“QUOTH THE RAVEN, ‘EAT MY SHORTS!’": ADAPTATIONS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE IN YA CULTURE

By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>WE WILL FORGET NEVERMORE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATIONS: COMICS, GRAPHIC NOVELS, AND EDUCATIONAL INTENT</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>INTERPRETIVE ADAPTATIONS: COMPUTER GAMES AND ILLUSTRATED POEMS</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PARODIC ADAPTATIONS: &quot;COUNTLESS HERE, OR MAYBE MORE!&quot;</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CONCLUSION: &quot;NEVERMORE&quot; OR &quot;EAT MY SHORTS&quot;?</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
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“QUOTH THE RAVEN, ‘EAT MY SHORTS!’”:
ADAPTATIONS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE IN YA CULTURE

By

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Today’s youth culture is awash with gothic elements, but many original gothic manuscripts are now more popular in adapted form. This is especially true of the works of Edgar Allan Poe; adaptations of Poe’s texts – especially humorous adaptations – for youth continue to be popular even (or especially) today. Comic books by *Classics Illustrated*, computer games such as *The Dark Eye*, and cartoon sitcoms like *The Simpsons* ensure Edgar Allan Poe’s works a fixed place in the canon of adolescent culture. Within this canon, works adapted from Poe’s texts fall into three categories: 1) self-proclaimed “educational” adaptations, 2) interpretive texts which utilize Poe’s original language to suggest a new story via illustrations or subtext, and most importantly, 3) outright parodies of the author and his works. Although generally not granted as much critical attention as is merited, the parodic works are actually as informative – if not more informative than – self-proclaimed “educational” adaptations. These parodic texts provide audiences and critics with important information regarding cultural literacy transmitted via parodic elements. This occurs mainly due to parody’s authority via adherence to original texts (in such elements as rhyme scheme) and to their wide audience appeal. Comics, computer games, and cartoon sitcoms lend examples to the discussion of Poe’s lengthy relationship to the canon of great American writers and to discussion of the strange bedfellows (comedy and gothic trends)
that seem to bind contemporary youth culture into a coherent entity. This thesis seeks to bolster understanding of both Poe and parody, and to help us decide if the raven now more correctly quotes “Nevermore” or “Eat My Shorts”!
CHAPTER 1
WE WILL FORGET NEVERMORE

Indeed the hated-welcome bird of “Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance” [sic] is Poe himself, beak in the reader’s heart, evermore repeating that those we have loved and who become lost to us can never return, that we can never clasp them in Aidenn, that they can never be forgotten, and that however painful it may be to remember them, it is still more painful to give them up. (Silverman, 241)

As Kenneth Silverman suggests in his biography, Edgar Allan Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance, Poe’s most famous work, “The Raven,” is popular not chiefly for its structure and rhythm, but for its subject: memory and the impossibility of forgetting. It is the bird’s repetition of what has already been said that makes its message potent, a message that gets stronger with each repetition. Likewise, repetitions of Poe – not simply reproductions of his work, but also (and more importantly) adaptations thereof – have existed since the author himself was alive. Within a month of its publication, “The Raven” was parodied and usurped by the masses to serve purposes other than that of the original text. Such adaptations of this and other of Poe’s work continue to be popular even (or especially) today, primarily in youth culture¹. Songs like “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (Iron Maiden 1981), video games like The Dark Eye (Inscape 1995), comic books by Classics Illustrated, and cartoon sitcoms like The Simpsons ensure Poe’s work a fixed place in the canon² of adolescent pop literature and culture. Poe’s message to us, as Silverman suggests, is that he can’t (and won’t) ever be forgotten.³

¹ Although those objects that are marketed to youth and those that youth make their own are not necessarily the same, I will here be using “adaptations for youth culture” to be indicate those texts that are adapted from their original texts and marketed specifically to youth and children.

² Although “canon,” like “youth culture,” is certainly a loaded term that carries with it much theoretical baggage, I will be using the term throughout the course of this paper to include the body of work that exists generally for the consumption of young adults and children. I use “canon” to signify Poe’s body of works; his status as a canonical writer will only briefly be touched upon. Although I will be using both “youth culture” and “canon” throughout, I acknowledge that these terms are potential topics of debate, themselves.

In his article “From Ahab to Peg-Leg Pete: A Comic Cetology,” M. Thomas Inge asserts that Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Edgar Allan Poe have the greatest presence in pop culture, but in youth culture the competition is not so close. Melville has not had the distinct honor of being immortalized in the form of action figures, and neither Melville nor Twain have their own brands of beer⁴. Inge notes that Poe has also been portrayed in well over 200 comic books and acknowledges that “in the twentieth century, his works have never been out of print or unavailable in a popular edition” (Inge “Comics Connection” 2).⁵ He adds, “Poe has been used as a source of humor or intrigue [in magazines, comic strips, and comic books] more than…any other American writer,” (Inge “Comics Connection” 2). These works – humorous adaptations of Poe for younger/popular audiences – constitute the topic of this thesis.

Poe’s texts can be found virtually everywhere in popular culture, yet his works are not always acknowledged as omnipresent. They are central to the genres of both comedy and Gothicism, but ever remain just below the surface, much as Poe’s narrators’ madness. The almost haunting presence of Edgar Allan Poe’s texts within contemporary young adult culture manifests itself in three ways: 1) adaptations created to educate and entice younger readers to explore the original texts, 2) interpretive texts that use Poe’s original language to suggest a new

Footprints” (<http://www.poedecoder.com/Qrisse/footprints.php>), which offers references to Poe found in movies, television, books, music, and miscellaneous (bubble gum, life insurance, and even “Snoopy: The Musical”). Of course, throughout the years many authors have been inspired by Poe, including Richard Wright (Native Son evokes images from “The Black Cat” and “Murders in the Rue Morgue”) and even acclaimed children’s author Avi (his text The Man Who Was Poe explores Poe’s life vicariously through the eyes of a young boy who knows Poe only as “Mr. Dupin”).

⁴ For Poe action figures and plush dolls see websites such as <http://www.accoutrements.com>, <http://www.poemuseum.org>, or <http://www.mcphee.com>; for Poe’s brand of beer (Raven Beer) visit <http://www.ravenbeer.com>.

⁵ Although anxiety regarding the validity of texts such as comics still exists, it must be noted that a shift in attitude generally occurs when the comic takes as its subject a “canonical” or “classical” author, such as Poe, Twain, or Shakespeare. For more on anxiety regarding comic scholarship, see Marion D. Perret’s “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare” or Scott McCloud’s Understanding Comics.
story via illustrations, and most importantly, 3) parodies of Poe’s work. Although it is not their manifest goal, it is actually the parodic texts which maintain a more conscious attention to structures of the original texts, such as rhyme scheme, mood, and setting, and are therefore more authoritative and instructive for the education of younger audiences. This thesis provides an analysis of each category of adaptation and illustrates just how educational and far-reaching are the underestimated parodies, as well as an exploration of the relationship between the two genres that fuse in order to make these adaptations work.

Although Poe’s texts are simultaneously considered and yet not considered children’s texts, his works appear in numerous publications for children, including grade school literature textbooks and the adaptations that are discussed in the remainder of this paper. Poe is often criticized as writing with immature sensibilities; however, this aspect of his writing may have more to do with those reading his works than the works, themselves. The contention that Poe’s texts are too simplistic or crude for scholarly attention rises from those who greatly misrepresent Poe’s works. As James Gargano states:

It goes without saying that Poe, like other creative men, is sometimes at the mercy of his own worst qualities. Yet the contention that he is fundamentally a bad or tawdry stylist appears to me to be rather facile and sophistical. It is based, ultimately, on the untenable and often unanalyzed assumption that Poe and his narrators are identical literary twins and that he must be held responsible for all their wild or perfervid utterances; their shrieks and groans are too often conceived as emanating from Poe himself. (22)

In many adaptations of Poe’s texts, Poe, himself, does appear as the narrator (as seen in the Classics Illustrated Study Guide’s version of “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Gomez’s “The Bells,” and many republications and adaptations of “The Raven”). But instead of bringing out “his worst qualities” this trope simply serves as a device which reiterates my previous point: that by placing Poe in his own text the author(s) are calling to the audience’s attention a point of
basic cultural literacy – Poe, himself, as an important American author who culturally literate non-literary scholars should know.

Poe is not the only popular author whose works have been reconstituted and published for a young audience. Numerous works of scholarship regarding the status of Shakespeare and Melville in young adult culture have appeared in recent years. Poe was chosen for the present study because of his unique (perhaps uncanny) relationship to adolescence and his employment of both satirical and gothic elements in his texts. As Jonathan Elmer suggests, “Poe’s connection with juvenile tastes, and hence with a time when reading and acquiring “culture” were actually enjoyable…has been insistently and disapprovingly stressed [and thus recognized] by the Anglo-American literary-historical tradition” (3). Poe is arguably one of the most assimilated authors in youth culture today, but – perhaps because of the “disapproving stress” placed on Poe’s “pre-adolescent mentality” – few scholars address adaptations of his work; M. Thomas Inge and Jonathan Elmer are the only two scholars who have seriously attempted to broach the subject of Poe in comics and/or popular culture, and even they do not discuss adaptations such as cartoons and video games. Many articles on Poe rely on psychoanalytic paradigms, but this model does not suffice to explain why interpretive and parodic reconstitutions of his works serve more academic purposes than the “educational” interpretations, nor does it explain the odd bedfellows that adaptations force together: namely, the comedy and gothic genres.

Gothic texts such as Poe’s works have been associated with youth and younger readers even since the genre’s inception in 1764 with Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (or *Wieland* in

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6 See for example M. Thomas Inge’s “From Ahab to Peg-Leg Pete: A Comic Cetology” and Marion D. Perret’s “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare.”

7 T. S. Eliot, qtd. in Elmer 3.

8 Interestingly, *The Castle of Otranto* has also been cited as one of the first “fantasy” texts, as well.
America, 1798). David Stephens explains this phenomenon partially by the assertion that, at the
time gothic literature was becoming popular (both to write and read), the middle class was secure
enough in itself to “cultivate imaginary fears and fantasies, in the same way that a child may do,
reading horror stories and experiencing the delicious thrill while apparently immune from real
danger” (10). This almost masochistic “safe/danger” relationship to gothic literature helps
explain gothic genre’s link to childhood at a very primal level:

On the basis of personal belief and observation, I’d say that those of us who direct our
storytelling into darker channels do so because we were perhaps a bit more mindful than
most regarding our childhood confusions of identity, our conflicts with unpleasant realities
and our traumatic encounters with imaginative terrors. (Bloom, qtd in Stephens 32)10

This interest in “imaginative terrors” does not go out with the tide of childhood, but instead lasts
well into adolescence, if not even (at least for some of us) into adulthood. Once given a taste of
gothic flavor, adolescents tend to come back for more; as Stephens points out, evidence of this
can be seen in the popularity of such series as Goosebumps and Point Place, and even the
popularity of such authors for older adolescents as James Herbert and Stephen King, all of whose
work undeniably includes gothic elements.11 These elements tend to include sensationalism or
heightened emotional/perceptual sensitivity on the narrator’s part, darkness or suspense,
supernatural beings or occurrences, and at least one character with malicious intentions.

But the adolescent taste for everything gothic does not stop there. Today’s youth culture
is flooded with gothic elements, from the literary series mentioned above to television shows (X-

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9 For more on the distinction/parallels between the European and American gothic movements, see Louis S. Cross’s
Redefining the American Gothic: From Wieland to Day of the Dead.

10 Noteworthy is the parallel between the function of Gothic texts in popular culture today and Bettelheim’s theory
of the function of fairy-tales in the 1970’s. Unfortunately, a thorough and extensive discussion on this topic is
outside the scope of this paper.

11 Stephens is referring to gothic elements; although “gothic” and “horror” are separate genres, gothic elements can
be seen in each of these texts. For my purposes, I will use the term “gothic” to allude to gothic elements, not
necessarily only those texts which have been proven to be “gothic.”
Files, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) to movies (think Alfred Hitchcock, Tim Burton) to video and computer games (the ever-popular *Tomb Raider* series, which incidentally has also been adapted to movies, as well as *Dungeons and Dragons; Warhammer*). In fact, even original gothic texts such as *Frankenstein* and “The Raven” are more popular today in adapted form\(^\text{12}\) than in their original medium: “For the most successful of gothic novels, dramatic renditions (for both stage and, subsequently, large and small screens) have all but supplanted the original in the popular imagination” (Stephens 25). This is especially true in the case of Poe.

Parody, like Gothicism, is popular and abundant in youth culture. It exists in many fields and has been studied for centuries as a cultural phenomenon, an educational device, a musical form, and a historic paradigm. As a genre of literature and film, parody has been both praised and criticized. Its roots extend to works as old as Aristophanes’ comedies through to the novel *Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes in 1605 (Dentith 21), and stretching to postmodern works such as *The Simpsons*’ latest Halloween special, aired on November 2006. Through the years, parody has been considered as both a negative, malicious attack on high-brow culture and as a paradoxical form of flattery which, as Simon Dentith points out, serves to sustain the very text it imitates (36), following in a tradition of great parodies that serve as silent sentinels for the “classic” works they champion.

Parody as a genre has lately (if not always) been a battleground for scholars, not only due to its elusive definition, but also because “to some critics, parody makes the original lose in

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\(^\text{12}\) For the purposes of this study, “adaptation” will be considered as any reproduction that alters the original text but maintains its themes, including such adaptation as addition of illustrations. An example, then, of a work that will not be included is the Kaplan SAT study guide. (Kaplan’s *The Tales of Edgar Allan Poe: A Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Classic* reproduces Poe’s texts in full, unabridged versions and has no illustrations. The only addition to this text is definitions of words or phrases that Poe used that are likely to appear on the SAT.) Likewise, when I speak of adaptations being ‘educational’ I’m referring to whether or not the texts maintain defining features of Poe’s original text; “truth” and “intention” will not be assumed here, only a text’s ability to convey information to the audience about the original texts by Poe on which the adaptations are based.
power, appear less commanding; to others the parody is the superior form because it does everything the original does – and more” (Hutcheon 76). To other scholars, the dichotomy isn’t between superior/inferior texts but between whether or not parody should assume the authority to be “a popularly available and prevalent critique” (Gray 43). But putting aside the question of superiority and power for the moment, a definition of parody is necessary before further discussion can ensue.

For some, the definition of “parody” is clouded with subtleties and shades of meaning, where “pastiche,” “satire,” “parody,” and “spoof” all evoke different types of texts. “Pastiche” is most often used as a term to describe a work that integrates several different texts; when that work is consciously humorous, pastiche can be said to parody several different sources, but is not itself a parody. Satire, however, can become slightly more problematic when compared to parody rather than pastiche; as stated succinctly by Joseph Dane, “satire refers to things; parody refers to words” (145). Dane spends an entire article discussing the differences between satire and parody. A satire, as Dane and many other critics define it, is a work that takes as its subject social norms and mores, whereas parody relies on specific texts or groups of texts (genres).

For the purposes of this essay, Timothy Dentith’s definition works nicely. He defines parody as: “any cultural practice which makes a relatively polemical allusive imitation [my emphasis] of another cultural production or practice. ... This is a definition based upon the function [my emphasis] of parody in the continuance of human discourse, not upon the formal means by which parody is achieved” (Dentith 37). This definition serves well, and includes several crucial factors. By “polemical allusive imitation” we can assume that the new text must present a new, contestable point of view (polemic) using a previously written source as its material (allusion) and basing its mode of communication on that already established by the
original text (imitation). In other words, the point being made in the text must directly reference
the work being parodied, thereby providing both the parody’s source of authority and its unique
critical distance. A parodic work’s authority rests on the authority assumed by the primary text
on which the parody is based. Neither satire nor pastiche draws from this type of commandeered
authority, and it is this authority that sets parody apart13.

As Gray puts it, “parody may be one of the most taken-for-granted and least-respected art
forms, but it is one of the oldest and potentially most powerful” (4). It is this potential power
which merits examination, especially within youth culture, where balances of power are
particularly precarious. Educational adaptations purport to have this power, but a comparison of
such texts show that “educational” adaptations of Poe’s works do not perform their function as
well as do the interpretations and parodies. In fact, the best educational works for children are the
parodies, not the “educational” texts that are sold expressly for that purpose. Parodies appearing
in young adult culture serve as indicators as to what specific cultural literacy adults expect
children to have, and also serve as buoys keeping Poe’s works afloat within adolescent literature
and culture. As mentioned in the epigraph, Edgar Allan Poe refuses to be forgotten14. I hope to
explore those devices that most readily keep Poe alive in our memories: those genres and media
that adolescents revel in and critics tend to denounce. By examining these works I hope to see
just what portrait of Poe we are painting for our children, and to decide whether the Raven now
more correctly quotes “nevermore” or “eat my shorts15.”

13 “Spoof,” generally used as slang for “parody,” was coined by British comedian Arthur Robert and originated as
the name of a game he invented. Interestingly, the first recorded appearance of the term “spoof” generally referred to
the game’s revival in 1884. As parodies rely on ‘revivals’ of their host-text’s authority to exist, it is certainly ironic
that the term “spoof” is first recorded via a revival.

14 Or, perhaps more accurately, by investing in adaptations of Poe’s work we refuse to forget him. See my
conclusion for more information regarding invested authority in adaptations of Poe’s texts.

15 As proclaimed by Bart Simpson in The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror episode.
**A Fantastic History – Gothicism, Parody, and Fantasy.** Recently, pop culture has seen a surge in the fusion of two dramatically different genres: comedy and gothic. The *Scary Movie* series\(^\text{16}\) (2000, 2001, 2003, 2006), *Dead Like Me* sitcom (2003-2004), and Tim Burton’s *The Corpse Bride* (2005), not to mention the numerous parodies of original gothic texts, all attest to the strange and uncanny union of gothic and comedic texts that seems so natural. Bangsian fantasy\(^\text{17}\), in particular, has relatively recently risen in popularity, especially in children’s and youth culture as seen in such movies as *All Dogs Go to Heaven* (1989), *The Corpse Bride*, *Scary Movie*, and even such popular anime as Hayao Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* (2001). Although not overtly gothic as the Gothicists would define them, these movies still explore the fundamental premise of gothic texts: sensationalism, particularly as it pertains to death and dying\(^\text{18}\).

Due to the interwoven histories of these two genres, it is no mystery why parody and Gothicism should meld so effortlessly. As Richard Mathews asserts in his history, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, fantasy literature as we know it today grew out of a resistance to the realistic fiction that characterized the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Derived from hundreds of years of ancient literature from every country and culture (including sacred texts such as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the Judeo-Christian Old Testament), fantasy was a refreshing alternative to readers who were accustomed to fiction that strictly relied on

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\(^{16}\) The tagline for *Scary Movie* ironically reads “No Mercy. No Shame. No Sequel.”

\(^{17}\) Bangsian fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy literature wherein the plot is situated at least partially in the afterlife. This concept, of course, directly relates to the question in gothic texts of sensations, particularly during death. (See, for example, Poe’s *A Predicament* and *The facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*). Bangsian fantasy is named for John Kendrick Bangs, author of *The Enchanted Type-Writer* (1899).

\(^{18}\) Although *Spirited Away*, for example, does not directly address death, its main character, Sen, still passes into the “spirit world” and has to deal with numerous sensations such as smell (the Radish Spirit), taste (the river god’s medicine), and such sights as the illusion of Yubaba’s child made by the Kashiro. Though it probably should not be considered a gothic text, it does, in at least some respects, maintain gothic ideals and elements.
realistic and logical plots, settings, and characters\textsuperscript{19}, and yet who yearned for something more imaginative (along the lines of the nursery rhymes and fairy tales told to them as children). Out of the resistance to realistic fiction evolved four sub-genres of fantasy, all including fantastic elements with their own twist on what a departure from realistic writing should involve. Utopian fiction, science fiction, gothic horror, and satire were all bred from the fantasy movement in literature, each contributing to the fantasy genre in its own way. Gothic texts, the first sub-genre to radically depart from realistic fiction and gain their own identity beyond that of the all-inclusive term “fantasy,” juxtaposed realistic elements with “frightening intrusions from the supernatural” to “[play] fear and terror against the light of reason” (Mathews, 4). This “dark fantasy” portrayed by gothic fiction contributed significantly to the emerging movement against realistic fiction, and helped to shape many of the fantasy texts we are familiar with today (Mathews, 18). Gothic texts’ trademark literary devices – sensationalism and horrific affect – can easily be seen to have grown from this movement against stern adherence to logic and realism.

Satire, too, sought to amend dry realistic fiction, but unlike gothic horror, satire chose to resist by making a mockery of the very things it took as its subject. Some satire, such as Swift’s \textit{Gulliver’s Travels}, creates a fantastic world meant as an allegory of current affairs. Other satire simply seeks to “improve identifiable behavior in real life lived by realistic rules” (Mathews, 5). It is no wonder, then, that the gothic predilection to sensationalism – spawned from fantasy’s resistance to realistic fiction – should fall prey to a sister sub-genre, parody. As discussed earlier, some scholars find it very important to distinguish between satirical and parodic texts; however, as both fall under Dentith’s definition (as given in the introduction as “any cultural practice which makes a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or

\textsuperscript{19} Examples of authors who employ realistic fiction are: Henry Fielding, Frances Burney, Jane Austen, and later Charles Dickens.
practice’’), both types of texts can be traced back to the movement against realistic fiction. And although many see parody as omnipresent in literature, ranging from playwrights in Ancient Greece to songs by Weird Al Yankovic, some prominent scholars such as A.S. Martin go so far as to call parody “the first-born of Satire” (1), as parody was not recognized as its own genre until after satire was recognized as separate from fantasy. Thus, both satire and parody can be traced back to fantasy and the anti-realistic fiction movement of the eighteenth century. Because of their historical simultaneity, both gothic and parodic texts can be said to have the same aim: to present the reader with an alternative to the reality they experience on a daily basis and within realistic fiction.

Poe himself was enamored with comedic effect and frequently incorporated satire into his writings, especially in his early career. For example, his first surviving verse, “O, Tempora! O, Mores!” written 1825, is a satirical poem. In 1833, Poe wrote the political satire “Four Beasts in One – The Homo-Cameleopard,” and authored another popular satire, “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” in 1838. In fact, Poe’s very first publications were satiric; “in 1832, the first five Poe stories to appear in print were published by the Philadelphia Saturday Courier.

Apparently, all of them were originally intended to parody some of the poorer fiction of the day, and, perhaps to an extent, to satirize current intellectual fads” (Hirsch, "'The Duc De L'Omelette" as Anti-Visionary Tale"). Some of Poe’s tales were even self-parodic; Poe used parody to turn his own horrific tendencies on their heads. As Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV notes:

Recently, “The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether” has been viewed in the light of its satiric elements . . . . Given the fact that elsewhere Poe lampooned his own and others’ methods of popular horror fiction, while continuing himself to purvey such wares, I think it likely that he intended self-parody in “Tarr & Fether.” (“Poe's "Usher" Tarred & Fethered”)

Poe was not shy about derogating practices and literary devices of his day, but neither was he shy about poking fun at himself, either.
Many of Poe’s texts – both his early writings and his later, darker stories – reflect fantastic elements common in both fantasy literature and gothic literature, alike. His “Fairy-Land” (written in 1829) evokes images of fairies in the moonlight; “Al Aaraaf” from the same year is set in a fantasy world between Heaven and Hell; and his “The Coliseum” (written in 1833) contains a spectral-like character, “Echoes,” who serves as a personification of the coliseum and those who died there and who responds to the narrator’s reveries about the culture and happenings in the Roman Coliseum. But perhaps his most important contribution to fantasy came in 1839 in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” This story served as a forerunner of a literary trope which would later be made a staple of fantastic texts by William Morris: the physical landscape or setting becoming a character itself. As Mathews quotes, “Geography and setting have a numinous value and function almost as characters and symbols in the [fantasy] work” (39). As many scholars have noted, Usher’s mansion is a driving force behind the story and serves as a character in its own right. That Poe’s texts would thus serve to influence many fantasy writers – including William Morris – should come as no surprise to those familiar with his early works, such as those listed above.  

Besides Poe’s own satiric verses and stories, his more serious works were often (mis)appropriated by fellow authors. This unauthorized “borrowing” is not a new phenomenon; Poe’s contemporaries commandeered “The Raven” even within a month of its publication to suit the needs of the general populace. Temperance, local politics, whippoorwills, and turkeys were substituted for the original narrator’s torment and the original raven (Silverman, 238). A.S. Martin’s influential text On Parody (1896) even includes two parodies of “Annabel Lee,” two

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20 A particularly interesting graphic novel inspired by Edgar Allan Poe was released in 1998 by Sirius Entertainment. This text, called Jason Asala’s Poe, much like Avi’s The Man Who Was Poe, chronicles an imaginary adventure detailing how Poe was inspired to write his famous tales and poems. This type of text is generally categorized as Biography/Fantasy.
parodies of “The Bells,” and a parody of “The Raven” involving a goose and a very gluttonous narrator. In fact, Walt Whitman may even have had a hand in a Poe parody published in the in Brooklyn Daily Eagle in 1848 (Brasher, “A Whitman Parody of “The Raven”?”). As one can see, parodying Poe is not a new idea; however, Poe’s parodies have never been granted the serious attention they deserve.
CHAPTER 2
EDUCATIONAL ADAPTATIONS: COMICS, GRAPHIC NOVELS, AND EDUCATIONAL INTENT

As early as 1858, Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories and poems were being adapted and illustrated by some of the world’s most famous illustrators, engravers, and artists. Along with John Tenniel\(^{21}\) and Édouard Manet\(^{22}\), Gustave Doré was one of the first famous illustrators to take on what would become one of the most well-known poems in popular culture, Poe’s “The Raven.” Using elaborate woodcuts, in 1884 Doré decorated the poem with beautifully rendered interpretations of several key lines from the text. Innocuous furniture turns to skeletons and avenging angels of death, invisible seraphs surround the tortured narrator, and Lenore constantly appears to be trying to soothe her still-living lover from beyond the grave. As an artist who is remembered primarily for his gothic illustrations for children’s tales, including Aventures du Baron de Münchausen (1866) and several fairy tales and nursery rhymes,\(^{23}\) Doré’s imaginative response to Poe is classified by the Library of Congress as children’s literature, and I believe this marks one of the first attempts to interest a younger audience in the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

From such illustrious beginnings, Poe’s works were eventually transposed from illustrated text to sequential art in both comic books and graphic novels. But these adaptations to forms of sequential art were not merely for entertainment. Over the years, several different groups of people have taken it upon themselves to educate the masses about Poe. Self-proclaimed “educational” material has been on the market as early as the 1940’s; Albert Kanter’s *Classics*...

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\(^{21}\) Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914) is most commonly known for his illustrations to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, as well as *Aesop’s Fables*. His work for Poe’s “The Raven” can be found in *The poetical works of Edgar Allan Poe*, with original memoir (1858).

\(^{22}\) Édouard Manet’s (1832-1883) relationship to Poe is via his lithographs to “The Raven,” featured in a French translation (“Le Corbeau”) by Stéphane Mallarmé in 1875.

\(^{23}\) Among his works are one of the most famous illustrations of “Little Red Riding Hood,” as well as illustrations to Coleridge’s gothic poem, “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and many Bible stories.
Illustrated were the first comics that had the express aim of “introducing young readers to the classics literature that has sustained him over the years” (Jones 9). But, of course, no comic book adaptation can be made without much cutting and rearranging of the texts, and Poe’s short stories and poems, though short, were still subject to the adaptor’s red pen.

Following Kanter came Tom Pomplun, editor and designer of the Graphics Classics line of graphic novels which began in 2003. The homepage of Graphic Classics features in bright blue their motto: “CLASSICS YOU’LL WANT TO READ! [sic]” Edgar Allan Poe was given the posthumous honor of leading this new line of graphic novels in 2001 with the inaugural issue, which has since undergone two republications. The first edition was marketed primarily for adults, while the second and third editions target middle- and high-school libraries. Creator and editor Tom Pomplun originally envisioned a series of graphic novels for adult readers, but;

My original conception for the series was that it be for adult readers, and that the books would be about half comics adaptations and half heavily-illustrated text. … By the time the first edition sold out and a second edition of GC: EDGAR ALLAN POE was published in March 2004, the series had evolved into an all-ages publication (targeted at ages 12 to adult). … The major market for the books shifted from comic shops to school and public libraries. (Pomplun 11 Sept.)

Each novel is devoted solely to Poe’s work, and each maintains works from the previous edition while including some new material as well. The first edition, according to Pomplun, was targeted to adults, while every edition since has focused on adolescent readership. In addition, volume 14 (titled Gothic Classics) is scheduled for release in April of 2007, and will include Poe’s “The Oval Portrait” illustrated by Leong Wan Kok (Pomplun 11 Sept.). Because each story was adapted and illustrated by different writers and artists, and because the second edition of Poe’s

Graphics Classics features some works from the first edition and some new material (adaptations

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24 The Graphic Classics line of graphic novels stemmed directly from Pomplun’s earlier magazine company, Rosebud Magazine. This line lasted from 1993-2003 and began incorporating comics by its 18th issue.

specifically designed for educational settings), select works from the second edition will be examined in both this section and section 2.

Stories in each of these publications will be examined in order to get an idea of what happens to Poe’s stories when they are made “educational” for their younger audience. As an author who is popularly conceived of as one of the many authors that children don’t know but need to, attention needs to be paid not only to the effects of adaptations, but to the effects of adapting Poe with a specific agenda – education – in mind. How well adaptors and illustrators manage these assumed facts are debated in the final section of this section.

One statement by William B. Jones, Jr. fairly sums up the success of the infamous line of comics known as *Classics Illustrated*: “with their childish, improbable plotlines, the tight-underwear guys in other comic books - Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, and the rest - seemed pitiably weak substitutes for Athos, Porthos, and Aramis” (4). Based on some of the world’s finest (or most canonical) works, these comics sought to entice younger audiences to read versions of stories by famous authors that not only would be easy to understand, but that would encourage their young readers to read the originals (Sawyer 1). Borrowing stories from popular literature of the time, *Classics Illustrated* sought to educate the masses.

William B. Jones, Jr.’s *Classics Illustrated: A Cultural History with Illustrations* is an invaluable resource for those interested in *Classics Illustrated* comics. According to Jones’

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26 Sawyer goes on to say, “exactly when Kanter conceived the idea of producing the *Classic Comics* is not known, but the story, embellished perhaps by legend and the passage of time, has it that Kanter became concerned because his children were reading comic books and neglecting the rich literature on the shelves. … Kanter saw an opportunity in this new field and decided to take advantage of it,” (2). Lenny Kaye, too, mentions that Kanter had no intention of supplanting the original literary texts, but instead “he merely wanted to place the original books in a form more accessible to a generation that was beginning to recoil from the linearity of printed matter into more immediate less cerebral mediums,” (Kaye, qtd in Sawyer 6).

27 What was and still is considered canonical hasn’t changed much since *Classics Illustrated* began in 1941. For more information about perceptions of the canon around the time of the Cold War, specifically as it reflects identity construction, see chapter two of Leerom Medovoi’s *REBELS: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*. 
extensive appendices, Poe’s stories were first reproduced by *Classics Illustrated* in issue 17. “Annabel Lee” is included in a collection under the title *Deerslayer* (by Cooper) in January 1944. No adaptor is credited, so one can hazard a guess that the text was true to the original. In the very next issue, number 18 in March 1944 titled *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Poe’s “The Bells” is included and illustrated by Louis Zansky. Poe pops back up in issue 21 (*3 Famous Mysteries*) with an inclusion of “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” A brief biography is also offered in this issue.

The first *Classics Illustrated* comic to be devoted to Poe was issue 40 in August 1947. Titled simply *Mysteries*, such classics as “The Pit and the Pendulum,” “The Adventures of Hans Pfall,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” took center stage, forcing other pieces to the periphery, including “The Cherokee Nation” by John H. O’Rourke. Adaptations are credited to Samuel Willinsky, and a biography is also included. For no clear reason, Poe did not appear again until issue 84 in June 1951. Titled *The Gold Bug and Other Stories*, the publication featuring the reappearance of Poe is credited to adaptor John H. O’Rourke and included “The Gold Bug,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Cask of Amontillado,” along with a bio in this issue. *Classics Illustrated* would survive for twenty more years until, in 1971, it breathed its last. Within these twenty years, Poe was not to be found in any of the comics.

When First Publishing tried to revive the series in the early late 1980’s/early 1990’s, they began their collection with a comic entitled *The Raven and Other Poems*. This inaugural issue (Feb 1990) included “Annabel Lee” and “The Conquerer Worm.” Issue 14 (September 1990) was titled *The Fall of the House of Usher* and adaptations are credited to P. Craig Russell. Unfortunately, this line of comics did not take off as intended and stopped shortly after at issue 27 in 1991. However, considering that Poe was included twice in two years in this line when he
disappeared from the early line of comics – first for a span of four years and then for twenty –
might suggest a resurgence in Poe’s popularity among younger readers. Also noteworthy, when
First Publishing attempted to revamp the old Classics Illustrated series, they “consulted with
various literacy programs and the books were intended to some extent to use as reading tools”
(Jones 191). Obviously this idea didn’t strike the general populace as a good one, for as Jones
suggests,

While the original series had been aimed primarily at the adolescent male comic-book fan
who already had a frame of reference thanks to a popular culture awash in film adaptations,
the contemporary comic-book reader was often clueless about either the classics or
Classics Illustrated. (Jones 191)

Instead of putting academic pressures on an already-established line of comics, a different series
of comics was released with the clear and focused intent of educating the young masses; thus
was the dawn of the Classics Illustrated Study Guides.

The lesser-known comic collections Classics Illustrated Study Guides were published by
Acclaim Books from 1997-1998. Among these study guides are two collections of Poe’s work.
The first was Study Guide 17 (June 1997) titled Stories by Poe, including “The Adventures of
Hans Pfall,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” These works were simply
reproduced word for word (and picture for picture) from the 1947 and 1951 Classics Illustrated
versions with no more touch-up than a little bit of modern coloring. Study guide 29, More Stories
by Poe (August 1997), worked the same way, including “The Pit and the Pendulum,” “The
Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and “The Raven,” all of which
had been borrowed from the 1944, 1947, and 1990 Classics Illustrated comics. An essay by
George Feeley attempts to explore those of Poe’s stories which, as will be discussed below, had
actually been stripped of their effect by the images accompanying stories using Poe’s original
texts. Not revamping the comics was their crucial error; instead of hiring new, educated artists
who could render Poe’s stories with some insight (for a price), *Classics Illustrated* choose to simply (and more cheaply) replicate the adaptations of Poe that they already had from previous comic publications. This would not have been a bad move, but for the poor quality of the adaptations themselves.

In the first *Classics Illustrated Study Guide* devoted to Poe, the spotlight story is “The Tell-Tale Heart,” suggested by the cover, featuring a blue face looming at the reader from under broken floorboards. This comic contains “The Adventures of Hans Pfall,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” These three stories are each fairly faithfully copied from Poe’s originals. However, in some cases (especially in “The Tell-Tale Heart”) word balloons contain ejaculations that are foreign to Poe’s texts. In the second *Classics Illustrated Study Guide*, things begin to take a turn for the worse. The spotlight story in this edition is “The Pit and the Pendulum,” a fact made obvious by the rats and pendulum on the cover. “The Pit and the Pendulum” is, in fact, the first story in this comic, but a reader would never be able to glean this fact from the pictures alone. Instead of maintaining Poe’s use of a first-person narrative, illustrator August M. Froelich takes the liberty of constantly switching back and forth between the captive’s thoughts (manifested in word balloons) and the actions of his captors during his bouts of unconsciousness, effectively stripping the story of the bulk of its terrifying affect. The reader is made to feel secure by the knowledge that other men are behind this and are waiting for the prisoner to “descend into purgatory himself” (*Classics Illustrated Study Guide* 2, 6).

The second blunder in this comic is on the title page of the next story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Either the illustrator, Arnold L. Hicks, was unaware of the importance of the surprise ending, or he simply didn’t care. As Jones asserted regarding the 1944 publication of this same story by the same illustrator, “the artist spoiled the resolution of the mystery by filling
the title-page splash with the looming shadow of an ape” (32). The resolution was also spoiled by the adaptor’s placement of the solution to the mystery. In the very middle of the story (page 5 of 10), Dupin reveals the identity of the murderer; the rest of the story is simply an elaborate plot to catch the orangutan who, incidentally, is fatally wounded by Dupin’s gunshots after having attacked the narrator (who is named “Poe” on the title page).

The final comic book-style story in this text is “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Although the previous stories had egregious errors, this rendition has little to criticize and is actually done rather well. One point to notice is that Madeline Usher has no distinguishing facial features before her dramatic entrance to the story of Ethelred. The same can be said about the last story in this book, a reproduction of “The Raven.” The poem is not a comic strip, but is simply printed in white text on a black background, and a total of 6 quarter-size illustrations make it quite clear that Poe, himself, is the tortured narrator. Again, considering the inexcusable faults of the previous two works, “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Raven” contain little for Poe aficionados to dislike.

*Classics Illustrated* is not the only company interested in reproducing Poe’s stories for comic-fiend teens. One of the up-and-coming graphic novel companies, *Graphic Classics*, has produced several editions of collected works by Poe. Their webpage boasts such quotes as “I’d say we're finally getting a worthy successor to the old CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED [sic] line,” quoted by Greg McElhatton of *iComics*. But whereas the educational goals of *Classics Illustrated* comics were unquestioned, a quote by Carolyn Bailey (ForeWord Magazine) makes one wonder, “Who has time to read the classics? Everyone, now that Eureka Productions has created the GRAPHIC CLASSICS [sic] series.” Is it simply the case that adolescents do not take the time to read the classics and thus require these new, ‘quick reads’? Or are they simply
unmotivated to do so since they have condensed versions at their fingertips? These questions, of course, invoke a long debate, but with the advent of short, easy-to-read adaptations of Poe’s texts, this author leans toward the latter explanation.

*Graphic Classics* began in October 2001 with the publication of *Graphic Classics: Edgar Allan Poe*. The company, published by Eureka Productions, is now in its fifth year and shows no sign of slowing down. The Edgar Allan Poe graphic novel has been published in three editions already, and Poe’s stories have been featured in both the *Horror Classics* (in the inaugural issue, Sept. 2004) and *Gothic Classics* (scheduled for release in April 2007) multi-author anthology novels. Even so, creator and editor Tom Pomplun believes that Graphic Classics are not done with Poe,

> It is likely that more Poe adaptations will be included in future themed anthologies, but there are no more currently in production. I certainly hope that there will eventually be a fourth edition of *GRAPHIC CLASSICS: EDGAR ALLAN POE*, but that depends on sales, and will probably not be for several years, (Pomplun 11 Sept.)

This forward-looking statement certainly shows that Poe is no danger of being dropped from youth culture any time soon.

As mentioned above, the second edition of the *Graphic Classics* devoted to Poe represented a conscious shift in the market for the graphic novels “from comics shops to school and public libraries” (Pomplun 11 Sept.). Therefore, works featured in the second edition that do not appear in the first edition will be the focus of discussion, along with some of the works that were retained, presumably for their “educational” value. These stories were included in order to draw a primarily adolescent audience, and are thus the most pertinent here. Because the original market targeted ages twelve to adult, works that appeared in both the first and second editions are not necessarily out of the scope of this discussion. In fact, those stories that are maintained from the first to second edition provide as much information for scholars as the material included...
exclusively for the second edition, since they were deemed “academic” enough to be reprinted in an edition marketed to school libraries.

In the second edition of the Edgar Allan Poe graphic novel, a formidable amount of Poe’s work is printed faithfully, but the illustrations tend to depart from original intended affect and details. Works new to this edition include; “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Haunted Palace,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and “Never Bet the Devil Your Head.” As mentioned above, several of the stories and poems are faithful to Poe’s original text, but they include only one or two decorative illustrations (such as “The Haunted Palace”). On the other hand, some of the illustrators take great liberty with the material.

The first story in the second edition, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” adapted & illustrated by Rick Geary, was one of the nine stories carried over from the first edition of the Graphic Classics salute to Poe and is, in fact, one of the more liberal adaptations. Although the text is maintained fairly adequately, several panels lend clues as to the narrator’s reliability and this, I believe, empties much of the intrigue from the story. The biggest problem is that after the very first panel the narrator is never seen as a whole entity. In fact, not only is he never shown as a single coherent entity from that standpoint, but his fractured personality is captured within the comic as fractured panels. Perhaps the best illustration of this comes from two adjoining panels on page 12, wherein the narrator’s face is split in two by a horizontal line delineating the two separate panels. This obvious fracturing of the character suggests that the narrator does not act as a single, coherent person and is – as his actions suggest – crazy.

If the fractured narrator isn’t enough to show the bias created by the illustrator in his rendering of the story, consider also the very first panel. Immediately to the narrator’s right sits an empty decanter and a glass that has been pushed over onto its side. One can only assume that
the glass has tipped over because the owner has drained it to the dregs and hastily tried to put it down. The illustrator’s use of fractured panels suggest insanity via (a literally) split personality, and his inclusion of specific details in the first panel (the decanter and glass) seem to suggest that even if he isn’t crazy, he certainly is a drunkard.

Admittedly, out of the thirteen stories included in the Graphic Classics volume devoted to Poe, the only one that perceptibly and unconstructively veers from Poe’s original story is “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

For the most part, the stories are well illustrated and, even when the text is adapted to fit the space allotted, Poe’s original affect and ideas are preserved. For a publication that did not begin as an educational endeavor, Graphic Classics actually depicts Poe in a very commendable manner. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Classics Illustrated second study guide. From the beginning, Classics Illustrated sought to entice younger readers to educate themselves about the canonical – or at least, popular – writers of the world. However, in adapting the stories to comic book format, the illustrators took enormous liberties (perhaps to make the storylines clear, as in the case of “The Pit and the Pendulum”) which ultimately destroy the power and fascination the stories hold. Thus, the self-proclaimed “educational” adaptations cannot be said to be the most reliable, nor even the most entertaining, versions of Poe’s works.

This section’s goal was to get an idea of what happens when Poe’s stories are consciously made “educational” for younger readers. As we’ve found, although some adaptations are true to Poe’s original texts, others are seriously altered in ways that are deleterious to – or completely change – the affect Poe’s originals seem designed to evoke. Within the stories examined here, when adaptors got something wrong they most often destroyed (or at least seriously impeded) the

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28 “The Inheritance of Rufus Griswold,” included in both the first and second editions, is questionable from a historic standpoint, as it attempts to examine the mysterious circumstances around Poe’s death; it presents an interesting case study, but as it is not an original story by Poe, a discussion of it will not be included here.
impact the original story intended to make. Adaptors who aim at educating their audience ultimately rob the stories of their mystery (as seen in Classics Illustrated “The Pit and the Pendulum,” “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” and Graphic Classics’ “The Tell-Tale Heart”). When education is the agenda, much is lost in translation. Of course, educational adaptations are not the only reconstitutions of Poe on the market. Numerous artists have picked up where Poe left off, translating his work into interpretive – and in some cases interactive – adaptations for younger audiences. These interpretive works will be the focus of discussion in the next section. Perhaps when the goal is no longer to educate, education can occur.

Educational adaptations require their audiences to accept their new versions of the old stories as equivalent to their original text. Often, however, the reconstitution does not work because the adaptation alters key aspects of the text (such as point of view, key details, and even characters) in order to make the new adaptation more accessible (in this case, more accessible to younger readers). Admittedly, parody also relies on host texts, but in a much different way.

According to Linda Hutcheon, “parody’s transgressions ultimately remain authorized – authorized by the very norm it seeks to subvert. Even in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked convention onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence” (75). Simon Dentith, too, points out parody’s paradox:

Parody has the paradoxical effect of preserving the very text that it seeks to destroy, even if the hypotext remains only ‘under erasure’... This can have some odd effects, even running counter to the apparent intentions of the parodist. Thus the classic parody of Don Quixote … preserves the very chivalric romances that it attacks—with the unexpected result that for much of its history the novel has been read as a celebration of misplaced idealism rather than a satire of it. ... I shall have frequent cause to refer to this ‘parodic paradox’—understood as the generation of further writing (36) out of the assault upon stigmatised [sic] forms that the parody is supposed to bring to a halt. (my emphasis; 36–37)

29 I use the term “host text” with tongue-in-cheek; as parodies rely on previous texts’ authority, critics of parody may consider the form to be parasitic. It should be noted that these critics are generally thought of as parasites, themselves.
Even when a parodist has the intention of destroying a text or genre by exposing what the author believes to be the text’s or genre’s faults or blemishes, the author actually performs an act that will aid the survival of a text, not its demise. For, as Hutcheon suggests, the authority of the parody is assumed (borrowed) from the primary text; by invoking this authority to make the parody work, the original work is constantly being reestablished. As A.S. Martin states in his cornerstone text on parody, “a clever parody…reveals a writer’s tricks of style and expression, affectations and deficiencies, as nothing else could ever do” (116). The elements of the original story usurped by a parodic adaptation are those elements which ultimately circulate the authority between the original and parodic texts.

One must question why parodies can work better than educational materials when the manifest goals of these two genres are considered to be quite different. But as seen before, the same basic principles apply to each. In children’s adaptations – especially those that add visual components – a certain amount of editing must be done to the original story in order to emphasize key storylines and concepts. (See, for example, Classics Illustrated’s version of “The Pit and the Pendulum.”) In so doing, the authors and illustrators essentially perform the same action on the text as those transposing works into parodies, as key aspects of the texts are illuminated.

However, educational adaptations that do not necessarily wish to draw attention to the fact they are adaptations and do not contain the original story do just that. By trying to pass themselves off as replicas of the original story, educational adaptations lose some of their authority when they add or delete details from the original for their own ends. To illustrate, in Classics Illustrated’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” the first-person view, which ultimately makes the story a gothic, anxiety-provoking text, is whitewashed by the author’s attempt to reconstruct
the original story in such a way as to make it more accessible to younger audiences. But by doing so, the author effectively destroys the story as it was intended to be told. Parodies, “serve the function of reordering the elements in the system, allowing previously low-status elements to take on high-status positions,” (Dentith 33). Although parodies can arguably be said to ravage their text even as they reconstitute it, parodies (by definition) do so self-consciously; in fact, they cannot be seen as merely a retelling of the original tale in order to function as a parody (see definition, above). Because parodies are trying to emphasize key points, they can maintain the authority to do so by virtue of their very structure. Educational adaptations, on the other hand, lose too much in translation to be of much educational value.
CHAPTER 3
INTERPRETIVE ADAPTATIONS: COMPUTER GAMES AND ILLUSTRATED POEMS

As is the case with many works of literature, some adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe’s works do not fit easily into one category. The interpretative adaptations of Poe’s texts cannot be said to be expressly intended for either educational purposes or for humorous effect. Instead, these works form a middle category of texts that are both educational – because of their unique perspective into Poe’s works, offering new storylines to accompany old texts – and simultaneously critical in a manner very similar to that of parodies because of the alternative meaning offered. This is the reason I have chosen to give them their own section in my discussion; although they overlap with both educational adaptations and parodic works, these interpretive texts claim neither of the agendas professed by the other types of texts explored here.

The second edition of *Graphic Classics: Edgar Allan Poe* was marketed to young audiences, both in comic shops and school libraries (Pomplun 11 Sept.). Several of the texts featured in the original graphic novel targeting adult audiences found their way into the second, more educationally-focused edition. One such text was an adaptation of Poe’s “The Bells,” adapted by Rafael Nieves and illustrated by Juan Gomez. Gomez’s vision for “The Bells” is an extension of that told by Poe’s poem. Traditionally, the first stanza (silver bells), is seen to represent youthful joy, the second stanza (wedding bells) marriage and family, the third stanza (war bells) hatred and pain, and the fourth stanza (iron bells) the narrator’s or reader’s death tolls (Graham). Alternative versions of “The Bells” have been offered before, but few have been so

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30 The version of Gomez’s “The Bells” found in the *Graphic Classics* graphic novel is a condensed version. The full version, published in 1999 by Tome Press, is now considered a rare book. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate a copy in order to compare the full text to the version offered in *Graphic Classics: Poe*. According to critic Gary Butler, however, “this adaptation does not suffer for being shorter” (http://www.graphicclassics.com/pcs/reviews1.htm).

31 See Richard Fusco’s article, “An Alternative Reading of Poe's 'The Bells',” for example.
artfully presented as Gomez’s. Not only does Gomez offer a new point of entry to understanding Poe’s poem, but he also incorporates several tidbits of biographical information by positioning Poe as the main character in his own poem.

When the story opens, Poe is summoned to his window by church bells tolling, a horse and carriage jingling, and a raven squawking. Throughout the story (told strictly by the illustrations with an occasional image-text of the word “bells”), we see a young Poe falling in love with a beautiful woman. He attends a party and recites some of his poem “The Raven” to impress the other guests, but the young woman he fancies only has eyes for a brutish-looking man in a corner. Next, we see the two getting married, while Poe looks on helplessly, attempting to drown his sorry the way history teaches us he did: with drink. When the next stanza begins, cries in the night wake Poe, and he and many neighbors and friends try to suppress the fire that broke out in the newlyweds’ house.

Poe suspects dirty play when the widower-groom sits on the side of the street instead of helping to douse the fire. He follows the man and sees money being exchanged – the man killed his young bride for a price. But the man discovers Poe lurking in the shadows and seeks to silence him. The man ties Poe to an enormous church bell that, when it tolls, shows Poe back at his writing desk (identical to the first panel, no less), summoned out of his daydream by the tolling of a grandfather clock. As Poe is looks out of his window to see a horse and carriage jingling, and a raven squawking, instead of pursing the young lady who looks up at him from the carriage he slams his window shut on the bells and the raven with an emphatic “damnation!” (77). Although the original text of “The Bells” is maintained verbatim (with the exception of occasional liberties with punctuation, such as exclamation points instead of periods), the story

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32 This fire scene could easily be an allusion to Poe’s “The Black Cat,” although no odd shadow of a cat appears in the illustrations.
Gomez tells via his illustrations is quite different from the interpretation most readers and scholars accept: the cycle of life and death told through the allusion to bells that toll during different rites of passage in a person’s life.

Instead of offering pictures following the life of any random character, Gomez’s use of Poe as his protagonist and his focus on Poe’s life at one specific moment adds a personal dimension to the poem that Poe, perhaps, did not intend. But by cleverly inserting excerpts from “The Raven” and Poe’s own biography (alcoholism and a death-haunted love-life, to name a few), Gomez also brings an educational aspect to his work. Unlike Geary’s illustrations for “The Tell-Tale Heart,” Gomez’s panels do not give away elements of the story. For example, whereas Geary shows his narrator drunk and as a fractured (insane) character, Gomez uses such devices as split panels and overturned glasses of alcohol to add to his secondary, imaginative plot which takes place solely in the illustrations. Geary ruins his adaptation by adding details in the images that result in alterations to the original written narrative set forth by Poe.

Gomez, on the hand, by including elements that add to his interpretation rather than Poe’s text for the poem, maintains Poe’s original language and devices while adding a few of his own. The original host text is not altered or destroyed; instead, Geary simply adds a fresh layer of meaning to this well-known poem. Returning to the idea of authority for a moment, we find that both parody and educational adaptations appropriate authority from their host texts. However, parody (or in this case, self-conscious interpretation like Gomez’s “The Bells”) never asks the audience to assume that the new text is interchangeable with the original text. Educational adaptations – such as Geary’s “Tell-Tale Heart” – do require the audience to accept this direct compatibility and to accept the new text as synonymous for the old. Geary’s

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33 Some of these inclusions allude to facets of Poe’s life, and thereby serve a dual purpose; they both to add to Gomez’s unique take on the poem and serve as educational markers suggesting scenes from Poe’s life.
adaptation, while well-drawn, adds elements that any Poe fan knows should not be there, sacrificing important elements of the original for accessibility. Thus, Gomez’s version of “The Bells” proves itself to be a much more approachable text than Geary’s “Tell-Tale Heart” because audiences can come to the story knowing that Gomez’s story is not meant to replace Poe’s original text, but instead to supplement it. This text cannot be said to be as culturally educational as parodic adaptations, however, because the audience is not offered the critical distance between the original text and its adaptive counterpart as in parodic works.

In 1995, computer company Inscape released a fascinating game simply titled *The Dark Eye*. Within this game, the player must work his way through three of Poe’s most famous stories – “Annabel Lee,” “The Masque of the Red Death,” and “The Cask of Amontillado” – as well as an original frame story that cleverly connects Poe’s tales. Several aspects of this game make it a fascinating addition to the multitudes of Poe paraphernalia in pop culture today.

First, in true Poe form, the characters that the player must interact with in the game are truly “uncanny” in Freud’s sense of the term: they are puppets, at once human and inhuman, familiar and strange. Instead of attempting realism in their game, designers at Inscape sought to create a game that was, in reviewer Dan Ravipinto’s words, “stunningly beautiful, well-thought out, atmospheric, eerie and frightening—much like the works of Edgar Allen [sic] Poe,”34 and the puppets certainly lend verisimilitude in a very strange way. Their costumes are precise and evocative of both the appropriate time period and status of their characters. Also, players must navigate each of Poe’s stories – as both murderer and victim – in order to work their way through the game. As Ravipinto notices, however, “each story has a particular, single narrative line through it - one that must be strictly followed. This makes sense, since all are based on existing,

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linear writings, but can be incredibly frustrating if you don't know where the story's supposed to go next” (par. 10). As an educational tool, this strictly linear plot could certainly pose a problem. If a young student is trying to play the game in order to familiarize herself with Poe’s works, she may encounter some unnecessary frustration. On the other hand, if she is diligent she may, in fact, find herself even more appreciative of Poe’s intricate, complex, and ultimately effective plot devices and twists by having to work through them actively.

These interpretive texts are slightly more helpful to students of Poe than “educational adaptations” because they offer the audience a unique form of access to Poe’s original stories, either by offering a nontraditional and suggestively biographic interpretation, such as Gomez does, or by placing the audience in the story, as The Dark Eye seeks to do. However, these texts are not quite as culturally edifying as parodic adaptations because these works only offer one interpretation to the texts they focus on. Parodies – though they focus on specific traits of the original text – offer their audiences critical distance from the original text, allowing for a higher level of critique. But these parodic adaptations are more often than not dismissed – much as Poe’s writings often are – as childish and puerile. Let us now examine this common misconception.
CHAPTER 4
PARODIC ADAPTATIONS: “COUNTLESS HERE, OR MAYBE MORE!”

Poe’s harshest critics have always been quick to decry his works as immature. T.S. Eliot even goes so far in one famous quote to proclaim Poe’s works to be those of “a highly gifted young person before puberty” (qtd in Gargano, 22). According to those G. Richard Thompson calls “Gothicists,” Poe’s satires and parodies serve to convince discerning audiences that “humor was actually “alien” to his personality; when he tried to write humor, he was attempting to put on an incongruous mask, out of keeping with his real self” (98). But such criticisms are not universal sentiments. Daniel Hoffman offers a counter to this line of thinking with the statement that though Poe’s humor was at times “droll” (9), “sick” (10), and even “a parodic jest of real fear” (10), Poe’s humor had (and more importantly, still has) “the power to transform itself into the serious thing of which Poe’s tale was a parody” (10-11). This power, which has served to preserve a place (however arguably tenuous) for Poe in the American literary canon, has itself been reconstituted in recent years. This section will focus on the strange power vested in parody.

One of Poe’s most well-known works of satire is “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” which takes as its subject female sensationalist writers. Mercilessly, Poe exposes and exaggerates their methods and then – to add insult to injury – proceeds to write a story based on his own satiric advice. The result is the horribly funny short story “A Predicament.” But these two texts were not his first, nor his last, works of satire or parody. In The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, editors Stuart and Susan Levine set aside three separate chapters for Poe’s humorous tales. These stories were not listed in chronological order within the book but, if they had been, one would easily notice that Poe’s earlier works were the more imaginative attempts at humor. It was

only during his later works that he began his proverbial descent into the maelstrom. The Levines categorize Poe’s humorous tales as follows: *Slapstick Gothic* (chapter 7)\(^{36}\), which includes the short story “Menzingerstein”; *Literary Satires* (chapter 9)\(^{37}\), with “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” “A Predicament,” and “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob Esq.”; and *Political Satires* (chapter 10), which includes only two stories, “Four Beasts in One / The Homo-Cameleopard” and “The Man That Was Used Up.” G. Richard Thompson goes so far as to suggest that many of Poe’s parodies took for their topics his own serious works of horror and sensationalism\(^{38}\). Parody obviously remained an important aspect to Poe’s writing, as even his most serious works can be found to contain parodic jabs and innuendos.

Ironically, in popular culture Poe is portrayed most often as a parodied figure, as Poe himself was a master of parody. Even the cover of comics and graphic novels pay homage to this great American writer via caricatures, and cartoons portray his work (serious and satiric) with tongue-in-cheek humor (see section 1). But the comedy imposed upon Poe, whether politically correct or otherwise, is not restricted to caricatures of the author in comic books; satires and parodies of both Poe and his works can be found in cartoons and all over the internet, as well. Poe’s works lives on in the hearts of *Simpsons* fans, *Tiny Toon Adventures* audiences, *Garfield & Friends* aficionados; the list goes on and on. Three of Poe’s most popular texts reappear over and over in re-imagined and re-appropriated forms. “The Raven,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” and

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\(^{36}\) Including *King Pest, Metzengerstein, The Premature Burial, and The Sphinx*.

\(^{37}\) Including *How to Write a Blackwood Article, A Predicament, Never Bet the Devil Your Head, A Tale of Jerusalem, The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq., The Duc De L'Omelette, Some Passages from the Life of a Lion, The Devil in the Belfry, Bon-Bon, Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling, and ‘X-ing a Paragrab’*.

\(^{38}\) “This loose pattern of alternation continues to the end of Poe’s career, even suggesting conscious self-parody [my emphasis]; the Dupin stories (1841 to 1845) are burlesqued in the comic detective story “Thou art the Man;” (1844); the suspended animation of “M. Valdemar” is made comic in Count Allamistakeo’s resurrection in “Some Words with a Mummy” in the same year; the living burials of Madeline Usher and of Berenice are travestied in “The Premature Burial” (1844); the Gothic décor of “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842) and the revenge theme in “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846) became part of an absurd, though savage, fairy tale in “Hop-Frog” (1849)” (Thompson 100).
“The Tell-Tale Heart,” re-emerge in adolescent culture in what may seem to be odd or unusual places. Of these three, “The Raven” has been the most picked apart, chewed up, and spat back out in forms both funny and strange. According to Kenneth Silverman;

Within a month after its appearance [in the Jan 29, 1845 issue of the *Mirror*] “The Raven” was reprinted at least ten times. …Excitement over the catchy poem broke out in a rash of parodies. Periodicals in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia comically turned the famous bird into other creatures…. According to a later account, Dr. John Francis of New York invited Poe to his home and introduced him to his wife and guests by saying, “Eliza, my dear – ‘The Raven’!” (Silverman 238)

Today, the raven has become the über-symbol of death and all things creepy, and Poe’s original poem is alive and well. “The Raven” can be found in the most unlikely places, allowing it to reach (and captivate) audiences otherwise unlikely to be (willingly) exposed to what may be deemed “academic” work such as Poe’s canonical poem. Consider, for example, the inaugural Halloween episode of one of America’s most irreverent and parodic cartoon sitcoms, *The Simpsons*.

When *The Simpsons* aired for the first time on *The Traci Ullmer* show as a short, no one – especially creator Matt Groening, who is widely acknowledged to have come up with the concept in fifteen minutes – ever dreamed that it would become one of the “longest-running prime-time animated show[s] in history.”39 *The Simpsons* have become synonymous for “smart but funny” television (Gray 142), and it is viewed by both children and adults, and all ages in between. According to Jonathan Gray’s findings, *The Simpsons* basically operates on three levels: a simplistic visual level reflecting Homer’s stupidity, a slightly deeper level which involves Bart and his wisecracks/witticisms, and the deepest level based on “parodic-satiric

commentary” (Gray 131). The third level, of course, will be of most interest to the current discussion.

*The Simpsons* first and second seasons included several classic episodes, but none picked up momentum quite as well as the first Halloween episode, “Treehouse of Horror” which included references to *The Amityville Horror, The Twilight Zone*, and a full parody of “The Raven.” Since the first Halloween episode in October of 1990, a total of seventeen Treehouse of Horror episodes have been made, the most recent of which aired on November 5, 2006. Apart from the cartoon episodes, in 1995 Bongo Comics picked up the series as an annual comic titled “Bart Simpson’s Treehouse of Horror.” The most recent collection of these comics by Harper Publishers, *The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror: Hoodoo Voodoo Brouhaha*, contains a delightful spoof on Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado.”

The very first Treehouse of Horror cartoon episode begins with Marge offering a slightly odd monologue to the audience. She tells us, “Nothing seems to bother my kids, but tonight’s show – which I totally wash my hands of – is really scary.” She then advises all parents to put the children to bed early. This monologue is strange because Bart and Lisa are the ones telling the stories; Marge is the one who, towards the end of the episode, tells Homer not to be frightened because the stories told in the episode are “just children’s stories, they can’t hurt you.” This quote belies the fact that the Halloween episode was not necessarily only for an older audience, as the preamble suggested. But if the stories are not too scary for children, then why does Bart originally resist Lisa when she tries to read him Poe’s “The Raven”? His fear is not the story itself: “Bart: Hey, Poindexter, it’s Halloween! Put the book away! / Lisa: For your information, I’m about to read you a classic tale of terror by Edgar Allan Poe. / Bart: Wait a

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40 Unfortunately, I could find no script for the Treehouse of Horror episode; all transcriptions, therefore, are my own.
minute! That’s a schoolbook! / Lisa: Don’t worry Bart, you won’t learn anything [my emphasis].” Bart’s fear that he might “learn something” from a horror story is a telling clue about the cultural literacy associated with Poe, even in children’s culture. But it seems this reassurance is for both Bart and the audience.

As the narration begins, older audience members will immediately recognize the narrator’s voice: no less than James Earl Jones. The rich, trademark timbre of Jones’ voice adds an authoritative air to this adaptation from the outset. Even from the strong start provided by Jones, several “educational” moments can be found in this adaptation of the “The Raven” for Simpsons fans, though some of them do occur in a very brief amount of time. For example, in the opening scene showing Homer “nearly napping” (though he is actually drooling all over his armchair), the mug on the table beside him reads “Amontillado.” Also, after Homer flies into a rage at the raven (who bears an uncanny resemblance to Bart in both appearance and voice), the raven proceeds to drop several books on Homer’s head in self-defense; these books just so happen to be titled “The Pit and the Pendulum,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Purloined Letter.”

The actual text read by James Earl Jones is appropriated directly from Poe’s original poem. Throughout the frame story, Lisa reads Bart “The Raven” from one of her school textbooks and Bart frequently interjects with objections and opinions with which many elementary students may be able to identify. Also, as Homer reacts to the story being narrated he adds some interpretive gestures, but even Homer’s additions are not great enough to alter the possible meaning(s) of the text.

Of the original eighteen stanzas, eleven were reproduced in Lisa’s reading, and of those eleven stanzas four lines were deleted entirely and only two were tampered with; when James
Earl Jones recites “here I opened wide the door,” Bart interrupts with “This better be good.” Jones continues, “Darkness there and nothing more.” Of course, Bart cannot let this opportunity go. He asks Lisa, “You know what would’ve been scarier than nothing? … Anything!” Bart curbs his sarcasm for the next several stanzas until the classic line, “Tell me what thy lordly name is on the night’s Plutonian short! / Quoth the Raven…” and here Bart interjects “…eat my shorts!” Despite Lisa’s earlier assurances that Bart will not learn anything from this story, she now declares, “Bart, stop! He says ‘nevermore’ and that’s all he’ll ever say.”

Instead of arguing against this informative statement, Bart backs down and the story continues. Of course, the raven’s mindless repetition of the term “nevermore” is the key defining feature of this poem, and learning that the raven has only one line is probably not a fact many audience members would have thought about in any great depth before this information is offered to them. (Interestingly enough, in The Simpsons version of “The Raven,” the raven has one other line: “Uh-oh!” Besides that one exclamation, and Bart’s previous interjection of “eat my shorts,” the raven sticks to saying “nevermore”.) Other than these few minor modifications that mark the episode in distinctive Simpsons style, the text remains unadulterated.

“The Raven” is not the only Poe story The Simpsons has appropriated. In The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror: Hoodoo Voodoo Brouhaha, Homer and barkeep Moe Szyslak relive the horror of Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado.” In this parodic adaptation – "The Cask of Amontilla-D'oh!" – even though the text is heavily revised compared to “The Raven” parody, certain core elements remain the same, and the amount of cultural literacy required to understand the nuances is greater. For example, the text begins with a familiar lilt: “The thousand unpaid bar tabs of Homer Simpson I had borne as best I could…[sic] but when he ventured upon insult [here Home interjects “These pickled eggs stink!”], I vowed revenge!” (113). After Moe fails to
impale Homer with an ice pick, he states, “Failing that [the ice pick plan], I decided to wall up the big dummy in my basement” (114). Although this statement betrays the denouement of the story, culturally literate readers are expected to have already anticipated what the end of the story would be, because of two noteworthy clues presented immediately in the text: both the title and the opening “thousand unpaid bar tabs” line.

Besides the overt reference to “The Cask of Amontillado,” the comic invokes another famous Poe story several times throughout the course of the story. On page 119, Dr. Marvin Monroe is shown in a panel strapped to a giant table replete with rats gnawing on the straps and a huge scythe swinging above him. Also, in the end of the comic we are to assume that Homer suffers the same fate as Dr. Monroe while Moe drinks his Amontillado from the “E.A. Poe Vineyards.” If readers had missed the boat up to this point, there is no way they could read this last panel and remain ignorant of the throwback to Poe. This intertextual misappropriation is a very important detail, as the parody relies on an audience’s understanding of the text in order to become a site of criticism.

The Simpsons are not the only cartoon clique to borrow material from Poe for their scripts. The popular cartoon series Tiny Toon Adventures ‘spoofed’ several of Poe’s stories, including both “The Raven” (in an episode titled “How Sweetie It Is”\(^{41}\)) and “The Tell-Tale Heart” in the infamous episode “The Tell-Tale Vacuum.” This episode contains highly evocative images of many traditional Halloween stories, as even the introductory dialogue suggests. The opening of the episode is reminiscent of Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas, as a singing Pumpkin King stands on what resembles Spiral Hill. After the Tiny Toons emerge from

\(^{41}\) Unfortunately, this episode is not available on video cassette or DVD; as I was unable to locate a copy, I will focus my discussion on “The Tell-Tale Vacuum.” No transcript of this episode is available, so all transcriptions are my own.
one of the mystic trees deep in the woods, they proceed to invoke images from several classic horror movies and television shows, including *The Twilight Zone*, *Casper*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, and of course, “The Tell-Tale Heart.”

Plucky Duck’s retelling of Poe’s tale, called “The Tell-Tale Vacuum,” takes place in Hampton Pig’s house. Hampton’s eye is not the issue for the quirky green duck, but as Plucky tells the audience, “the pig were a friend to me; he had never slighted me or given me slight in the slightest way. It was not he who raised my ire and made my blood boil so – it was his vacuum cleaner!” Plucky then imitates the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart,” who says, “whenever [the old man’s glass eye] fell on me, my blood ran cold.” (Poe 555) Plucky shouts, “whenever it fell upon my ears, my blood ran cold!” Plucky also plays with the mental state of the tortured narrator. As the narrator in the *Graphic Classics* version was literally fractured, so too does Plucky suggest a touch of madness. “Mad, you say? Crazy, you say? Slightly imbalanced in the face of opposition you say if you have the time? Would a madman do this?” Here, Plucky proceeds to make a crazy face in a mirror and adds, “Don’t answer that.” Of course, the parallel here is to Poe’s own narrator, who, when recounting how he opened the old man’s door, asks, “would a madman have been so wise as this?” (Poe 555). In “The Tell-Tale Vacuum,” no room remains for speculation. By Plucky asking this question of the audience and then withdrawing it, he makes it perfectly clear that the narrator is, indeed, “imbalanced in the face of opposition.”

Besides using quotes adapted directly from the text, the story continues along roughly the same lines as Poe’s original. After furiously dismantling the vacuum and burying it under the floorboards, Plucky sits and talks merrily with Hampton about the “tragedy.” Of course, Plucky starts to hear the vacuum and begins to believe that Hampton hears it too; “he knew, and he was
making a mockery of my horror!” At last, Plucky can no longer stand it, and he rips up the floorboards screaming “I did it! I did it! Here, here, it is the whirring of your hideous vacuum!”

The similarities between Poe’s story and the Tiny Toon’s version are too many and too obvious to miss, even though most of the dialogue is not a direct application, as was the case in The Simpsons “The Raven.”

Unlike The Simpsons’ “The Raven,” the animated series Garfield and Friends borrow from Poe, but their adaptation is quite liberal. This series is amazingly self-conscious; Garfield frequently makes comments such as “I can’t save Odie, I’m not in this cartoon.” This self-referentiality is also noticeable in the U.S. Acres episodes. U.S. Acres, or “Orson’s Farm,” as it is also commonly referred to, actually began as a comic strip by Garfield creator Jim Davis. It has been adapted into children’s books, toys, and even into segments of the animated series Garfield and Friends. The self-conscious attitude of the series becomes important when audiences (or scholars) examine their adaptation of Poe’s work.

Episode 79, which begins with “The First Annual Garfield Watchers Test,” includes a parody of Poe’s “The Raven” performed entirely by the U.S. Acres cast. The episode begins with a very timid Wade Duck reading Poe’s “The Raven” to the audience: “Today the Orson Farm Players present for your erification [edification] the classic poem by Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Raven’,” but before he can read the first line, a stagehand interrupts with “we’re not doing that poem, we’re doing Orson’s version!” Wade, after grumbling a bit that no one tells him anything, proceeds to tell the audience that they will instead be watching “the not-so-classic story, ‘The Rooster’ by Edgar Orson Pig.” Here the parody is not constrained to Poe’s work, but to Poe’s name, as well. Also to note, Wade introduces Poe’s poem as a work that is “for your erification

42 Once again, all transcriptions are my own.
This presents the audience with an interesting twist: the idea that Poe’s poem would necessarily be educational and the educational aspect is the reason the Orson Farm Players are performing the poem in the first place. The audience is left to decide for themselves whether Orson’s version will serve as “erification” or not, as Wade does not address the issue of education again. As we shall see, the adaptation is, in fact, very edifying, whether the audience recognizes that fact or not.

Throughout the cartoon, Poe’s original rhyme scheme is strictly maintained, but most elements of the story are unique to U.S. Acres. The story recounts a familiar trope typical within the U.S. Acres storylines. After falling asleep and dreaming about his lost friend (aptly named Lenore), Orson Pig, who is to be guarding the harvest’s crops, realizes that the crops are missing. Roy Rooster, one of the “good guys,” attempts to take some of the crops for himself. After being foiled several times, Orson’s brothers come and hijack all the vegetables. Of course, all is well at the end of the poem, as Orson recovers the crops and Roy learns his lesson after some of his own crop-stealing plans backfire.

Obviously, this story has little in common with Poe’s original poem, but several key factors conspire to make this parody work. First, Wade introduces us to the work on which “The Rooster” is based (and even goes so far as to tell us that this poem has educational value). He does not invoke Poe’s name and the poem’s title by accident; by doing so, Wade primes the audience to be on the lookout for elements of Poe’s original story. In fact, by telling us that the original poem is edifying, Wade effectively alerts the audience that the elements of Poe’s original story as found in Orson’s adaptation would be those elements which are accepted as cultural literacy (those elements that they would be taught in school, for example). As mentioned above, the rhyme scheme, which maintains strict adherence to Poe’s “The Raven,” includes such
terms as “shore,” “deplore,” “yore,” words that are readily found in “The Raven.” Orson’s lost friend, Lenore, also adds verisimilitude to the poem by the mere mention of this familiar – and highly suggestive\textsuperscript{43} – name.

Two lines, in particular, aid Orson’s retelling of “The Raven.” The first comes roughly in the middle of the poem, as Roy states, “cartoons can’t have blood and gore!” The second line in question closes the cartoon; Orson asks Roy “I asked, do you intend to swipe the food we try to store? Quoth the Rooster…” and Roy finishes the poem with “Nevermore.” This is the only time the word “nevermore” is used in Orson’s retelling. These two lines are critical because they explain and legitimize the adaptation. If the audience wonders why \textit{U.S. Acres} didn’t simply perform Poe’s work as it was written originally, Roy suggests that the reason is one of genre limitations, while closing with a line that embodies and maintains all the implications and horror, if not gore, of Poe’s original poem. By drawing attention to the fact that the animators of \textit{U.S. Acres} are not willing to compromise their audience by showing them “adult” content, as they must believe Poe’s works to contain, they are certainly taking an extremely interesting risk by not only suggesting elements of Poe’s original (“Nevermore” and “Lenore,” for example), but by mentioning Poe’s original poem by name at the beginning of the episode. The writers obviously meant to draw on Poe’s authority as a writer, but did not wish to present age-inappropriate storylines or elements (i.e., death or torment).

We are then presented with a strange contradiction. If we assume that audience members have not yet been introduced to Poe’s original story, one must view this adaptation as a strange attempt to educate without giving all the “gory” details. All the original elements invoked

\textsuperscript{43} By “suggestive,” I mean that Lenore’s name is not commonly found in contemporary poetry, and thus the uniqueness of the name necessarily draws on the context given in Poe’s original “The Raven.” It is a rare case wherein the name “Lenore” doesn’t remind the reader of Poe’s poem.
(rhyme scheme, “nevermore,” Lenore), coupled with the odd introduction of the story explicitly stating Poe’s name and “The Raven”’s title, create a space wherein young audience members can gain cultural literacy about the original story without having to read the original. If the audience members already know “The Raven,” these factors serve merely to support the parody, but if audience members don’t know the original, these elements carry a much more complex purpose. They tell the audience what information is essential to “The Raven,” that is, what elements make “The Raven” what it is.

*The Simpsons, Tiny Toon Adventures, and Garfield and Friends* are only a sample of the many cartoons that have, in one way or another, parodied Poe’s texts. But these cartoons all present the strange paradox alluded to above; audience members can view the adaptation with no prior knowledge of Poe’s works and come out of the experience with at least a general idea of what rhetorical and textual elements are crucial to Poe’s key texts. This situation is a paradox because parody is generally accepted to work the opposite way (understanding of the original text precedes the adaptation and supports it). But the information provided by parodies – the same information that supplies the parody with its legitimacy – provides clues to cultural literacy without the reader ever having to look at the original text in question.

After examining the above adaptations of Poe’s works, it becomes clear that parodic interpretations of cornerstone texts merit more critical attention than has previously been granted to them. I hope now to explore parody as a teaching device within culture compared to the “educational” comics and media discussed above in terms of ‘assumed’ (both suggested and borrowed) authority. Parodies should not necessarily be conceived of as “good” or “bad” (flattery or belittling satire of the original text), nor as “playful” or “scornful attacks” [my emphasis] (Gray 44), but rather as new texts in their own right. These new texts serve as
indicators to what specific cultural literacy children viewing the parodies and adaptations should have. Parodies are as instructional to scholars as to the children they target, functioning not only as cultural indicators of literacy, but also as historic markers. As historic markers, these parodies are part of a much larger trend in gothic and comedic subcultures/genres. Because they reach larger audiences, parodies of Poe’s work can be shown to be more useful as educational devices than the “educational” adaptations, themselves. Regardless of whether or not Poe’s works are seen as puerile, they serve to educate both children and scholars alike.

According to A.S. Martin, a parody will only survive if “the work being parodied [is] well-known and likely to remain so… . If the model is lost to sight half the humor of the parody, that of contrast, is also lost, and the poem must stand on its own strength, which it rarely can do” (93-94). Again, parody’s reliance on the authority of its host text is emphasized. Martin also notes the critical distance a parody offers; if the host text vanishes from public consciousness, audiences will have nothing to compare the parody to, and thus the elements of the original text that the parodist emphasized will lose their transparency.

Because the parodist relies on key “faults” – or, more neutrally, elements – of the original text in order to bring the parody to life, these elements lose their transparency. Both Dane and Gray stress the significance of parody’s innate ability to draw attention to key elements in the original text. As Gray puts it, “the act of parody must first involve identifying a characteristic stylistic habit or mannerism and then making it comically visible” (32). By thus emphasizing certain aspects of a text, the emphases serve as a signal to the audience that, for whatever reason, this aspect carries importance and is something they should know. Although the process of making a key element visible need not necessarily be funny in order to point out its importance, Dentith suggests, along with many generations of psychologists, that “laughter, even of derision,
helps secure its point” (37). This is parody’s unique ability: to bring critical distance to a text, albeit in a very unorthodox way. By alluding to and comically exaggerating fundamental aspects of the original text, the parodic text offers a critique on the subject matter under the guise of comic entertainment. But it serves a much greater purpose than mindless entertainment.

For example, *The Simpsons* punctuates Poe’s immortal poem “The Raven” by sight gags and, most importantly, Lisa’s comment regarding “nevermore” – “that’s all he’ll ever say.” Paired with Bart’s comic interjection of “eat my shorts” is Lisa’s lesson about the repetition in the poem. Once exposed to this fact, made unmistakable via the parody, audiences will not be able to go back to the original poem without that tidbit of information that makes “The Raven” the poem as we know it. After key elements that define an original work appear as opaque to an audience, the audience must then approach the original text with this newly gained awareness. The next look they take at the original will necessarily be more informed, or at the least, those key elements will be more obvious. This is the second use of the term ‘assumed authority’ that needs explication; parodic texts do not function without the authority the audience assumes is there (because they invest it, themselves).

But what happens if an audience member cannot connect the parody to its original text; does the parody still work? David Buckingham poses the question this way: “If the reader does not recognize the signals of the parodic intention, or the difference between the two ‘text-worlds’ of the original and the parody, what consequences does this have?” (69). Jonathan Gray explains the dependence of the parody on the audience’s comprehension as follows: “Parody is a teacher, but its method is Socratic, encouraging the audience to make the final and decisive link between criticism and target” (47). Numerous scholars (including Dane, Buckingham, and Hutcheon) have commented on this dependence, as well. But all these scholars discuss is one side of the
coin and leave the question up in the air: what happens if the parody is the first contact the audience member has to the original text? I believe the answer is cultural literacy.

Dane states: “parody and satire can operate like fiction: that is, they may create fictitious worlds of their own; but these worlds and the texts that create them are parodic or satiric only if the reader himself constructs another world to place in direct comparison to the fictitious one” (147). In other words, according to Dane, parody works only if the audience is smart enough to understand what original work is being referenced. But, as mentioned earlier, parodic texts are indeed new texts that, although based in intertextuality, still make a unique point (see Dentith’s definition). For example, the *U.S. Acre*’s parody of “The Raven” is based on a concept entirely different from that of Poe’s original poem, but it still maintains some key elements. The audience is certainly supposed to keep that reference in the back of their minds, as Wade Duck informs us from the outset. Right from the start, then, audience members invest the coming story with authority, and the text itself borrows authority from Poe’s original poem. Both of these investments of authority begin simultaneously at the moment when Wade Duck informs the audience that the Orson Farm Players will present “The Raven” for the viewers’ enrichment. Even though parodies rely on borrowed stories, they still offer their own interpretation of the text by giving the audience an outline as to what the original text does. The choice of what elements to emphasize (and how to emphasize them) grants parody its newness as a text, and also its educational value. The assumed authority inherent to parody as a genre allows this transfer of information to happen.

Parodies rely on making opaque key elements from the original text on which the parodies are based, but because they are also new texts they can offer new information regarding the original text even if the audience is not familiar with the original text. Jonathan Gray states,
“parody can encourage the further step of activating a renewed understanding of text or genre to apply to previously-read or yet-to-be-read texts, so that the parodic effect will step beyond the text-at-hand to other texts, as a truly corrosive, yet truly helpful instructor of genre literacy” (47). Although Gray is concentrating on “genre” and “media literacy,” his statement holds true for cultural literacy, as well. All of the parodies I studied began by explicitly stating which text the parody at hand was based on, therefore implying that the coming parody was to be read as a parody. Once alerted to this fact, the audience need not be familiar with the original text, because the parody informs the audience as to which elements from the original are the most important. Whether the authors of parodies intend for their works to be degradations of the original text or roundabout praise of the original text does not matter; the chief elements used to make the parody remain the same. Because of this elemental parallel, parody as a teaching device should not necessarily be conceived of as “good” or “bad,” but instead as an indicator as to what level of/specific cultural literacy children viewing the parodies and adaptations should have. For children, they may even go so far as to suggest what type of knowledge should be sought after in order to be a productive member of society.

*The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror* episode featuring “The Raven” is perhaps the best example to use here. This component of the episode begins by Lisa pulling out a book: a textbook from school, as Bart points out. Lisa then reads the title of the poem and even introduces the author. At this point, even children unfamiliar with Poe’s “The Raven” will recognize that this text is an important one; so important, in fact, that they can expect to come across the original poem sometime during their academic careers. A more comprehensive analysis of this episode has already been offered, but here I simply wish to reiterate the point that even audiences which are unfamiliar with a parody’s host text can gain cultural knowledge from
viewing the parody. The only criterion for this education to occur is that the audience members must be aware that the text they are about to encounter is, in fact, a parody. Because audiences can gain cultural literacy (and learn something even if, or especially because, they are unfamiliar with the original text), parodies function as instructionally to scholars and critics as they are to their target audiences. Whereas audience members are learning what elements of a text they are expected to know to be considered culturally literate, – and learning about the original text via the parody, in the case of those audience members who have not had previous experience with the primary text – scholars and critics should use the parody as a guide to what elements of “highbrow” or scholarly texts are being used in popular culture. This, of course, helps scholars understand how texts function, re-circulate, and re-emerge in pop culture.

This “assumed authority” allegedly unique to parodies allows the parodic adaptations of Poe’s texts to work. When Poe’s works are simply transposed to YA-popular mediums such as comics for accessibility purposes only (including education), they lose some of their authority because the authority lost in translation from the original medium to the new is not replaced. Parody, on the other hand, borrows and bolsters the original text’s authority, both relying on it and perpetuating it. Because of parody’s critical distance, parodic texts have the ability to transmit elements of cultural literacy without losing the authority that is generally diminished in translation from the original medium or text to the new.
Fascinatingly, current adaptations of Poe’s works seem to reenacting the pattern of parodying and being parodied that emerged from and swirled around the author when he was alive. Poe’s texts sought to break away from the realistic (and perhaps didactic) fiction of his time, and others like him sought to do the same with parodies of his literature; likewise, contemporary parodies of Poe seek to break themselves away from the prescriptive, overly-simplified versions of Poe’s stories offered in didactic publications such as Classics Illustrated Study Guides. Young audiences seeking refuge from didactic materials rejoice in the reconstitution of a text, regardless of whether the text is fantastic, parodic, or a pleasant mixture of the two (as is most often the case).

In light of this historicity, it is no mystery why Poe’s texts find a home in popular culture for youth. What needs to be noted is that Poe remains one of the few original gothic writers maintained in popular culture today; movies like The Corpse Bride and series like Scary Movie generally take as their subject other phenomena of recent culture (such as the horror movie Scream). As Mark Twain has memorably commented, “a classic is something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read” (The Disappearance of Literature speech). Scholars such as John Guillory have noted that cultural capital is linked to those texts in a public bookstore considered “classics,” which translates directly into texts only those who are trained to read can read. Among these texts perceived as too difficult for the layperson are Moby Dick and the works of Poe. Though many perceive gothic texts as too difficult to read for pleasure, two of

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44 It should be noted that Scary Movie, being a parody, relies on such movies as Scream to model its characters, settings, and action upon. However, Tim Burton’s The Corpse Bride originated from a 16th Century tale by Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed, though numerous people and stories are parodied in the film. (For example, a married couple recites the last few lines and pose of Gone With the Wind towards the end of the movie; during the “Bonejangles” musical number the dead piano player “downstairs” is a parody of Ray Charles, not to mention the parody on the name “Bojangles;” and there is even a fleeting reference to Nosferatu.)
the three most popular American writers in today’s popular culture (Poe, Melville, and Twain\(^{45}\)) are known for their gothic texts. 46 “Although few would dispute the claim that Moby Dick (1851) is the master-work of the Gothic tradition in America, it is clearly Poe, rather than Melville or Hawthorne, who is the acknowledged master of American Gothic fiction,” (Thompson 97). It is still Poe, however, whose texts “have never been out of print or unavailable in a popular edition [in the 20\(^{th}\) Century]” and have “been used as a source of humor or intrigue [in magazines, comic strips, and comic books] more than…any other American writer,” (“Comics Connection” 2).

As M. Thomas Inge also notes, there is a “paradoxical attitude of Americans towards the classics and tradition – a combined respect and disdain for the revered artifacts of our culture” (“Cetology” 168). In my opinion, Poe’s unique relationship to adolescent literature is what allows him to function as both a canonical\(^{47}\) writer in the university system and as an icon within youth pop culture. Poe’s works are accessible enough to be parodied and understood by children, yet esteemed enough to have a place in the ranks of university-taught literature classes. Elmer connects the idea of cultural capital in Poe’s work with that of juvenilia: “Poe’s connection with juvenile tastes, and hence with a time when reading and acquiring “culture” were actually enjoyable…has been insistently and disapprovingly stressed [and thus recognized] by the Anglo-American literary-historical tradition” (3). Classic works of literature in our culture, as Inge notes, are things to be both admired and feared, known of yet not fully understood. Adaptations of Poe’s texts offer a wide variety of audiences – mostly target marketing audiences of children

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\(^{45}\) See Inge’s “Cetology,” page 157.

\(^{46}\) Poe was even parodied by Twain, himself. Steven Kemper’s article “Poe, Twain, and Limburger Cheese” discusses the ways in which Twain’s “The Invalid’s Story” functions as a direct parody of Poe’s gothic text “A Descent Into the Maelstrom.”

\(^{47}\) Poe’s position in the canon is certainly a point of debate; see, for example, James Gargano’s article “The Question of Poe’s Narrators”
and young adults – a chance to engage Poe’s texts without the fear of having to deal with something beyond their understanding. Again, this is the assumed authority of power; people are willing to invest in parodic works because they are not threatening. Poe’s texts may exude a “pre-adolescent mentality” (T.S. Eliot, qtd in Elmer 3), but the very elements that make it suitable for adolescents also make it a fascinating to scholars and critics.

Parodies serve as important tools for both teaching cultural literacy to youth and for aiding scholars who strive to examine the function of texts within popular culture. Poe’s status – walking the line between canonical and popular – allows him to provide the perfect example of the use of parody within children’s and YA culture. As parody relies on assumed authority – both the authority the text borrows from the host text and the authority invested by the audience – to function, it thus has the ability to reconstitute the original text in such as way as to make opaque key elements of the original text. This latter function allows the audience to gain knowledge regarding what aspects of the original text they must know in order to be culturally literate members of society.⁴⁸ As Poe’s texts reside within the vein of gothic/comedic texts in popular culture, his work is doubly reinforced by both those gothic texts that seek to borrow from him and the cartoons and comics that assure his fame. Parodies of Poe’s texts do not merely reenact his tales; they add to them and bolster their fame as they reach larger and larger audience. I think it has now become clear that the Raven is certainly authorized to croak either “nevermore” or “eat my shorts,” but the general message is the same. Poe, like his immortal Raven, is here to stay, perpetuated by children’s/youth culture, and the strange synthesis of Gothicism and comedy that allows for the repetition and reconstitution of parodic adaptations.

⁴⁸ As M. Thomas Inge stated so well, “Poe, no doubt, would have preferred to be read rather than tastefully appreciated,” (“Comic Connection” 17).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cari Keebaugh is a master’s student in English at the University of Florida. She graduated with a B.S. in psychology from the University of Florida in 2005 and plans to continue studying literature at the doctoral level. Her primary research interests include children’s and young adult literature and culture, and she has a particular interest in fantasy texts for young adults. She currently lives in Gainesville with her husband.