


## TWICE-TOLD TRAUMAS: WHATEVER

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### ROGERS CRUISES REVENGE ON LIFE

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#### *Abstract*

In 2006, the American scholar and writer Daniel Stashower published *The Beautiful Cigar Girl: Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe and the Invention of Murder*. In this postmodern work, which can be described as a mixture of historical and detective narration, Stashower intercalates the investigation of Mary Rogers' murder and Edgar Allan Poe's simultaneous fictionalisation of the actual events in his tale "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". Even if Poe boasted he had managed to solve the case, updated information published in the press of the time menaced to defeat him as a master of detection, since Dupin's thesis seemed to be wrong in the light of new discoveries. Poe thus faced a traumatic situation that may have cost him his reputation as a renowned tale-teller. Nonetheless, he managed to escape fatalism through rewriting some sections of the tale. This article aims at taking Stashower's postmodern account as a point of departure to reinterpret Poe's tale "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" as a textual source for trauma and for

#### *Resumen*

En el año 2006, el académico y escritor norteamericano Daniel Stashower publicó *Edgar Allan Poe y el misterio de la bella cigarrera: la investigación de la atroz muerte de Mary Rogers*. En esta obra postmoderna, que puede ser descrita como mezcla de narración histórica y relato detectivesco, Stashower intercala la investigación del asesinato de Mary Rogers con la ficcionalización simultánea de los hechos que Edgar Allan Poe realizó en su relato "El misterio de Marie Rogêt." Pese a alardear de haber resuelto el caso, las últimas noticias acerca del caso divulgadas en la prensa de la época amenazaban con derrotar a Poe como maestro de la detección, puesto que la tesis de Dupin parecía errónea a la luz de los nuevos descubrimientos sobre el caso. Poe encaró así una traumática situación que pudo haberle costado su reputación como reconocido escritor de cuentos. Este artículo pretende tomar el relato postmoderno que ofrece Stashower como punto de partida para reinterpretar el cuento de Poe "El misterio de Marie Rogêt" como origen textual de su trauma así como de la

restoration of his creative distress as a writer, thus unravelling the traumatic discourse hidden in Poe's tale through a postmodern perspective.

*Key Words:* traumatic discourse; creativity; detection; textual therapy; postmodernism.

curación de su malestar creativo como escritor, desvelando así el discurso traumático escondido en este cuento de Poe a través de una perspectiva postmoderna.

*Palabras clave:* discurso traumático; creatividad; detección; terapia textual; postmodernismo.

In his recently-published volume entitled *The Beautiful Cigar Girl: Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe and the Invention of Murder*, Daniel Stashower ties together a thoroughly researched recreation of a factual nineteenth-century crime, as well as a detailed portrait of an episode in Edgar Allan Poe's life that gave rise to the second tale comprising his detective trilogy, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", published in 1842. Gathering extensive data from the periodicals of the time about Mary Rogers' death, together with Poe's biographical writings and personal letters, Stashower's volume may be read as a both comprehensive nineteenth-century documentary of crime in New York, as well as a detective narrative which not only recreates the atmosphere of the period and reinterprets the dreadful events that took place at the time but, as a postmodern work, it also sheds light on the creative process of writing and rewriting, thus subverting the slight boundary separating fact from fiction.

According to Fredric Jameson (1991), postmodernity turns the historical past into a series of stylisations he aptly terms 'pastiche' which are mostly aimed at commodification and consumption, ultimately describing postmodernism as the consumption of sheer commodification. In this respect, drawing on Jameson, postmodern texts underscore desperate attempts at recuperating and making sense to ultimately discover that there is no possible way outside ideology and textuality, thus realising there is no possible claim to 'truth' outside culture. Jameson also draws attention to our loss of historicity, which inevitably propels a breakdown of the signifying chain and a loss of subjectivity, limiting our experience to pure material signifiers and a series of unrelated presents in time. Hence, the past merely becomes a referent which leaves us nothing but texts giving way to an infinite regress into textuality and the omnipresence of the formation processes. Likewise, Ihab Hassan (2001) associates postmodernism with terms such as textualism, relativism, scepticism and indeterminacy, ultimately concluding that postmodernism can be defined as a continuous inquiry into self-definition as it assumes epistemic self-reflexivity, a polychronic sense of time, and eventually, a crisis of cultural and personal

identities. In this respect, both Poe's and Stashower's texts refer back to other texts, thus revealing the impossibility to escape from recurrent textualities as well as the collapse of meaning outside the text.

More recently, according to Mary Klages, postmodernism has been characterised by subjectivity in writing and perception; a movement away from apparent objectivity, a multi-layered narrated form, a blurring of distinctions between genres, as well as an emphasis on spontaneity and discovery in creation (2006:165). Postmodern narratives thus evoke fragmentation and discontinuity, ambiguity and an emphasis on the decentered subject, using forms such as pastiche. Likewise, Steven Connor (1997) also refers to the nature of postmodernism as particularly concerned about self-consciousness, celebrating fragmentation, provisionality and even incoherence, thus focusing on metanarratives and the discursive function. In this respect, Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as postmodernism (2001:21), claiming that nearly all contemporary experimental writing displays some sort of explicitly metafictional strategies drawing the reader's attention to its process of construction.

Taking these textual features into consideration, Stashower's contemporary re-telling of Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", along with the factual evidence gathered from nineteenth-century newspapers, arises as a paradigm of postmodernism. The intercalation and subsequent problematisation of fact and fiction -of Poe's biographical details, Poe's fictionalisation of Mary Rogers' case, and the careful depiction of her murder in journals- constructs a pastiche that refers back to its form, leading critics to hesitate whether to consider Stashower's work as historical fiction, literary biography, or history of crime in nineteenth-century America. Stashower's intention to intertwine different levels of reality and fictionalisation through extracts from periodicals, letters, fragments from Poe's story, and his own personal interpretation as a twenty-first century scholar and writer, ultimately serves the purpose of coming to terms with different instances of trauma at a personal and, especially, at a creative level. In this respect, *The Beautiful Cigar Girl* carefully examines the way Edgar Allan Poe's interest was raised by the death of the beautiful young American girl Mary Cecilia Rogers, and how he decided to unravel this real mystery and turn it into one of his most well-known detective tales, thus outlining striking parallelisms established between both tragic figures, Mary Rogers and Poe himself. Furthermore, Poe's second detective tale would prove especially traumatic for him as a story-teller as it compelled him to face the threat of public exposure. Having advertised his tale as an ingenious piece which sorted out the puzzle of Mary Rogers' death, Poe had to witness how the explanation to the real case of Mary Rogers not only came earlier in the

periodicals of the time than in his own tale, but also how the solution of the puzzle that Poe pointed out in the manuscript he was shortly to publish ostensibly differed from the updated accounts given in newspapers. If Poe felt compelled to retell his tale twice so as to suit reality, Stashower also incorporates a dual perspective through his creative mixture of Mary Rogers' crime together with Poe's fictionalisation.

Having been compared with works such as Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* (1994) and Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City* (2003), in Stashower's postmodern recreation of the murder of Mary Rogers and the strenuous attempts at its resolution, a nineteenth-century trauma is brought back to life to ultimately discover and explore Poe's own traumatic experience as both a tale-teller and a master of ratiocination. This article thus aims at interpreting Stashower's documentary narrative as a point of departure to explore writing as both a source and a cure for trauma through the construction and deconstruction of one tragic episode in Poe's life, that is, Poe's personal trauma at facing the threat of being defeated as a master of detection. Subsequently, this article will also explore trauma from different perspectives, such as the changing attitudes towards Mary Rogers as an epitome of the American heroine, the concern about the vulnerability or strength of the law enforcement at the time, and above all, the changing attitudes towards the reception and ultimate meaning of Poe's second detective tale, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt."

## 1. THE UNSOLVED CASE OF MARY ROGERS: A PUZZLE FOR NATIONAL CONCERN

Even though nowadays Mary Cecilia Rogers is known as the beautiful young girl who inspired one of Poe's most popular tales of detection, her death in 1841 instantly became a national sensation in the United States. Mary Rogers was born in 1820 in Connecticut, and when her father died in a steamboat explosion, Mary and her mother Phoebe moved to New York City, where they managed a guesthouse. Mary soon took a job as a clerk in the tobacco shop that John Anderson owned, and she was paid a generous salary as Anderson believed her good looks would attract many customers to the store. Actually, notable literary figures such as James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving became habitual customers, as Mary's youth and beauty soon turned her into a focus of attraction, becoming one of the most well-known women of the time in New York.

In October 1838, Mary suddenly disappeared from both her home and Anderson's store, causing a great stir as the periodicals of the time widely reported. Despite the fact her mother claimed she had found a suicide note her daughter wrote and the local coroner asserted the girl had the determination to commit suicide, it was soon reported that Mary Rogers' disappearance was merely a hoax as she had only gone to Brooklyn to visit a friend. Even though Mary did not go back to work immediately, she eventually resumed her post at the tobacco shop, thus leading some periodicals to boast the whole event had been devised by John Anderson as a publicity machination so as to attract more notice.

Nonetheless, only three years later, Mary Rogers went missing again and this time she would never return to the store. On July 25, 1841, Mary Rogers left home, told her fiancé Daniel Payne she would visit her aunt, and asked him to come and fetch her in the evening. As a result of the terrible storm that unleashed that night, Payne believed Mary would remain at her aunt's house until the following morning and finally decided not to meet her as they had arranged. Even though many believed she would return soon as had happened some years before, her body was eventually found floating in the Hudson River three days later. Due to the terrible violence inflicted on her body, it was soon estimated she had been sexually abused and killed, becoming a victim of the violent gangs that began to populate the city of New York at the time. The details surrounding the case were soon published in the periodicals of the time, and as a result of her youth, beauty and popularity, her death was sensationalised in the periodicals, receiving national attention, and becoming an icon that was soon to be known as the 'Beautiful Cigar Girl.' Nonetheless, in the following year, while the inquest was ongoing, Mary Rogers' fiancé, Daniel Payne, was found dead in the spot where Mary had presumably been murdered, and beside his body, a remorseful note and an empty bottle of laudanum were found, thus proving Payne had committed suicide.

In clear analogy with Jack the Ripper's case in Victorian England, Mary Rogers' murder also gained special significance, soon turning into a symbol of the loss of innocence and the surrounding circumstances characterising the American society at the time. Mary Rogers' case also brought to the floor the ineptitude of the city's system of law enforcement. Despite the recent massive increase of the population in New York, the citizens still had to rely on an archaic force of watchmen that only seemed committed if a really notorious reward was at stake. As happened with Jack the Ripper in Victorian England, Mary Rogers' murder acquired notorious relevance as evidence of the citizens' manifest vulnerability in an increasingly corrupted city, where the police enforcement seemed powerless and at the mercy of gang violence. Resembling the crimes committed in the Whitechapel districts of Victorian England, Mary

Rogers' case also raised extensive newspaper coverage, and attracted much attention due to the youth and beauty of the victim as well as the unusual violence inflicted on her body. Resembling Jack the Ripper's victims, Mary also presented abdominal mutilations and wounds around her neck that seemed to prove she had been raped and strangled.

However, there was a slight but an important difference that separated both cases across the Atlantic. If Jack the Ripper often attacked prostitutes in Whitechapel, and therefore, embodiments of the so-called Victorian fallen woman, thus becoming a reactionary epitome against the moral corruption that characterised the East End of London, Mary Rogers was conversely heralded as a martyr and an innocent victim of the sinful citizens that began to populate the American metropolis. Mary thus became a symbol for the loss of innocence in nineteenth-century America and a popular folklore myth; an American counterpart to the Irish Molly Malone. Despite being constantly exposed to the public gaze at the Anderson's tobacco shop, Mary Rogers came from an honourable and even Puritan family, originally related to the notorious Cotton Mather, and regardless of her job as a clerk and her apparently coquettish manner with customers, both her acquaintances and most periodicals after her decease exalted her virtuosity and piety, debunking the watchmen's ineptitude at identifying her murderer and thus avenging her death.

## 2. A LITERARY SLEUTH AND A MASTER OF DETECTION IN PURSUIT OF FAME

Daniel Stashower's fictionalised study, as well as narrative based on actual facts, minutely details Mary Rogers' mysterious murder as well as Poe's increasing interest in the case. In this respect, Stashower echoes Poe's actual actions in the past, fictionalising them as well as reifying the fictional events Poe included in the tale, which in turn were also gathered from different actual sources. In this sense, Stashower's work becomes a contemporary contribution underscoring manifold layers of textuality, only becoming meaningful in relation to the symbolic order from which it originates.

At the time Mary Rogers' death was extensively reported in journals, Edgar Allan Poe had become especially concerned about the powers of ratiocination, the analytical method of detection, as well as the slight boundary separating fact from fiction. Being well acquainted with the art of fiction, Poe

was nevertheless familiar with journalism, since he had already had been hired as editor in several journals. Thus, it is no wonder he felt interested in fictionalising real events, and conversely, writing hoaxes that he would advertise as actual truths. After all, as Garner asserts (143:1990), Poe's own tale about Mary Rogers could be regarded as an example of ill-disguised journalism.

Struggling harshly against economic constraints, Poe moved to New York in 1837, together with his wife Virginia and his aunt Maria Clemm, to work on new tales, find a new job in one of the periodicals of the city, and raise enough money to fund his own journal, *The Stylus*. During this period, Poe had become specially concerned about the slight boundary separating fact from fiction, as his tales and articles show. Some years before, Poe had published an essay entitled "Maelzel's Chess Player" (1836), in which a narrator accurately explained the mechanisms by means of which an automaton had acquired the skill to play chess proficiently, which was ultimately found out to be a hoax. Likewise, when he was living in New York, Poe had also finished the only novel he would ever publish, *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), with the exception of the six instalments of his unfinished novel *The Journal of Julius Rodman*, which were published in different issues of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in 1840. *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* included a significant prologue through which Poe presented himself as a mere editor of the actual account provided by Arthur Gordon Pym, who led an expedition across the ocean. At this stage, Poe had also acquired scientific reasoning through the edition of *The Conchologist's First Book* (1839), and in his tale "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), he had also begun to create the fundamentals of the detective tale. Moreover, as editor of journals such as *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine* or *Graham's Magazine*, Poe repeatedly encouraged his readers to send him puzzles, enigmas and cryptograms so that he could solve them. Taking into consideration these precedents, Poe further explored the mixture of artistic temperament and scientific reasoning in his first detective tale, "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), thus consolidating the analytical method and the powers of detection he had been introducing in previous tales.

It was precisely soon after Poe had published his first detective tale that Mary Rogers' body was found in the Hudson River. Poe may have felt immediately attracted towards the case. Having presented Dupin's abilities of deduction and the way his method could be applied to sort out any kind of puzzle, Poe took advantage of the popularity the death of Mary Rogers had acquired to try to solve that real-life mystery using Dupin's methodology. Poe had been in charge of unravelling the enigmas his readership sent and had thus showed evidence of his skills at detection. Despite his obvious ingenuity, Poe

always felt underestimated, compelled to accept minor and underpaid jobs to earn a living, and thus may have felt it was high time to make amends.

Having published several tales presented as actual facts, as he would do later again with “The Balloon-Hoax” (1844), in his tale “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842-3) Poe for the first time fictionalised a contemporary real incident. Setting the action in Paris again, as a continuation of his first detective tale, and changing the names of the actual characters to suit the Parisian setting, Poe faithfully followed Mary Rogers’ case through journals, boasting he had managed to solve the mystery by the mere careful analysis of the reports published in the periodicals of the time. Poe thus attempted to gain popularity and reputation, taking advantage of the extensive coverage Mary Rogers’ case had attracted. Nonetheless, there seemed to be more than met the eye, as Poe’s concern about solving Mary Rogers’ murder soon appeared to acquire personal transcendence.

Years later in “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), Poe would claim that the death of a beautiful girl was the most poetic topic, and thus Mary’s untimely death, at scarcely twenty-one years of age, must have attracted his attention. Moreover, as Stashower estimates, Poe may have even been personally acquainted with Mary Rogers as many literary figures often approached Anderson’s shop to buy tobacco from the lovely cigar girl. Nonetheless, even if Poe had never met Mary personally, he may have identified several features which struck him as particularly familiar, especially with regard to his wife. In the same year Poe published “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”, his wife Virginia broke a blood vessel while she was playing the piano. Since then, Virginia’s health seriously declined, leading Poe to fear the inevitable outcome arising from this terrible incident. Poe may have noticed the haunting nature of his writings, and how fiction and real life often presented a blurring boundary that separated both domains. He may have thought that, if he managed to solve Mary’s puzzle in fiction, Virginia’s condition may also find a cure in real life, thus exchanging fact for fiction, and vice versa. After all, Mary’s youth and beauty, as well as her fragility and innocence, may have easily reminded Poe of his own wife.

Moreover, Mary’s biographical details also bore striking similarities with those of Poe. Both of them had travelled to New York in search of a better job to make a living. In the great American metropolis, Poe’s aunt, Maria Clemm, decided to set up a guesthouse to earn some money. Likewise, Phoebe Rogers, Mary’s mother, also managed a pension in the same city. With regard to their respective backgrounds, Poe was the natural son of travelling actors, but when his father David abandoned his family and his mother Elizabeth died from consumption, Poe was soon adopted by John and Frances Allan; the former being a prosperous tobacco merchant that provided young Poe with the



education and wealth which otherwise he would have never known, even though his spoiled youth soon came to an end when he was disinherited on turning twenty years of age. Similarly, Mary was raised in a fairly wealthy household, but was forced to take a job as a clerk in John Anderson's tobacco shop when her father died in a steamboat explosion. Consequently, at some point in their lives, both Poe and Mary got acquainted with the lifestyle pertaining to affluent households, but as a reversal of fortune, they also had to struggle against harsh economic constraints. Moreover, despite their popularity, none of them were fairly treated by the press and the public opinion. Even though Mary's innocent reputation was heralded at first, some moralist journals began to assume her murder was the result of her careless behaviour as a young coquettish girl. Similarly, even if Poe was an already reputed writer, his character and his constant problems with alcoholism often discredited him in his profession. Their identities as both victims and perpetrators were often difficult to separate. Actually, Mary's tragedy may have exerted a deeper influence that even Poe acknowledged to admit, as time would subsequently show. If Mary Rogers' fiancé, Daniel Payne, was found dead months after Mary's decease beside a bottle of poison and a suicide note, in 1848, after Sarah Helen Whitman had rejected his proposal of marriage, significantly, Poe also attempted to commit suicide ingesting a copious dose of laudanum.

As shown, the outstanding similarities established between some of Poe's biographical details and Mary Rogers' case endow Poe's tale, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," with a particular significance. Poe inevitably felt personally involved, but he was also putting himself to the test, challenging himself to sort out more than just another murder mystery. Poe faced public exposure, as by means of fictionalising a factual mystery, he was also aiming at unravelling an actual unsolved crime. Turning fact into fiction, he sought to subvert the boundaries separating both domains, thus turning fiction into fact. Feeling under unbearable pressure as a result of his wife's terrible illness, Poe attempted to escape reality by turning reality into fiction. Feeling underestimated by the press and the public opinion, he tried to make amends and gain public acclaim. Nonetheless, Poe may have also been led by the imp of the perverse, and to use Stashower's words, his own self-destructive character since, as Poe would later notice, he would soon realise that, through this creative attempt, he had simply risked far too much.

Confident as a result of the success his first detective tale had acquired, Poe wrote a letter to the editor Joseph Evans Snodgrass, dated June 4 1842, in the hope he would accept his tale "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" for publication in the *Sunday Visitor* of Baltimore. According to Hobson Quinn, Poe must have been in desperate need for money at the time (1998:357). This letter shows Poe felt particularly optimistic about the success of the tale not only as a

fictionalised piece but about its transcendence to solve the mystery, thus stating: “I really believe, not only that I have demonstrated the falsity of the idea that the girl was not the victim of a gang as supposed, but have *indicated the assassin*” (Ostrom 1966:202). Despite Poe’s great expectations, Snodgrass rejected to publish his tale, and so did George Roberts, director of the Bostonian journal *Notion*, which Poe had also requested to consider his tale. Except for some tales like the “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), Poe had recently undergone a hardly prolific creative period, and he seemed to be in desperate need for success. Poe’s tale was finally published in the *Ladies’ Companion* of New York; a highly-respected journal which was mainly addressed to ladies of ‘taste and exquisite refinement’, as its director William Snowden professed (Stashower 2006). Even though Poe’s intricate and repulsive details about Mary’s atrocious murder appeared to be particularly unsuitable for publication in such a refined journal, Snowden’s acceptance of Poe’s tale mainly responded to the concern Mary’s death had awakened among young female readers, as well as to the need of calling authorities to look into the matter and solve the crime so as to ensure the security of other young ladies in the city.

Due to the unusual length of “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”, it was agreed the tale would be published in three instalments, each section being divided rather randomly and appearing in November 1842, December 1842, and February 1843, respectively. Setting the action in Paris and changing the names of the main characters, Dupin solves the case through the methodical analysis of extracts from six periodicals of the time about Mary Rogers’ mystery, focusing on clues such as Marie’s former disappearance years before, the kidnapping of another girl on the same night, the wrongful accusations of some suspects, the extended belief that Marie was attacked by a gang, and the late discovery of a boat floating adrift on the Seine River. Dupin definitely refutes any possibility of Marie being still alive or the general conviction that a gang had attacked her, and conversely, along the two first instalments of the tale, Poe rather seems to point at a navy official as Marie’s ultimate murderer.

### 3. A TRAUMATIC TEXTUAL EXPERIENCE: “THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGÊT” AS A SOURCE OF DISTRESS

At this stage, Poe's apparent confidence in his powers of ratiocination, taking Auguste Dupin as his own alter ego even if not his exact duplicate (Garner 1990), seemed to be coming to an end, thus ultimately unveiling scepticism and relativism in the creative process. As luck would have it, even if the investigation of Mary Rogers' case had apparently come to a halt at the end of 1842, real life seemed resolute to defy Poe's attempts to unravel the puzzle in the domain of fiction. Poe had already finished writing his tale and the three instalments had been sent to the *Ladies' Companion* for their publication, when quite unexpectedly, journals reported some breaking news. Frederica Loss, landlady at the Nick Moore's Tavern, where Mary Rogers had been witnessed in the company of a dark man before her disappearance, had suffered a terrible accident. Apparently, one of her sons had shot her unintentionally, and before she died, she determined to tell a secret she had kept during the past months. As a result of Frederica Loss' revelation, most journals published the startling news that Mary Rogers had died as a result of an abortion, and therefore, had not been murdered as everybody had believed up to then. Likewise, Nick Moore's Tavern was believed to be one of the dwellings of Ann Trow Lohman, widely known as Madame Restell, an abortionist, who presumably operated on Mary on that day, ultimately causing her death.

Even though this unexpected revelation seemed to contradict obvious facts such as Mary's clear signs of having been strangled and the finding of some of her torn clothes in a forest nearby, these late reports significantly contributed to changing the public opinion about the case and the victim herself. If Mary Rogers had been considered an innocent victim of the ineffective system of law enforcement and the increasing corruption of the city, her attempted abortion inevitably turned her into a fallen woman. Mary thus illustrated a national trauma; formerly a martyr, she had become a source of contempt. Nonetheless, for Poe himself, this updated piece of news proved particularly traumatic. At the beginning of his tale, Poe had boasted that, by means of solving Marie Rogêt's murder, Dupin would also be pointing at the solution of Mary Rogers' case. In the light of these new findings, Dupin's apparent resolution seemed to lack consistency. Having rejected the theory defending that Mary was attacked by a gang as well as underlining the importance of her former disappearance years before, Dupin rather implied that Marie had been killed by a former lover; a navy official she had met during the first period she had been missing. Hence, Poe not only faced the danger of being defeated as a master of detection, but he may have also felt threatened to be deprived of his ingenious creative gift, and especially, the alluring prospect of managing his own journal someday. If Dupin's resolution of the case was wrong, Poe was well aware he would not achieve his expected success as a tale-teller, but would rather meet a resounding failure.

When Frederica Loss' confession was echoed in the press, Poe's first two instalments of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" had already been published in the *Ladies' Companion*. As a detective tale, the third and last instalment was presumed to include Dupin's resolution of the crime, and therefore, the criminal's identity, as Poe had shown in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Poe may have realised he had set himself a trap, and certainly had little time to escape fatality. Dupin had been right in rejecting the theory of the gang as well as any possibility of finding Marie still alive. However, it was clear that Dupin's thesis pointed at a sailor having committed Marie Rogêt's murder, regardless of any remote reference to a possible abortion. Poe's last chance simply consisted in modifying certain aspects in the third instalment of the story that still had to be published so that the tale would have a conclusion and Poe's reputation would remain undamaged. Poe thus took revenge on real life, rejecting to introduce any explicit hint at the abortion theory in his tale. As if he were actually Dupin, Poe followed his analytical method revising the periodicals again, modified the manuscript he had written, and delayed the publication of the third and last instalment of the tale until February 1843, one month later than it was due. Poe obviously felt unable to alter the course of the story significantly as the first two instalments had already been published. Therefore, the outcome of his tale could not possibly be entirely detached from the preceding sections, especially taking into consideration his 'theory of the effect', whereby all details should be addressed to achieve an overall result in the whole story.

Even if still subtly incriminating the sailor, Dupin never states the identity of the criminal categorically, and despite his cryptic reflections, in the tale it is asserted his resolution was found to be correct, and as a result, the criminal was correspondingly apprehended. Poe thus effectively introduces an unexpected turn, a poetic license, claiming that the identity of the criminal was mentioned in the manuscript of the story, but the editors of the journal decided to omit this section for the sake of decency. Thus, a significant paragraph in square brackets, presumably written by the editors of the tale, was placed towards the end of the third instalment of the tale in its 1843 edition which reads as follows:

For reasons which we shall not specify but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the *following up* of the apparently slight clew obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass; and that an individual assassin was convicted, upon his own confession, of the murder of Marie Rogêt, and that the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier. Mr. Poe's article concludes with the following words. – *Eds.* (Poe 1843:166-7)

After all, Poe's second detective tale seems to remain open-ended since, despite Poe's editorial notes and Dupin's self-confidence, the reader remains mystified as for the actual identity of the criminal. In Gerald Kennedy's words, he is left "in a condition of attenuated mystification" by means of what he regards as a "forgettable experiment in forensic narrative" (1987:120). In spite of the fact it seems obvious Poe made some alterations in the manuscript of the third instalment before publication, as Stashower claims, it becomes difficult to assert the precise modifications Poe introduced as the manuscript has not been preserved. Nonetheless, the delay of its publication together with the last paragraphs through which Dupin reflects on coincidences together with the reassuring editorial notes added seem enough evidence to prove Poe's concern about literally saving his tale. In addition to the editor's openly asserting that Dupin's resolution of the case was entirely right, the detective and narrator of the tale, Poe's alter-ego, also feels the need to justify himself asserting that the case of Marie Rogêt and its resolution may not be applicable to any other situation in real life, obviously making an implicit reference to Mary Rogers' case and its recent resolution:

But let it not for a moment be supposed that, in proceeding with the sad narrative of Marie from the epoch just mentioned, and in tracing to its *dénouement* the mystery which enshrouded her, it is my covert design to hint at *an extension of the parallel*, or even to suggest that the measures adopted in Paris for the discovery of the assassin of a grisette, or measures founded in any similar ratiocination, would produce any similar result. (Poe 1843:167)  
(Poe 1845:198)

Dupin's final words, which appear in both the 1843 and 1845 editions, seem to be in sharp contrast with the footnote which was later added to the first instalment of the story in its 1845 publication, asserting that a parallel could be established between Mary Rogers' real case and Poe's fictionalised text:

Herein, under pretence of relating the fate of a Parisian *grisette*, the author has followed, in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth: and the investigation of the truth was the object. (Poe 1845:152)

This footnote was subsequently added two years after the first publication of the tale, when the abortion theory had merely become another possible explanation to the mystery. In any case, the editor's assertion of Poe's success in the 1843 edition, and especially, Poe's own footnote in the 1845 edition stating the applicability of his method in real life, stand in sharp contrast with Dupin's hurried last words, which appear in both the 1843 and 1845 editions, about the blatant dissimilarity between the tale and the real case. Dupin thus seems to question Poe's self-confidence. Dupin is allowed to show his

weakness; Poe simply could not. Poe thus made use of a poetic license, taking revenge on life through fiction, asserting he was right in his deductions, and including the editor's reassurance for his own sake. Despite these obvious inconsistencies, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" has been held as one of Poe's most highly-acclaimed works of detection. Stashower's postmodern intercalation of fact and fiction subverts Poe's fictionalisation of a real event, and provides a reification of a fictionalised piece instead. Through his postmodern interpretation, Stashower's postmodern account shows that Poe's tale can be focalised from a different perspective, no longer a real event turned into fiction, but a fictionalised tale turned into reality, that is, the ordeal Poe was compelled to undergo to save his tale, and by extension, his creative genius.

#### 4. IN NEED OF RESTORATION: A PALIMPSEST OF TEXTUAL THERAPY

Most critical studies on Poe's tale "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" are embedded within wider analyses of Poe's trilogy of detective fiction and its critical apparatus has mostly been overshadowed by its preceding tale "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (Daniel 1971; Garner 1990; Van Leer 1995; Thoms 2002). However, there exist some outstanding previous studies especially focused on this tale. The most thorough critical study to date is John Walsh's detailed historical analysis, carefully examining Poe's use of newspaper accounts, his revisions to accommodate the news that Mary Cecilia Rogers had died from an abortion, as well as his self-congratulatory footnotes, which Walsh found out to be hoaxes, ultimately concluding that neither Poe nor anybody else had convincingly solved the mystery of Mary Rogers.

If Walsh mostly revealed Poe's strategies to save his reputation as a master of ratiocination, Richard P. Benton rather drew attention to the textual nature of Poe's tale itself, describing it as a mixed form of colloquy, tale, and essay, through which Poe sought to ridicule "the thinking of the Jacksonian common man" (1969:147); thus, not entirely removed from Stashower's own postmodern rendering based on Poe's tale. In this sense, Benton's allusion to forms of ratiocination refers back to Poe's intention to reveal the whole secret of the construction of tales of ratiocination in the second tale of his detective trilogy. This secret ultimately consists in Dupin's mode of reasoning which amounts to the fact that proof for his hypothesis lies in, firstly, reasoning inductively from collateral or circumstantial events, which often conceal the truth precisely

because of their own marginal status, and secondly, relying on the doctrine of chance, which must also become a matter of calculation so that Dupin's reasoning is ultimately based on the reciprocity between chance and calculation, thus founding his scientific method of analysis. Benton's reference to the linguistic nature of the tale as well as Poe's intention to unveil his scientific reasoning brings into play the important role of the symbolic order which determines the nature of the signifier. In this respect, Lacan's reading of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" also seems to be relevant to interpret Poe's second tale in his detective series.

In this respect, in his essay on Poe's "The Purloined Letter", Jacques Lacan does not dwell upon the psychology of the author, but rather interprets Poe's tale as a metaphor which sheds light on the unconscious and the nature of psychoanalysis as well as on aspects of language. In his reading of Poe's tale, Lacan focuses on different hypotheses to support his argumentation, mainly claiming that firstly, the stolen letter is an emblem of the unconscious itself; secondly, Dupin's investigation of the stolen letter enacts the process of psychoanalysis, and thirdly, the letter with its unknown content merely becomes an embodiment of the nature of language. Hence, Lacan concludes that the letter in Poe's tale is merely a signifier, and therefore, its content is ultimately of no importance. Nonetheless, Muller and Richardson go as far as to assert that the place of the signifier is ultimately determined by the symbolic system within which it is constantly displaced, as it is only in terms of a symbolic order that one may refer to the signifier as the symbol of an absence (1998:58).

Nonetheless, through the perspective of time that Stashower's work offers, Poe's second detective tale can thus be interpreted as a textual source for creative trauma as well as a restorative and therapeutic cure for it. Poe surely faced public opprobrium as a result of the publication of the two first instalments of the tale and the updated news about Mary Rogers' possible abortion, which were virtually mutually-exclusive solutions to the case. Nonetheless, despite Poe's apparently traumatic situation, he struggled to find a cure and modify the third instalment of the tale to suit reality. Poe thus both un-wrote and re-wrote the conclusion of the tale in both its 1843 and 1845 edition, coping with his traumatic situation and struggling to find a cure, omitting and adding fragments correspondingly. Thus, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is not only a detective tale, but a text that underlines a personal creative trauma. Moreover, it can also be defined as a palimpsest, including traces of omissions, additions and alterations so as to ultimately save Poe's reputation as a tale-teller and a master of detection.

Reality insisted on taking revenge on Poe's fictionalisation of Mary Rogers' case, while Poe further attempted to take revenge on real life through the careful and subsequent manipulation of his tale. As such, this traumatic

experience as a writer exerted a deep influence on Poe during a certain amount of time since, not only was he compelled to modify the manuscript of the third instalment of the story, but a comparative analysis between Poe's tale as published in 1843 and its subsequent revised version in 1845 also shows significant differences, thus proving Poe must have felt particularly concerned about his failed attempt at unravelling a real life mystery. According to Thoms, the critic John Walsh claimed that Poe introduced about fifteen changes in the 1845 edition of the tale, so that, if necessary, the abortion thesis could appear somehow plausible (2002:140), in addition to adding the footnote which asserted he had been correct in its judgement from the very beginning, and underlined the parallelisms between real life and his fictionalised version.

As a case in point, in the excerpt corresponding to the original third instalment of the tale, Poe introduced some significant changes in the description of the crime scene. In the 1843 edition of the tale, Dupin mentioned in a rather confident way that "that it was the scene, I believe –but there was excellent reason for doubt" (1843:162), whereas in its 1845 edition, Dupin seems more hesitant stating that "that it was the scene, I may or may not believe –but there was excellent reason for doubt" (1845:185). In addition to the description of the scene where the murder was committed, Poe also introduced some meaningful alterations when referring to the criminal. In this respect, in the 1843 edition of the tale, Dupin claims that "the horrors of this dark deed are known only to *one* living human being, and to God" (1843:165), thus explicitly stating that he considered only one single person could be incriminated as the murderer. In contrast, in the 1845 edition of the tale, this sentence is altered to widen the search, thus stating that "the horrors of this dark deed are known only to *one*, or two, living human beings, and to God" (1895:194).

Apart from these significant changes in both editions of the tale, Poe also applied some omissions which are worth noticing, since he decided to omit sentences that appeared too categorical or seemed particularly telling. In the 1845 edition, Poe omitted a fairly confident assertion in relation to the criminal, thus questioning "and who that one? It will not be impossible –perhaps it will not be difficult to discover" (1843:165). Likewise, Poe also seemed to have felt the need to omit a passage from the third originally published instalment in which Dupin gave out too much information, as he explicitly pointed at a dark man, a sailor, as the ultimate murderer of Marie Rogêt, thus stating:

We are not forced to suppose a premeditated design of murder or of violation. But there was the friendly shelter of the thicket, and the approach of the rain –there was opportunity and strong temptation– and then a sudden and violent wrong, to be concealed only by one of darker dye. (1843:165)

Poe's introduction of hesitating remarks as well as Dupin's inevitable incapacity to provide an outright answer to the puzzle has led critics to prefer



Poe's first and third detective tales to the detriment of Poe's fictionalisation of Mary Rogers' murder. Critics such as Van Leer thus recently argued that "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is probably the least familiar of Dupin tales and is not as successful as the rest of tales conforming Poe's trilogy. In this respect, Van Leer claims that Poe's tale is "too long, too detailed, too unshapely, and too inaccurate to offer an entertaining account of Marie Rogêt or an historical illumination of Mary Rogers from whom she derives" (1995:80). Likewise, Hoffman tried to exculpate Dupin claiming "the crimes he solves are best solved when committed for the purpose of his disentangling them, not when they are the actual deeds of others" (1998:116). However, from a postmodern perspective, Poe's second detective tale unravels much more than another murder mystery; it unveils Poe's own trauma and his own use of detection to restore a traumatically creative situation.

As Stashower's volume widely shows, despite Poe's obvious trauma as a tale-teller and master of detection, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" has defeated the test of time as well as the actual investigation of Mary Rogers' case in nineteenth-century America. Nowadays, Mary Rogers is mostly known because of Poe's fictionalisation of her case. Actually, Stashower's volume entitled *The Beautiful Cigar Girl* has also been published in its subsequent edition under the telling title of *Edgar Allan Poe and The Murder of Mary Rogers*, thus showing the interest in the Bostonian writer takes precedence over the murder of Mary Rogers itself. Hence, Poe has ultimately taken his particular revenge on life through time. He took advantage of a traumatic situation at a national and a personal level to apply his genius and turn Dupin's story of detection into a cryptic tale about his own trauma as a creator; a contemporary reading of the tale that may be pursued through postmodern tenets.

As opposed to the first and third detective tales of the Dupin series, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" necessarily remains an open-ended tale; a forerunner of the postmodern detective narrative, as Dupin does not provide a concrete solution, partly because of Poe's dependence on his contemporary reality and the events taking place at the time. Nonetheless, according to Stashower's postmodern intercalation of Poe's biography and criminal research into Mary Rogers' case, nowadays Dupin's, and thus Poe's, resolution of the case seems to possess a greater validity than the abortion theory that was brought up at the time. After all, Dupin may not have solved the case, but actually nobody managed to reach a definite conclusion about the case in real life either. However, as Carlson asserts, Poe considered his second detective tale as the text that revealed the whole secret of the mode of construction for the tales of ratiocination (1996:241). Poe's tale thus becomes significantly telling because of what it seeks to conceal rather than what it actually unveils.

## 5. A NEW INTERPRETATION: POE'S TALE FROM A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

In sharp contrast with Jameson's concept of pastiche or blank parody, which he describes as mere imitation or mimicry of a peculiar style, Linda Hutcheon (1989) perceives much to value in the parodic self-reflexivity pertaining to postmodern literature. As a matter of fact, postmodern parody, critical and ironic in its approach rather than nostalgic, is not entirely ahistorical, as it certifies that present representations derive from already existing ones, even if it also underlines that these representations are inevitably separated from the past. According to Hutcheon, postmodern parody also contests humanist assumptions about artistic originality and uniqueness, and thus, in terms of historiographic metafiction, it problematises revision and reinterpretations of the past, underscoring the process of reproduction and thus foregrounding the politics of representation. Furthermore, the postmodern parody both legitimises and subverts what it parodies, becoming deconstructively critical and constructively creative. In this sense, Stashower significantly parodies Poe's tale and its surrounding events, rendering a contemporary pastiche, a blending of fact and fiction, which legitimatises as well as subverts Poe's text, arising from it so as to unveil the artificiality of both Poe's tale and his own creation. Nonetheless, if Stashower's approach is eminently postmodern, Poe's treatment of his tale and his constant manipulation also prove to be definite forerunners of these theories.

In this respect, according to Carlson, Poe's constant subversion of "the notion of a rationally ordered and morally coherent universe" made him appear postmodernist more than a century before the precepts of the postmodern literary theories were developed (1996:410). Poe's "The Purloined Letter" has often been cited as a tale specifically illustrating Poe's postmodern qualities. The French poststructuralists soon became interested in Poe's work, and Lacan's deconstructionist reading of "The Purloined Letter" still remains a seminal interpretation of Poe's third detective tale, despite Derrida's subsequent objections. From Lacan's perspective, "The Purloined Letter" involved a display of the Freudian repetition automatism, reconstructing two passages that were repeated all through the tale, namely the scene in the chamber with the king, the queen, and Minister D, and subsequently, its counterpart scene in the chamber with Minister D. and Dupin. Marie Bonaparte already argued that the purloined letter's true content was hidden in some secret biographical details that necessarily referred back to the real. Lacan went beyond this and analysed the symbolic evidence of the letter's displacement within a signifying structure, thus underlining the analogy between language and the psyche. Taking these

precedents into consideration, later on Shoshana Felman seemed to draw on both the interpretation of the letter's actual reference in real life and Poe's tale as an allegory of psychoanalysis to interpret his third detective tale as a display of the poet's superiority in the art of concealment as well as an allegory for poetic writing.

In this respect, Poe's previous detective tale, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" also seems to display these qualities, even though postmodern studies have not taken Poe's rendering of the actual murder of Mary Rogers as earnestly as Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Poe's second detective tale also illustrates the Freudian repetition automatism inasmuch as Dupin must necessarily re-enact Marie Rogêt's actions so as to unravel what happened to her. Moreover, Stashower's recently-published volume further underlines this repetition by means of the constant intercalation of facts and fictionalisation, as well as the inevitable mirror-effect it involves as it constantly refers back to Poe's text. Dupin's armchair investigation also involves a careful textual analysis of the reports of Mary Rogers' murder published in the press, thus illustrating the repetitive reference to linguistic structures. Finally, Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" not only illustrates an actual reference to the real, as it is a story based on actual facts, but it inevitably displays the intricacies of poetic writing, as both editions of the tale, published in 1843 and 1845 respectively, show Poe's own process of unwriting and re-writing so as to save his own reputation as a creator, thus becoming a tale illustrating Poe's own art at self-concealment.

It can thus be argued that, through his postmodern approach, Stashower has turned a detective tale into a source of trauma which is articulated by means of Dupin's hesitating interpretation of Marie Rogêt's mystery as well as Poe's particular trauma and his apparent failure at solving Mary Rogers' case. In this respect, Stashower's documentary narrative acts like a mirror, turning a fictionalised text, Poe's tale, into a textual rendering of traumas as well as a restorative account of creative distress. Poe took advantage of a national trauma symbolised by the death of a young girl as reflecting the nation's loss of innocence, the weakness of the American law enforcement and the corruption that characterised New York, to exorcise a personal trauma: his need to escape his immediate reality and show his reputation as a master of scientific reasoning. However, Poe faced public exposure when life seemed to take revenge on him. In an attempt at retaliation, Poe modified the conclusion of his tale to save his reputation. However, his hands were tied as part of the story had already been published. Subsequently, he would also feel the need to introduce different changes through time to assert he was right, even if he knew he had inevitably failed. Nonetheless, if Poe fictionalised a real case, Stashower, taking a postmodern perspective, has reified Poe's fictional tale, turning Poe's

tale into a real account of Poe's situation as a writer at the time. Poe tried to cure his trauma through altering the source of it, the tale itself, and therefore, Stashower interprets Poe's tale as a necessary restorative text for his trauma, thus proving trauma necessarily reverberates in a series of cause and effect, of grievance and healing, through textual intercourse.

Dupin's solution to Poe's second detective tale may have often been interpreted as a triumph of error (Daniel 1971: 108). Ultimately, Stashower's narrative biography and accurate interpretation of a nineteenth-century murder case underlines trauma at different levels, namely at a national, personal, and creative level, which in turn undergoes changes through the passage of time. Due to Mary Rogers' death, the law enforcement watchmen were openly debunked at first in the press due to their incapacity to protect young women. Likewise, the police are also harshly criticised in Poe's tale due to their ineptitude. Nonetheless, as a result of the social concern raised by Mary Rogers' case, the police force acquired professional running in America for the first time. Similarly, soon after her demise, Mary was heralded as a martyr in the press, as a coquettish victim in Poe's tale, and finally, as a fallen woman once she was believed to have undertaken an abortion. Nonetheless, postmodern reinterpretation of her case may even consider Mary Rogers as a forerunner of the liberation of women. Likewise, through his alter ego Dupin, Poe openly boasted that he could solve Mary Rogers' murder. However, he was soon to discover his thesis was not entirely satisfactory, and felt compelled to modify his first resolution of the case so as to avoid public exposure. And yet, owing to his creative genius, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" remains one of Poe's most well-known and well-rounded tales, precisely because it underscores Poe's creative trauma and his therapeutic efforts to restore his text.

All in all, Poe's second detective tale can be considered as a literal palimpsest, comprising traces of trauma, but also including the seeds of its own restoration. It is an explicit sample of both construction and deconstruction in a single text. The contemporary impact it still exerts is illustrated through the recent publication of Stashower's postmodern volume in which he wisely intercalates Poe's life, the creative process of his tale of detection, and the nineteenth-century investigation of Mary Rogers' case, thus constructing a pastiche of biography, research and postmodern interpretation of a traumatic past, ultimately mirroring Poe's own creative intentions from a contemporary perspective. Poe fictionalised a real case so as to mirror and try to defy reality, and conversely, Stashower reifies Poe's tale so as to find out and further explore Poe's creative trauma, thus conforming a continuum and becoming two sides of the same mirror. As Oscar Wilde would say, these two parallel texts, which speak to each other through time, and underline their own nature as sources and restoratives of twice-told traumas, seem to exemplify the axiom that life

imitates art far more than art imitates life. After all, nowadays Poe's solution to the case seems to have prevailed over other possible hypotheses, and Mary Rogers remains inextricably linked to Poe's second detective tale rather than to the historical annals of crime in America, which becomes an ultimate proof that fiction sometimes surpasses life. Through Stashower's concatenated writing of biography and criminal research, Poe's tale appears as a pastiche; a text reflecting the trauma of exposure as well as displaying the restorative effect of omitting and rewriting so as to suit reality and ultimately preserve Poe's reputation and cure his trauma as a defective-detective even if just for once.

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