge scenes that Daguerre and a partner had painted on layers of fabric, some of which were front lit, others back-lit. They were viewed through a series of windows. The fabric was attached to cords and pulleys, and a variety of slides and shutters were used to give the illusion of three-dimensional animation through each window. Daguerre added sound, stage props, and even live animals (Hirsch 7) to the show to further enhance his audience's experience, seeming to transport them to exotic places or expose them to fantastic, other-worldly dimensions complete with supernatural creatures. He went on to develop and build a two-hundred seat amphitheater in London that could pivot viewers from scene to scene. The Diorama was all about eliciting effect. Viewers, of course, knew that what they were seeing was the result of optical trickery, but the novelty of the experience continued to draw them in. It is during this time that Daguerre became a partner with Joseph Niepce and began work on what would become his greatest achievement: photography.

Daguerre introduced the world to the heliograph, the first permanent photograph, on January 9, 1839 at the Academy of Sciences in Paris. Daguerre had not invented the heliograph; this had been accomplished in 1826 by Niepce, a French printer with whom Daguerre had worked on this new "printing" process beginning in 1828. When Niepce died in 1833, Daguerre continued to improve the heliograph and
finally patented the process. By August of 1839 the French government had purchased Daguerre's patent for his re-named "daguerreotype."

The significance of the fact that a man who was known for his mastery of illusion introduced the photograph to the world cannot be overemphasized. Here was the daguerreotype, which was widely, if not universally, considered the single most visually affective object ever seen. It was an embodiment of reality but it was presented by a master of visual manipulation. The photograph would change the way people saw the world. Truth would come to trump fiction in terms of its affective power.

Two weeks after Daguerre's presentation of the daguerreotype in Paris, William Henry Fox Talbot feverishly presented his calotype, or "talbotype," to the British Royal society. A negative-positive process which, unlike the daguerreotype, was easily reproducible, but yielded an image far inferior to the French process. Talbot rushed to publish an account of his own discoveries, which he titled Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing. It would not be until 1841 that Talbot would finally patent his calotype, but due to a number of factors (not the least of which was the fact that, unlike Daguerre, Talbot failed to win a pension from his government for his invention) the daguerreotype process was immediately and widely embraced while the calotype process remained largely unexploited in the early years of photography. The public embraced the daguerreotype perhaps in part because of Daguerre's expertise in
marketing and showmanship as to the striking beauty of his particular product. Robert Hirsch observes, "Daguerre's necromancy had mesmerized viewers with its detailed, miniature, monochrome reflections of the world. Even Talbot's friend [Sir John] Herschel said of daguerreotypes that 'Certainly they surpass anything I could have conceived as within the bounds of reasonable expectation'" (40). The calotype's "visual softness neutralizes singular detail in favor of universal. Its matte surface image, with a limited tonal range, makes contrast and mass, not sharp line, the major visual impulse" (Hirsch 41). That is to say, as the calotype was printed on paper rather than metal, and from a negative "original" that become a positive image upon printing, its product was considered far inferior to that of the one-of-kind daguerreotype. Ironically, the cheapness, versatility, and ease of reproduction would eventually make the calotype the favored photographic process, rendering the daguerreotype obsolete when the modern age of photography was born a decade after its invention.

As R. Derek Wood has noted, "[a]lthough the announcement to the world concerning the invention of the Daguerreotype was made in Paris at the beginning of January 1839, the method used to produce Daguerre's 'ingenieux miroir' remained secret [until] . . . . [Daguerre's process] was officially released at a special joint meeting of the Academie des Sciences and the Academie des Beaux-Arts held at the Institut de France in Paris on August 19, 1839" (1). This long-awaited revelation consisted only of a
lecture given by the world-famous scientist and French politician Francois Arago acting on Daguerre's behalf. Without an accompanying demonstration or distribution of a manual, the process remained essentially impossible to reproduce. Such a manual was finally published in Paris the following month, then quickly translated into English and published in London on Friday, September 13, 1839.

Coincidentally, Samuel F. B. Morse was in Paris demonstrating his electric telegraph when Daguerre exhibited his invention at the Academy of Sciences. Morse wrote the first account Americans would have of photography, which initially took the form of a letter addressed to his brothers, Sidney and Richard, in New York. The Morse brothers had the letter printed as an editorial on April 20, 1839 in the New York Observer, the newspaper they had founded years earlier. Morse's letter was picked up and reprinted in newspapers throughout the United States in the weeks that followed.

Now considered the "Father of American Photography," Samuel Morse saw this "discovery," as he described it in that initial letter to his brothers, primarily as a means to support himself as he continued to await patents for his electric telegraph from the governments of Russia, France, England, and the United States. Morse rapidly mastered the daguerreotype process and immediately began making great strides in the art of photography. Most notable was his achievement of what was perhaps the first photographic portrait in the autumn of 1839, despite
Daguerre's expressed skepticism of such a possibility just months earlier. Morse had struck up what would prove to be a lasting friendship with Daguerre at the Academy of Sciences in Paris earlier that year. Daguerre acquiesced to a request from Morse to view his "secret discovery" if Morse promised to return the favor and demonstrate his own (also yet unpatented) invention. Morse was stunned by Daguerre's work. He was especially appreciative of Daguerre's accomplishment because, as a student at Yale many years earlier, Morse had attempted to fix the images of a camera obscura. Of this he wrote to his brothers, "finding that light produced dark, and dark light, I presumed the production of a true image to be impracticable, and gave up the attempt." Daguerre, Morse continues, "has realized in the most exquisite manner this idea" ("Editorial"). Sadly, at the very hour when Morse fulfilled his end of the agreement and was demonstrating his telegraph to Daguerre, the world-renowned Paris Diorama burned to the ground, as Morse notes in his letter: "while [Daguerre] was [observing Morse's telegraph], the great building of the Diorama, with his own house, all his beautiful works, his valuable notes and papers, the years of experiment, were, unknown to him, at that moment the prey of the flames. His secret indeed is still safe with him, but the steps of his progress in the discovery, and his valuable researches in science, are lost to the scientific world" ("Editorial").

Morse clearly felt obliged to do what he could for the unfortunate Daguerre, writing in a letter to Francois Arago shortly after his return
from Paris, "[e]ver since the misfortune that befell M. Daguerre a few days before I left Paris, and at the very hour, too, when he was with me examining my Telegraph, I have felt a deeper interest in him, and in his most splendid discovery, and a desire, so far as I can be of service to him, to render him substantial aid. His discovery has excited great attention throughout the United States . . . . We in the United States might in some way contribute our portion of the reward due M. Daguerre." Indeed, as soon as Morse returned to New York, he began advocating for his new friend. He proposed that Daguerre be elected as an honorary member of the National Academy of Design, of which Morse was president. In a letter to Daguerre, he offered to organize demonstrations of Daguerre's process in cities throughout the United States that, he claims in his letter, "might be managed, I think, to your pecuniary advantage" ("Letter to Louis Daguerre"). Daguerre declined Morse's offer. Having just secured a patent and a pension from the French government, he preferred to publish his process in a widely distributed instructional pamphlet and send his own emissaries to the United States to demonstrate his process.

Responding to the American public's interest in the daguerreotype created in part by the evocative descriptions Morse had sent from Paris, Daguerre wasted no time sending his representatives to New York, Boston, and Philadelphia to demonstrate his invention. Since the loss of the Paris Diorama his livelihood now depended upon the success of this latest endeavor. According to R. Derek Wood, the first production and
exhibition of a daguerreotype in America was achieved by D. W. Seager in New York sometime between September 13, 1839 and the last week of that month. It would not be until December that an associate of Daguerre would finally display daguerreotypes taken by Daguerre and some of his "most talented pupils" (Arrival 2) as well as demonstrate the photographic process to American audiences in New York.

Meanwhile, Morse had purchased one of Daguerre's pamphlets from a New York bookseller, and, with Daguerre's advice and blessing, he quickly mastered Daguerre's technique. He then began conducting his own photographic experiments alongside his colleague John Draper in the latter's rooms at what is now New York University. Word of Morse's photographic advancements spread quickly, and people began to request sittings. Realizing the economic possibilities of photography, Morse began charging his subjects a nominal fee, while his brothers Sidney and Richard commissioned the erection of a daguerreotype studio on the roof of their building, what Samuel Morse called "'a palace for the sun'" (Prime 403).

After Morse moved his operation to this new glass-roofed studio, he began instructing enterprising young men in this emergent trade on overcast days when portrait sittings would be impractical. Some of these students would go on to become among the best-known photographers of their day. Both Matthew Brady and Albert Southworth trained under Morse in his studio. Scientists all over the country began to contact
Morse, imploring him to share his secrets for creating such successful portraits. Professor E. N. Horsford of Albany wrote to Morse in November, 1840, asking him to "reveal . . . the wondrous discovery" that allowed him to take "likeness in ten seconds with diffused light." The accounts of Morse's accomplishments that had reached Professor Horsford in Albany had certainly been exaggerated, but Morse was immediately hailed as the foremost American photographic expert. His studio was flooded with requests from enthusiasts looking to have their portrait taken, receive instruction in the process, or observe Morse's latest advancements.

Morse had initially started experimenting with photography while working on what he considered his greatest achievement, the electric telegraph. His success as a daguerreotypist, though more lucrative than any other trade he had ever engaged in, had led to long hours spent in the studio and to his having to respond to the seemingly endless influx of photography-related correspondence he was receiving. He apologized to his friend Washington Allston, "I had hoped to have seen you long ere thus, but my many avocations have kept me constantly employed from morning till night. When I say morning, I mean half-past four in the morning!" ("Letter to Washington Allston"). He longed to return to his work on the telegraph, not to mention his efforts to secure a patent for it.

In addition, Morse's fellow painters were pressuring him to return to his duties at the National Academy of Design. Many of these artists,
such as Thomas Sully and the aforementioned Washington Allston, regarded photography as a potential threat to their livelihood. Morse dismissed these concerns, writing to Allston in late 1839:

Art is to be wonderfully enriched by [photography].
How narrow and foolish the idea which some express that it will be the ruin of art, or rather artists, for every one will be his own painter. One effect, I think, will undoubtedly be to banish the sketchy, slovenly daubs that pass for spirited and learned; those works which possess mere general effect without detail, because forsooth detail destroys general effect. Nature, in the results of Daguerre's process, has taken the pencil into her own hands, and she shows that the minutest detail disturbs not the general repose. Artists will learn how to paint, and amateurs, or rather connoisseurs, how to criticise, how to look at Nature, and therefore how to estimate the value of true art.

("Letter to Washington Allston")

As a scientist, Morse conceived of photography as a technological breakthrough that would undoubtedly improve human life. He believed that photography would "improve" art, thus bolstering the case for realist painters (like himself) and eradicating the "sketchy, slovenly daubs" of the emerging proto-expressionists. Of course, photography would only complicate this artistic debate as daguerreotypists immediately begin experimenting with photographic effects—such as blurring a subject or
hand-coloring an image—in order to achieve what would, ironically, be considered more "artistic" results.

In the first letter in which he describes daguerreotypy to his brothers, Morse recounts photography in artistic terms. The images, he writes, "resemble aquatint engraving; for they are in simple chiaroscuro, and not in colors, but the exquisite minuteness of the delineation cannot be conceived. No painting or engraving ever approached it . . . . The impressions of interior views are Rembrandt perfected" ("Editorial"). This was a scientific invention that produced stunning visual representations that had all the affective power of the finest works of art. Yet, for Daguerre and his contemporaries, including Morse, photography seemed to accomplish something formerly inconceivable: it seemed to remove the human element from visual representation. And although this view seems glaringly contradictory to modern audiences—we display photographs in museums and consider photographers to be artists—the conflating of photography and art is a comparatively modern notion. The fact that a photographic image was understood to be a recording of a real moment in the past overshadowed the role of the creator of the image. Daguerre's process was thought to capture unmediated, unbiased truth. Photographers were considered "operators" who functioned hardly more than as mechanical extensions of the camera. Daguerreotypist Anson Clark expressed this sentiment when he wrote in 1841 that a daguerreotype is "produced by the unerring operation of physical laws—
human judgment and skill have no connection with the perfection of the picture, any more than with that formed upon the retina of the eye, and the likeness produced will be the exact image of the object" (126). It was light that created a photograph, or, as Morse wrote in that first letter to his brothers, daguerreotypes were "painted by Nature's self with a minuteness of detail which the pencil of light in her hands alone can trace . . . . They cannot be called copies of nature, but portions of nature herself" ("Editorial").

This view was echoed again and again by others encountering photography for the first time. Writing in the New York newspaper The Corsair shortly after Morse's account appeared in the Observer, Nathaniel Willis, a highly successful American writer and editor who would become Edgar Allan Poe's dear friend and staunch advocate, declared that with the invention of the daguerreotype "all nature shall paint herself." Henry Fox Talbot described photography in The Pencil of Nature as "a process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves." Willis echoes this sentiment in his Corsair article, declaring that "by means of this contrivance, it is not the artist who makes the picture, but the picture which makes itself."

Before Ralph Waldo Emerson sat for his daguerreotype portrait, during which he would have to remain completely still for as long as eight minutes, he had written of daguerreotypy that it "is good for its authenticity. No man quarrels with his shadow" (87). Yet when shown
his own photographic image, Emerson reconsidered his initial enthusiasm, writing that, "unhappily, the total expression escaped from the face and [viewers found] the portrait of a mask instead of a man" (111). Harriet Beecher Stowe described daguerreotypes as "useful like the Irishman's guideboard which showed 'where the road did not go'" (Fields 105). It seemed, somehow, that the portrait painter's hand was better-suited to capture human life than the daguerreotypist's camera. Carol Shloss suggests that daguerreotype subjects' common disappointment with their images seemed to come from a "feeling that their pictures had not 'captured' or represented a sense they had of themselves that existed prior to the sitting . . . . They perceived a discrepancy between what they saw represented in a plate and what they felt to be unexpressed in their own character" (35). If photography was the strictest expression of realism, then the fact that true realism was often viscerally disaffecting destabilized the very notions of the primacy of realism.

Despite its often surprising and humbling reflections of their truest selves, Americans embraced photography with an enthusiasm unmatched by the citizens of either Britain or the birthplace of daguerreotypy, France. The American fervor for photography contributed to its democratization. The first daguerreotype studio in the United States was established in Philadelphia in 1840. Within a decade there were over 1,700 daguerreotype studios in America. By 1853 there were more studios in New York than there were in London. Along Broadway alone
that year there were thirty-seven daguerreotype studios (Hirsch 30). In the United States, for a fee of about two dollars anyone could have his daguerreotype made. Many of the itinerant and less expensive daguerreotypists produced portraits that equaled or surpassed in beauty those on display in the windows of the established daguerreotype studios. By 1853, for every established daguerreotype studio in America there were roughly ten itinerant daguerreotypists working in the United States.⁹

Many daguerreotypists were dilettantes simply seizing upon the latest viable trade, as Hawthorne's daguerreotypist Holgrave does in *The House of the Seven Gables*: "[h]is present phase, as a daguerreotypist, was of no more importance in his own view, nor likely to be more permanent, than any of the preceding careers" (177). From the first, photography was often little more than an economic opportunity afforded by new technology. For the most part, the photographer considered his role the same way his clients did: he was an invisible, neutral catalyst of a natural process.

On the other hand, some daguerreotype "operators" established themselves as catering to an elite clientele. They set up ornate studios with specialized lighting and backdrops and used cutting-edge techniques, thereby producing particularly exquisite images. Albert Southworth and Josiah Hawes, who established their famous Southworth and Hawes daguerreotype studio at 5½ Tremont Row in Boston, were the best known "high-end" photographers of the 1840's. In an elaborate 1848
advertisement which features a cartoon image of an anthropomorphized sun painting an anthropomorphized earth's portrait, Southworth and Hawes declare they have "The Only First Premium Daguerreotype Rooms." They promise in the ad attentive, personalized service of the highest order: "We have in attendance two Ladies, and Females can have assistance in arranging their dress and drapery, and consult them as to colors most appropriate and harmonious for the Daguerreotype process." The ad also boasts, "in style of execution and picturesque effect—in boldness of character and beauty of expression—in variety of size and delicacy of lights and shadows, we shall aim at the highest perfection possible . . . No CHEAP work done. Plates PERFECTLY polished. They neither use steam, humbug by false pretences, nor wear laurels won by competitors."
The numerous images of their celebrity clientele displayed in Southworth and Hawes's studio window served as the most effective advertisements of their "premium" work.

In part because photography was so readily embraced in the United States, American daguerreotypists were rapidly able to improve upon the process. Their daguerreotypes were widely recognized as finer than those of their European counterparts. At the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, the Jury of the Crystal Palace Exhibition, which judged the first international daguerreotype competition, declared, "[o]n examining the daguerreotypes contributed by the United States, every observer must be struck with the beauty of execution, the broad and well-toned masses of light and shade, and the total absence of all glare which render them so superior." The mainly British jury went on to attribute these results to "that climate" unique to the United States which boasts "the purest of atmospheres" (63). As John Wood points out, however, it was less an atmospheric influence than it was an economic one that allowed for the perfection of the technology in America. Wood notes that the United States had a larger middle class who could afford daguerreotype portraits and that daguerreotype studios in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia almost immediately began employing assembly line operations in the production of daguerreotype plates. Many of the more well-regarded
studios denied using this practice, despite evidence to the contrary. As Wood observes, the proliferation of assembly line operations in American daguerreotype studios made it "next to impossible to isolate the work of certain skilled American daguerreotypists from that of their studios" (17). Alan Trachtenberg emphasizes what was perhaps the appeal of this distinctly American version of photographic art:

The daguerreotype gave rise to an essentially anonymous, unsigned art . . . . Anonymity is something a bit different from simple namelessness. It refers to a quality of genuine selflessness, a submergence of ego, rather than an assertion and expression of it, within an impersonal process. [There was] a need introduced by photography of giving yourself over to what lay before the lens—judging as the sun judges when it “falls upon a helpless thing” as Whitman wrote in *Leaves of Grass*, 11 which opens with a daguerreotyped portrait of the poet. (“Daguerreotype” 15)

The timing of photography's introduction to the United States also contributed to its democratic nature. In the midst of an economic depression in the late 1830's, photography was seen by many young, unemployed tradesmen as a new fiscal opportunity. Many daguerreotypists briefly trained under other photographers before striking out on their own, thus promoting the rapid spread of technical
information. Indeed, there was a remarkably high turnover of
daguerreotypists in American studios as young pliers of the trade took
their skills on the road, gradually spreading the trade southward. The vast
majority of these early practitioners remained itinerant. Some even
invested in horse-drawn wagons and plied their trade in rural America
where families did not have access to city studios.

A number of African-American men found success as
daguerreotypists. John B. Bailey, an African-American daguerreotypist
from Boston, trained a number of aspiring young daguerreotypists. One
of his former students, James Presley Ball, another African-American man
and an active abolitionist, found much professional success, opening the
nationally recognized “Great Daguerrean Gallery of the West” in
Cincinnati. The exquisite quality of Ball’s work became so well-known
that he and his son expanded their studio business throughout the
American west, from Minneapolis to Seattle. Another African-American
daguerreotypist, Augustus Washington, operated a highly successful
studio in Hartford, Connecticut for ten years, during which time he
captured the now iconic image of abolitionist John Brown.

Matthew R. Isenberg characterizes the particularly "Americanness"
of early photography: "the truth of the medium was its ultimate message:
visual facts for the masses, immortality for the common man, and an
uncommon uplifting of the middle classes. They, too, had their painters for posterity. In an age of democratization, the photograph thus further served to blur the lines of distinction between the middle and upper classes" (10). It is only because daguerreotype portraiture was so accessible to working class Americans that we have images of iconic figures such as John Brown who had his daguerreotype “likeness” recorded in 1847, over a decade before he gained national notoriety for the raid on Harpers Ferry.

The process of daguerreotypy was a relatively easy skill to learn, and the equipment was readily obtainable as well as highly portable. The photographic image of a daguerreotype rests on the polished, silvered surface of a copper plate and can only be viewed from a particular angle. Depending on the angle at which a viewer holds a daguerreotype, the image can disappear, appear as a negative of itself, appear three-dimensional, or even blend with the viewer's own, mirrored image as Alan Trachtenberg describes:

By a mere shift of optical focus from the image to the ground upon which the image appears, beholders have a personal hand-mirror, their own mutable reflections mingling with the primary image. The result is a doubling of image upon image: the beholder's fluxional image superimposed upon the fixed daguerreian image,
most commonly a portrait of someone known to the viewer. The effect is apparition: at the merest tilt of the plate the photographic image flickers away, fades into a shadowed negative of itself entangled in the living image of the beholder. ("Mirror" 65)

Robert Hirsch recounts the daguerreotype as having an "ephemeral personality, its sparkling, gemlike quality, lend it a sense of magical realism" (21). To protect these extremely delicate objects, daguerreotypes were always enclosed in a velvet-lined, hinged case and mounted behind glass. They were small enough to hold in one hand,¹² and, as Hirsch notes, the experience of viewing a daguerreotype portrait was both "intimate and private" (22).

There was a huge demand in America not only for portraits of family members and acquaintances, but for images of celebrities as well. As Susan S. Williams points out, by 1842 daguerreotypes were already being engraved and published in books and magazines, and some daguerreotypists began to offer "subscription series that would deliver portraits of famous Americans to one's home once a month or even every day, creating a 'Gallery of Illustrious Americans.'" She notes: "[t]he appeal of such portraits lay in their ability to provide a substitute for the real thing: one could closely examine the likeness of a president, an author, or other celebrity, in a way that would otherwise be inappropriate"
Public galleries displaying daguerreotype images were set up as early as 1846, such as Plumbe's Broadway Gallery about which Walt Whitman declared, "What a spectacle! In whatever direction you turn your peering gaze, you see naught but human faces! . . . Ah! what tales might those pictures tell if their mute lips had the power of speech!" (117). It is no surprise that the man who introduced the daguerreotype to the world was better known as a showman than as a scientist. Even as they became common, daguerreotypes retained, as Susan S. Williams explains, “a magical, even mystical quality; . . . scientific understanding did not preclude a sense that the daguerreotype transcended human comprehension. It seemed always to contain a secret at its core; it was, as a writer in *Littel’s Living Age* put it, ‘strange, scientific, mournful, all at once!’” (“The Inconstant Daguerreotype” 166).

The American public's initial reaction to photography was complex, at times even contradictory. At the moment of photography's introduction, scientific discoveries and developments were rapidly ushering in the modern era. Hirsch suggests that inventions, especially those linked with the visual arts such as the Drummond Light which was used to project even more "realistic" optical illusions in theatrical productions, demonstrate how "the science-based industrial revolution
was transforming how the world was viewed, altering public desires" (6). Carol Shloss notes that "the photograph was invented at a time when 'fact' was conceived of as sensory evidence at the same time that perceiving subjects were required to be eliminated—a contradiction of early positivism that has only received retrospective attention" (33). That is to say, the mid-nineteenth century American public readily accepted human artifice as a natural part of "objective" scientific advances. For example, the powdering of hair and faces with flour and the use of a vice to position a sitter's head at a particular angle were listed in an October 1839 edition of the New York Evening Post as "improvements" in the science of the daguerreotype process (Shloss 34).

At this same time, pseudo-sciences such as mesmerism, spiritualism, and phrenology were being widely embraced by the American public, "not only among the uninformed and credulous but also among the respectable and educated" (Wrobel 1). The emerging middle-class flocked to stage productions and panoramic exhibits that featured increasingly complex camera-projected "gothic horror" images and optical illusions (Hirsch 7). Inventions that provided a false view of reality, such as anamorphic drawings (images that were only discernible from a particular point-of-view), the kaleidoscope, and the "wonder-turner" and "zoetrope" of the mid-1820's—kaleidoscope-like toys that showed the
viewer illusions of images in motion, akin to a flipbook today—were wildly popular consumer items.

When photography appeared in 1839 it was embraced as a technological breakthrough, yet as Carol Shloss points out, "[n]o other invention in a time of splendid inventions . . . was so quickly pulled away from the particular genius of the inventor and the ingenuity of his followers . . . . Since nature recorded her own appearance, since no individual sensibilities interfered with its rendering, photographs were thought to be true" (33). Indeed, an early report in Cincinnati's *The Daily Chronicle* immediately divorced the invention from human agency: "[the daguerreotype's] perfection is unapproachable by human hand, and its truth raises it high above all language, painting or poetry. It is the first universal language, addressing itself to all who possess vision" ("The Daguerreolite"). In an era in which the study of physiognomy was a generally accepted science, photography seemed to confirm the potential truth encoded in appearances. As Williams notes, “[d]aguerreotypes taken of the dead were thought to be able to reveal whether the deceased had died with a guilty or innocent conscience; they were also able to reveal truths of character that underlay social masks” ("The Inconstant Daguerreotype" 166). Yet, as noted earlier, an individual's reaction to a photographic image was frequently one of surprised disappointment.
Photography profoundly destabilized the realms of truth and appearance for many Americans.

Karen Halttunen has argued that appearances played an essential social role in Victorian American life as evidenced by the emergence of etiquette and conduct manuals in the 1830's. She writes,

The sentimental ideal of dress insisted that a woman's clothing should serve not as a disguise but as a transparent reflection of her soul. The sentimental ideal of etiquette demanded that politeness be the sincere outward demonstration of inner virtue. And the sentimental ideal of mourning dictated that mourners dress and behave in a ritual designed to demonstrate the perfect sincerity of their grief. (194)

This premium on outward show reveals a cultural anxiety regarding inner reality. As Walter Houghton argues, "Of all the Victorian attitudes, none was so often attacked by the Victorians themselves as hypocrisy" (424). As individuals were faced with their own natural—therefore "true"—portraits, they were burdened with an awareness of the inherent meaning in their often unflattering appearances.

Some did resist the widely practiced impulse to "read" an individual through the scrutiny of his or her daguerreotype portrait. Henry David Thoreau contemplates this issue in his journal:
Nature has readily made to repeat herself in a thousand forms, and in the daguerreotype her own light is amanuensis, and the picture too has more than a surface significance,— depth equal to the prospect,—so that the microscope may be applied to the one as the spy glass to another. Thus we may easily multiply the forms of the outward; but to give the within outwardness is not easy. (189)

The temptation to discover something about a sitter's inner-self through his image was frequently indulged, however, especially with regard to photographs of celebrities, public figures, and even criminals. Some of the most prominent daguerreotypists promoted their work in this way, claiming, as James Ryder did in his memoir, "[the camera] could read and prove character in a man's face at sight. To [the camera's] eye, a rogue was a rogue; the honest man, when found, was recognized and properly estimated" (16).

While there were some well-known practitioners, the role of the photographer was often obscured by his product. He disappeared behind his work at least in part because his status was unclear. He was not considered an artist in his own right, but neither was he strictly a scientist or innovator. As an "operator" he was as much a means to an end as were his camera and plates. In fact, many daguerreotypists in the earliest years distinguished themselves from their competition not by advertising
the superiority of their product but by promoting their "painless"
methods—better posing techniques and equipment that meant shorter
exposure times for their sitters. The photographic images these
daguerreotypists produced, especially early on, were largely
indistinguishable in terms of quality, despite the claims of superiority by
studio owners such as Southworth and Hawes, Plumbe, or Brady.

In the minds of many mid-nineteenth century Americans, the
daguerreotypist was likened to Roland Barthes' post-modern description
of the photograph itself: "a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that
we see" (6). What many individuals did see in a daguerreotype, as Susan
S. Williams has noted, was themselves. Because of the reflective nature
of both the copper plate and the protective glass mounted on its surface,
"to look at a daguerreotype was to look at oneself even as one looked at
the image . . . . The self one saw was not posed for a portrait but rather
engaged in the act of contemplating the image: the daguerreotype could
reveal the truth not only about others but also about oneself" ("The
Inconstant Daguerreotype" 165). The rich artistic potential inherent in
this newly complicated visual reality particularly piqued the interest of
the emergent literary figure, Edgar Allan Poe.

In the first of his three essays on the daguerreotype—the most he
would write on any single scientific invention or breakthrough for his
regular "Chapter on Science and Art" article for *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*—Poe echoes his contemporaries, explaining how a photographic subject essentially draws itself and that, because of this phenomenon, the daguerreotype far surpasses the representational quality of even the most supremely talented painter’s work. For Poe the manifestation of perfect truth requires a sublimation of human agency—the photographer's role in the creation of these perfect likenesses is reduced to little more than having the "experience" to know "the proper moment of removal" of the plate from the camera.

It would seem, upon initial consideration, that in its trivialization of human involvement, photography would pose a threat to art. Indeed, many portrait painters became daguerreotypists as the demand for their traditional services rapidly waned in the photographic age. And one might expect that Poe, who had little patience for even the faintest hint of unoriginality in any work of art, would disdain an invention that does little more than provide a copy of nature, which, in turn, could be endlessly copied. Nevertheless, Poe was fascinated by photography and embraced it, as evidenced by his return to the subject in his column two more times, as well as by his numerous visits to daguerreotype studios in the decade to come. This study will examine the subtle but notable emergence of a photographic aesthetic in Poe’s writings after the autumn
of 1839. Poe’s evolving focus on presentations of the visible and invisible reveals the profound effect that the invention of photography had on Poe's sensibilities as an artist.
Chapter II

Pre-Photography Tales and the Visual:

"Metzengerstein," The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and "Ligeia"

The invention of photography in the midst of Poe's literary career was serendipitous. Here was a scientific breakthrough that seemed to embody all of the intricacies of one of the most prominent themes in his writing: the interplay between truth, appearance, and the shadowy world of the human mind. The complex reaction to photography in antebellum America parallels the inherent tensions within contemporary American gothic literature. That is, the simultaneous fascination and dismay with a subject's own or another's frozen image, as well as the otherworldliness of these copies of the real world, echo the conflicts present in American gothic literature as Leslie Fiedler has described it: "a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (29). Even the mechanics of photography, requiring the manipulation of light, reflect gothic sentiments.

Regarding the uncanniness of the gothic, Fiedler has noted that "there is a place in men's lives where pictures do bleed, ghosts gibber and shriek, maidens run forever through mysterious landscapes from nameless foes; the place is, of course, the world of dreams and of the repressed guilts and fears that motivate them" (140). Horace Walpole, the first novelist to be identified as a purveyor of the Gothic, established as both
the means and the end of Gothic romance those dark recesses which, "the
dogmatic optimism and shallow psychology of the Age of Reason had
denied" (Fiedler 140). Gothic literature provided, as Cathy Davidson
argues, "the Age of Reason with its perverse mirror image" (238). Poe
discovered an embodiment of this "mirror-image" in the polished metal of
the daguerreotype: it simultaneously displays the image of its subject
along with the mirror-reflection of its viewer.

The development of photography dovetails with Poe's evolving use
of gothic elements in his writing. While gothic literature had become a
caricature of itself in Britain by the 1830's, many American writers had
continued to find the tradition particularly well-suited to their
explorations of the inner-life in the outer-world. A number of nineteenth-
century American novelists also found the gothic mode especially
compatible with their endeavor to establish a proper national literature.
They were keenly aware of the inherent contradictions of their homeland:
although the United States was established as the first society based on
reason, their great-grandparents had engaged in witch hunts. Women were
denied what for some white men were inalienable rights, and the republic
thrived because of the institutionalization of slavery and grew as a result
of the displacement and genocide of Native American peoples. As the
goal of all gothic literature is ultimately to bring to light the shadowy
workings of the psyche, gothic themes were uniquely meaningful to the
nineteenth-century American writers struggling with their complex and
often contradictory national identity. Poe's 1837 novella, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, exemplifies the ways in which the gothic mode could express these particularly American preoccupations. In both gothic literature and in American society appearances could rarely be trusted.

Poe does not take pains to locate his gothic tales in particular times or places because for him a person's crucial reality exists inside the mind. Poe's first priority is to explore the interactions between reason and the faculty that often supersedes it, the imagination. For Poe, one's very existence is inextricably linked to the workings of one's mind. Thus, the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse" is undone not when his crime is discovered but in the moment when he betrays his formidable capacity for reason and confesses the crime. He, like the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," is destroyed when his inner-life is manifested in the outer world. Appearances are manipulated in Poe's fiction primarily as means to make visible the activities of the mind. William Wilson meets a very real manifestation of his conscience in that eponymous tale, and C. Auguste Dupin is able to solve crimes by examining the complex workings of the human mind, rather than by counting only on information from material evidence or eyewitness accounts.

The contradictions at the heart of gothic literature that were of particular concern to American writers of the mid-nineteenth century were embodied in both the daguerreotype process and the resulting images. And as the ambiguity of the daguerreotypist Holgrave's claim in
Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* that he "make[s] pictures out of sunshine" (91) belies, while photography may be the result of "sunshine," it also reveals something which lies beyond the reach of that same light, some otherwise hidden truth.

In the years before Daguerre’s discovery, Poe explored the possibility that imagination can both affect, and potentially create, reality. This perspective underlies his later treatises on the art of writing in which Poe declares that the “effect” of literature on the reader is the only benchmark for success. He demonstrates this approach to writing in a particularly intriguing way in his first published tale, "Metzengerstein."

When Poe wrote his first essay on the invention of the daguerreotype he appropriated an exact phrase he had used in "Metzengerstein." Describing the daguerreotype as an invention that will "exceed, by very much, the wildest expectations of the most imaginative," he recalls precisely his narrator's description of the leaping ability of the demonic horse on which the 1831 "Metzengerstein" is centered: "[t]he space passed over in a single leap had been accurately measured, and was found to exceed, by an astounding difference, the wildest expectations of the most imaginative" (677, italics added). This is no accident; it is not unreasonable to suggest that later Poe invokes his earliest and most traditionally gothic tale in his initial description of photography in order to signify his suspicion that here, in this magnificent scientific breakthrough, lies the confirmation of all he believes to be true about the
evocative power of the truest depictions of nature.

Jerome DeNuccio has argued that the theme of metympsychosis—the idea that a soul can transmigrate, upon death, from one body to another—is manifest in "Metzengerstein" in two ways:

On the surface, of course, the tale strongly implies that the soul of Count Berlifitzing has transmigrated to a horse, thereby exacting revenge on his hereditary enemy Baron Metzengerstein. But a second, less apparent, metempsychosis takes place between Metzengerstein and the narrator. Indeed, in the process of recounting Metzengerstein's obsessive desire for unbounded subjectivity, the narrator enacts a parallel desire for narrative authority...just as Metzengerstein's coercive quest for self-authorization generates its own subversion, so too does the narrator's attempt to present Metzengerstein's story buckle under the weight of his own need to contain and control its meaning. (71)

The tale's narrator undergoes a shift in perspective. He moves from a close focus on the young Baron Metzengerstein's witnessing of the apparent animation of an ancient tapestry to an increasingly distanced view of the Baron. The narrator's point-of-view at the end of the tale is aligned with that of the crowd of onlookers who behold the fiery collapse of the Palace Metzengerstein and the subsequent apparition of a cloud of smoke that rises from the rubble and resembles "the distinct colossal figure of—a horse" (678). The subjectivity of appearance is at the heart
of this tale, but it is not just in terms of the dual perspectives of the Baron and the narrator as DeNuccio suggests. Rather, more importantly, it manifests in the effect Poe intended to have upon his readership in terms of the tale's consequent meaning(s).

Scholars continue to debate the sincerity of Poe's use of gothic themes and devices in this tale. "Metzengerstein" appears to be a straightforward, definitively Germanic gothic tale, but Poe's arguably disproportionate use of the traditional gothic elements has led many critics to read it as a humorously intended farce. Benjamin Fisher argues for a reconsideration of this reading in his 1971 essay "Poe's 'Metzengerstein': Not a Hoax." He suggests that "['Metzengerstein'] was written with no comic intention; it was an early venture of Poe's into gothic fiction and followed in the sober path of numberless predecessors" (487). Questions regarding Poe's intent persist, however, as other critics have pushed back against Fisher's reading such as George H. Soule Jr. and G. R. Thompson. Thompson contends that “Metzengerstein” “has too many absurd exaggerations of both content and style, exaggerations too clearly patterned, too symmetrically developed, for the tale to be a serious work of gothic terror” (52).

The disagreement is part and parcel of Poe's intended meaning. That is, just as witnesses are baffled by the Baron Metzengerstein's "marked alteration . . . in [his] outward demeanor" (676) so the readers of this tale are left uncertain what to make of what they are reading. In the
end, the tale is neither wholly comical nor is it completely in earnest as a traditional gothic story. It is a commentary on the centrality of reader response, which, in turn, demonstrates the instability of appearances both in art and in the world at large.

It is the "misshapen little page, whose deformities were in everybody's way," who, ironically, seems to be the most likely source of meaning in the tale despite the narrator’s assertion that the page’s appearance renders his perspective "of the least possible importance . . . (if his ideas are worth mentioning at all)" (677). It is this page, who appears out of nowhere and then is never mentioned again, who contradicts the otherwise unanimous certainty of the "extraordinary affection which existed on the part of the young nobleman for the fiery qualities of his horse" (677). The page "had the effrontery to assert that his master never vaulted into the saddle without an unaccountable and almost imperceptible shudder; and that, upon his return from every long-continued and habitual ride, an expression of triumphant malignity distorted every muscle in his countenance" (677-78). Though the page is the source of apparent truth, he is an annoyance and a monstrosity who appears merely in an aside—a two-fold deviation from gothic tradition.

The "misshapen" page is literally not what he appears to be. He is an actual character, but he is also a metonymic device for the very appearances he disputes. This page illustrates Poe’s view of the subjective nature of truth. The reader of "Metzengerstein" is in the end
more closely allied to the "misshapen" page's view than that of the narrator who, as DeNuccio has demonstrated, is at least as unreliable as the crazed Baron himself. And yet, the page concurrently suggests an alternative interpretation of an otherwise agreed upon reality that Poe's readers (but not the tale's characters) recognize as accurate. The page reports what the reader has been seeing all along. The reader recognizes the gothic style and devices, and as such he abides by the possibility of the "Hungarian superstition" (672) of metempsychosis noted at the opening of the tale. Clearly, the mysterious horse is the figure from the ancient tapestry come to life, possessed by the soul of the lately deceased Count Berlitzing who seeks to avenge the wrongs of the Baron Metzengerstein. The narrator's hesitation to include the page's report—evidenced by the former's belittling description and scornful tone—is a nod toward the instability of appearances that illustrates Poe's narrator's inadvertent admission of uncertainty regarding his own viewpoint.

If Poe has been successful, his reader should also conclude the tale with some uncertainty regarding his own perspective. The apparent truth of the tale is the idea that an ancient prophecy has come to fruition through metempsychosis. Coming to this conclusion requires the rejection of the view of the ostensibly logical—though increasingly unreliable—narrator who appeals to the practical reason of his audience at the opening of the tale and who remains to the end non-committal regarding any possible supernatural occurrences through the end. In the
opening paragraphs, after listing a number of very rational, quotidian sources of the enmity between the Berlitzing and Metzengerstein families, the narrator notes, "[w]hat wonder, then, that the words, however silly, of that prediction, should have succeeded in setting and keeping at variance two families already predisposed to quarrel by every instigation of hereditary jealousy? The prophesy seemed to imply—if it implied anything—a final triumph on the part of the already more powerful house; and was of course remembered with the more bitter animosity by the weaker and less influential" (672-73). Because he is the apparent voice of reason and pragmatism, the reader naturally allies himself with the narrator’s obviously judicious view. By the end of the tale, however, what appears to be reality undermines this ostensibly sensible narrator, ironically rendering him unreliable.

When the narrator declares that the capabilities of the horse are demonstrated to be well beyond the "wildest" expectations of even "the most imaginative" witness—using that turn of phrase that Poe will call upon a decade later to describe a real phenomenon that seems beyond belief—the subjectivity of appearance is invoked in a particularly complex way. The "reality" of the horse's leap—which was witnessed by many—is actually not what it appears to be. It cannot be; it lies beyond what anyone could imagine is possible. Poe's narrator, here, is really commenting on the remarkable leap the author causes his reader to make. By the end of the tale, the reader is left with profound uncertainties
regarding a tale that appears, on all counts, to be one thing, but somehow ultimately escapes definition. The gap between what "Metzengerstein" appears to be and what the tale actually is remains irreconcilable. Thus, its meaning(s) can only be discovered outside the tale itself, somewhere in the "expectations of the most imaginative."

In one of his earliest book reviews as editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in April, 1836, Poe declares, "the only proper method of testing the merits of a poem is by measuring its capabilities of exciting the Poetic Sentiment in others . . . . [f]or a poem is not the Poetic faculty, but the means of exciting it in mankind" ("Review of Drake and Halleck" 20). Poe will demonstrate his manipulation of the "Poetic Sentiment" both literally and figuratively in his novella, *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, which would be published early the following year in the same magazine.

*Pym* is an adventure tale of a young thrill seeker who stows away on a ship that ends up succumbing to a bloody mutiny before he has the opportunity to show himself on deck. In a pivotal scene, Pym and his accomplices (Augustus Barnard, the son of the captain, and Dirk Peters, a half white, half-American Indian former line-manager under Captain Barnard) devise a plan to take over the ship from the mutineers: Pym will disguise himself as the corpse of one of the unlucky mutineers who has recently died of alcohol poisoning and whose body has been stowed in the hold until the first opportunity to throw it overboard following a violent
storm that has set in. The advantage of such a plan, presumably, is two-fold: the element of surprise to be sure, but more noteworthy is its appeal to the crew's imagination.

In fact, even Pym is moved by his disguise. Catching sight of himself in a looking glass, he declares, "I was so impressed with a vague awe at my appearance, and at the recollection of the terrific reality which I was thus representing, that I was seized with a violent tremor, and could scarcely summon resolution to go on with my part" (54). The following passage from the scene that follows, which describes the responses of the other mutineers, can be read simultaneously as fictional narrative and as one of Poe's pre-photography treatises on fiction:

The intense effect produced by this sudden apparition is not at all to be wondered at when the various circumstances are taken into consideration. Usually, in a case of a similar nature, there is left in the mind of the spectator some glimmering of doubt as to the reality of the vision before his eyes; a degree of hope, however feeble, that he is the victim of chicanery, and that the apparition is not actually a visitant from the old world of shadows. It is not too much to say that such remnants of doubt have been at the bottom of almost every such visitation, and that the appalling horror which has sometimes been brought about, is to be attributed, even in the cases most in point, and where most suffering has been experienced, more to a
kind of anticipative horror, lest the apparition might possibly be
real, than to an unwavering belief in its reality. (56)
Poe suggests that in situations such as this, in which a rational
explanation is immediately elusive, what affects an individual most
forcefully is not the fact that the possible cause becomes the absurd;
rather, that one can (and will) imagine that the absurd might be the cause.
In other words, by means of the creation of his illusion, Pym, akin to an
artist, recognizes the power and supremacy of the imagination—here
focused on an artistic representation of a reanimated corpse—which can
be conceived as real because the mind of an observer is so affected by an
artfully constructed appearance.

The earliest action in Pym sets the stage for the exploration of such
visual themes. The young Pym recounts a late night adventure that he and
Augustus embarked upon before the ill-fated voyage that encompasses the
majority of the narrative. After returning to bed following a party at the
Barnards' home, Augustus suddenly jumps up and declares that he was
"tired of lying in bed like a dog on such a fine night . . . and was
determined to get up and dress and go out on a frolic upon [his boat]" (4).
Pym, bewildered, mirrors his friend with his response: "I sprang out of
bed, nevertheless, in a kind of ecstasy, and told him I was quite as brave
as himself, and quite as tired as he was of lying in bed like a dog, and
quite as ready for any fun or frolic as any Augustus Barnard in Nantucket"
(4). Once out on the water at a great distance from land, Pym discovers
that Augustus had only seemed sober and rational while delivering his
inspiring speech and that, in actuality, "his conduct in bed had been the
result of a highly-concentrated state of intoxication—a state which, like
madness, frequently enables the victim to imitate the outward demeanor of
one in perfect possession of his senses" (5). The extreme state of
inebriation that seems like sobriety is emblematic of the nature of all
visual representation for Poe in the pre-photography world: the artist's
to create a sense of reality by means of anticipating
and appealing to the mind of his audience. Pym is affected by Augustus's
speech; despite its being unexpected, out-of-place, and, thus, bewildering;
he accepts what he apprehends and participates in this false reality. Pym
is a sober man who is convinced by a drunk man to go along on an ill-
advised, potentially deadly escapade because appearances are more often
than not little more than what a viewer imagines them to be. To Poe at
this stage of his career, the imagination is more readily appealed to than
is rationality.

Poe frames the novella with an appeal to the audience's own ideas
about the nature of truth. Pym "speaks" directly to the reader in the
preface, declaring that under the advisement of "Mr. Poe, lately editor of
the Southern Literary Messenger" he decided to publish the story of his
adventures "under the garb of fiction" because "the incidents to be
narrated were of a nature so positively marvelous, that . . . I could only
hope for belief among my family and those of my friends who have had
reason, through life, to put faith in my veracity" (1-2). In other words, this "true account" had no hope of being perceived as such because it challenges known paradigms of truth and reality. In his recommendation to "disguise" the narrative as fiction, "Mr. Poe" emphasizes the author's responsibility to take pains to affect his audience, whose imagination is readily appealed to. Not only does Poe suggest this to his fictional creation; he *demonstrates* it by presenting his views regarding truth and fiction within an invented preface that he presents as reality.

Such complicated artifices will disappear from Poe's works after 1839 as photography would demonstrate how and why the onus on an author should be simply to capture a truth in his work—which, in turn, will affect the reader more profoundly than any particular artistic device ever could. There will be no need for "Mr. Poe" to announce himself—literally as in this case, or figuratively—in his fiction. Instead, as his photographic aesthetic emerges, "Mr. Poe" ostensibly vanishes from his pages as the daguerreotypist seemed to disappear behind his remarkable creations.

The preface to *Pym* establishes a theme that runs throughout the tale. Poe explores it most overtly toward the end when Pym, Peters, and their rescuers from the *Jane Guy* finally reach a mysterious, temperate island within the Antarctic Circle. Since the beginning of the narrative, Pym has been driven to see for himself this land rumored to be in the unexplored region of the South Pole. What he discovers there is
ultimately a reflection of himself and all “civilized” humanity: a people whose perspectives are profoundly limited as a result of their surroundings. The islanders’ world is permeated by blackness. The islanders themselves are completely black, right down to their teeth—a detail Pym only discovers after the natives have killed all of the crew except himself and Peters. The native animals and landscape are all black, an especially strange phenomenon considering that this island is surrounded by the whiteness of the Antarctic. Being so profoundly limited to blackness, anything which is not black both frightens and threatens the islanders. This is why they flee in terror when the body of an all-white polar creature lands on their beach, and this is presumably why they kill the all-white crew of the *Jane Guy*.

The islanders are akin to Poe's notion of his readers—they reject the unfamiliar and anything that challenges the limits of their perceptions. This is why "Mr. Poe" recommends that Pym tell his tale as fiction, an invented (and, in this case, inverted) rendering of reality. *Pym* is an extended meditation on the challenges of the artist in appealing to—and affecting—the imagination of his audience. The polar creature, "covered in straight silky hair, perfectly white" with "feet armed with long claws of a brilliant scarlet, and resembling coral in substance [and] teeth of the same brilliant scarlet" with a "tail peaked like that of a rat . . . [and whose] head resembled a cat's, with the exception of the ears—these were flopped like the ears of a dog" (112-13), would just as readily be rejected.
by the reader as it is by the islanders, who, as inhabitants of an unknown region of earth, challenge the same reader whom they represent.

Poe invokes the power inherent in a successful appeal to the imagination again near the end of the novella. Pym describes how his imagination nearly caused him to fall to his death as he was scaling down a cliff edge:

[P]resently I found my imagination growing terribly excited by thoughts of the vast depths yet to be descended, and the precarious nature of the pegs and soapstone holes which were my only support. It was in vain I endeavored to banish these reflections, and to keep my eyes steadily bent upon the flat surface of the cliff before me. The more earnestly I struggled not to think, the more intensely vivid became my conceptions, and the more horribly distinct. At length arrived that crisis of fancy, so fearful in similar cases, the crisis in which we begin to anticipate the feelings with which we shall fall—to picture to ourselves the sickness, the dizziness, and the last struggle, and the half swoon, and the final bitterness of the rushing and headlong descent. And now I found these fancies creating their own realities, and all imagined horrors crowding upon me in fact. I felt my knees strike violently together, while my fingers were gradually but certainly relaxing their grasp... I had swooned, and Peters had caught me as I fell. (142)
In the first section of the story, one might read Pym as the writer whose appeal to the imagination of his "readers" (the mutineers) will directly affect the real, external world. They do not see Pym dressed as a reanimated dead man; they see the ghost of a dead man. He creates a successful effect. In the second scene, Pym is the reader whose powerful imagination is called upon by his dazzling circumstances. He experiences the effect of his own "Poetic faculty." A key element in both of these scenes is the fact that the "truth" of both situations is localized within the imagination of the viewers, rather than outside of the mind. In each case the effect has real consequences in the external world. Pym fools the mutineers, and later he nearly falls to his death, as a direct result of the power of imagination.

Shortly before they are rescued by the *Jane Guy*, Pym and Peters encounter a ship of corpses. The passengers and crew of the "Dutch trader" (71), as Pym refers to it, appear to have succumbed to disease or food poisoning and all died in short order. He recounts this encounter in the manner of a suspense tale. He first records his initial impression of the ship while it remained at a distance, then builds to the "horror of the spectacle" that he apprehends when the ship drifts close to his own ship (69). He describes what appears to be a sailor on the still distant ship,

who appeared to be looking at us with great curiosity, [he] was leaning over the starboard bow near the bowsprit . . . he seemed by
his manner to be encouraging us to have patience, nodding to us in a cheerful although rather odd way, and smiling constantly so as to display a set of the most brilliantly white teeth. As his vessel drew nearer, we saw a red flannel cap which he had on fall from his head into the water; but of this he took little or no notice, continuing this odd smiles and gesticulations. I relate these things and circumstances minutely, and I relate them, it must be understood, precisely as they appeared to us. (69)

As it turns out, the "sailor" is a dead body draped over the side of the ship whose apparent movements are caused by a sea bird tearing at the flesh on his back; the "red flannel cap" was an organ the bird had dropped, and the "smile which had cheered [Pym] on to hope" resulted from the lips and lower portion of the face having rotted away from the mouth (70). Here, appearances are devastatingly misleading: the appearance of the ship initially inspires hope of rescue, but upon closer inspection it serves only to remind Pym of the potential horrors of his predicament.

Pym is unable to find a satisfactory explanation for what caused the sudden demise of those aboard the death ship, concluding in the last lines of Chapter X, "it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain for ever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery" (71). Yet, he admits that he "vainly endeavored" long after the encounter "to obtain some clew to the hideous uncertainty which enveloped the fate of the stranger" (71). This
seemingly random and ostensibly meaningless occurrence encapsulates the theme of the entire text: the limits of human perception and reason in the larger world.

The narrative leaves the reader in the same predicament in which the death ship leaves Pym: without explanation, resolution, or a sense of conclusion. He intimates that there is a particular truth to the cause of the death on the ship and lists a number of possible scenarios based on the visual: yellow fever, or perhaps food poisoning as evidenced by the "saffron-like hue of . . . the corpses" (71), but he cannot settle on a satisfactory explanation. Simultaneously, Poe subtly reminds the reader of the limits of Pym's own perceptions when the character admits "[w]e might have easily seen the name [of the ship] upon her stern, and, indeed, taken other observations, which would have guided us in making out her character; the intense excitement of the moment blinded us to everything of that nature" (71). In other words, all too human emotions prevented the apprehension of any verifiable indicators. C. Auguste Dupin will later distinguish himself in Poe's detective stories through both his keen awareness of and unique ability to overcome such seemingly inevitable limits. But here, these human limits of perception remain insurmountable.

This is why the novella ends so ambiguously. From the beginning, the nature of the tale—a truth disguised as fiction—is unclear. If the entire narrative is a hoax, on what level is it so—that it is true or that it is not? The ending reveals that Pym's manuscript has been left unfinished at
its most tantalizingly fantastical moment. Pym, the reader is told in the postscript, has lately suffered a "sudden and distressing death" which is "already well known to the public through the medium of the daily press" (153). Yet, the writer of this concluding "note" declares that the other figure in the narrative, Dirk Peters, "is still alive, and a resident of Illinois, but cannot be met with at present. He may hereafter be found, and will, no doubt, afford material for a conclusion of Mr. Pym's account" (153). The implication, though, is that Peters' "conclusion" of Pym's "account" would be no more satisfying than the one Pym, himself, has left: no tale of the discovery of formerly unknown and even unimagined realms can have a conclusion. Pym's account ultimately reflects that of the human endeavor to seek out the unknown corners of his own, endlessly mysterious world and then to communicate his experience. As such, Pym's narrative mirrors Poe's attempt to explore the dark, unfamiliar realms of the endlessly mysterious world of the mind and to convey what he discovers in a true and affective way. This is the problem photography will solve for Poe.

Poe's self-described favorite tale, "Ligeia," which he first published in the fall of 1838, is perhaps the best example of his pre-photography use of visual representation. In this story an unnamed narrator recounts the death of his much beloved young wife, the Lady Ligeia, and his subsequent marriage to the professedly unloved Lady Rowena of Tremaine. Rowena also dies, shortly after her marriage to the narrator,
but her shrouded corpse reanimates, only to be revealed at the conclusion of the tale to have morphed into the form of her predecessor.

It is only when the reanimated figure opens her eyes that the narrator is able to confirm her identity despite his earlier observations that the corpse had "grown taller since her malady" and, more strikingly, revealed hair that was "blacker than the raven wings of midnight" rather than Rowena's formerly fair tresses (665). The narrator recounts, "now slowly opened the eyes of the figure which stood before me. 'Here then, at least,' I shrieked aloud, 'can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the Lady Ligeia" (665-6). This is a fitting response because the narrator had focused on Ligeia's eyes in all of his descriptions of her, from the first detailed account of the appearance of her face to his narration of her illness: "Wanting the radiant lustre of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill" (657). Here, the visual is both the subject and the driving theme of the tale as Ligeia's eyes are presented simultaneously as, of course, the means by which she is able to see the world and, more subtly, as the object of the narrator's obsessive gaze and recollection. Ligeia's eyes are a metonymic symbol of the woman herself, whose beauty conveys one of Poe's consistent ideas regarding truth in art: her eyes are the ultimate source of her striking beauty precisely because of their
"strangeness" (655).

Here Poe anticipates his later explanations of how the artist ought to approach representations of appearances and his belief that in order to seem true, they must be disproportional. The narrator’s reference to Bacon explains this idea in terms of his beloved: "'There is no beauty,' says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and genera of beauty, 'without some strangeness in proportion'" (655). Poe demonstrates his theory of visual representation by explicitly focusing on the visual. The narrator concludes that because Ligeia's eyes are strange they are the source of her beauty: "in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad" (655). Her beauty, in turn, represents that truth in art that, for Poe, would become manifest only when it had the proper effect on its audience. This is why the narrator notably remarks upon Ligeia's eyes in terms of their potential meaning:

The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the expression. Ah, word of no meaning! . . . . The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! . . . . What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which
lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What was it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. (656)

The narrator senses that he might discover a philosophical truth through Ligeia's eyes, even in their absence, as he recalls them here through an aged memory. Ligeia, of course, is long dead when the tale opens. The narrator of "Ligeia" is the affected reader whose "Poetic faculty" has been profoundly and enduringly awakened through a complex contemplation of visual representation. It is the "strangeness" itself— the appearance of Ligeia's eyes—that conveys some elusive meaning to both the narrator and the reader that he simultaneously appeals to and represents.

And yet, exactly one year after "Ligeia's" publication—and nine months after Daguerre's announcement to the world in September 1839—Poe indicates in a letter to Philip Cooke that he wished he had concluded "Ligeia" differently: "[o]ne point I have not fully carried out—I should have intimated that the will did not perfect its intention—there should have been a relapse—a final one—and Ligeia (who had only succeeded in so much as to convey an idea of the truth to the narrator) should be at length entombed as Rowena—the bodily alterations having gradually faded away." Poe suggests that the character, Ligeia, should have failed specifically because she merely "conveys" an "idea" to the narrator, rather than affecting an enduring, visual impression. This reconsideration is particularly interesting as a post-photography reflection upon a pre-photography text. As Poe writes this letter, he has just
completed the manuscripts for both "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson," two tales awaiting publication that stand as key examples of the post-photography shift in his visual representations. His reassessment of "Ligeia" at this moment is evidence of his new sense of the affective possibilities inherent in representations of the visual in literature. Poe believed in 1839 that Ligeia, who, as critics such as Clayton Hamilton have claimed is arguably the main character of tale, is ultimately rendered a tragic figure not so much because she dies, but because she fails to successfully imprint her image either on the body of her replacement or, subsequently, upon the page of her eponymous tale. In this way, Ligeia's impression on the material world can only be fleeting because she, like her own tale, consists primarily of effect. Poe sees her in these terms in 1839 because he has since realized that the affective power of art is more readily and meaningfully employed when it results from—rather than points to—a central truth.

In his letter Poe conceives of Ligeia as a visual artist would in the fall of 1839 because she so easily becomes a photographic symbol: she is both a potential daguerreotype and a daguerreotypist who is unsuccessful in properly developing her image. Poe regrets that he did not describe her "fade[ing] away" like a daguerreotyped image that fails to remain chemically fixed upon the plate. He explains this lament particularly in response to Cooke's kindly worded critique of the tale outlined in a letter he had composed earlier that month. Cooke writes to Poe, "if you had
brooded and meditated upon the change until proof accumulated upon proof, making wonder certainty, and then, in the moment of some strangest of all evidence of the transition, broken out into the exclamation which ends the story—the effect would not have been lessened, and the 'ghostly proprieties' would, I think, have been better observed.” Poe enthusiastically agrees with Cooke's observations: "Touching 'Ligeia' you are right—all right—throughout. The gradual perception of the fact that Ligeia lives again in the person of Rowena is a far loftier and more thrilling idea than the one I have embodied. It offers in my opinion, the widest possible scope to the imagination—it might be rendered even sublime" ("Letter to Phillip Pendleton Cooke"). Both Poe and Cooke reveal a photographic influence on their aesthetic senses. Had Poe composed "Ligeia" in the fall of 1839 or later, he apparently would have incorporated a greater focus on the deliberate process of the development of Ligeia's appearance and the superior effect such a technique would elicit. Poe and Cooke agree that a "gradual" recognition of Ligeia's appearance would have been better; it as though Rowena's body is akin to a photographic plate being subjected to the chemical process of daguerreotypy in the gloom of a bridal chamber-turned-mortuary. It is clear that the photograph, with its characteristic gradual manifestation both during the multiple minute-long sittings and as the plates develop illustrates materially what Poe will recognize as ideal artistic effect.
Poe would go on to incorporate the ballad “The Conqueror Worm” into later, post-photography versions of “Ligeia”—the poem first appears in the tale in the February 15, 1845 edition of the New World, nearly seven years after the tale’s pre-photography publication in the American Museum. “The Conqueror Worm” had been previously published by itself two years earlier in Graham’s Magazine, and its inclusion in the later version of “Ligeia” lends the tale a distinctly photographic quality.

In the pre-photography version of “Ligeia,” it is the narrator, rather than Ligeia, who recalls the Joseph Glanvill quote that opens the tale, and he does so only as he gazes at Ligeia’s corpse. In the post-photography version it is Ligeia who recites the Glanvill quotation immediately after hearing the narrator’s recitation of “The Conqueror Worm” and then again with her dying breath only moments later. In the later version Poe only cites the final line of the quote within the tale (though the full quote appears at the opening of the tale as it does in the pre-photography version). In the earlier version, the full Glanvill quote, as reflected upon by the narrator, functions largely to foreshadow the re-appearance of the late Ligeia at the conclusion of the tale:

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will. —Joseph Glanvill (654)
Writing in England in the seventeenth century, Glanvill was known for defending the reality of the supernatural; his *Saducismus Triumphatus*, a book-length treatise on witches and apparitions, greatly influenced Cotton Mather. The narrator’s recollection of Glanvill in the pre-photography version occurs in a quiet moment of reflection immediately following Ligeia’s death, and it expresses for the narrator, for whom his own words fail, his awe at the depth and strength of Ligeia’s love for him and for life.

In the post-photography version, however, the Glanvill quotation takes on an entirely different tone. It is first “shrieked” by Ligeia in response to hearing her own verses recited to her, then “murmured” by her in her dying moments (659). It is the truth expressed by her own poem that so dramatically moves Ligeia to recall only the “concluding words of the passage in Glanvill,” which, taken out of their larger context, place a premium on the individual will (“Ligeia” 659). The individual is largely de-emphasized in the full quote which describes the will of God “pervading all things” (654). In this version, uttered by Ligeia, herself, the Glanvill quote functions as a personal expression of Ligeia’s own will to overcome death, that very “conqueror worm” about which she had written only days earlier. The addition of “The Conqueror Worm” allows Poe to refocus the tale on Ligeia. In the post-photography version, Ligeia’s struggle to resist death (as it seems she ultimately succeeds in doing) is first an internal conflict (expressed by her shrieking resistance
to her own lyrics) that ends up being projected into the outer world when she literally reappears at the end of the tale.

As Ligeia’s own creation, “The Conqueror Worm” effectively reveals her inner reality at the conclusion of the tale. Ligeia’s reaction to the narrator’s recitation of the poem is one of horror as she recognizes the truth in her own creation: “‘O God! O Divine Father!—shall these things be undeviatingly so?’” (659). As such, “The Conqueror Worm” functions like a photograph: the subject is confronted with a true depiction of her own reality (she is dying) of which she was very recently the “designer.” And as was the case with so many photographic subjects, Ligeia recoils from what she faces. It is not simply the inevitability of death that horrifies her; it is her own, highly visual,—“The Conqueror Worm” depicts a play on a stage—imagistic rendering of this personal truth that is so terrifying.

No surprise, then, that "Ligeia" continues to challenge scholars. It remains, as Yaohua Shi notes, "a special case" that "[l]ike The Turn of the Screw . . . has been interpreted from a dizzying array of approaches" (485). Shi suspects that the reason for the enduring disagreements regarding the tale is due to the fact that "Ligeia" ultimately "dramatizes the impossibility of language to interpret or represent" (486). According to Shi, the narrator "insists on the inadequacy of language" (487) as he struggles to articulate what he means by the "expression" of Ligeia's eyes. Such an idea will naturally lead to interpretive disagreement.
that Poe saw his favorite tale through a new lens following the invention of photography usefully reveals some essential elements of his pre-photography use of visual themes.

As it stands, references to the visual in "Ligeia" recall those in *Pym*: in both tales there is the recognition of an animated corpse. In the earlier novella, the corpse is an illusion used to elicit a calculated psychological response from the mutineers. But one could argue that the portrayal of Rowena's corpse was intended to have a similar effect on Poe's reader. The sudden revelation of Ligeia's likeness appeals to both the reader and the narrator's imagination; the latter "shrieks" his final lines (666) declaring that the figure before him is none other than Ligeia. Yet, his declaration, though written as a statement, grammatically forms a question: "*can I never—can I never be mistaken*—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the Lady Ligeia" (666, italics added). The open-endedness of the conclusion, along with the certainty that is not certainty on the part of the unreasoning narrator, appeals to the reader's imagination. The "effect" of shock and bewilderment is derived almost wholly from the description of the apparent appearance of Ligeia.

The tale ends suddenly and jarringly. The closest the reader might come to discovering any finality is in a return to the opening of the tale where one encounters the narrator who, the reader is reminded, has survived this ordeal into old age. The final paragraphs of "Ligeia" are
particularly descriptive of the figure of the reanimated body while the narrator's own thoughts and emotions regarding this spectacle are recalled as "unutterable," "inexpressible," "mad[ly] disordered," and of a "paralyzed" "brain" (665). This recalls the reader's introduction to the narrator who opens the tale with a failure of memory: "I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia" (654). Yet, he notes that his lapse in memory may actually be attributable to the fact that "the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive, that they have been unnoticed and unknown" (654, italics added). Ligeia's effect on the narrator is akin to that which the successful writer achieves upon his reader; it is subtle, incremental, and profound.

It is only when Poe finds himself in a photographic world that he realizes that the best literary "effect" is a holistic impression made on the mind of the reader caused by a contemplation of a tale or poem in its entirety. In 1838 Poe largely limits his use of visual themes to painstaking descriptions of the figure of Rowena's body as though a credible depiction of the phenomenon of a transmigration of soul will be the source of the desired effect. By late 1839, Poe expresses a new belief; it is actually the realization in the mind of the reader caused by his successful, incremental depiction of a particular "truth" that is the
ultimate source of effect. The dynamism of Ligeia's initial impression on the narrator described in the opening lines of the tale stands as a prelude to the incremental effects her return has on him and on the reader. After the advent of photography, Poe’s tales become photograph-like: the details of his plots function like the painstaking steps in the development of a daguerreotype. When they are performed perfectly, they reveal a sublime, arresting, and perhaps even disturbing depiction of truth.

Following the development of the daguerreotype, Poe’s approach to his art begins to mirror the approach the photographer takes to his work. The fact that Poe would publish more essays on photography than on any of the other remarkable inventions of his day, not to mention the fact that he subjected himself to a number of daguerreotype sittings, suggests just how profoundly meaningful he found the development of the daguerreotype to be. Photography was a science that seemed to render visible Poe’s ideas about the ultimate potential of art. Through an expertly performed process, one could capture a glimpse of what heretofore would have remained a hidden truth.
Chapter III

The “Daguerreotype Essays,” Poe’s Philosophy, and

The Earliest Post-Photography Tales:

Crowd," and “The Oval Portrait”

In January of 1840 Poe published a short essay in Alexander’s
Weekly Messenger entitled simply “The Daguerreotype.” He would go on
to publish two additional essays in April and May of that year (after
Alexander’s had become Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine) in which he
described some particular "[i]mprovements" that had been made in
daguerreotypy. Poe’s initial description of the yet enigmatic
daguerreotype process in January echoes the jargon of Daguerre himself,
as well as of the other early experimenters in the emerging field of
photography. After a detailed technical description of the metals and
solvents involved in the creation of a daguerreotype, Poe notably
concludes, “the plate is then deposited in a camera obscura, and the lens
of this instrument directed to the object which it is required to paint. The
action of the light does the rest” (“Daguerreotype” 4). The role of the
daguerreotypist is minimal. As Carol Shloss puts it, "The photographer
might be the dexterous handler of chemicals and lenses, but nature was
the real artist working through him" (33). Daguerre, Talbot, and their
followers were seen less as inventors of photography than as the
discoverers of a natural phenomenon.

   The marginalization of the daguerreotypist is both literal and
   figurative:

   In truth, the Daguerreotyped plate is *infinitely* more accurate in its
   representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a
   work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces
   of resemblance to nature will disappear—but the close scrutiny of
   the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more
   perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented. The variations
   of shade, and the gradations of both linear and aerial perspective
   are those of truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection.

   (“Daguerreotype” 4)

For Poe and his contemporaries the daguerreotype represents raw truth.
The notion of truth in appearance as an end, however, is astonishingly
complicated by photography. Nature’s “true” portraits of herself prove to
be often unflattering, even disquieting in appearance. Thus, even after
Poe declares the camera to be the most important invention of his day, it
is ultimately not surprising that neither daguerreotype nor daguerreotypist
appears anywhere in his fiction. This is in part due to that sublimation of
the human agent that daguerreotypy conventionally required, but also
because photography as a science almost immediately transcended itself,
becoming less an invention than a revelation regarding the ways we saw
each other, the world, and ourselves.

Poe alludes to a reason for the absence of daguerreotypy in his stories in his conclusion of “The Daguerreotype” when he recalls his phrasing in “Metzengerstein,” writing: “[i]t is a theorem almost demonstrated, that the consequences of any new scientific invention will, at the present day exceed, by very much, the wildest expectations of the most imaginative” (4). That is to say, the potential inherent in photography rests upon the human imagination. This is what makes Daugerre’s discovery so particularly valuable and interesting for the writer. Susan S. Williams has argued that a key reason for any writer’s interest in daguerreotypy was derived from the fact that “the full power of the image remained beyond the confines of language” (“Inconstant Daguerreotype”” 162). Consequently, early written responses to the daguerreotype, both fictional and non-fictional, “rather than dwelling on the ability of the daguerreotype to replace verbal description [allowed] many writers who used the daguerreotype to encourage readers to explore the ‘dark chamber’ of the mind” (“Inconstant Daguerreotype”” 162).

Such speculations led to Poe's effort to create works of timeless relevance: he knew that the products and means of photography would continue to develop and change rapidly, but its stunning influence upon ways of seeing was both all-encompassing and irreversible. Within just weeks of Poe's first daguerreotype essay in *Alexander's*, photographers invented new cameras and developing processes and were experimenting
with new image media. Were he to include a daguerreotype or camera in one of his stories, by the time it was published those objects would be outdated.

In addition to the rapidity with which photography was changing and improving, Poe was also fascinated by the increasing simplicity of each new breakthrough. Much of his April 1840 essay, titled "Improvements in the Daguerreotype," consists of reports of what had been found to be extraneous to the creation of daguerreotypes. He declares that "[s]everal of the conditions which have been announced as required for the success of the process, may be dispensed with" (193). This includes details ranging from "do[ing] without the dilute nitric acid" to "mak[ing] the iodine-box . . . much shallower than does M. Daugerre" (194). Poe takes care to note that both of these innovations are American, referring to them as processes that "we" have accomplished. In addition to undercutting assumptions about what is necessary, the fact that this "most extraordinary" process is proving to be most successful when it is simplified and condensed echoes Poe's philosophy that literature's affective nature results in large part from its conciseness.

In addition to its revolutionizing of visual representation, photography was also significant to Poe in terms of its potential to replicate. As he notes in his May article on daguerreotypy in Burton's, the invention will soon prove "detrimental to the interests of the engraver" as "the production of the Daguerreotype effects on paper is
likely to be soon accomplished" (4). He is referring here to the calotype developed by Talbot in Britain. The fact that photography would soon share the medium of his own art, paper, only further confirmed his notion that this new science was intrinsically linked to his philosophy regarding the relationship between art and truth. Yet, interestingly, the man who will come to be known for his near-obsessive preoccupation with plagiarism adds that "the invention will prove, upon the whole, highly beneficial to the interests of the fine arts" (4). It is this complexity—the suggestion that the reality of perfect and potentially infinite replication posed by photography might actually contribute to (rather than threaten) art—that Poe had already begun to explore through his earliest photographically influenced tales, particularly "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson," months before his making this suggestion in Burton's. He writes in his first daguerreotype essay that "[a]ll language must fall short of conveying any just idea of the truth, and this will not appear so wonderful when we reflect that the source of vision itself has been, in this instance, the designer" (4). This echoes the subtext of "William Wilson": an individual can encounter a replica of himself in the world only when it is of one's own making. The daguerreotype, like William Wilson's doppelganger, is a superior likeness to that of a "positively perfect mirror" ("Daguerreotype 4) because they each spring from their respective originals.

The invention of photography played a significant role in shaping
Poe’s post-1839 representations of the visual primarily as a means toward achieving a greater, overall effect. Photography confirmed his reservations regarding didacticism and demonstrated the premium he placed on the effect of art on its audience; since actual photographs were thought to be embodiments of unmediated truth, they proved to be astonishingly affective. It comes as little surprise, then, that Poe's earliest predictions for the potential uses of photography extend to that which lies beyond the known world. He concludes his first daguerreotype essay by noting that "among the obvious advantages derivable from the Daguerreotype: by its aid, the height of inaccessible elevations may in many cases be immediately ascertained, since it will afford an absolute perspective of objects in such situations, and that drawing of a correct lunar chart will be at once accomplished, since the rays of this luminary are found to be appreciated by the plate" (4). In the winter of 1840 Poe had only begun to imagine the extent to which his visions of his own world—both as artist and viewer—were about to be both confirmed and complicated by this revelation of "truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection."

The photographic aesthetic that emerges in Poe's fiction is apparent in a variety of subtle ways. In Poe's pre-photography fiction, the visual is a frequent, explicit, and often complex subject. After the introduction of photography in 1839, Poe's use of the visual becomes a much more nuanced device. His references to the visual become particularly
photographic in his new emphasis on the role of the observer rather than the observed, and he begins to use encoded allusions to photography in his tales. He also frames his tales in new ways that suggest the work of a daguerreotypist behind a camera, particularly in the way he manipulates light and settings. These techniques anticipate his ideas about the role of the reader that he will outline in his April 1846 essay, "The Philosophy of Composition," and will lead the way to the ontological theories he outlines at the end of the decade in his self-professed best work, the prose poem *Eureka*.

Before the invention of photography Poe had employed largely traditional usages of the gothic in his visual representations: appearances were highly suspect and almost always concealed something. As his photographic aesthetic emerges in his writings after 1839, the emphasis moves from a premium on the visual subject to a preoccupation with the participatory role of the viewer as well as with the supposedly transparent but necessarily ingenious creator (whether author or daguerreotypist) of descriptive images. As the viewers of photographs were being asked to see familiar things in new ways, the audiences for literary texts were quickly asked to explore a different sort of relationship to such works as well.

Poe's philosophy of literature does not profoundly change with the advent of photography. Rather, photography seems to demonstrate the validity of his literary philosophy both through its creative process and its
results. As Susan S. Williams has recently noted, the invention of the daguerreotype "aided Poe in articulating his belief in the importance of 'unity of effect' in fiction" ("Daguerreotyping" 16). Williams observes: "[l]ike the short tale and poem—Poe's preferred literary modes—the daguerreotype was self-contained, portable, and intense. Its erasure of extraneous materials and its status as an authentic object—a ‘faithful’ transcription of the real thing—gave it a focus and a novelty that Poe clearly found fascinating" ("Daguerreotyping" 16). Indeed, in many ways the daguerreotype simultaneously exposed everything that Poe believed was wrong with the popular didactic style of literature, and, as such, proved the superiority of the gothic and romantic traditions. Like gothic literature and the romance, photography seemed to penetrate surfaces to reveal the essential truth regarding an individual's inner-life that would not otherwise have had occasion to manifest.

Susan Sontag has written that, "[a]ll photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (15). While the invention of photography almost certainly contributed to the popularization of the already emergent realism movement in literature, and "[m]ost authors then considered their writing complimented when it was called 'photographic'" (Rabb 38), photography seemed only to confirm Poe's affinity for the opposing romantic style. For Poe, didacticism in literature removed any potential artfulness from the work. Just as the "meaning(s)" of a
photographic image depend enormously upon the viewer, to Poe the didactic premium on realism threatened to diminish the role of the reader as related to the work of literature. As the beautiful and arresting photograph through its incontrovertible truth seemed to reveal the otherwise hidden aspects of an individual's character, so the flatness of literary didacticism's representations of reality became all the more apparent.

Photography also demonstrated the problems Poe saw as inherent in supposedly true-to-life representation: it is often, ironically, unrealistic. Realism should not be an artistic end in itself according to Poe as he explains in his May 1841 review of Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*: “We do not paint an object to be true, but to appear true to the beholder. Were we to copy nature with accuracy the object copied would seem unnatural. The columns of Greek temples, which convey the idea of absolute proportion, are very considerably thicker just beneath the capital than at the base” (251). As John Reed has recently argued, Dickens's style was not realistic, but rather a "hyperrealism" that actually subverted that emergent style that Poe so opposed. The works of didactic writers, such as those of Poe's favorite target, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, were artless because objective, exacting depictions of life would always fall short of "true" representation. The uncanny and highly affective appearances seen in photographic portraits exemplified Poe's artistic theory: the most faithful depictions of reality that science had developed
were hardly recognizable as depictions of life. They showed viewers reality in a completely new, unfamiliar, and unnatural way. For the nineteenth-century viewer, the apparent photographic revelation of the hidden truths in the minds and hearts of men—the most important truths to Poe—actually skewed the appearance of reality.

Photography also undercut didactic writing in its presumption of a passively receptive readership by showing how the meanings of representations of reality, especially portraits, require a "reader." It was only after a photograph was viewed that its full meaning would begin to manifest. Though it was thought to spring from within, the truth of a photograph was apparently not completely self-contained. Like literature, photography reveals otherwise hidden truths about its subject, but these truths become manifest only in the act of being "read." Poe's philosophy of literature places a particular premium on reader response. As he specifies in his 1846 treatise "The Philosophy of Composition," the ultimate goal of an author is achieving a particular "effect" on his reader, an "elevation of soul—not of intellect" (103) that requires "a distinct limit, as regards length . . . the limit of a single sitting" (102). Consciously or not, Poe's use of the word "sitting" evokes photographic portraiture terminology. He links the viewing of a photograph with a reader's experience of literary "effect." The reader's mind, as affected by the author, is akin to a metal plate's transformation into a daguerreotype.
Both events appear natural and effortless, though in reality they are both ultimately the results of careful human skill and ingenuity.

After a detailed description of the mechanics of creating a daguerreotype in his first "Daguerreotype" essay, Poe is uncharacteristically concise about the technicalities of the development of the actual image on the plate, writing only that "the light does the rest" (4). While "the light," indeed, does play a key role in the creation of a daguerreotype, photography for Poe was ultimately a magnificent result of scientific ingenuity. "The light" in Poe's description can be likened to the imagination—or genius—of the artist. His notable conciseness at this key point in his technical description anticipates his ironic failure to delineate the role of individual genius in the process of creating a work of literature in his "The Philosophy of Composition."

Indeed, “The Philosophy of Composition” reads very much like the instruction manuals that Poe had familiarized himself with while writing his daguerreotype essays in 1840. In addition to emphasizing the amount of time a work should take to read, referring to the aforementioned centrality of a single “sitting,” Poe also uses terms that were commonly used in early descriptions of the photographic process such as “frame” and “contrast” (107). He declares that his purpose in writing the essay is to reveal his “modus operandi by which some one of my own works was put together” (102), making the entire essay a step-by-step instruction manual of sorts for successfully developing a work of literature.
Additionally, as Leonard Cassuto has rightfully noted, his “extended use of ‘The Raven’” is “interlaced with humor” (100). This humor originates in the glaring fact that Poe makes no mention in “The Philosophy of Composition” of that intangible, yet absolutely essential element to any good piece of writing: genius. This omission echoes those daguerreotype instruction manuals in which Poe himself points out that the most important element remains both unquantified and enigmatic: “the light itself does the rest.” The corresponding parallel can be read in one of Poe’s concluding declarations in “The Philosophy of Composition.” After laying out specific, detailed instructions for successful poetry writing he declares that “[t]wo things are invariably required—first, some amount of complexity . . . and secondly, some amount of suggestiveness—some under current, however indefinite of meaning” (109).

On a related note, a work of literature is no place for a moral, as Poe explains in his posthumously published essay, "The Poetic Principle," "there exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than . . . [the] poem which is a poem and nothing more—the poem written solely for the poem's sake" (178). This comment provides a clue as to why he so vehemently rejects the didactic literature of mid-nineteenth century America: its premium on the idea of an external objective truth which a piece of writing might describe, but not encapsulate, necessarily presupposes a submissive, non-participatory readership. Authors such as Longfellow, for Poe, were overly concerned
with their writerly authority and not enough with the affective potential of self-contained photograph-like depiction of truth that good poetry and prose should achieve. Precisely because Longfellow's works purport to be descriptive, they are anything but true. For Poe, Longfellow’s and his ilk’s depictions of the world are merely prescriptive. As such, they marginalize the reader, which dooms them always to fail in their purported endeavors to faithfully represent reality. Such literature described the world to a reader instead of incrementally and holistically revealing a truth to them. In the daguerrean era, truth ideally emerges from the thing itself, be it a poem, tale, or photograph.

Even worse for Poe were the liberties Longfellow took with his self-proclaimed true-to-life works. Regarding his poem "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp," Poe complains about the lack of care the poet takes in representing the real horrors of slavery. "Because he has heard that runaway slaves are so treated in Cuba, he has certainly no right to change the locality, and by insinuating a falsehood in lieu of fact, charge his countrymen with barbarity. What makes the matter worse, he is one of those who insist upon truth as one of the elements of poetry" ("Longfellow's Poems" 132). Poe takes issue less with Longfellow’s abolitionist stance than with his heavy-handed, subjective, and biased attempt to convey "truth." Longfellow's overt omni-presence in his works precludes them from containing or conveying any revealed truth.

Daguerreotypists are like authors for Poe because if they do their
jobs brilliantly, their audiences will discover truth in their work for themselves. This is where both the didactic and the Transcendental writers err in Poe's mind. There has to be both the mysterious "light" of the Emersonian "frenzied" imagination along with skilled, precise work for art to be created. Emerson and his acolytes were, for Poe, as solipsistic in their transcendental writings as the didactics were in their authoritative narratives. As he explains in "The Poetic Principle," "[h]e who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odours, and colours, and sentiments, which greet him in common with all mankind—he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title" (179). Perhaps even worse were what Poe considered the disingenuous claims of unmitigated composition by some of his contemporary writers:

Most writers . . . prefer having it understood that they compose by a series of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes . . . at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions . . . which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio. ("Philosophy" 101)

To Poe, transcendentalist writers are as hypocritical in their claims of exclusive subjectivity as didactic writers are in their claims of strict objectivity. Photography demonstrated the absurdity of considering true
representation as one or the other. Its invention proved that capturing reality—whether through a photograph or a work of literature—required a marriage of the hard work of meticulous technical expertise to the "light" of individual genius.

To date, aside from Susan S. Williams' aforementioned 2009 article in *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism*, very few scholars have made note of any significant correlation between the invention of photography and Poe's writing. Although they do not suggest that the advent of daguerreotypy had an effect on Poe's fiction, Benjamin J. McFarland and Thomas Peter Bennett in their study of a daguerreotype in the archives of The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia that may possibly feature Poe, note that there is a distinct change—an improvement—in Poe's writing after 1838, the year he moved to Philadelphia and became closely associated with the renowned scientific community in that city. McFarland and Bennett write, "[t]here is a notable difference in the stories published before and after Poe's move to Philadelphia in 1838. 'Berenice' (1835) describes an epileptic trance. The cataleptic trance of Lady Madeline described in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839) is more complex in both literary and scientific terms . . . . This maturation both factually and artistically may indicate the new source of scientific information Poe found in Philadelphia" (18). As mentioned, the first daguerreotype exhibited in the United States was in Philadelphia on October 16, 1839; the first commercial photographic studio in the United
States was established in Philadelphia, and Philadelphian practitioners embraced and immediately began improving the daguerreotype process. McFarland and Bennett claim that "a lecture given by one of Daguerre's assistants on the newly invented method [of daguerreotypy] attracted a huge crowd in New York City but failed to raise interest in Philadelphia, because the technology prevalent in the city had already eclipsed that of the original inventor's" (5). Poe befriended some of the most highly-regarded men of science in his hometown, many of whom dabbled in daguerreotypy. There is little doubt that the scientific community of Philadelphia was enthusiastically discussing this new invention soon after its arrival in America.

Initially published in *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine* in September 1839, "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a tale of the final days of the two remaining members of the ancient Usher family, the twins Madeline and Roderick. The unnamed narrator arrives at the house on a "dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year" (231) having been summoned there by Roderick who had been his dear friend in boyhood. The narrator discovers that Madeline is slowly dying of a mysterious "catalytic" disease while her concerned brother appears to be wasting away in part from "hypochondriasis." One stormy night, shortly after Madeline's death and subsequent entombment, she appears at her brother's bedroom door bloodied and "emaciated," having been prematurely buried. Madeline's sudden appearance is too much for Roderick, who perishes as
she collapses upon him. The narrator immediately flees the house, only to witness its spontaneous destruction: the building splits in two with a flash of light, then collapses and disappears into the tarn below.

Unlike his other well-received tales of 1839, Poe hardly changes a word of "The Fall of the House of Usher" in preparation for its second publication the following year in Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. This is particularly surprising as Washington Irving, after having read the yet unpublished "William Wilson," wrote to Poe to praise the latter tale and to contrast it with what he considered the inferior "Usher." Irving refers to "William Wilson" as "much the best, in regard to style," because, he explains, the tale is "simpler" than "Usher." Irving writes to Poe, "you have been too anxious to present your picture vividly to the eye, or too distrustful of your effect, and have laid on too much coloring. ["Usher"] might be improved by relieving the style from some of the epithets. There is no danger of destroying its graphic effect, which is powerful."

Poe was apparently unwilling to jeopardize any element of that "graphic effect" he had achieved in "Usher" since he does not implement any of Irving's much sought after advice in subsequent versions of the text.

David W. Butler suggests one reason why Poe ignored Irving's suggestions regarding "Usher." Butler notes in "Usher's Hypochondriasis: Mental Alienation and Romantic Idealism in Poe's Gothic Tales" that "since hypochondriasis was thought to involve the interaction of mind and body, it offered a superb medical analogy to the romantic's concern with
the bonds between the internal, subjective realm and the external world of physical objects" (5). Indeed, the "too much coloring" that Irving laments is a purposeful device, intended to parallel the psychosomatic symptoms of the central figure of the tale, Roderick Usher. The exaggerated "graphic effects" of "Usher" are, ironically, included in order to realistically convey Roderick's subjective experience. As Butler points out, "[b]y dissolving the distinctions between the hypochondriacal Roderick and his environment, Poe posits a world in which the alienists' belief in the capacity of the mind to interact with the body which contains it, and the romantic idealists' faith in the capacity of the imagination to interact with the world around it, are no longer only suggestively similar, but one" (9-10). Through "Usher," Poe contemplates the role of subjectivity in our experience of the larger, external world.

"Usher" is Poe's earliest photographic text. The tale is intended to be a true-to-life portrait of an individual as Poe now began to conceive of it in this very early moment in the post-photography era. The truest portraits, as the earliest witnesses to the daguerreotype report, capture both the inner and outer self; indeed, in the 1840's one could not view a photographic portrait without seemingly getting a glimpse of an individual's character. The tale is, ultimately, a photographically inspired representation of the main character Roderick Usher.

Butler describes "Usher" and its protagonist from a strictly physiological standpoint: "'The Fall of the House of Usher' is finally,
then, Poe's most thorough and sophisticated dramatization of the impossibility of developing unquestionably valid and complete medical or unquestionably valid and complete mystical explanations of some extraordinary private experiences" (11). "Usher" is ultimately an exploration of subjectivity, particularly through Poe's depiction of the tormented Roderick as Butler notes, but this exploration is also achieved more generally and subtly though his rendering of a variety of appearances throughout the tale.

Before we meet Roderick or Madeline, the reader sees an image of their home in exquisite detail. The narrator opens the tale recounting the "sense of insufferable gloom pervad[ing] his spirit" upon the "first glimpse" of the house of Usher (231). He likens the sensation afforded by the "scene" of the house viewed from a distance to that of the "bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil" of an opium user returning to sobriety (231). Poe presents the narrator as gazing upon a reality that he finds profoundly disturbing, describing the feelings elicited by this experience as "an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime" (231). But the narrator is unable to satisfactorily pinpoint any particular reason for this impression. He suspects it has something to with the overall image the house presents, so, having heard that "a mere different arrangement of the particulars of [a] scene, of the details of [a] picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its
capacity for sorrowful impression" (231), he changes his perspective by riding his horse to the very edge of the precipice upon which he had stopped and "gazed down" at the reflection on the house in a "black and lurid tarn" that lay below (231). The reflected or, as the narrator refers to it, the "remodeled and inverted images" of the house elicit "a shudder even more thrilling than before" (231). The reversed likeness of the building only serves to more definitively bring out those elements of the house that disturbed him upon his initial, direct glance. The image of the house of Usher reflected upon the tarn—the very pool into which the house will later collapse—functions like a daguerreotype as Poe would have understood it in the early fall of 1839. Here, nature literally draws itself, and as such, it captures and displays a level of reality that heretofore could have only been intimated.

The narrator notes that "the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment—that of looking down within the tarn—had been to deepen the first singular impression" (232). That is, the reflected image of the house—a metaphorical daguerreotype—shows him exactly what his mind's eye had detected but his physical eye had missed: the doomed and dangerous nature of the building. The reflection shows him a previously hidden truth and, as such, changes the way he sees the building when he reconsiders it after contemplating its reversed image. He notes that it is only after gazing at the reflection that "when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a
strange fancy . . . that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity . . . which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued” (233). The experience of contemplating the daguerreotype-like reflected image of the house comes to change the way he sees everything; the reversed image reveals truth and, in so doing, elicits a distinctly powerful and long lasting effect upon its viewer.

The narrator informs the reader early on that this is not his first visit to the house; rather, he spent much of his childhood visiting his "boon companion of boyhood," Roderick Usher (232). Yet, after his experience of viewing the reflection of the house, he notes that he now sees even familiar objects differently. When he enters the house he tells how

Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me—while the carvings of the ceilings, the somber tapestries of the walls . . . were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy—while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this—I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. (233)

Even his friend Roderick, upon their reunion, appears "terribly altered" at
first glance: "[i]t was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of early boyhood" (234). Yet, the narrator questions the nature of even this alteration, noting, "[y]et, the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye, large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison . . . a countenance not easily to be forgotten" (234). The narrator is uncertain as to whether the change is really in the person of Roderick, or if he is simply seeing him differently, akin to the way he has begun to see everything in a new way since experimentally “re-framing” his view when he contemplated the image of the house in the tarn.

As such, much of "The Fall of the House of Usher" can be read as a contemplation of the possibilities of a photographic world. That which is familiar will become unfamiliar as new dimensions of appearances are revealed. Thus, Roderick's theory regarding the "sentience of all vegetable things" (239) is ultimately an extended hypothesis regarding the nature of reality and how much of it might lie beyond human apprehension. Suddenly, in 1839, Poe realized that the world was about to be shown in a completely new way, and that possible hidden realities such as those that Roderick describes might now be made visible.

It is worth noting, then, that it is not simply the "conditions of the sentience . . . fulfilled in the method of collocation of [the] stones . . . as well as in that of the many fungi that overspread them, and of the decayed

95
trees which stood around" that is the source of the strangely affecting atmosphere about the house of Usher. More importantly, Roderick theorizes, it derives from "the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn" (239, italics added). Fittingly, this reflective pool is also suspected to be the source of the eerie light witnessed one night glowing all around the exterior of the house. The narrator describes the scene: "the under surfaces of . . . huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion" (242). The narrator's description echoes the reports that had been circulating in American newspapers over the summer of 1839 recounting the methods by which daguerreotype plates were developed. The daguerreotype's underside would have been exposed to a series of luminous chemical vapors such as those produced by bromine, iodine, and mercury, which lead to the appearance of something that had not been there before.

The fact that the house and its doomed occupants disappear into the tarn in the closing lines of the tale can also be read as a photographic detail. The pool had revealed the previously hidden truth of the house through the "reduplicated" image captured on its surface; its vapors both literally and figuratively bring reality to light. Poe projects upon the tarn key aspects of photography as he understood them at this early juncture.
When the house violently collapses into the tarn, it fittingly disappears into that which had exposed its reality through a natural means of exact replication. That is to say, the house of Usher is subsumed by its own image. This was a possibility posed by the yet mysterious process of photography: might replication, in its very perfection of truth, eclipse the very objects—or individuals—it simultaneously captures?

Poe’s investigation of this question is perhaps best explored through “The Haunted Palace,” the sole “rhymed verbal improvisation” of Roderick Usher’s that the narrator recounts to the reader (237). The narrator “easily remembers” these lyrics “very nearly, if not accurately” because, upon hearing them he claims, “I fancied that I perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher of the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne” (237). Indeed, as Peter Beidler argues, “[b]ecause [“The Haunted Palace”] demonstrates the progression of Roderick Usher’s madness, it provides the clues that allow us to read Poe’s story correctly” (26). Beidler suggests that the poem serves as “the very heart of Poe’s story;” it also demonstrates Poe’s emerging photographic technique because the poem functions like a daguerreotype. It is a miniature version of the larger text that “mirrors” two things simultaneously as the polished surface of a daguerreotype plate would do, in this case the house and the creator of the lyrical representation, Roderick Usher. In so doing, the poem represents the “truth” of the entire
tale, which is photographic in nature. Inner realities can be seen to find expression in external objects.

The subject of the poem is ostensibly the deteriorating house, but, as Beidler points out, the house becomes a metaphor for the failing mind of Roderick:

The ‘green valley’s ‘stately palace,’ which ‘rears its head’ in the first stanza is the cranium of the sane man, the head where the ‘monarch Thought’ holds dominion . . . . Through the eyes or ‘luminous windows’ visitors to the happy valley see the ordered thoughts or ‘spirits’ of the ‘ruler’. . . . Then in the last two stanzas come madness . . . instead of gently flowing songs of wit and wisdom, the visitors now hear through the pale door (mouth) of the king, a ‘hideous throng’ of nonsensical utterances and insane laughter. The sovereign’s once sane ‘palace’ is, like Roderick Usher’s house-head, full of horrors. (Beidler 26)

Much as the tarn at the beginning of the tale mirrors the house, “The Haunted Palace” reflects both the apparent subject, the house, and the poem’s creator. Through Roderick Usher’s poem the reader discovers the “truth” of the tale; it is a metaphorical portrait of its central figure. As a photograph was thought to do in 1839, “The Haunted Palace”—as the locus of the “meaning” of the tale—demonstrates how “the source of vision itself has been, in this instance, the designer” (“The Daguerreotype” 4). As the poem emerges from within its very subject, the
tale, in essence, “draws itself” as a daguerreotype image was thought to do.

Interestingly, “The Haunted Palace” is the first poem Poe embeds in a tale. It is only in the months immediately following the invention of the daguerreotype that Poe begins this practice (see the Chapter II discussion of the addition of “The Conqueror Worm” to the later versions of “Ligeia”). He had originally published “The Haunted Palace” in the short-lived Baltimore magazine *American Museum* in April 1839, but it then appears again in the earliest incarnation of “The Fall of the House of Usher” in September of that year, thus fixing the poem’s place in literary history.

The addition of “The Haunted Palace” to “The Fall of the House of Usher” demonstrates Poe’s early exploration of the ominous power that the daguerreotype seemed to display. Through this medium was revealed the inner-life of a subject. Poe allegorizes this rich theme through “The Fall of the House of Usher” on a number of levels, from the house to the tortured protagonist, to the effect that viewing such a creation has on the narrator. Because of the emergent notion that the daguerreotype could expose one’s character, photography was rapidly complicating notions of identity in profound ways. Poe recognizes this most evocatively in the story he publishes on the heels of “The Fall of the House of Usher”: the masterful (and Washington Irving’s preferred) “William Wilson.”
A tale of a young man's dealings with an apparent doppelganger, "William Wilson" was first published in October of 1839 as part of "The Gift of 1840," a collection of fiction published annually in time for the Christmas and New Year gift-giving season. Along with "The Fall of the House of Usher," this tale stands as an important indicator of Poe's early impressions of photography. Poe certainly had not yet seen a daguerreotype, nor did he have a clear understanding of the method by which they were created when he composed "William Wilson." Yet, it seems obvious that the mysterious notion of photography—the mirror-like replication of one's own image—was on his mind as he wrote this story. Most scholars read the tale primarily as a chronicle of the narrator's psychological breakdown—as, for example, Robert Coskren does in his observation that "the history of William Wilson in the plot, his necessary appearance and brutal demise, parallels the gradual disintegration of a self-divided psyche" (155). Like so many of Poe's other tales, "William Wilson" can be read as a visionary text beyond its time in its psychological insight. More particularly, what Poe is actually exploring in this tale is a response to what must have seemed, in 1839, to be the very real possibility of encountering one's double in the world that Daguerre's discovery seemed to propose.

As many scholars have noted, Poe includes numerous autobiographical elements throughout "William Wilson." Some of the most prominent include the fact that the narrator's birth date is the same
as Poe's (though the author is four years older than his narrator); like Poe, the narrator disdains his true surname, which he describes as "one of those everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob" ("William Wilson" 629); the name William Wilson is very similar to that of two men of the same name of Poe's acquaintance; and the name of the narrator's school principal—Mr. Barnaby—is nearly identical to that of the principal of the school Poe attended as a boy in England, a man named John Bransby. Thus, the narrator simultaneously faces his own double within the tale and figures as a double to his author. In so doing, Poe explores two central possibilities inherent to a literary photographic theme: that of the anxiety associated with an individual's mirror-image existing in the world beyond himself as well as the question of what extent the role of the "invisible" photographer might prove to be a new model for the artist—could the creation of a daguerreotype image be akin to the creation of a literary double?

The theme of the double is raised in the tale even before the second William Wilson appears on the page. The narrator recalls his earliest memories of his childhood school days, recounting two incarnations of Mr. Barnaby. In addition to serving as principal of the academy, Mr. Barnaby is also Pastor Barnaby of the local church that the narrator and his fellow students attend twice every Sunday. The fact that one man can have multiple, disparate identities puzzles the narrator, calling the
phenomenon a "gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!" (627). He marvels at the transformation Mr. Barnaby makes from one incarnation to the other: "[t]his reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast,—could this be who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian Laws of the academy?" (627). As the author creates a literary double of a living acquaintance, this character appears as a doubled figure in the eyes of the narrator, himself a double of the author. The narrator cannot come to terms with the fact that one man can appear to be two. Mr. Barnaby’s transformation as he passes beyond the walls of the academy remains a mystery to him. The inability to accept duality in an individual—the fact that the narrator considers this a "monstrous paradox"—ultimately reveals the nature of the narrator’s self-conception. As far as he is concerned, he has been distinguished only by his "evil propensities" from his "earliest infancy" (626-627). As such, the narrator has an established, one-dimensional sense of his own identity. He simply knows himself to be no more or less than a singular rogue.

When another student appears at the school on the same day as the narrator's arrival who shares his name, birth date, physical appearance, and wardrobe, no one but the narrator takes notice of this incredible coincidence: "in truth, I had no reason to believe that . . . this similarity had ever been made the subject of comment or even observed at all by our
schoolfellows" (632). The narrator explains this odd fact in artistic terms: "[p]erhaps it was the *gradation* of his copy rendered it not readily perceptible; or, more possibly, I owed my security to the masterly air of the copyist, who, disdaining the letter (which in a painting is all the obtuse can see), gave but the full spirit of his original for my individual contemplation and chagrin" (632). That is to say, the preciseness of Wilson's reflection of the narrator is manifested only in its effect on his audience—the narrator, himself:

His cue, which was to perfect an imitation of myself, lay both in words and in actions; and most admirably did he play his part . . . . How greatly this most exquisite portraiture harassed me (for it could not justly be termed a caricature), I will not now venture to describe. I had but one consolation—in the fact that the imitation, apparently, was noticed by myself alone, and that I had to endure only the knowing and strangely sarcastic smiles of my namesake himself. Satisfied with having produced in my bosom the intended effect, he seemed to chuckle in secret over the sting he had inflicted, and was characteristically disregardful of the public applause which the success of his witty endeavors might have so easily elicited. (632)

In this way, Wilson is an artist according to Poe's own philosophy of art: he masterfully achieves a profound and sustained effect on his audience. Thus, the narrator's doppelganger is as much Poe's double as the narrator
As both the creator and the embodiment of a mirror image, Wilson's character simultaneously invokes both the daguerreotypist and his product. The fact that Poe describes Wilson's single-minded pursuit of effect suggests a potential conflation of daguerreotypy and literature; his carefully crafted creation of a highly affective mirror-image will be echoed later in Poe's description of the painstaking artistic process in his "Philosophy of Composition."

A mirror image, while ostensibly a perfect likeness of that which it reflects, is nonetheless a reversed image. As such, William Wilson is very much a mirror-image of the narrator—he looks exactly like him—yet his behavior is in direct opposition to his. While the narrator is a confessed scoundrel, his doppelganger is markedly honest and principled—an embodiment of the narrator's absent conscience. As his benevolent double, William Wilson's role seems to be to constantly force the narrator to face himself at potentially definitive moments in his life. The narrator describes: "[i]t was noticeable, indeed, that, in no one of the multiplied instances in which he had of late crossed my path, had he so crossed it except to frustrate those schemes, or to disturb those actions, which, if fully carried out, might have resulted in bitter mischief" (639). This is what disturbs the narrator the most about Wilson. In exposing his numerous dastardly schemes, his double forces the narrator to act in ways he considers uncharacteristic of himself.
Wilson shows the narrator that his "evil propensity" is not his sole definitive characteristic. He has the potential to be someone other than a scoundrel. Every time Wilson appears to the narrator his presence causes him to literally confront his own image and, in so doing, destabilizes the narrator’s singular self-identity. The narrator's double alienates him from himself just as early daguerreotypes surprised subjects with the "truth" of their own appearances.

The narrator comes to associate the existence of his apparently "omnipresen[t] and omnipotent" double with a loss of freedom: "[p]oor indemnity for natural rights of self-agency so pertinaciously, so insultingly denied!" (639-640). Here Poe draws upon emerging ideas regarding the surveillance possibilities that photography posed. The fact that his protagonist is, indeed, the rogue he considers himself to be echoes the positive associations the public had regarding the use of photography for purposes of surveillance. In 1839 it was commonly thought that many crimes would be prevented or solved by the invention of the camera. Alan Trachtenberg explains, “numerous writers will include, in their list of ‘applications’ of photography, protection against crime both by direct surveillance (anticipating the autopic functions of the camera) and by physiognomic identification of criminality, or revelation of ‘character’ through ‘image’” (“Mirror” 62). Poe will take up this idea in later post-photography tales such as “The Black Cat,” “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Imp of the Perverse.”
The tale ends with the narrator's destruction of William Wilson. In the moments immediately after he stabs his doppelganger, he thinks he sees his reflection in a mirror that appears out of nowhere, but it turns out that he is actually gazing at the dying Wilson:

A large mirror,—so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been before; and as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait. Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist—it was Wilson . . . Not a thread in all his raiment—not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, mine own! (641)

Wilson's subsequent dying words are a warning to the narrator:
"henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" (641). The reader learns at the opening of the tale that Wilson's words proved prophetic. From the moment of Wilson's death, the narrator regained his freedom to be the rogue he believed himself to be, and "in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle. From comparatively trivial wickedness I passed, with the stride of a giant, into more than the enormities of a Elah-Gabalus" (626). And yet, he declares in the earliest section of the tale, which takes place years after Wilson's murder, that he is dying "a victim
to the horror and the mystery of the wildest of all sublunary visions" (626). That is to say, he is succumbing to the effects rendered by his double, rather than by means of the consequences of his evil actions. As such, the narrator is eventually destroyed as a direct result of having faced his double in the world.

Poe suggests that this phenomenon is ultimately positive. The narrator dies because he refuses to acknowledge the truth about himself that his double had presented to him again and again: the fact that he is not entirely who he believed himself to be. In this case, his mirror-image had the potential to save him from himself if he had only accepted the truth manifested in that reflection. Poe's earliest attitude toward the yet mysterious daguerreotype can therefore be seen as hopeful. It may prove to be a model for a new approach to art that renders one's hidden truths evident through its remarkable visual effects. Akin to the author who creates a literary double in order to artistically reflect life or human nature, the daguerreotypist does essentially the same with his fixed mirror images. As a writer might reflect elements of the human experience in a new way, so the daguerreotypist may more particularly reflect the individual to himself in a new way. The premium, in both cases, is on the role of the audience—whether a reader or a viewer—and the extent to which the art affects him.

"The Man of the Crowd," published in December of 1840, stands as a particularly interesting early example of Poe's post-daguerreotype work.
At the opening of the story, the narrator essentially takes on the role of the idealized, disinterested daguerreotypist, describing himself as having a “calm, but inquisitive interest in everything . . . peering through the smoky [window] panes into the street” (475). Michal Sapir points out that the café that the narrator is sitting in at the outset of the tale is in the same hotel in which Dupin’s nemesis, the Minister D—, resides throughout “The Purloined Letter.” This setting, then, clearly serves as a nexus for Poe’s emergent photographic themes.

Comparing the narrator of “The Man of the Crowd” to the contemporary French photographer Gaspard-Felix Tournachon (a.k.a. Nadar), Sapir notes that, “[The narrator of ‘The Man of the Crowd’] attempts to illuminate, via acute observation and professional acumen, a certain subterranean realm. By the artificial light of the gas-lamps he follows the subject of his investigation, only to find himself circulating and retracing his steps in an urban labyrinth” (19). Akin to the famed photographer, Poe’s narrator arduously seeks to discover the true character of his “subject.” Like the photographer, the narrator is simultaneously enabled and limited by various sources of light. The story begins and ends as the sun sets so that the narrative is framed by darkness, while both artificial and natural light literally and figuratively guide the narrator in his pursuit.

Earlier in 1840, in the follow-up article to his original daguerreotype essay in *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine*, Poe describes the
advances that have been made in photographic lighting technology, noting that the newest cameras can now be used "in the open country—even those nice and delicate [cameras] which, at present, seem to demand protection against too strong a light" (193). He also reports that "oxy-hydrogen gas" is now being used "as the principle of illumination to the objects intended to be represented" (193). No coincidence, then, that the narrator of "The Man of the Crowd" is readily able to track his subject under the glow of a variety of lights, not the least of which is that of the gas-lamps in the street which "threw over every thing a fitful and garish lustre" (478). Indeed, the nature of lighting in terms of the narrator's ability to observe his object is unmistakable: the "square, brilliantly lighted and overflowing with life" (479), the "street of the D—Hotel" which "no longer wore the same aspect [though] [i]t was still brilliant with gas" (480), "the dim light of an accidental lamp" (481), and the "blaze of light" outside a popular bar (481).

The narrator's description of the crowds passing by echoes Poe's observation regarding the scrutiny of a daguerreotype under a "powerful microscope." The narrator states, "At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance" (475-6). The professions and social standing of the individuals passing by the
window are evident to the observant narrator: “[t]he wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although . . . the window prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that . . . I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years” (478). Characters and identities are instantly discernable to him, even in the single "glance" his window affords him. For instance, he marvels how the individuals he deems obvious “swell pick-pockets . . . should ever be mistaken for gentlemen by gentlemen themselves. Their voluminousness of wristband, with an air of excessive frankness, should betray them at once” (476-7). His revelations of abstract “facts” based on people’s appearances are immediately convincing, even amusing, especially since he declares, “the decent . . . the common-places of society—men of leisure and men actively engaged in affairs of their own . . . did not greatly excite my attention” (476). The narrator's ability to penetrate the appearances of passers-by recalls the role of a viewer of a photograph. In both cases, the opportunity to scrutinize individuals at a particular, fleeting moment may well reveal hidden truths. Yet, the narrator's is a very particular view that may or may not be trustworthy. After all, he remains throughout the tale little more than a mysterious voice.

The narrator's shadowy identity and unknown motive are compounded when a certain visage “catches” his eye. He moves from behind his window into the street outside to pursue this particular
individual. The narrator describes how “[w]ith my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age)—a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Any thing even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before . . . . Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view—to know more of him” (478). At this point, at the start of the narrator’s pursuit, he equates “keep[ing] the man in view” to “know[ing] more of him.” By the end of the cyclical “labyrinth,” as Sapir calls the narrator’s chase, at the second sunset, back at the hotel where he had started the previous evening, the narrator declares that “[i]t will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds . . . and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that ‘er lasst sich nicht lessen’ 23 (481).

Having come full circle, he knows no more about the man than what he gleaned from his first impression from behind the window: “upon beholding [the man’s face] [had] Retzch 24 . . . viewed it, [he] would have greatly preferred it to his own pictorial incarnations of the fiend” (478). In other words, his conclusion is simply a recollection of his first impression.

The narrator has observed the man’s bizarre pattern of behavior over the course of the night. He moves from crowd to crowd until they disperse. He then gravitates toward artificially lit areas of the city where
he might discover another crowd, or at the very least, a small group of people to join and move within. Finally, as the sun begins to set on the second day, the narrator looks the man directly in the face. “He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. ‘This old man,’ I said at length, ‘is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*’” (481). As the “type and genius of deep crime” he can be found anywhere with anyone, and his context is always changing. Although his appearance belies a basic, evil character to the narrator, no one else notices him in the crowd and the narrator fails to discover anything about him beyond his own impression. In other words, the narrator has been pursuing an image whose context is constantly shifting, yet reveals no more of the “man” than the narrator’s first impression of him through the window. All that the man can mean is what the narrator imagines him to mean. Ironically, the man who remains inherently "meaningless" throughout the tale inspires a revelation in the narrator.

The man of the crowd is an animated daguerreotype. The man never speaks to or takes notice of the narrator, even as they stand face to face. Despite the fact that the narrator views him from a variety of angles and under different lights, he is unable to discover anything about the man from his observations. Ultimately, the figure disappears from view as the narrator discovers, instead, only his own mirrored image when he declares that the man is the "type and genius of deep crime." The superficiality of
this verdict will not escape the reader. The narrator has provided no
evidence for such a discovery; in fact, the man's extraordinary nature
seems only to exist in the mind of the narrator. No one in the streets or
crowds takes notice of the man, save the narrator himself. He never
observes any criminal behavior—only inexplicable behavior. The man's
very elusiveness is what inspires the narrator's damning conclusion. It is
obvious that the reader has learned more about the narrator's character in
those last lines than of the man he follows.

The narrator's pursuit of the "man of the crowd" is akin to that of a
viewer of a daguerreotype portrait. Photography introduced the
possibility of prolonged observation and scrutiny of another individual's
appearance. The "type and genius of deep crime" actually describes the
narrator's own voyeuristic activities over the course of two days. His
uninterrupted gaze, which permits the observed subject no privacy,
escape, or, even more disturbingly, any detection of his being observed—
call recall that the "man" "notice[s] him not" even when the narrator is face to
face with him. This, too, is akin to the viewer of a daguerreotype. As
Carol Shloss has noted, a key element of the novelty of photography in
the mid-nineteenth century was the opportunity it presented for
individuals to stare at and scrutinize one another as they had never before.
In the narrator's freedom to indulge his monomaniacal quest to understand
the "man of the crowd" through observation alone, he catches, instead, a
glimpse of his own, reflected "deep crime": his desire to violate another's
privacy and sovereignty. Photography, Poe realizes, would reveal aspects of ourselves as both subjects and viewers in ways we never imagined possible.

Poe published "The Oval Portrait" (originally appearing under the title "Life in Death") in Graham's Magazine in early 1842. The tale is told in the voice of an unnamed and "desperately wounded" narrator who, along with his valet, has stumbled upon a "temporarily and very lately abandoned" chateau in the Apennines (290). He finds a bedroom in which to spend the night and discovers a "great number of very spirited modern paintings" hung around the room along with a small book that contains descriptions and critiques of each one (290). Nearly half of this brief tale consists of the account in the aforementioned book of the history of one particular "oval portrait" that arrests the narrator's attention. This portrait is of "a young girl just ripening into womanhood" which has been painted by the subject's husband, an artist of great renown (290). Upon completing this remarkably lifelike portrait, the artist discovers that his reluctant but devoted subject has died at the moment of his final brushstroke.

The oval portrait is described in photographic terms. It is only when the narrator shifts his light source, a "tall candelabrum" (290), in order to more easily see the pages in his book that the formerly invisible portrait suddenly comes into view, then disappears again when he returns the candelabrum to its former position—akin to shifting one's gaze in
order to see an ephemeral daguerreotype image. The narrator mistakes the picture for "a living person" (291) despite the fact that it only depicts the bust of the subject. It is the "light," he notes, that "dripped upon the pale canvas from overhead" (291) that causes his confusion. Upon completing his work the painter is said to have declared that the portrait "'is indeed Life itself!'" (292).

The portrait is painted in an aforementioned "modern" style—one that reminds the narrator of the paintings of "Sully," (291) presumably, Thomas Sully, an American contemporary of Poe, fellow Philadelphian, and the uncle of his dear friend from boyhood—and artist in his own right—Robert Sully of Virginia. One of the foremost portrait painters of his time, Thomas Sully was known for his apparent ability to depict the inner-lives of his subjects. Robert L. Gale explains that Sully was known for “avoiding mere likeness and instead capturing the emotion of his subjects” (131). In this way, the Sully style was essentially photographic; it was thought that one could learn much about the sitter from a study of his paintings.

It is natural that Poe would surround his narrator with modern painted portraits rather than daguerreotypes. The physical nature of daguerreotypes prohibited them from being displayed on walls; small and delicate, they could only be viewed from a particular angle. The story-within-the-story can be seen as an allegorical exploration of how photography was changing the ways individuals do—and do not—see one
another. The moral of this allegory is fairly obvious: the painter neglects his young wife in his zeal to capture her likeness and in this way selfishly display his talent. The achievement of the life-like representation, however, robs the original of life.

No coincidence, then, that the narrator describes the artist's work as "an absolute life-likeliness of expression, which, at first startling, finally confounded, subdued, and appalled me" (291). Conversely, the tale of the portrait's creation recounts the reactions of the painter's observers who, echoing the common sentiment toward daguerreotypists, "spoke of its resemblance in low words, as of a mighty marvel, and a proof not less of the power of the painter than of his deep love for her whom he depicted so surpassingly well" (292). In other words the creation is divorced from the genius of its creator due to its uncanny likeness to the living subject; it is more the result of nature (his heart) than of his hand. This is what makes it a "mighty marvel." Yet, the narrator is dismayed by this phenomenon of realism. Like the painter's onlookers, the narrator is struck less by the "immortal beauty" of the object than he is by the "life-likeliness" of the figure portrayed. Tellingly, he turns away from the image to the corresponding book and never turns back. “The Oval Portrait” ends with the story of the painting's creation and never returns to the framing tale of the narrator. Thus, the tale becomes a figurative daguerreotype; the highly contrived framing story disappears into the story it confines just as a daguerreotypist's framing technique disappears into his portraits.
As such, in this contemplation of “modern” visual representation, where a painter's success comes from a dangerous ability to paint a seemingly photographic image, Poe explores what exactly lends the daguerreotype portrait such power. Not all portrait painters lost their livelihood to photography; in fact, many continued to thrive in the post-photography world. Amid his numerous daguerreotype sittings, Poe also sat for a few sketched and painted portraits in the 1840's, including a now lost "from life" portrait painted by his friend Robert Sully when Poe came to visit him in Richmond in 1848 or 1849. While photography remained a marvel of science, nature, and human ingenuity that showed us our truest selves as we had never seen them before, it is no small wonder that many people still turned to the artist rather than the camera “operator” to capture his or her image.

Poe realized that what ultimately bewitches a viewer of a photograph is ultimately little more than a new visual representation of our humanity. He suggests that the subject of a daguerreotype portrait, like that of a painted portrait, or of a written tale, is actually subsumed by the effect it elicits. The painter of "The Oval Portrait" robs his subject of life by means of his art. In this case, a successful work of art breathes life not into its subject, but into its viewer.

This is why the narrator's account in "The Oval Portrait" disappears into the tale he is reading about the portrait to which his gaze never returns. Like the reader of his own tale and the audience of any
successful work of art, the narrator is moved by the story he discovers behind what he sees. In the end, it is not about the object itself, rather, it is about what it comes to mean for the individual inspired to contemplate the object that is most significant. It is not what we see—the visible world is available to us all—but how we see it. Poe will explore issues of perception in a photographic world most memorably through the eyes of the world’s first fictional detective, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin.
Chapter IV
The Detective Fiction:
“The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and
“The Purloined Letter”

The emergence of photography and its immediate revelations of new possibilities for covert observation, uninterrupted scrutiny, and exact duplication made the detective tale possible. Accordingly, the world’s first fictional detective, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, is a remarkably “photographic” creation with his affinity for “developing” his ideas in darkened rooms, his tinted spectacles, and his ability to see and, in turn, reveal reality in new ways. At times he is camera-like in his ability to uniquely discern a scene as it really is; at other times he is a keen viewer of photograph-like situations who is acutely aware of the ways a subject would disappear if viewed from the wrong angle.

As Poe invents the detective genre over the course of the three Dupin tales, he does so with a decidedly photographic bent. Each tale is driven by particular photographic themes. In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” Poe explores the limits of perception; how we do and do not see reality. Through “The Mystery of Marie Roget” he attempts to solve an actual murder case by making use of the affective power of “photographic” depictions of reality. Finally, in “The Purloined Letter” he explores the social consequences of photography, especially the potential loss of privacy and autonomy as copies of originals become
increasingly common. The remarkable Dupin echoes these themes in his explanations as he delves into the nature and power of appearances.

It is in April of 1841 that "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" introduced the world to C. Auguste Dupin, Poe's amateur detective. The reader is never told what the "C." stands for, but the choice of initial is certainly appropriate: Dupin has the ability to "see" what others cannot. Like a daugerreotypist developing his plates, Dupin insists upon working only in the dark, as the narrator of the tale recounts:

It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamored of the night for her own sake . . . . At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighted a couple of tapers which . . . threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. Then we sallied forth into the streets, arm in arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour. (144)

Dupin is also photographic in his scrupulous observational skills. Like the camera, he does not miss the most minute gesture or oblique glance. His constant scrutiny enables him to apparently read the narrator’s mind at the opening of the tale. Yet, Dupin proudly reveals the “method” by which he ascertained the narrator’s thoughts. However, his ostensibly logical explanation is, itself, logical in appearance only. His method
actually requires a keen imagination as well as a close familiarity with the narrator. The “logic” involved is specious; there could be no singular and predictable series of thoughts inevitably inspired by the random events Dupin recalls observing the narrator endure. “‘It was the fruiterer,’ replied [Dupin], ‘who brought you to the conclusion that the mender of soles was not of sufficient height for Xerxes’” (145). Like a daguerreotypist explaining his craft, the technical details only go so far; at some point the process is removed from human hands and depends upon the unpredictable, unquantifiable effect of light. In Dupin’s case, this “light” is that of genius, an element he notably omits from his account of every detail he has just witnessed the narrator take note of along their walk. The progression of these observed events and personages supposedly allows Dupin to guess the narrator’s most recent thought regarding the poor choice of actor for the role of Xerxes in a play they had just attended.

This moment anticipates Poe's tongue-in-cheek instructions how to go about composing literature that he details in "The Philosophy of Composition." There, the champion of artistic genius and originality notably fails to mention these key elements in his ostensibly straightforward, step-by-step directions to authorial success. Instead, he takes what Leonard Cassuto calls “a strong (and eccentric) formalist position against Emerson’s organic theory of creativity” (100). The aforementioned “humor” that Cassuto notes in “The Philosophy of
Composition” lies in the absurdity of Poe’s stated purpose to provide an
instruction manual of sorts for other aspiring writers. Any successful
piece of writing will, Poe writes, “proceed, step by step, to its completion
with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem”
(102).

It is through Dupin that Poe most carefully considers the role of the
viewer in a post-photography world. In his detective fiction Poe ponders
the role of human agency in the realm of creation by extending his
exploration of the observer that he began in “The Man of the Crowd.”
Dupin complicates the potential truth inherent in any observation. In
"The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe suggests that the manifestation of
the truth of any situation depends primarily upon an observer’s ability to
recognize and interpret the scene in its entirety. Through Dupin, Poe
explores the extent to which the post-photography viewer must draw upon
his imagination in order to perceive reality. Dupin is the ideal observer
precisely because he is keenly cognizant of every onlooker's inherently
limited point of view.

Solving the mystery of the eponymous murders requires what would
seem simple: seeing the evidence at the crime scene for what it is. This
requirement proves to be beyond the capabilities of the police, however.
The crime scene in “Rue Morgue” makes no logical sense because there
appears to be no motive. Furniture is strewn about, a large sum of money
is left behind, a variety of witnesses recall hearing a voice speaking an
unidentifiable "foreign" language, and the body of one victim has been rammed up a chimney while the body of the other has been violently decapitated, the latter two feats requiring "strength superhuman" (161). As Dupin puts it, the whole affair can be summed up as "a butchery without motive, a grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabifiction" (161). The crimes are literally inhuman, and therein lies the solution: because they could not have been perpetrated by a human, they must not have been committed by a human.

This crime scene is a figurative photograph as Poe, the artist, has come to think of it. Every detail of a particular moment in the past is preserved and open to scrutiny, yet it remains difficult—if not impossible—to see it for what it is. This is due to the fact that the truth of both the crime scene and a photograph lie beyond the sum of their parts. To view either, one must consider the totality and not fixate on individually affective aspects. Because they cannot see beyond the physical evidence in front of them, the investigators fail to perceive the scene as the aftermath of an animal attack. The scene disappears before their eyes because they are viewing it from the wrong angle, or, as Dupin explains, they “have fallen into the gross but common error of confounding the unusual with the abstruse” (154). This hearkens back to the narrator's treatise at the opening of the tale in which he asserts that
"the truly imaginative [are] never otherwise than analytic" (143). Dupin is able to discern the truth of the scene because he views it in its entirety and not simply as a crime scene, as ultimately, it is not. As Dupin observes, "this mystery is considered insoluble, for the very reason which should cause it to be regarded as easy of solution— . . . for the outré character of its features" (154). As the only the "truly imaginative" viewer of the apartment, only Dupin comprehends the truth. Dupin’s solution demonstrates that, like the subject of a daguerreotype, the reality of the apartment scene disappears if viewed incorrectly. It is obscured by the properties of its very physicality. The truth of the crime scene is concealed by the investigators’ limited perspectives, just as a daguerreotype image will not appear unless viewed from the precisely correct angle.

This is not to say that the investigators discover a false truth in their scrutiny of the scene; they simply discover nothing. The scene eludes meaning because of the investigators' limited, unimaginative perspectives. Indeed, what they see is little more than a reflection of themselves based on their expectations. As is the case with a daguerreotype, the truth is there to be discovered in the apartment, but like the viewer of a daguerreotype, the observer must alter the angle from which he views the scene so as to avoid gazing at nothing beyond himself.

Poe's photographic exploration of confounding appearances here is two-fold: because he presents his reader with no more or less information
than he does the characters in the tale, the reader is affected not only by the novelty of the plot and its resulting suggestions regarding human perceptions but also by their own inevitable failure to solve the central mystery of the tale.

It is no coincidence that Poe develops the detective tale shortly after the invention of photography. This genre freed him to engage his readers in a contemplation of truth as he never could before because the truth of a detective tale is always two-fold. The solution of the crime must be discovered, but the solution depends upon the contemplation of the nature of truth and human nature. The modern detective tale, with its unique invitation to readerly scrutiny, could only have been conceived of in a post-photography world.

In his follow-up to the extremely popular "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe attempts something that had never been done before: the solving of an actual murder mystery by means of detective fiction. "The Mystery of Marie Roget" is based on the case of the beautiful, young Mary Rogers of New York City whose body was recovered from the Hudson River in the summer of 1841.

What exactly happened to the ill-fated Rogers remains unknown to this day. Most scholars agree with William Kurtz Wimsatt Jr. and Samuel Copp Worthen that Rogers had probably left her mother's home and boarding house on that fateful July morning to seek an illegal abortion. What ensued between her leaving her mother's house around ten in the
morning (reportedly to visit an aunt on Jane Street) and the discovery of her body floating in the river near Hoboken three days later, however, remains the subject of speculation. Some of the more prominent hypotheses range from an abortion gone wrong, after which the panicked physician disposed of her body by making it appear that she had been murdered, to a gang rape and murder, and to a mis-identification of the body pulled from the Hudson as that of Rogers.

Poe's interest in the Mary Rogers case is not surprising. The tale of the murder of "the greatest beauty in New York" (Worthen 308) was picked up by newspapers throughout the United States, so Poe would have heard about it within days despite his living in Philadelphia at the time. It is almost certain, too, that Poe had once made Rogers' acquaintance as he had been a regular customer of the well-known tobacco shop where Rogers was employed. In fact, Poe and his family had lived within walking distance of John Anderson's famous tobacco shop at 319 Broadway for the majority of 1837, and he had made regular business trips back to New York in the years following his move to Philadelphia in early 1838.

Mary Rogers was known as John Anderson's "beautiful cigar girl," whose presence in his shop contributed to his success as much as did his unique blends of tobacco. Rogers had countless admirers, including, according to Worthen, Anderson himself, who may have "admitted having been responsible for [an abortion] on a former occasion [and] [t]hat when
similar circumstances arose after she had left his employ, she appealed to him (as one of her friends and admirers best able financially to do so) to come again to her rescue [and] [t]hat he gallantly responded by putting up the money and making the necessary arrangements" (311).

At the time of her disappearance Rogers had been engaged to one of her mother's boarders, Daniel Payne, who, three months after Rogers' disappearance, committed suicide at the supposed scene of Rogers' murder,29 a thicket near the Hudson just outside Hoboken. Payne left a suicide note which read, "'Here I am on the very spot. God forgive me for my misspent life'" (Worthen 310), which only added fuel to the public's still fervid interest in the story. It would take several more months for the public's interest in the unsolved case of Mary Rogers to wane, but the mystery was never allowed to fall fully into obscurity.

Not long after the sensationalism resulting from Payne's suicide had subsided, Poe published his loosely fictionalized account in the autumn of 1842. Shortly thereafter, a Mrs. Loss, the owner of a Hoboken tavern, was shot by one of her sons and on her deathbed confessed that Rogers had died at her tavern as a result of a failed abortion that a physician had performed in an upstairs room of the tavern. This sparked yet another period of renewed interest in the mystery30 that served only to further convolute the case. Complications associated with the Loss confession (primarily due to suspicions regarding Loss' sons' possible involvement in Rogers' disappearance) ultimately lent more credence to Poe's fictional
solution. In fact, Poe's theory held up for a little more than a century until Wimsatt Jr. and Worthen published their close analyses of both the Rogers' case and Poe's version of it.

Poe's solution is decidedly Victorian. He never questions the chastity of Rogers, suggesting instead that she twice attempted to elope with the same "associate of swarthy complexion" (204). Dupin dismisses any suggestion of gang rape implicit in the "revolting details of the surgeon examined at the inquest" as "unjust and totally baseless" (200). He theorizes that Marie Roget had attempted to elope with a sailor during the course of her first disappearance, but called it off and returned home following "a quarrel between the lovers" (193). Citing the span of time between the first disappearance and the second as typical of "the general period of the cruises of our men-of-war" (194), Dupin suggests that the former lover had returned from his latest voyage, renewed the love affair and, again proposed elopement, which Roget accepted. Dupin argues that "[t]he chances are ten to one, that he who had once eloped with Marie would again propose an elopement, rather than that she to whom proposals of elopement had been made by one individual, should have them made to her by another" (193).

Dupin does not speculate on why the sailor murders Roget, other than to assert in the 1842 version—a supposition Poe eliminates from the 1845 edition—that "[w]e are not forced to suppose a premeditated design of murder or of violation" (166). In both the 1842 and 1845 versions
Dupin proposes that Roget is killed in the thicket near "Madame DeLuc's" tavern and that the murderer drags her body to a boat, from which he disposes of his "ghastly charge" (205) in the middle of the Hudson River. Interestingly, he also entertains the possibility in the 1845 version (which was published after Mrs. Loss' "confession") of "a fatal accident under the roof of Madame DeLuc" as a possible alternative to the murder in the thicket (204), but this new theory is mentioned without further comment.

Remarkably, Dupin solves the Roget case without leaving his "chambers in the Faubourg Saint Germain" (170). In fact, neither he nor the narrator had left his rooms for some time when the tale commences, the latter recounting that shortly before the Roget case is brought to their attention, they had "[given] the Future to the winds, and slumbered tranquilly in the Present, weaving the dull world around us into dreams" (170). This contrasts with the plot of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in which Dupin and the narrator are more active in their investigation, inspecting the physical crime scene themselves and taking out an ad in the local paper in order to catch the guilty party. In “Marie Roget,” the truth emerges from “stepping back” and considering “the whole picture” of the case. This is why Dupin sleeps through the Prefect’s long-winded “explanations of his own views,” as the narrator recounts: “[Dupin] wore spectacles, during the whole interview; and an occasional glance beneath their green glasses sufficed to convince me that he slept not the less
soundly, because silently, throughout the seven or eight leaden-footed hours which immediately preceded the departure of the Prefect” (173). The Prefect’s “views”—of the case or of the much more immediate situation of this “conversation”—are profoundly limited. It is only by capturing all of the views of the case in his “dark room” that Dupin develops the true picture of Roget’s fate.

The tale's narrative consists almost exclusively of Dupin's deconstructions of all of the various newspaper accounts related to the Roget case. To a point, this recalls “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” which also featured Dupin’s references to newspaper reports of the atrocities, but in the case of the “Rue Morgue” it is several editions of a single paper, the “Gazette des Tribunaux” (153), which are cited. This is one way that “Marie Roget” is designed to function like a daguerreotype: Dupin develops a picture of reality by capturing all of the official accounts of the case. He then lays out all of the sometimes disparate and contradictory newspaper reports for the reader’s consideration and shows how the truth emerges from the overall effect these details have on the observer. Poe concludes the tale by citing a common mistake regarding probability. The narrator explains, that, for the “general reader . . . the fact of sixes having been thrown twice in succession by a player at dice, is sufficient cause for betting the largest odds that sixes will not be thrown in the third attempt” (207). But, of course, this is just an example
of “one of an infinite series of mistakes which arise in the path of Reason through her propensity for seeking truth in detail” (207).

Related to this depiction is the fact that in “Marie Roget” Dupin is very closely aligned with the reader, much more so than he is in either of the other two detective tales. His deconstruction of the newspaper accounts seems so logical and easy that he becomes a stand-in for any reasoning seeker of truth. The majority of the tale consists of a monologue only occasionally and briefly interrupted by the narrator. Here, Dupin is less the inscrutable, preternatural diviner of truth than he is the professorial, methodical delineator of proper reasoning. This effect derives from the fact that in this tale, unlike in “Rue Morgue” or “The Purloined Letter,” Dupin becomes little more than a thinly veiled stand-in for Poe himself.

At the moment that Poe is composing “Marie Roget” he is enjoying wide renown for his remarkable ability to solve cryptograms and ciphers. Much like Dupin is sought after to solve the most perplexing of crimes, in the early 1840’s 34 individuals sought out Poe to decipher seemingly insolvable cryptograms. Poe took great pride in his ability to rapidly crack the most difficult codes. He was so good at it that he complained in a letter to his friend Fredrick W. Thomas, “people will not believe I really decipher the puzzles” 35 (“Letter” 4 July 1841).

Poe’s self-professed purpose in writing “Marie Roget,” as he admits in his footnote to the 1845 edition of the tale, was to publicly solve the
Rogers case. “Under pretence of relating the fate of a Parisian grisette,” he writes, “the author has followed, in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential, facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth: and the investigation of the truth was the object” (169). Through the medium of fiction, the master puzzle solver would present the heretofore unseen truth. In a photographic world, “true” representation suddenly has that much more resonance, especially for the fiction writer who eschews realism as an end in itself.

Poe recognized the affective power of daguerreotypes, the truest depictions of reality yet seen. He experiments with the photographic potential of fiction with “The Mystery of Marie Roget.” The tale is a writerly version of a daguerreotype in which Poe turns reality into an affective object to behold. He places before his reader all of “the essential[] facts” of the Rogers’ case so that the ultimate effect is the revelation of truth. And as far as he was concerned, this experiment was a success. He declares in a note to the 1845 version of the tale that, “the confessions of two persons (one of them Madame Deluc of the narrative), made at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely all the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained” (169). Photography demonstrated the highly affective nature of reality. This opened up a world of creative possibilities for Poe.
As early as the 1840’s individuals and galleries began collecting palm-sized daguerreotypes. Daguerreotypists would often make multiple copies of an image (usually of the famous, but not always) and display them in their studios for sale. Suddenly, one’s image could be possessed and circulated without one's knowledge or permission. The interest in daguerreotypes as “substitutes for the real” (“Inconstant Daguerreotype” 163), as Susan S. Williams terms it, spawned a real anxiety regarding privacy. With the advent of photography private lives were suddenly on public display. It would not be long before Poe would personally experience this particular consequence of the photographic process.

On the front page of the March 1843 edition of the Philadelphia Saturday Museum magazine there appeared a woodblock portrait of Poe along with a biography of the ascendant writer. This engraving had apparently been copied from the "McKee" daguerreotype— or another lost daguerreotype image created during the same sitting—which had been taken the previous year. Engraving had become a common copying technique in the years after the invention of the daguerreotype, and as Micheal Deas notes, "woodcut portraits of this kind were typically copied from an original [daguerreotype] with slavish fidelity" (15-16).
Poe was horrified by this copy of the original image, complaining in a letter to Frederick W. Thomas, "I am ugly enough, God knows, but not quite so bad as that" ("Letter" 25 February 1843). Later that year he sent a copy of the cover to James Russell Lowell enclosed with a note which read, "I send you the paper with my life and portrait. The former is true in general—the latter particularly false" (Deas 16). Poe realized that as soon as his image was photographically recorded, the potential for duplication was beyond his control. In the copying process, his "truest" personal image was instantly transformed into something he did not recognize, even though to the copyists and perhaps even to the eyes of the magazine editors, it was an exact facsimile.

It is not surprising, then, that at this point in his career the discernably photographic elements of Poe’s writing seem increasingly forward-looking and are largely concerned with the complications that might develop from this new scientific field. It is apparent in “The Purloined Letter” that by 1844 Poe agrees with the sentiment that privacy
and even personal autonomy may suffer by means of the photograph.

Dupin's resolution of his final case is affected through the use of facsimile, which, in turn, indicates the increasing unreliability of appearances and the associated dangers that lie therein.

"The Purloined Letter" opens with the Prefect of the Parisian Police showing up at Dupin's apartments one autumn evening while the detective and the narrator are "enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and meerschaum" (209). He seeks Dupin's counsel regarding a case of blackmail involving the royal family. Referring to the situation as both "simple and odd" (208), the Prefect explains that the Minister D—has purloined a letter from the royal apartments which gives him an advantage over a certain female royal personage. The problem the police face concerns recovering the letter from the Minister's possession. For weeks they have surreptitiously searched every corner of the Minister's apartments as well as waylaid him on the street in order to search his person, but have found no sign of the letter. Dupin has no better advice to the Prefect than to search the Minister's home again. A month later the Prefect returns to Dupin, still having failed to recover the letter. Dupin tells the Prefect that if he will write a check for half the amount of the reward offered for the letter's recovery, he will promptly hand him the desired object. The Prefect does so, and Dupin hands him the letter. The remainder of the tale consists of Dupin's account of his location and recovery of the letter.
Dupin had discovered upon personally visiting the Minister D—that he had "hidden" the letter in plain sight. Leaving it on a card rack in full view, he had merely turned it inside out and mangled its appearance so that it looked "worthless" as though it had been "thrust carelessly, and even, . . . contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions on the rack" (220). Subsequently, on a return visit to the Minister's apartments, Dupin contrived a distraction which allowed him the opportunity to exchange the letter with a facsimile of his own making without the Minister's notice.

The letter is particularly interesting in terms of its photographic nature. The Minister D—hides the stolen letter by placing it in full view. Dupin explains, "the minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of the world from perceiving it . . . to conceal this letter, the minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all" (219-20). By turning the letter inside out and thereby changing its outward appearance, he made it "radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description" (220). By "hiding" the letter in this unexpected and brazen way, the Minister essentially turns the letter into a daguerreotype of itself. That is, he exposes the "interior," secret, side of the letter and leaves it on display, recalling the accepted conception of photography at the time as capable of revealing the inner-truth of its subjects. The secret
that is outlined in the exposed side of the letter is, ironically, the truth at
the heart of the tale and, as such, the source of the Minister's power.

Ronald R. Thomas has described Dupin’s role in “The Purloined Letter” in terms of a camera: “Dupin’s all-seeing gaze, itself obscured
from the sight of others by those tinted lenses, detected what had been
invisible to everyone else and brought to light what was determined to be
absent from the minister’s rooms” (136). But when Dupin recognizes the
letter and creates an exact copy of it, he usurps the Minister's power by
using yet another photographic trope: duplication. The facsimile Dupin
creates and surreptitiously substitutes for the original is, in photographic
terms, a “corrected” image. Since daguerreotype originals are mirror
images of their subject, in order to achieve a correct image, a second
daguerreotype would be taken of the original. The facsimile serves the
purpose of fooling the Minister into thinking he retains a power he does
not. While the threat of the original letter was in its potential to reveal a
personal secret, the facsimile becomes an equally destructive secret
precisely because Dupin knows that the Minister will fall victim to the
very same assumptions he counted on the police making. The facsimile,
like the original, is the external embodiment of what before was an
internal knowledge; it diminishes the power of the original because it too
is not what it appears to be.

Because Dupin is acquainted with the Minister, unlike the Prefect,
he is able to discover his method. According to the Prefect, the Minister
is a fool because he is a well-known poet; thus, the Prefect conducts his searches as though he is seeking to foil a fool. The Prefect's assumptions are based on his own superficial reading of the Minister's highly contrived appearance and what to the policeman are his bizarre interests. The Prefect's understanding of the Minister is akin to a viewer who misreads a daguerreotype: a death photograph in which the subject is positioned in such a way as to appear asleep, or a portrait of a working class individual wearing a luxurious costume. Such daguerreotypes inarguably record a true moment of reality, but just because what is depicted is real does not mean that a given subject is truly what it seems to be.

The Minister seems to habitually indulge in the creation of obfuscating facades. Dupin recounts this in his description of his initial visit to his apartments: "I found D—at home, yawning, lounging, dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive—but that is only when nobody sees him" (220). The Minister is the opposite of what he appears to be and is therefore akin to the letter in his possession. Ironically, it is by co-opting the Minister's reliance on false appearances—both in body and in object—that Dupin outwits him. Dupin wears dark spectacles to the Minister's apartment "under cover of which [he] cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of [his] host" (220). By appearing to have weak eyesight, Dupin is ironically freed to see more
than he would have without the cover of a false appearance. Dupin essentially foils the Minister by creating doubles of both the Minister and his possession: Dupin becomes the Minister's double by pretending to be that which he is not. In so doing, the unreliability of appearances and the potential dangers associated with them become key elements of the resolution of the case of the purloined letter, as well as of the meaning of the tale.

In this final "Dupin" tale Poe presents his amateur detective with a functioning negative of himself in the Minister D—; the shared initial letter of their surnames as well as their common nationality as Frenchmen is no coincidence. Jean-Claude Milner has even suggested that these commonalities actually suggest that the Minister and Dupin are brothers, especially when one considers the reference to the brothers Atreus and Thyestes cited in Dupin's revelatory inscription on the facsimile. There is also the fact that the reader learns in the final paragraph of the tale that Dupin has a history with the Minister, established well before this case was brought to him by the Prefect. He recounts that "D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember" (222). Indeed, he accomplishes this by duplicating the Minister's own visual tricks.

In photographic terms it is worth noting that Dupin develops his plan of mirroring the Minister's methods in his signature "dark room." He tells the Prefect upon his initial consultation: "'[i]f it is any point
requiring reflection,' observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, 'we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark' (208). This photographic creation of a living double recalls "William Wilson," but here, while the roles are reversed, the purpose is essentially the same.

In “The Purloined Letter,” unlike in “William Wilson,” the protagonist acts as the doppelganger of the antagonist. Acting out the role of Wilson's double, rather than of Wilson himself, Dupin impedes the "original's" evil plans. But in this later tale, after Poe had been subjected to the photographic process and its consequences, there is also a new suggestion of an unstable relationship between truth and appearances, especially as photographs are now capable of being duplicated ad infinitum. In "William Wilson" no one else can see the doppelganger; Wilson alone recognizes himself in the appearance of the other. His inner-truth, though manifested in his double, ultimately remains secret to all but the narrator. In "The Purloined Letter," however, only the most keenly observant (Dupin) actually sees the letter at all, which is, ironically, out in the open for anyone to notice. The police fail to recognize it in plain sight. Furthermore, the Minister D— fails to perceive the facsimile Dupin creates; because it appears to be the letter, the Minister mistakes it for something it is not. It is this failure to recognize a copy as entirely distinct from the original from which it was derived that will ultimately be the Minister's undoing. As daguerreotypes began to be duplicated, the "truth" that the original plate seemed to
capture becomes obscured by these exact copies of what was considered an "original copy" both of and by nature itself. The stunning "truth" revealed by photography can be seen to fade as daguerreotypes are endlessly reproduced. Further, the fact that a daguerreotype could be the source of countless more daguerreotypes complicates the notion of photography as the supposedly autotelic process of nature painting itself. Whereas an original daguerreotype was nature’s picture of herself, copies of that picture were something else entirely. Daguerreotype copies were, by definition, artificial; they were man’s pictures of nature’s self-portrait.

It is no coincidence that the power of both the original letter and the facsimile originate from secrets. The letter's existence is attributed to a clandestine affair; the Minister can only use it to blackmail so long as his possession remains secret to all but the letter's intended recipient. Dupin's replacement letter is only effective if its presence remains unknown to the Minister until he attempts to make use of it. Once it has been duplicated, the meaning of the original is diminished. Here, one can hear the echoes of Poe's obsession with plagiarism in the photographic world, which had an apparent manifestation in the crude woodblock copy of his first daguerreotype. Poe extends his consideration of the potential threats to privacy inherent in duplication in one of his most overtly photographic tales, “The Black Cat.”
Chapter V
The Later Post-Photography Works:
"The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Imp of the Perverse," and
Eureka

As noted in reference to "The Purloined Letter," Poe sat for his first
daguerreotype portrait sometime in late 1842. His explorations of
appearance in the tales he composed during and just after this moment
seem to suggest a newly complicated awareness of the potential power of
photography. Concerns with surveillance emerged almost immediately
upon the invention of daguerreotypy. As early as 1839, in response to
Samuel Morse's reports from Paris about the new invention, Nathaniel P.
Willis speculated, "[w]hat will become of the poor thieves, when they
shall see handed in as evidence against them their own portraits, taken by
the room in which they stole, and in the very act of stealing!" (71).
Additionally, as the demand for daguerreotype copies increased, concerns
regarding the control of one's own image began to surface. Once one's
likeness was immortalized by the camera, it could be endlessly copied and
distributed without one's knowledge. Suddenly, any individual,
especially a famous one, might encounter his own image almost anywhere.
Such darker potential consequences of photography began to emerge as
more and more Americans sat for daguerreotype portraits. As noted
previously in the discussion of "The Man of the Crowd," in the early
1840’s it was becoming clear that an unintended consequence of the invention of photography was a loss of privacy.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat," both of which were written in the autumn of 1842, stand as particularly interesting examples of the workings of Poe's creative genius at this moment. Poe was at this point both well-known and highly esteemed in many literary and academic circles. He was also associated with notable Philadelphia scientists who were actively practicing and improving the technology of daguerreotypy. One such individual was the innovative daguerreotypist and physician Paul Beck Goddard, whom Poe knew through their mutual association with the newly established Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Given the proliferation of daguerreotype portraits and the growing public appetite for celebrity photographs, by 1842 Poe was almost certainly aware that he would be asked to pose for the camera in due time—if he had not done so already (see the appendix). In fact, Poe was planning to include pictures of the authors he hoped to feature in Stylus, a literary magazine that he was desperately attempting to get off the ground by 1843. In March of that year, Poe wrote to James Russell Lowell asking him to procure both a tale and a portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne to be published in the first edition of Stylus: "we intend to give a series of portraits of the American literati, with critical sketches."

Poe's earliest confirmed photographic image, which was almost certainly taken at the end of 1842, is referred to as the "McKee"
The "McKee" Daguerreotype

Poe shared the disillusionment of his daguerreotyped contemporaries upon seeing his appearance represented so harshly. In a close, methodical study of Poe's facial expression McFarland and Bennett echo Deas' characterization of the image as evidence of the "ordeal" of sitting for a photographic portrait, even though an acquaintance of Poe, Gabriel Harrison, reported this earliest photographic image of the man to be "the most characteristic of all the portraits of Poe known" (Deas 4).
Poe completed his manuscript of "The Black Cat" in October of 1842. There are actually two cats in the tale, though the suggestion is that the second is a reincarnation of the first. On a psychological level, the cat(s) seem to be external manifestations of the narrator's destructive impulses, his "perverseness" (225)—a topic Poe will explore further in "The Tell-Tale Heart" as well as later in "The Imp of the Perverse." The narrator's first perverse act in “The Black Cat” occurs when, in an intoxicated rage, he "deliberately cut one of [the cat's] eyes from the socket" (224). In essence, he has turned his formerly cherished pet, his “favorite pet and playmate” (224) among a number of beloved animals he and his wife have brought into their home, into a living camera, a single lens which he spends the remainder of the tale trying to elude.

The one-eyed cat is both witness to and the impetus for the narrator's ultimately self-destructive descent. Following the initial injury, the narrator eventually kills the cat and hangs its body from a tree on his property. That night, the narrator awakens to find that his house has caught fire. He escapes, then discovers that the entire house has been destroyed, save the wall that had stood behind the head of his bed which now has "the figure of a gigantic cat" burned into the plaster "as if graven in bas-relief upon the white surface" (225). Not long afterwards a second one-eyed cat appears in the narrator’s new home. The only difference between this and the original animal is what is at first described as "a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole
region of the breast," but over time "by slow degrees . . . at length assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline . . . of the GALLOWS" (226-7). Shortly after the narrator realizes this, he attempts to kill this second cat, only to be thwarted by his wife, whom he brutally murders in a rage. He walls his wife's corpse up in the basement of his home and, in his final act of perverseness, he leads the police to discover her body. In a hubristic display, the narrator points out the "excellently well-constructed house" to the police, going so far as to tap on the wall behind which he has concealed his wife. Upon his doing this however, a loud "howl—a wailing shriek . . . such as might have arisen only out of hell" (230), is heard from behind that very wall. When the police pull the plaster down, they discover the corpse of the wife, upon which is perched the second one-eyed cat.

Having witnessed the apparent ability of the camera to bring out the least flattering features of an individual, Poe extends this theme beyond physical appearance to the inner-life. In doing so he is drawing upon the popular belief in the power of the camera to reveal a subject's hidden nature. This theme is the impetus for the main action of "The Black Cat." Here the photographic theme of Poe's work becomes a means for demonstrating the advantages of the gothic elements of the tale which are used to expose the shadowy, hidden realm of the mind by means of the light of external reality.

The narrator of "The Black Cat" describes his early relationship
with his pet as one of near-constant companionship: "[the cat] attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets" (224). Over the course of some years under what increasingly seems to be surveillance by the cat, the narrator "experience[s] a radical alteration for the worse" of his "general temperament and character" (224). The narrator mutilates the cat in response to the animal's injury to him: the cat bites him, literally penetrating his outward self. It is in this moment that the narrator recounts, "I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body" (224). He transforms the cat into a figurative camera the moment it wounds him, and in so doing releases his inner-essence into the outer world. He can no longer restrain “the fury of a demon” (224) that had heretofore remained suppressed. The cat had been latently camera-like all along in its constant surveillance of its master, but it is not until the cat draws out the narrator's true nature that he correspondingly manipulates the animal's appearance to reflect its function. The cat’s subtextual meaning is thereby reflected in its outward appearance.

Recalling photography’s surveillance potential, Nathaniel Willis’ speculation that a "room" could become an autonomous camera is echoed in the suggestion of the cat-as-camera: suddenly, everything has a potential gaze and nothing may be as objectively passive as it may seem. Fitting, then, is the fact that Poe chooses a black cat, which the narrator
comments upon, recalling "the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise" (223). In so doing, Poe is drawing upon contemporary associations of the supernatural with photography. This anxiety regarding the mysterious and potentially revelatory power of photography is a particular manifestation of the shadowy elements of human life that gothic art had been depicting all along.

The mysterious elements of the photographic process—and the often unaccountable and unpredictable images it produces—are referenced in the narrator's explanation of the "bas-relief" silhouette of the hanged cat burned into the bedroom wall. Benjamin J. McFarland and Thomas Peter Bennett refer to this scene in "The Black Cat" as the only moment they could find in their research on an enigmatic 1842 daguerreotype image that may feature Poe in which there was evidence of "daguerreotype imagery" in any of Poe's works. They note that "the image of a dead cat . . . etched into a plaster wall by ammonia fumes from its decomposing body . . . is faintly analogous to the chemical processes of photography and may serve as a metaphor for the process" (17). Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that there are photographic references throughout the tale, subtle though they may be. The narrator's rationalization of the aforementioned phenomenon reads like Poe's own scientific descriptions of the steps in the photographic process in his 1840 "Daguerreotype" essays. The narrator explains:

Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by
the crowd—by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of the other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it. (226)

As noted earlier, in his earliest "Daguerreotype" essay, Poe describes, in great detail, the chemicals and procedures used to create a daguerreotype image, but concludes this otherwise highly technical report with the phrase, "[t]he action of the light does the rest." This phrase, with which he is echoing the language of all daguerreotype instruction manuals, ironically exposes the unexplained elements of this emergent scientific process. The fundamental nature of the science of daguerreotypy is mysterious, even to those who practice it. The narrator of "The Black Cat's" ostensibly rational explanation comes across as highly contrived and, ultimately, unconvincing. He admits only coming up with it "at length" following his initial reaction of "extreme . . . wonder and terror" (225). His reasoning is a result of "reflection com[ing] to [his] aid" rather than a discovery of hard evidence. Indeed, his initial account that "the impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous" only adds to the photographic tone of the scene and, in so doing, serves to discredit his explanation (255). Thus, the wall is a figurative daguerreotype—a one-
of-a-kind image taken directly from its original subject and rendered through the effects of light and chemicals, the result of which is the revelation of a previously hidden, internal truth.

The second cat, or, as Poe seems to imply, the reincarnated one-eyed cat, is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the tale. The second cat shares the first cat's facial disfigurement. It is "fully as large as [the first cat], and closely resembling him in every aspect but one" (226), that "one aspect" being a white marking on the new cat's chest. It is this mark that indicates that the second cat is not another figurative camera, but a living copy of the original cat’s photographic image. When the image of the original hanged cat is “photographically” recorded on the plaster of the burned out bedroom wall of the narrator’s destroyed house, it exposes the narrator’s inner-reality for all the world to see, just as daguerreotypes were thought to do. And once the original cat’s photograph-like “bas-relief” image was created, it becomes subject to limitless copying.

The added element of the narrator’s fate, “the GALLOWS!” (227) emblazoned on its body recalls the nearly unrecognizable engraved copy of Poe’s “McKee” daguerreotype. Whereas the original image was of a hanged cat, the copy brings out the formerly hidden meaning behind this image, the fact that the “bas-relief” hanged cat is a physical manifestation of the narrator’s guilt. The copy brings this truth to light in a way that the original did not. Like the image of Poe that appeared on the cover of The Saturday Evening Museum, the second cat demonstrates how the
“exactness” of a photographic copy is very much in the eye of the beholder, as well as how quickly one’s “truest” image can morph into something else entirely.

As a figurative daguerreotype copy, the second cat extends Poe's use of the photographic theme in "The Black Cat" beyond exploiting the possibility of a daguerreotype's revelation of a subject's inner-life. He is also considering the future affective possibilities of photography. The narrator describes his "absolute dread of the beast" which only increases as the cat's constant companionship intensifies: "[i]t followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend" (227). The more he sees the cat, the more disturbed he becomes: "neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone, and in the latter I started hourly from dreams of unutterable fear to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face" (228). The effect of the cat's visual presence parallels the effect of horror on the reader. The horror Poe hoped to elicit from his reader is ultimately one of the possibilities of a photographic world; namely, being faced with omnipresent reflections of our truest selves that threaten to expose our inner life at any time. Bound up with this is the subsequent potential for endless manifestations thereof being disseminated without one’s knowledge or control.

The narrator’s opening comments echo the photographic zeitgeist of the early 1840’s. Referring to his own tale which he is about to tell, he
declares, “Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects” (223). Like the tale itself, the very science about which “The Black Cat” is a commentary was little more than the result of “an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects”; yet, its mysteriously sublime results were difficult to regard without “excitab[ility]” and “awe,” not to mention, potentially, horror.

Poe continues to explore such photographic themes in "The Tell-Tale Heart." This is not surprising, given that the two tales were composed within months (if not weeks) of one another. Although “The Tell-Tale Heart" more closely anticipates the explicit examination of perversity that Poe will present later in "The Imp of the Perverse," the particular photographic elements of "The Tell-Tale Heart" are more clearly linked to those of "The Black Cat." In both tales there is the specter of a single penetrating eye, the slaying of the bearer of said eye, and a concealment of a body within the narrator's home. Unlike in the "The Black Cat," however, the murder that occurs in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is carefully—even, according to the narrator, rationally—premeditated. The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" takes great pains to make clear that he was and remains sane. "Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what
dissimulation I went to work!" (303). Indeed, despite his grisly crime, the narrator remains ostensibly reliable, even quite reasonable, throughout most of the rest of the tale.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" opens after the narrator has committed and subsequently revealed the murder of an old man living in his home. Speaking directly to the reader, the narrator opens the story with a defensive diatribe, insisting upon his sanity. It is unclear what his circumstances are at the opening of the tale, though some critics have speculated that he may be defending himself in a courtroom. He recounts exactly how—though less precisely why—he killed the unnamed old man. His motive, the narrator claims, was the old man's eye; as he explains, "I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire" (303). Rather, he describes how 

"[o]ne of his eyes resembled that of a vulture . . . . Whenever it fell on me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees . . . I made up my mind to take the life of the old man and thus rid myself of the eye forever" (303).

Through his paranoia regarding the potential power of an eye, the narrator establishes himself as the figurative subject of a photograph. The impetus for the murder is his disinclination to be seen—as though there is something inherently threatening in the experience of being observed. In the age of daguerreotypy there was perceived to be such a threat: through the study of an individual's photographic image, one could discern the subject’s deepest secrets. They might be discovered by even the most
casual observer both during and after the subject’s lifetime.

The entire tale consists of the narrator's attempt to establish his version of the truth in the face of the accepted belief that he is simply a madman. Refusing to accept this verdict, he seeks to provide an alternative portrait of his defining moment. Yet, in doing so, he only manages to confirm his own worst fears. Ironically, the old man's eye causes the narrator to reveal his true self. As he is seen by the eye, he is finally "seen" by the reader as an individual capable of remarkably heinous acts.

The narrator takes great pains to describe his careful approach to the murder. Seven times he approached the bedroom of the old man at midnight and very slowly poked his head through the slightly ajar bedroom door. He recalls, "[i]t took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed" (303). He then, just as gradually, uncovered his lantern and directed the light to the aforementioned eye of the old man. The eye remained closed. On the eighth night the old man happened to awaken during his approach. Upon shining the light on the open eye, the narrator is able to proceed with his plan. He bursts into the room and smothers the old man with his bedding. He then dismembers the corpse and stashes it beneath three floorboards in the same room, leaving no trace of the crime in sight.

The police arrive within hours of the murder, as a neighbor had reported hearing a scream, and the narrator confidently leads them into
the old man's room and proceeds to have a lengthy conversation with them as he sits in a chair that he has placed upon the aforementioned floorboards. During the course of this conversation, the narrator begins to hear the beating of the dead man's heart and is gradually driven to dramatically confess his crime, as "any thing was better than this agony" of trying to ignore what he assumed everyone in the room could hear (306).

The crucial impetus for the narrator's murderous impulse was a desire to evade observation. He sought to escape the gaze of the vulture-like eye of the old man. His likening the eye to that of a scavenger—a bird that feeds on the dead—suggests that the narrator feels objectified (or, more figuratively, drained of life) by the gaze. This recalls Poe's own negative reaction to his first daguerreotyped image. Coupled with the fact that the old man resides in the narrator's home, it is clear that the narrator feels a distinct loss of privacy, as though he is a living subject of a daguerreotype likeness, the constant object of potentially penetrating gazes.

Fittingly, the narrator incorporates his desire to remain unseen in his murderous plan. He only approaches the old man's bedroom under cover of darkness, and he brings along his own carefully controlled source of light to shine upon the eye: "I opened [the lantern]—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily—until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of a spider, shot from out the crevice and full upon the vulture
eye . . . I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye" (304-05). The narrator needs the eye to be open in order to dispense with it. By shining light directly into the open eye, he makes the camera lens-eye his own photographic subject and in so doing renders it powerless by controlling its source of power, light. That is to say, when the eye is open the old man represents a figurative camera upon which the narrator "turns the tables": he makes the camera the subject of the narrator's own, painstakingly framed gaze. As such, the narrator is metaphorically photographing the source of his anxiety. He will then go on to "develop" the image that results from this moment of exposure. After carefully exposing his subject to the light as a daguerreotypist would do to his plate, the narrator proceeds with the rest of his plan in a literal and figurative "dark room." He murders the old man and dismembers and conceals his body, all by four a.m., when it is "still dark as midnight" (305). By completing his plan with extreme precision in the dark, he essentially creates an image. In this case the image is of an ordinary, undisturbed bedroom. He does this so particularly and with such care that he believes that "no human eye—not even [that of the old man] could have detected any thing wrong" (305). But, because the scene is a figurative photograph, its hidden truth will inevitably come to light. And because the image the narrator creates is a result of capturing the process of photography, the way the truth is revealed can be read as Poe's commentary on the unintended consequences
of a photographic world.

The narrator's attempt to escape the old man's gaze is the only apparent motive for the crime. The old man's penetrating, lens-like eye does, finally, expose him as only a camera can by bringing out what was formerly hidden within. The tale is named for what is revealed at the conclusion to be the true subject of the story: the narrator's heart. The heart, of course, is a hidden organ that lies within and symbolizes our most essential selves. The narrator mistakes the beating of his own heart—the more agitated he becomes, the more "steadily" the "noise . . . increased"—for that of the dead man; consequently he discloses the truth of his crime in the last lines of the tale (306). It is the heart that ultimately "tells" the "tale" of a narrative that is primarily focused on the ultimate visual symbol, an eye. The photographic elements Poe uses here reflect the new reality of a photographic world in which what lies in our hearts may no longer remain hidden from view.

Poe anticipates even more extreme possibilities regarding the loss of privacy in the wake of photography in 1845 through "The Imp of the Perverse." This tale concludes with the narrator's brief account of a murder he committed years earlier, which was followed by a public confession of his crime that has landed him in prison awaiting execution. Recalling the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse" devises a method of murder that would afford absolutely no possibility of detection, explaining, "I rejected a thousand schemes,
because their accomplishment involved a chance of detection” (283).

Indeed, the narrator asserts that upon committing the murder, “I had left no shadow of a clew by which it would be possible to convict, or even suspect, me of the crime” (283).

The majority of his tale leading up to his confession is a rumination on “perverseness,” or “a paradoxical something [that] through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction of terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should not” (281). Over time, the phrase “I am safe” (284) becomes the narrator’s mantra. One day he catches himself muttering this phrase aloud, followed by “if I be not fool enough to make open confession!” He then continues:

No sooner had I spoken these words, than I felt an icy chill creep to my heart. I had had some experience in these fits of perversity (whose nature I have been at some trouble to explain), and I remembered well that in no instance I had successfully resisted their attacks. And now my own casual self-suggestion, that I might possibly be fool enough to confess the murder of which I had been guilty, confronted me, as if the very ghost of him whom I had murdered—and beckoned me on to death. (284)

The narrator conceives of himself in a world in which no matter how forcefully he asserts his will he cannot maintain the boundaries of his
interior state. This leads to his frightening belief in the inevitability of his self-betrayal. In this nightmarish world, secrets are not possible and privacy is only a dream. This is, in many ways, a photographic world; scrutiny is a constant concern, and as a result, the individual becomes his own worst enemy as his outer self becomes, he believes, more and more the target of the gazes of others. In a panic, he begins to run like "a madman through the crowded thoroughfares" (284) in an attempt to avoid uttering the confession that he feels so irresistibly compelled to reveal. As a result he draws attention, and people begin to pursue and eventually stop him, only to witness his self-destructive act of declaring his guilt. His ruin, of course, requires a perceiving audience. Without witnesses his confession would be meaningless.

The narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse” is divided against himself. Poe envisions the photographic world as one that alienates the individual from himself, as he had anticipated in "William Wilson" before he had seen an actual daguerreotype. The narrator recounts the crucial moment of his public confession secondhand; he is so divorced from himself when driven by his innermost elements that he is does not even consciously witness the moment that "[t]he long-imprisoned secret burst forth from [his] soul." He can only state that "[t]hey say that I spoke with a distinct enunciation, but with a marked emphasis and passionate hurry, as if in dread of interruption before concluding the brief but pregnant sentences that consigned me to the hangman and to hell" (284). This self-
betrayal might be described as the narrator "painting [him]self," effectively echoing Poe's description of how photography worked in his first "Daguerreotype" essay. That is, the narrator's crime was so perfect that only he had the power to reveal this innermost truth. He does so, unable to resist his natural, perverse impulse to expose his secret. He "bounded like a madman through the crowded thoroughfares" seeking to escape his own mind, but "[a]t length, the populace took the alarm, and pursued me" (284). His actions externalize his inner reality, and the appearance this creates of a madman running and shrieking through the streets transforms him into just that.

Photography is related to perversity for Poe because it asks individuals to see themselves and one another as they truly are. It exposes the inner-self to the outer world, transcending the facades an individual maintains for others and, perhaps, also for himself. As such, photography, like the persistence of the perverse impulse, demonstrates the tendency for humanity to conceive of itself "a posteriori" rather than a priori (281). To Poe, perversity is a hidden, historically overlooked, but absolutely fundamental aspect of human nature. It serves no discernable purpose; in fact, its destructive nature is both illogical and absurd. Yet, as the narrator explains, it is undeniable. He cites a number of examples that his audience will certainly recognize: the irresistible draw of procrastination despite its potentially ruinous consequences; the temptation to torment a listener with "circumlocution" (281); or the
unaccountable enticement of a dangerous precipice, that desire to fling oneself off the edge in full knowledge of its deadly consequences.

The daguerreotype, like the perverse aspects of our nature, points to the artificiality of an individual's concept of himself. Until the photographic era we had been faced only by the familiar reflections visible in a mirror; we had not truly seen ourselves as we really are. The narrator muses, “[i]f we cannot comprehend God in his visible works, how then in his inconceivable thoughts that call the works into being?” (280-1). The truth is in the previously hidden depths, the “inconceivable thoughts” of God, that create the possibility for our destruction.

One can argue that the pleasure of privately scrutinizing another's appearance that photography makes possible is an indulgence of a perverse impulse. And yet, it was just this impulse that drove the establishment of photographic galleries, inspired private subscriptions to series of daguerreotype images, and led to the demand of literary magazines for photographic images of its most illustrious contributing writers. Photography appeared to bring out the hidden truths of both its subjects and of its enthusiastic viewers. The daguerreotype demonstrated the darker side of the human psyche through its depictions of individuals as well as through the desires of the images' consumers. Poe saw that in gazing at ourselves frozen in time, we encounter our often paradoxical truest selves.
One of the elements that Poe fixates upon in his 1840 daguerreotype essays is the remarkable exactness of photography. The daguerreotype omits nothing in its representation. Every shadow, every wrinkle, even every cell is captured by a photograph: "the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented" ("The Daguerreotype" 4). This thought, along with his astonishment at the fact that "the source of the vision itself [is] . . . the designer [of its image]" ("The Daguerreotype" 4), anticipates some of the central ideas integral to Poe's 1848 "prose poem" Eureka, which Poe refers to as his last and greatest work.

In a letter to his mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, dated July 7, 1849, Poe writes, "I have no desire to live since I have done 'Eureka.' I could accomplish nothing more." He will, in fact, be dead within months. Since the meager response to Eureka's publication in the fall of 1848, which followed its initial presentation in a less-than-successful lecture Poe delivered in February of that year, critics have had very disparate reactions to the "prose poem." To this day, much like Poe's photographic images, Eureka continues to both fascinate and frustrate. Some scholars consider it the key to understanding Poe's corpus of work, while others (including modern day mathematicians and physicists) see it as a brilliant anticipation of the scientific understanding of the cosmos. The majority of readers both today and in Poe's lifetime, however, are simply puzzled
by this dense, sometimes humorous but mostly earnest treatise on the origins and workings of the known universe.

When Poe writes in his first daguerreotype essay that he "uses" the term "infinitely advisedly" in his description of the daguerreotype as "infinitely . . . accurate in its representation" (4), he anticipates his contemplation of infinity in *Eureka*. He writes there that "the human brain has obviously a leaning to the infinite, and fondles the phantom of the idea. It seems to long with a passionate fervor for the impossible conception, with the hope of intellectually believing it when conceived" (*Eureka* 102). Yet, infinity is beyond human comprehension: "I cannot conceive Infinity, and am convinced that no human being can" (25).

Poe's wonder at photography is due at least in part to the apparent glimpse of the infinite it seems to provide. The photograph freezes time, but perhaps more importantly, it provides everlasting, incontrovertible documentation of an individual's existence. He declares in *Eureka* that "[s]o long as this Youth endures, the feeling that we exist, is the most natural of all feelings. We understand it thoroughly. That there was a period at which we did not exist — or, that it might so have happened that we never had existed at all — are the considerations, indeed, which *during this Youth, we find difficulty in understanding*" (140). This recalls the wonder of photography as a physical manifestation of the universe at a particular moment. What made the daguerreotype so miraculous was the fact that it was an enduring means for future generations to visually
witness a moment in which they did not exist. At the same time, these
future viewers would be faced with the consideration of the daguerreotype
as a momento mori, as they behold a subject of a photograph who very
well may no longer exist on earth.

In 1840 Poe notes that the "accuracy" of a daguerreotype is perhaps
its greatest wonder: everything that was there at the moment of an image's
creation is captured in the photograph. Poe's awe at the all-encompassing
nature of photography is echoed in the thesis of *Eureka*: "In the Original
Unity of the First Thing lies the secondary cause of all things with the
Germ of their eventual Annihilation" (7). That is, everything and
everyone in the universe came from God. God is in everything, and "the
sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general
consciousness—the Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel
himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he
shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah . . . all is Life—Life—
Life within Life—the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit
Divine" (*Eureka* 143). Photography seemed to embody what Poe would
later liken to the way the universe operated. When he writes in his first
daguerreotype essay that "the source of the vision itself has been . . . the
designer" ("The Daguerreotype" 4), we see the inklings of his philosophy
regarding "the unity of all" (*Eureka* 136).

As noted earlier, Poe concludes his first essay on photography by
noting that the possibilities of this new science lie beyond even the
“wildest” imagination, perhaps making something as distant as the moon accessible. It is no coincidence that throughout his treatise on the nature of the universe Poe returns again and again to the moon as a point of reference. In one notable section, he points out that were a cannon fired on the moon, an individual on earth "would have to wait, after perceiving [the flash], more than thirteen entire days and nights before getting any intimation of the [report]" (Eureka 108). This is not to suggest that Poe had not referred the moon in his writing before 1840, but rather to point out that in both his description of this "most important" scientific breakthrough and his self-professed greatest literary accomplishment he looks primarily to the night sky in his contemplations of the most sublime elements of life. The miracle of photography would eventually illuminate the dark reaches of the universe just as the writer of the gothic tale attempted to reveal the darkest reaches of the human mind.

Fittingly, Poe's photographic portraits continue to fascinate audiences, perhaps just as much as does his writing. There is more scholarship on Poe's life and its influence on and presence in his works than there are straightforward critical analyses of his writing. It is my hope that this study will begin a discussion among scholars about the particular influence of photography on Poe's work. Poe's explorations of visual themes in response to the age of the daguerreotype now seem prophetic, in some cases ironically so. His premium on the primacy of effect in literature extends to his own photographic representations:
portraits of him that affect the viewer most—often due to their unflattering appearance—are more well-received and highly prized than those that arouse less feeling. And the nightmarish world envisioned in "The Imp of the Perverse" where an individual's internal reality can divide itself from—and even directly lead to the destruction of—his external identity seems to play out in the wide influence Poe's daguerreotype likenesses have had in determining his legacy.

The ubiquity of Poe's photographic image today and its close association with his work exemplifies the intersection of the potential effects of art and photography. Even Arthur Quinn, whose 1941 Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography remains the standard authority on Poe's life, concludes his text by referring to Poe's photographic image:

The duality of Poe's nature will be apparent to anyone who has closely studied his life. It is reflected most concretely in his countenance. Take a full face daguerreotype of Poe, lay a card upon it, so that first one side and then the other will be concealed. On one side you will see a high forehead, an eye large and full, a firm mouth and a well shaped chin. On the other will appear a lower brow, a less lustrous eye, a mouth painfully drawn, and a chin less certain. That is why an artist like Sully chose to paint Poe's three-quarter face. (693)

Again and again, readers of Poe's work—both scholars and general readers—return to his photographic image in search of answers to
questions that both his life and his works leave behind. We are still searching for Poe, the man, a century and a half after his death. Perhaps part of the reason we so often consider his writing alongside his photographic images is because, akin to gazing at those daguerreotypes he left behind, when we view his works from just the right angle, we find that we are suddenly faced with a surprising reflection of ourselves.
Appendix

Poe as Photographic Subject

It would be a little more than two years after Poe published "The Daguerreotype" that he would sit for his first daguerreotype portrait. In the remaining seven years of his life, from 1842-1849, Poe would have at least seven more daguerreotype portraits taken from a total of six sittings. According to Micheal Deas, there is substantial evidence that Poe may have had more than the currently authenticated eight known daguerreotype portraits taken (multiples were taken during particular sittings), but no hard evidence for these apocryphal images has surfaced with the exception of one that will be discussed subsequently. Today, only three of the eight authenticated original daguerreotypes of Poe have survived; the extant daguerreotypes are contemporaneous copies of lost originals.

By many accounts Poe was a strikingly handsome man until the final few years of his life when alcoholism and depression began to take a physical toll. Thomas Higginson wrote of him, "I only saw him once, [yet] I distinctly recall his face, with its ample forehead, brilliant eyes, and narrowness of nose and chin; an essentially ideal face, not noble, yet anything but coarse . . . a face to rivet one's attention in any crowd" (12-13). As Michael Deas notes, drawing upon numerous recollections of Poe's familiars, "[h]is eyes were certainly his most compelling feature—virtually every description of length calls attention to their unusual size
and color" (5). Yet, it is the images of the gaunt, sickly man captured in Poe's final daguerreotype portraits that have become the most recognizable and widely reproduced. These images seemed to match the popular associations with Poe based on his gothic style of writing and bolstered by the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death, not to mention Rufus Griswold's widely read (and unfortunately enduring) disparaging obituary published within days of Poe's passing. Regarding both Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, Susan S. Williams observes that "the daguerreotype contributed to the popular, and long-lasting image of these men as solitary, tortured, and introspective" (“Daguerreotyping” 15). Because these later images seem to confirm popularly held beliefs regarding Poe as a brooding and troubled—even mentally disturbed—poet, they live on. The youthful, genteel man depicted in the earlier portraits failed to "reveal" what audiences had decided in advance was his true nature, and so these images have largely disappeared from view.

Two of these now familiar images of Poe, based on the "Whitman" (Figure 1) and "Ultima Thule" (Figure 2) daguerreotypes, were taken fewer than three weeks after Poe’s attempted suicide in November 1848. The last two daguerreotypes taken of Poe, the "Thompson" (Figure 3) and "Traylor" (Figure 4) images, were taken only weeks before his death in Baltimore in the autumn of 1849.
Figure 1 ("Whitman" Daguerreotype)

Figure 2 ("Ultima Thule" Daguerreotype)
As Michael Deas has noted, "the portraits are surprisingly rich in biographical content, with each likeness depicting the author at a particularly decisive moment in his career" (1). Not surprisingly, Deas
also records the fact that Poe was "seldom pleased with the results of his sittings" (2). Those who knew him expressed the same disappointment with his daguerreotype images. Echoing numerous complaints regarding the "disparity between the sitter and his portraits" Susan Ingram, a friend of Poe's at the end of his life, lamented that "Poe's face possessed a 'peculiarly changeful character' which made any 'adequate transmission of its various and subtle moods . . . impossible'" (Deas 2). Deas has also noted that because most of Poe's daguerreotype images are mirror images (as most daguerreotypes were until the close of the 1840's), "the mirror-reversal phenomenon seems to have accentuated the asymmetry of Poe's face, a circumstance that over the years has prompted some peculiar commentary on the lack of 'moral character' evidenced by his physiognomy" (9).

Nearly all of Poe's daguerreotype portraits were taken at the behest (and at the expense) of an admirer, a magazine, or an enterprising daguerreotypist who could benefit from adding the author's portrait to his inventory of marketable images. Thus, it is not surprising that his first confirmed daguerreotype portrait (the "McKee" daguerreotype, see Chapter V) was taken within a year of the publication of some of his most successful works.

The public's views of Poe both during and beyond his lifetime have been highly influenced by his (in)famous photographic images. William Pannapacker has explored the unique interplay between Poe's
photographic image and the popular conceptions (and receptions) of both him and his work. He explains that "[m]any nineteenth-century biographers of Poe, including [Poe's fiancée Sarah Helen] Whitman, saw their task as analyzing Poe's 'character,' rather than the value of his literary works. They regularly used Poe's visual record in tandem with his writings" (11). Pannapacker goes on to assert, "[i]t is often assumed that portraits of an author are subordinate or even incidental to the text of a biography or an edition of an author's works . . . however, the reciprocal relationship between image and text guided the construction of 'Edgar Allan Poe'" (12-13). In fact, Poe's nineteenth-century biographers were exceptionally preoccupied with Poe images, particularly with Poe's daguerreotypes. "By the 1870's and 80's, during the rise of literary realism and scientific empiricism, a race was on to acquire 'original' Poe daguerreotypes, which would provide direct access to the 'real' Poe" (Pannapacker 14). Indeed, by the turn of the twentieth century, Pannapacker observes, "Poe existed for biographers . . . not simply as a body of scripture. He was a face, and preferably not the face of the old-fashioned, idealized engraving or portrait. Rather, he was recorded by the modern, scientifically accurate perception of the photograph. The text and the photograph of the writer became increasingly interconnected in the literary biographer's craft, each shaping the meaning of the other" (18). Pannapacker notes that this becomes a trend in the decades following the invention of the daguerreotype for many well-known
authors. But Poe's mysterious and tragic fate, coupled with his gothic writings, his reputation in life as an eccentric, troubled soul, and the existence of his multiple apparently "darkly" phrenologically revealing daguerreotype images, made this conflation of image and work distinctive. Pannapacker traces this trend back to Poe’s earliest biographers. This popular, complex fascination with his image carries through to the modern day as Mark Neimeyer has recently demonstrated in his chapter on "Poe and Popular Culture" in The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe. He observes, “[w]hen the newly reformed Baltimore professional football team chose to call itself the Ravens in 1996, Poe received a fin-de-siècle apotheosis as one of popular culture's favorite sons. The fact that football and Poe have nothing to do with each other only highlights the extent to which this nineteenth-century American author has remained not only present, but much appreciated in the minds of the general public throughout the world” (Neimeyer 205).

Poe's images remain a source of intrigue. In 1996 chemist Benjamin J. McFarland and biochemist Thomas Peter Bennett, both of the University of Florida, undertook a research project investigating the identities of three unidentified figures pictured in a mysterious daguerreotype image recently discovered by M. Susan Barger and William B. White in the archives of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (Figure 5). Barger and White reproduced the image in their 1991 history of daguerreotypy, entitled The Daguerreotype, and include
the following caption:

Daguerreotype taken in a lab at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. The daguerreotype, made about 1840 is attributed to Paul Beck Goddard. The figures are unidentified; however, it has been conjectured that the central figure is Joseph Leidy, who became a leading American paleontologist. The seated figure on the right may be Edgar Allan Poe, who worked in Philadelphia assisting Thomas Wyatt of the Central High School in writing books on natural history. (81)

McFarland and Bennett attempted to identify the three figures in this daguerreotype. They conclude, based on a variety of circumstantial evidence, that the daguerreotype was an experimental one, almost certainly taken by Goddard in the winter of 1842-43. Using modern forensic techniques, they compared authenticated images of Poe (mainly the McKee image as it was taken around the same time as they suspect the image in question was) with the image of the seated figure they refer to as “The Academician.” In addition to their cultural research into the style of clothing worn by the figures, and their posture and positions amongst various skeletal specimens which they manage to identify in order to confirm that the image could have been made at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, they conclude that "the sitting Academician is Edgar Allan Poe" (24).
The convincing case McFarland and Bennett make is fascinating for both Poe scholars and photographic historians. The image is unusual as an interior scene taken during the winter months as proper lighting would have been a challenge in such circumstances in late 1842 or early 1843. It is also interesting because of the lack of formality conveyed by the subjects: all are wearing hats indoors and do not appear to be dressed for a "proper" formal portrait; in fact, the Poe figure is wearing striped trousers, which was uncharacteristic for him according to scholars who understand his personal style. McFarland and Bennett argue that as a rising star of the American literati, it would have behooved Poe to "dress with some flair" to bolster the endeavors at self-promotion that he was undertaking in the early 1840's (23). They also point out that as the recently resigned editor of *Graham's Magazine*, Poe would have had access to the "influx of new fashions [being sent to the magazine] for its
prominent fashion plate illustrations" if his own, personal wardrobe was lacking (24).

Michael Deas makes no mention of this daguerreotype in his 1989 catalog of Poe portraits. Given that the Academy of Natural Sciences daguerreotype was probably taken during the same winter that the earliest confirmed daguerreotype of Poe was taken, there is the distinct possibility that the Academy image could very well be the earliest photographic image of Poe. If this is the case, it raises a number of questions regarding the history of the McKee daguerreotype, not to mention intriguing thematic possibilities for the Poe scholar. If Poe's first experience of sitting for a photograph was an experimental, group endeavor among the up-and-coming scientists of the day, how might this change the ways scholars view his later formal portraits? How does it affect the significance of the McKee daguerreotype? And might there be more images tucked away in forgotten collections of archives in which Poe appears anonymously? The irony of the fact that Poe's image in the Academy daguerreotype—a copy of which has since been displayed in the entranceway of The Wagner Free Institute of Science in Philadelphia (founded by Joseph Leidy)\(^37\)—had gone unrecognized for generations would not have been lost on the author of "The Purloined Letter."

Poe's missing images continue to surface. In a February 2005 broadcast of the PBS television program, "The Antiques Roadshow," an amateur daguerreotype collector displayed what appeared to be a
daguerreotype portrait of Poe. The on-air appraiser, Wes Cowan, agreed that it seemed to be an authentic portrait and estimated its value at $30,000-$50,000. Soon after this episode aired, the Poe daguerreotype "became an FBI matter" (Crafton). As it turned out, the "Daly Daguerreotype" (Figure 6)—a daguerreotype copy of a long-lost 1847 original—was missing from the archives of the Hampden-Booth library in New York City. Just how and precisely when the daguerreotype was stolen from the collection, and ended up for sale in an Iowa junk shop for $96, as the amateur collector on "The Antiques Roadshow" recounted, remains unknown. It has since been returned to the library and is available for viewing by "qualified researchers" (Crafton).

Figure 6 ("Daly" Daguerreotype)
Kevin J. Hayes argues in his 2002 essay, "Poe, The Daguerreotype and the Autobiographical Act," that Poe became an adept daguerreotype subject. He suggests that Poe learned how to pose himself and frame his image in ways that would create an effectively "iconic" image of himself (Hayes 490). Hayes writes: "[t]he effective arrangement of light and shadow in [Poe's] fiction offered a precedent for the effective use of light and shadow in his photographic portraiture. In much the same way that he helped control the image of himself for the biographical essay [Henry B.] Hirst composed, Poe exercised control over the images of himself that the daguerreotype photographers created" (487). Hayes bases his argument on the fact that in all of the known daguerreotype images of Poe taken after the McKee daguerreotype he wears a moustache, presumably to mask the deep "philtrum" above his mouth, and that all of these later images are similarly framed and posed (Hayes 487). While his argument is interesting, it amounts to only little more than what he criticizes William Pannapacker for supposedly doing, which Hayes describes as "conflat[ing] life and photographic images as he attempt[s] to discern Poe's physical and mental state from one particular daguerreotype" (490).

Although he does not elaborate, Hayes observes that Poe seems to connect writing with photography very early on. Hayes notes the preciseness of Poe's physical descriptions of himself as well as others and contrasts this with his disdain for engraved images: "[f]or Poe, the written
word could accomplish more effectively than the engraving the same kind of work that the camera does. Biography, in Poe's mind, was closer to photography than engraving" (Hayes 485). But Hayes stops there. It is the endeavor of this study to offer the first serious exploration of this rich topic by beginning the close study of the connection between photography and Poe's writing that scholars such as Hayes, Pannapacker, and Susan S. Williams have noted but not fully investigated.
Notes


2. See the Appendix for a discussion of Kevin J. Hayes' 2002 article, "Poe, The Daguerreotype and the Autobiographical Act."

3. It was printed on paper, rather than on metal plates as daguerreotypes were.
4. Sidney Morse was serving as senior editor of the paper at the time.

5. Professor John Draper, with whom Morse collaborated on many photographic experiments, claimed that he created the first photographic portrait a few days before Morse did. This controversy remains unresolved, though most scholars believe that Draper may, indeed, have accomplished the feat before Morse. Either way, the photographic portrait is unquestionably an American innovation.

6. Luckily, firefighters were able to stop the flames from spreading to Daguerre's adjacent studio, which held all of his daguerreotype specimens, equipment, and documents (Wood 39).


8. Photographic "tricks"—from retouching images to costuming subjects—were employed almost immediately after its invention.

9. According to Susan S. Williams, there were between 13,000-17,000 practicing daguerreotypists in the United States in 1853.
10. Albert Southworth's wife and daughter, who the ad promised "will sustain their well-earned reputation."

11. The preface to the 1855 version.

12. Most daguerreotypes were "quarter plates" approximately three inches wide by four inches long.

13. The Drummond Light came to be known as the "limelight."


17. See Reed’s *Dickens’s Hyperrealism*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2010.

19. See the Appendix for a discussion and copy of this image (Figure 5).

20. This claim continues to be debated among historians. Some, such as R. Derek Wood, argue that the first daguerreotype studio was set up in New York (see his monograph *The Arrival of Daguerreotype in New York*. New York: The American Photographic Historical Society, 1995.

21. Poe disliked his own surname because its pronunciation was identical to the Southern pronunciation of the word “poor.”

22. Nadar was known for his intimate photographic portraits, often of celebrities. He insisted upon recording his subjects while at ease in a relaxed atmosphere, often setting up a studio in his home.

23. “He does not permit himself to be read”
24. Mortiz Retzch (1779-1857) was a German painter known for his illustrations of Goethe’s *Faust*. Poe is probably referring here to Retzch’s depiction of the demon Mephistopheles.

25. Both were writing in the 1940's. Wimsatt Jr.'s meticulously researched essay "Poe and the Mystery of Mary Rogers." *PMLA* 56.1 (March 1941): 230-48 is still considered the most authoritative work on the subject.

26. It is worth noting a fascinating coincidence here. Rogers' mother's boarding house and home was located at the corner of Nassau and Beekman Streets—the same address as the building upon which Samuel Morse's glass-ceiling daguerreotype studio was erected the year before Rogers' disappearance.

27. According to Wimsatt Jr. gangs were particularly problematic that summer in New York City. There were a number of lurid newspaper articles published around the time of Rogers' disappearance reporting the victimization of young women by gangs.

28. According to Worthen, Poe was one of many literati who frequented Anderson's shop. He also names James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving as fellow patrons.
29. A parasol and ladies gloves were supposedly discovered in this thicket just outside a Hoboken tavern where Rogers had reportedly been last seen in the company of a "tall, well-dressed man of dark complexion" (Worthen 307). Many concluded that this was the scene of her death and her body had been dragged to the river.

30. The Mary Rogers case seems destined to never go away. An 1892 New York trial brought the case back to light as the daughter of the famous tobacconist John Anderson sought to have her father's will declared null and void on grounds of Anderson's mental incompetency. According to testimony, throughout much of his later life Anderson claimed to have been communicating with the ghost of his late former employee (and presumed lover), Mary Rogers. The minutes of the trial were only rediscovered in the 1940's by Samuel Copp Worthen whose essay on Poe's tale shed new light on the nature of the evidence upon which Poe had based his fictional "investigation."

31. Poe comments on this in a footnote to the 1845 version of the tale.

32. Mary Rogers had disappeared for approximately a week a few years earlier and returned to her job at the tobacco shop "as well as ever, with the exception of a slight paleness not altogether unusual" (New York
*Express* June 23, 1841). The assumption was that Rogers had received an abortion during her unexplained absence.

33. Mrs. Loss of Hoboken.

34. Interestingly, Poe’s involvement with cryptograms coincides with the photographic shift in his writing. As W. K. Wimsatt Jr. has noted, the first cryptogram he publically deciphers is while he is working for *Alexander’s Weekly Messenger* in the fall of 1839. This marks the beginning of his remarkable career as a puzzle-solver of unmatched genius. See Wimsatt Jr.’s “What Poe Knew About Cryptography.” *PMLA* 58.3 (September 1943): 754-79.

35. In yet another odd coincidence associated with Mary Rogers, Poe wrote this letter just days before Rogers would go missing.

36. See Chapter V for a copy of this image.

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