“Valdemar” and the “Frogpondians”:
The Aftermath of Poe’s Boston Lyceum Appearance

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In the lecture season of 1845–46, both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Edgar Allan Poe spoke before the Boston Lyceum. Less than two months apart, they spoke at the Odeon on Boston’s Federal Street, a converted theater with a seating capacity of 1,500. If advance publicity for their respective presentations—Poe in mid-October and Emerson in mid-December 1845—appears to have been enthusiastic, the Boston responses to their actual performances could not have been more markedly different. In praising Emerson’s course of lectures on “Representative Men,” the Boston Post announced a “rush of transcendentalism toward . . . general and assimilated discourse on men and things.” The Post further expressed confidence that the city had survived its outbreak of “poe-etical cholera,” a pun on Poe’s name testifying to the lasting and corrosive impact of his reading of “Al Aaraaf” in October (“Lyceum Lectures,” Boston Post, 23 December 1845, p. 1).

The annual report of the lyceum, highlighting Emerson’s contributions, was no less invidious in its comparison of the two authors: “The great feature of the Course was Mr. Emerson’s lectures on Representative Men. The lectures have been pronounced the most remarkable and eloquent that have ever been given in this city.” The Board of the Lyceum, having invited Poe on “the strength of his literary reputation,” expressed shocked surprise at “his personal habits” and “eccentricities” of character. As for the aftermath of his appearance, “his subsequent abuse of our city and its institutions shows him to be an
unprincipled man, while the venom which he ejected against us, only defiled himself."

The lyceum season of 1845–46 was replete with ironies, intended, concealed, and unintentional, not the least of which was the attendance of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a recent target of Poe's attacks, at several of Emerson's lectures. An inveterate follower of Emerson's lectures, Longfellow even loaned his friend a number of volumes from his Shakespeare Society collection, which allowed the lecturer to polish what turned out to be the sixth presentation in his series. Friendly to Emerson but wary of the mantle of Transcendentalist prophet, Longfellow was able to distinguish matter from manner. Cool to the content of the "Representative Men" series, Longfellow remained captivated by Emerson's "beautiful voice" and the "melody of language" contained in the lectures. Longfellow's response was typical of many antebellum audience members, delighted with Emerson's manner of delivery even when unable to remember or even follow central points of address. Emerson's success on the platform had less to do with physical gesture or emotional coloration, both of which he apparently downplayed, in favor of vocal modulation. His non-adversarial way of lecturing seemed to underscore a sincerity of character to which many audiences responded enthusiastically.

Poe, whose earliest public lecture was in 1843, may have confounded this brand of New England eloquence with a high moral tone, his object of attack at the Boston Lyceum. Adopting the posture of cultural adversary, he prefaced his recitation of "Al Aaraaf" with remarks against didactic literature. Some Boston editors expressed impatience with this position on didactic verse, the usual poetic fare for recitations on the lyceum circuit. Despite following "Al Aaraaf" with an apparently successful rendering of "The Raven," Poe was chided not only for his assertive judgment but also for his weak delivery, thus making him a convenient foil for the more experienced Emerson. The generally sympathetic Thomas Wentworth Higginson, then a student

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at Harvard, recalled that when introduced, Poe "stood with a sort of shrinking before the audience and then began in a thin, tremulous, hardly musical voice, an apology for his poem, and a depreciation of the expected criticism of a Boston audience; reiterating this in a sort of persistent, querulous way, which . . . impressed me at the time as nauseous flattery." Another observer, less attentive to Poe's vocal qualities, also found his physical demeanor "modest" and "unassuming," in sharp contrast to the substance of his pre forensic remarks, which were characterized as "very learned, very transcendental, very mystic, very pompous." The adjective "transcendental," here a term of opprobrium, was thus used as a rhetorical weapon against one of the sharpest critics of New England Transcendentalism.

The responses to the two figures were so radically dissimilar that it would appear fruitless to compare further their respective presentations. The subject of Emerson's third lecture, however, was "Swedenborg, or the Mystic." The recent dedication of the Church of the New Jerusalem had made the choice of a Swedenborgian topic timely. Swedenborg's writings were being newly edited or translated; in fact, on 1 November 1845, Poe noticed the first two volumes of the Swedenborg Library, edited by the Rev. George Bush, in the Broadway Journal. By 1845 Swedenborg's works posed new challenges to Unitarians, Fourierists, Transcendentalists, and Mesmerists. Emerson remained a pronounced skeptic on the subjects of animal magnetism and mesmerism, and in his lecture he made the reproachful claim: "The universe in his [Swedenborg's] poem suffers under a magnetic sleep, and only reflects the mind of the magnetizer." Sustaining his critique of a Swedenborgian vision that denied the universe its inherent vitality, the lecturer stated: "All his figures speak one speech. All his interlocutors Swedenborgize" (CW 4: 75). With his metaphor of the universe stifled into a kind of trance-like paralysis with all vocal expression subject to the will of an all-powerful magnetizer, Emerson found Swedenborg wanting on a number of scores. The lecture reflected a fascination with Swedenborg's scientific works—indeed his appetite for these early writings exceeded that for the later theological works—but his enthusiasm evaporated quickly on the pseudoscience of mesmerism. Due to

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Swedeborg’s excessive moralism, Emerson concluded, “There is no beauty, no heaven: for angels, goblins. The sad muse loves night and death and the pit. His inferno is mesmeric” (CW 4: 79). Emerson’s nightside vision of goblins, death, hell, and the pit might seem more typical of Poe, who railed against transcendental “mysticism” and the obscurity of expression it fostered. Poe also associated Swedenborgianism and mesmerism with other social fads and fascinations that beguiled what he called the “Humanity clique,” the Party of Progress in Boston.7 Nevertheless, Poe turned to mesmerism once again in the fall and winter of 1845 when Emerson was offering his course of lectures. If he had seemed singularly unprepared for the caustic reception he endured for reading “Al Aaraaf” in October, he quickly and resourcefully drafted “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” in a game of literary and political advantage that became his final assault on the “Frogpond” in 1845.

This ultimate skirmish with the “Frogpond,” his dismissive term for Boston, has escaped scholarly attention, though it provides a rare intersection of the careers of Poe and Emerson. For all the attention lavished on the genesis of Emerson’s published works—their transformation from journals to notebooks, lectures, and polished essays—there has been much less focus on Poe’s writings within such an evolutionary or historical framework. Of particular interest is a clever parody of Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” a story that attracted considerable attention in the Boston press. Just as Emerson’s “Brahma” and his obscure writings offered grist for the parodist’s mill in the 1830s and 1840s,8 Poe’s works in a number of genres became the target of imitators in 1845. In the wake of the “little Longfellow War” over plagiarism early in 1845, his notorious lyceum appearance, publication at other times during the year of both his Tales and The Raven and Other Poems, and reprints and parodies of other works in the local newspapers,9 “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” became fodder for the Frogpondians late in 1845.

Of course, "The Raven," rather than Poe's fiction, provided the primary stimulus for imitators and parodists, as was the case when the Boston Post reprinted the poem ("Poetry," 17 February 1845, p. 1). As Burton R. Pollin has shown, two subjects seemed to intrigue parodists of "The Raven": animals and inebriation. Both were in evidence when, only ten days later, the Post reprinted "The Owl" by "Sarles," "A Capital Parody of Poe's Raven" and perhaps the most clever imitation of its kind published during Poe's lifetime ("Poetry," 27 February 1845, p. 1).¹⁰ The pseudonymous author has his midnight dreary (and his sleep) interrupted, but is the interruption caused by the snoring of a fellow lodger or by a winking owl?

Much I marvelled this ungainly bird to hear discourse so plainly,
Though 'tis true his answer sounded very like my neighbor's snore;
And I couldn't help a-thinking, as I saw the creature winking,
That no human being ever yet had been seen above his door—
Tell me now, Sir Owl, your business and your name, or there's the door—
Quoth the owl then, "nevermore."

But the owl he looked so lonely, saying that word and that only,
That a thimble-full of whiskey I did speedily outpour
In a tea-cup on the table, which, as well as I was able,
I invited him to drink of, saying there was plenty more—
But the owl he shook his head, and threw the whisky on the floor,
Plainly saying, "Nevermore."

"What? a temperance owl, by thunder! Well, indeed 'tis no great wonder;—
He has doubtless just come from out the 'Tabernacle' door,

Where he’s heard a temperance lecture, and has seen a fearful picture
Of the consequence of running up a whisky-toddy score—
Of the evils wrought by sixpence worth inside the pot-house door—
This it is, and nothing more.

Or this word so full of meaning is perhaps his only gleaning
In the field of human lore—doubtless his only stock and store,
Taught him by some drunken master, who by bailiffs and disaster
Aye was followed fast and faster, while his friends he did adjure,
Left him and forevermore."

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"Prophet," said I, "who the devil sent you here to warn of evil?
Feathered prophet! I must ask you still a single question more;
Tell me now, and tell me truly, and I will reward you duly,
Will that individual in the next room never cease to snore?
Will he never cease that ghostly, guttural, and unearthly snore?"
Quoth the owl still, "Nevermore!"

On 6 October 1845, in anticipation of Poe’s appearance before the Boston Lyceum, the Post published “Chinese Music and Poetry,” an article that exploited current local interest in Oriental lore. The author, "Yankee Doodle," used as a butt of humor "Professor Le Kaw-Hing." Apparently a Chinese musician and savan who entertained curious Bostonians at the city’s popular Chinese Museum, the professor serenades his audiences with the “midnight music” of his voice, described in the following terms:

Soon the cry began to languish, melting into plaintive anguish,
Like the lyre Aeolian, lulling to a tender, slender tone;
Then as if some brute were boiling, or on red hot gridirons broiling,
Or some fond mamas were spoiling (just because they were their own)
Half a hundred blubbering babies (just because they were their own)—
Such the sounds I heard alone.

Then there came a spitting, sputtering, stifled stammering and stuttering—
Then a shriek so shrill and piercing that it cut me to the bone,
Like the death cry of a lonely, lost and loveless being only—
Like that awful death cry only, sinking to a gasping groan;
Then the silence fell, as falling floating feather downward prose,
And once more I seemed alone.

With a facetious nod to the Poe-Longfellow War, Yankee Doodle chides Longfellow for not providing a translation of Professor Le-Kaw-Hing's verses. Such negligence, the "Raven" parodist implies, makes a range of English and American poets, who consciously or unwittingly relied on the Chinese master's work, vulnerable to the charge of plagiarism. Yankee Doodle concludes his column: "We advise Mr. Poe to search . . . for plagiarisms of a similar character."

Yankee Doodle introduces another parody, a piece on the issue of temperance, thus implicitly keeping before his reader's attention Poe's reputed partiality for alcohol. As the most assiduous compiler of parodies in the nineteenth century noted, an easy transition could be made from Poe's alleged fondness for spirits to his interest in spiritual manifestations. The latter interest reflected itself in a series of tales that dealt with mesmerism and related subjects: phrenology and animal magnetism. The most notorious of these tales was, of course, his grisly masterpiece, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar."

As students of Poe have long known, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" caused quite a popular sensation in the British press, a surge of controversy over the authenticity of his description of a figure whose death was supposedly arrested by mesmeric influence. Before the tale captured British attention, however, the mesmerist Robert H. Collyer apparently wrote to Poe from Boston, a letter dated 16 December and published in the *Broadway Journal* on 27 December 1845:

Your account of M. Valdemar's case has been universally copied in this city, and has created quite a sensation. It requires from me no apology, in stating, that I have not the least doubt of the possibility of such a phenomenon; for, I did actually restore to active animation a person who died from excessive drinking of ardent spirits. He was placed in his coffin ready for interment. . . . I will give you the detailed account on your reply to this, which I require for publication, in order to put at rest the growing impression that your account is merely a splendid creation of your own brain, not having any truth in fact. My dear sir, I have battled the storm of public derision too long on the subject of Mesmerism, to be now found in the rear ranks—though I

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If we except the official report of the Boston Lyceum, the letter appears to be the culminating statement on Poe’s appearance in Boston in 1845. The claim that Poe’s tale was widely copied, however, suggests that a work on mesmerism might have found a receptive, if not wholly uncritical, audience in Boston during that year. Poe, in fact, inscribed into the opening paragraphs of “Valdemar” his narrator’s acknowledgment that his attention had been drawn to the science for the past three years, a time frame consistent with Poe’s publication of other pseudoscientific tales (“A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” and “Mesmeric Revelation”) as well as a period of intense popular interest in mesmerism concentrated in Boston. “Valdemar” fulfills the theorist Roland Barthes’ claim that Poe’s mesmeric stories can be situated at a “summit of . . . scientific illusion,”\footnote{Roland Barthes, “Textual Analysis of A Tale by Poe,” trans. Donald G. Marshall, Poe Studies 10 (1977): 6. Tracy Ware, in “The ‘Salutary Comfort’ in the Case of M. Valdemar,” Studies in Short Fiction 31 (1994): 471–80, draws on Barthes’ reading. I encountered Ware’s rich essay after delivering a version of this paper at the Conference of the American Literature Association, San Diego, May 1992.} a time when seers and charlatans, respectable lecturers and itinerant humbugs, paraded throughout New England with lectures, promises, theories, and demonstrations about magnetic forces that shaped the lives of individuals as well as the entire universe. It was difficult to distinguish mesmerism from the disparate mixture of reform movements, fads, and obsessions, as Emerson himself noted in his lecture on “New England Reformers” given in Boston’s Amory Hall in 1844. The witty “harvest of reforms” that spiced the opening of that lecture was an assembly of eccentricities, ranging from subsistence farming to dietary reform. Special scorn was reserved for homeopathy, hydrotherapy, phrenology, neurology, and mesmerism, which seemed to offer mankind false promises in the guise of potential
miracles. One scholar has speculated that one target of Emerson was Joseph Rhodes Buchanan (1814–1899), a physician and writer who also spoke in Boston in 1844. He presented one of his favorite lecture topics, “The Pursuit of Truth.” This title masked its focus on “Neurology,” a mixture of phrenology and mesmerism that paralleled the theories of “phren-o-magnetism” popularized in the early 1840s by Robert H. Collyer, Poe’s Boston correspondent on “Valdemar.”

### III

The fullest response to Poe’s tale in the Boston press was a substantial parody of “Valdemar” in the Boston Daily Mail, which anticipates other prose parodies of Poe like Grace Greenwood’s “A Tale of Horror by E. A. P.” The parody in the Daily Mail, which followed several reprints of “Valdemar,” also alerts us to the reception of Poe’s mesmeric hoax by Boston audiences almost immediately after his October appearance at the Lyceum.

The two events—his reading of “Al Aaraaf” and his publication of “Valdemar”—were apparently connected in Poe’s mind, as suggested by his word choice in his combative self-justification for his lyceum appearance: “The facts of the case seem to be these” (Writings 3: 298). Using similar diction (“The fact is”), he further claims to have recited the poem “verbatim” from a previously published volume, thus echoing the tale in which Valdemar’s approaching dissolution is recorded from notes and memoranda “condensed or copied verbatim” (Works 3: 1,236). For his lyceum appearance, Poe seemed to offer justification by recourse to a previously written text; with “Valdemar,” a design of deceptive written words, the apparent domain of the magnetizer, is offered until the text literally erupts via the tongue of M. Valdemar.

Indeed “Valdemar” is a text that exploits the relationship between speaking and writing, as two critics have previously suggested. That

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reciprocal relationship, however, takes on greater significance if the tale’s context is the aftermath of Poe’s appearance before the Boston Lyceum, a social system which offered ample opportunities for presentation and reception of spoken and published discourse. In the apt phrasing of Roland Barthes, the aftermath of Poe’s lyceum appearance becomes “a staging of a speech” (9) in which he develops a carefully crafted scenario for his own presentation and reception. In the case of his lyceum appearance and the tale, Poe seemed to offer spoken and written texts that defied easy comprehension. If the Boston newspapers found “Al Aaraaf” above “comprehension,” its title “profoundly incomprehensible,” Poe developed in “Valdemar” a first-person narrator who records purported facts “as far as I comprehend them myself” (Works 3: 1,233), who confesses fear “that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended” (Works 3: 1,240). Fresh from a public speaking fiasco in which Poe felt that the record of his conduct had been falsified in the press, Poe inscribes into the opening paragraphs of “Valdemar” an atmosphere of “excited discussion” in which “unpleasant misrepresentations” have fostered a “great deal of disbelief” (Works 3: 1,233). In dismissing Poe’s claim that his reading of “Al Aaraaf” was a hoax, the 4 November Boston Star, p. 2, commented: “The poem speaks for itself, and requires no one to speak for it.” With newspaper reports of his lyceum debacle fresh in his mind, Poe said of “Valdemar,” as he reprinted the tale in the Broadway Journal: “We leave it to speak for itself” (Writings 3: 342).

If the lyceum appearance functioned as a kind of pre-text for “Valdemar,” one should detect in the tale possible autobiographical or self-referential elements. The mesmerist in the tale is Mr. P—, a mask for Poe himself. The first-person narrator, of course, describes his record of events as a kind of “conversation with myself” (Works 3: 1,236); indeed an expressed objective of mesmerism is “inward examination” (Works 3: 1,237). To the best of my knowledge, no one has identified Mr. L—I, apparently the neutral observer who takes notes and from whose memoranda P— relates the facts. In all likelihood, this figure is Poe’s playful version of James Russell Lowell, whose good offices Poe used to arrange his lyceum appearance. In Poe’s eyes Lowell was hardly

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18Boston and New York newspapers were fairly consistent in their characterization of the incomprehensible nature of “Al Aaraaf.” For reviews in the Transcript and other papers, see The Poe Log, pp. 581–85. On 13 December 1845, the New York Saturday Emporium inferred a connection between Poe’s lyceum appearance and his new tale in the American Review: “Mr. Poe, in article entitled ‘Facts of M. Valdemar’s Case,’ seems to have attained what he is generally striving after—the incomprehensible.”
a neutral observer, since only months before, the respected New England poet had written a flattering portrait of Poe for *Graham’s Magazine*. This literary portrait could be construed as an extended puff, since it was written at Poe’s invitation and derived from his *Saturday Museum* autobiography, a self-promotional document based on Poe’s own notes and memoranda and replete with romantic fabrications. At the end of 1845, Poe numbered Lowell among the distinguished contributors to the *Broadway Journal*, even referring to him as the “noblest of our poets” (*Writings* 3:274), the author of verses of “nerve and grace” (*Writings* 3: 352). Poe, moreover, wrote to Lowell in 1844 to explain the philosophy behind “Mesmeric Revelation,” perhaps expecting him to be receptive to such pseudoscientific fare,19 and asked his correspondent to place a reprint of that tale in a Boston periodical. There could even be a playful pun in the narrator’s “application of a mirror” to detect signs of life in the dying patient. Poe’s battle with Lowell’s predecessor at Harvard, Longfellow, was carried out in the pages of the New York *Evening Mirror*, a publication referred to in his new periodical, the *Broadway Journal* (*Writings* 3:340). The narrator confesses that the “mirror no longer afforded evidence of respiration” (*Works* 3: 1,239), an acknowledgment of imminent death. Twice in the tale the narrator professes to “speak freely” or “calmly” of “approaching dissolution” (*Works* 3:1,234, 1,236), and describes Valdemar as a “dying man” collecting his fading energies “to speak” (*Works* 3:1,238). Poe, who acknowledged in gallows humor fashion that “Al Aaraaf” offered a pretext for his own hanging, saw the aftermath of his speech as a period in which he was “being ridden to death by New England” (*Writings* 3: 312).

By appearing before the Boston Lyceum, Poe, knew, of course, that he was participating in a prestigious New England cultural institution. He must have been sensitive to the tradition of New England

oratory, embodied in figures like Emerson, who captivated listeners with their imposing speaking voices. If one persists in analyzing “Valdemar” analogically in relation to his lyceum appearance, the tale may mark Poe’s deliberate undermining of that celebrated oratorical tradition. The sound emanating from Valdemar does not originate in human consciousness, nor does it even derive from the motion of the patient’s jaws. Its “wonderfully, thrillingly distinct—syllabification” (Works 3:1,240) suggests a pure, original voice. According to one critic, Michael Williams, this distinct sound seems to augur a voice from the transcendental beyond. In challenging public misrepresentations about mesmerism, however, the narrator’s earnest endeavors to represent this voice fall flat (112). Poe, caricatured by at least one Boston newspaper as a “devil” among the literati, summons an unearthly voice of possibly infernal origin, that is, “from some deep cavern within the earth.” Applying a range of “epithets” to this “hideous,” “indescribable” sound, the narrator considers the voice “harsh, and broken and hollow” (Works 3:1,240).

In rebutting attacks on his demeanor before the lyceum, Poe challenged charges that his presentation was acerbic, disjointed, and empty.

To argue, on the basis of a series of puns, suggestions, and low level allusions, that Poe wrote “Valdemar” exclusively for a Boston audience would seem to invite a challenge; nevertheless, it seems clear that Poe had the Frogpondians in mind in composing the tale just as he did when he conceived his plan for reading “Al Aaraaf”—as he explained, to an audience of transcendentalists vulnerable to the perils of didacticism. A correspondent in the 13 November 1845 Boston Daily Star, p. 2, reminded the Bostonians that “Al Aaraaf” was indeed a juvenile poem written years ago. “Its resuscitation,” the correspondent noted, “might have caught the weasels of Boston napping.” In the 22 November Broadway Journal, Poe’s tone became jocular when he reviewed his lyceum experience. In purporting to look back—in the narrator’s words, in “retracing . . . steps” (Works 3:1,242)—he was clearly looking ahead. In a supple use of time that paralleled the flexible manipulations of tense in the tale, he anticipated the appearance of his tale of mesmeric “sleep-waking” in the December American Whig Review. The story presented a figure subjected to dramatic attempts to “resuscitate” his decomposing body:

Never was a ‘bobbery’ more delightful than that we have just succeeded in ‘kicking up’ all around about Boston Common. We never saw the Frog-Pond so lively in our lives. They seem absolutely upon the point of waking up. In about nine days the puppies may yet open their eyes.

That is they may open their eyes to certain facts which have been obvious to all the world except ourselves—the fact that there exist other cities than Boston—other men of letters than Professor Longfellow—other vehicles of literary information than the ‘Down East Review’. (Writings 3: 313)

IV

Poe’s claim of hoaxical intent for his reading of “Al Aaraaf” may indeed have been an after-the-fact rationalization for what turned out to be an embarrassing public failure. The hoax Poe concocted in the fall of 1845 was “Valdemar,” and the facetiously proposed “visit” to “Frogpondium” announced in the 25 November Broadway Journal, in all probability, was the imminent publication in that city of the tale. Whatever the case, there is little doubt that his Boston audience duplicated its response to his lyceum appearance in its response to the tale.

The Boston Courier reprinted the tale on 12 December, p. 1 (reprinted Boston Semi-Weekly Courier, p. 4) with the following caveat:

Mr. Edgar A. Poe, having, as he says, hoaxed the Bostonians (or the ‘Frog-Pondians’, to use his own phrase) seems to have undertaken to hoax the rest of the world—an easy task, perhaps he thinks, after he had consummated his intention upon Yankee credulity. The following article, from the last number of the American Review, shows that Mr. Poe is quite an accomplished hoaxer, though we presume that not many readers could be found with gullets of sufficient capacity to swallow the story.22

21 I incline toward Ottavio M. Casale’s view that one must distinguish Poe’s response to criticism after his reading of “Al Aaraaf” from his initial desire to present a serious philosophical poem to a Boston audience. Casale, in “The Battle of Boston: A Reevaluation of Poe’s Lyceum Appearance,” American Literature 45 (1973): 423–28, supplements his previous work on Poe’s complex attitudes toward Emersonian and other brands of Transcendentalism, conveniently synthesized in The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Modern Language Association), pp. 362–71. 22 The tale was also reprinted in the Boston Semi-Weekly Courier 15 December 1845, p. 4 and in the Weekly Courier 18 December 1845, p. 4. The Boston Daily Star, in “As We Expected” 3 January 1846, p. 2, commented: “The distinguished Mr. Edgar A. Poe, has ‘hoaxed’ himself out of the Broadway Journal. The man is a regular ‘hoax’, in all his parts, and never did, and probably
The 15 December *Boston Daily Mail*, p. 1, reprinted the story and commented under the heading “Extraordinary Case—Edgar A. Poe on Mesmerism—Human Credulity Taxed One Hundred Per Cent”:

In adjoining columns will be found a most remarkable statement of the wonders of Mesmerism, by Edgar A. Poe, whose poetic aspirations, or hallucinations, have recently made some stir, in the small way, among the literary savans of this most magnificent city. The statement of Mr. Poe is put forth as fact, and tacitly sanctioned by the highly respectable magazine in which it is published. The subject matter of the narrative has been much discussed in private circles in New-York, and created quite an under current of excitement in that city. We give it place as one of the remarkable matters of the day, with no endorsement upon the credibility of our readers than the consideration which their own good sense may please than to attach to it.

The 18 December *Daily Mail*, p. 2, the Boston paper that had given most extensive coverage to the cause of mesmerism and to Robert H. Collyer’s lectures on the subject, gave additional publicity to “The Mesmeric Wonder—the case of M. Valdemar”: “We shall republish in our next Weekly, on Friday next [25 December], the remarkable story of Edgar A. Poe, the case of M. Valdemar, which has excited much attention in the city since its publication in the Mail of Monday last” [15 December]. The 19 December *Boston Daily Journal*, p. 1, joined the attentive chorus. It did not reprint the story, but introduced a correspondent, named “Investigator”:

> A tale of horror, entitled ‘The Facts in M. Valdemar’s Case,’ written by Mr. Poe, and founded on a mesmeric operation supposed to have been performed on a person in the agonies of death, is going the rounds of the papers. A correspondent, who has read this horrible tale, and is an adept in etymological lore, has sent us the following communication:
> MR. EDITOR:—I was reminded by ‘The Facts of M. Valdemar’s Case,’ copied into some of our papers, of an etymological discovery,

never will hold fast in any place where sense and industry are required. To take a position in the best publication in the country, he would kill it in a year. Alas! poor Poe.”

Collyer is defended in the 25 June 1841 and 10 December 1841 *Boston Daily Mail*. On 26 January 1842, the *Mail* called him a “man of genius,” and on 25 February 1843 dubbed him the “father of Mesmerism, as he is called in this country.” Collyer had apparently just returned from Europe at the end of the fall lecture season, as indicated by 3 January 1846 announcements of his lectures in the *Boston Post* and the *Daily Mail*.
which, by patient study and careful investigation, I succeeded some-
time since in making.

There is an interjection which has been in use in our language for
many centuries, signifying incredulity, disbelief, and the like. I have
discovered (what Horne Tooke gave up in despair) that this word,
now spelt Poh! was originally spelt Poe! but by constant use and
corruption has been changed, and I think not for the better.

I would humbly suggest that the original orthography be resumed,
in order that when any one hears of an uncommonly senseless hoax,
he may exclaim, with perfect truth, 'Poe! Poe!'

The 20 December Boston Daily Star, p. 2, commented under the head-
ing "AL ARAAFED" [sic]:—"Some of our papers have been putting
out a Mesmeric story, by Poe, as a genuine story of a real case. Poe has
thus 'hoaxed' the Bostonians, when he didn't intend it. He never
pretended that the tale was anything more than a birth of fancy.—
People who swallowed it as genuine got 'Al Aarrafed' [sic]."

Just as parody followed reprint in the case of "The Raven," the
Boston Daily Mail, after reprinting "The Premature Burial" and "The
Tell-Tale Heart,"24 followed "Valdemar" with "The Facts of Another
Case of Artificial Existence" on 25 December 1845, p. 2. The pseu-
donymous author Philo Philbrick M. D. (another P—) imitates both
the subject matter and the style of Poe's original. The opening paragraphs
suggest the verisimilar style of a real case with close attention to highly
particularized mesmeric procedures done at specific times. The author
also seems keenly aware of the inability of some people to distinguish
among quackery, sensationalism, and serious scientific investigation.
This was an issue to which Boston audiences had been alerted by
Collyer, referred to by the Boston Daily Mail as "the father of modern
Mesmerism" in recognition of his highly popular Boston lectures in the
1840s. Mesmerists like Collyer, on the other hand, had been frequently
satirized, scorn reflected in two Boston reprints of "Establishing the
Science" by "Everpoint," also known as "Straws." The author was the

24"The Tell-Tale Heart" was reprinted from the Broadway Journal in the 30 August 1845
Daily Mail, p. 1 and 1 September 1845 Daily Mail, p. 1; anonymous excerpts from "The
Premature Burial" in the 8 and 9 July Daily Mail, p. 1; Poe's activities led to other reprints
during the year: The Boston Post reprinted "Romance" anonymously from the Broadway
Journal on 3 September 1845, p. 1 and "Bridal Ballad" with Poe's name on 15 August 1845, p. 1:
"Diddling" appeared in the 8 October 1845 Boston Courier, p. 1, and the 9 October 1845
Semi-Weekly Courier, p. 4; "The Tell-Tale Heart" in the 20 December 1845 Boston Weekly
Bee, pp. 1–2. Poe's notoriety in Boston led to repeated puns on his name: The 8 August 1846
Streeter's Weekly Star printed an article entitled "Edgar Alaaraaf Poe."
humorist Joseph M. Field, editor of the *St. Louis Reveille*, with whom Poe later corresponded about "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." Field's story deals with a popular mesmeric lecturer, a follower of Monsieur De Bonneville, whose success and reputation become so celebrated that an anti-humbug faction develops against him, embodied in a group that confronts the performer one evening in a tavern: "'Good evening, Perfesser,' said one. 'Won't you take a little of the fluid!' said another, and this being evident in the way of a joke, the 'anti-humbugs' proceeded to more serious business." In the story, the lecturer is a confidence man, and one aspect of Field's humor is punning about magnetic fluids and intoxicating liquors, wordplay about alcohol that surfaces as well in the Poe parody. In "The Facts Of Another Case of Artificial Existence," a Negro servant is administered "artificial warmth" or spirits before he is subjected to experimentation; in other words, there is ambiguity as to whether he is "under the influence" of liquor, mesmerism, or infernal power. In the *Broadway Journal* Poe had recently expressed disgust with the Frogpondians: "The fact is, we despise them and defy them (the transcendental vagabonds!) and they may all go to the devil together" (*Writings* 3: 315). The *Daily Mail* parodist returned the favor by reporting the devil's message to Poe, transmitted to the reader via the character of the servant.

The Facts of Another Case of Artificial Existence

I read with deep interest upon its appearance in the American Review, a development of facts, in the case of M. Valdemar by Edgar A. Poe. These "facts" were certainly astounding, and had they not emanated from an authentic pen, and been conveyed to the public through so respectable a vehicle, I should in my mildest moments, have pronounced the whole matter a vile attempt to victimize the good public with a hoax. These considerations, and these alone, induced me to give full credence to the narration and acting upon the belief, I have since tried an experiment, which not only convinces me that my belief was not yielded mistakenly, but that I have settled a point, which

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has been much discussed by modern philosophers, viz:-the identity of
the Animal magnetic, with the electric fluids. But the experiment will
develop this principle, and I hasten to lay before the public my state-
ment.

My father, once a southern planter, upon his removal to New
England some thirty years since, brought with him an old favorite
Negro servant. Upon his arrival, the negro was informed of his free-
dom, but he chose to spend the remainder of his life among the friends
of his youth, and has continued with us until the event connected so
intimately with my statement occurred. Year after year rolled away,
and the snows of a century had whitened upon his head, and like many
of his race, he seemed destined to a long, vegetative existence; for his
faculties one after another departed, and still he lived on, becoming
more shrivelled and emaciated, until little was left of him but skin and
bones. The approach of the last cold weather, about the first of the
present month of December, affected him strangely, and Nero, who
had been punctual, so many years, in all his habits, remained in bed
one morning long after his usual time of rising. My father went up to
ascertain the cause and found the poor old fellow nearly pulseless at
the wrist, with cold extremities, and a more than usually confused
mind. I was immediately summoned, and after the administration of
some stimulating medicines, artificial warmth, &c succeeded in arous-
ing him. The effect of this treatment however was evanescent, and it
become evident that a few more days would eke out his last portion
of existence.

I felt as if I was losing an old friend, one of the truest I ever had,
and determined to spend most of my time with him, until his eyes
should be closed in death. On the 15th inst. at the hour of midnight, I
was sitting by Nero’s bedside, watching the last pale flickerings of his
lamp of life. The family had all retired, and though I supposed the old
negro to be dying, I did not think it best to disturb any of them. At such
hours, the mind will sometimes unconsciously stray from the solemn
subject of thought presented to it, and I found myself engaged in some
conjectures concerning the case reported by Mr. Poe.

How long my mind had been thus employed I do not know, when
a sudden gasp, followed by a groan, recalled my scattered thoughts to
the old sufferer before me. Dying scenes are familiar to me, and I saw
by his labored breathing, and his fierce protuberant eye-balls, that a
few minutes of suffering was all that was left to him of life.

A sudden thought seized me. I was no mesmerizer, but I had
heard much of the principle to which I have alluded, and determined
to try the effect of magneto electricity, upon the dying negro. I had in
the house an Improved Vibratory Apparatus and left the room immedi-
ately for the purpose of procuring it. I was occupied some five minutes
in this matter, and in preparing it for operation, and when I returned
was surprised to find that the last breath had been respired, and that
Nero was really dead. I was thus frustrated in my original design, but
determined upon another experiment. I filled a vessel with water and
putting it upon the foot of the bed, immersed the feet of the dead man
in it.

I then placed the button, of the positive pole of the battery, in the
same vessel, and the button of the negative pole, after putting the
apparatus in motion I placed alternately upon his forehead, and over
the region of the cervical vertebrae. These movements I continued
perhaps twenty-five or thirty minutes. I then to my surprise observed
a quivering of the muscles of the body generally, and a faint effort
made to open the eyes which I had closed mechanically, as I stood
beside him.

"Nero," said I softly, for I acknowledge I felt awed by the scene
before me, "Nero, what is the matter?"

"Me dead, Massa Philo!"

I may here observe that there was no breathing; in fact no effort
made at respiration, and in spite of my habitual self command, a feeling
akin to terror fast crept over me. I addressed him again.

"Nero where have you been?"

This question I repeated but received nothing but a faint attempt
at reply. I then added more sulphuric acid to the fluid of the battery,
and was gratified to perceive the general tremor increased, but upon
another repetition of the question, was horror struck at his answer.

"Oh gorry Massa! I se been to hell."

"Nero," said I with a voice trembling with emotion, "what did
you see there."

"I see the Debbel."

"What was he doing," I continued.

"He was readin' in a book, Massa!"

My curiosity now became painfully excited, and I pursued my
questioning still farther.

"Nero what was the book?"

"Nigger can't read Massa Philo."

I perceived that this answer was given with a fainter voice than
the previous one, and again increased the power of the machine.

"Did the devil say anything, Nero?"

The countenance of the negro now assumed a serio comic ex-
pression, very common with him while living, and notwithstanding the
strangeness of the circumstances, I could not restrain a smile. He
raised his hand tremulously towards me, to beckon my ear to his lips,
and then communicated to me as nearly as I can recollect, the follow-
ing:
“Massa Debbel say Massa Poe, shan’t come to lib wid him case he tells such foolish stories, he disgraces de family. He say de hossec-fieashum of de lungs in de last story, made hole big enough for Jackass’s ears to stick through, dats what he said; but I se know nothing what he means.”

“Did you see anything more, my good fellow?”

“Yes Massa, I see a great, black bird, lookin’ some like a crow, and some like a buzzard, some like a goose and some like the debbel his self, and a poor old Frenchman trying to get on to his roost. And the old man says he, “ain’t your name Raven? my name’s Valdemar-ain’t we brodders?” “Oh go way,” says the bird, and den he said what the debbel said, “you se disgrace to de family!”

“Anything more?”

“NO MORE!”

“What?” cried I, “I’ve heard that before, say it again!”

“NEBER MORE!”

The last word was uttered with a pathos and a solemn earnestness, I never heard equalled.

At this moment, a suggestion flashed upon my mind that almost deprived me of motion; I had recalled and retained his spirit; but unlike the mesmerizer I had not power to release it. What cause to pursue I was at a loss to determine. At this moment his feet slipped from the bath. I looked to ascertain the cause, and found that his limbs had contracted in length, sufficiently to draw them out. Upon turning again to his face, I observed that his head and face were reduced to the dimensions of those of a child. The truth was obvious. The intense life he was laboring under, had accomplished more for his reduction, and emaciation, in the short space of one hour, than the last half century had been able to effect.

He was drying up and I could not help it! He was now seized with strong convulsions, which seemed to be caused by the struggling of the spirit to remain in a body which was too small for it.

At length he opened his eyes and casting upon me a despairing, affectionate look, exclaimed with a loud cry of anguish, “Oh gorry Massa ho ha oh! it’s all ober wid dis nigger.”

A dusky shadow passed before my eyes, and swept across the pale face of the moon, and the spirit of Nero had forever fled. The body however, still under the influence of magnetism continued to contract, until it became perfectly puny in its dimensions. Inch by inch its magnitude disappeared, and in a shorter time than it has taken me to relate the fact, it was all wasted but a small miniature of a man, and looked much like a small black Chinese God. I knelt, and bent over it and with eager eyes watched it as its parts seemed to creep into one another. When it had fallen to about the size of a thimble,
unconsciously to me a tear stole down my cheek and dropped upon
the little black mass. It exploded with a concussion like thunder, each
part igniting of itself and falling over the whole room in fiery spray like
that which falls from a rocket. I retired bewildered to my chamber,
went to bed but dared not sleep.

Recent critics have made much of the ambiguous nature of parody,
it's unique combination of empathy with and distance from the object of
imitation. The ambiguity is perhaps even more complicated in this case,
since what we have here is a parody of a tale that Poe deemed a hoax
(Letters 2: 337, 349). In the sense that imitation is a form of flattery, the
author identifies with the style and content of Poe's original: the studied
uncertainty over the truth or falsehood of the case, its credulous
narrator, its seemingly fact-based prose, its exploitation of pseudo-
scientific measures to prolong life, its deathbed setting, the subject's
emaciation, his utterance without apparent respiration, the contrast of
blackness and whiteness in the physiognomy of the subject. Distingui-
shing speaking and writing, the parodist shows that reading in a book
avails nothing; only speech and voice disclose that even the devil finds
Poe a disreputable fellow, an ironic reversal that undercuts the "re-
spectable" organ of publication for Poe's tale, the conservative Ameri-
can Whig Review. The parodist retains as well the central irony of
the original tale. Poe's narrator is rendered inarticulate by the "unut-
terable, shuddering horror" (Works 3:1,240) he beholds, a mesmerist
hypnotized by the "indescribable" voice that seemed to come from
"a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth" (Works
3: 1,240). Similarly, the subject in the parody, rather than the doctor,
gets "the last word," the final utterance. Poe's words, moreover, are
turned against him as the "serio-comic expression" of the negro, the
knowing "smile" of the narrator, and Nero's visionary speech indicate
humorous undercutting of Poe's original, satire accented by the overt
claim that Poe wrote "Valdemar" to exploit or to outdo the popularity
he achieved with "The Raven." A recent article nicely sums up the
way in which parody both exalts and derides imitated texts: "Clearly,
one of the most evident explanations for the plethora of parodies . . . is
that the parodists, vultures of culture, live to pick over the bones
of dead popular gods, thriving on carrion, smug in their assurance that
corpse's can't fight back."27 Certainly the Daily Mail parody, imitating a

27James C. McKelly, "For Whom the Bull Flows: Hemingway in Parody," American Literature
Margaret A. Rose distinguishes parody from hoax.
story in which a corpse speaks, gives literal expression to this dictum even to the point that Nero's body, as it decomposes to "miniature" stature, begins to "look like a small black Chinese god." In addition to the satiric deflation traditionally associated with parody, the pseudonymous author also engages in literal reduction of scale of Poe's title character, M. Valdemar ultimately reduced to the size of a small Oriental artifact.

The ambiguity of this image, reinforcing the possibility that the narrator may stimulate "the spirit of the devil" rather than Nero, may derive from repeated puns ("spirit," "wasted," "trance," "under the influence") that suggest an alcoholicly induced nightmare rather than a scientifically induced transit to the spirit world. Nero's "drying up," in addition to furthering such wordplay, may be the Daily Mail's response to Poe's query in the November 29 Broadway Journal: "The Frog-Pond seems to be dried up—and the Frogs are, beyond doubt, all dead—as we hear no more croaking from that quarter" (Writings 3:324). Whatever the case, the external evidence surrounding Poe's tale seems as ambiguous at the story itself, and the most equivocal document relevant to his Boston reception remains the Collyer letter, which contains several inconsistencies. Despite the letter's claim of reviving, by mesmeric means, a sailor who appeared to have drunk himself to death, Collyer's officially published rendition of the same case makes no mention of mesmerism. This claim about the drunken sailor is offered in direct contradiction of Collyer's published assertion: "And it is somewhat singular that a person in any degree under the influence of liquor, is insensible to the exertion of mesmeric power." The letter, moreover, says Collyer had not lectured in over two years, though his own later record of his speaking career mentions public appearances in 1842, 1843, and 1844. Out of respect for the authenticity of Poe's story, the letter cites the Zoist, a British periodical alleged to have published Collyer's contributions. An examination of that magazine, however, discloses no

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reprinting of Poe’s story and no contributions by Robert Collyer.\textsuperscript{37} It is likely, as one Poe correspondent speculated, that Collyer’s letter, of which no manuscript version has survived and dated before some of the reprints of “Valdemar,”\textsuperscript{33} is another Poe-esque hoax, a further “quiz”\textsuperscript{34} on the gullible Frogpondians. Whether or not Poe was consciously exploiting the publicity about mesmerism attached to both Emerson’s and Collyer’s lectures, there is reason to believe that he savored such a deception. On 11 December 1845, Boston newspapers were reviewing George Bush’s 9 December lecture on the “facts of mesmerism,” a presentation that would clash directly with Emerson’s critique of Swedenborg, the third biographical subject of his course just about to commence. Bush opined confidently that mesmerism threw light on the future condition of man, even to the day of judgment. In mesmerism, a “state of mental activity, independent of bodily organs, is distinctly recognized.”\textsuperscript{35} Poe, who had written to Bush in January 1845 about “Mesmeric Revelation” (Letters 1:273), presented in “Valdemar” a figure whose utterance reflects a kind of activity independent of suspended bodily functions. Poe would have remembered as well that Swedenborgians in another cultural center (Philadelphia) had taken “Mesmeric Revelation” as gospel.

V

The inconsistencies in Collyer’s writings and in reports about him have caused one historian of the pseudosciences to suggest that there were actually two Robert Collyers,\textsuperscript{36} one a visionary proponent of mesmerism and animal magnetism, the other a confidence man, much like the crafty lecturer in Joseph Field’s humorous story. Collyer was

the author of *Lights and Shadows of American Life* (1843), which ac-
tcented decidedly more shadows than lights in American society, par-
ticularly in cities like Boston where his popularity in the early 1840s was
immense. Publishing the pamphlet in Boston just after departing for his
native England, much like a confidence man who enjoys the upshot of
his exploits after he has left town, Collyer scored American culture for
its commercialism and philistinism, extending his critique not only to
science but to the realm of literature. 37 *Lights and Shadows* contains
many purple passages about dissolute ways in Boston, and he chastises
the city, in particular, for its double standard on drinking. By the begin-
ing of 1845, however, Collyer, apparently anticipating another visit to
the United States, disclaimed any responsibility for *Lights and Shadows*,
calling it a “trumpery pamphlet” with neither a sentence nor syllable
composed by him. 38

How much Poe knew of Collyer’s penchant for equivocation, in
printing the letter in the *Broadway Journal*, is a matter of speculation,
though the two men had apparently met in 1843. 39 He may have
enjoyed Collyer’s attacks on Boston’s imitative tendencies in literature,
a subject that continued to exercise Poe even after the “little Longfel-
low War” over plagiarism had died down. He may have also enjoyed
Collyer’s barbs about Boston hypocrisy regarding drink, especially in
light of Poe’s own appearance before the Boston Lyceum at which he
was accused and later admitted to being drunk when he read “Al
Aaraaf.” In particular, he may have remembered reports of a lyceum
performer who had battled “the storm of public derision” on the lecture
circuit, who had directly confronted claims about the “fanciful” nature
of mesmeric stories. Just as he inscribed a note from M. Valdemar into
his mesmeric hoax, Poe used the Collyer letter for purposes of self-
promotion in the *Broadway Journal*. There could be no better way
to add insult to Boston’s injury, as “Valdemar” was being reprinted,
than to “quote” another critic of the Frogpond. Poe could enjoy the

38 Col-
llyer’s disclaimer about having attacked Boston appears in a 29 January 1845 letter to the
*Boston Post*. His letters to the 8 and 21 November 1843 *Boston Daily Mail*, in sharp contrast,
previewed a “book of solemn truth,” *Lights and Shadows of American Life*. 39 Collyer,
*Mysteries of the Vital Element*, p. 110. Poe rendered Collyer’s exploits with sufficient factual
basis to warrant belief. A 23 December 1845 account of a “Death from Rum” in the *Boston
Courier*, for example, duplicated the language and circumstance of the letter in the *Broadway
Journal*: “Coroner Smith held an inquest . . . on the body of Daniel Regan, who died at a
sailor-boarding house. . . . They rendered a verdict of ’death from the effects of excessive
drinking of ardent spirit.’ ”
impact of his mesmeric hoax on the gullible, perhaps including practicing mesmers like Robert Collyer, at the same time acknowledging the story's specious authenticity. Thus, his response to the letter in the *Broadway Journal* is jocular:

We have no doubt that Mr. Collyer is correct in all that he says—and all that he desires us to say—but the truth is, there was a very small modicum of truth in the case of M. Valdemar—which, in consequence, may be called a hard case—very hard for M. Valdemar, for Mr. Collyer, and ourselves. If the story was not true, however, it should have been—and perhaps 'The Zoist' may discover that it is true, after all. *(Writings 3:356)*

The phrase "hard case" was a popular heading in columns of nineteenth-century newspapers, which applied it to individuals in predicaments or straitened circumstances. The phrase may also contain a pun on the process of ossification of the lungs, an aspect of M. Valdemar's deterioration exploited in the *Daily Mail* parody. It is more likely that Poe intended other meanings in his comment, a technique of verbal play central to his hoax, a form that establishes two audiences: those deceived by the author's ironic dissembling and those cognizant of his satiric purpose. In the nineteenth century, a "hard case" was a scapegrace, a figure case hardened by unprincipled or deceptive action. "Case," moreover, could refer to a burial coffin, and "hard" was and is traditionally associated with alcoholic liquors. The letter presented a mesmerist who tried to "restore to active animation a person who died from excessive drinking of ardent spirits," a figure "placed in his coffin ready for interment," thus presenting a "hard case" and thus joining, as do other documents relevant to Poe's Boston reception, spirits and spiritual manifestations. Poe's jocular response—characterizing a misrepresentation as what "should have been" true—shows his propensity for humorous banter in his editorial columns. It shows as well wordplay in matters related to alcohol, and the proverbial drunken sailor of the letter, based on fictive embroidering rather than authentic circumstance, clearly evokes Poe's mirth. After all, this survivor of premature

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40 Williams, p. 108. The comic connection between drinking and death is similar to that in "Some Words with a Mummy," in which the narrator, after drinking five bottles of brown Stout for a light supper, promises to get "embaumed for a couple of hundred years" *(Works 3:1,178, 1,195).* 41 H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: Supplement One* (New York: Knopf, 1962), pp. 263, 568–70. Mencken also notes that "ossified" was a slang term for "drunk."
burial, which he may have offered as an example of human misconduct *in extremis*, is a Poe-esque character, reminiscent perhaps of the dead-drunk, or drunk-dead, antagonists in a more famous Poe tale, "The Cask of Amontillado." 42

VI

Poe's claim that there was "a very small modicum of truth in the case of M. Valdemar" (*Writings* 3:356), echoing his statement that there was not a "single syllable of truth" (*Writings* 3:298) in newspaper reports about his lyceum appearance, causes any reader to be wary of his intent. Poe's acknowledgment of hoaxical intent actually does little to clarify matters, since the reader senses, as did Poe's audience at the Odeon, that contextual evidence in these two related episodes is as ambiguous as the texts that Poe presented to the public. The reader should be reminded, however, that even when Poe adopted the posture of hoaxter, a playful or sarcastic tone might conceal a conscious strategy, in this case, Poe's literary war with Boston as a cultural center. In noting that "Al Aaraaf" would "answer remarkably well" for its audience, he had a specific set of listeners in mind: His poem would "answer sufficiently well for an audience of Transcendentalists" (*Writings* 3:298). "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" is also a text about attentive listening, anxious queries, and dramatic replies, but the answer comes via the vibratory tongue of its title character. In the guise of a factual account that purports to reveal the truths and wonders of mesmerism, the tale, in effect, ends with this character sticking his tongue out in the direction of his auditors, who ultimately swoon at a grisly spectacle. If my contextual reading of the story has validity, there is indeed something visceral in this answer to Poe's audience. Whatever his equivocations about the truth or falsehood of the tale, there is little doubt about his target at the time Emerson was in the midst of his lecture series. "Insulting a Boston audience"? Poe asked rhetorically in the 13 December *Broadway Journal*. He sustained his own reply: "Very true—meant to do it—and did" (*Writings* 3:338). With all the bravado of a person affirming his own triumph, Poe countered more than just the negative review he had just received in the *Harbinger*, organ of the Brook Farm.

Phalanx. He denounced the “respectable Crazyites” of that movement, and gave them advice about their obsession with reform: “Reform it altogether, or give up preaching about the Truth” (Writings 3:338). Continuing his banter about facts and truth in the same issue, he deflects attention from “Al Aaraaf” to “Valdemar”: “we find it difficult to understand how any dispassionate transcendentalist can doubt the facts as we state them” (Writings 3:340).

Only one week later in the Broadway Journal, Poe quoted a poem by another representative of this movement. The poem recounted a “quarrel” between two antagonists, one apparently possessing a decided advantage over the other. Poe may have damned with faint praise this “naive” and “piquant” poetic text, since its author was Emerson, just about to finish the year at the Odeon with his series of lectures. In the eyes of the Bostonians, Emerson's performance would clearly eclipse or even erase Poe's. The latter may have sensed autobiographical significance in the lines he quoted, especially in light of his battle with Boston, equated in his mind with Emerson and his circle. He perhaps even drew sustenance from the second stanza of “A Fable”:

But all sorts of things and weather
Must be taken in together
To make up a year
And a sphere;
And I think it no disgrace
To occupy my place. (Writings 3:344)