

“And My Soul From Out That Shadow”: Necromancing the Author on Screen

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Abstract

This thesis explores what the author-character reveals about the perspective on the author-figure in its socio-historical context. Previous research has identified a conflation of the author-character with his works, but none has considered its development. Following the Poe-character from the first biopic in 1909 through multiple depictions to a YouTube series from 2016, this thesis traces the changes of the Poe-character while considering Poe's author- and celebrity-function. It analyses how the Poe-character is portrayed through close-reading and comparative research, asking what elements are inspired by Poe's biography, where it diverges from factual evidence and how this affects his characterisation. Barthes' 1967 "The Death of the Author" essay distinguishes the depictions of the Poe-character into those that predate the rejection of the God-like author-figure, and those that followed. Referring to the author-function and celebrity-function, the thesis argues that the Poe-character always shows a conflation of the author and his works, but that the historical biography is further neglected and altered in the depictions from the pronounced death of the author onwards. The author-character is a series of simulacra, which further detaches itself from their historical origin with each new depiction. Like this, the Poe-character becomes the embodiment and representation of his popular works.

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Introduction: What's in Poe's Name?

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most adapted authors in American history (Perry and Sederholm 3). Not only have his stories fascinated the public, but his life has been subject to adaptation as well. The author as a character is a long-standing genre (Franssen and Hoenselaars 12) with a hybrid nature, as it inherently merges the author's biography with an "ultimately subjective" narrative (19). Poe as a character appeared first on-screen in a short biographical film in 1909 called *Edgar Allen Poe* [sic]. This silent film was the first of many depictions of the Poe-character. Since then, the Poe-character has been featured to depict the historical Poe's life, as is the case in biopics, or adapted within a fictional narrative. He has been characterised in various ways, including (but not limited to) a grieving widow in *Edgar Allen Poe* [sic] (1909), misunderstood poet in *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* (1942), and even a detective hero in *The Raven* (2012). Magistrale comments how "[t]here is Poe the poet, Poe the inventor of detective fiction, Poe the literary critic, Poe the book reviewer and magazine editor/contributor, Poe the author of grotesquely comic sketches, Poe the creator of psychological horror tales" (15), and this variety certainly seems to be reflected by the many Poe-characters. The author-character is always a subjective interpretation and has often been analysed as a reflection of its socio-historical context, but how does his characterisation reflect his authorial role?

The figure of the author receives different treatment in academia compared to popular culture and fulfils various functions as a result. Barthes' "Death of the Author" essay held that to impose an author on a text is to limit that text's meaning (6) and resisted biographical readings and authorial intention (Bennett 14-5). Since then, academic tradition is reluctant in giving the author unwarranted attention. On the other hand, popular culture seems to indulge in the 'literary celebrity'. Franssen and Honings argue that there is a complex interplay

between Foucault's notion of the "author-function" and this "celebrity-function" (10). For Foucault, the "author-function" refers to the separate entity formed from the author's name, as it detaches from its referent and becomes an "equivalent of a description" (12). The author's name then "allows an orderly manner of talking about a collection of texts, statements, actions and judgments" (Franssen and Honings 10) as it represents the context and works of the author, but is no longer associated with the author themselves. The celebrity-function contrastively turns to the figure behind the name, while the author-function neglects them. However, it is essential to note that the literary celebrity's popular image is also distanced from the individual. Franssen and Honings note that the author's public image is appropriated during their lifetime "and even more so after [their] death" (3). This image is made of "intertextual structures" of images and statements made by and about the celebrity in question (5). Like the author-function's distinction between the historical writer and the name, the celebrity-function separates the public and the private life. Importantly, the celebrity-function refers to the dramatisation of humanity, as the celebrity's life becomes the focus of popular culture rather than the works that led to fame. For a literary celebrity, these two functions show a complex interplay in which the border between "oeuvre and persona" will blur (12), which is especially visible in the author-character on screen.

The author-character is an adaptation of the author-figure, and may be based on the author's biography in a biographical film but is not limited to this format. Rather, the story surrounding the author-character varies because of its vague purpose. Fokkema notes that this may be founded in the postmodern interest in the "story of the story" (Fokkema 41), which asks where the inspiration for the story came from. The answer is, of course, the author. As such, the focus shifts to them and their wish to understand "why [the author] wrote, and how" (42). The author-character portrays the major themes of postmodernism through his characterisation, namely the "concern with writing, origin and loss, [and] the question of

representation” (41). However, despite this interest in the author’s inspiration, there is no real need for historical accuracy. Rather, there seems to be a wish for a “biographical replica” of the author’s stories (42). Within this genre, the author may become more than a vague public persona or image; instead, they may stand as a full-fledged character. For screened adaptations of the author, this characterisation may reveal society’s function for the author-character, as biopics shape and are shaped by their context (Shachar 4). Neimeyer notes that “the last thing that seems of interest in popular depictions of Poe” is the truth (210); instead, they choose to perpetuate the aforementioned “Poe-myth.” Weinstock notes that the Poe-character in film is a kind of quotation: “taken out of context and inserted into a new one” (16). Subsequently, it can be assumed that the Poe-character should change as the socio-historical context changes.

Furthermore, biopics reconcile “high and mass culture” (Oliveira and Indrusiak 68), as such, Poe’s role in pop-culture cannot be neglected. The Mystery Writers of America annually give out the Edgar Allan Poe Awards or “Edgars” (Neimeyer 206) as it was Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” that transformed the Gothic story “into a modern detective story” (Fisher 58). Furthermore, Poe’s presence within pop-culture crosses the literary boundary into other unrelated fields (Neimeyer 205). Peeples remarks how an iconic image of Edgar Allan Poe is often accompanied by the Poe/poor pun (“Poe’s Image” 169) (see fig. 1), which shows how Poe’s name has become separated from his works while simultaneously simplifying him to a poor and unfortunate author. However, in addition to these individual images of and references to Edgar Allan Poe, his life and mysterious death have interested popular culture as well. Notably, authors have “anything but the last word” regarding their public image; instead this is shaped by “readers, critics, admirers, and other actors in the

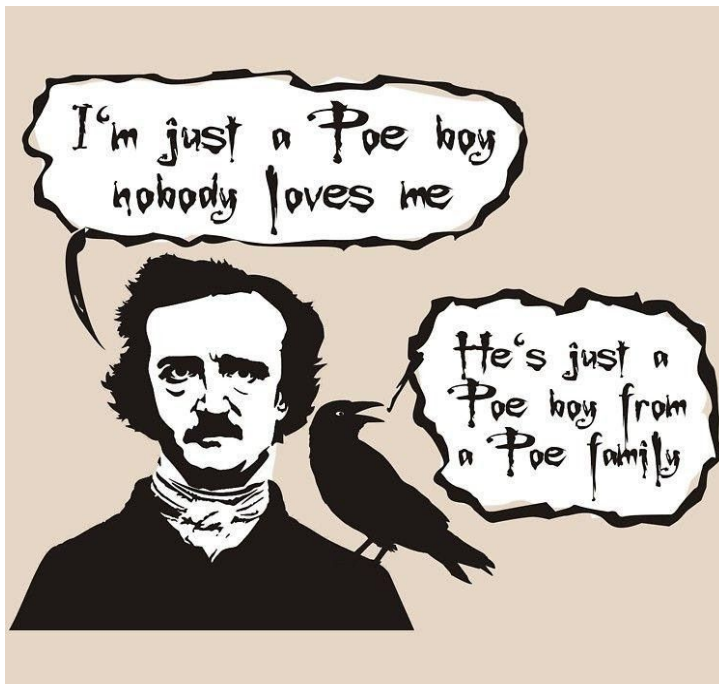


Fig. 1. Internet Meme: "I'm just a Poe Boy Nobody Loves Me AKA Poehemian Rhapsody." Designed by digerati. Redbubble.com.

literary field," especially after the author's death (Franssen and Honings 3). Poe's first biography by Rufus Griswold (1849), while highly subjective and holding false and degrading accounts of Poe, established the foundation on which Poe's pop-culture image is built (Neimeyer 209). Arguably, this work has started the so-called "Poe-myth," which portrays Poe as a "drunken madman" (210) and later also the tormented and misunderstood poet (Peeples, "Lionising" 127). Additionally, Poe's death itself was a "perfect mystery" (Peeples, "Afterword" 155), not unbecoming of his writings, and continues to be subject to new theories and fictions starring the author-character.

Previous research on the Poe-character has shown a conflation of Poe's life with his works, but the relation to the author's role in its respective socio-historical context remains as yet unexamined. Weinstock discusses the "Undeath of the Author" through the transformation of the "historical Poe into 'Poe' the adaptable narrative"(14) and argues that the adapted Poe is formed through his works, and separated from the historical Poe. Similarly, Van Leeuwen describes how various biographers connected Poe to his stories,

either as an expression of his own dark desires or as the hauntings of his last moments. He argues that the first 1909 biopic shows this conflation of Poe's biography with his poems (51). This conflation is further analysed by Oliveira and Indrusiak, who describe the blurred line between author and character in adaptations of Poe's work and biography (167), focusing on McTeigue's *The Raven* (2012) and Griffith's *Edgar Allen Poe [sic]* (1909). Furthermore, Peeples argues that the Poe-character has been simplified to a tortured and unrecognised genius ("Poe's Image" 181). He describes the development of Poe's works through multiple films, including briefly *The Raven* (1915), in which he argues that the raven signifies future grief for Poe's wife, and *The Raven* (2012), in which he focuses on Poe's characterisation as an "underdog-hero" (179). Notably, while Van Leeuwen and Peeples imply that the films' purpose was not to be true to Poe's biography (Peeples, "Poe's Image" 181, Van Leeuwen 57), they do not explore what the purpose then was.

This thesis examines how the Poe-character has developed between its earliest and its latest depictions, and subsequently what this reveals about the socio-historical perspective on the author-figure. It compares older adaptations to the newer adaptations to analyse the author's role in popular culture. These adaptations are *Edgar Allen Poe [sic]* (1909), *The Raven* (1915), *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* (1942), *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974), *The Death of Poe* (2006), *The Raven* (2012), and the YouTube-series *Edgar Allan Poe's Murder Mystery Dinner Party* (2016). These depictions all pose Poe as the motivation for the plot and the main focus of the narrative. This specification serves to differentiate between a round characterisation of Poe rather than a flat characterisation, to allow for an in-depth analysis of his character and the inclusion of his works, style, and biographical elements. The year of publication of Barthes' famous essay (1967) divides the films into those that predate the structuralist rejection of the imposing author-figure, and those that followed.

Chapter 1: Poe's Soul with Sorrow Laden

The early biopics discussed in this chapter ground themselves in factual historical context and events. In contrast, the later biopics discussed in chapter two neglect verifiable history in favour of a romanticised fiction. Notable, Shachar notes that because biopics are intertwined with their times, shaping and being shaped by their context (4), neither the early nor the later adaptations can be considered objective accounts of an author's life. Biopics are unique because of this "hybridity," narrating the life of a real person while simultaneously falling into other genres such as "melodramas" or "propaganda films" (Robinson 105). As such, it is "not so much a film about a life as it is a film about competing and intersecting discourses" in which the biography in question is "one of those discourses" adapted by and for the purpose of other people (Man as quoted in Robinson 105). The earliest biopic of Poe, Griffith's silent film *Edgar Allen Poe [sic]* (1909), shows only two events of Poe's life, namely the creation of his famous poem "The Raven" aligned with the demise of his wife, Virginia Clemm. The second biopic, Brabin's silent film *The Raven* (1915), starts Poe's story with his father's arrival in America and ends with his own death. The third film, Lachman's *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* (1942), follows Poe from his youth to his death with a focus on his romantic relationships. While biopics dramatise certain events to make the story appealing, how this is executed is arbitrary. While certainly filled with tragic events, Poe's life is not only characterised by struggles and grief, yet this seems to be the main focus of the films. While Poe could have been portrayed as a hopeful and determined writer who continues despite his struggles, he is "simplified" into a tragic figure (Peeples "Poe's image" 181). In order to satisfy the curiosity of the story behind the story, the connection between the writer and his stories has to be made clear. For the early biopics, this curiosity was based on

his poetry. As such, these films show how the story of Poe's life is influenced by the main themes of his works, especially the infamous one intertwined with his name; "The Raven."

"The Raven" is repeatedly included and integrated into the story of Poe. The poem brought Poe international recognition, and people began to associate the poem with Poe's name. Some even called him "Raven" (Hayes 83), invoking both the fascination with and intertwinement of the story behind the famous work. Poe was known mostly if not solely for this poem, and the biopics explicitly connected him to "The Raven" in an attempt to satisfy the public interest with the poem's author, prioritising this connection over objectivity. They integrate "The Raven" into Poe's life, making the story of Poe literally a part of his own narrative. Griffith's short film focuses on Virginia's death as Poe struggles to earn money by selling his poem "The Raven," which the film shows was inspired by a raven appearing magically on a bust of Pallas (02:10). In Brabin's *The Raven*, Poe's act of writing the poem is omitted, but a raven does make an appearance (26:25). Peeples argues that in both films the raven signals "future grief" ("Poe's Image" 172), though in Griffith's version it also serves as inspiration, whereas Brabin's film places Poe as the poem's speaker ("Poe's Image" 172). Contrastively, Lachman's *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* does not integrate the poem as literally as its predecessors. Instead, it portrays Virginia's demise as the inspiration for the poem as Poe tells her that all he writes is for and because of her (53:06). Her passing embeds "The Raven," as Poe's narration starts after showing Virginia miserable in bed (58:10-59:30), and his return after being rejected shows their last scene together. Similar to how the raven bird functioned as an omen for death and future grief in the previous biopics, so functions "The Raven" poem as an omen for Virginia's death. While the chronology of Virginia's illness and the writing of "The Raven" is true to historical fact, the intertwinement of the poem's composition as a foreshadowing of Virginia's death is fiction and only serves the public's fascination.



Fig. 2. Two screenshots of *The Raven* (1915) (33:29 - 33:34).
The Poe-character lies on the floor, performing the depicted lines from “The Raven.”

In addition to the poem’s narrative content, its main themes as detailed in Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” are also convoluted with Poe’s life in the films. This essay describes Poe’s thought process of composing “The Raven” and exposes his reasoning and intended meaning. Arguably, the most noteworthy statement is one reflecting on the foundational purpose of the poem, according to Poe “the death ... of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover” (436). While telling Poe’s story, Griffiths and Lachman’s films bring attention to the death of a young and beautiful woman, effectively putting Poe into the role of the “bereaved lover.” Notably, for Griffith’s film, the audience may not recognise the dying woman as Poe’s wife (Robinson 109). The anonymity of this female figure ensures that Poe’s life resembles his writings regardless of the spectator’s biographical knowledge. The film’s title *Edgar Allen Poe* [sic] invokes an association with the historical writer, but it is the content of the film that aligns the author-character in the same universe as his works. This alignment of Poe into the same story of his poem is especially clear in *The Raven* (1915), as Poe becomes the speaker of “The Raven” as the film switches between scenes of the Poe-character enacting the narrative of the raven and intertitles (text frames, see fig. 2) containing quotes from the poem. These two

films both explicitly keep the raven as a symbol to enhance the melancholy of a “lover lamenting” (Poe 436), but *The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe* relies entirely on its own story to convey this feeling. It frequently remarks on Poe’s love for Virginia Clemm, and their relationship is that of lovers, despite biographers disagreeing on the nature of their relationship (Magistrale 7). Poe confesses his undying love for her and kisses her until she is dead (1:03:10). This is one of the factors that lead to Poe’s demise, and the film shows this as not even two minutes from Virginia’s death it shows Poe’s subsequent demise. Melancholy is ever-present as each film invokes it through the death of a young woman, whether or not they are recognisable as historical characters or are confined to their only role; a dying young woman.

The Loves of Edgar Allan Poe sets itself further apart from the other two biopics as the Poe-character does not literally experience the narrative of “The Raven.” Instead, the film lives up to his title and chooses to focus solely on women as the source of Poe’s inspiration. In addition to the inclusion of “The Raven,” the Poe-character narrates two of his other works before his death, namely the poems “Annabel Lee” and “A Dream within a Dream.” “Annabel Lee” was published posthumously, whereas “A Dream Within a Dream” was published just months before Poe’s death. Combined with the previous scenes of Poe’s demise, which invokes the “popular but unsubstantiated” theory that Poe was the victim of a common form of voter fraud at the time called ‘cooping’ (Peeples, “Poe’s Image” 174), the quotation is detached from the famous poem. It is after Poe’s incoherent rambling about his dead wife that he cites the famous lines “all that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream” (01:05:53). The film does not touch upon Poe’s writing or publication of the poem. Instead, by omitting this connection to the historical author, the Poe-character becomes the speaker of the text. Similarly, “Annabel Lee” is quoted seconds after Virginia’s death when Poe solemnly opens a window, reminiscent of the speaker of “The Raven” who “flung the

shutter” of his window lattice. Poe does not speak, but his voice-over narrates “we loved with a love that was more than love” (01:04:00), simultaneously creating distance and intertwinement of the Poe-character and the Poe-author. The distance is only superficial, as Poe composing or pronouncing the lines is omitted, but the intertwinement is effective in two ways. For an audience unfamiliar with the poem, the romantic quotation merely adds to the tragedy of a lamenting lover, but those who recognise the poem understand the implication that Poe was inspired by his wife’s death, at least in the film. Either way, it shows a conflation of the Poe-character with his works.

It is important to note that these films predate the poststructuralist movement questioning the God-like status of the author figure over his own work and the biographical interpretation of literature. The conflation of Poe’s biography with his works can be seen as the result of this biographical interpretation, as the Poe-character represents the historical Poe while he is connected to his own most famous poem. Furthermore, the fact that this conflation exists and the extent to which it does, literally casting Poe as the main character of his own poem in the first two biopics, shows how the author-function is translated into the author-character. As the author’s name is the “equivalent of a description” (Foucault 12), these early Poe-characters exhibit this description by intertwining the author-figure with his most famous poetry and context. These biopics show the tendency of reading an author’s biography into his work by paradoxically writing the works into the author’s life. The films are set in the appropriate time and place of Poe’s life, the characters are all based on real people, and most events shown are either true or could be true. The biographical nature of the films attempt to remain truthful to some extent to the historical facts, but the dramatisation of the events and the fusion of Poe’s life with his works reveal the films’ implicit goal: entwining the author’s public image and his name with his stories.

Chapter 2: Poe's Tell-Tale Death

The portrayals of Poe after Barthes proclaimed the “Death of the Author” no longer write the author’s works into his biography, but rather write his fiction into his name. While the older biopics present (a part of) Poe's biography, the adaptations discussed here present an original story starring the author. Though some films claim a place within the author’s life, the plot always strays too far into fiction to be considered an actual biography. The hybridity of genres of biopics (Robinson 105) becomes especially clear in these depictions, as each film takes a different approach to the portrayal of the author-character. Still, all of the films include original characters and/or events that have no historical evidence, nor does the narrative focus on the historical Poe’s factual biography. Furthermore, it has to be noted that between the previous biopics and the 1974 film, there were eleven popular adaptations of Poe’s stories, nicknamed the ‘Poe-Cycle’, starring the well-known horror actor Vincent Price. While Poe’s fiction had been previously adapted, it was not until the Poe-Cycle films that Poe’s identity became that of a horror icon (Perry 133) as they achieved a “semi-cult status” (Neimeyer 218). Notably, it was only the prose stories that were adapted, which gave the following ‘biopics’ a larger body of fiction to connect to the Poe-character, whereas the older biopics mainly took inspiration from Poe’s most well-known work “The Raven.” The Poe-Cycle films revived the interest in Poe’s fiction while also embracing “unfaithful adaptation” in translating the stories onto screen (Neimeyer 218). Additionally, Poe's name was used for the marketing of the films (Ormrod 147) (see fig. 3). This promotion of Poe’s name not only effectively merged Poe’s name with his Gothic tales and horror-tropes of the Poe-Cycle films in addition to his poetry (Peeples, “Poe’s Image” 181), but also “sets up [audience] expectations” (Ormrod 146). The use of Poe’s name in future depictions then builds on these expectations of the horror genre. Van Leeuwen notes how Poe in

contemporary culture holds the reputation of the “master of horror” and how this has been “enhanced by the film industry” (43). The Poe-characters discussed in this chapter will be surrounded by horror elements as the stories leave a biographical narrative behind in favour of portraying the author as the embodiment of his own writings.

Unlike the biopics within the previous chapter, these adaptations each have their own distinct genre and background. *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974) was a low-budget and aesthetically “terrible film” that was “an outrageous conflation of the author’s life and work” (Van Leeuwen 54). Set in the 1830s, it claims to depict an episode of the historical Poe’s life that inspired some of his most famous horror stories. This entirely fictional plot only proved “how obsessed American popular culture had become with explaining the mysteries of Poe’s life through his writings” (55). Contrastively, *The Death of Poe* (2006) is an independent film by Poe-fan and director Mark Redfield, which was only shown on film-festivals before being digitised on DVD. It was “it was not intended to be a biography” (Redfield, *Making of* 16:13) and depicts Poe as a ghost witnessing his own final days. Mostly in black-and-white with few colour-sequences, the film is a hallucinatory and dreamlike chronicle of the days leading to Poe’s demise. Then, *The Raven* (2012) is a historical horror film with high profile actors, so is Poe played by John Cusack, and targeted to the general public. It is a fictional narrative where a serial killer, whose murders mimic the crime scenes of Poe’s stories, taunts Poe by kidnapping his love-interest. To release her, Poe must write stories about the investigation and propose an ending the killer will accept, ultimately writing his own death. And lastly, *Edgar Allan Poe’s Murder Mystery Party* (2016), or *Poe Party* for short, is a comedic *YouTube*-series created by the independent production company Shipwrecked Comedy, crowdfunded by fans and aimed at the internet audience. The company advertises their content as “Vaguely Historical. Loosely Literary. Stupidly Smart” and the *Poe Party* shows this by gathering authors from different periods, including Charlotte Brontë and Ernest

Hemingway, for a murder mystery dinner party. However, it soon turns into a real murder, and the authors are forced to work together to find the culprit, all the while making literary jokes. Despite these diverging genres, target audiences, and budgets, each of these depictions shows how the Poe-character is characterised through his works.

“What drove him down a bizarre world of madness and murder?” asks the film poster of *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974). This film is the first adaptation following the Barthes’ essay and the Poe-Cycle films. In answering the poster’s question, it detaches itself from Poe’s factual biography while creating a setting for the Poe-character that resembles the author’s historical context. The film intertwines the Poe-character with the author-function by writing the author-figure into a fictional narrative where he experiences elements from his famous stories. The film opens with Lenore from “The Raven” being buried alive, a reference to “A Premature Burial,” she is declared insane after this experience. The plot takes Poe to a strange asylum where the doctors are hiding something, loosely calling upon “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether.” Then, the Poe-character is put into a position similar to that of the narrator of “The Pit and the Pendulum” who was tortured by the Church’s Inquisition, and Poe later shares his knowledge on the Inquisition’s torture methods (1:04:03) (see fig. 4). The Poe-character is positioned in a dark pit with his arms and legs bound as vermin crawl around him. However, unlike “The Pit and the Pendulum” in which rats surround the narrator and there is the threat of a blade-pendulum, *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974) uses snakes and the blade-pendulum is absent. Each of these elements implicitly inspires the respective stories, and it is the first example of the Poe-character being connected

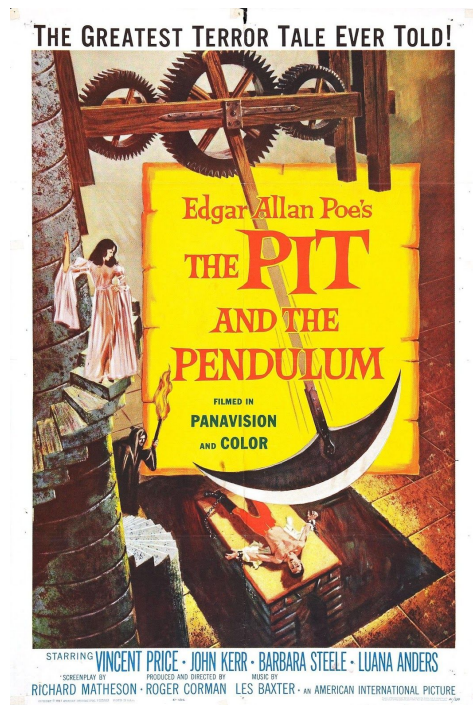


Fig. 3. Movie Poster. *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Directed by Roger Corman. Illustration by Reynold Brown. 1961.



Fig. 4. Screenshot from *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974) (0:44:10).

to these well-known horror tropes. Furthermore, the film itself remarks that Poe is an “unusual writer, genius of macabre” (0:21:36), establishing what the name Poe should invoke to the audience and then cementing this “macabre” to the Poe-character as he experiences the horrors of his own stories. However, unlike the older biopics which connected the historical Poe to the Poe-author through his poetry, this Poe-character is only connected to his historical source through vague biographical references. This is especially evident in the ending, as the Poe-character’s best friend comments how the events would inspire Poe’s future works: “All his works thereafter would reflect these morbid, dark aspects of life” (1:20:04). This obvious falsity shows that the interest in the story behind the story is not concerned with facts, but rather wishes for a “biographical replica” (Fokkema 42) of the author’s fiction. Although the notion of the biographical replica is already seen in the earlier biopics, as they connected the deaths of Poe’s lovers to the themes of his poetry, *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974) is

the first Poe-character that is not obviously connected to his historical counterpart. The film is the first “biographical fantasy” (van Leeuwen 55), showing how Poe’s name starts to separate itself from the historical writer while entwining itself with the author- and celebrity-function.

The historical writer still provides some inspiration for entwining his name with his writings, as is shown by *The Death of Poe* (2006) and *The Raven* (2012). In contrast to the events in *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974), which supposedly predated Poe’s stories, these films give an account of Poe’s mysterious final days, though both take a different approach. *The Death of Poe* (2006) reflects on Poe’s literary afterlife while creating a dreamlike narrative surrounding the biographical plot, whereas *The Raven* (2012) gives a fictional account of Poe’s final days surrounded by references to the biography in the opening scene and Poe’s last words. Both films conflate the author with his works, placing the author as a character in a life-story resembling his fiction. *The Death of Poe* (2006) opens with a famous citation from one of Poe’s poems: “is all that we see or seem, but a dream within a dream?” This sets the film’s premise: A dreamlike sequence of the week before Poe’s death in which the dying Poe repeatedly appears as a ghost watching his final days. *The Raven* (2012) opens with announcing the historical Poe’s mysterious disappearance and reappearance, before cutting to an image of a raven flying away as the Poe-character sits in a daze. Similar to how the raven signalled future grief in the 1909 film, the bird signals the upcoming murders and Poe’s demise. These murders are direct translations from his stories (“The Murders of Rue Morgue,” “The Pit and the Pendulum,” “Masque of the Red Death,” “Mystery of Marie Roget,” “The Cask of Amontillado”), and the Poe character must work together with a detective to save his fictional love-interest Emily from being buried-alive (“A Premature Burial”). The Poe-character must appease the serial killer by writing an account of these murders, and eventually proposes to give his life for Emily’s. In return, the killer gives

him the clue to where she was hidden through a reference to “The Tell-Tale Heart.” *The Raven*’s (2012) Poe reflects on the conflation notes that he feels “like I’ve gone from author to character in one of my tales” (0:46:52). For *The Death of Poe* (2006), the only literal reference to Poe’s fiction is “A Premature Burial” as the Poe-character is shown to be buried alive, but his characterisation mostly resembles the author’s mad narrators as he too “follows a self-destructive path” (McCoppin 106) and is repeatedly shown in situations that damaged his posthumous reputation. In both films, Poe’s writings have shaped his characterisation. His imagined final days are filled with elements from his fictions, conflating Poe’s mysterious death with the horrors of his writings.

These two films show a self-awareness of the Poe-character’s fictionality and its portrayal of the Poe-myth, where the older biopics suggested their portrayal presented ‘the real Poe’. *The Raven* (2012) introduces the Poe-character through a Poe/poor pun (“I am a nationally lauded poet!” “That’s why you ain’t got no money.” “I’m Poe.” “That’s what I said.” (00:07:21)) and remarking he is the author of the infamous “The Raven.” This Poe-character is the epitome of the Poe-myth, an alcoholic and debt ridden poet, and only shifts to a “selfless detective-hero” once this popular image has been established for the audience (Peeples, “Poe’s Image” 180). Furthermore, historical accuracy is nearly completely absent; even the reference to the historical Poe’s repeatedly calling for ‘Reynolds’ on his deathbed originates from unreliable sources (Peeples, “Afterword” 158). This only shows how the film is not concerned with depicting a truthful image of the historical writer (Neimeyer 210), and instead twists the narrative to tell Poe’s biography as if it is one of his own horror stories, much like how the older biopics altered the narrative to portray Poe’s loves as the inspiration for his poems. In a way, *The Raven* (2012) is a metafictional comment on how the author-figure is haunted by his own stories in popular culture, as the serial killer taunts and challenges the Poe-character with the murders he designed. Similarly, *The Death*

of Poe (2006) metafictionally shows to the Poe-character himself how Poe's reputation as an alcoholic, despite his recent sobriety, affected his posthumous public image. For a long time, Poe's literary afterlife was predominantly influenced by Griswold's biography, which conflated him with his writings while simultaneously portraying him as a drunken madman. The voice-over tells the Poe-character, who regards his own corpse in an out-of-body experience, "in death you will see in this image which is your own how utterly you have murdered yourself" (1:16:33) as the sound of heartbeat sounds in the background. The sound connects the Poe-character to the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" who is haunted by the thumping of a heart, his undoing. Here, the Poe-myth started by Griswold haunted the Poe-character; a disrespected writer whose premature death was due to alcoholism. This Poe-character is aware of the simplification but powerless to correct it. The film's final scene shows Griswold writing Poe's biography while the Poe-character is buried alive. Where *The Raven's* (2012) Poe indulges in the Poe-myth, *The Death of Poe's* (2006) Poe helplessly watches his defamation.

The Poe-character is completely detached from the historical Poe in *Edgar Allan Poe's Murder Mystery Dinner Party, Poe Party* (2016) for short. *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974) gave a fictional account of the inspiration of some of Poe's famous works, and *The Death of Poe* (2006) and *The Raven* (2012) depict the Poe-character in a fictional account of his final days. Contrastively, the *Poe Party* (2016) creates a new universe in which the Poe-character's only affiliation with the historical Poe is his moustache, which is also tied to Poe's pop-culture image. This Poe-character is solely the embodiment of his writings and truly follows the idea that "the author's art [is] a direct projection of his personality" (van Leeuwen 55). He is a caricature-Poe formed from the author-function, representing the general associations of Poe's writings (horror, detective, dark romance) through his script, and the historical period through his fashion. Poe and the invited authors become stuck in a

mansion with a murderer who is killing the authors one by one in “ways that are relevant to [their] artistic output” (“Ch.7: Mesmeric Revelation” 04:11). As many of the author’s stories are about death or murderers, the Poe-character becomes a major suspect. The Poe-character performs this reputation by “naturally” having a cellar “suitable for storing dead bodies in” (“Ch. 3: The Purloined Letter” 03:19-03:26) and giving an incriminating speech describing his perfect murder:

If I had wanted to kill Eddie, I wouldn’t have done it in a crowded room full of potential witnesses that I invited. I would have been far more inconspicuous, perhaps learning a foreign language to throw anyone off within earshot, Mandarin, probably. Then I would have followed him home from work at the bank on Tuesday because he uses the back entrance off of Pratt Street. Then, to further confound authorities, I would have planted something inscrutable, like the feather of Brazillian peacock or the rind of a fruit grown only in Papua New Guinea, at which point I... I would... I mean that was just one idea I had. (“Ch. 4: A Descent Into the Maelström” 01:23)

Additionally, the Poe-character’s companion is Lenore, and his love-interest is Annabel Lee, both brought to life from their respective poems. Notably, like his predecessors, this Poe-character is still a “bereaved lover” after Annabel Lee is killed, but unlike the older biopics in which Poe grieves his wife, this Poe-character grieves his own creation. Essentially, his characterisation is solely through themes of his writings and his characters, while his appearance stems from the celebrity-function.

Three of Poe’s stories are repeatedly included in these adaptations, each functioning to characterise the author-character; “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “A Premature Burial” for their terror-inducing essence, and the heartbeat from “The Tell-Tale Heart” which is repeatedly connected to the Poe-character’s final scenes. The titles of “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “A Premature Burial” are descriptive of their content and invoke a horrific

image which is recognisable and easily adaptable. As such, these horror-tropes appear across the adaptations, though for different purposes. For *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974), this horror imagery serves as a source of inspiration for the Poe-character. Similarly, for *The Raven* (2012), they serve as murder methods that the Poe-character has to solve, much like his famous detective character Auguste Dupin. Both films conflate the author-character with his writings while simultaneously putting him into the role of his narrators. *The Death of Poe* (2006) includes references to “A Premature Burial,” which serves as a metafictional comment on Poe’s literary afterlife, which is supported by the heartbeat from “The Tell-Tale Heart” implying that Poe caused his damaging posthumous reputation. In *The Raven* (2012), “The Tell-Tale Heart” serves as the clue for Poe’s lover’s location and is essentially a metafictional comment on how his own creations haunt the author-figure. In the *Poe-Party*, as the murderer reveals himself, he says: “You fancy me mad. 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” (“Ch. 11: The Tell-Tale Heart” 02:33), which are lines from “The Tell-Tale Heart” (Poe 166), which the killer then announces Poe will use in “another tale of woe” (04:47). The Poe-character later kills the murderer in self-defence and hides the body underneath the floorboards. As Poe gives his statement to the police, he hears a heartbeat coming from a loose plank, effectively placing the author-character into the role of the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” (“Ch. 11: The Tell-Tale Heart”). These stories show their function in the Poe-character’s life, and subsequently, his authorial role in the public image, as the stories take the foreground over biography. The author-figure has been denounced and removed from textual interpretation, but the works are returned to the author-figure.

These films focus either on only Poe’s final days (*The Death of Poe* (2006)), display a new fictional story starring Poe (*The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974), *Edgar Allan Poe’s*

Murder Mystery Dinner Party (2016)), or a combination of the two (*The Raven* (2012)), each creating a narrative that “sounds like an Edgar Allan Poe story” (Ch. 9 The Sleeper” 07:55). These films show a continuing increasing distance between the Poe-character and the historical Poe. *The Spectre of Edgar Allan Poe* (1974) conflates the author-character with his horror stories in a fictional plot while pretending to hold a place in the historical Poe’s biography. *The Death of Poe* (2006) and *The Raven* (2012) are aware of how the Poe-myth has shaped Poe’s popular persona, and neither offers a reflection of the actual historical Poe. Instead, they indulge in the Poe-myth and create a surrounding narrative in the (psychological) horror genre of a misunderstood author who inadvertently causes his own death and posthumous Poe-myth. *Edgar Allan Poe’s Murder Mystery Dinner Party* (2016) portrays the live iconic image of Poe, completely separated from the historical person and is characterised solely by the themes of his works. Like the older biopics, these Poe-characters step into the author-function as the “equivalent of a description” (Foucault 12) by combining themes and imagery from his work and placing them in a narrative about the Poe-character. However, unlike the older biopics, the Poe-character no longer represents the historical author, only resembling his looks and historical setting as part of the author-function, but instead becomes the embodiment of his works and the Poe-myth born from the celebrity-function. Notably, these Poe-characters are solely shaped by murder, mystery, and tragic romances, despite the diversity of themes in his “extensive oeuvre” including “satirical and humorous pieces ... along with dense philosophical treatises” (De Oliveira and Indrusiak 165), as only these are perpetuated by popular culture. Where the older biopics take greater inspiration from Poe’s biography, these newer depictions take more inspiration from Poe’s celebrity-function and fiction.

Conclusion: Poe's Premature Burial

Edgar Allan Poe's biography has been conflated with his writings since the beginning of his literary afterlife, but this conflation changed with Barthes' denunciation of the biographical interpretation of literature. As the role of the author changed, so did the author-character. The early biopics portrayed Poe's biography following the idea that an author's writings are reflections of himself by connecting the Poe-character to his poetry. As Poe's name grew, he was no longer mainly famous for his poems, but also his macabre tales of mystery and imagination. After a resurgence in popularity in his horror fiction through the Poe-Cycle films of the 1960s, the Poe-character demonstrated a conflation with these stories in addition to his poetry. This change coincides with Barthes' proclaimed "Death of the Author" (1967). As authorial interpretations left the academic stage, another function was needed for the Poe-character to reconcile "high and mass culture" (Oliveira and Indrusiak 68). Instead of telling biographical narratives, the Poe-character became the star of fictional plots resembling his role in popular culture as a "master of horror" (Van Leeuwen 43). The playful *YouTube* depiction is the epitome of what the Poe-character has become; an entity wholly detached from its historical counterpart, solely consisting of the most dominant associations that the author's name holds. Essentially, the Poe-character is the child of the author-function and celebrity-function, conflating the author's writings with his public image into a new entity. The stories featuring the author-character become part of the author-function as Poe's name now invokes associations of morbid imagery and narratives while perpetuating Poe's iconic image. The Poe-character has developed from a biographical representative to a simplification. The author-function only carries minimal associations with the historical author and the popular themes of his writings, which the author-character embodies.

Though the historical author is dead, his literary celebrity was buried alive. Poe's public afterlife has been altered from its first biography onwards, conflating the author with his works, and popular culture indulges in this; moving from a biographical replica of the author's stories to a biographical fantasy, as the historical author became less important but there was still a wish for an author-figure. The Poe-character fills the space between historical Poe and his author- and celebrity-function, representing or merely resembling the historical predecessor while merging his name with the main themes of his works. In postmodern terms, the Poe-character has become what Baudrillard calls "hyperreal:" a "generation" of simulacra of a real (2) that detaches itself further from their origin with each new generation (5), until the Poe-characters no longer refer to the historical Edgar Allan Poe, but to the other simulacra presented by popular culture. What is left is a Poe-figure that solely embodies his pop-culture icon and his popular works.

Notably, this thesis only explored one author and has neglected portrayals of the Poe-character as a minor-character and in off-screen adaptations. Still, the argument made in this thesis stands: The author-character becomes the representative for the author's body of works, whether that is as a misunderstood poet or detective author. Edgar Allan Poe has been necromanced from his death in the author-character, but the dead never return the same. The resurrected Poe-figure is merely a reflection of the soul of his writings; its main themes taken from out the shadow of his writings and the tragic and mysterious parts of his life, to haunt popular culture forevermore.

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