

Poe's De Quincey, Poe's Dupin

ROBERT MORRISON

'IT IS CURIOUS', wrote D. H. Lawrence, 'that the two men fascinated by the art of murder . . . should have been De Quincey and Poe', and Lawrence's connection of the two writers highlights the basis of a trans-Atlantic literary relationship that has been largely neglected in critical accounts of nineteenth century magazine writing, the evolution of the tale of terror, and the rise of crime and detective fiction.¹ Poe was intimately familiar with De Quincey's work and, like him, spent his entire career with the magazines, where he explored everything from literary and philosophical conundrums to the extremes of violence, paranoia, and guilt. More intriguingly, De Quincey's success as a writer for the immensely influential *Blackwood's Magazine*, and his presentation of himself throughout his works as 'The Opium-Eater', served Poe as a dynamic model for his own creativity. Poe's various debts to De Quincey are most clearly revealed in the Dupin detective stories, which draw on a series of seminal narrative features De Quincey put in place in his own tales of mystery, and which transformed the Opium-Eater persona into the figure of Dupin himself. Most strikingly, De Quincey's account of his own investigations of Samuel Taylor Coleridge on charges of plagiarism established a model for the most famous of the Dupin stories, 'The Purloined Letter', for both cases involve a stolen text that is hidden in plain view, and an amateur detective who is in ironic pursuit of his own double. Poe himself seems to acknowledge these various precedents when in 'The Purloined Letter' he fictionalises his debts to De Quincey in Dupin's encounter with the suggestively named 'Minister D___'.

Poe had a thorough knowledge of De Quincey's works. His various treatments of Immanuel Kant seem to draw on De

Quincey's 'Kant in his Miscellaneous Essays', published in *Blackwood's* in 1830. His 'Masque of the Red Death' borrows heavily from De Quincey's Gothic novel *Klosterheim: or, the Masque*.² In 'Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences' Poe parodies elements of De Quincey's first two *Blackwood's* essays, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts'. He called De Quincey a 'psychological autobiographer' and one of 'the first men in [England]'.³ In an 1835 letter to his editor Thomas W. White, Poe cited De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* as one of those invariably popular magazine articles in which 'the ludicrous [was] heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical' (*PL*, i. 57-8). Three years later, in his spoof on 'How to Write a Blackwood Article', Poe offered further, and more exuberant, praise of the *Confessions*: 'fine, very fine! – glorious imagination – deep philosophy – acute speculation – plenty of fire and fury, and a good spicing of the decidedly unintelligible. That was a nice bit of flummery, and went down the throats of the people delightfully' (*PW*, ii. 339). Poe was a keen reader and penetrating critic of De Quincey.

The autobiographical nature of so much of De Quincey's writing meant that Poe was also familiar with many of the details of De Quincey's life, and he would have been quick to spot key parallels between De Quincey's experience and his own. Like De Quincey, Poe was traumatized as a child, and experienced intense forms of isolation and bereavement. As a teenager, both he and De Quincey rebelled against their families only to find themselves cast off, and down and out. Both were classically educated in England and went to university, but both failed to take a degree. Both conceived of themselves as pariahs, gifted but tortured, and fated to persecution and misunderstanding. Both took Coleridge as a literary hero: at 17 De Quincey was 'in transports of love and admiration' for Coleridge, while at 21 Poe could not 'speak but with reverence' of Coleridge.⁴ Both were addicts, caught in vicious circles of excess, humiliation, and guilt. Finally, both were magazine writers *par excellence*, and spent their entire careers with the

periodical press, cultivating notoriety and eccentricity, and employing the format to produce highly marketable blends of badinage, sensationalism, and erudition.

But of course the two are connected not simply by Poe's knowledge of De Quincey's work,⁵ and the many similarities between their lives. Their writings are full of striking parallels. Like De Quincey, Poe wrote in a remarkable number of genres, from comic fiction, burlesque and parody, to literary criticism, aesthetics, and philosophical speculation. Both filled these works with personal anecdotes, Latin tags, recondite references, and repeated claims of vast learning. Both wrote 'impassioned prose',⁶ De Quincey in autobiographies such as the *Confessions* and *Suspiria de Profundis*, and Poe in fantasies such as 'Shadow – A Parable' and 'Silence – A Fable'. Both practised a method of composition whereby a work was composed 'backwards' from the conclusion to the introduction, in the belief that this was the best way to produce a powerful rhetorical effect.⁷ Both were fascinated by the psychology of drugs, dreams, and hallucinations. In the *Confessions*, De Quincey recounts how, 'at night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions passed along in mournful pomp; friezes of never-ending stories, that to my feelings were as sad and solemn as if they were stories drawn from times before Oedipus'.⁸ In 'Ligeia', the narrator describes a canopy 'spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures', and how as a visitor 'moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk' (*PW*, ii. 322). Clark Griffith notes that in the *Confessions*, as De Quincey deplored 'the dearth of English philosophy and boasted in the same breath of his opium feats and wide readings from the German, so Poe's narrator, contemptuous of the English Rowena, gave himself up to the drugged visions of the German Ligeia'.⁹ For both De Quincey and Poe, the world is, as Francis Thompson put it, 'the world of an opium-dream'.¹⁰

As D. H. Lawrence observed, however, it is their keen interest in murder and the macabre that most closely aligns the two writers. Both believed the death of a young woman was the

height of the sublime. In his biography 'Joan of Arc', De Quincey declared that a woman 'can do one thing as well as the best of . . . men – a greater thing than even Milton is known to have done, or Michael Angelo: [she] can die grandly, and as goddesses would die' (Masson, v. 406-7). Poe declared in 'The Philosophy of Composition' that 'the death . . . of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world' (Galloway, p. 486). Both were enthralled by scenes of violence, isolation, and death. Eve Sedgwick states that De Quincey was 'a great Gothic novelist' because he was primarily concerned with 'certain heightened versions of privation and immobilization . . . submergence under a massive space, the unspeakable', and a ubiquitous 'sense of helplessness'.¹¹ De Quincey wrote often of murderers such as Thomas Griffiths Wainwright and John Williams, and of murderous confederations such as the Thugs of India.¹² Similarly, tropes of claustrophobia, helplessness, and the unutterable are at the centre of some of Poe's finest tales, while his fascination with violence is evident in works such as 'Berenicë', 'The Fall of the House of Usher', 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Black Cat', 'Hop Frog', and many others. In 1822, in the wake of the enormous success of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey projected a novel called *Confessions of a Murderer*.¹³ It is an apt title for much of Poe's most powerful fiction.

Perhaps most crucially, however, De Quincey was also for Poe a kind of literary and creative model. He was for many years one of the leading writers with *Blackwood's*, the most popular and influential magazine of the first half of the nineteenth century, and a publication that Poe read devotedly. De Quincey himself appeared as a character in the highly successful *Noctes Ambrosianae* series, published prolifically in the magazine for nearly three decades, and repeatedly made much of his personal relationship with key contemporary figures such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and *Blackwood's* mainstay John Wilson. It was the kind of international celebrity that Poe sought to emulate, but never did. Yet more importantly, De Quincey also served Poe as the model of a writer who knowingly used the magazines to create a dynamic public image of himself that idealised and tapped the various facets of his

intellectual make-up. 'The Opium-Eater' is a persona that De Quincey usurped from Coleridge, modified according to his own experience, and then traded on successfully for nearly forty years.¹⁴ He is the prototype of the brilliant but estranged intellectual whose indulgences and reclusiveness detach him from society while paradoxically bestowing upon him an insight and an objectivity that make him profoundly knowledgeable of it. The Opium-Eater is bookish, dreamy, and aloof, yet urban, street-smart, and with a keen interest in the macabre. His mental faculties are a potent combination of the ratiocinative and the imaginative, and he applies them to a wide variety of intellectual pursuits, from literature and economics to aesthetics and philosophy. He is an amateur and an eccentric whose poetic flights and sometimes bizarre idiosyncrasies are nevertheless rooted in a methodology of reason. Above all, in the face of inconclusiveness and helplessness, he devotes his intellectual labours to ensuring that the universe is intelligible. Such a persona had a profound appeal for Poe, who throughout his career presented himself to the public as a kind of De Quinceyan double, a figure isolated, brilliant, addicted, visionary. He is an amateur who trumps the professionals; he is an eccentric who sees into the heart of the mainstream; he is a dreamer who is enthralled by violence and the city. His intellect is strikingly characterised by its combination of the sumptuously poetic with the rigorously analytic, while his interests are wide-ranging and idiosyncratic. Through despair and indecisiveness, he labours assiduously to demonstrate that the seemingly arbitrary and sometimes brutal world of dead-ends belies a comprehensible universe. From prose fantasies and fables, through literary criticism and reviews, to aesthetic and philosophical speculations, Poe repeatedly appeared before the public in a guise heavily indebted to De Quincey.

Given the many ways in which De Quincey appealed to Poe, it is not surprising that when Poe came to write detective fiction he seems so often to be retracing De Quincey's footsteps. De Quincey himself wrote several mystery stories of murder and dissimulation, all of which pre-date Dupin's first appearance in 1841. De Quincey's 1832 novel *Klosterheim*

features an avenging hero named Maximilian, whose rightful place as Landgrave has been usurped by a duplicitous tyrant, and who seeks revenge in the guise of a mysterious masque. The novel is laced with the rhetoric of crime fiction. Citizens are ‘arrested’ and sent to ‘city prisons’. The Landgrave retires ‘with the stealthy pace of a robber anxious to evade detection’. The Masque himself is apparently guilty of ‘murderous violence’ (*DQW*, viii. 271, 285, 281). The crime scene is described in forensic detail: ‘traces of bloodshed were apparent in some instances, and of ferocious conflict in others. Sometimes a profusion of hair was scattered on the ground; sometimes fragments of dress, or splinters of weapons’ (*DQW*, viii. 281). Most remarkably, part of the plot revolves around a ‘long and confidential letter’ that has been ‘purloined’, a device that obviously anticipates the central feature of Poe’s most famous detective story. The letter is recovered by Maximilian’s lover Paulina, who plans to ‘prosecute her investigations in the night-time’, and who solves the mystery of the letter’s disappearance based on a ‘clue already in her possession’ (*DQW*, viii. 316-17, 319). Indeed, in using the word ‘clue’ in this way De Quincey becomes probably the first crime-writer to use that key-word of the detective story in its modern sense.¹⁵

Of equal significance in this context is De Quincey’s 1838 fiction ‘The Avenger’. De Quincey himself described it as ‘a German Tale . . . entirely my own invention . . . turning upon secret murder’.¹⁶ The story is narrated by a university professor, who describes a quiet city in ‘the north-eastern quarter of Germany’, and an idealised hero named Maximilian Wyndham, who has just returned from the Napoleonic Wars (*DQW*, ix. 265). Before long a murder is reported, but footsteps in the chapel promise to ‘furnish a clue to the discovery of one at least among the murderous band’. Other murders follow, all equally inexplicable, and the terrified townspeople grapple with ‘the mystery of the *how*, and the profounder mystery of the *why*’ (*DQW*, ix. 275, 278). What is more, these subsequent murders display, as Grevel Lindop notes, ‘a range of thrilling and horrific details, many of which have passed into the standard repertoire of crime fiction and cinema’, including:

the thin stream of blood escaping under the door into the street; the terrified girl pursued by the knife-wielding killer and falling at the threshold, only to be dragged to safety by her frantic sister . . . [and] the trusted figure in uniform . . . who enters the house only to reveal himself as the killer in disguise. (Lindop, p. 153)

At the conclusion of 'The Avenger' the murderer is revealed to be Maximilian himself, who is Jewish, and whose mother was publicly flogged to death in the city when Maximilian was a boy. Through a striking reversal of perspective, then, the seemingly innocent inhabitants of the city are discovered to have been sadists and fanatics who had killed others for the crime of their race. In a confessional letter, Maximilian anticipates the rhetoric of detective fiction as he explains the inspired ways in which he committed his acts of murderous vengeance, and marks 'the solution of that mystery which caused such perplexity' (*DQW*, ix. 298). In its suspense, violence, reversals, and ingenuity, as well as in 'the solution of that mystery', 'The Avenger' maps the salient features of the detective fiction of Poe and his many imitators.

Yet while these two tales have an important place in the tradition of crime literature that extends from the *Newgate Calendars* of the 1770s to the *Newgate* novels of the 1830s, what neither the fictions of De Quincey nor any of these other works contain is the actual invention of the detective figure, and it is here that several have asserted that Poe's real originality lies.¹⁷ Yet his creation of the brilliant and eccentric Monsieur Dupin is indebted to a number of sources: the hero in Voltaire's *Zadig* (1748), who performs remarkable feats of analysis; the prominent French politician and jurist André Marie Jean Jacques Dupin, whose *Observations sur plusieurs points importants de notre législation criminelle* appeared in Paris in 1821;¹⁸ and the 1828-9 *Memoirs* of Eugène François Vidocq, an actual criminal turned full-time inquiry agent for the recently founded French national police (Knight, pp. 8-38). Poe's greatest debt in the creation of Dupin, however, is almost certainly to De Quincey, whose name is a clear verbal echo of Dupin, and who as 'The Opium-Eater' put in place several key

features which distinctly anticipate Dupin. The Opium-Eater is introduced in the *Confessions* as a young 'gentleman' who collapses under the weight of poverty and misfortune and who now lives as a reclusive scholar. He is a prodigious reader who is beset by 'gloomy melancholy' and whose soul is enmeshed in dreams. On many evenings, he wanders forth into the London streets and roams for hours and to 'great distances' to observe the markets and the 'philosophic' temperament of the poor (*DQW*, ii. 53, 66, 50, 49). He has a keen interest in violence and crime, and is a connoisseur of murder considered as a fine art. In 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841), Dupin is introduced as a 'young gentleman' who, because of 'a variety of untoward events', has been reduced to 'such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world'. His reading is 'vast', his temper is one of 'fantastic gloom', and his soul is busy 'in dreams'. Each evening Dupin and the narrator sally forth 'into the streets . . . roaming far and wide until a late hour', and 'seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford'. Dupin is fascinated by guilt and violence, and probes into the circumstances behind gruesome murders for 'amusement' (*PW*, ii. 531-3, 546). The Opium-Eater's reclusiveness, erudition, gloom, and nocturnal habits, in addition to his preoccupation with crime and the city, all clearly prefigure Dupin's.

The Opium-Eater's intellectual character is also a blueprint of Dupin's, for it combines the '*analytic* functions' with the 'power of intuition'. He dotes on 'logical accuracy of distinctions' and recognizes that his 'proper vocation' is the exercise of 'the analytic understanding' (*DQW*, ii. 12-13, 29, 63). He writes at length on questions of casuistry and on a series of historical riddles, puzzles, and enigmas. But the Opium-Eater is also a poet who projects 'his own inner mind' and brings out 'consciously what yet lurks by involution in many unanalysed feelings'. In particular, he 'attempts to clothe in words the visionary scenes derived from the world of dreams, where a single false note, a single word in a wrong key, ruins the whole music' (Masson, x. 226, i. 14). Similarly, Dupin glories 'in that

moral activity which *disentangles*' and he 'is fond of enigmas', but recognizes that 'the *truly* imaginative [are] never otherwise than analytic'. 'His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition' (*PW*, ii. 528, 531). Following the pattern established by the Opium-Eater, Dupin combines 'the creative and the resolvent' and is both 'poet *and* mathematician' (*PW*, ii. 533; iii. 725, 986). James Russell Lowell's famous assessment of Poe as a thinker who united 'a faculty of rigorous yet minute analysis' with 'a wonderful fecundity of imagination' is an equally apt characterisation of De Quincey (Meyers, p. 166).

At its most exalted level, this powerful combination of intellectual faculties bestows upon the Opium-Eater and Dupin 'an inner eye . . . for the vision . . . of our human nature', and enables them both to solve mysteries that baffle everyone else (*DQW*, ii. 13). In 'On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*' (1823), De Quincey cannot initially solve the mystery of why the knocking has always 'produced to my feelings' such a powerful effect because he has inadvertently set his understanding in opposition to his imagination, 'which may do for ordinary life', he notes, 'but not for philosophic purposes'. Once, however, he is able to set his analytical and poetic faculties to work in tandem, he 'solves' the mystery to his 'own satisfaction', and then offers us his 'solution'.¹⁹ On another occasion De Quincey reprimands Maria Edgeworth for failing to understand the lines from Book Four of *Paradise Lost*, 'And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still opens to devour me'. According to De Quincey, Edgeworth complained that 'if it was already the lowest deep . . . how the deuce . . . could it open into a lower deep?' De Quincey replies:

In carpentry it is clear to my mind that it could *not*. But, in cases of deep imaginative feeling, no phenomenon is more natural than precisely this never-ending growth of one colossal grandeur chasing and surmounting another, or of abysses that swallowed up abysses. (Masson, x. 416)²⁰

Edgeworth has been unable to solve the mystery because she has not brought both the logical and the poetic faculties to bear on the problem. Once De Quincey does so, the mystery of

the line is solved and its grandeur is revealed. Likewise, Dupin constantly chides the police and newspaper reporters for what he calls their 'excessively unphilosophical' thinking, by which he means a thinking that is unimaginative and hidebound by 'principle, with rigorous disregard of the conflicting exception' (*PW*, iii. 740, 747). Dupin's method is to utilize both the ratiocinative and the intuitive in order to dismiss specious theories about Marie Roget's disappearance, or to discover the purloined letter in a room where everyone else has already looked. While the Prefect cannot solve the crime because he is unable to see what is right in front of him, Dupin enters into the mind of the Minister, and then adapts his stratagems accordingly. In the 1820s and 1830s, De Quincey was championing that same combination of logic and imagination that Dupin would later exploit with such success, and seems often to have entered into the mind of Poe as he crafted his stories of murder and detection. Indeed, like the narrator in 'Rue Morgue', Poe may well have 'amused' himself with 'the fancy of a double Dupin' (*PW*, ii. 533).

It comes as little surprise, then, that De Quincey appears on several occasions to have thought of himself as a criminal detective. He once observed that the 'one great class of criminals I am aware of in past times as having specially tormented myself' was 'the class who have left secrets, riddles, behind them'.²¹ He owned the four volumes of Vidocq's *Memoirs*²² and, like Dupin, often tried to piece together the solution to a murder case by reading the newspapers. The publisher James Hogg remembered De Quincey's ability to piece together the solution to a murder 'long before the messengers of justice had tracked out the missing links in the chain of evidence'.²³ De Quincey followed closely the newspaper accounts of the 1856 murder trial of the Rugeley poisoner William Palmer, and was equally intrigued a year later by the case of Madeleine Smith, who was tried and acquitted for killing her lover with arsenic-laced chocolate (*Life*, pp. 393, 411). His most probing investigation, however, was one which he himself conducted, and which involved Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the crime of plagiarism. With Coleridge, De Quincey shared financial incompetence, temperamental irresoluteness, an addiction to

opium, and enormous intellectual gifts, as well as the guilt of plagiarism. So it was as Coleridge's double and fellow-thief that he conducted, his ironic investigation, and in his many references to the Coleridge 'case' he repeatedly represented it in the language of crime fiction. In 1804 De Quincey began reading 'in the same track as Coleridge, – that track in which few of any age will ever follow us, such as German metaphysicians, Latin schoolmen, thaumaturgic Platonists, religious Mystics'.²⁴ In 1817 De Quincey read Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and detected a large number of 'thefts' and 'robberies' where Coleridge borrowed without acknowledgement from several German authors (Wright, p. 41). With the publication of the *Confessions*, however, De Quincey himself faced the charge of plagiarism when he was accused of basing his famous story of the visit of the Malay on a tale by the Ettrick Shepherd James Hogg, and in 1823 William Hazlitt brought forward more charges against him, this time for borrowing from an article Hazlitt himself had written on Robert Malthus (Masson, ix. 39, 20).²⁵ Ironically, though, 1823 was also the year in which John Wilson introduced the character of 'The Opium-Eater' into the *Blackwood's* Noctes Ambrosianae series, and here, on his first appearance, the Opium-Eater announced that Coleridge was 'not only a plagiarist, but . . . a *bonâ fide* most unconscientious thief' who 'has stolen from a whole host of his fellow-creatures'. 'I [will] examine his pretensions,' he declared, 'and shew him up as impostor.'²⁶ De Quincey duly presented the evidence against Coleridge in 1834, when he described himself as one to whom 'the case had been best known and most investigated', and stated that he 'detected' Coleridge's crimes 'in a very wide course of reading' (Wright, p. 37). Several came quickly to Coleridge's defence, including Julius Hare and Coleridge's daughter Sara, but this pot was prepared unabashedly to call the kettle black: 'the people whom . . . [Coleridge] seems to have robbed were all pretty much in the sunshine of the world's regard', De Quincey reported coolly; '. . . and an intentional robber must have known that the detection was inevitable' (Japp, ii. 34).²⁷

Poe's voracious reading of British periodicals meant that he may well have known of the charges of plagiarism brought by

Hazlitt against De Quincey, but he undoubtedly knew the much more widely publicised case of De Quincey's charges against Coleridge, as the British magazines covered the affair in considerable detail, and a March 1840 *Blackwood's* essay by J. F. Ferrier on 'The Plagiarisms of S. T. Coleridge' rehearsed De Quincey's accusations, and spoke at length of Coleridge's 'purloinings from Schelling' (*BM* 47 (1840), p. 292).²⁸ But whether consciously or otherwise, Poe in 'The Purloined Letter' produced a strikingly similar replication of the ironies and strategies of De Quincey's investigation of Coleridge. Both the De Quincey and Poe cases involve the purloining of a text, in De Quincey's instance a series of essays and in Poe's a letter. In both cases, that text is in plain view: Coleridge plagiarises from a series of published essays which exist 'pretty much in the sunshine of the world's regard', and while many read *Biographia* without suspecting foul play, Coleridge is quickly apprehended by someone who knows what he is looking for. Similarly, the Minister 'hides' the letter in a 'card-rack' where many overlook it because of its obviousness, though it is easily seen by someone who knows where to look. In both cases, the detective is also a poet/thief: it takes one to know one. As Coleridge purloined from Schelling to write *Biographia*, and De Quincey purloined from Coleridge to write the *Confessions*, and Poe purloined from De Quincey to write the Dupin mysteries, so Dupin the poet/thief purloins the strategy of the Minister in order to steal back the already stolen letter, adapting his 'measures' to the Minister's 'capacity' in order that he, like these other poet/thieves, may create an alternative narrative that is bolder and even more ambitious than the original conception (*PW*, iii. 988). Such methods, moreover, enable De Quincey, Poe, and Dupin all to perform the same fundamental manoeuvre: they each replace one text with another that looks similar but is crucially different: De Quincey bests Coleridge to become *the* Opium-Eater, Poe bests De Quincey to create *the* first fictional detective, and Dupin bests the Minister to perform *the* cleverest of crimes. De Quincey's investigation of Coleridge, and Dupin's of the Minister, then, both involve a stolen text that is hidden in plain view, and a detective who is also a poet/thief in ironic pursuit of his own

double. In his fine study *The Mystery to a Solution*, John Irwin states that, 'as a character, Dupin is as thin as the paper he's printed on' (p. 1). But he is in fact the fictive culmination of a rich line of poet/thieves that extends from Coleridge through De Quincey and to Poe himself. Poe's method of writing the tale doubles Dupin's actions within it, for as Poe purloins to create the fiction so Dupin purloins to solve the mystery. Dupin is a fictive double of all three writers, a poet and thief who prizes imagination, eccentricity, logic, and intellectual bravado, and who silently removes the texts of others in order to assimilate and transform them within grander designs of his own.

Pointing to doubling motifs in 'The Purloined Letter' has of course become something of a critical commonplace. Doubling is what Jacques Derrida in his famous reading finds everywhere, and Irwin notes that 'doubling tends . . . to be a standard element of the analytic detective story, in that the usual method of apprehending the criminal involves the detective's doubling the criminal's thought processes so as to anticipate his next move and end up one jump ahead of him' (p. 5). This pattern is clearly visible in 'The Purloined Letter', and it has also been replicated in recent criticism of the text, making the tale the occasion for one of the more famous games of one-upmanship in twentieth century literary criticism. In 1957 Jacques Lacan argued in his 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' that the tale consists of 'two scenes', each of which has a triangular structure of 'three logical moments'. In 1975 Derrida, in 'The Purveyor of Truth', trumped Lacan when he contended that the tale has, not a triangular but a quadrangular structure.²⁹ In Derrida's view, Lacan ignores the presence of the unnamed narrator and reduces 'The Purloined Letter' to 'merely triangles' because as a psychoanalyst he wants to read the tale as structured by the Oedipal triangle. Derrida rejects such a reading as 'a characteristic psychoanalytic attempt to dismiss or absorb the uncanny effects of doubling' (Irwin, p. 5). Then, in 1978, Derrida himself was one-upped by Barbara Johnson who, in effect, refused to play the numbers game.³⁰ If Lacan played an odd number (three), and Derrida countered with an even number (four), and Johnson were to play the

next available number (five), someone would only come along and play six, and then seven, and eight, in an oscillation of odd and even that would run on to infinity. To go one up would only eventually be to go one down. Yet as Irwin points out, though Johnson herself will not take a numerical position on the structure of the tale, 'doesn't the very form of her essay . . . involve her in the numbers game?' She has placed herself in the third position in which the observer may mistake her 'insight concerning the subjective interaction of the other two glances for an objective viewpoint above such interaction' (Irwin, pp. 7-8). Dupin doubles the thought processes of the Minister to use his own methods against him, as Derrida mimics Lacan, as Johnson bests Derrida. And so on.

Each of these readings, however, sees the trope that initiates this potentially infinite series as the contest between Dupin and the Minister: we are trapped in an endless spiral of 'counting trump by trump', as the narrator puts it in 'Rue Morgue' (*PW*, ii. 530). But Dupin's contest with the Minister is itself the culmination of a series of similar contests that have preceded the writing of the fiction, and that extend back through Poe's encounter with De Quincey, and De Quincey's with Coleridge. Like Dupin and his relationship with the Minister, 'The Purloined Letter' is a text with a past. It is rooted in the dynamics of thievery, creativity, and pursuit that inform De Quincey's relationship with Coleridge, and Poe's with De Quincey. The text initiated a twentieth century battle between literary critics, but it also enshrined a similar nineteenth century battle between a famous series of poet/thieves. Dupin is the image of an artist who purloins to best, and his methods mirror Coleridge's in *Biographia*, De Quincey's in the *Confessions*, and Poe's in writing the tale itself. In the standard edition of Poe's *Tales*, T. O. Mabbott asserts that 'no exact source' for the plot of 'The Purloined Letter' has been 'pointed out' (*PW*, iii. 972), but the tale draws deeply on the rhetoric and manoeuvres Poe found in the writings and relationships of De Quincey.

A clue to the extent to which De Quincey preoccupied Poe as he wrote the Dupin stories is perhaps to be found in 'The Purloined Letter' itself, where Poe structures a duel of wits

between Dupin and the Minister, who is known throughout the text, significantly, as 'Minister D___'. Critics have long pointed out that the letter 'D' for the Minister's surname highlights his kinship with Dupin (Irwin, pp. 341-2), but this 'purloined letter' also clearly suggests 'De Quincey'. Like other pairings in the tale, De Quincey and D___ are doubles, both poets, mathematicians, and thieves. Moreover, and as with Poe and his double Dupin, De Quincey's role in shaping the text replicates D___'s role within the text: as De Quincey establishes the paradigm of the Opium-Eater which Poe transforms in his creation of Dupin, so D___ establishes the paradigm for the crime which Dupin transforms when he commits his own theft. It is as though Poe rewrites his own intellectual exchange with De Quincey into the contest between Dupin and D___: Poe purloins from De Quincey (who has previously purloined from Coleridge) in order to write the tale, in the same way that Dupin purloins from D___ (who has previously purloined from the Queen) in order to solve the crime. In 'How to Write a Blackwood Article', Poe's foolish heroine Signora Zenobia claims that De Quincey's *Confessions* were written by her 'pet baboon', 'an interesting anticipation', notes Lindop, 'of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"', where the criminal likewise turns out to be an intelligent ape' (Lindop, p. 157). In 'The Purloined Letter' Poe took his association of De Quincey and crime even further, paralleling Dupin's contest with Minister D___ in his own rewritings of De Quincey. As a figure both without and within Poe's fiction, De Quincey played a key role in the development of detective genre, and in the formulation of Dupin.

Acadia University
Nova Scotia

NOTES

¹ D. H. Lawrence, 'Edgar Allan Poe', in *Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1986), pp. 33-4. De Quincey's contribution to the rise of crime fiction has been overlooked entirely in several modern accounts. See, for example, A. E. Murch, *The Development of the Detective Novel* (1958); Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder* (1972; hereafter Symons);

Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980; hereafter Knight); and Richard Alewyn, 'The Origin of the Detective Novel' in Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (eds.), *The Poetics of Murder* (San Diego, 1983), pp. 62-78. De Quincey is mentioned briefly in Ian Ousby's *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), but not in direct connection with his own contributions to crime or detective fiction.

² *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas O. Mabbott, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1969-78), ii. 358 (hereafter PW); *The Works of Thomas De Quincey* (hereafter DQW), viii. *Articles from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and . . . Klosterheim . . . 1831-32*, ed. Robert Morrison (2001), pp. 226-7, 437-8.

³ PW, iii. 880, 882; PW, ii. 199; *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. John Ward Ostrom, 2 vols. (New York, 1966), i. 58 (hereafter PL).

⁴ *The Works of Thomas De Quincey: Writings 1799-1820*, ed. Barry Symonds (2000), i. 44; cited in Jeffrey Meyers, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy* (New York, 1992), p. 53 (hereafter Meyers).

⁵ There is no indication that De Quincey knew of Poe, though he may well have come across him. 'The Fall of the House of Usher' appeared in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1840, and an abridged version of 'The Purloined Letter' was published in *Chamber's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1844. The September 1845 issue of *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* featured De Quincey's essay 'On Wordsworth's Poetry' and a long commentary on Poe. In 1847 *Blackwood's* itself carried a review of Poe. If De Quincey did read Poe or any of these British reviews, however, he was maddeningly silent.

⁶ *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, 14 vols. (Edinburgh, 1889-1890), i. 14 (hereafter Masson).

⁷ *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Grevel Lindop (Oxford, 1998), p. 89; 'The Philosophy of Composition', in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, ed. David Galloway (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 480 (hereafter Galloway).

⁸ *DQW*, ii: *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, 1821-1856*, ed. Grevel Lindop (2000), p. 66.

⁹ Clark Griffith, 'Poe's *Ligeia* and the English Romantics', in *Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Bloom cited n.1, p. 78.

¹⁰ Cited in Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968), p. 135. Thompson is speaking specifically of Poe.

¹¹ Eve Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1986), p. 37.

¹² Masson, v. 246-50, xiii. 70-118; James Hogg, *De Quincey and his Friends* (1895), p. 174.

¹³ Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (1981), p. 258.

¹⁴ See Robert Morrison, 'De Quincey and the Opium-Eater's Other Selves', *Romanticism*, 5/1 (1999), 87-103.

¹⁵ Grevel Lindop states that De Quincey first uses the word 'clue' in the context of solving a crime in 'The Avenger', but *Klosterheim* is six year earlier; see Lindop's 'Post Face', in *Justice Sanglante*, trans. Roger Kann (Paris, 1995), p. 153 (hereafter Lindop). The *OED*'s first reference to the use of the word 'clue' as it relates specifically to a murder mystery is from Fergus Hume's 1888 thriller *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*.

¹⁶ Cited in *DQW*, ix: *Articles from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, 1832-38*, ed. Grevel Lindop, Robert Morrison and Barry Symonds (2001), p. 264.

¹⁷ For example, John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore, 1994), p. 1 (hereafter Irwin); Symons, p. 38; Sally Munt, *Murder by the Book?* (1994), p. 2.

¹⁸ Irwin, pp. 341-2.

¹⁹ *DQW*, iii: *Articles and Translations . . . 1821-1824*, ed. Frederick Burwick (2000), pp. 150-1.

²⁰ De Quincey slightly misquotes *Paradise Lost* and parenthetically admits that the phrase 'how the deuce' may be his, and not Edgeworth's.

²¹ *Posthumous Works of De Quincey*, ed. A. H. Japp, 2 vols. (1891), i. 82 (hereafter Japp).

²² T. Nisbet, *Catalogue of an Extensive and valuable collection*

of Books . . . including the library of the late Thomas De Quincey (Edinburgh, 1860), p. 37.

²³ A. H. Japp, *Thomas De Quincey: His Life and Writings* (1890-93), p. 329 (hereafter *Life*).

²⁴ *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 40-1 (hereafter Wright).

²⁵ For the most thorough consideration of De Quincey and plagiarism, see Albert Goldman, *The Mine and the Mint: Sources for the Writings of Thomas De Quincey* (Carbondale, Ill., 1965), pp. 11-25.

²⁶ *Blackwood's Magazine* (hereafter *BM*), 14 (1823), 500 .

²⁷ See Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 1-52.

²⁸ See also, William E. A. Axon, 'De Quincey and J. F. Ferrier', *Manchester Quarterly*, 17 (1898), 268-76.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies*, 48 (1972), 38-72. Jacques Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', trans W. Domingo, J. Hulbert, Moshe Ron, and M.-R. L. *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 31-113. My summary here follows Irwin (pp. 3-11).

³⁰ Barbara Johnson, 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida', in *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore, 1980), pp. 110-46.