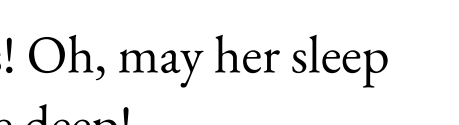


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February 23rd, 2009

Rare Poe Materials Sell via Private Treaty and Benefit Auction

by Jeanne Schinto



"My love, she sleeps! Oh, may her sleep
As it is lasting, so be deep!
Soft may the worms about her creep!"

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), "The Sleeper" (1831)

Even before the start of the many year-long celebrations of the bicentennial of Edgar Allan Poe's birth on January 19, 1809, two Poe rarities have surfaced and sold. One was a previously unknown poem by Poe. The other was a newly discovered copy daguerreotype of the man who, although portrayed in the popular press as a drug addict, drunkard, and scoundrel, nonetheless wrote some of American literature's most rightly famous works—poems, short stories, essays.

"The Black Cat," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Pit and the Pendulum." Besides his poem "The Raven," these are the short stories that readers will probably know best, all of them as chilling as they are brief. As for his only longer work, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, a novella about a whaling-ship stowaway's adventures, it is often credited with influencing another American author who wrote a bit about whaling, Herman Melville.

On December 10, 2008, anyone using the Internet to watch results of the sale of "Important Printed Books, Manuscripts, Literature and Americana" by Bloomsbury Auctions in New York City would have noted a long pause at 3:10 p.m. At that moment, lot 145, an unpublished early draft of what would later be Poe's published poem titled "The Sleeper," was set to be offered with an estimate of \$100,000/200,000. Instead, when action resumed, lot 145 had been altogether skipped, and lot 146 was suddenly racking up figures on the computer screen.

It was reasonable to assume that the market had for some reason rebuffed what had been described by Bloomsbury as "the most significant Poe manuscript to come to auction in at least half a century." A while later, however, the auction house's public relations office issued a statement quite to the contrary. Before the auction began that morning, the statement explained, the principal lot of the sale had been sold "by private treaty" to a collector who paid a price "well in excess of the high estimate." Without being specific, the statement went on to say that the price was one of the highest paid for any 19th-century American literary manuscript in the past decade.

Members of the Poe collecting community, meanwhile, had already heard the news before the official word was out and were transmitting their version of what had transpired. The collector was a Frenchman, they said, whose interest in Poe stemmed from his interest in another writer, French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891). The eventual buyer had offered to pay the high estimate for the 68-line verse—and been declined. So he'd gone higher. The consignors had countered that offer with an even higher number, which he'd agreed to pay. Just like a real auction.

Why hadn't he just bid and bid at the auction? He apparently just had to have the item and didn't want to take any chances of its getting away, the Poe people said.

Was it true? Reached by phone after the sale, the auction house's specialist in charge, Richard Austin, would say only this much: "The private collector is a collector of not necessarily Poe but of literature in general and has a strong affinity for French literature, and Poe had a big influence on French literature as well [as American literature]."

The theme of "Lady Irene" (and "The Sleeper") is one of Poe's most frequent: the premature death of a beautiful young woman. "The rosemary sleeps upon the grave/ The lily lolls upon the wave," one rhyming couplet goes. "I pray to God that she may lie/ Forever, with as calm an Eye," goes another. It was handwritten and signed "E.A. Poe" circa March 1830 on two-and-a-half pages of a gilt red-morocco bound friendship book—also called a lady's keepsake book—owned by 14-year-old Sallie Chevallie of Richmond, Virginia. "It has been in the same family ever since he wrote it," said Austin. "The person who bought it is the first person to own it outside the family."

This new literary discovery has some added zest; it contains information relevant to the writer's social circle. A long list at the end of the album, likely of party guests, includes Poe's name (written as "Messr. Allan," surname of his foster family) as well as that of a person taken to be Poe's sister, Rosalie. As for Sallie Chevallie (1816-1847), the Bloomsbury catalog states she was a French aristocrat's daughter who married Abram Warwick (1794-1874) and, considering her birth and death dates, died young herself, at age 30 or 31.

There are ten other known versions of "The Sleeper," but "Lady Irene" is its earliest known draft, Bloomsbury's catalog stated. The auction house also noted that, of collections with major Poe material sold at auction—in 1924, 1939, 1945, 1974, and 1990—only the last, the H. Bradley Martin sale at Sotheby's, "contained manuscript material of comparative importance and only two of earlier dates than the present."

If a public sale of "Lady Irene" had taken place as planned, Susan Jaffe Tane of New York City and Westport, Connecticut, would have been a contender. "I was absolutely not going to miss that auction," she said after the fact. "To have such an important piece come up, it's very, very rare."

Tane, a businesswoman and philanthropist, possesses what is considered to be "the best Poe collection in private hands in the world," in the words of Stephan Loewentheil. "It is, it really is," said Loewentheil, proprietor of The 19th Century Shop, based in Stevenson, Maryland, just outside of Baltimore, where, as it happens, Poe lived, died, and is buried. "There's nothing comparable. The next best one is owned by Mr. William Self, who is in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and he will shortly be selling his collection at Christie's. It has already been contracted."

Francis Wahlgren, senior vice president and international department head for Christie's rare books and manuscripts, confirmed that the sale is scheduled for October. Earlier, on April 2, 2008, the William E. Self family collection of Charles Dickens was sold by Christie's for a total of \$1,917,488. The October single-owner sale will offer Self's mostly 19th-century British and American literature, including a significant section of important Poe material, both manuscripts and printed books.

Tamerlane and Other Poems (1827), Poe's very rare first book, one of only 12 known copies, will be among the offerings, provisionally estimated at \$600,000/800,000. "It's a kind of 'black tulip' among collectors," said Wahlgren. "There hasn't been one on the market in more than fifteen years"—i.e., not since October 11, 1991, when Tane bought her copy at Sotheby's sale of the library of Richard Manney. For more information about the Christie's sale, contact Wahlgren at (212) 636-2665.

Someone once said an artwork is never completed; it's only, finally, abandoned. One could say the same of a collection. Many collectors, however, can name the moment a particular collection of theirs began. Tane said her Poe collection began in 1987 at a Wendy show at the Seventh Regiment Armory on 66th Street and Park Avenue in Manhattan. There she encountered Loewentheil, who sold her a copy of *The Raven and Other Poems*. Tane said she didn't even know the significance of the fact that it was "in wrappers" (in original temporary paper covers). She had always been a serious reader and a collector of other things, starting with childhood collections of matchbooks, but that was the day she realized "somebody could own something as wonderful as a first edition." That was also the day she became "a serious, focused collector of one thing."

Tane's Poe collection is superior in the "depth and extent of the manuscript material," said Loewentheil, who helped her build it. Besides *The Raven* and other scarce first editions, there are original newspaper and magazine issues in which much of Poe's work first appeared, as well as manuscripts, including "Epimaniacs." It is the only Poe tale, complete, left in private hands; the rest are in institutions, said Loewentheil.

Tane also owns artifacts of Poe's life, and death—most notably a shard from his coffin. Purportedly it was "collected" when Poe's body was relocated from his family's plot to a new marble monument in the burial yard of Westminster Hall in Baltimore in 1875. For more information, see the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore Web site (www.eapoe.org/papers/MISC1851/18930226.htm).

On October 17, 2006, at Sotheby's in New York City, Tane added another rare, non-literary item to her collection, a quarter-plate copy of a Poe daguerreotype, estimated at \$30,000/50,000, for which she paid \$150,000 (includes buyer's premium). The laterally reversed original, known as the "Thompson" Poe daguerreotype, is in the collection of Columbia University. A thumbnail is viewable on the university's Web site (www.columbia.edu/acis/textarchive/rare/77.html). The image was nicknamed for its previous owner, John R. Thompson of Richmond, Virginia, editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, where Poe began his literary career.

Most recently, on November 8, 2008, Tane acquired the newly discovered sixth-plate copy daguerreotype of Poe offered by the Daguerreian Society at its 2008 symposium's benefit auction at the Washington Marriott Hotel in Washington, D.C. Unofficially estimated at \$7500/ 10,000, it sold to her for \$14,000 (there was no buyer's premium).

Traveling in Asia at the time of the sale, Tane bid as an absentee for the image identified by Daguerreian Society experts as a laterally reversed copy of the Poe daguerreotype known as the "Annie" daguerreotype. Annie Richmond, who met Poe at a poetry lecture he gave while visiting Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1848, was thought to have arranged and paid for the sitting. Two portraits in all were believed made by the same unknown daguerreotypist. One of them, owned by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, is viewable on the museum's Web site (www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=39406).

It isn't known who made the copy plate or when. Nor is it known how many copies of it were made or are in existence today. In the short-lived Daguerreian era—from the 1839 announcement of the invention of the daguerreotype to the mid-1850's patenting of the ambrotype, tintype, and carte de visite—it was common practice for daguerreotypists to copy and sell each other's work. Frequently, in newspapers of the period, these portraitists advertised their ability and willingness to do so. Later, studios using the newer photographic inventions copied each other's work. A Poe carte de visite identical to the copy plate that the Daguerreian Society auctioned to Tane is owned by the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

It should not be assumed, however, that either daguerreotypes or copy plates of Poe are common.

When the "Annie" daguerreotype that would eventually be sold to the Getty was auctioned to dealer George Reinhart at a September 23 and 24, 1973, sale at the Hanzel Galleries in Chicago, that was a significant event in the market, preceded by only two other public auctions of Poe daguerreotypes, in 1903 and 1905 at New York City's Anderson Galleries.

The sale of the copy plate at Sotheby's in 2006 was, according to the auction house, only the second public offering of a Poe image in more than a century. That would make the Daguerreian Society's copy plate only the third.

Why, then, didn't it achieve more? The state of the economy is, of course, partially to blame, but so are several other factors. First, the maker of the original of the copy plate sold by Sotheby's is known. He was William Abbott Pratt, who also made the copy plate, in 1854 or 1855. Second, the Pratt copy plate came from a source that the Poe collecting community found more reassuring than the source of the one offered by the Daguerreian Society. The Pratt was deaccessioned by the Hampden-Booth Theatre Library in New York City; the society's image was consigned by the heirs of a man who bought it at a flea market in the mid-1970's.

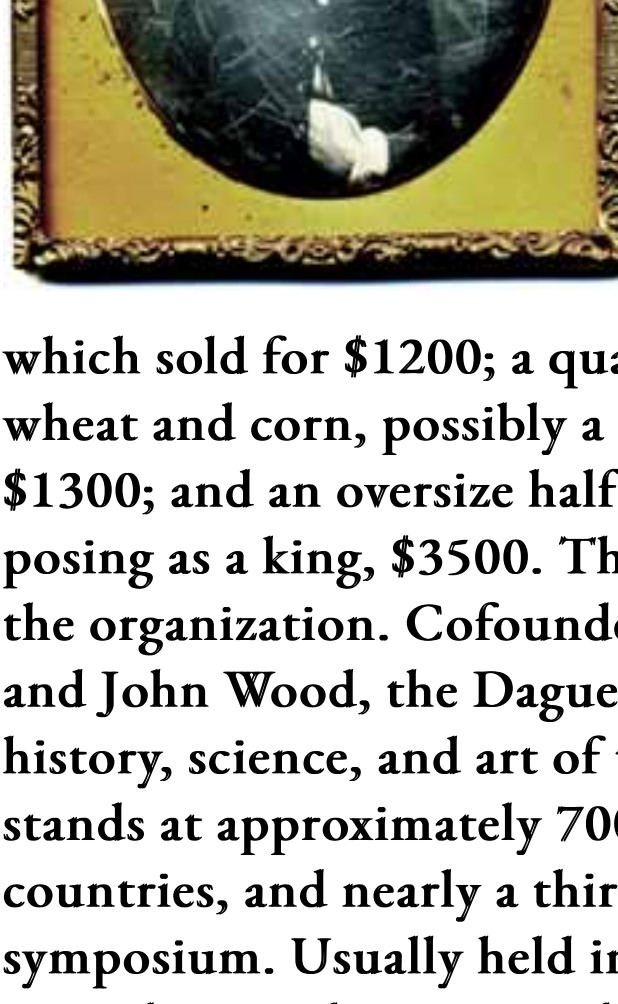
Then there were the relative attributes of the two daguerreotypes themselves. Condition must naturally be one point of comparison. While Pratt's Poe had a light "wipe" across his face, the Poe that was sold by the society shows much more wear, including wipes over the whole, as well as genuine scratches. (A "wipe" is caused by attempts to clean a daguerreotype. Never touch, much less rub, a daguerreotype's perilously fragile surface, photography specialists urge everyone.)

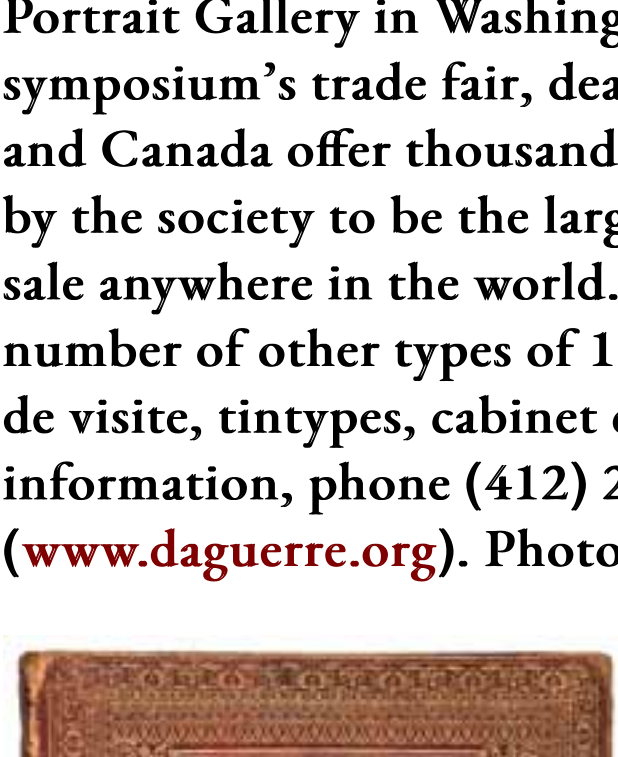
As for their comparative aesthetics, the Pratt's Poe is considered to be more pleasing to the eye than the other image. It's a subjective opinion, to be sure, but widely shared. The society itself, in its committee report, declared: "The first [Sotheby's] Poe had more of an artistic flair to it both in its pose and its execution."

That said, the committee report went on to conclude: "In the final analysis, the high bidder acquired a historic and artistic treasure for a reasonable sum of money, the consignors' reserve was more than satisfied, and the consignors are pleased with the results. We're proud to have facilitated this sale."

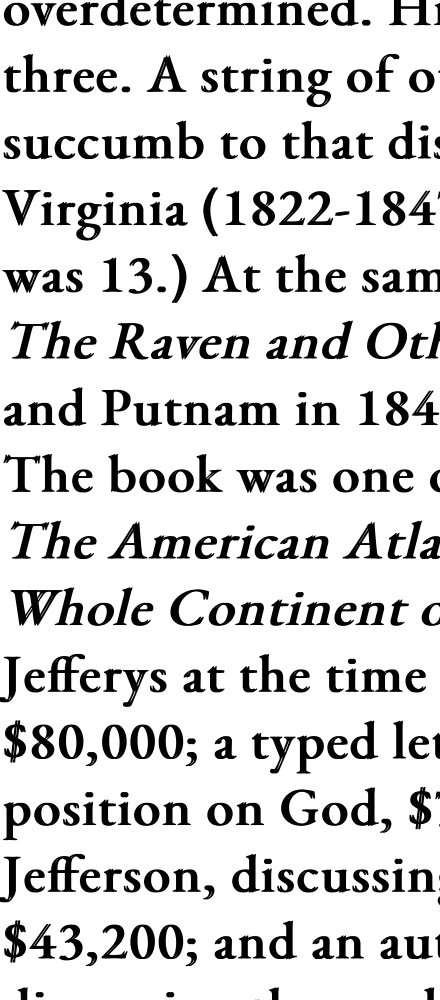
Poe's cause of death, in October 1849, has never been determined. It is agreed that he went into a state of decline during his last three months. Some people say that period in Poe's life was marked by paranoia. He is said to have thought he was being followed; in fact, he may have shaved his mustache for that reason. Susan Tane, asked about that possibility, said, "Well, you know, he had a mustache only in the last few years of his life."

Considering all the bicentennial celebrations of Poe being held around the country, we'll all undoubtedly learn new facts about Poe and shed the merely colorful details. As to whether the festivities will affect the Poe market, we asked Stephan Loewentheil. "It will just reaffirm the strength of Edgar Allan Poe as one of the leading American men of letters," the dealer said. "It will bring people to reflect upon his impact on American letters, as the detective story, mystery story, and horror story have all become staples of modern American literature. They all trace themselves back to Poe's genius."

 This sixth-plate copy daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe was offered at the benefit auction of the Daguerreian Society's 2008 symposium on November 8 in Washington, D.C. It sold to Susan Tane for \$14,000. That same evening 17 other lots of images were offered, with a portion of their proceeds going to benefit of the Daguerreian Society. They included a quarter-plate daguerreotype of a seated man by Southworth & Hawes, which sold for \$1200; a quarter-plate of a couple posed with wheat and corn, possibly a farmer or merchant and his wife, \$1300; and an oversize half-plate of a brightly painted actor posing as a king, \$3500. The auction raised nearly \$10,000 for the organization. Cofounded in 1988 by Matthew R. Isenburt and John Wood, the Daguerreian Society is dedicated to the history, science, and art of the daguerreotype. Membership stands at approximately 700 people from almost a dozen countries, and nearly a third of that number attended the 2008 symposium. Usually held in conjunction with a museum, the annual event this time took place at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. Each year at the symposium's trade fair, dealers from across the United States and Canada offer thousands of images, including what is claimed by the society to be the largest assemblage of daguerreotypes on sale anywhere in the world. On sale too are a tremendous number of other types of 19th-century images, including cartes de visite, tintypes, cabinet cards, and stereoviews. For more information, phone (412) 221-0306 or see the Website (www.daguerre.org). Photo courtesy Daguerreian Society.

 This is the friendship album, approximately 10" x 8", in which Poe handwrote his earliest known version of his poem "The Sleeper." It was a half pages, titled "Lady Irene" and signed "E.A. Poe," it includes an entire previously unknown stanza. Estimated at \$100,000/200,000, the lot was cataloged for Bloomsbury's sale in New York City on December 10, 2008, but was withdrawn and sold privately for an undisclosed sum

that was described by the auction house as being "well in excess of the high estimate." Poe's obsession with early female death, explored in this work and numerous others, may have been overdetermined. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was three. A string of other important women in his life would also succumb to that disease, including his wife and first cousin, Virginia (1822-1847), whom he married when he was 27. (She was 13.) At the same sale, a first edition in book form of Poe's *The Raven and Other Poems*, published in New York by Wiley and Putnam in 1845, sold for \$22,800 (est. \$10,000/ 12,000). The book was one of the sale's top ten lots, which also included *The American Atlas: or, A Geographical Description of the Whole Continent of America*, published in London by Thomas Jefferys at the time of the American Revolution, which sold for \$80,000; a typed letter signed by Albert Einstein discussing his position on God, \$72,000; an autograph letter by Thomas Jefferson, discussing his collection of Indian vocabularies, \$43,200; and an autograph letter by George Washington, discussing the sending out of Mount Vernon window curtains to be dyed green, \$38,400. For more information, contact Bloomsbury at (212) 719-1000 or visit its Web site (www.bloomsburyauctions.com). Photo courtesy Bloomsbury.

 Some 60 pieces of Tane's collection were on view at Cornell University's Carl A. Kroch Library from September 29, 2006, through February 24, 2007. Each piece of Nevermore: The Edgar Allan Poe Collection of Susan Jaffe Tane is still viewable on the university's Web site (<http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/poe>). The catalog still is available too. For more information, contact the library via e-mail (rareref@cornell.edu). Design by Ken Williams, Cornell University Library, reprinted with permission from Cornell University Library.

Originally published in the March 2009 issue of *Maine Antique Digest*.
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