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Stephen Bretzius

It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed, and re-sealed. I bade the Minister good morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

—Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter"

In Poe's three sea stories, the sea yawns into vast funnels down which the son precipitously returns to the place wherefrom he issued.

—Marie Bonaparte, *Edgar Poe: Etude psychanalytique*

At the moment of the letter's furthest trajectory—at the precise moment, that is, when Dupin substitutes his facsimile for the Minister's stolen letter—the Minister rushes to the window, drawn by a diversion of Dupin's. In his Seminar on "The Purloined Letter," Jacques Lacan refers to this diversion as "an incident in the street," but Poe is more explicit about the distraction through which the entire circuit of the letter is itself diverted:

A loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a mob.¹

At this moment, Dupin reports, "I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *fac-simile*." Then the scene outdoors again in a kind of secondary revision:

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The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay. (*Poe*, 20)

For Lacan and many subsequent readers, the letter changes hands according to the repetition compulsion (*Wiederholungszwang*) developed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but I want to suggest now that the entire compulsion repeats the historical violence staged, in Poe's story, by the man with a musket, and even earlier by the shoutings of a mob. To read the story in this way is also to repeat it, not by imitating its various transformations but by suggesting that its power to transform is really *too* plain—that is, hidden in the diversion.

In privileging the scene of exchange at the desk over the moment of diversion in the street, psychoanalytic readings of the story like those by Lacan and Marie Bonaparte understandably emphasize inside over outside, but the scene outside very much restages, and a moment earlier, the same psychoanalytic drama as the scene inside. In Bonaparte's brief remarks on the letter's purloining, she notes how the momentary presence of Dupin at the Minister's desk serves as an image of Poe the author, but no mention is made—and this in a book notorious for its emphasis on Poe's dipsomania—of the man in the street, "suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard" (*Poe*, 130-31). The movement from inside to outside is also a movement from Poe's most exalted sense of self (Dupin) to his most diminished ("a lunatic or a drunkard"). For Lacan, Dupin's repurloining of the letter from the Minister's dangling "fillagree card-rack" signifies castration, yet in the scene outside the still more phallic musket "proved to have been without ball," in the story but also in the Seminar. For while this purloined "ball" receives no direct commentary by Lacan, it rolls into view anyway, like a repression, at the very moment when the importance of just such an unconscious "remainder," or reminder, is being emphasized, "a *remainder* that no analyst will neglect, trained as he is to retain whatever is significant, without always knowing what to do with it: the letter, abandoned by the Minister, and which the Queen's hand is now free to roll into a ball [*rouler en boule*]" (*Poe*, 34). In the process, the Seminar ably affirms the Lacanian proviso that, when it comes to the psychoanalytic in-

terpretation of literary texts, too much emphasis on the head is bound to leave something undetected in the tale, particularly a tale like “The Purloined Letter.” For inside out, and at the precise moment of transference, it would be the message and not the address which shows through the window.

Poe’s story, in these terms, is not just an allegory for the letter in psychoanalysis but for the letter’s inside-outside relation to ongoing historical process. Literally superimposing one register (the Lacanian) over another (the historical), the crucial verb “hung” in the “trumpery fillagree card-rack that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon from a little brass knob just beneath the mantel-piece” clinches both Bonaparte’s and Lacan’s anatomical reading of the scene, but it also significantly resonates with an earlier story by Poe, “Loss of Breath,” which turns “The Purloined Letter” upside-down when its narrator-protagonist, Mr. Lacko’breath, is mistaken for “the mail-robber W—,” and hanged. Because he is perpetually “out of breath,” however, because he is all letter, he survives. This unusual story, too, is no doubt one more allegory of castration, one more “male-robbing,” but it also makes unusually explicit the letter’s seamless appropriation of historical violence as it is worked out, to far more spectacular effect, in “The Purloined Letter,” and above all when a kind of analysis closer to Lacan’s than to Dupin’s is figured in the famous British doctor John Abernethy, who founds psychoanalysis when he prescribes “advice.” “Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy,” Dupin asks the Prefect by way of producing the letter, intimating himself into the place of the doctor, renamed for John Abernethy from the Sir Isaac Pennington of Poe’s source in honor of his stepfather John Allan—and this movement of the letter from John A. to John A., from physician to father, is foundational for analysis. “‘Hang Abernethy!’

‘To be sure, hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time . . .’” (*Poe*, 13).

The story begins—“once upon a time”—but the Oedipal violence it refashions, the “hanging” or “hung dangling” out of which it is written or purloined, is historical through and through.

So situated, the story is not just a reflection, but a refraction, of an historical violence that further impels the readings. To see this, let us return for a moment to an equally crucial passage in Lacan’s Seminar, where at another desk in another office, for Lacan as for Poe, the scene of the crime returns:

And that is why without needing any more than being able to listen in at the door of Professor Freud, he [Dupin] will go straight to the spot in which lies and lives what that body is designed to hide, in a gorgeous center caught in a glimpse, nay, to the very place seducers name Sant' Angelo's Castle in their innocent illusion of controlling the City from within it. Look! between the circles of the fireplace, there's the object already in reach of a hand the ravisher has but to extend. . . . The question of deciding whether he seizes it above the mantelpiece as Baudelaire translates, or beneath it, as in the original text, may be abandoned without harm to the inferences of those whose profession is grilling. [note: 'And even to the cook herself.'] (*Poe*, 48)

The paragraph begins with Lacan "listen[ing] in at the door of Professor Freud," but it ends with a well known and bawdy allusion to Marie Bonaparte in the person of "the cook herself," a reference whose maternal resonance deepens the Atrean backdrop for the self-consuming violence of the Freudian maternal that underwrites her appearance in the Seminar long before any particular Parisian *tête-à-tête* ("Eat your Dasein" [*Poe*, 52]). For as Freud himself would be the first to insist, the transition from the detective-analyst Dupin eavesdropping at Freud's door to Bonaparte in the role of "cook" points to something like the Seminar's own primal scene—the primal scene, that is, of psychoanalysis itself, since Freud himself occupies the first position, Bonaparte the second, and Lacan the third.

Revisiting, in these ways, Freud's (and Dupin's) Vienna, Lacan's revision of Bonaparte's reading may itself be read as an Oedipal struggle for rights to the Oedipal drama, as the literalization of an excluded son's struggle for the paternal signifier—in this case, the story. Of royalty herself, Bonaparte very much plays the queen to both Lacan's jack-like Minister and his joker-like Dupin, as René Major explores in intriguing detail.² Lacan, in turn, seeks redress for his own distant wrong "at Vienna"—in this case, Bonaparte's role in his "excommunication" from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1953, together with the obstacle she presented to his meeting Freud in Paris in 1939, who was staying with Bonaparte on his way to London (*Poe*, 89). Psychoanalytically, then, though Lacan twice remarks that there is only one other Dupin story besides "The Purloined Letter" (*Poe*, 30, 33), the story's opening paragraph makes reference to both "the affair of the Rue Morgue and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt" (*Poe*, 6). The second story that twice drops out would be Lacan's story, "the murder of Marie"—though not, again, without a remainder (the ex-

traordinary “*nullibiety*, to use a term which the thesaurus known as *Roget* picks up from the semiotic utopia of Bishop Wilkins” [*Poe*, 38]).³ In each instance, the maternal Marie in Jacques-Marie Lacan, Lacan would say, occupies the middle place of the occluded maternal signifier that corresponds, in the original story, to the paternal Allan in Edgar Allan Poe, even as Dupin’s “D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn” becomes Lacan’s own remembered wrong, one refigured in the scene at Freud’s office. Thus when Lacan parenthetically adds “‘at Vienna’ (at the Congress?)” (*Poe*, 50), the rem(a)inder again brings Marie Bonaparte, the grandniece of Napoleon, to Vienna, and to Freud’s office, along the rails of a metonymy (“Vienna” for both Freud and Bonaparte) more beholden to the scene of French revolution outside the Minister’s window than to the scene of purloining inside, and beginning with the Seminar’s own self-consciously queen-like Bonaparte turned psychoanalytic Marie Antoinette (“Eat your Dasein”). For while the Congress at Vienna is mentioned by Lacan only once, and parenthetically, its psychological import for the Seminar resonates beyond Freud’s office to Lacan’s comparison of the events in Poe’s story to the “*politique de l’Autriche*,” which separates by a letter, “u” from “i,” the politics of the Congress (*l’Autriche*) from those of the ostrich (*l’autruche*) while bringing together or convening virtually all of the various psychoanalytic references in the Seminar—Lacan “listen[ing] in at the door of Professor Freud”; Dupin’s “D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn”; the overriding “discourse of the Other [Autrui],” as Jeffrey Mehlman observes (*Poe*, 86); the Minister’s own “Autruicherie,” as Lacan presents it (*Poe*, 44); the “atrocious couplet [*rime atroce*]” from Crébillon’s *Atrée* (*Poe*, 49); and so on. Austria is the country written in large letters across the top of Lacan’s Seminar, but the psychoanalytic props for that reading converge on a metonymy—and an emblem for French claims on psychoanalysis—whose origin, again, is historical through and through: Vienna-Napoleon (Napoleon-Bonaparte).

In his essay on Lacan’s Seminar, which he also translated, Mehlman draws out this particular relation of the letter to ongoing historical process. “To the extent that there is a locus of power in Lacan’s version of the tale,” he writes, “it is not in the intellectual strength of the master-analyst Dupin, but rather in the persistence of a structure whose mode of existence is the erosion of just such an imaginary autonomy.”⁴ The desire for each subject is in the “persistence,” in the movement from letter to letter, which Mehlman’s

translation of the Seminar also literalizes. “It is clear,” Poe’s narrator remarks of the purloining, “that the letter is still in possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs” (*Poe*, 9). As Lacan similarly observes, echoing not just the narrator’s position but his words,

it is clear [*il est clair*] that if the use of the letter, independent of its meaning, is obligatory for the Minister, its use for ends of power can only be potential, since it cannot become actual without vanishing in the process—but in that case the letter exists as a means of power only through the final assignations of the pure signifier, namely: by prolonging its diversion [*détour*], making it reach whomever it may concern through a supplementary transfer [*transit de surcroît*], that is, by an additional act of treason [*une autre trahison*] whose effects the letter’s gravity makes it difficult to predict—or indeed by destroying the letter, the only sure means, as Dupin divulges at the start, of being rid of what is destined by nature [*destiné par nature*] to signify the annulment of what it signifies. (*Poe*, 46)

The letter’s persistence is equally political when, in a very different reading of the story, Barbara Johnson notes how the narrator’s account of the Minister as someone “who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man,” recalls Macbeth’s “I dare do all that may become a man./ Who dares do more is none.” For now the unbecoming context of the letter is “Duncan betrayed by Macbeth’s letter to Lady Macbeth; Macbeth himself betrayed by his own confidence in his ability to read the letter of his Fate; and of course, the King in ‘The Purloined Letter,’ whose power is betrayed by his not even knowing about the existence of the letter that betrays him.”⁵ For John T. Irwin, the three-part chain letter of readings from Lacan to Jacques Derrida to Johnson similarly replays its own chess-like competition for the letter, a competition and a theater—a play—that Irwin himself provocatively enters: “if the structure that we find in ‘The Purloined Letter’ involves doubling an opponent’s thought processes in order to turn his own methods against him, then the only defense against having the same strategy repeated against oneself by the next player is to produce an insight or take a position that is already self-consciously doubled back upon itself.”⁶ For Joseph Riddel, the story further “puts in question the notion of representation, of the proper relation of inside and outside, that governs the classical idea of detection or unconcealment (*aletheia*),” a subversion and a politics that once again extends to the reading’s

own inside-outside relation to the story in question.⁷ Thus for Mehlman, Johnson, Irwin, and Riddel, the very force of the letter, each of them would almost allow, transforms its various readers into allegorical characters or types of the Minister (Mailman), Poe (John's son), Dupin (Ur-win), and the letter (Riddle). For in each case, history—Mehlman's "locus of power"—is not so much written into as out of the story, a story whose central character D— still more literally lifts or repeats a spacing that is temporal before it is personal, or that continues or repeats a strictly temporal sequence or loop ("At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—").

Just as literally, Poe's story is perpetually outside the symbolic order (English) to which it immediately belongs, from the opening "At Paris" to the final "Atrée." The letter, too, is French, as is the scene of its double purloining, first the Queen's "*boudoir*" and then the "*escritoire*" of the Minister—"a letter, to be frank" (Poe, 8, 14). From the time he left Virginia until he entered the army, Poe himself went by the name Henri le Rennet, whereupon he changed it to Edgar A. Perry (that is, and only in French, Edgar A. *Paris*), as if a difference in identity were somehow a function of different languages. Inside the story, a similar discrepancy of linguistic orders is played out in Dupin's struggle with the mathematical Minister, a "*monstrum horrendum*" even if his final "*descensus Averni*" is perhaps too stiff a sentence for one "merely guilty of a *non distributio medii*" (Poe, 23, 17). In any case it is the otherness of the dead language itself that Dupin's struggle with his alter ego can be said to *emplot*. His revelation to the Minister, in turn, is a scene of translation ("He is well acquainted with my MS."); the substitute letter, too, is a "*fac-simile*": "In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *fac-simile* (so far as regards externals) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings; imitating the D— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread" (Poe, 22). Even in the gastronomic lexicon occasioned by *Atrée*, this final "seal formed of bread" is an odd detail but one that gives a no doubt French finish to the sealing of the "*fac-simile*," and to the sealer, a "*du pain*" whose subjective distance from the Minister is only revealed or guaranteed—and at the moment of sealing—in translation.⁸

Thus refigured, historical violence in Poe's story is nothing less than the struggle of one language with another for possession of the letter, and vice-versa. From the narrative's final disappearance into

French (*Atrée*) to its opening epistolary signature (“At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—”), the story, inside out, is the letter they struggle over, “fort-da” “fort-da” until it becomes, a year later, “Geh’ in K[r]ieg!” (“Go to the fwont!”).⁹ As such, “The Purloined Letter” closely resembles another work of literature influenced at least in part by Poe’s story, Conrad’s *Nostromo*, whose “Author’s Note” introduces Nostromo as “the purloiner of the treasure.”¹⁰ Midway through the novel, the fictional republic of Costaguana is falling to the Monterists when Martin Decoud writes a letter to his sister, describing recent events. Single-spaced, the letter is interspersed with double-spaced commentary while still monopolizing the first half of the chapter in which it appears, as if Decoud and Conrad were struggling for the same narrative space. The civil war that strikes Sulaco, then, splits the narrative, even the type. At the height of the conflict, the novel’s persistent image of the novel, the fictional *Fifty Years of Misrule* authored by old Don José, Joseph Conrad’s Iberian other, is “littering the market place, floating in the gutters, fired out as wads for trabucos loaded with handfuls of type” (213). Here the materiality of the signifier is literally the agent of historical violence and revolution. Like the letter in Poe’s story, moreover, Decoud’s letter literalizes the novel’s ongoing transformation of historical violence, and at an equally crucial juncture in the narrative:

But all this is nonsense. Nobody in the town has any real power except the railway engineers, whose men occupy the dismantled houses acquired by the Company for their town station on one side of the plaza, and Nostromo, whose *cargadores* were sleeping under the arcades along the front of Anzani’s shops. A fire of broken furniture out of the Intendencia saloons, mostly gilt, was burning on the Plaza, in a high flame swaying right upon the statue of Charles IV. The dead body of a man was lying on the steps of the pedestal, his arms thrown wide open, and his sombrero covering his face—the attention of some friend, perhaps. (208)

The psychological displacement here is double. The fiery statue of Charles IV represents, for Decoud, a displacement of Charles Gould, the owner of the mine and figurative “*rey de Sulaco*”; the body at its feet, however, “his sombrero covering his face,” is Nostromo’s, who later appears to Decoud, dozing over the letter, “under the round brim of a sombrero low down over his brow” (221).

Closer still to Poe’s story in this regard is André Gide’s *The Immoralist*, in which the colonizing forces of history explored by Conrad

are linked even more immediately to the structure of repetition explored by Poe, whose story this novel also revisits. In a village in Tunis, where the narrator, Michel, is recovering from tuberculosis, a young Arab boy (Moktir) purloins a pair of scissors, an act witnessed by Michel in a mirror. Soon Michel recovers. Later, in Paris, a friend named Menalque returns the scissors, rusted. Soon his wife (Marceline) falls ill, and they return to the Tunisian village, where she dies. The symmetrical movement of characters, set against the theft and return of the scissors, recalls “The Purloined Letter,” but it is at the return of the scissors in Paris that Poe’s narrative comes closest to the surface of Gide’s:

‘[Moktir] claims he took them from you while you weren’t looking, one day when you were alone with him in your room; but that’s not the interesting part; he also claims that at the very moment he hid them in his *burnous*, he realized you were spying on him in the mirror and caught the reflection of your eyes watching him. You saw the theft and said nothing! Moktir seemed very surprised by that silence . . . So was I.’

‘I’m just as surprised by what you’re telling me now: you mean he knew I was watching him?’

‘That’s not the point; you were trying to outwit him; that’s a game children always win. You thought you caught him and you were the one who got caught . . . That’s not the point. What I want you to explain is your silence.’

‘I’d like an explanation myself.’¹¹

Here the specular relation (“You thought you caught him but you were the one who got caught”), mediated by a mirror (and not a window), corresponds directly to the Poe story. The characters moved by the narrative, Michel, Moktir, Menalque, and Marceline, not only invoke the place of the letter (“m”) in their displacement but recall, in so doing, the Minister in Poe’s story. Menalque’s “that’s a game children always win” further recalls Dupin’s school-boy of eight years, “whose success at guessing in the game of ‘even and odd’ attracted universal admiration” (*Poe*, 14). Like Conrad’s *Nostromo*, Gide’s *Immoralist* thus situates itself in the literary-historical *mise en abîme* opened up by Poe’s story—the *mise en abîme*, that is, of literature and history. Gide, in fact, introduced the expression “*mise en abîme*” into critical discourse in a discussion that includes among its chief examples the “Mad Trist” episode in Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher.”¹²

On the part of history, on the other hand, the events of Poe’s “Purloined Letter” may be said to govern the whole of something

like the Iran-Contra affair, where the missing letter around which all of the intrigue turns is the memo with the signature, or the initials, authorizing the diversion. For while this letter has never surfaced, its real significance is once again in its loss, its shredding by the machine, which is itself the shred of evidence, the letter, that cannot (Lacan) be shredded. Thus like the letter in Poe, Conrad, and Gide, this one intervenes directly between Ronald Reagan the would-be myth or movie and the facts, between a Stallone-like, gun-running Commander-in-Chief and the truth—*Rambo IX*, “Une Saison en Avernus.” Yet it can never be all fiction, of course, even as critics could only pan the naming of the personification of North American imperialism “North,” or the subsequent scapegoating of Donald Regan for Ronald Reagan. More importantly, the contents of this particular letter have been variously identified, if never, as in the story, directly—namely, that the planes flying down loaded with weapons for the Contras were flying back filled with cocaine. With far less culpability, but with full state compliance, at least according to certain “Whitewater” reports surrounding the real estate investments of then Governor Bill Clinton, the same planes routinely landed in Arkansas. For what the letter conceals, what the concealed letter reveals, is the dark side of imperial politics that so fascinated Poe, even if Poe himself is perhaps the only person who could find compelling, or even amusing, the image of himself *inside* a polling booth, given his stuporous demise outside a polling place in Baltimore, brought on, most probably, by repeaters. But then, as Sylvester Stallone has said of his pet project, a film biography of Poe: “I am a student of his. But people have this image of Poe as a crazy alcoholic and drug addict, and that’s wrong. I’d like to set the record straight.”¹³ The incongruousness, the gorilla-like Stallone playing the ephemeral Poe, is the dialectic itself.

In both the story and its reception, then, literary, critical, and historical, the materiality of the signifier is literally joined to the movement of ongoing historical process. In the case of Poe’s French detective Dupin, his unparalleled “powers” of ratiocination are themselves of a piece—and hence unparalleled—with the “powers” of history itself, as if control of one were inseparable from mastery of the other; in C. Auguste Dupin, the purloined letters are “Caesar Augustus,” as Irwin also observes by way of Borges.¹⁴ Refiguring one supreme authority (the analytic) in the other (the historical), the narrator’s opening salvo to the Prefect, “nothing more in the assassination way, I hope,” returns a few moments later to the Prefect’s

own “ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho! . . . oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!” (*Poe*, 7). From the exchange of letters at the desk, in turn, to the musket in the street outside, the story offers a striking emblem for Paul de Man’s notorious assertion that the phenomenological (and military) “bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars and revolutions.”¹⁵ In his suggestive reply to Lacan’s Seminar, Derrida doesn’t even mention Lacan’s “incident in the street,” but it returns to his reading anyway, and just where the entire psychoanalytic project is being displaced by way of a “typical” core dream:

Dreams of nakedness, then, provoking a feeling of modesty or shame (*Scham*). They are ‘typical,’ precisely, only by virtue of their association with distress, embarrassment, discomfort. This ‘gist of [their] subject-matter’ can then lend itself to all kinds of transformations, elaborations, changes. Nakedness gives rise to substitutes. The lack of clothing, or undress (*Entkleidung, Unbekleidung*), is displaced onto other attributes. The same typical core organizes the dream of the former officer pushed into the street without his saber, without his necktie, or wearing civilian check trousers.¹⁶

As in the original story, the innermost, core dream of psychoanalysis gives rise to the extroverted drama of historical violence, supplying an appropriately deconstructive context for the entirely arbitrary collection of letters that, in something of a huge generalization for the process we are considering here, came to represent “Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country.” From “fort-da fort-da” to Elmer Fudd, musket in hand, at the “fwont,” the movement of the letter covers over historical violence, but the act of covering over engenders the very same violence, even as a French play based on “The Purloined Letter” and entitled *Les pattes de mouche* (1860), translated as *A Scrap of Paper* (1861), “gave rise,” as Thomas Mabbott observes, “to the sinister phrase used contemptuously to describe the treaty broken in 1914 by the invasion of Belgium that began the First World War” (*Poe*, 4-5). In like fashion, the events surrounding Poe’s “Purloined Letter” might suggest that historical violence emerges wherever the difference between fact and fiction is no longer secure, like the smashing of the puppets in *Don Quijote*; but if the story and its reception are any indication, it is more right to say that history, at any moment in its history, is all the violence necessary to keep them apart.

NOTES

- 1 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter," in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 20 (hereafter cited as *Poe*); Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" in *Poe*, p. 31. Unless otherwise noted, all citations to "The Purloined Letter" and its criticism are to this edition. This essay owes a considerable debt to the patient readings of Barbara Johnson and Alice Jardine.
- 2 See René Major, "The Parable of the Purloined Letter: The Direction of the Cure and Its Telling," *Stanford Literature Review* 8.1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1991), pp. 88-97.
- 3 I consider this resonance of Roget-Rogêt in an earlier version of these remarks in *Criticism in Style: Theory as Aesthetic Form* (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1988). The relation is also developed in interesting detail by John T. Irwin in *The Mystery of a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 443-45.
- 4 Jeffrey Mehlman, "Poe Pourri: Lacan's Purloined Letter," *Semiotexte* I, no. 3, p. 55; see also Donald Pease, "Marginal Politics and 'The Purloined Letter': A Review Essay," *Poe Studies* (June 1983), pp. 18-23.
- 5 Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 133-34; *Poe*, p. 236.
- 6 John T. Irwin, "Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story: Also Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson," *MLN* 101.5 (December 1986), p. 1180; see also *The Mystery to a Solution*, p. 11.
- 7 Joseph Riddel, "The 'Crypt' of Edgar Poe," *boundary 2* 7.3 (Spring 1979), p. 37.
- 8 I discuss this pun on "*du pain*" in *Criticism in Style*. It is also mentioned by Servanne Woodward in "Lacan and Derrida on 'The Purloined Letter,'" *Comparative Literature Studies* 26 (1989), p. 42.
- 9 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tr. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), p. 10.
- 10 Joseph Conrad, *Nostramo* (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 31. Further references are to this edition.
- 11 André Gide, *The Immoralist* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 98.
- 12 André Gide, *Journals 1889-1939* (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1948), p. 41. See also R.C. De Prosop, "Deconstructive Poe(tics)," *Diacritics*, Fall 1988, p. 58, and Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror and the Text*, tr. Jeremy Whitley and Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 7.
- 13 Quoted in de Prosop, p. 43.
- 14 See Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution*, p. 32.
- 15 Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983 [first published 1971]), p. 165.
- 16 Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 415-16; *Poe*, p. 175. Near the close of his essay "Le facteur de la vérité," Derrida does momentarily invoke the "frantic behavior" of the "pretended lunatic" in Dupin's "pay," but only as a passing figure for the excesses of psychoanalysis, and without any reference to

the incident itself: "at the moment when the madman (who is a false madman paid by him: 'the pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay') distracts everyone with his 'frantic behavior,' what does Dupin do? He adds a note. He sets in place the false letter, that is, the one concerning his own interests, the *true one* which is an *ersatz only on its outside*" (p. 494; *Poe*, p. 205).