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Burning Fat: Edgar Allan Poe's "Hop-Frog," Literary Overproduction, and the Engine of Revenge

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ABSTRACT

Revenge is the theme and purpose of Edgar Allan Poe's "Hop-Frog." This tale of an enslaved jester who burns his captors alive during a courtly masquerade doubles as a tirade against the exploitative magazine owners, greedy editors, and literary cabals Poe battled throughout his career. Given its blunt biographical overtones and sensationalism, "Hop-Frog" has been considered a minor entry in Poe's canon. This article suggests otherwise by tracing two unexplored dimensions of the story: first, Poe's fattist depiction of the ruling class—aligned with his satirical works and the historical origins of fat-shaming in the United States; and secondly, a setting and plot that mimic through their design several technological innovations in vogue during the first half of the nineteenth century, most notably the internal combustion engine. By mechanizing revenge, Poe asserts the superiority of ingenious contraptions over lazy flesh, efficiency over accumulation. Anointing Hop-Frog/himself master of the machine, he imagines a model of literary production that only authors control and refine, in the same way that engineers strived for engines that would accomplish more with less. This model, I contend, finds artistic creation and technological prototyping converging in the antebellum imagination.

KEYWORDS: Edgar Allan Poe, "Hop-Frog," mechanical engineering, antebellum literary market, mass culture, fat-shaming

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The March 17, 1849 issue of Boston weekly *The Flag of Our Union* has earned a place in literary history for featuring "Hop-Frog; or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs," the last tale of horror Edgar Allan Poe ever published.[1] Like most magazines at the time, the *Flag* offered readers a smorgasbord of sensational short fiction, serialized exotic novels, sentimental poetry, and eye-catching miscellanea. "Hop-Frog" thus shares the spotlight with, among other items, an installment of Martha Ann Clough's *Paolina: The Sybil of the Arno*, a sketch of "The Mines of Potosí," an account of the latest panorama exhibited in London, and a list of "Good Rules for Writers" reprinted from the *Boston Olive Branch* (*Flag* 1-2). These unoriginal "Rules"—which nonetheless solicit originality—encapsulate important tensions underlying Poe's piece, its mass-oriented publication venue (the *Flag* was subtitled "A Paper for the Million"), and the entire edifice of U.S. publishing during the so-called "Golden Age of Periodicals" (Mott 340). Not without irony, the "Rules" go on and on about the need to be succinct—"be brief"; "CONDENSE"; "Make your sentences short"—and uphold the highest standards: "If you have written anything which you might think mightily smart, throw it into the *fire*" (*Flag* 2). But *Flag* editors did not practice what they preached. Their proverbial "flag of union" rather conveys a sprawl of clippings and borrowed materials that typify the era's "culture of reprinting" (McGill 17).[2] While authors had to keep it short and punchy, editors enjoyed a free pass to flood the nation with secondhand literature. Nothing went into the fire.

"Hop-Frog," which ends in violent conflagration, thematizes this clash between creative freedom, mass readership, and a saturated literary market. The story of an overworked artist who lynches his bosses sits somewhat uneasily in a magazine that otherwise epitomizes the capitalist logic of "*growth by growth*" (Baudrillard 39). Rapid industrialization, high literacy rates, the consolidation of a market economy, and the rise of middle-class consumerism during the Jacksonian era boosted periodical and book sales to unprecedented levels. Publishers met such an increasing demand at the expense of originality. "Growth by growth" aptly describes, then, a recursive print culture exemplified

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[1] Poe's literary executor, Rufus Griswold, shortened the title to "Hop-Frog" in 1850. The short version has prevailed in most anthologies. On "Hop-Frog's" publication history, see Thomas Mabbott's notes (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1344).

[2] Unauthorized reprinting and widespread piracy resulted from the absence of international copyright laws before 1891. Editors reused British sources instead of paying domestic authors for original contributions. This circumstance incensed most professional men of letters, Poe among them (see McGill 8-11; Phillips 480; and Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe* 36).

by "That Valentine, by Poe," a notice *Flag* readers encountered on the page opposite to "Hop-Frog." Apparently, Poe had penned the poem "A Valentine" for the *Flag* but it ended up in the *Union Magazine*. Poe's alibi convinced *Flag* editors. Conveniently for them, settling the matter also filled space on the page. As libels, counter-libels, and polemics pervaded the popular press, confusion segued into clarification and/or confrontation. In any case, print begot print.

That antebellum publishing had become a many-headed hydra was a blessing and a curse for Poe, who seized the chance to disseminate his work in (re)print but also pined for a return to quality over quantity.[3] Despite his involvement in various plagiarism controversies and circulation stunts (hoaxes, cryptography contests), Poe harbored loftier goals.[4] Kevin Hayes rescues his attempts, during the early 1840s, to launch a top-notch magazine readers would want to bind and collect "while cheap books fell by the wayside" (93). As Poe himself put it, "the enormous multiplication of books in every branch of knowledge is one of the greatest evils of this age" (Review 731).

My claim is that, in "Hop-Frog," Poe bids adieu to American literature on a bitter but remedial note, suturing the nation's juggernaut of publications to patrons' plus-sized bodies while, conversely, comparing his own authorial travails to a seamlessly efficient engine. A quick synopsis helps us situate fatness and technology at the story's thematic core. The eponymous protagonist and his ballerina friend Tripetta are two dwarves kidnapped from their homeland and forced to work as entertainers for a king and his seven ministers—"large, corpulent, oily men, as well as inimitable jokers" overfond of pranks and gimmicks (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1345). One day, after the king forces Hop-Frog to drink wine and splashes a cup on Tripetta's face, Hop-Frog concocts his revenge. He persuades the king to host a masquerade and dress up, along with his ministers, as unleashed orangutans. To keep them incognito, Hop-Frog applies a "thick coating" of "*flax*" (3: 1351) to their bodies, already "saturated with tar" (3: 1350). The ball takes place in a domed, "circular room" with a "single window" on top (3: 1351). The king agrees to lock the doors and leave Hop-Frog the key. Synced to a clock that strikes midnight, the ruse

[3] Here I am indebted to Terence Whalen's distinction between an aesthetically-inclined "Ideal Reader," whom Poe imagined as a soul brother; a "Feared Reader," to whom Poe attributed a herd mentality; and a "Capital Reader" aware of the power she or he wields through the act of purchase. Neither an outlier nor a puppet of commercialism, the Capital Reader reminded Poe of the strictures of a literary scene governed by supply and demand (Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe* 14-16).

[4] For comprehensive analyses of Poe's media experiments, see Elmer and both works by Whalen.

succeeds in sending attendants from fright to laughter. Then, amidst the general exhilaration, the jester ties up the eight fake apes with a few deft and geometrically studied passes of a chain. Next they are lifted by a pulley wheel usually attached to a candelabrum, which Hop-Frog has removed for the occasion. The load is raised by an "unseen agency" (most likely Tripetta), since the "counter-balance" segment of the chain lies outside the building (3: 1351-52). Inside, Hop-Frog climbs atop the king and ministers, torch in hand, and cremates them while horrified guests try to flee in vain. After declaring his coup "*my last jest*," Hop-Frog escapes through the sky-light window. The king and his retinue hang below, reduced to a "fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass" (3: 1354).

Mass is a recurrent theme in the story, specifically the overlap of body mass and mass culture. Poe conflates the rulers' hoarding of fat and wealth—the king's "capital figure"—with their incessant extraction of amusements from diminutive Hop-Frog and Tripetta (*Collected Works* 3: 1346). Class vampirism unfolds as an embodied zero-sum game in which rulers' gains are workers' losses. Hop-Frog hijacks this political economy by operating to his benefit the machinic assemblage of the circular ballroom. Thus, the pulley wheel gives Tripetta enough leverage to hoist the heavyset villains, rendering them weightless and powerless. A new social order and aesthetic experience crystallize in this machination (the term's etymology should not be lost on us). When avenging angel Hop-Frog lands his torch on the villains' flammable costumes and shrinks them to a charcoaled pulp, he focalizes our attention with the same ease with which he lassoed them—another unifying gesture. Here, Hop-Frog borrows a lesson from Poe, who believed that "a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the force of a frame to a picture" (*Essays* 21). The tightly-sealed ballroom, with the top window as its only exhaust valve, catalyzes the "unity effect" that Poe advocated in fiction (*Essays* 13-14). Part of this effect hinges on the simultaneous cleansing of body mass and mass culture. By congregating masqueraders and readers around *one* traumatic spectacle (no longer the scatteredness of the *Flag* and its ilk), "Hop-Frog's" engine-like locale channels Poe's fantasy of regained authorial control.

The key ingredient in this fantasy is a horror-producing machine whose mechanism Hop-Frog exhibits in full pomp, not unlike the charlatan at a fair or the eminent scientist before his colleagues—in Poe's America no clear line

separated the two. Later sections will assess Poe's analogous depiction of royal hall and combustion chamber, including his prescient narrativization of a four-stroke engine's functioning stages. Suffice it to say here that Poe's exposure to STEM fields dated back to his formative days at West Point, where he excelled in pyrotechnics and chemistry among other disciplines.[5] From then on, Poe never lost track of scientific and technological breakthroughs, reporting them in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* and *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*, attending lectures within the Lyceum circuit, and immersing himself in popular science's realm of quacks, showmen, and snake-oil salesmen. Ensconced somewhere between circus and laboratory, Poe harmonized literary and scientific advancement in bold and often misunderstood ways. He once complained: "Because it suited us [Americans] to construct an engine in the first instance, it has been denied that we could compose an epic in the second" (*Essays* 549). Resentful of this misconception, Poe showcased in his swan song a vengeance of epic, yet methodically calculated, proportions. The story thus bears enormous potential for advancing the project—in full gear since the recent publication of John Tresch's *The Reason for the Darkness of the Night*—of recasting Poe as neither a supplier of thrills nor a myth-buster scientist, rather someone playfully navigating a scale of grays between inductive exposition and popular sensation, empiricism and humbug.

Despite the intensity with which Poe's technological and artistic imaginations converge in "Hop-Frog," experts have relegated it to a B-side Poe. The story soon developed a reputation for being too obvious, too in-your-face. It did not help that Poe's only documented reference to it is "[t]he 5 prose pages I finished yesterday" (*Letters* 2: 425).[6] Mabbott led the charge by declaring Poe's handling of the revenge theme too overblown for refined tastes (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1343). Later commentators have foregrounded the subtexts of slavery and abolitionism (Jones), humor (Taylor), disability (Tyrrell), and

[5] By the time Poe entered West Point in 1830, cadets enrolled in primary subjects such as engineering and military science while completing 1,032 hours of natural philosophy, divided in "statics, hydrostatics, hydrodynamics, hydraulics, pneumatics, optics, and practical astronomy" (Hope 81). On Poe's brief but intense sojourn in West Point, see Tresch, *Reason* 42-57.

[6] The *Flag* paid him five dollars per page (Poe, *Letters* 2: 425). Poe's page count suggests he was strapped for cash rather than mindful of aesthetic effect; however, his description is not at odds with my claim that the point of "Hop-Frog" is, precisely, to unsettle assumed correlations between size, literary, and economic value.

terrorism (Kennedy 823-24). Despite this upsurge in attention, critics still tiptoe around biographical interpretations, deeming them too facile.[7] Such animosity characterizes scholarship that otherwise expounds in fascinating detail Poe's ordeals in the publishing industry. Meredith McGill, Jonathan Elmer, and Hayes never mention "Hop-Frog" in their respective monographs, Whalen only in passing (*Edgar Allan Poe* 38; "Poe" 82). Justine Murison even warns us about how "tempting" it is "to read it as a culmination of [Poe's] ire at the reading public" (60).[8]

Falling into this temptation, I unearth not Poe's "ire" but an arc of revenge in which superfluous bodies give way to a syncretic machine. Like Poe, who opens "Hop-Frog" discussing the links between fatness and popular culture, I first examine his fattist portrayal of the king and ministers: a hyperbolic, stigmatizing presentation of their bodies that also crops up in Poe's anti-publisher satires and coincides with the origins of fat-shaming in US society. Poe's hatred of heedless accumulation in its many forms—corporeal, textual, capitalist—morphs into his veneration for machines that produce distilled effects. These range from printing presses and coal stoves to automatons and, above all, combustion engines. Because these machines find their way into "Hop-Frog," my analysis of the text is preceded by an overview of Poe's writings on mechanics.

I. Puffers, Fatquacks, and the Starved Author

In "Hop-Frog" and elsewhere, Poe deploys fat as a symbol with which to denounce a national print culture in which circulation and availability

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[7] John Bryant proves the exception by discerning in "Hop-Frog" an "allegorization of Poe's relationship to his reader," although he concedes that "the allegory is finally more personal than political" (44-45). In my view, Poe's mechanization of Hop-Frog's revenge radically democratizes American literature's business model. The intricacy of Poe's allegory resides in the fact that, *pace* Bryant, the story displays not two but three allegorical foci: author (Hop-Frog), readers (guests), *and* publishers/mediators (king and ministers). I cover this threefold allegory in my final section.

[8] Murison's warning notwithstanding, a biographical approach to "Hop-Frog" involves us in a game Poe liked to play with readers. McGill has pointed out how he sowed his unsigned magazine contributions with hints for savvy readers to connect the dots all the way back to himself. Authorship became a mind game, an extension of his cryptographic challenges. Poe "oscillat[ed] between an awareness of the precariousness of authorial identity—its dependence on repetition and the recycling of literary conventions—and the conviction that the author's mark can be detected at impossibly minute levels" (McGill 144).

paradoxically lead to stagnant accumulation. The tale opens with a conundrum: "Whether people grow fat by joking, or whether there is something in fat itself which predisposes to a joke, I have never been quite able to determine; but certain it is that a lean joker is a *rara avis in terries*" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1345). Are fat individuals victims of unequal access to nutritional food or should they be blamed for their unhealthy diet?[9] The question, at the center of so much debate in public health today, befits Poe's dilemma: were readers making dumb choices or were they dumbed down by a profit-obsessed culture industry? Here, the term "joker" suggests the latter, signaling a transition from corpulent jesters of yore to their patrons in the narrative present (i.e., the king and his ministers). As fat historically travels from artists to their sponsors (hence Hop-Frog and Tripetta's emaciated forms), the latter cohere as front-line consumers who then impose their preferences on the public at large. Within this scheme, the king becomes consumer zero, and not one to appreciate wit. "Over-niceties wearied him. He would have preferred Rabelais's 'Gargantua,' to the 'Zadig' of Voltaire." As the Gargantua connection insinuates, the king's hunger and boredom are mutually constitutive. Manifesting "especial admiration for *breadth* in a jest," he incarnates the art forms he craves and popularizes in his kingdom (3: 1345).[10]

Poe's characterization of the king oscillates between the medieval iconography of the tyrannical giant and an overindulgent middle class that, by 1849, also struggled to keep boredom at bay. In her cultural history of fat-shaming, Amy Erdman Farrell digs out a continuum between girthy ogres in ancestral folklore and an increasingly overweight bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century. Whereas medieval writers used fat to signify an excessive power that easily leads to despotism, cartoonists and social commentators in Poe's day started to berate "the middle-class fat person, unable to regulate the abundance of the modern world" (Farrell 44). Moreover, adipose bodies became increasingly racialized, as more white Americans associated fatness with "'greedy' Africans" and clung to a Protestant ethics according to which "overeating was ungodly" (Strings 6). Poe joined many of his contemporaries

[9] I err on "fat" over "obese," "overweight," and other euphemistic alternatives in accordance with fat activists' ongoing reclamation of the term (see Farrell 22, Freespirit and Aldebaran 342).

[10] Katrina Bachinger places the king in the orbit of George IV, whom Charles Lamb dubbed "Prince of Whales" on account of his weight and reputation for gluttony (qtd. in Bachinger 381). Voltaire's Zadig inspired C. Auguste Dupin, Poe's svelte detective-hero and the very antithesis of Hop-Frog's king (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1354-55).

in no longer adhering to fatness as an index of power and ambition—one thinks of Hans Holbein's dignified portrait of Henry VIII (c. 1536). Instead, as Arthur Rackham would capture in his illustration for "Hop-Frog" (Fig. 1), the bulgy king and ministers are meant to repel viewers on first sight. Appetite here denotes waste, not conquest.

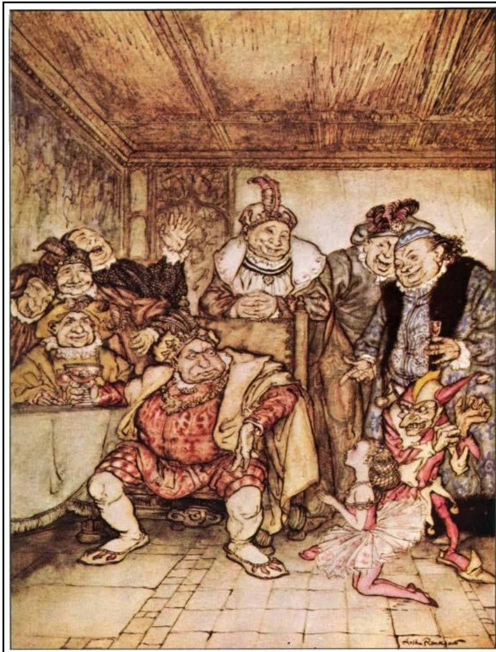

Fig. 1. Arthur Rackham, *Tripetta Advanced to the Monarch's Seat, and, Falling on Her Knees Before Him, Implored Him to Spare Her Friend*, 1935.

Antipathy for fat people evolved into antipathy for fat the substance. Many started to perceive fat as destroying, through its obstinate materiality, the immaterial preserves of intellect and soul. Walt Whitman worried that "the absorption into the system of fat, or any indigestible substance . . . will be pretty sure to injure the voice" (39). Recalcitrant fat threatened thus a romantic idealism that valued voice, mind, and spirit over flesh. Shifting constructions of fat in the 1840s and 1850s highlight its propensity to sediment, to overstay its welcome. William Banting, one of the first diet gurus in the United States,

spoke of it in terms of "superfluous deposit" and "undue formation of fat," understood as a "hydrocarbon" that "deposits itself so insidiously and yet so gradually amongst the tissues of the body" (161-62). Transatlantic celebrity author Harriet Martineau warned that, if somebody "take[s] more fuel than he wants, part of it is wasted, and part of it the body stacks away as fat" (608). Given these odds, readers soon welcomed any remedy that would make "the fatty and serous plethora [dissipate] itself," as an article in *Godey's Lady Magazine* proclaimed the year "Hop-Frog" came out ("Health" 145).

Fat did not think; what is worse, it precluded thinking. Steven Shapin has charted the genealogy, in Western philosophy, of the truism by which a "philosopher's disembodiment is the condition for his hope to attain truth" (25). The truism intimates an ominous flip side: too much body condemns us to a perpetual stupor, eroding our will and leaving us at the mercy of shrewd (and thinner) others. Fat became the proxy of a self who, in Susan Bordo's words, "simply *receives* and darkly, dumbly responds to impressions, emotions, passions" (11). In "Hop-Frog," the king and his councilors cannot choose a costume because "they found it difficult, on account of being so fat, to make up their minds." During a previous pageant, we are told: "there was not a particle of indecision anywhere—except in the case of the king and his seven ministers" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1347). No wonder, then, that the king ultimately depends on Hop-Frog: fatless *ergo* "so inventive in the way of getting up pageants, suggesting novel characters, and arranging costume, for masked balls, that nothing could be done, it seems, without his assistance" (3: 1346-47).

Murison is right in stating that "the king's body . . . exemplifies his limited mind" (58), but I would add that his surplus of fat also underscores the iniquity of accumulation itself. Like the anatomies of bourgeois consumers, print culture dilated for reasons that had more to do with instant gratification than aesthetic merit. It did so through blatant repetition: plagiarism, reprinting, and misattribution squabbles of the "That Valentine" kind. Exasperated by the bulk of published material and blaming his financial problems on the market mentality behind it, Poe longed to purge American *belles-lettres*. As a critic, he enjoyed slimming down books. He decried a poetry anthology for featuring "every one in the country who had established even the slightest reputation as poet . . . an inordinate quantity of the purest twattle" (*Essays* 551). "Poe's only worry," Whalen opines, "is that literary overproduction will impair the acquisition of 'correct information' and other 'useful matter'" (*Edgar Allan Poe*

12-13). Brevity struck Poe, then, as a sensible way to fend off glut. He famously dictated that "a long poem does not exist" and that a work of fiction should be read "at one sitting" (*Essays* 71, 15). If excessive fat clogs one's mind, excessive text hardly leaves an impression.

"Hop-Frog" endorses this less-is-more ethos by juxtaposing Rabelais and Voltaire. As already seen, the hedonistic king and his acolytes look up to Gargantua. In addition, Poe must have known that, in *Temple du Gout* (1732), Voltaire reduces Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-64) to one eighth of its length before allowing this gigantic novel about giants to sit in "God's library" (Bakhtin 117-18). Voltaire's rationale for doing so foreshadows Poe's rants against padding: "[Rabelais] poured out erudition, filth and boredom," says Voltaire, "you will get a good story two pages long, at the price of two volumes of nonsense" (qtd. in Bakhtin 116-17). Aided by purifying fire, Hop-Frog does to eight members of the managerial class what Voltaire did to Rabelais' cycle of novels: turn them "eight to a fraction" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1350). The engine of revenge conducts the work of mass reduction (and price adjustment) by burning fat, which in turn discontinues Hop-Frog's performance routines and tightens them up into one magisterial effect.[11]

Before "Hop-Frog," Poe had rebuked the commodification of literature in several polemics that mobilize images of food, gluttony, and fatness. Alternating satire and pathos, Poe repeatedly confronts a starved author (a poorly disguised construct of himself) with a bevy of capitalist gourmands in charge of publishing. His 1845 article "Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House" begins by invoking the contrary: an ethical magazinist reluctant to reprint uncopyrighted writings from abroad. "It would *not do*," he claims, "to let our poor devil authors absolutely starve, while we grow fat, in a literary sense, on the good things of which we unblushingly pick the pocket of all Europe" (Poe, *Essays* 1036). Poe puns on "literary sense." Editors' fattening is literal *and* "literary," since literature magnetizes predatory business practices. To corroborate this, Poe sides with a "young author . . . politely requested to compose an article for which he will 'be handsomely paid'" (*Essays* 1037). Hunger and fattening are gradually de-troped once actual starvation kicks in,

[11] As Hop-Frog promises the king: "Your majesty cannot conceive the *effect* produced, at a masquerade, by eight chained ourang-outangs" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1350).

due to a "'pursy' editor" who promises yet postpones payment (*Essays* 1038).[12] The aspiring author quits "the sole employment which affords him the chance of a livelihood" and, joined by his family, relinquishes food during the month he spends hammering out his article (*Essays* 1037). The article goes to print yet he never sees a dime. Unsurprisingly, "[h]e dies, and by the good luck of his decease (which came by starvation) the fat 'editor and proprietor' is fatter henceforward and for ever to the amount of five and twenty dollars, very cleverly saved, to be spent generously in canvas-backs and champagne" (*Essays* 1038).

The plea of the starved author reappears in "Hop-Frog," where court jesters are "always ready with sharp witticisms, at a moment's notice, in consideration of the crumbs that fell from the royal table" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1345). Poe settles on not one but eight morbidly obese villains, which suggests a class critique reinforced once the ministers come across as an uncritical mass subordinated to the monarch's whims. When the king tells Hop-Frog "[c]haracters, my fine fellow; we stand in need of characters—all of us—ha! ha! ha!," his demand "was seriously meant for a joke" and "his laugh was chorused by the seven" (3: 1348). Poe thus obliquely nudges those sycophantic reviewers of his day lacking enough moral "character" to champion emerging authors. That body mass helped Poe visualize the coddling of American readers also becomes evident in "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." (1844). In this satirical piece, Poe refers to a magazine editor as "that pig" and to prolific author James Fenimore Cooper as "Fatquack" (3: 1139, 1137). Poe saves his harshest blows for the practice known as "puffery," common in literary circles and an idiomatic use of "to puff" that tethers ego inflation to corporeal aggrandizement. Puffers perpetuate exclusive circuits of mutual adulation (see McGill 204). An outcast from these circles and an iteration of the starved-author archetype, Bob undergoes the same embodied transactions we witness in "Hop-Frog." When an editor reviles his poems, he is literally de-puffed: "I felt myself growing gradually smaller and smaller, and when I came to the point at which the editor sneered at the poem as *verses*, there was little more than an ounce of me left" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1130). This scene of subtraction follows one in which another seedy editor asks Bob for a publication fee (3: 1134).

[12] During the 1840s magazine editors often delayed or revoked stipends for original contributions (Zboray 128; Phillips 480). "Hop-Frog" appeared on March, 1849; by April, *Flag* owner Frederick Gleason announced that the magazine "could no longer pay for whatever articles and poetry it published" (Frank and Magistrale 131).

"Thingum Bob" thus rehearses "Hop-Frog's" symbolic transpositions of literature, capital, and body mass.

All-devouring entrepreneurs in "Magazine Prison-House" and "Thingum Bob" met an actual correlate in the event that inspired "Hop-Frog." The incident known as *Bal des Ardents* took place in Charles VI's Parisian court in 1393. Jean Froissart devotes one of his *Chronicles* to this farce-gone-wrong, which the king survived but which exacerbated the populace's perception of the monarch as a debauchee. Poe read Froissart's account in an extended footnote his friend and fellow writer Evert Duyckinck placed in "Barbarities of the Theater," published in the *Broadway Journal* on February 1, 1845. "Barbarities" narrates the tragic death of Miss Clara Webster, an actress on the Drury Lane stage, in London, whose dress caught fire when coming to close to the candle "lights placed below" the proscenium (Duyckinck 71). Miss Webster's accident along with Duyckinck's angry exposé of performers' precarious work conditions struck a nerve in Poe. Although it is impossible to pinpoint a *terminus a quo* for "Hop-Frog," fatness clinches the connection between fictional king and real-life impresario: "The blue-lights and sulphure are a nuisance which, out of the theatre, would be indictable at common law . . . Mr. Povey may, very mysteriously by some unknown laws of assimilation, continue to grow fat in such an atmosphere" (Duyckinck 71). "Hop-Frog" avenges Miss Webster and all imperiled cultural producers. To that end, Poe turns the tables and burns the Mr. Poveys of the land—a combustion that reveals their woeful nature. This was, nonetheless, a controlled fire: for Poe, the remedy against accumulation arrived in the form of pristine machines fated to distill—not disperse—human ingenuity.

II. Critical Engines

Engines compress, combust, and discriminate. They strive to do as much as possible with as little as possible, synthesizing sheer power from raw materials and tossing the leftovers aside. As more powerful, compact, and cost-saving engines of different kinds (steam, pneumatic, combustion) entered American life, science evolved into a profession and a spectacle. Discussions of engine prototypes in fiction and journalism zeroed in on an engine's cost-efficiency as much as its horsepower and applications. Poe was tuned into this optimization drive. In his March 1840 entry for *Burton's Gentleman's*

Magazine "A Chapter on Science and Art" series, he ponders the claim by a "gentleman of Liverpool" to have invented an engine that "will consume only one-half the quantity of fuel of the old one." In "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" (1845), he turns the locomotive into a "huge horse." Though trite, the metaphor stresses outstanding consumption rates: "he had black stones for his usual food; and yet, in spite of so hard a diet, he was so strong and swift" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1166). We may even attribute Hop-Frog's masterstroke of revenge to an economizing feat of ingestion-production similar to the ones just outlined. While the king and ministers guzzle jar after jar of wine in order to endure their tedious existence, a few goblets, which Hop-Frog drinks against his will, activate the revenge engine: "the effect of wine on his excitable brain was not more powerful than instantaneous" (3: 1348).[13]

Less input, more power. "Scheherazade" adheres to this principle, already in the minds of industrialists and technophiles. Although "Scheherazade" and "Hop-Frog" have never been analyzed in tandem, both anachronistically frame present-day scientific discoveries and mechanical prodigies. In his last horror story, Poe imbues his exploration of engines with pre-industrial elements such as masqueraders, buffoons, and ogre-like monarchs. The case for a technological reading of "Hop-Frog" rests partly on the fact that "Scheherazade," one of Poe's most technologically-inflected works, adopts another pre-modern guise: an *Arabian Night*. As the princess-storyteller entertains her husband with an allegorical catalog of contemporary inventions, a tale *à clef* ensues in which neophyte readers can look up each referenced item in Poe's footnotes. The counterintuitive move of placing machines outside historical time enables Poe to wrap new state-of-the-art technology around an atemporal imagination, as seen in Hop-Frog's mechanized masque.

Whether through explicit, historicized allusions or behind an allegorical veil, Poe suffuses his works with engines. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Poe alternates skepticism with techno-triumphalism, always flaunting his connoisseurship. For instance, the narrator of "Some Words with a Mummy" (1845) is reprimanded for not knowing "that the modern steam engine is derived from the invention of Hero, through Solomon de Caus" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1194). "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" (1839), one of Poe's post-

[13] Hop-Frog's reaction to wine echoes Poe's dipsomania (Bachinger 399). Hop-Frog's "efficient" intoxication by micro-consumption also mocks Rabelais, who bragged about writing *Gargantua and Pantagruel* while eating and drinking nonstop (5).

apocalyptic dialogues, features an accurate disquisition on the principles of combustion. Likewise, "Scheherazade" draws part of its content from Dionysius Lardner's *Course of Lectures* (1842), a compilation of the notorious divulgator's speaking engagements in New York including a full session on "Steam Engines" (48-52). True to his reputation for analytical rigor, Poe was not afraid to cast doubts on some of the latest inventions. He leans on his technical background to question a "Levi Bissell, of Newark," who apparently had "perfected a pneumatic apparatus, by means of which to employ the atmospheric air as a motive power" ("Chapter," April). Situating Bissell's challenge as the latest iteration of an "old problem," Poe takes issue with how reports of Bissell's machine were "probably a misunderstanding" ("Chapter," April). Scientific progress was not immune to the distortions of print.

If Ralph Waldo Emerson grieved that mid-nineteenth-century Americans had entered an "age" with "an engine, but no engineer" (282), Poe nominated the literary genius, creator of effects (that is, Hop-Frog; that is, himself), as engineer-in-chief of mass culture. Tresch reminds us that "[b]y focusing on the production of effects as the defining relation between the author and the reader, a relation mediated by the paradigm of the machine at every stage, Poe's works demonstrate, enact and redirect the machine's capacity to incite terror and wonder" ("Potent Magic" 290). Poe's machines do not threaten as much as spur creativity. They do so partly by crossing disciplinary boundaries. My engine-themed approach to "Hop-Frog" gains traction once we consider magazines' frequent *mélange* of literature, art, business, and science. As copywriter and page composer, Poe rejoiced in this hodge-podge, eventually orchestrating meaningful juxtapositions. His "Chapter on Science and Art" from May 1840 places an account of "THE COMPRESSED AIR ENGINE" between a description of "TRENCH'S PAPER MILL" and a denunciation of the economics of annual gift books: "[D]uring the seventeen years in which annuals have been published in England, seven millions of dollars have been expended upon them . . . the engravers come in for the largest share of the spoil. The sums paid them precisely double those paid the poor authors." In his online notes to this extract, Jeffrey Savoye confirms that Poe had written for several of these annual books (not his most lucrative gig). As laid out on the page, Bissell's engine mediates between the productive frenzy of Trench's paper mill (capable of spitting out "a single sheet" of paper "one mile in length") and those "poor authors"—himself included—still getting the short end of the stick.

Blending works of literature and mechanical engines allowed Poe to re-dignify his trade. Most authors were stuck in an amateurish limbo where they either prospered as *protégés* of upper-echelon figures or survived as underpaid hacks. Meanwhile, engineers had been cooperating and professionalizing since the establishment of the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia (1824). What was needed, Poe felt, was depth over breadth: writers who would thrive through their artistry rather than the favor of influential coteries. The narrator of "Hop-Frog" fulfills this desire for legitimacy when he alludes to a "professional jester . . . not *only* a fool" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1345). Poe wore the same technician's hat when he reminisced about writing "The Raven" with "the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (*Essays* 15). As Tresch argues, in "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe "casts himself as a poetic engineer" (*Reason* 274). After all, in "Philosophy's" inaugural statement, Poe recalls how he reverse-engineered "the mechanism of [Dickens's] 'Barnaby Rudge'" (*Essays* 13). During his later years, as "Hop-Frog" evinces, Poe continued to enrich his vision of a "mechanic" literature synonymous not with dystopian uniformity but transformative inventiveness.

Conceptualizing Poe's mechanic revenge as the culmination of a career-long process opens up new constellations of "Hop-Frog," the rest of his oeuvre, and its technocratic backgrounds. A case in point is the circular base and domed design of the masquerade ballroom, which reproduces in large scale the "Latrobe stove," patented in 1846 and soon the "model for all fireplace heaters" in the United States ("Recent Deaths" 489). Poe was well acquainted with his inventor, John Latrobe. In 1833, Latrobe had been one of the three jury members who awarded "Ms. Found in a Bottle" the first prize in a writing contest. Latrobe extended his artistic sensitivity to his inventions. He designed his stove with an eye on aesthetic as well as practical value. His registered patent describes being motivated by doing away with "the unsightly appearance of an ordinary stove" (Latrobe). To that end, his prototype could be adjusted to fit most fireplaces inconspicuously and, as a result, beautify households while maximizing the distribution of heat. The ballroom also imitates the stove's interior. Latrobe distributed "radiators on each side of the receptacle for the fuel" (Latrobe); Hop-Frog replaced the chandelier (the room's central source of heat and light) for a circle of "Caryatides that stood against the wall," each one holding a torch (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1351). A venue whose architecture replicates the Latrobe stove closes Poe's career full circle, paying homage to a

benefactor bold enough to support a—back then—unknown writer on the sole basis of his talent. Puffers were no rivals to elegant machinists.

Like a good story for Poe, a stove or any other combustion chamber depends on a "*circumscription of space*." For engines to operate well, their core receptacle needs a certain degree of insulation from the outside world, hence the historical preference for internal over external combustion engines.[14] The chimney-esque Latrobe stove mimicked the ur-shape of most engines and engine-operated appliances. Poe had either heard or read Lardner's remark that "the cylinders of engines are generally of a greater length than width, being commonly twice as long as their diameter" (48). A notable feature of Bissell's engine, which Poe reviewed, was "[a] cylindrical iron chamber of the capacity of ten gallons" ("Railway Pneumatic Engine" 753). Cylinders also made all the difference in Richard M. Hoe's rotary printing press, the first to print both sides of a sheet simultaneously. Poe describes it in "Scheherazade" as "a mighty thing that was neither man nor beast, but which had brains of lead, intermixed with black matter like pitch" (*Collected Works* 3: 1166). This allusion to a mechanic "brain" manipulating "black matter like pitch" announces Hop-Frog's use of tar.[15]

In several understudied ways, Poe's most celebrated essay on technology also prefigures "Hop-Frog." It is in "Maelzel's Chess Player" (1836), his dissection of an allegedly infallible automaton, where we first envision a dwarf operating the machine from within. The "mechanical Turk," as Maelzel's exhibit became known, consisted of a life-size figure clad in Orientalist regalia and attached to a rectangular stand that held the chessboard and concealed its machinery behind three doors and two drawers. A popular explanation for such

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[14] "A steam engine is an external combustion engine: the fuel is burned in a container (the boiler) which is separate from the engine and a gas (the steam) communicates energy between them . . . an internal combustion engine, in which the explosion of flammable fuel powers the drive train directly, would be much more efficient because there would be no need for a mediating fluid" (Cowan 225).

[15] On a different (yet related) front, controversial meteorologist James Pollard Espy postulated that the interplay of columns of hot and cool air in a storm could be predicted, equipping us with the means to produce artificial rain—"a power which can be calculated with as much accuracy as that of the steam engine itself, and in part on the same principle" (498). Poe was familiar with Espy's theories, which he saw as a continuation of Roger Bacon's (*Essays* 1415). Featured in his December 1846 "Marginalia," Poe's comment on Espy enacts another telling juxtaposition by following a paragraph in which, for the umpteenth time, Poe lashes out at the "Magazine Literature of America": "We now demand the light artillery of the intellect; we need the curt, the condensed, the pointed, the readily diffused—in place of the verbose, the detailed, the voluminous . . . . On the other hand, the lightness of the artillery should not degenerate into popgunnery" (*Essays* 1414-15). The "artillery" metaphor interweaves industrial and artistic innovation, stating the case for a "light"—though not trivial—literature.

a contrivance posited that a human actuator, possibly a dwarf, hid inside the console (Poe, *Essays* 1262). The notion of a groundbreaking technology covertly steered by human intelligence predates Hop-Frog's "unseen agency." In the story, fat presents the jester with a reliable fuel source for his revenge engine. In addition, the king and ministers' fat-induced manipulability provides the jester with a fixed, reliable set of data with which to program it. Hop-Frog's mechanical trap thus parallels Charles Babbage's analytical engine, as Poe described it in contrast to Maelzel's chess-player. Unlike this fraudulent forerunner of artificial intelligence, Babbage's analytical engine "is modelled by the data, . . . the *certainty* of its operations remains altogether unimpaired" (Poe, *Essays* 1256). In other words, it could be programmed to perform certain functions. Hop-Frog knows that the king and ministers will follow his instructions for the masquerade, since, as already stated, their corporeal largeness leaves them vulnerable to manipulation. The "*certainty*" of their "operations" under Hop-Frog's influence guarantees the jester's desired outcome.

Despite their differences in genre and tone (sensational vs. analytical), "Hop-Frog" and "Maelzel's Chess-Player" follow the same expositional sequence. At some point of the show, Maelzel announced to "the company that he will disclose to their view the mechanism of the machine." He then moved the Turk around and opened its drawers and doors while "introducing a candle light behind it and within it" so that "a bright light is thrown entirely through the cupboard" (Poe, *Essays* 1258-59). This hollowing-out gesture grew as memorable a part of the exhibit as watching the Turk in action. Hop-Frog also exults in the theatricality of his exposition, building a crescendo toward the fatal conflagration: "If I can only get a good look at them, *I* can soon tell who they are" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1353). The role of fire as enlightening force enabling audience members to see *through* the machine is also "Hop-Frog's" manner of exposing and redefining mass culture.

Like the culture of reprinting in which Poe had to eke out a living, the Turk involved redundancy: two chessboards for one game. Every time a volunteer tried to beat the Turk, she or he played on a separate chessboard. On the other side of a rope, Maelzel updated the automaton's board before letting him—it?—decide the next move. Maelzel "then act[ed] as the representative of the Automaton," shuttling between spectator and spectacle (Poe, *Essays* 1261). Such a modus operandi confounds the game's agential dynamics, not to

mention allowing ample room for error and fraud: Was Maelzel faithfully relaying information between automaton and guest player or taking advantage of his position to rig the game? Antebellum periodicals reproduced this equivocation of agents, causes, and consequences. The prize Poe and others paid to publish a text was to relinquish control over its circulation. Far from an indissoluble unity, texts and their creators parted ways and rarely crossed paths again, entering a media environment in which plagiarism, forgery, and misattribution were the norm. Modernity's project of mass production and dissemination, anachronistically embodied by the tubby king and ministers in "Hop-Frog," required an agent of mass reduction through which to reassert its priorities. High among these was to bring authors and readers closer together by eliminating reprinters, editors, and self-serving literati. As the next section shows, Hop-Frog spectacularly combusts this gluttonous class of mediators.

III. Cutting Out the (Fat) Middleman

Compression and combustion fix chaotic dispersals and accumulations. But for compression and combustion to succeed, an engine has to admit different elements in the right proportion and obey a strict schedule. Furthermore, residual matter has to be quickly ejected before further intake. Aware of these challenges, Poe uncannily anticipates, in the last stretch of "Hop-Frog," the running stages of a four-stroke internal combustion engine: intake, compression, combustion, and exhaust. Lynwood Bryant situates the four-stroke engine's definitive design in 1876, when Nicolaus August Otto calculated the right amounts of "fuel and air" inside a cylinder to be compressed by a moving piston. The ascending piston coincided with a spark-based ignition and the resultant explosion retracted the piston, creating a rotating force while residual gases were released via an exhaust pipe (L. Bryant 178). My adoption of this mechanic-narrative sequence as reading guide may come across as ahistorical, yet it should be said that precursors of Otto's model abounded before and during Poe's lifetime. Since Poe had written about the origins of the daguerreotype, it is fair to assume he knew that one of its earliest developers, Nicéphore Nièpce, had also built the *pyréolophore* (1807)—one of the first explosive motors. Theoretical designs of combustion engines had been pioneered by, among others, Christiaan Huygens, who completed his a few years before describing the universe in *Cosmotheros* (1695), a cosmogony that

influenced Poe's *Eureka* (1848).[16] My goal here is not to prove that Poe prototyped a four-stroke combustion engine *avant la lettre*; however, evidence shows how insistently he tapped into interdisciplinary efforts to conceive the next generation of engines. These efforts yielded, in turn, a blueprint for US literature.

The first clue about the story's roots in the era's techno-imagination comes with the clock, which lends the scene an air of automatism:

> The eight ourang-outangs, taking Hop-Frog's advice, waited patiently until midnight (when the room was thoroughly filled with masqueraders) before making their appearance. No sooner had the clock ceased striking, however, than they rushed, or rather rolled in, all together—for the impediment of their chains caused most of the party to fall, and all to stumble as they entered.
> (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1352)

Poe contrasts unruly courtiers and pranksters bursting into the scene "*en masse*"—that word again—with a clockwork mechanism that will eventually sort this mass into rulers, spectators, and artist (3: 1350). Later, when Hop-Frog sets the king and ministers on fire and the crowd throngs toward the doors, they discover in horror that "the king had ordered them to be locked immediately upon his entrance" (3: 1352). As in any combustion engine, intake and enclosure happen almost in unison, readying the stage for compression and combustion.

Even in predecessors such as the *pyréolophore*, compression constitutes a crucial stage. When the piston ascends, it squeezes the mixture of air and fuel, increasing its flammability (L. Bryant 179). Hop-Frog prepared a similar blend by adding layers of tar and flax to his victims' already exorbitant anatomies. The optimal conditions for combustion are reached once they are tightened together and lifted from the ground, a trajectory that reproduces the piston's upward movement. Mabbott notices that Hop-Frog's "manner of chaining apes . . . is not mentioned by any authorities consulted, and . . . may well be invented" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1344). Poe teases us by keying it to "the fashion adopted . . . by those who capture Chimpanzees, or other large apes, in

[16] On the Huygens-*Eureka* connection, see Laverty 308. Huygens's research on pendular oscillation also informed Poe's 1842 hit "The Pit and the Pendulum" (Miles 193).

Borneo" (3: 1351). The lengthy explanation that ensues nonetheless stands out for its geometrical calculatedness. The chain was

> passed about the waist of the king, and tied; then about another of the party, and also tied; then about all successively, in the same manner. When this chaining arrangement was complete, and the party stood as far apart from each other as possible, they formed a circle; and to make all things appear natural, Hop-Frog passed the residue of the chain, in two diameters, at right angles, across the circle. (3: 1351)

Hop-Frog's desire for his maneuvers to "appear natural" ironizes such a hyper-technical description. In contrast, the crowd's disorderly nature evokes Poe's portrayals of literary overproduction: "there was much real danger from the pressure of the excited crowd" (3: 1352). The statement might as well apply to the overstuffed pages of a magazine or the nation's bookshelves.

Punctuated by Hop-Frog's movements and final speech, combustion acquires apocalyptic overtones. Fire recovers the transformative effect of purification-through-destruction it had acquired in "Eiros and Charmion," whose epigraph—borrowed from Euripides—reads: "I will bring fire to thee" (Poe, *Collected Works* 2: 455). In that story, an incandescence of biblical proportions ends the world, a fire that Poe nonetheless explains via new studies of combustion as a result of removing the air's levels of nitrogen (2: 460-61). Combustion in "Hop-Frog" also results from a dramatic removal, as Hop-Frog ousts his masters from power. Quick, spark-like movements bring him to the compressed matter's focal point, also the epicenter of the king's indolence: "seizing a flambeau from one of the Caryatides, he returned, as he went, to the centre of the room—leaped, with the agility of a monkey, upon the king's head" (3: 1353). The operatic aura of this re-coronation may distract us from its impeccable, mechanical timing. Hop-Frog choreographs the chain's movements, his own gestures, and the crowd's silences in measured intervals. When the chain is raised "for about thirty feet," the masqueraders undergo a "dead silence, of about a minute's duration"; and when Hop-Frog initiates combustion, it takes "less than half a minute" for the flames to engulf the king and councilors. This apogee coincides with his speech's finale: "Owing to the high combustibility of both the flax and the tar to which it adhered, the dwarf

had scarcely made an end of his brief speech before the work of vengeance was complete" (3: 1353-54). Hop-Frog also speaks through the machinic-rattling noise of his teeth, "a low, harsh, grating sound" first heard after the king's affront and then during the fire (3: 1353). A courtier mistakes the sound for that of a "parrot at the window, whetting his bill upon his cage-wires" (3: 1349); however, as readers and attendants learn, Hop-Frog/Poe is not a caged pet parroting others' words; he has promoted himself to master of the machine.

Accustomed as we have grown today to think of an engine's exhaust in terms of environmental pollution, we may be struck by the angelic ascent Poe implies. In his final elevation, Hop-Frog "clambered leisurely to the ceiling" aided by his extra-strong arms (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1354).[17] Leaving us with an abject mass defined by its persistence and uselessness, Hop-Frog exits the confines of the machine he has designed never to be seen again. Not even the narrator, an odd mixture of omniscient storyteller and objective bystander, follows him outside, forced instead to hypothesize the story's conclusion: "It is supposed that Tripetta, stationed on the roof of the saloon had been the accomplice of her friend in his fiery revenge, and that, together, they effected their escape" (3: 1354). Witnesses to the massacre remain, too, inside the machine, although subjected to Hop-Frog's creative powers instead of the king's dictates. All in all, the king's physiological hunger and psychological hunger for novelty impose a constant demand and exert considerable pressure on cultural producers; however, their constant craving also plants the seeds of their undoing by leading the king and his accomplices to a trap thanks to which Hop-Frog/Poe regains the right to curtail literary circulation. The mass production of capitalism gives way to the mass reduction of Poe's mechanic aestheticism. Cutting out the fat middlemen, Hop-Frog/Poe finally addresses his audience in his own terms—even if that means disappearing.

Poe soon followed in Hop-Frog's footsteps. But "Hop-Frog" is not a suicide note; rather it is an underestimated tale best read in conjunction with Poe's lifelong obsession with science, technology, and the need for a meritocratic mass culture that would grant creators a financial safety net. If "Poe's ideal economy" is one in which "the author would achieve independence

[17] Through Hop-Frog's powerful arms, Poe winks at the printers guild. Before the advent of the steam press, "considerable upper-body strength was required as well as considerable skill on appropriately adjusting various parts of the press" (Cowan 52). Hop-Frog's name draws attention to his "interjectional gait" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1346). Similarly, printers during Poe's era "were known for their special gait" (Cowan 52).

from *both* capital and the mass reader" (Whalen, "Poe" 83), nowhere does Poe come closer to fulfilling this fantasy than in "Hop-Frog." Why not study this text, then, in connection with nonfiction entries such as "Anastatic Printing" (1845), where a brand-new technology also enables authors to "giv[e] their own manuscripts directly to the public without the expensive interference of the type-setter, and the often ruinous intervention of the publisher" (Poe, "Anastatic Printing" 230)? If, as Poe came to believe, "every word" is "an impulse on the air," literary circulation belonged in the ether's democratic terrain rather than in profiteer-led businesses and cabals (*Collected Works* 3: 1215). As a result of the opposite, overproduction decreased literary value.

Such an inverse proportionality unfolded in tandem with fat-shaming as a way of vilifying a pampered middle class. Poe posits fat as a textual and anatomical surplus whose value resides in its combustibility: what it creates by being destroyed. Following this discursive thread, Poe even dared dematerialize authors themselves, freed from the constraints of nutrition and exertion and rather reliant on a self-generated, sustainable creative force: "[*T*]*he true invention never exhausts itself* . . . . So long as the universe of thought shall furnish matter for novel combinations' so long will the spirit of true genius be original, be exhaustless" (*Essays* 319). Genius was to evolve into pure spirit freed from the flesh's subordination to cycles of consumption and expenditure.[18] "Hop-Frog" takes us one step closer to that perfect engine: infinite motion, zero cost.

IV. Conclusion: Revolutions per Minute

As "Philosophy of Composition" attests, Poe believed he could trigger certain effects on readers without experiencing them himself. The secret was to proceed mechanically. And so, "Hop-Frog" diagrams a machine that produces horror without being itself horrifying. On the contrary, it inverts a top-down culture industry and returns the jester to his rightful position at its helm. The king and ministers' status as a coterie regulating collective taste transpires in

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[18] Of course, this results in a tension between the need to obliterate fat (publishers, surplus literature, reprints, etc.) and the need for fat to remain an essential fuel in Poe's crusade toward leaner bodies and texts. Poe's brand of fat-shaming, then, speaks to everchanging constructions of fat and fatness today—defined not by health criteria but by late capitalism's drive to foster consumption and moderation at once. The rise of a multimillion-dollar diet industry (i.e., consuming products that help us manage our consumption) speaks to this point and demands further study in light of Poe's articulation of its core paradox.

the story's closing scene. They remain in the middle, yet Poe flips the hierarchical scale of literary production and distribution, with the author on top, the audience below, and the mediators downsized to a ghastly fraction of what they were. An engine's orderly, predictable frequency of behavior (measured in the oddly antithetical phrase "revolutions per minute") afforded Poe a serviceable tool with which to contain, purify, and revamp—in short, revolutionize—a literary market that had been expanding without accruing aesthetic value. Unraveling the role of metal and fat in this story forces us to reconsider Whalen's conclusion that Poe closed his career "in an apocalyptic embrace of the mass audience" ("Poe" 90). His farewell text, I have argued, does not convey a kamikaze surrender to forces larger than himself. Instead, Poe deploys the cultural valences of fatness and mechanical engineering to instigate cultural and economic change. Poe's efforts in this direction qualify "Hop-Frog" as one of the era's "second-creation stories," which historian of science David Nye defines as technologically-inflected "accounts of becoming more efficient or less wasteful in utilizing resources that ultimately could not be destroyed" (40). Once we tap into Poe's dense web of techno-references (a strategy he rehearsed in "Scheherazade"), it becomes easier to filter "Hop-Frog" through the prism of lazy accumulation and machinic syncretism locked in battle.

Somewhere between flesh and machine, though, lies money. Like Hop-Frog, who is uninterested in the king's riches, Poe aspired to overcome not just poverty but artists' overall dependence on wages. In a letter to a friend, after recounting a prolific bout of writing, he confessed, "I have made no money. I am as poor now as ever I was in my life—except in hope, which is by no means bankable" (Poe, *Letters* 1: 286). For all his calculations converting pages into dollars and vice versa, Poe refused to put a price tag on that primal engine known as the imagination. When Hop-Frog proposes his plan to the king, the jester calls it a "capital diversion" (Poe, *Collected Works* 3: 1349). Although an avenged Hop-Frog leaves the palace with empty pockets, he has diverted several elements (fat, tar, flax) into a captivating combustion. Such is the miracle of engineering, which distills power from quantity and multiplies profit out of raw materials. But profit was not Poe's goal as much as freeing literary creation from it. The ultimate capital diversion was to transcend capital itself.

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