

LETTING GO

There you lie, Mr. Poe, on your back,
Splayed across these other texts,
Gazing out at me,
Familiar to me
With your faux-leather cover,
But now if I want to take you home,
I must purchase you anew.

When I was 14 you gazed out at me
For the first time at Waldenbooks
In the Lockport Mall.
That Waldenbooks did not survive,
A bellwether of what was to come
For the entire chain, and, later, the Mall itself.
A Wal-Mart stands where once the Mall stood.

I took you, Mr. Poe, and hid you within the store,
As I did with so many of your compatriots
Who now join you in this musty Philly used bookstore.
I hid you by placing you out of alphabetical order,
So that others, in their search, would overlook you,
Because I wanted you. You and Kerouac and Voltaire
And Kafka and Melville and Conrad and Steinbeck
And Thoreau and Emerson and and and and and
And now you are all scattered among these strangers.

Seeing you here is uncanny.
I know you.

You retain my highlights.
You cannot escape my margin notes.
Someone will eventually take you home,
But they will always know that
You belonged to someone else first.
They will be drawn to those markings.
I know; I've bought used books myself.

(Those markings. Damn those markings.
How many books, in fact, have I passed up
Because of someone else's markings?
I don't want to read your notes!
I don't want you to influence my reading!

I want my own experiences of it.
Innocent. Free of others.
Just me and Poe.
Or me and Thoreau.
Or me and Kafka.
Or or or or or.
And how naive.
How naive to think that
Such “freedom” is possible.
Isn't Meaning entirely in our relation to others?)

I'd be lying if I said I was here to bring you home, Mr. Poe.
I'm not. I won't be. Frankly, your work is available online for free.
I traded you in for store credit, because I need to digitize my life.
How can I be expected to bring you with me each time I move?
We live in a digital age. I have a Kindle. I have Google Books.
This isn't to say that I don't miss the tactile sensation of holding
An analog book. In fact, I just read *For Whom the Bell Tolls*
In such a manner, and if I were to look, I'd likely find him here, still, too.
Look, you aren't so heavy in and of yourself, but
The combined weight of all of you is just too much.

I had to let you go.
I had to let all of you go.
All my little darlings.
My little signifiers of “worth.”
Now, I can move more freely.

Goddamn it, stop staring at me.
Of course, I know that we have memories together.
When I brought you home, you stood so prominently
On that black metal shelf in my room.
At the time, the combined weight wasn't so much.
At the time, I hoped to expand on the library forever.
At the time, it was so important that others see you.
I wanted anyone who came into my room to see you
To see Nietzsche. To see Plato. To see—Nay! To say!
To say, “Ah, look! Look at this intelligent, well-read
Young man of significance. Look what he reads, he's so smart.”
And now with you all gone, how am I to send up such flags?
Write a poem to you? ;-)

Ah, but let's be honest; it wasn't *all* ego.

You helped me through my teenage years, Mr. Poe.
I haven't opened your pages in so many years, but
Without you who knows how much more intolerable
High school would have been?
When my classmates bullied me,
Called me "Gook,"
Stole food from my tray during lunch,
You were always there for me.
"Hop-Frog; Or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs"
"The Tell-Tale Heart"
"The Cask of Amontillado"
One hundred-fifty years separated us,
Mr. Poe, but your works
Conjured a common experience
That made me know that I was
Not alone.

I know you know,
Or would know,
If you weren't dead,
That this is not easy,
Stepping away from you.
But I will not turn back.
Though I'll want to.

I'm not here for you today.
Seeing you was unexpected.
I was looking for Proust,
With whom I've never spent time,
And apparently won't be spending time,
Since he is missing from this shelf.
The same was true of Roth and Russo,
Though I was pleased to see *Travels with Charlie* nearby.
DeLillo, too, is absent, but I saw
Christ in Concrete—which I never actually read,
So it wasn't a meaningful reunion.

I'm lingering.
I know.

Well...
I guess it's time to go.

One last thought.

You were 40 when you died.
Kafka was, too.
Jack London, as well.
I'll be 39 this summer.
40 is one of those markers, like 27.
Morrison. Joplin. Hendricks. Cobain. All 27.
They were practically children when they died.
And yet all had accomplished much.
When I passed 27, it felt like it should mean something.
It didn't.

I'm very likely gonna live longer than you, Mr. Poe,
But most likely will never be as accomplished as you.
I'm one of billions and billions, like everyone else.
I recognize it, but have a hell of a time accepting it,
Because I have for so long wished for more,
For ultimate purpose and value.
It's another of those things from youth.
I don't have religion to fill that void,
And so I seek sustenance in "the Now,"
But I often fail because of my superficiality.
Derailed by distractions and childish wants.

Well, we all have to let go at some point.

I hope that you find a nice personal collection to join.
Or, better yet, that you pass from hand to hand
And enrich many more lives.
Thanks for being in my life, Edgar.
I'll see you in cyberspace sometime.
Or maybe I'll take you out of the library;
I hope those aren't going away anytime soon.