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## Politian: a critical analysis

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Edgar Allan Poe's  
**POLITIAN**



# *Politian*: A Critical Analysis

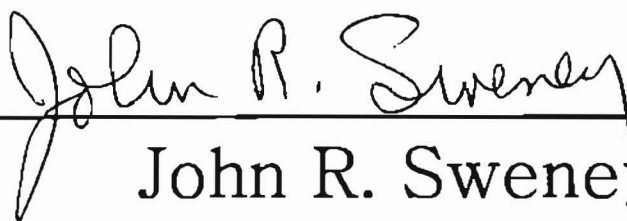
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## Introduction

There is little left in the life and works of Edgar Allan Poe that has not already been examined, criticized, misinterpreted, and dramatized. Poe's fantastic personal life, daring literary style, and risqué subject matter elevated him to the position of an American legend. As with all legends, much of the facts and truths surrounding his life have been embellished and expanded to grandiose proportions, making it nearly impossible to distinguish fact from romanticized fiction. As for the large body of prose, poetry, literary criticism, journalistic endeavors, and philosophical writings that Poe left behind, one can only generally state that this body of work forms an impressive canon for critics and teachers of literature.

However, there remains one work of Poe's that has garnered little attention. An unfinished dramatic effort at eleven scenes, *Politian* is based on a sensational murder trial. Though it is Poe's sole attempt at writing for the stage, *Politian* cannot be found in the majority of Poe collections and even when it appears in the collected works, it appears in an abridged five-scene version. It would seem that *Politian* has gotten lost among the poems, short fiction, mysteries, novels, psychological treatises, and literary criticism.

Dr. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, a prominent Poe scholar and authoritative source on *Politian*, believes that Poe began work on his play in 1835 and that he drew the inspiration for it from the celebrated 1826 murder trial of Jeroboam Beauchamp, a young Kentucky lawyer and political activist. The events, which began with the seduction and expulsion from society of Ann Cook, a Kentucky lady, in 1819 led to a bitter political and

personal battle between Beauchamp, an active member of Kentucky's Old Court party, and Colonel Solomon P. Sharp, a senator from the Kentucky New Court party.

Beauchamp married Ann Cook, who divulged to him that her seducer had been Sharp. An enraged Beauchamp confronted Sharp, which ended in Beauchamp's challenging Sharp to a duel. After refusing to fight Beauchamp, Sharp was found dead in his home. An investigation of Old Party suspects led to Beauchamp, who was tried, convicted, and hanged. His wife, Ann, was tried as an accessory to murder and acquitted. She committed suicide while sharing a cell with her husband.

The trial, which came to be widely known as the Kentucky Tragedy, shocked Southern society and became a hot topic for journalists and novelists. Mabbott believes that Poe, who reviewed two literary explorations of the tragedy as a critic, was enticed to attempt his own version of the events after reading the confessions of Beauchamp and the letters of Ann Cook.

*Politian* first appeared, incomplete at just five scenes, as "Scenes from Politian" in *The Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835 and later in *The Raven and Other Poems* in 1845. The remaining six scenes, never published by Poe, were collected and edited by Mabbott who eventually published all eleven scenes as "Politian: an Unfinished Tragedy."

In 1835, when Poe first published "Scenes from Politian," the play seemed destined for greatness. The Kentucky Tragedy, sensational as it was, left a lasting impact upon Southern society, not quickly forgotten. Poe was riding the recent success of the publication of four short stories: "Metzengerstein" (1832), "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833), "Berenice," "Morella," and "Hans Pfall" in (1835). Poe had already proved

himself to be a master of the tragic, and the sordid action of the Kentucky Tragedy provided the fodder for his play. However, *Politian* was critically a disappointment to all and scathingly dismissed by literary critics; it was never performed in Poe's lifetime, and was abandoned before Poe himself finished it.

The question that remains is: why even look at *Politian*, an unfinished failure? While it is true that *Politian* was a failure for its time and surely one of Poe's least successful attempts, it may improve on a stage with a more modern perspective. If not solely for examination of Poe's artistic effort, *Politian* also warrants a closer read due to its historical relevance by way of Beauchamp and Sharp. Poe, a most fastidious editor of his work, was ultimately required because of financial constraints to lay aside *Politian* in its unfinished state. As a result, the unedited *Politian* may provide insight into the writing process of Poe that other polished pieces cannot, and that, if nothing else, warrants a more precise study of his play.

### **Poe: A Life**

To understand why *Politian* was left in its present condition, raw and unedited, it seems relevant to chronicle the life led by Poe, with heavy attention paid to the 1831-1835 period when *Politian* was most likely being written. It also appears pertinent to establish the theatrical background from which the author came to suggest that Poe did not simply attempt a piece for the stage on a whim. After all, Poe's grandparents and parents were actors by profession, and throughout his life Poe was intimately connected in artistic circles with well-established playwrights and famous actors, most notably J.B. Booth. Poe, though no actor himself, was well acquainted with the theatre.

So much speculation has been written about the life of Poe that it is difficult to ascertain fact from fiction. However, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, by Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn, is one of the few biographies that relies almost entirely on primary sources, mainly the correspondence with John Allan, John Pendleton Kennedy, and others. Quinn resists the temptation to speculate or perpetuate rumors that are unclear and inconsistent in Poe's life and criticizes those biographers who have, making Quinn a complete and authoritative source.

Poe came from a background rich in theatre. His grandmother, Elizabeth Smith Arnold, a well-established actress in England, left her native land with husband Henry Arnold in 1796 for America to join the fledgling Boston Company. While the Arnolds enjoyed a modest amount of success, it was their daughter, Elizabeth, the future mother of Poe, who was to win the adoration of the American audience. Young Elizabeth made her stage debut in April of 1796 singing "The Market Lass" between acts of *The Mysteries of the Castle* (Quinn 1).

After the loss of her mother to yellow fever, Elizabeth remained in the Boston Company traveling to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Elizabeth progressed from minor ensemble roles and took her first major role at age 14, playing Shakespeare's Ophelia. She became a great favorite of audiences and critics alike, who were enchanted by the gifted young woman with a child's face. In 1802, Elizabeth married Charles Hopkins, fellow thespian, and left the Boston Company to join Green's Virginia Company. After three years of marriage to Elizabeth, Charles died in Richmond of unspecified causes. Meanwhile, the man who was to become the father of Edgar Allan Poe, David Poe, was making a name for himself in the same company. Elizabeth Arnold

Hopkins and David Poe began their relationship by acting opposite one another, often in romantic roles, and were married March 14, 1806 in Richmond (Quinn 22).

David Poe, who had not half the talent his wife had, was soon unable to get lead parts in Virginia. The Poes left Green's Virginia Company and moved to Boston, with the hopes that David would be able to get better roles where he wasn't known. William Henry Poe, their first child, was born in Boston in 1807 (Quinn 26).

Edgar was born January 19, 1809 in Boston during a time of struggles for his parents. Elizabeth was often doing two shows a night to support her family, while David, who was not better received in Boston than he had been in Virginia, struggled to find roles. Later that year, David left Elizabeth and the children to find acting jobs back in the South. Elizabeth last saw her husband in October of 1809. David Poe disappeared from all records, and it is believed that he changed his name as no death certificate or any trace of him can be found after 1809.

Elizabeth could not sustain herself and her children on her actor's wages. She moved her family back to Virginia, the place where she had been most successful, a place where many still remembered her name. Despite giving benefits for herself to raise funds, she slipped further into poverty and debt. After an extended illness in 1813, Elizabeth Poe died destitute at the age of 24 in Virginia (Quinn 45). During her career she garnered over 250 roles, 14 of those Shakespearean characters including Juliet, Cordelia, Ophelia, Desdemona, Ariel, Regan, and Jessica. She had been a versatile actress, able to act in tragedies, comedies of manners, romantic farces, and romantic melodramas (Quinn 47).

Thus Poe's origin lay in the theatre, as the first two years of his life were spent



among actors and stages. He became a man with a flair for the dramatic and the theatrical. Women were drawn to the young serious man, always attired in dark garments, who walked about with a melancholy air, and those who knew him or heard him read at the salons remembered his dramatic presence and his melodious voice so like an actor's.

Poe's intimate connection with the stage was to die with his mother. He was taken into the care of John and Frances Allan along with his mentally deficient sister Rosalie in 1813, while Colonel Poe, a relation of David Poe, adopted the elder son, William Henry. The world of the Allans greatly differed from Poe's few short years with his biological parents. The Allans were a financially comfortable couple with no children of their own.

There is great speculation about the nature of the relationship between Allan and Poe, though Quinn offers the only concrete proof: the letters of correspondence between the foster father and his adopted son. The letters span nearly a decade and range in tone from affectionate and respectful to cold indifference from both parties.

In 1826, Poe entered the University of Virginia. Founded by Thomas Jefferson, the University was still in its formative years when Poe enrolled. He stayed just ten months and left with debts, claiming that his stepfather had not given him a sufficient amount to live on or pay his expenses.

Poe departed for Boston, his place of birth, in March of 1827. Quinn suggests that Poe returned home because "Boston had the reputation as a literary and publishing center" (Quinn 118). There is even speculation that Poe tried his hand at acting. The play *Foundling of the Forest* featured a "young Bostonian" in the role of Bertram and has

led some to surmise that Poe, who later published his first work "by a Bostonian," was the same Bostonian who played Bertram (Quinn 119). This rumor has never been proved and Quinn puts no faith in it other than to point it out as fanciful speculation.

Poe enlisted in the United States Army as a private in May of 1827. While in military service, he published his first work, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, but critics and readers ignored the work. Poe wrote to John Allan in December of that year begging for his consent to leave the army. In February, Poe's stepmother, Frances Allan, died and Poe returned for the funeral. John Allan agreed to write him a reference for an appointment to West Point and Poe was discharged from the army.

While waiting in Baltimore for his West Point position, Poe published *Al Aaraaf*, his last attempt at epic narrative. Poe's appointment came through in 1829 and he left the Allan home never to return. After several exchanges of letters with Allan requesting funds, Poe became angry and decided to leave West Point. Poe was formally court-martialed and convicted of gross neglect of duty and dereliction of duty (Quinn 173-174). Expulsion followed and Poe left West Point in 1831.

Poe journeyed to the house of Mrs. Clemm, the only relation that would take him in. Mrs. Clemm lived with her children, Henry and Virginia, as well as Poe's own brother, William Henry. Virginia, his future wife, was just eight years old when Edgar came into her life.

In 1831, *The Philadelphia Saturday Courier* announced a contest with a cash prize of one hundred dollars for the best short story. Poe submitted five stories in all, none of which garnered the top prize, but all of which drew attention from the editors. All five were published in 1832: "Metzengerstein" January 14, "The Duke De

L'Omelette" March 3, "A Tale of Jerusalem" June 9, "A Decided Loss" November 10, and "The Bargain Lost" in December (Quinn 191-193). It seemed that Poe's future as a writer was looking more and more promising. It is believed that Poe may have begun *Politian* as early as 1831 during these fruitful literary years.

In 1833, *The Baltimore Sunday Visitor* sponsored its own contest with a prize of fifty dollars for the best tale and twenty-five dollars for the best poem. Poe submitted six pieces for consideration. His "MS Found in a Bottle" took home the fifty-dollar prize, but more importantly, the story caught the eye of John Pendleton Kennedy, the contest judge. A friendship ensued between Poe and Kennedy, a powerful and influential literary man of excellent standing and good connections in Baltimore (Quinn 201-204). It was Kennedy whom Poe came to rely on for introductions, advice, and occasionally monetary assistance. 1833 also saw the publication of "The Coliseum" in *The Baltimore Sunday Visitor*, a poem which was to become scene xi of *Politian*.

Two years later in 1835, a handful of new stories appeared in *The Southern Literary Messenger*: "Berenice" in March, "Morella" in April, "Lionizing" in May, and "Hans Pfall" in June (Quinn pg 208). In December, Poe published "Scenes from an Unfinished Drama." This first appearance featured just three scenes; Poe added two more in January of 1836. Poe began work on six more scenes, but when asked about the status of his drama, Poe replied, "*Politian* is no more" (Fagin 84).

Shortly thereafter, Poe joined *Burton's Gentleman Magazine*, published "The Fall of the House of Usher" and wrote several literary critiques. Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque appeared in 1840 and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Masque of the Red Death", and "The Pit and the Pendulum" were published 1842. His most prominent

tales, "The Tell-tale Heart", "The Black Cat", and "The Gold Bug", emerged in 1843.

But after 1843, Poe's short-lived luck began to spiral downward. In 1844, he produced "The Balloon Hoax", "The Oblong Box", and "The Premature Burial". Poe became the editor and owner of *The Broadway Journal* in 1845, which despite his efforts, failed financially and folded in 1846. Poe rallied slightly with "The Raven" in 1845 and "The Cask of Amontillado" in 1846.

In 1847, Virginia died of tuberculosis and a despondent Poe produced "Ulalume" and began work on what he hoped would be his masterpiece, *Eureka*. In 1849, Poe died of a fever at the age of 40. His final poems, "Annabel Lee" and "The Bells" were published posthumously that same year. Poe took the unfinished *Politian* with him to his grave, as there is no mention made of the drama after 1836 and one can only surmise that Poe had abandoned it completely.

Poe may have laid aside his own theatrical endeavor, but he never laid aside his roots in the theatre. In 1845, Poe wrote a scathing defense of a New York lady, Anna Cora Mowatt, (see Figure 1.1) who turned to acting after financial difficulties. He wrote:

In the mere name of the actress she can surely find nothing to dread...The theatre is ennobled by its high facilities for the development of genius—facilities not afforded elsewhere in equal degree. By the spirit of genius we say it is ennobled—it is sanctified—beyond the sneer of the fool or the cant of the hypocrite. The actor of talent is poor at heart, indeed, if he does not look with contempt upon the mediocrity even of a king...The writer of this article is himself the son of an actress—has invariably made it his boast—and no earl was ever prouder of his earldom than he of the descent from a woman, who, although well

born, hesitated not to consecrate to the drama her brief career of genius and of beauty (Fagin 33).

Poe's words demonstrate that he still sympathized and identified with the acting profession. The stage eluded him as his mother had eluded him in her early death, but still he was drawn to it. Because he did not act and did not choose originally to write plays and farces, as John Pendleton Kennedy had suggested, Poe instead briefly turned to writing theatre criticism for *The Broadway Journal*.

*The Broadway Journal* consisted of book reviews, articles on the fine arts, and theatre reviews. The journal was founded by Charles F. Briggs. Poe eventually took over the majority of the editing and the publishing (Albert H. and Shirley Small Special Collections Library) until the publications end in 1846.

In the March of 1845 Poe critiqued *Fashion* by Anna Cora Mowatt, the actress he had previously defended. Even though the play was an immense popular success, Poe was critical of the unoriginal plot lines, but continued to see the play night after night until his opinion became more favorable.

### **The Kentucky Tragedy**

In 1818, while Poe was just nine years old and living in Richmond, the events that were to become the inspiration for his drama were unfolding: Colonel Solomon P. Sharp seduced a young Kentucky woman of good family, Miss Ann Cook. Although the affair was concealed by Sharp, a rising star in Kentucky politics, it was not to stay secret when Cook became pregnant. She was forced to retire from polite society and bear the child

alone. Although the child was stillborn, the irreparable damage had been done to Cook's reputation.

Sharp was dead seven years later, stabbed through the heart in the night by an assassin (see Figures 2.1-2.2). Sharp was a prominent figure; in 1820 he had been appointed Attorney General by the governor and had just recently won a seat representing Franklin County in the legislature for the New Court party.

It was no secret that Sharp had political enemies. The politics of the state were bitterly split between the Old and New Court Party and Sharp had made foes in the highest ranks of Old Court. His most passionate adversaries were Patrick Henry Darby, a prominent Old Court editorialist, John U. Waring, the Old Court party member who had lost the county seat to Sharp in 1820, and a young lawyer and Old Court supporter, Jeroboam O. Beauchamp, who vehemently despised Sharp and had been quoted as saying "anyone who would vote Solomon P. Sharp ought to be damned" (Johnson). That wasn't Beauchamp's only connection to Sharp, however; Beauchamp had married Ann Cook in 1824 after her retirement from society, well aware of Sharp's seduction of her. He had vowed to Miss Cook, before she would accept his suit for marriage, that he would avenge her honor.

At first though, the law suspected a political assassination and turned to the Old Party. Waring provided the soundest alibi: he had been shot through both hips during a duel and was unable to walk. This left Darby and Beauchamp; Darby, in an attempt to save his own skin, tipped off authorities about Beauchamp and his vow to Cook. When questioned, Beauchamp confessed and was tried for murder.

The trial, widely celebrated and followed, was brief and less sensational than the actual events that had led up to it. The jury would not look the other way on what Beauchamp claimed to be an act to restore honor to his wife. He was found guilty and sentenced to die on July 17, 1826. His wife, Ann, was brought before the court on accessory to murder charges. She was found not guilty and secured permission to remain in her husband's cell until his execution date.

The night of July 16 arrived, and with it, the suicide attempt of the condemned man and his wife. Ann had smuggled a knife under her skirts into her husband's cell. According to the jailer, Beauchamp first turned the knife on himself, stabbing his stomach. He then gave the knife to his wife who quickly did the same. Despite efforts of doctors to revive Ann, she died of her wounds while her husband survived his. However, he was so weak from blood loss at the gallows he had to be supported by two men while the rope was put around his neck. The two were buried in one grave with a poem engraved on it penned by Ann herself.

The whole sordid affair had Kentucky and surrounding Southern states buzzing with gossip. Rumor had it that Beauchamp was a puppet of Waring's, beginning in 1820. During his campaign against Sharp, Waring handed out pamphlets exposing the affair with Cook. Beauchamp, although not married to her yet, was very much in love with her and was enraged by the action and attention it shed on his love. Waring, who supposedly knew of Beauchamp's affections, published the pamphlets anyway in the attempt to convince Beauchamp to join in his hatred of Sharp. To counteract these pamphlets, the Sharp family and friends circulated their own version of the affair claiming that Cook had



not been seduced by Sharp and that the stillborn baby was black, which brought more tarnish to Cook's reputation.

Upon his sentencing, Beauchamp asked for a stay of execution for three weeks while he completed a confession.. This request was granted and Beauchamp began work on his confession. Meanwhile, the brother of Solomon Sharp, Leander, was at work on his own publication called *Vindications*, which he hoped would clear Sharp's name and establish the guilt of the Old Court party. Throughout the trial, the Sharp family maintained that Beauchamp was part of a larger conspiracy to bring down Sharp, who had become too powerful of a political figure. The heads of the conspiracy, according to the Sharp family, were of course Patrick Henry Darby and John Waring. The family was even willing to let Beauchamp live if he would implicate the two Old Court supporters. Beauchamp kept mum on the subject and stuck to his story of revenge of honor and nothing more. However, Leander claimed that Beauchamp confessed to his uncle, also named Jeroboam O. Beauchamp, that in fact he had acted as part of conspiracy led by Darby and Waring.

Leander Sharp had intentions of publishing his *Vindications*, as several copies were brought to press. Upon learning of Sharp's plan, Darby threatened to sue him, and Waring made it known that he would kill Leander if *Vindications* ever became available to the public. Leander Sharp took his copies and holed them up in a wall in the Sharp estate; they were found years later during a renovation.

The only two primary sources of the tragedy are Ann Cook's letters and Beauchamp's confession. Ann Cook's letters to an unnamed friend in Baltimore dealt less with Beauchamp's doings and more with the pain that Sharp had caused her.

Beauchamp's confession, however, was more controversial. After his execution, when the confession was brought forth, it was noted that whole sections had been written over in someone else's hand. Some believed that the Old Court network had seized the confession and tampered with it because Beauchamp had in fact named Darby, Waring, and others as part of a conspiracy against Sharp. Nothing, however, was ever proven, although there still remain several conspiracy theories surrounding the Kentucky Tragedy.

In the wake of this sensational affair, a slew of literary pieces appeared. It seemed that Poe was not the only writer interested in the affair as several prominent authors came out with their own accounts of the episode. As a critic, Poe reviewed Charles Fenno Hoffman's *Greyslaer* in 1840 and William Gilmore Simms' *Beauchampe* in *Graham's Magazine* in 1842. Neither of Poe's reviews was particularly positive and in regards to Hoffman's he made the remark:

*Greyslaer* followed a romance based on a well known murder of Sharp, the Solicitor General of Kentucky by Beauchampe [sic]. W. Gilmore Simms...has treated the subject more effectively in his novel *Beauchampe*, but the fact is that both gentlemen have positively failed, as might have been expected...The real events were more impressive than the fictitious ones. The facts of this remarkable tragedy, as arranged by actual circumstances, would put to shame the skill of the consummate artist...the incidents might be better woven into a tragedy...

(Kimball)

Similarly, Poe noted in a review of William Gilmore Simm's *Beauchampe* that "no more thrilling, no more romantic tragedy did ever the brain of a poet conceive than

was the tragedy of Sharpe and Beauchampe" (Fagin 78) but "that the facts of the case, or the historical truth, had "hampered and repressed" the natural strength of the novelist." Fagin believes this problem of the historical accuracy of the events motivated Poe to change the setting of his play: "With this remote setting and these strange names Poe sought to escape being hampered and repressed by the facts upon which he based his play" (78).

Although it isn't clear when *Politian* was actually started, Poe scholars James Harrison, *Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, and J.H. Whitty, *The Complete Works of Poe*, argue that *Politian* could have been begun as early as 1831. T.O. Mabbott, the leading authority on *Politian*, disagrees and insists that *Politian* was started in 1834. What is certain is that in 1835, John Pendleton Kennedy in his letter dated April 13, to T.W. White, the proprietor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, noted that Poe was "at work upon a tragedy, but I have turned him to drudging upon whatever may make money" (Kimball).

### **Poe's Attraction to the Kentucky Tragedy**

Though one can never fully understand a writer's motivation for the subject he chooses, even if he states his motives, one can still speculate. There were probably several reasons why Poe, a deliberate writer, chose the Kentucky Tragedy.

The most obvious motivation was that no other had previously captured the events with any success. Hoffman, as Poe so eloquently critiqued, had failed in *Greyslayer*.

The events that transpired were lurid and sensational, a quintessential love triangle with murder and deception. But all had failed in their attempts to capture it.

Thinking of the Kentucky Tragedy as an irreconcilable enigma unable to be captured brings to mind Poe the cryptographer. Poe boasted that he could solve any cryptogram at the *Alexander Weekly Messenger* and *Graham's Magazine* (Dukes 1). He often made good on his bragging and solved and published cryptograms that were sent to him. His short story "The Gold Bug" features the character Legrande, who solves the cryptogram that leads to Captain Kidd's treasure (Dukes 2). In addition Poe wrote "A few words on Secret Writings" on the subject of simple encryption (Jackson). Experts of cryptography have long since discovered that Poe, who was often credited as a skilled cryptographer, was "no master cryptographer, but rather a legendary magician who disguised tricks of tale with the cipher of slick and distracting presentation" (Dukes 1).

While he gave the illusion of being a cryptographer, it is no sleight-of-hand that Poe was the prominent figure in the development of the detective story and the creator of Dupin, hero of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Roget", "The Purloined Letter", and the first great detective. It was Poe's Dupin who provided the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes (Jackson). Other tales, such as "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-tale Heart", call to mind narrators who commit their crimes and then act as detectives in their own right by confessing and unraveling their murderous deeds.

In "The Mystery of Marie Roget", Poe attempted to solve the real life murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers in 1841 (Jackson), an event similar in proportions to the Kentucky Tragedy for garnering the attention of the press. Poe offered his own interpretations of

what may have led to her demise, including, most famously, the idea that Marie's death was caused by a botched back alley abortion, a taboo subject for the period. Though the case was never solved and there was little evidence to support Poe's conclusion, in many people's estimation, Poe had solved the mystery.

The Kentucky Tragedy, shrouded in the rumors of political conspiracy and intrigue, may have appealed to Poe, as a mystery he could "solve" by writing about it. Though *Politian* does not address the political conspiracy of the Old Party and New Party directly, perhaps Poe had intended to add it later. The issue of whether Beauchamp killed Sharp for revenge of love is not disputed. The dispute is whether Beauchamp killed for love of his wife or love of his party. There is also the problem of the altered lines of Beauchamp's confession. Who wrote over them and why? The temptation to solve was there. Poe's mystery stories came long after he set aside *Politian*. However, it may be possible that *Politian* was a primer for Poe's penchant for solving mysteries.

In the unfinished *Politian*, however, Poe focused on the romantic aspect of the love triangle, an area, according to Levin, that he may not have been entirely comfortable with. In Levin's discussion of Poe and his predilection for the "posthumous heroine," (Levin 156) he quotes Baudelaire, the great translator of Poe's work into French, who observed, "there is not a single love-story" (Levin 155). Levin refutes this generalization but does remark that there are love stories in Poe, they just happen to occur after the heroine has departed this life. Levin invokes Poe's famous lines from his poem, "Romance": "I could not love, except where Death/Was mingling his with Beauty's breath."

Indeed, the heroines of "Berenice", "Morella", "Ligeia", and *The Fall of the House of Usher* are the consumptive ghastly beauties who are more triumphant in death and the supernatural thereafter than they are in life. These women hold their power and their sway over men from beyond the grave.

The Kentucky Tragedy's principal player, Ann Cook, takes her life in the cell of her husband while awaiting his hanging. In life, Cook was a jilted woman, cast from society after a lover spurned her, who then married the much younger Beauchamp for what appears to be a marriage of convenience. But in death, she is glorious. One can only imagine the recounting of her death. Allowed to share the cell with her husband until his execution, she smuggled a knife in under her skirt. Beauchamp stabs himself and then gives the knife to his wife. The wound she gives herself is mortal and Beauchamp calls for the doctor, but his wife is beyond the reach of anyone. How that must have appealed to Poe, the woman triumphant in her death.

From the accounts and her own letters, Poe transformed Cook, described by Solomon Sharp's brother as a most unattractive, horse-faced woman, into Lalage, a beautiful young ward, seduced by a Count and left to exile in the palazzo. Like a princess in the tower, Lalage is rescued by the melancholic Earl, who can only win her love by defending her honor.

As noted by William Kimball, author of "Poe's *Politian* and the Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy," Poe weaves Cook's own words and sentiments into his drama. In scene iii in a passionate exchange with the monk, Lalage exclaims:

*I cannot pray!--My soul is at war with God!*

The frightful sounds of merriment below

Disturb my senses--go! I cannot pray--

The sweet airs from the garden worry me!

Thy presence grieves me--go!

Kimball finds in Beauchamp's *Confessions* that Cook "sternly refused to make any acquaintances or even to receive the society or visits of her former acquaintances . . . and she said she could never be happy in society again." He also looks to Cook's own correspondence with Mrs. Ellen R---n, whose advice parallels that of the monk's. Mrs. Ellen R---n claimed to have written to Ann that "I begged her to consult her Bible; for in that alone she would find happiness and peace; and to struggle to subdue her violent passions, which might yet lead her into the commission of dreadful errors."

In reference to Colonel Sharp, Kimball notes that Cook wrote of allowing her suffering "heart to be irrecoverably lost and blighted by one so little to be trusted --so little worthy of [her] affections. But whom I yet love." He finds echoes in the words of the servants in scene i:

And ever and anon amid her sobs

She murmured forth Castiglione's name

. . . she loves him still! (1, 52-54)

When the Monk advises her to "think of [her] precious soul!" Lalage replies:



Think of my early days! Think of my father

And mother in Heaven! Think of our quiet home,

And the rivulet that ran before the door!

Think of my little sisters!--think of them! (IV, 83-86)

In *Confessions* Cook's "father, brothers and friends, by a most strange succession of calamities had been swept into the grave" (Kimball).

When Politian professes his love to Lalage in scene vii, "knowing what he knows" and "seeing what he has seen," he claims that he loves her for her "beauty" and her "woes." Lalage reminds him that her "seared and blighted name" would not tally "with the ancestral honours of [his] house / And with [its] glory." He replies that he loathes the name of glory and tells her that it does not matter if they "go down unhonoured and forgotten / Into the dust--so [they] descend together." She reminds him that "A deed is to be done-- / Castiglione lives!" to which he replies that "he shall die!" After some hesitation about the forthcoming death of Castiglione, she decides that "--'tis very well! / So that the blade be keen--the blow be sure'" (Kimball). Kimball claims that this exchange is based "largely on fact"; pages 74-75 of Ann Cook's *Letters* read:

... He offered me his hand. Yes, forlorn and abandoned as I was, he was willing to become my husband, as he had been my friend. What could I do? I addressed him candidly and openly. 'You know my history,' said I, 'and my shame, if you are willing to receive to your bosom a poor outcast, whom the world has

stigmatized as guilty and polluted, with a wounded heart and a blighted name,  
then take me. I am yours forever.'

'My dear Ann,' he replied, 'I regard you as the innocent victim of the most  
detestable treachery.... I have long admired the cultivation of your mind, and the  
proud dignity and elevation of your soul You were calculated to grace the most  
elevated circles of society . . . I am proud to be the object of your choice, humbled  
as you may be in your estimation, or . . . in that of an unfeeling world.... my  
attachment is deep, sincere, and ardent, and while we live it shall never become  
extinct. . . .'

Finally, a reporter for the Lexington *Kentucky Reporter* on July 7, 1826, recounts  
Beauchamp's words as his wife lay dying: "'Farewell,' said he, 'child of sorrow-- Farewell  
child of misfortune and persecution--you are now secure from the tongue of slander--for  
you I have lived; for you I die.'" Kimball speculates that Poe could have read this  
newspaper article, as it appears as an appendix to the *Confession*. And Poe's Politian  
says: "And life shall then be mine, for I will live / For Thee, and in thine eyes-- and Thou  
shalt be / No more a mourner" (Kimball).

While many of these similarities drawn by Kimball are certainly open to  
interpretation, others are more clear. The duel in scene ix over Lalage's honor mirrors  
Beauchamp's description in his *Confession* (pp. 15-17) of an encounter with Colonel  
Sharp:

Politian: Thus to the expiatory tomb, / Untimely sepulchre, I do devote thee / In the name of Lalage! (59-61).

Castiglione: Hold off thy hand--with that beloved name / So fresh upon thy lips I will not fight thee / I cannot--dare not (66-69).

Castiglione (falling upon his knees): Alas! my lord, / It is--it is-- most true. In such a cause / I am the veriest coward. O pity me! (72-73).

In his *Confession* (p. 15) Beauchamp wrote: "Colonel Sharp, I *have come deputed and sent by her, to take your life....* Will you fight me a duel? To which, according to Beauchamp, Sharp replied, My dear friend I cannot fight you, on account of Miss Cook.... I never can fight the friend of that worthy injured lady" (Kimball).

Additionally, Kimball writes:

Beauchamp, thinking that Sharp was about to run, sprang forward, caught him by the breast of his coat, and said, Now you damn'd villain, you shall die. Sharp then fell on his knees and said, My life is in your hands, my friend I beg my life. Spare it for mercy's sake. Beauchamp then records that he said, tomorrow I shall horsewhip you in the streets, and repeat it daily till you fight me a duel.... You are about such a whining coward, as I was told you were. (Kimball)

During the final scene after Politian's soliloquy, Lalage enters "wildly" and informs Politian that "the hour is come / For vengeance or will never," as Alessandra and

Castiglione are now standing at the wedding altar. Politian swears that "By the God of Heaven / I'll mar this bridal if at the altar's foot / The bridegroom dies," and dashes out (60-61). Mabbott (I, 297) suggests that Poe recalls something on page 84 of Ann Cook's Letters where she wrote, "I suggested that it would be better to plunge the dagger into his heart while folded in the arms of her for whom he deserted me."

Kimball's and Mabbot's research and comparison of *Confessions* and Cook's *Letters* put the question to rest whether Poe based *Politian* on the events in Kentucky or not. Poe now had a play poised for the stage. The question was whether the stage was ready for him.

### **The Early American Theatre (1815-1850)**

As expansion of the country moved westward, the American theatre experienced its own growth and extension of boundaries. The demands for theatres rose as larger audiences clamored for more performances. Prior to 1815, most of America's leading actors were English, while the most popular plays were English and French. But by 1815, it appeared that an American style was emerging; the American dramatists and actors were coming into their own and no longer were they content to mimic the English and French styles. The American stage was undergoing a transformation.

The Jacksonian democracy that prevailed in 1830 encouraged the dramatic tastes of the common man (Brockett 479). Regional theatres were increasingly popular, and the general public turned a more favorable eye on actors, who were previously assumed to be moral plagues upon the population. American dramatists like James Nelson Barker and

Samuel Woodsworth gained recognition while American actors like Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, and J. B. Booth usurped their English counterparts as the dominant stars of the American stage (Brockett 480).

The Romantic philosophy, marked by the idealistic views of natural man and equality, began to influence the stage. Philosophical foundations of the Romantic movement centered around the belief that behind all earthly doings lies the higher truth, that everything social and natural has been created by the absolute being, be it God, Spirit, or the Ego (Brockett 431). Consequently, everything created must participate in the absolute, eternal truth: all things are parts, which make up the greater whole. What is most valued then is not everyday action but a higher and infinite existence.

Romantic writers were interested in the pure, unspoiled, and natural state of being. The ideal hero was natural man, who rebels against restrictive society and chooses the fundamental, higher truth over society's acceptance. Oftentimes, writers chose their heroes from the distant past because they believed that men of the past were closer to the natural ideal than their own current, social state. One can see a natural man in Poe's hero, Politian, a young idealist disgusted with the excesses of his aristocratic experience, who seeks truth and love above power and glory.

The duality of man's being was another aspect of Romantic philosophy that intrigued writers. Poe himself often wrote about the "double," as seen in "William Wilson" and in the relationship of the twins, Madeleine and Roderick in "The Fall of the House of Usher." Romantics believed that man was constantly struggling with the dichotomy between his body and soul, his physicality and his spirituality. Kant's belief that man must struggle in the physical world while understanding that a metaphysical

world exists, without ever knowing that world, was a popular concept widely accepted by many Romantic philosophers of the time. Ultimately though, as Kant suggested, true happiness can never be known in the physical world, only in the spiritual.

Natural man need not despair though, as there remained one medium available to him that could unite conflicting nature. Art. The most sublime and spiritual existence could make man whole (Brockett 431). The dramatists turned a critical eye on the previous philosophy, Neo-classicism, and its theatre trends, and literally began to reinvent the theatre. They began with the theatre space. The stage itself was too restrictive. The previously popular “drop set,” which grounded the play in a specific setting, was discarded for the new “box set,” which allowed for more variety and freedom of settings and place. Despite the newly instituted box set, many dramatists chose to reject a set entirely and turned to the “freedom of imaginative flights permitted by the closet drama” (Brockett 437).

The idea of closet drama had been resurrected from two centuries earlier to become the new medium for dramatists, who yearned for a more natural environment. A closet drama in theory is a dramatic piece composed for the stage that is meant to be read and published, but never performed. Lord Byron’s *Manfred* and Goethe’s *Faust*, the most popular of closet dramas, became the foremost examples. For the Romantics, a closet drama approached their vision, allowing them to forgo the strict Aristotelian Unities of time and place. Oftentimes, traditional dialogue was replaced by long poetic verse, which would have made the closet drama’s acceptance on the stage nearly impossible because it would have been difficult to sustain an audience’s interest for an extended amount of time.

Quinn suggests that *Politian* may have been a closet drama, as Poe seemed so unconcerned with the Aristotelian Unities. As evidence Quinn cites Poe's published poem, "The Coliseum," which doubles in *Politian* as scene ix, insisting that Poe's long verse in that scene indicates that *Politian* was intended as a closet drama.

In his period as a theatre critic, Poe wrote that "a closet drama is an anomaly--a paradox..." and that "There should be no such things as closet drama" (Fagin 77). Furthermore, he concluded "let a poem be a poem; let a play be a play and nothing more" (Fagin 75). With this in mind it seems unlikely then that Poe would have intended *Politian* to be a closet drama.

The period of 1815-1850 was an especially lucrative time for playwrights. Poe, who had the renown but not the means, would surely have been looking for ways to supplement his income. A successful run of his play on the stage would have made Poe financially comfortable. Moreover, the American stage, which had just begun to birth playwrights and dramatists, was still waiting for a leader to emerge. A closet drama wouldn't have brought the financial gain nor the recognition that Poe may have been striving for. Perhaps Poe fancied himself as that leader, the man who would become not only the father of the short story but also of the stage.

However it seems unlikely that *Politian* was a melodrama, the other dominant genre of the Early American era. The common man's taste in the Jacksonian era demanded something pulpy and sensationalist. Derived from the words "music drama," melodrama brought spectacle and overblown characters to the forefront. The episodic formula consisted of a villain, almost always recognizable by his dark clothes and sinister mustache, who presents problems that must be solved by the valiant hero, who then must



vanquish the villain while rescuing the helpless heroine. A happy ending was a must, as were fantastic costumes, spectacle effects such as fires, earthquakes, floods, and, of course, theme music to announce the villain's, hero's, and heroine's entrances. Melodrama played down to the rowdy common man who came for the action and crude jokes of the play.

One may make the argument that some of *Politian's* characters are decidedly stock, and the plot, which is contrived in places, may have led critics to believe that Poe intended *Politian* as melodrama. However, one must also consider Poe's lack of experience in the theatre and that his stock characters and contrived plot may not have been intentional. *Politian* does not provide the spectacle, nor the satisfaction of a melodrama, nor the archetypical hero, heroine, or villain types and it is difficult to imagine that Poe meant for his poetic verse to be delivered on the stage by fools playing to the crowd for laughs.

*Politian* never made it to the stage because the stage had no place for it. It couldn't cater to the common man's wants nor the demands of the intellectual. Poe wanted *Politian* to be something bigger than a closet drama, something grander than a melodrama, a reconfiguration of tragic events and a vehicle that would establish him as a commanding playwright. Instead *Politian* was somewhere lost between a melodrama, a Shakespearean tragedy, and a closet drama. Unfortunately for Poe, who had not the theatrical skill to make elements of the three genres compatible, *Politian* became a confusing and motley piece, rejected by all.

### Critical Reaction to *Politian*

Instead of a vehicle to propel Poe forward, *Politian* was a critical flop, allowing critics to pounce on Poe. There are four known critical reviews of Poe's five scenes, published as "Scenes from an Unfinished Drama," none of them particularly flattering. *The United States Telegraph* "was disappointed in a 'Dramatic Extract' from the pen of Mr. Edgar A. Poe. He taught us to expect much, for his prose is often high wrought poetry; but his poetry is prose, not in thought but in measure. This is a defect of ear alone, which can only be corrected by more study than the thing is worth" (80).

*The Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser* remarked that "Mr. Poe's Unpublished Drama: does not suit our taste. Why eternally ring the changes on those everlasting and hackneyed Venetian Doges and Italian counts--latticed balconies and verandas--time out of mind exhausted?" (80).

*The Lynchburg Virginian* was even less kind:

"Scenes from *Politian*" like the prose productions from the same pen (Mr. Poe) evinces great powers, evinced on trifles. Why, (to adopt the catechetical style of his own criticisms,) why does Mr. Poe throw away his strength on shafts and columns, instead of building a temple to his fame? Can he not execute as well as design? No one can doubt it who is conversant with his writings. Eschew affectation, Mr. Poe. It is a blot upon genius as well as upon beauty (80).

Even the *Messenger*, a publication Poe was intimately connected with, felt that "'Scraps from an Unpublished Drama,' by Edgar A. Poe contains one or two stirring and beautiful passages-but we are not partial to dramatic poetry" (80).

After such poor reviews, one may venture to guess why Poe decided not to finish his tragedy. Perhaps it was with his best intuition that Poe sensed himself to be no more a playwright than he was an actor and this may have led him to announce to John Pendleton Kennedy in a letter that "*Politian* was no more" (Kimball).

These four reviews, however, can only have evaluated the merit of *Politian* based on the text. They had not the opportunity to see *Politian* performed on stage by actors who were capable of delivering Poe's dialogue. It is an actor's job to take the lifeless speeches of playwrights and breathe into them passion and meaning for an audience. Perhaps had these critics seen *Politian*, they wouldn't have been so quick to dismiss it.

However, in 1933, nearly a hundred years after Poe wrote *Politian*, the Virginia Players, a theatre troupe formed at the University of Virginia in 1924, attempted the first and only recorded staging of *Politian* (see Figures 3.1-3.2). Fagin includes the review by Donald Kirkland from the *Baltimore Sun*:

*Politian*, produced last night at Catherine Hooper Hall Goucher College, for the first time in the city in which it was written one hundred years ago, showed what a bad playwright Edgar Allan Poe was, and what a good company of actors exists at the University of Virginia.

The Virginia Players revealed a mastery of all the branches of stagecraft, which certainly would have brought out whatever hidden treasures might have lurked in this minor work of a major American poet.

The effort was a commendable one, fulfilling the highest function of that valuable branch of the theatre, which is amateur in the best sense of that much-abused word.

'Politian' turned out to be a poorly constructed and inadequate play, judged even by the standards of Poe's own time. By the standards of today it is no more than a quaint example of the florid romanticism and artificial heroics of a period in American Literature, which, happily, has vanished. Such phrases as 'the grave untimely yawning for a ruined maid' and Politian's request that Castiglione 'arise and die' have become faintly ridiculous. 'I cannot pawn my honor' says Castiglione. 'Wed a wanton? Never-no never!'

These inflated phrases might be overlooked, but there are other faults, such as skimpy characterization, feeble attempts at humor, and the failure of the plot to get well under way until many scenes have unfolded. Also one looks in vain for occasional lines of living poetry, until the final scene.

It is well that Poe's reputation does not depend upon the poetry in the first ten episodes. Only in the Coliseum soliloquy, which deserves to be better known, does his genius manifest itself.

In defense of Poe, Fagin remarks that

Playwrights are not, however, critics, anymore than critics are playwrights. Mr. Poe the critic advocated realism on the stage and

excoriated American writers of drama for using the wrong models, yet his own play is definitely indebted to the Byron school of Romantic tragedy. *Politian* is no more realistic than a play by Sheridan Knowles whom Poe denounced with unbridled severity (77).

Fortunately for Poe, he was long dead before his play ever reached the stage. Though Kirkland's review is rather harsh in places, he raises excellent concerns about the lack of plot coherence and flimsy characters.

### ***Politian*: A note about the Text**

After his death, Poe's manuscript passed through several hands and eventually came to reside in the J. Pierpont Morgan collection, where Dr. T. O. Mabbott accessed it. Upon examination of the manuscript, Mabbott found corrections, in Poe's hand, written in the margins. Faithfully, Mabbott made all of the changes laid forth by Poe. Mabbott himself did very little in the way of editing, correcting only spelling and punctuation. Unfortunately, two pages appeared to be missing, and Mabbott estimated that about one hundred lines are lost.

In his lifetime, Poe published five scenes (iii, iv, vi, vii, ix). Additionally, "The Coliseum," first published as a poem, became scene xi. Mabbott's one liberty, and it is one of practicality, is the condensation of the scenes into a single act with sequential numbering i-xi. This separation into scenes makes *Politian*, a piece that was first published in five scenes with an additional six added later, into a more coherent and accessible text.

The result, a thoughtfully restored and accurate *Politian*, also brings with it a sense of unfinished potential. A few scenes, such as vi, were polished by Poe: the dialogue flows, the plot and action are clear. However, Poe never returned to edit many of the other scenes as he was persuaded by John Pendleton Kennedy to take up a more lucrative pursuit. This unfortunate state of the majority of the scenes has led most critics to dismiss *Politian* while overlooking any merit.

### **A Scene by Scene Plot Summary of *Politian***

The scene lies in sixteenth-century Rome. DUKE DI BROGLIO, father of CASTIGLIONE, is preparing for the nuptials of his son to his cousin, ALESSANDRA. CASTIGLIONE is not happy about this match, but feels bound by honor and duty though he is still in love with the gentle LALAGE, the orphaned ward of DI BROGLIO. The DUKE to avoid the disgrace of his son has cast LALAGE from society. LALAGE lives alone with her treacherous, conniving maid, JACINTA. The jovial SAN OZZO, attempts to cheer CASTIGLIONE and prepare him for his wedding. Coincidentally, POLITIAN, Earl of Leicester and his traveling companion, BALDAZZAR, Duke of Surrey, have just arrived in Rome from Britain. DI BROGLIO is adamant about having them at the wedding. Meanwhile, the servants, UGO, RUPERT, and BENITO, attend to the wedding plans.

Scene I. An apartment in the palazzo of DI BROGLIO. A party has just ended and BENITO stumbles upon a drunken UGO. They talk of the festivities until RUPERT enters. RUPERT announces that he has put the intoxicated Count CASTIGLIONE to

bed. The three discuss CASTIGLIONE and reveal that this formerly respectable man has become a drunk and a gambler following his affair with the Lady LALAGE. The men discuss whether he is at fault or whether she is the wanton; no conclusion is reached. Regardless though, LALAGE has been punished by being cast out of society by DI BROGLIO while the indiscretion of CASTIGLIONE is ignored. BENITO informs the others that CASTIGLIONE is to wed his cousin, ALESSANDRA, the "bosom friend" of LALAGE in a week. RUPERT and BENITO retire, while UGO remains to finish the last of the wine. Enter JACINTA with jewels. She proceeds to taunt her drunken lover, asking him to hazard a guess as to where the jewels may have come from. UGO recognizes a ring that belonged to CASTIGLIONE and becomes frightened and angry. He threatens to slit JACINTA'S throat for stealing them. She does not back down but continues to flaunt the jewels, finally revealing that her mistress, LALAGE, has certainly gone mad for she has given JACINTA all her jewels. UGO, not entirely convinced, demands to know where the ring has come from, and JACINTA tells him that CASTIGLIONE had previously given it to LALAGE as a token of affection, hereby establishing their past romantic history for the audience. UGO becomes playful and insists that JACINTA show him the jewels again. She leads him off the stage. By the end of the first scene, the audience learns of the wedding, the past love of CASTIGLIONE and LALAGE, DI BROGLIO'S banishment of LALAGE from society, and CASTIGLIONE's rapidly deteriorating character.

Scene II. The dressing room of CASTIGLIONE. The scene opens on SAN OZZO laughing outrageously. The audience is led to believe that CASTIGLIONE has just told him something quite funny. However, CASTIGLIONE was being quite serious

and is now put out by his companion's reaction. He was trying to tell SAN OZZO of his guilt over his treatment of LALAGE by himself and his father. SAN OZZO will have none of it. Believing that CASTIGLIONE needs to be brought out of his penitent state, SAN OZZO attempts to put the blame of the whole affair on the character of LALAGE. CASTIGLIONE vehemently denies these accusations and insists the blame lies with him. The audience is allowed for a moment to see CASTIGLIONE'S deep remorse and love for her. SAN OZZO taunts him, offering him the good life of wine or the sinner's ashes and sack cloth. SAN OZZO reasons that LALAGE has paid for both of them and now CASTIGLIONE, who has escaped punishment, will wed his cousin. SAN OZZO leaves his friend but first has UGO bring up a basketful of wine bottles and ashes so that CASTIGLIONE may literally see his choice of pleasure or pain in front of him. CASTIGLIONE reasons that he cannot ever marry LALAGE because of her low rank in life. Symbolically, he chooses the wine and rejects the ashes.

Scene III. The hall of DI BROGLIO. ALESSANDRA is upbraiding CASTIGLIONE for his recent drinking and gambling habits. She is concerned about his image and reputation. CASTIGLIONE does not seem particularly enthralled or enraptured by his sharp-tongued bride-to-be, but he does submit to her commands and promises to change but not before accidentally muttering the name LALAGE. ALESSANDRA is alarmed as she knows of the affair. DI BROGLIO enters in good spirits to inform them of the news that the illustrious POLITIAN of Britain has come to Rome. A conversation about the moral character of POLITIAN ensues. CASTIGLIONE dismisses POLITIAN as a melancholy sort of man cut off from himself, while DI BROGLIO maintains that POLITIAN is an intellectual man of all talents. The argument



cannot be resolved between father and son, and DI BROGLIO ends the scene by ushering them all into the garden. The audience can see from this scene the lack of love between ALESSANDRA and CASTIGLIONE as well as CASTIGLIONE's relationship with his father. The introduction of POLITIAN is similar to the discussion of CASTIGLIONE's character by the servants in the previous scene. Again LALAGE is mentioned, this time with a sense of dread.

Scene IV. The Lady LALAGE's apartment. LALAGE is in mourning and sees no one but JACINTA. LALAGE speaks in riddles and verse of love lost. She reads tales of tragic love, like the story of Cleopatra. She asks JACINTA to bring her a spiritual text. JACINTA grudgingly agrees and returns, slamming the book down in front of her mistress. LALAGE asks if she has done anything wrong or if she can do anything for the coming wedding between JACINTA and UGO. Her inquiries are half-hearted and JACINTA's pride is wounded. She taunts LALAGE and says that her mistress has no use for jewels anymore and that CASTIGLIONE never loved her. JACINTA exits in a huff while LALAGE is left to weep and stare at her reflection in the mirror. Again she talks of a love gone bad. Enter the MONK. The MONK, in his attempt to comfort her, suggests that LALAGE turn to God. LALAGE confesses to the MONK that she has rejected God and instead swears revenge. This is a charged scene. The audience watches LALAGE go from pitiable to vengeful in the matter of minutes. LALAGE is young, out of love, unstable and bent on revenge. JACINTA'S character is further revealed as well, showing her as conniving and cruel.

Scene V. A room in the palazzo. DI BROGLIO and his son are again discussing POLITIAN. CASTIGLIONE has just run into him and now declares him to be a worthy,

interesting man. This pleases DI BROGLIO until POLITIAN and BALDAZZAR enter. POLITIAN is sick and BALDAZZAR is gravely serious. POLITIAN requests to retire immediately, forsaking formalities for comfort. CASTIGLIONE sends for the servants while BALDAZZAR makes excuses for his friend. After their departure, DI BROGLIO, a little put off by his guest's behavior, insists that he is the one who always had believed POLITIAN to be a melancholy man. The audience is finally introduced to POLITIAN. They see very little of him, except for his sickness and rude behavior towards DI BROGLIO. BALDAZZAR is established as a solid, reasonable character, while DI BROGLIO is shown to be an inconsistent man in his views. The DUKE, who once praised POLITIAN to the skies without ever having met him, now dismisses him after a brief introduction.

Scene VI. An apartment in the palazzo. BALDAZZAR is greatly concerned about POLITIAN and urges him to get up, get dressed, and make an appearance for the DUKE. POLITIAN muses aloud but refuses to rise. He speaks of death and the eternal life that awaits and complains that life holds nothing for him. POLITIAN hears a phantom voice, a lady's voice. BALDAZZAR does not immediately hear it. It calls to POLITIAN. He asks again if BALDAZZAR hears it. The voice becomes louder. It is a woman singing a sad, English love song. Finally, BALDAZZAR can hear it and begs POLITIAN to get away from the window where he can hear the voice. BALDAZZAR insists that it must be ALESSANDRA and that it would be improper to seek it further. POLITIAN convinces his friend to go down to meet the Duke without him and BALDAZZAR reluctantly leaves. POLITIAN is left to go after the voice. The audience sees BALDAZZAR'S reason and POLITIAN'S discontentment with life. The voice is

certainly that of LALAGE. One suspects that some sort of meeting will ensue between the two.

Scene VII. The moonlit garden of the palazzo. Off stage, POLITIAN has traced the voice to LALAGE. He woos her in the garden. She will not accept his love because of the stain on her reputation. POLITIAN says what CASTIGLIONE cannot: he is willing to throw off honor and duty for her love. LALAGE finally gives in but becomes wild at a sound in the garden. She tells POLITIAN that she will not have him until a deed is done. CASTIGLIONE lives, she explains. POLITIAN understands now where the stain on her name came from and swears that CASTIGLIONE will die. He dashes off, leaving LALAGE to mull over her revenge. She seems hesitant and dazed. The audience is asked to suspend disbelief here and imagine for themselves that POLITIAN has had enough time between this scene and the last to meet LALAGE and fall in love with her. POLITIAN, perhaps taken in by her beauty and dire situation, loves her deeply and promises her the world. The audience sees LALAGE consider this offer of marriage but may be surprised when she adds the stipulation that CASTIGLIONE must die. POLITIAN readily agrees to do this deed in the name of his love.

Scene VIII. A street near the palazzo. RUPERT and BENITO discuss the wedding, which is to occur that evening. JACINTA sits alone and recounts how she's left LALAGE to be the maid of ALESSANDRA, a better position because ALESSANDRA is of more noble birth and will be married to the Count. LALAGE was humble, she explains, and not a good mistress. JACINTA thinks that now she is maid to ALESSANDRA she will not have to marry lowly UGO but perhaps an apothecary, which would bring her out of servitude. UGO enters and accidentally treads upon a bandbox,

creating a moment of comedic relief as JACINTA flies into a fit of anger and curses, chasing him offstage with the bandbox still on his foot.

Scene IX. POLITIAN awaits the return of BALDAZZAR. He enters only to inform POLITIAN that CASTIGLIONE, knowing no cause for quarrel, will not fight POLITIAN. This news sends POLITIAN into a fit of rage mingled with some relief. BALDAZZAR is dismissed. Enter CASTIGLIONE. A battle of pride follows; CASTIGLIONE taunts POLITIAN, POLITIAN calls him a villain. This remark enrages CASTIGLIONE, who draws his sword on POLITIAN. The two fight until POLITIAN cries out the name of LALAGE. CASTIGLIONE is overcome by this mention of her and he falls to the ground. Instead of killing him, POLITIAN takes pity and explains that he will not kill but taunt CASTIGLIONE in public, in the streets, so that everyone may know of the Count's shame and cowardice. POLITIAN exits. The audience is left with a groveling, utterly human CASTIGLIONE. One also marvels at POLITIAN'S kindly decision not to kill CASTIGLIONE.

Scene X. SAN OZZO and UGO are conversing. UGO believes that he himself is dead. SAN OZZO taunts him and plays with his mind, assuring him that he really is deceased. This scene is a break between the duel and the resolution scene; an attempt by Poe at comedic relief. The audience is left to ponder the grotesque, dark humor.

Scene XI. The resolution. POLITIAN waits alone in the Coliseum, musing about fate and time. The speech is eloquent and contemplative. In enters LALAGE in a wild rage demanding death and revenge. POLITIAN is stunned. He realizes that to keep his love he must finish what he has begun with CASTIGLIONE. LALAGE ends the play alone, describing her abandonment of her hopes of Heaven. The audience doesn't know

if POLITIAN finishes the deed or not.

### **Themes within the Text: Class in *Politian***

One of the benefits of setting *Politian* in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Rome is that Poe is free to explore universal class issues. *Politian* is rich with complex layers of class tension. As Poe demonstrates, hierarchy of class in his play is ever changing. A character may gain status through marriage or change in employment. The reverse holds true that no class place is fixed and one may be toppled from that position.

The Duke Di Broglio and his son, the Count Castiglione, are at the zenith of the hierarchy in Rome at the play's beginning. Even though Castiglione has seduced a virgin, his rank in society does not change. As the male who will most likely continue the patriarchal ruling line, the Duke Di Broglio has pardoned Castiglione with no more than a chastisement and a promise that Castiglione will marry his cousin, Alessandra. Alessandra ranks below the Duke and the Count as she is a noblewoman by birth, but without a title. Her marriage to Castiglione will elevate her position in the hierarchy, as she will acquire the title of Countess.

The floaters, who are neither nobility nor serving class, are San Ozzo and Lalage. Alessandra describes San Ozzo, the rakish confidant of Castiglione, as a "lowly-born" fellow who has no business associating with the Count. However, because of his friendship with the Count, his position is highly elevated as he is permitted to counsel Castiglione as well as order about the servants. His position, however, depends entirely

on his relationship with the Count and should a quarrel occur, he would be relegated to a lower, less important position.

Lalage enjoyed special privilege as the orphaned ward of the Duke. In a cancelled passage from the original manuscript Lalage was described as being "of noble birth" (Mabbott 60) similar to Alessandra. However, that line was deleted from the final manuscript for reasons unknown. Her position as ward afforded her both living arrangements in the palazzo of the Duke and her own servant maid, Jacinta. Her special situation also placed her in the view and company of the Count Castiglione, who ultimately proved to be her downfall. As a seduced woman, cast out from society by the Duke, she still retains her apartment in the palazzo and the services of Jacinta. However, these comforts come at a cost to her dignity: in her apartment she is sequestered from all except Jacinta, who has lost all respect for her tainted mistress and mocks her, acting as her captor.

The serving class occupies the lowest rank in the social hierarchy. However, even within the serving class there are ranks. It is clear to the audience that Ugo is the lowest and most base of servants. He is a buffoon and a terrible drunkard who is strung along like a puppet by Jacinta and San Ozzo. He is the play's fool, used by Poe to elicit cheap humor when the plot becomes too serious. The other male servants, Benito and Rupert, look down upon Ugo as they maintain and command a certain level of respect.

The three male servants have no opportunity for improvement of their situation. Their place is fixed. Jacinta, however, uses cunning and feminine wiles to assure herself advancement. While she serves Lalage, she wheedles jewels from her mistress by convincing her that she will marry Ugo. Lalage willingly gives Jacinta her jewels, as

Jacinta will have use for them while she, a cast out wanton, will not. Jacinta has no intention of marrying Ugo, but she deceives him and her mistress to attain financial gain. Jacinta sees her chance as the wedding approaches. Lalage has no influence: Alessandra will be Countess and mistress of the palazzo. Jacinta offers her service to Alessandra and, in return for her services, Alessandra will marry her off to an apothecary or someone equally respectable. Jacinta will leave the serving rank to become the wife of a tradesman and thus advance her position.

The English hierarchy, as it includes only Politian and Baldazzar, does not shift as the Roman one does. Politian is the Earl of Leicester and Baldazzar, confidant to Politian, is the Duke of Surrey; although of higher rank than his companion, he is subservient in personality to Politian. In some ways, the relationship of Politian and Baldazzar parallels that of Count Castiglione and San Ozzo: the alpha male has a low profile confidant who exerts much influence over his companion. In the case of Baldazzar, his influence over Politian is one of reason and knowledge; he counsels Politian to watch his treatment of the Duke and not to go chasing after foreign women. San Ozzo is a scoundrel who mocks Castiglione and urges him to choose between Lalage and the life of an outcast or the life of leisure and liquor if he marries Alessandra. Neither Baldazzar nor San Ozzo worries about his position in the hierarchy. San Ozzo teases Castiglione and Baldazzar lectures Politian; neither fears being rebuked by his companion.

As a rule most of the male characters in *Politian* do not give a thought to their rank. Each feels secure in his position. Conversely, the women, whose position in the hierarchy is more subject to change, have a heightened awareness of their social position.

Jacinta knows that marrying Ugo and remaining mistress to Lalage will keep her forever relegated to the servant class. If she is deceptive enough, she can recommend herself to Alessandra, a more powerful mistress, who will make sure she marries well. Alessandra, similar to Jacinta, is a social climber. Alessandra will marry the Count, even though the audience knows from her aside in scene iii that Alessandra is aware that Castiglione is in love with another woman. She will marry him for rank and position and acquisition of a title. It is not clear that Lalage understood her privileged status as ward of the Duke, but as a fallen, wanton woman, she realizes that she is of little worth to anyone. She is humbled and isolated. Her romantic notions convinced her to believe that Castiglione would marry her. Had she been right, she would have inherited the Countess title sought by Alessandra, which would have made the orphaned ward the most dramatic advancer in social status. However, her dreams failed and she is now even lower than Jacinta in some respects as Lalage seemingly has no chance for betterment.

As a result the women seem particularly aware of rank because they understand that their actions can alter their position. They understand that through their dealings with men comes their ruin or betterment. The men, however, seem less perceptive to these shifts. They do not understand that they are being used as rungs on a ladder. However, perceptions change when men are in love. They become keenly aware of their rank and position then. Politian and Castiglione are both aware that by choosing Lalage they are marrying below rank. Castiglione will not dishonor the family line by marrying someone of low birth and no consequence. He is content to seduce her and leave her on her own to endure the punishment handed out by his father. He pines for his lost love but does nothing to alleviate her suffering or his own. He is bound by his position to marry



another he does not love because she proves to be a good blood match. Politian, who woos Lalage after she has been banished from society, has more prestige to lose than Castiglione did. When she was a virgin, she had worth. Now that she is a seduced woman, Lalage has even less merit than before. Yet Politian, who is aware of his obligations of honor and duty, is willing to forsake them for the love of Lalage. He does not seek to indulge his lust as Castiglione did but pursues the nobler offer of marriage.

What distinguishes Politian as the hero of the play are his intentions for Lalage and his willingness to transcend rank to marry for love. Conversely, Castiglione becomes the cowardly villain for turning from his love and leaving her to fall alone in rank for a sin they both committed. Though he does not fall in the social ranking, he falls in the esteem of the audience, while Lalage and Politian achieve favor.

### **The Unrealized Revenge Plots: Women in *Politian***

Ann Cook exacted revenge on her former lover, Sharp, through her husband, Beauchamp. The family of Sharp won revenge over Cook and Beauchamp as Cook killed herself and Beauchamp was hanged. However, as Sharp was slain first, he left no record, no defense of his actions. Beauchamp's confession and Ann Cook's letters remain to clear their names. It is through their eyes, their narration, that the Kentucky Tragedy is portrayed. These were the only accounts available at the time when Poe was at work upon his tragedy. It may follow then that *Politian* is ultimately sympathetic to the point of view of Cook and Beauchamp as that was the position most accessible.

Most people held with the cause of Cook, who was not only seduced by Sharp, but vilified by him in the form of public pamphlets during his election. Beauchamp, who was married to Cook at the time of the publication of the pamphlets, could be seen as defending the honor of his wife. So it was, that Sharp went down as the villain, undefended in any writing, while his murderer and the accomplice won the sympathy of all.

In *Politian*, though, revenge takes many forms. When the play opens, Lalage is forsaken and without power or resources to alleviate her condition. She has been seduced and manipulated by Castiglione. By the play's conclusion, however, she has persuaded Politian to enact her revenge and it will take many forms. Most importantly it will take the life of Castiglione, the lover who jilted her and besmirched her honor. However, by taking the life of the Count, Lalage takes from the Duke, the man who cast her out of society and kept her prisoner in his palazzo, the heir, his son. Revenge will be doled out upon Alessandra, described by the servants as the "bosom friend" (I, 68) of Lalage. Alessandra was to marry the love of Lalage with no qualms. Now Alessandra will be deprived of husband, advancement in rank, and acquisition of title. Lalage's revenge will affect even Jacinta, the servant maid, who schemed to become mistress of Alessandra all the while soliciting the jewels of Lalage under false pretenses. Alessandra will not advance and neither will Jacinta. Neither will have a place in the palazzo after the death of Castiglione.

Lalage's vehicle of revenge is her new love, Politian. As she was seduced by her first love, Castiglione, she has become wiser to the ways of men. Her love now comes with conditions. Though Politian declares his love, Lalage accepts his proposal of

marriage only after soliciting the vow that he will slay Castiglione first. After Castiglione is dead, her revenge will be over the Italian nobles, who barred her from society, but more importantly over men. Lalage has learned to manipulate men. She tricks the monk into watching her swear an unholy vow and she exacts a promise from Politian in exchange for her love. Like Jacinta, she has become wise to the fact that achievement of goals must come through men.

However, her final revenge is never full carried through. The death of Castiglione is never established and, although one may surmise from the outcome of the Kentucky tragedy who is dead at the play's end, Poe never writes the climactic scene. Scene xi sees Politian, recovered from his duel with Castiglione and urged forward by Lalage, exiting to dispatch him. However, the audience sees no resolution scene or proof of Castiglione's demise. Mabbott suggests that Poe surely meant to write the final scene. However, the fact remains that he did not and, as a result, Lalage's revenge fails.

### **Poe and the influence of Shakespeare**

In his *Commentary* section of *Politian*, Mabbott notes that Poe incorporates similar lines from Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *MacBeth*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, and possibly *Antony and Cleopatra* (although Mabbott admits the reference could have been to Dryden's *All for Love*).

The servants Ugo, Rupert, Benito, and Jacinta, whose main functions in *Politian* are to advance plot, also serve as comedic relief, similar to Shakespeare's use of minor characters for the same effect. Mabbott even believes that the exchange between San

Ozzo and Ugo was Poe's attempt to recreate the graveside humor provided in *Hamlet* by the gravediggers.

In scene iv, Lalage swears an oath on a dagger disguised as a cross. This gesture is strikingly similar to the moment in *Hamlet* when the young prince raises his dagger above his head and lets the ghost of his father lead him on with it. Later the ghost requires an oath from Hamlet to exact his revenge, making Hamlet swear it on his dagger, which doubles as a cross.

However it is not *Hamlet*, but *Romeo and Juliet*, that Politian bears most resemblance to. Baldazzar is similar to Romeo's faithful Benvolio, who is constantly the voice of gentle reason for his headstrong companion. Like Benvolio, Baldazzar serves the function of messenger. To convince Castiglione to fight, Politian uses the very insult that Tybalt employs to provoke Mercutio, and calls Castiglione a villain. This verbal abuse incites Castiglione to draw his sword and fight. Essentially, the entire dual scene closely parallels the exchange of swords in Shakespeare's play.

### **Flaws in *Politian* the Text**

Kenneth McGowan, a playwright, once remarked that:

It is not enough that he [the playwright] should be an inventor of good plots or a recorder and interpreter of human character. It is not enough that he should also be a master of dialogue. Besides all this, he must have a talent for the peculiar organization of plot, characters, and dialogue that creates the suspenseful and mounting excitement without which no audience is satisfied.

Poe may have been a master of dialogue within his short stories, but within his play he failed at the four critical elements of good playwrighting: plot, characters, dialogue and the arrangement and balance of the three.

*Politian* is riddled with plot problems. The story does not flow cohesively into one dramatic action but rather follows the separate plot lines of Politian and Lalage, Castiglione and the Italian nobles, and Jacinta and Ugo. The Politian and Lalage story line intersects with that of Castiglione because the hero and the villain share a common love interest, Lalage. However, the story of Jacinta and Ugo runs parallel to the main action and is never quite resolved. We don't know what happens to Jacinta or Ugo after the death of their lord. This wouldn't be so irritating to an audience, but the fates of the minor characters, San Ozzo, Alessandra, and the other servants, Benito and Rupert, are not alluded to either, which leaves an audience feeling cheated.

The lack of reason given for Politian falling in love with Lalage is troubling to an audience. In one scene, Lalage is but a voice that beckons to Politian. In the following scene, the audience sees Lalage, supposedly banished from society, out in the night air of the garden being wooed by Politian.

When one is writing a short story, as Poe was clearly capable of doing, one doesn't necessarily have to adhere to the conventions of drama. For example, one doesn't need to know the circumstances under which the narrator meets his wife in "The Black Cat" or where the black cat comes from. In "The Tell-Tale Heart," one doesn't care how the old man with the grotesque eye comes to be a neighbor of the murderous narrator. In fiction, sometimes what is, just is. The reader will accept certain facts as facts without an explanation.

In theatre, one needs to know about Romeo's past love, Rosalind, to understand why is he wounded in love. One needs to see the tension between the Montagues and the Capulets or have it reported to them, so that when Romeo and Juliet make their fatal union, one understands why that union is so fatal and so dramatically important to the plot of the play.

In *Politian*, one doesn't see the love develop between Politian and Lalage. One isn't even privy to how the lovers physically come together. Does Lalage sneak out of the palace? How does she know to sneak out? Does Politian send word? How does he find out who she is? These are just some of the questions that can be raised in that unsatisfying situation.

Another disappointing situation presented by Poe's plot line is the duel between Politian and Castiglione. Evidently, when Poe wrote in the stage directions that the dialogue should be spoken while they're dueling, he gave very little thought as to how difficult the words "untimely sepulchre" would have been to say while delivering blows. Another interesting nuance of that entire scene is that Baldazzar comes in early on to deliver the message to Politian that Castiglione will not fight him. A few lines later, Castiglione enters and proceeds to taunt Politian into drawing his sword. For somebody who doesn't want to quarrel with the Earl, Castiglione deals some verbal blows.

Possibly more frustrating than the plot inconsistencies are the characters themselves. None of them are really developed through their dialogues and as a result, they appear to act without motive or reason. What is lacking is a strong principal character. In his short stories, Poe often relies heavily on the first person narrator to carry his story. Often, that narrator has committed a crime, such as in "The Black Cat" or "The

Tell-tale Heart,” and though he is considered an unreliable narrator, he is profoundly interesting to follow.

In *Politian*, there is no narrator to carry the story. Politian, the main character, does not enter before scene v and the villain, Castiglione, is in just five scenes, while the heroine is in three. No character really dominates the stage, and so the audience is apt to pay most of its attention to the play’s namesake. He enters briefly in scene v and then has one short scene before an intermission would naturally occur. Until then, the audience flounders.

As noted by one of the reviews of *Politian*, Poe seems to have a defect of the ear when it comes to dialogue. To write as one would speak is difficult in any literary piece; however oftentimes a reader can forgive bad dialogue if the overall story is worth it. In theatre, it is unforgivable to offend the audience with stilted dialogue. Ideally the audience, even when hearing the Shakespearean verse, should forget that the character is even speaking in dialogue but rather should be *listening* to what the character has to say rather than *hearing* him speak. Hearing a character speak poorly or hearing a misplaced accent draws the audience away from the playwright’s message. When one is listening to the character, one has forgotten these other factors, and truly focuses on the playwright’s message.

According to Mabbott, the play’s lead character, Politian, is “named for the Florentine scholar and poet Angelo Ambrogini Poliziano (1454-1494)” (Mabbott 60), who composed poems for a lovely young Italian woman, Alessandra di Bartolomeo Scala and had an admirer named Baldassare Castiglione, who penned *The Book of the Courtier* (Mabbott 59-60). Poe’s Alessandra became the haughty betrothed of Castiglione,

eventual enemy of Politian, while Baldassare emerged as Baldazzar, confidant of Politian. The comparisons end here though, in name alone.

In a more important sense, Politian was Jeroboam Beauchamp, a headstrong young Kentucky lawyer, who fell for an older woman and committed murder to avenge her honor. But as Fagin suggests, perhaps there was something more to Politian. "But if Politian does not represent a great contribution to dramatic literature, it is nonetheless of considerable importance in helping us to understand Poe as a man and an artist. For it is, more than many of his poems and stories, a piece of self-revelation, an act of confession, and its failure as an actable play is due largely to his inability to forget himself. Who is Politian besides being a fictitious substitute...we today cannot fail to recognize in the young hero the characteristic, bearing, tone, and gestures of young Edgar Allan Poe...Politian is in short the kind of mysterious hero Edgar Allan Poe imagined himself to be" (Fagin 85).

Regardless, Poe's characters are trapped by their dialogue. He favors the repetition of lines, which works in poetry, but becomes quickly irritating to an audience if overused. Lalage is the most frequent victim of Poe's need to repeat himself. Her repetitions during her first scene approach a stuttering-like quality.

Shaky dialogue, under-developed characters and unclear plot lines all contribute to what made *Politian* look like an amateurish disaster on paper. However, a play that is unremarkable on paper does not necessarily translate poorly to a stage.

After Mabbott's careful and loving preservation of the manuscript, I felt uncomfortable, as a director, altering any major plot lines in *Politian*. Characters are always up for interpretation. For example, one actor may play Hamlet as a suicidal youth



while another interprets Hamlet as a cold, calculated being out for revenge. I wouldn't need to rewrite the characters so much as to flesh them out. Good actors can do that without a director.

What I did feel comfortable changing were some of the lines. I first read *Politian* aloud and began to edit repetitions and broken fragments that no matter how I tried to say them, still sounded wrong. I changed a few pronouns referring to the characters' names and added some new lines, not many, but a few lines of clarifications. The most cutting I did was during scene vi, the difficult love scene, which read like pure melodrama.

### Line Changes

#### SCENE I: Line changes

##### **Ugo:**

\*Please drop every hiccup that doesn't work for you. If a few work sprinkled in a line here or there, then do it. If not, forget it. There are other ways of demonstrating an inebriated state.

##### **Rupert:**

\*pg 3 line 48 please drop "Jacinta tells me this"

#### SCENE II: Line changes

##### **San Ozzo:**

\*please don't hit "ha ha ha ha" if it feels unnatural. Show mirth on your own terms.

\*pg 6 cut "You shall have them all" and drop both "you shall have it," but please substitute "you shall have them all."

\*No singing on pg 7.

##### **Castiglione:**

\*pg 7 ln 44 please change "that damned villain" to "then a damned villain am I."

\*on pg 10 same direction as before with "ha ha ha ha."

#### SCENE III: Line changes

##### **Alessandra:**

\*pg 11 ln 32 cut "he's not well!" feels awkward, getting rid of it will allow your character to address Castiglione and not the audience.

**Castiglione:** pg 11 ln 34 cut "madam," fair cousin will suffice.

#### SCENE IV: Line changes

##### **Jacinta:**

\*pg 14 ln 28 if "pshaw" feel awkward, try making a disapproving noise in your throat.

##### **Lalage:**

\*pg 15 ln 73 please drop the two "false" one will suffice.

\*pg 16 ln 99 please cut "Oh! No!—no!—no! Not that! Not that!"

\*pg 17 ln 103 after "the deeds register should tally, father!" Please add the line "Castiglione shall pay."

#### SCENE V: Line changes

##### **Castiglione:**

\*Cut your first line of the scene. "Undoubtedly."

\*pg 18 ln 38 add the name "Baldazzar" after the word friend. I am trying to give the audience a break here by cluing them in ahead of time as to who is who.

\*pg 19 ln 65 cut out "What ho!" and "Rupert," just call for Benito.

##### **Alessandra:**

\*You will usurp the Duke's first three lines of the scene: "Why do you laugh," (ln 2) "Perfectly...", (ln 6ish) and "Nothing at all (ln 8ish)." I want you as more of a presence to make the plot more cohesive and the stakes higher. Also take the Duke's lines beginning on pg 18 ln 43 "So, so you see" and drop the second "so."

##### **Duke Di Broglio:**

\*You will drop your first three lines of your scene: "Why do you laugh," "Perfectly...", and "Nothing at all." I am trying to establish Alessandra as a larger character. Also cut your line beginning on pg 18 ln 43 "So, so you see" and drop the second "so." Otherwise, every line is yours.

##### **Politian:**

\*pg 19 ln 60 cut "Your son made mention of" down to "Baldazzar ah!"

#### SCENE VI: Line changes

##### **Politian:**

\*pg 21 ln 29 cut out the two "sick" one will do.

#### SCENE VII: Line changes

##### **Lalage:**

\*pg 24 cut out your whole first section beginning with "And dost though speak of love...all the way down to "most cruel indeed."

\*pg 25 add to ln 50 "Thou **will** love me and in my heart of hearts I feel thou **will** lovest me truly"

\*pg 26 ln 65 add "Thou speakest to me of love **but** knowest thou the land..."

\*pg 26 ln 66 add "a land new found—**America**—Miraculously found by **Columbus** of Genoa"

\*pg 27 ln 86 add "**Yes, my love, but** first a deed is to be done"

\*pg 27 ln 88 cut "And he shall die—alas!" Leave in "Castiglione die?" But cut "Who spoke the words? Where am I—what was it he said?" Then cut the first "Politian thou art not gone."

\*pg 27 ln 97 cut "to say how thou doest scorn—how thou dost hate my womanly weakness. Ha ha! Thou art not gone" all the way down to "he is gone gone gone" just leave in one "he is gone."

\*pg 27 ln 103 lose "tis well—tis very well."

\*pg 27 ln 104 change "so" to "**May his** blade be keen—**his** blow be sure. **Castiglione shall pay.**" Cut the rest of you dialogue after this.

##### **Politian:**

\*pg 24 cut out your first lines beginning with “Weep not” down to “Be comforted” Start with “I know of **Castiglione**.” That way the audience can have a heads up to the plot development.

\*pg 24 cut out “thus on my bended knee I answer thee.” Then change your next line to “Sweet **Lalage**, I’ll love thee.”

\*pg 24 ln 16 “I love thee” becomes “**I’ll** love thee.”

\*pg 24 ln 18 drop “clime” the internal rhyme with time is out of place

\*pg 24 ln 20 drop “And do I love?”

\*pg 24 ln 21 drop the second “even for thy woes”

\*pg 25 ln 33 cut “Do I not love—art thou not beautiful—what need we more? Ha glory! Now speak not of it.”

\*pg 25 ln 41 drop the first “what matters it”

\*pg 25 ln 52, no need to throw yourself upon your knees, change to “**Lalage, will thou lovest me?**”

\*pg 26 ln 74 cut “O, will thou—wilt thou” change to the affirmative. “Fly to that paradise my **Lalage**, Fly thither with me.”

\*pg 27 ln 84, I’m considering cutting the “my own, my beautiful, my love my wife” but I’m not sure yet so for now just cut “my all—oh wilt thou **Lalage**” change to “**fly thither with me**”

\*pg 27 ln 87 add “**for you my love**, he shall die”

SCENE VIII: Line changes.

\*Note to all in this scene: Jacinta, Castiglione, Alessandra, Ugo, Rupert, and Benito.

Entrances will be all follows:

\*The scene will open with **ALESSANDRA** handing lists to **JACINTA** and exchanging words with her new servant. **JACINTA** will curtsy but not exit. **ALESSANDRA** will exit but wait in the wings unseen. Then **BENITO** and **RUPERT** will enter from opposite directions, nearly smack into each other because they will be carrying wedding boxes, and deliver their lines. Both will exit and then **BENITO** will reenter on pg 28 as the script dictates. Same deal with **BENITO** on pg 29. On pg 29 At **JACINTA**’S line “Oh she’s a lady” **ALESSANDRA** will enter on **CASTIGLIONE**’S arm, she will be silently lecturing/dragging him across the stage and exit opposite side of their entrance. **UGO** will enter when script suggests and exit with **JACINTA** chasing him off stage at end of scene.

**Jacinta:**

\*pg 28 ln 1 drop “o no! it is not late—”

\*pg 28 ln 4 drop “I’ll answer for it”

\*pg 28 ln 5 cut out “stay I can tell” all the way down to “these are pretty gloves”

\*pg 28 ln 18 just change “I’m a lady” to “**I am** a lady” and cut “I am indeed” just use “**Indeed**”

\*pg 28 ln 22 cut out “the ignorant stupid, villain”

\*pg 28 ln 25 just change “I made a change” to the “**I made the change**” and then change “for the better I think” to “for the better **I’m sure**” and cut out “indeed I’m sure of it.”

\*pg 28 ln 29 change “with her now” to “with **Mistress Lalage** now.”

\*pg 29 ln 32 drop “I hate all humble people down to “condescension.”

\*pg 29 ln 35 Instead of addressing yourself in this little speech, address the audience, so change “or would she now” down to “jewels” to “**Or would my former mistress, I ask you now, have give me all these jewels.**”

\*pg 29 ln 38 cut out “Or he would not be in a hurry—he would have stopped.”

\*pg 29 ln 43 cut out “well I don’t know.”

\*pg 29 ln 46 change “I couldn’t” to “**I won’t**”

\*pg 29 ln 48 cut out “Heigho”

\*pg 29 ln 52 cut out the counting “one, two, three” all the way to “ten yards of velvet”

\*pg 30 ln 72 cut out the first “Ugo you villain” so that it reads “I’ll play my lady to a T, **that I will.** I’ll be all dignity, and **I’ll say:** Ugo you villain—look **here,** you rascal...” and so forth.

\*pg 30 ln 85 let’s lose all those “thus” remarks. Use “thus” only when it works for you.

SCENE IX: Line changes

**Politian:**

\*pg 31 ln 15 please drop “With what excessive fragrance” down to “what said the count”

\*pg 31 ln 27 cut out “and he did say”

\*pg 32 ln 37 to make Castiglione’s entrance make more sense please cut out “Tis he—he comes himself” and start with “thou reasonest well.”

**Baldazzar:**

\*pg 31 ln 28 cut “than I have told you sir” so that it reads: “No more my lord. The Count Castiglione will not fight, having no cause for quarrel.”

SCENE X: Line changes

**San Ozzo:**

\*pg 35 ln 20 add “**I’ll set him a laughing at once**”

\*pg 35 ln 21 cut out “I’ll bet a trifle” and substitute “**I know what I’ll do,** I’ll make this idiot” and substitute “dead” for “deceased.”

\*pg 36 ln 50 cut out “Do you not think. You see I yield unto your better judgment”

\*pg 36 ln 55 cut out everything after “unto the count”

\*pg 36 ln 88 lose the “ha ha ha ha” part.

### **From Page to Stage: Directing *Politian***

I knew that to intimately understand and evaluate Poe’s *Politian* I had to see it performed. Some plays simply read better on paper than others, but some plays can only really be appreciated when performed. Despite the reviews of *Politian*, poorly received on both page and stage, I still felt that the play warranted another performance. Ideally, I wish I could have objectively seen it directed by someone else. This presented something

of a problem as *Politian*, to my knowledge, had only been performed once in the United States and was not recorded. This left one of two options: evaluate it on paper or put on a production of it.

In April of 2002, when I appealed to Powder and Wig, the student run organization which funds student-directed productions, they were willing to financially support *Politian* as well as grant me the use of the cellar theatre for my stage. Originally, I had hoped to produce it over a full semester. However, I was offered the January Term space, which would give me exactly one, intensive month to create *Politian*. I accepted these terms and scheduled auditions in December.

### ***Politian: An Analysis***

Prior to auditions, though, I began to work with *Politian* as a text. I needed to have some idea as to what I had in my hands and what I would need in a cast. I settled on an outline method by Francis Hodge, which allowed me to diagram plot action, characters, and scene action.

#### **I. The Given Circumstances**

##### **A. Environmental Facts**

##### **1. Geographical Location: Rome**

2. Date: Poe specifies the 16<sup>th</sup> century. To be more specific, after extensive costume research I decided on the year 1570 for this production.

3. Season: After scanning the text for any contextual clues, the only indication of a season may be the “autumn wind” alluded to by Lalage in scene vii ln 57. On that basis I will assume that it is the fall. This will not affect costuming or set, as the play predominantly occurs inside the palace.

4. Time of day: I am unclear as to how relevant this is to the interpretation of the scene, but my feeling is that most scenes occur in the afternoon or in the evening. Clearly, scene I is in the evening after a party and the love scene, scene vii, takes place at night as Poe specifies a “moonlit garden.”

5. Economic Environment: Poe focuses on the Italian and English nobility and to a lesser extent, the serving class.

6. Political Environment: Renaissance Italy under the rule of the Papacy. The Duke Di Broglio and his son and heir, the Count, suggests there is already a defined patriarchal monarchy system in place.

7. Social Environment: Marriages are still arranged; virginity is clearly prized. Duels are still acceptable forms of settling disputes. Religion seems important.

B. Previous Action: The seduction of Lalage has occurred prior to the beginning of the play and she is also already cast out of society. The Count’s marriage to his cousin Alessandra has been arranged and Politian is on his way to Rome.

C. Principal (Characters): The three principals are the hero, Politian, the villain, Castiglione, and the heroine, Lalage.

## II. Dialogue

- A. Word Choice: Long prosodic verse in English. Poe seems to have constructed his own language, words and names that are clearly Italian, British, and modern (1820's) English.
  - B. Sentence Structure: Blank verse.
  - C. Choice of Images: Extended literary allusions to the "Fairyland," which Poe suggests is America. There is a lot of reference made to the hereafter, Heaven, and life after death.
  - D. Peculiar Characteristics: The use of Italian as well as English words is curious. Characters don't seem to speak, rather they declare themselves in long speeches. This seems to be more of a defect of Poe's ear than anything else.
  - E. Sound of Dialogue: As mentioned above, dialogue exchange between characters is awkward. However, there are some truly beautiful as well as comedic moments where the verse just rolls off the actor's tongue.
  - F. Structure of lines and dialogue: Mabbott divided the play into eleven scenes, not Poe himself.
- III. Title of the Units. (A word about units. Units are frames within scenes. A unit occurs when the main action of the scene changes. For instance; Bob and Sweney are fighting. Bob gets flustered and leaves. This is the end of a unit within the scene.)
- A. Title of the Units (as determined by myself)
    1. "Talk of the Servants" scene I pg 1 ln 1-pg 2 ln 16
    2. "The Count's a Rake" scene I pg 2 ln 17-pg 3 ln 72
    3. "Jewels" scene I pg 3 ln 73-pg 5 ln 127
    4. "Sackcloth and Ashes" scene II pg 6 ln 1-pg 8 ln 63
    5. "A Dozen Bottles of Wine" scene II pg 8 ln 64-pg 10 ln 125
    6. "Alessandra" scene III pg 10 ln 1-pg 12 ln 37
    7. "We'll have him at the Wedding" scene III pg 12 ln 38-pg 12 ln 67

8. "Lalage and Jacinta" scene IV pg 13 ln 1-pg 15 ln 73
9. "The Monk" scene IV pg 16 ln 74-pg 17 ln 112
10. "Father and Son" scene V pg 17 ln 1-pg 19 ln 45
11. "Politian and Baldazzar" scene V pg 19 ln 46-pg 20 ln 79
12. "Golden Grains" scene VI pg 20 ln 1-pg 22 ln 69
13. "The Voice" scene VI pg 22 ln 80-pg 24 ln 115
14. ADDED SCENE "Fair Alessandra"
15. "Love in the Garden" scene VII pg 24 ln 1-pg 27 ln 115
16. "Jacinta's Monologue" scene VIII pg 27 ln 1-pg 30 ln 90
17. "A Challenge" scene IX pg 31 ln 1-pg 32 ln 43
18. "The Duel" scene IX pg 32 ln 44-pg 34 ln 95
19. "The 'Death' of Ugo" scene X pg 34 ln 1-pg 37 ln 88
20. "Farewell my Hopes in Heaven" scene XI pg 39 ln 65
21. ADDED SCENE "Final Tableau"

B. Breakdown of Actions into Verbs (Characters are designated by the letters of their first name. This is useful because if one can diagram each line into a verb, one can ascertain the actor's motivation.)

**"Talk of the Servants"**

U questions  
B answers  
U observes  
B remarks  
U denies  
B accuses

**"The Count's a Rake"**

R explains  
B questions  
U interjects  
R questions  
B agrees  
R explains  
B concurs  
R observes  
B agrees  
R questions  
B replies  
U interjects  
R departs  
B departs

**"Jewels"**

U rises  
J enters  
U accuses  
J teases

U questions  
J answers  
U questions  
J counters  
U threatens  
J accuses  
U threatens

J coaxes  
U listens  
J taunts  
U agrees  
J mocks  
U questions  
J answers  
U flirts  
J returns  
U advances  
J reveals

**"Sackcloth and Ashes"**

S laughs  
C corrects  
S jokes  
C insists  
S questions  
S answers  
C yells  
S questions

C counter questions  
S replies  
C disagrees  
S sings  
C defends  
S taunts  
C laughs  
S agrees

**"A Dozen Bottles of Wine"**

C ponders  
U hesitates  
C demands  
U explains  
C curses  
U defends  
C asks  
U refuses  
C questions  
U refuses  
C questions  
U explains  
C demands  
U refuses  
C insists  
U explains  
C jests



**"Alessandra"**

A accuses  
C denies  
A persists  
C concedes  
A pursues  
C muses  
A nags  
C agrees  
A insists  
C placates  
A continues  
C agrees  
A accuses  
C daydreams  
A questions  
C refuses

**"We'll have him at the Wedding"**

D exclaims  
A questions  
D explains  
A teases  
D disagrees  
A ponders  
C argues  
D placates

**"Lalage and Jacinta"**

L wonders  
J replies  
L remarks  
J mocks  
L muses  
L asks  
J ignores  
L demands  
J ignores  
L insists  
J replies  
L asks  
J fumes  
L muses  
J returns  
L questions  
J ponders  
L inquires

J rebuffs

L defends

J abuses

L defends

J abuses

L recovers

**"The Monk"**

M encourages

L rebuffs

M pressures

L retorts

M affirms

L vows

M agrees

L demands

M recoils

L swears

M despairs

L threatens

M departs

**"Father and Son"**

C laughs

A questions

C muses

A concurs

C ponders

D questions

C answers

D questions

C explains

D agrees

C concurs

A agrees

C introduces

**"Politian & Baldazzar"**

C introduces

D welcomes

P falters

D questions

C compensates

B beckons

D wonders

B apologizes

D muses

B apologizes

D wonders

**"Golden Grains"**

B encourages

P refuses

B confesses

P sympathizes

B stirs

P despairs

B questions

P replies

B pleads

P ignores

B denies

P philosophizes

B worries

P explains

B denies

P insists

B agrees

P pursues

**"The Voice"**

V beckons

B wonders

V sings

B silences

P disagrees

B wonders

P urges

B pleads

V calls

B begs

B ignores

B begs

V calls

P muses

B concedes

P dismisses

**"Fair Alessandra"**

A nags

C sighs

A pursues

C counters

S lies

C follows

A protests

B greets

A urges

B reveals  
 A mutters  
 B flatters  
 A accepts  
 B questions  
 A reveals  
 B pushes  
 A reveals  
 B flirts  
 A withdraws  
 B questions  
 P reveals  
 B protests  
 P insists  
 B acquiesces  
**"Love in the Garden"**  
 P declares  
 L questions  
 P affirms  
 L denies  
 P falters  
 L questions  
 P falters  
 L pursues  
 P affirms  
 L rejoice  
 P questions  
 L avoids  
 P assures  
 L hopes  
 P soars  
 L demands  
 P complies  
 L wonders  
**"Jacinta's Monologue"**  
 R questions  
 B answers  
 J hurries  
 J scorns  
 J taunts  
 J counts  
 J mocks  
 J tells  
 J rages  
 J scorns  
 U fears

J threatens  
**"A Challenge"**  
 P worries  
 B delivers  
 P questions  
 B insists  
 P concedes  
 B explains  
 P wonders  
 B hints  
 P rages  
 B withdraws  
**"The Duel"**  
 C exclaims  
 P acknowledges  
 C baits  
 P challenges  
 C accepts  
 P swears  
 C falters  
 P advances  
 C pleads  
 P acknowledges  
 C begs  
 P pardons  
 C inquires  
 P rages  
 C protests  
 P threatens  
 C falls  
**"The 'Death' of Ugo"**  
 U plans  
 S plays  
 U pretends  
 S questions  
 U avoids  
 S questions  
 U misdirects  
 S remarks  
 U taunts  
 S proposes  
 U agrees  
 S explains  
 U taunts  
 S wins

**"Farewell my hopes in Heaven"**  
 P muses  
 L insists  
 P acquiesces  
 L demands  
 P swears  
**"Final Tableau"**  
 P advances  
 C falls  
 L despairs

#### IV. (CHARACTER ANALYSIS)

##### A. Politian

1. **Desires:** Politian originally wants purpose in life or death. He wants release from the ties of honor that bind him to the pressure of his aristocratic life. He doesn't just want purpose, he needs it to continue.
2. **Will:** Politian wills to fall in love with Lalage.
3. **Moral Stance:** Politian is the Romantic's natural man. He scorns the aristocracy and society to which he had been born. He values truth and kinship with Baldazzar. For him, love is pure; honor is not.
4. **Decorum:** From the talk that precedes him, the audience expects pomp and circumstance. Politian is disdainful of the ways of the court and scorns the officiousness of manners and duty.
5. **Adjectives:** Melancholy. Charismatic. Desperate. Torn. Lovestruck. Contemplative. Lost.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** Stranger in a strange land. He is bewildered and despairing of life.

##### B. Lalage

1. **Desires:** Revenge. Solace. Forgiveness. Lalage wants to escape. She wants answers for her current situation. She desires Castiglione or the death of him.
2. **Wills:** She wills herself to love Politian. She wills him to wreak her revenge upon Castiglione.
3. **Moral Stance:** She is a victim of love who has rejected God. She wants revenge, yet still worries about her soul in heaven. From her isolation, she seems to have lost sight of right and wrong.
4. **Decorum:** She's in a state of disarray both physically and mentally. She is distracted with Politian and is wildly passionate and then cold again.
5. **Adjectives:** Inconsistent. Excitable. Pitiable. Unstable. Unbalanced. Shrewd. Lovely. Forlorn. Victorious.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** Angry, helpless, and unloved.

##### C. Castiglione

1. **Desires:** wants desperately to forget Lalage. Wants to do the right thing. Desires to enjoy life.
2. **Will:** He wills himself to forget Lalage. Will himself to obey his father's command that he must marry one he doesn't love.
3. **Moral Stance:** Chooses hedonism and deliberate unawareness of his situation over honor and responsibility to Lalage. Accepts cowardice over honor.
4. **Decorum:** He is cocky one moment and unsure of himself the next. He is terse with the servants but is easily dominated by his father and Alessandra. He loses all composure and decorum in the end and falls to his knees, a true coward.
5. **Adjectives:** Arrogant. Lost. Torn. Hedonistic. Sinner. Villain. Victim.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** False composure.

#### D. Baldazzar

1. **Desires:** desires order and stability and above all, normalcy. He desires Politian to be in a more stable state.
2. **Will:** he wills himself to remain calm in a strange place while his only tie to home, Politian, is slowly losing it.
3. **Moral Stance:** Baldazzar has a rigid moral code and a strict sense of right and wrong. He is loyal and willing to do Politian's bidding.
4. **Decorum:** Maintains dignity and an air of propriety and good breeding at all costs.
5. **Adjectives:** Composed. Worried. Annoyed. Cunning. Deft. Follower.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** Officious and ambassador-like.

#### E. San Ozzo

1. **Desires:** Pleasure. Above all, San Ozzo desires to live life to its fullest and enjoy every last sinful drop of it. He desires to convert Castiglione to his views of living life.
2. **Will:** He wills Castiglione to make the choice between choosing a life of pleasure or the lady Lalage.
3. **Moral Stance:** San Ozzo is a hedonist. He is selfish and cares little for anyone other than himself.

4. **Decorum:** He is a fop. He is overly decorous and sweepingly graceful and charming. He is sexually attractive and concerned with how others see him. He is effeminate.
5. **Adjectives:** Ridiculous. Foolish. Effervescent. Genial. Smooth. Persuasive.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** Carefree.

#### F. Duke Di Broglio

1. **Desires:** Merriment and joviality. He wants the Lalage scandal to fade away. He wants his son to marry Alessandra. He wants recognition and the good esteem of others.
2. **Will:** He commands his son to marry Alessandra.
3. **Moral Stance:** Morally ambiguous. Doesn't seem to mind sacrificing Lalage for the betterment of his son. He doesn't necessarily seem concerned about the events or people around him.
4. **Decorum:** Decorum and good manners are everything to the Duke.
5. **Adjectives:** Superficial. Merry. Unconcerned. Unaware. Self-important.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** Excited about the upcoming wedding.

#### G. Jacinta

1. **Desires:** wants to advance her place in life. She wants revenge on those who have snubbed or mistreated her, i.e., Lalage, Ugo, the other servants. She wants money and power.
2. **Wills:** She willfully manipulates her mistress into giving her jewels and gifts. She wills Ugo to do her bidding.
3. **Moral Stance:** Jacinta will stop at nothing to get what she wants.
4. **Decorum:** Jacinta is haughty in some instances, servile in other situations. She can exude sexuality when it suits her.
5. **Adjectives:** Predatory. Scheming. Villainous. Manipulative. Sexual. Cunning. Social climber.
6. **Initial Character Mood:** Dissatisfied with her current situation.

#### H. Ugo

1. **Desires:** Jacinta. He desires to please his masters but do as little work as possible.

2. **Will:** He wills himself to serve his masters. He wills himself to be obedient.
  3. **Moral Stance:** Ugo is a simple creature with simple concepts of right and wrong.
  4. **Decorum:** Often inebriated, Ugo shuffles and bumbles about his life like a dumb, affable servant.
  5. **Adjectives:** Simple. Humble. Confused. Eager to please. Drunkard.
  6. **Initial Character Mood:** Inebriated.
- I. Alessandra
1. **Desires:** wants a respectable match, an agreeable husband, and advancement in her station in life.
  2. **Will:** She wills herself to marry a man who is in love with her bosom friend.
  3. **Moral Stance:** Doesn't seem to be concerned with much other than appearances and taste.
  4. **Decorum:** Refined. Dignified. Behaves as a lady should.
  5. **Adjectives:** Haughty. Cold. Cool. Collected. Shallow. Playful. Unhappy.
  6. **Initial Character Mood:** Annoyed.

### Casting Expectations 12/01/02

There are twelve characters in all, three women and nine men. Realistically, due to the composition of theatre groups everywhere, I knew that the chance of finding nine good men for the roles was slim. At auditions, as any amateur theatre person can tell you, for every male that tries out there are five females. Finding three capable, talented women at Colby would present no problem. Finding nine men who could act would be another matter. Unfortunately, *Politian*, like most plays written by men, has more male roles than female roles, making female actors a surplus and male actors a commodity.

I preemptively solved this problem by cutting the number of males needed to six by doubling up on roles. Doubling is a popular concept in the theatre world to give minor characters another role to explore. Oftentimes, doubling is also done for comedic effect. For example, the actor playing the jester doubles in his other role as the wise soothsayer.

I looked for the non-major male roles that didn't overlap within scenes and decided that the character playing the drunken fool Ugo could double as the monk, the Duke Di Broglio could double as the servant Rupert (Benito appears in a scene with the Duke so it was impossible for the Duke to play any other) and San Ozzo, the fop, could also play the humble servant Benito. My decision definitely put a burden on the men, who would have to learn more lines and be concerned with additional costume changes.

I needed two incredibly strong leads to carry the play, a poetic Politian and his nemesis, a mournful villain, Castiglione. The actor who played Politian needed charisma that an audience could respond to. Otherwise the final scene, Politian's monologue, would fall flat on its face and kill the end of the show. I knew there were slim hopes of finding an actor who actually looked a bit like Poe. But I was hopeful anyway.

Castiglione isn't a stock villain. The audience needs to feel a mix of revulsion and pity for this character by the time he falls to his knees in scene IX. He still cares deeply for the lady Lalage, and he struggles with himself to come to terms with his decision to desert her. However, he has a short temper with the Lady Alessandra and his father. I wanted somebody physically strong but with an air of vulnerability.

Politian and Castiglione need to have chemistry. In the beginning, when Castiglione is resolute, Politian must be weak. After scene nine, when the power shifts it is Politian who is triumphant over Castiglione. The two are always in opposition.

Castiglione would hold honor above everything, including love. Politian would throw honor down to tread on it. Politian's platonic, worshipful love for the Lady Lalage must be illuminated by the lustful passion that Castiglione had for her.

A chemistry needs to exist between the lead's and their confidants, the reasonable Baldazzar and the foppish San Ozzo. I imagined Baldazzar as the grim realist, who knows that he will always be the second fiddle, but who still remains constantly loyal to Politian. Baldazzar demands order, sense of duty, manners, and decency. San Ozzo is everything that Baldazzar isn't: the hedonist with a love of flair and show. He cares for the finer things and the shirking of responsibility. Baldazzar is a calming influence on Politian; San Ozzo is a destructive force on Castiglione. The most important part an audience needs to sense about these two actors is that they are nothing without the leads.

Someone with a flair for comedy is needed for the Ugo/Monk role. The actor who plays the drunkard must be convincing to the audience of his inebriated state. He also needs to be dominating and serious as the monk.

The Duke of Broglio/Rupert role needs to be played by an actor with a grand stage presence. Somebody who was attractive, yet clueless was perfect for this role.

Whereas I was worried about finding men for all of these roles, I knew that there would be no trouble finding women. Alessandra, though a minor character, requires a deft touch to make her character believable, detestable, and pitiable. I was hoping for a girl with a shrill voice, who was charming in one breath and vicious in the next. Poe's Alessandra is but a character sketch, and the actress who plays her will need to have good acting instincts to make some strong intuitive choices regarding the role.



For the role of Jacinta, the conniving maid, I wanted an actress who was comfortable being a female villain. The actress must be able to support her monologue in scene viii. But above all, she has to be physically appealing to an audience and overtly sexual in her role. The “jewels” exchanged between her and Ugo is a sexually charged scene, and the actress needs to be comfortable with her body and the idea of sexual suggestion.

I believe that Poe intended Lalage to be a courageous, virtuous, victim, but I think that he overdid it and her dialogue borders on soap opera melodrama. The actress playing this part has to realize the weakness of this dialogue and overcome it. The audience must identify with Lalage. I need somebody strong and courageous who is eerie, vulnerable and cunning. Lalage isn't just a victim; she is a cunning manipulator in later scenes.

I was worried about the turnout of the auditions because so many of the talented sophomore and junior actors and actresses left during Jan Plan for the theatre program in London, which made them ineligible for *Politian*. Also many of the veteran senior actors took Jan Plan off. I was afraid of having to rely on inexperienced freshmen to carry the performance.

### **Auditions**

Surprisingly, I had a fantastic turnout, about 40-50 students overall, a good mix of class years and experience too. I had the women read scene iv, a heated interaction between Lalage and Jacinta. The men read the Politian and Baldazzar exchange about the phantom voice from scene vii. It was no trouble to find a Baldazzar, as there were

plenty of dependable males; however, I chose Michael H., whom I had worked with previously and knew to be a fantastic actor. He was also the sole person to pronounce Politian's name correctly. Every other actor opted for the pronunciation of politician.

Jon A., a senior actor who was known for being solid in character roles, was a perfectly believably drunk and, having worked with him before, I knew that if things went badly during rehearsals, he was great at boosting cast moral.

For the role of the Duke/Rupert I did not have as much luck as I had hoped. For the Duke, I was hoping for someone who had stage presence. I saw none. I settled on Peter B, a good public speaker. To be honest, I picked Peter because he was tall, attractive and arrogant, which I thought would be a good pick for the Duke. I figured that Peter could just act natural to accomplish the character of the Duke.

The search for San Ozzo was even more difficult than the finding of a Duke. Nobody struck me as particularly attractive or smooth. There were three males who were passable and I settled on a first year student, Steven W., who spoke too fast but had good movement on stage.

Cameron D., a rugby player who acted in his spare time, became my Castiglione. He was a huge physical presence who cut a smart, imposing figure on stage. Cameron had prior acting experience and an excellent, smooth manner of speaking Poe's dialogue.

Neil R. was one of the last people to audition, and I was frantic that I wouldn't have a play because I had no Politian. I knew Neil from the Colby Improv troupe and thought him a hilarious comic but not necessarily an actor. However, his voice, pitch, tone, intonations and pauses were fantastic, everything I wanted in a lead actor. And the creepiest part was, that Neil actually looks like Edgar Allan Poe.

For the three female roles, I had twenty girls who would easily have been able to do justice to Alessandra or Jacinta. I settled on Christiana S. for Alessandra because her voice was shriller than the others. For Jacinta, a decision I went back and forth on for days, I chose Andrea P., a sophomore I had seen the previous semester in *Twelve Angry Men*. I remembered being really impressed with her vocal range and presence, but mostly I remembered the way she stood with her hand on her hip. Although she wasn't particularly venomous or sexual in the audition, I figured that would be easy enough to remedy given some time.

Jeanine D. had never done theatre at Colby prior to last semester, when I convinced her to try out for dinner theatre. She got the lead and was an absolute natural. However, she had never acted in anything serious and moreover, she was one of my closest friends, and it's really considered gauche to give the lead to your friend simply because she is your friend. The truth was, I didn't see another actress who could pull off Lalage. There was some grumbling amongst the theatre crowd because I cast her. However, I knew that she would take the part, make it her own, and eventually devastate the audience on opening night.

Three days after the auditions, my stage manager, Rachel D., hung up the cast list. I was apprehensive that Neil or Mike, having seen the roles they received, might refuse them because I thought that Mike wanted the lead and that Neil thought the play too sophomoric. All actors accepted and I moved forward with a cast of nine: five seniors, one junior, two sophomores, and one first year. All but one had had previous acting experience at Colby with at least one show to their resume, four had two or more Colby shows under their belt, and two, had held leading roles in other productions.

## **First Impressions**

I felt fairly confident going into our first read through. I arrived armed with a personalized actor's handbook for each person, and felt that I was making the right first impression. I think as a director, it's important to get that notion of a crazy and disorganized, brilliant, creative force of a director out of their minds right away.

A Powder and Wig Officer, Andrew V., who was also our show's technical head, came and spoke about contracts and performing in the cellar theatre. After he was done, Rachel explained her role as a stage manager. Essentially, she was second in command below the director and made sure that all actors came to rehearsal, and she communicated and facilitated our business with the technical side of our production. Come tech week, the stage manager's job was to take over to run cues and all technical aspects while the director's job was to sit mute in the audience and hope everything would be okay.

The actor's broke for dinner, and while they were eating I gave my spiel about my senior scholars project, the difficulty of this play, the unfinished quality of the dialogue and the characters, and their responsibilities as actors. I leveled with them: I was going to need a lot of help making this play work. I told them to have a great break and come back in January with their lines memorized.

## **Costumes and Set**

Costumes and set are as integral to a play as the acting. Because theatre, which comes from the Greek *theatron*, or "seeing place," focuses primarily on the appeal to the

visual senses, costumes and set are critical. They can engage, distract, bore, or confuse an audience and must be appropriate for the characters and the mood of the play.

*Politian* is a period piece with period costumes and period scenery. To do it justice one would need to see the period costumes. The only problems with period costuming are the expensive nature of such costumes and the small fact that I didn't know in what part of the sixteenth century *Politian* was set. Poe had left few clues, so that even Mabbott, who discovered a reference to Columbus in scene vi, could only surmise that it was set sometime in the sixteenth century.

Possible styles ranged from the late, religious medieval look to the Renaissance age of elaborate costuming for both men and women. This was both daunting and exciting to me as I realized since Poe had left no indication it was solely up to me to select the look for *Politian*.

The most obvious feeling I sensed from Poe's characters was stiffness and struggle to be free. They were buttoned-up emotionally and restrained by a society with a strict moral code. I wanted a look of grandeur and opulence that also suggested isolation within themselves. The characters needed to be swallowed up by their costumes.

The most authoritative texts, compiled by Yarwood, provided both histories of costume and detailed pictures. I decided on the year 1570 for my costumes because of the big, elaborate look that seemed to stifle both men and women. Another sign I took to be an indication that I was on the right track was a picture I found of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in 1570. Obviously, the English costuming of *Politian* and *Baldazzar* would need to contrast with that of the Italian nobility and serving class.

Contrary to how I felt as a modern-day person looking back on what I considered to be restrictive dress, the Italians were actually quite relaxed in their dress as compared with the English, French, Spanish, and German. According to Yarwood, the Italians echoed the Spanish style as King Phillip of Spain ruled over most of Italy, except in Rome, where *Politian* is set. Even so, the papal state favored an interpretation of the Spanish style, opting for “rich and bright colours, silks and satins in luxurious Italian fabrics, which presented a glowing Neapolitan version of Spain, full of life, gaiety, insouciance and completely lacking the austere dignity of the Spanish prototype” (see Figure 4.1) (Yarwood 127).

During the Renaissance, Italians were interested in the celebration of the human form. Women wore corsets that flattered the hourglass style of their bodies, while men sported doublets that also accentuated their forms. Italian women preferred petticoats to farthingales. Both undergarments give a pleasant full bell-shaped curve to their dresses; however, farthingales are more restrictive and not nearly as easy to put on as simple petticoats. Women opted for lower cut necklines or a standing collar rather than the tight, ruffled collars worn by the English and Spanish, which most likely hid the gracefulness of a beautiful neck (see Figure 4.2). Jewelry was tastefully chosen with the purpose of flattering the bosom (see Figure 4.3). As for their hair, women wore elaborate braids, often held together by pearl caps.

“The masculine silhouette was slender and elegant” (Yarwood 127). Men’s ruffs, doublets, sleeves, and trunk hose were tailored to fit the form, not alter it. They often wore velvet hats with plumes and favored cloaks (see Figure 4.4). “Ruffs were small, padding and whalebone in the seams non-existent or kept to a minimum, trunk hose

easily fitting and of medium length, doublet naturally waisted and sleeves fitting” (Yarwood 127).

Finding dress for the Italian nobility was not a problem; the servant class however, proved much more difficult because most people don’t care how the servants lived. I met with Colby’s Costume Shop Designer, Lisa C., who suggested that in general the servants would have worn fashions from earlier years, as they would have gratefully accepted the castoff fashions of their lords and ladies. Men breeches would have been practical and loose fitting. No ruffs or doublets would have been worn. The servant women would have worn simple, lace-up dresses that would have imitated those of their ladies. The main differences would have been that they would have forgone petticoats, as they would have been cumbersome and the lace-up portion of the dress would have been in the front because they would have had to do it themselves. Proper ladies would have had their lacing in the back, as they had servants who could lace up the ties for them.

The fashion in Britain varied greatly from that in Italy. Politian and Baldazzar, the Earl of Leicester and the Duke of Surrey, respectively, would have forgone the comfort enjoyed by Italian nobility and worn tight-fitting doublets with breaches, also known as “pumpkin pants,” short fabric pants filled with stuffing and whalebone lining to give them their full, ballooning appearance; the length would vary, but most appeared to have been cut just above or just below the knee (see Figure 4.5). Collars were worn tight about the throat and were stiff with whalebone lining to keep their shape (see Figures 4.6-4.7).

In de Marly's *Fashion for Men*, where I found a passage concerning Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester from 1575, of which de Marly's inscription reads "Englishmen wore their Queen's colours in honour of her constant virtue, so that Leicester's satin suit is white and his gown black. The codpiece begins to disappear into the expanding trunk hose" (39).

I had found prototypes, information, and pictures for my characters, but the question was, did these costumes exist and could my budget from Powder and Wig cover these costs, or would I have to compromise artistic authenticity for budgetary concerns?

To my surprise, Colby's collection provided me with costumes for all three Italian women, the two English gentlemen, the three servants, and the monk. To achieve the desired effect of the male Italian nobility I had to rent the three costumes needed for the Duke, his son the Count, and the fop, San Ozzo.

Alessandra (see Figures 4.9-4.11) – the costume of Alessandra needed to be sumptuous and elegant to fit her noble air and blood connections. For her, Lisa C. found a gold dress from a past Colby production of *The Phantom Lady*. The dress was a close match of the dress in the Villa Giulia (see figure?). It even had the right waist cut, sleeves, shoulder padding, and collar for the period.

Lalage (see Figures 4.12-4.14) – For Lalage I wanted something black to signify her departure from society and the mourning associated with her departure. We found the dress used by the actress who used the gold dress in *The Phantom Lady*, who also wore a black mourning dress in the same style as the gold to mourn the loss of her husband. The black ensemble was perfect because it matched the period as well as the gold dress. The dress also featured a neckline buttoned all the way to the throat to signify



mourning. Its starkness and puritanical look contrasted nicely with the decadence and suggestiveness of Alessandra's gold ensemble.

Politian (see Figures 4.15-4.16)– The colors of the costume picked by Lisa were compatible with de Marly's description of the Earl of Leicester. The black of the jacket contrasted nicely with the white undershirt and the silver detail work on the costume was striking. The collar and the sleeves were a more muted cream because too much white on stage could blind an audience member. On the actor, the pants sagged considerably and needed to be altered.

Baldazzar – (see Figures 4.16a-4.17) the rich browns for this costume were well suited for the character of Baldazzar. The lace on the front of the jacket was consistent with Politian's jacket and the two were compatible on stage. Baldazzar's ruff and cape were purposefully less spectacular than Politian's, because his personality is more subdued than Politian's. The actor was apprehensive about wearing short pants, so Lisa made his pants and Politian's cut just below the knee rather than above it.

Jacinta – (see Figure 4.18) the color green, as noted by Sam Atkinson, the director of the movie *Great Expectations*, is the color of sexuality. I wanted something green that was suggestively low cut and hugged the curves of the actress's body. The dress worn by Jacinta needs to be a weapon in her arsenal.

The servants – (see Figures 4.19-4.21) Lisa helped me find an ensemble of maroons, oranges, browns, and greens for the servant. Benito and Rupert wore lace-up shirts underneath their tunics to lend a sense of dignity to their characters because they are revered servants. Benito wore the maroon tunic with silver piping and slightly worn sleeves while Rupert donned the orange ensemble with torn sleeves. Both looked like

royalty next to Ugo's costume. The pants and shirt were grossly exaggerated in length and bulk so that the actor needed to wear a fat suit to fill out the stomach. The colors, brown for the pants and shirt with green accents, matched the costume of his romantic interest, Jacinta. Ugo's entire costume was purposefully poorly made and suggested an all around incapability and ridiculousness. It was also larger than life and allowed the actor the leeway for an over-the-top performance.

The Monk (see Figure 4.22) – The monk had such a small role that we opted for the traditional chestnut colored robe with a hood. Poe wasn't specific and referred to the monk as priest and holy man. It was easy for the actor, who also played Ugo, to slip the large, shapeless robe over his servant's ensemble for a costume change.

Lisa had warned me ahead of time that renting costumes is a crapshoot; depending on the selection, even the most reputable of places can still send you unusable, decrepit costumes. Colby uses The Costume Shoppe in New York to rent for faculty productions that they are unable to build costumes for due to time or monetary constraints. We faxed Colby's contact in New York the Yarwood pictures (see Figures 4.23-4.28) with color preferences. When the costumes finally came in, costing about three hundred dollars including estimated dry cleaning costs, we were amazed at the excellent condition and quality.

The Duke (see Figures 4.23-4.24) - We requested deep royal purples or crimsons. They sent us a magnificent light colored green, which tied in wonderfully with the green of the servants' costumes.

Count Castiglione (see Figures 4.25-4.26) – Definitely the most impressive costume in the show. The count's costume was composed of an iridescent blue pants

ensemble with a black top and a stunning gold cloak. This costume seemed made for its actor, who was broad in the shoulders with a big chest.

San Ozzo (see Figure 4.27-4.28) – The only costume I had mild concerns with was the brown number that San Ozzo was to wear. It reminded me of a bullfighter's costume without the bull. It felt too Spanish in style, and the cape looked more like a 1970's shag carpet than a royal cloak. Nevertheless, the actor wore it quite well. Lisa added white lace to the bottom of the pants and the cuffs of the shirt to make it appear more effeminate.

While I had full input on the costumes, I realized my limitations when it came to the set and deferred all decisions to my stage manager, Rachel, and my actor Jon, who were currently taking a set design course and were interested in the cellar.

The cellar space is considered a black box theatre as it is small, box-like, and black. Rachel and Jon decided that since I had decided to direct *Politian* in a theatre in the round style (a style that permits audiences to sit on all sides of the space and see actors from all angles), they would use minimal props or furniture that might potentially block an audience member's view, and opted instead for paint. My one stipulation is that I wanted the cellar to look bigger. Because I had given so much space to the audience, it left my actors looking cramped.

To start they painted the cellar an off-white cream color. The lightness of the hue made the cellar appear bigger than it actually is. To further enhance the effect of the size, Rachel devised a maroon and cream checkerboard pattern for the floor; consistent with research she did on 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian palazzos (see Figures 5.1-5.2). Instead of making

each tile the usual 12x12 dimension, she made them 10x10 so that there were more squares on the floor creating the desired effect of more space.

Rachel and Jon decided that the set should look like the inside of the Duke's palazzo, so the floor design was consistent with their plan. They painted crimson arches on each wall, also keeping in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century style of incorporating geometrical arches in the interior of the house. The two entranceways, they flanked with thick red fabric curtains, tied back with gold cords. The cellar was transformed into a world of reds and creams, which echoed a royal palazzo, and would surely impress an audience used to the black void of the cellar.

### The Sound

The final element missing from the technical aspect of *Politian* was the music. Poe didn't write any sound cues, so we didn't have to worry about any sounds or music within the play itself. But opening and closing music are important. Though the audience may not realize it, the opening music is often a musical preview of what is to come. The closing music should offer an end as audiences thoughtfully shuffle out. I also opted for intermission music, which is the easiest way to signal the start of an intermission to an audience.

For the opening, intermission, and closing music, I eventually settled on spoken selections of Poe, read mostly without the effect of music in the background. I wanted to create a void. I didn't necessarily want the audience to hear each word but rather snippets of words like "death," "love," and "soul."

The Opening Music:

1. "Ullalume," performed by Jeff Buckley. Background music with strings, as Buckley's breathy voice reads one of Poe's poetic tributes to a dead woman. Buckley's voice rises and falls in pitch and intensity.
2. "The Raven," read by Christopher Walken. On opening night, I listened as several audience members realized that Walken with his dead, monotonous voice was reading Poe's most famous poem.
3. "A Dream within a Dream." Because I downloaded all musical selections from a secondary source, some of them did not credit the artist. This selection was chosen to give audience members the required time to get to their seats.
4. "Alone," read by Basil Rathbone. Rathbone made his career on performing Poe. This selection was played as the lights went out and then came up again on the first scene. The audience had no choice but to listen, and I wanted them to hear and remember these words of Poe: From childhood's hour I have not been/As others were/I have not seen/As others saw/I could not bring/My passions from a common spring/From the same source I have not taken/My sorrow; I could not awaken/My heart to joy at the same tone;/And all I loved, I loved alone.

#### Intermission Music:

1. "Annabel Lee," read by Marianne Faithfull. This selection is played as the lights come up signaling intermission. The beginning is loud and musical, which helps rouse an audience.
2. "The Masque of the Red Death." An uncredited male artist reads Poe's short story in its entirety. In some ways, this story symbolizes the character Politian for me. Like

the Red Death, he comes into the palace, a foreign body, and brings about the death of the prince (or in Politian's case, the Count).

Closing Music:

1. "Spirits of the Dead." The beginning of this poem actually has funereal tones, which I thought was perfect, for the play ends with the death of Castiglione.
- 2 & 3. "The City in the Sea," and "The Bells." These final two selections are for the people who take too long to file out. I picked these two rather arbitrarily because I knew most people wouldn't listen to them. I like the cadence of these poems, and that's why I decided to close the show with them.

### **The Director's Notes: Rehearsal Process 1/6/03-1/22/03**

It's a frightening thought that there are only eleven days before *Politian* begins tech. Eleven days of rehearsal to pull together eleven fragmented scenes with dialogue problems. I've scheduled the actors in one-hour scene blocks. Additionally, Neil, Jeanine, and Andrea are scheduled alone to run their monologues with the stage manager.

1/6/03. 4-5pm with Jon, Peter, Steve for scene i. This is one of Poe's weaker scenes. It is stagnant, wordy, and too overblown for an opening scene. However, it is crucial as an exposition scene as the audience learns the history of Castiglione and Lalage. The one bright spot about this scene is the drunken servant, Ugo. If Jon works the timing of this scene, the audience will enjoy the comedy of it. The three actors arrive and I explain that this scene is an opening expository scene. I let them run it first without any interruptions so that they can get used to each other. After the first run, I give a few

tips about speaking more slowly. For blocking, I have two of them seated on three staggered stools. Peter will enter and sit on the third stool. By the third run, Jon has the timing down perfectly for the drunk. It's Steve and Peter who are floundering. Pretend that you're sitting in a bar talking about a buddy of yours who is in trouble with his girl, is the note I give them. They loosen up a little bit and all in all it's not bad for a first run through.

1/6/03 6-7pm with Jeanine and Neil for scene vii. I envision the love scene on a bench in the garden, because the boughs in the wind disturb Lalage. This scene also has some of the blatantly over sentimental lines in the entire play, and it will be difficult to convey any real semblances love between Politian and Lalage. It's always awkward to ask actors to do love scenes anyway. Jeanine and Neil were neighbors during their sophomore year, and they're both being good sports about doing a kiss at the end. I have them run the scene two or three times before I interrupt. The chemistry between them is good and they read well as a pair on stage. However, I can tell they're both a bit uncomfortable, so I ask them to run it again as overly dramatic as possible. It reads like a soap opera and they both end up laughing, and after that the two of them are more comfortable with each other. I'm still not sure how this scene needs to be played. I'm not sure as which character is in control and which character is being led by the other.

1/6/03 7-8pm with Cameron, Mike, and Neil for scene ix. The beginning of this scene between Politian and Baldazzar is written well, but the lines for the duel ("I'll taunt thee villain!" and "Draw and prate no more") are absolutely laughable, maybe even worse than the lines for the love scene. What I don't want is an overly dramatic taunting brawl between the two characters. I want the audience to feel that there is something at

stake here between these two. Neil and Mike have a great dynamic. Mike yields the stage to Neil and Neil takes control, which is how the scene should play between Politian and Baldazzar. Neil and Cameron are less comfortable and aren't sure how to play the duel scene yet.

1/6/03 8-9 with Cameron, Christiana, and Peter for scene iii. This scene is designed to show the tension between Castiglione and his betrothed, Alessandra. I see Christiana's Alessandra circling Castiglione while she makes her accusations about his appearance and gambling habits. I want her to be vicious, yet refined. The key moment of this scene comes when Castiglione is daydreaming and lets slip the name of Lalage. This frightens Alessandra who puts her hand on his shoulder. Castiglione, startled at being touched, roughly brushes her off and in sweeps Peter in the Duke role. I want Peter to act larger than life. Totally oblivious to the quarreling, disastrous pair, the Duke comes with a piece of expository news: Politian is coming to Rome.

1/7/03 4-5pm with Cameron, Christiana, Mike, Neil, and Peter for scene v. I want this scene to play out like a power struggle between the Italian nobles and the English nobles. However, even though the Italians have home court advantage, they are outclassed and trumped by Politian and Baldazzar. The first part of the scene is slow with Cameron giving a big expository speech about meeting Politian. Neil and Mike have brief but key roles as Politian and Baldazzar. I can't figure out how to block this scene without obscuring the view of the audience since the men, especially Peter, are tall. Everything looks and feels unnatural about this scene.

1/7/03 6-7pm with Mike and Neil for scene vi. I am interested in relationships within *Politian*. The strongest bond, I think, exists between Politian and Baldazzar.



Baldazzar is a guide and a resource for Politian, who seems to be faltering. What's nice about working with Neil and Mike is that they always come ready to work and are very serious about getting their scenes right. This is an incredibly wordy scene, but Mike and Neil are working on a dynamic between their characters that will make the audience forget the wordiness. I'm not sure how to block this scene quite yet. I see Poltian sitting at first and then rising, but I'm not sure where I want Baldazzar to be.

1/7/03 7-8pm with Andrea, Jeanine, and Jon for scene iv. This entire scene rests on Jeanine's Lalage. The confrontation with Andrea's Jacinta and later her quarrel with Jon's monk are a critical moment; however, Jeanine must carry this scene. The first part of the scene reads like a monologue as Lalage cryptically recounts stories of love gone wrong. The audience needs to pity her but not hate her weakness as a character. Right now, Jeanine is playing it like a bad soap opera drama queen with tears in her voice. I want it to sound stronger, more resilient. Andrea is afraid to be mean to Jeanine during her confrontation about the jewels. Andrea has a great stage presence, she really knows how to work the areas of the stage. I think it would look best if Jeanine were seated and Andrea circled her. Jon's monk is perfect: understated, overblown in other parts. Jeanine needs to be more firm with him.

1/7/03 8-9pm with Jon and Steve for scene x. We've decided as a cast to leave this scene in and hope that Jon and Steve can convey the comedy here. I think Jon should be laid out on a bench so that he looks like he's in a casket. This leaves the movement of most of the scene on Steve. Steve talks too fast, but I am hoping that movement on the stage will slow him down. I let Steve and Jon play around with the scene for the full hour

because I'm not sure how to make this scene work yet. It doesn't seem very funny or relevant to me yet. I'm sure something will come.

1/8/03 4-5pm with Andrea and Jon for scene i. This scene is about action and movement. It's a sexual courtship dance between Ugo and Jacinta. It's one they've done before. They are callous and brutal with each other. I want Jon and Andrea to fight with each other for the audience's attention. This scene needs physical contact. I've already spoken to both actors separately about the sexuality and the physical contact of this scene. Jon is fine with it, though he's nervous about grabbing Andrea during the first part of the scene. Andrea isn't excited about Jon staring openly at her breasts, but she's willing to work with it. I told her if anything doesn't feel right, we'd stop and change it. Jon is a really great guy to work with and makes Andrea feel comfortable from the start. The two seem to really enjoy bullying each other on the stage.

1/8/03 6-7pm with Jeanine, Mike, and Neil for scene vi. The three of these actors take things incredibly seriously. It makes the scene go faster and smoother. The Mike and Neil relationship is growing stronger on stage and looks wonderful. I have very few notes for them as their characters are just evolving naturally. Jeanine has a small singing role here but for now she is just speaking it. There are several ways to go on the blocking. At first I tried Jeanine entering so that Poltian can see her but Baldazzar cannot. It looks funny though, especially because she is wearing a blue cloak that covers her and makes a lot of noise. It doesn't look right. Then I try her not coming on at all, but she sounds muffled offstage. I really need to think about this one.

1/8/03 7-8pm with Cameron and Steve for scene ii. I asked that all actors be off book prior to the 6<sup>th</sup>. However, Cameron and Steve both have scripts in their hands. This

irks me, especially Cameron, who has done five of the eleven scenes before. I cut Steve slack because he's in another play. I remind them that our first full run through of the play is on Sunday. This scene is the first glimpse of Castiglione, though he has been discussed previously by the servants. I want Cameron to be despondent and resigned, sitting off to the side. Steve will have to carry with movement as he does in scene x.

1/8/03 8-9pm with Cameron and Jon for scene ii. This scene is rather brief for Jon; he's gotten so good at playing a fool that any scene for him is easy. Cameron has a monologue at the end, two actually, one is about honor the other is about San Ozzo. He's not off book for either of them. This worries me.

1/9/03 4-5pm with Cameron, Mike, and Neil for scene vi. Neil and Mike are great; they've begun picking up on each other's speech patterns and movements, and they are now reacting to each other instead of just spewing their lines. Cameron and Neil are still stiff for the duel scene. We are trying different vocal ranges, but everything sounds fake so far; it's still early in the rehearsal process, though. I think whatever eventually evolves will be the right thing. I think Neil has the beginning and the end down. Cameron's speech on his knees still seems unnatural.

1/9/03 6-7pm with Mike and Neil for scene vi. Really, we're just fine tuning the movement here. Both actors have fantastic instincts. Watching this scene makes me feel better about our run on Sunday.

1/9/03 7-8pm with Jeanine and Neil for scene vii. God bless Jeanine and Neil. I've cut some of the worst lines, and then they have both dropped ones that don't work for them. Watching this scene makes me realize that there needs to be an intermediate scene between Politian hearing Lalage and the wooing scene. The love scene still feels a

bit comical in parts, but both of them are working toward a serious end. Jeanine's speech about America is coming along nicely. Tonight we choreographed two near kisses into the scene, although I think we may cut one. Both actors seem pretty comfortable with the physical contact.

1/9/03 8-9pm with Andrea, Jeanine, and Jon for scene iv. The monk and Lalage confrontation is looking so much better now that we've gotten Jeanine to play it less as a victim and more as a villain. It's more creepy and intense when Jeanine pulls the knife from her dress now. Andrea still needs to let loose her wrath a bit more. She's still too timid and gentle with Jeanine's Lalage. I let Jon and Andrea go early so that I can work this scene with Jeanine. Her monologue is too languishing and slow. It's not her fault, it's more the dialogue, but it still needs to be fixed. I'm trying to get a more determined Lalage with revenge on her mind rather than Lalage the victim. I don't want to compromise Poe's character; however, as a victim, Lalage reads unsympathetic on stage. I hope I'm just not modernizing Lalage so that she is a post-feminist heroine, but as she stands, no audience will want to watch her mope and carry on the way she does.

1/12/03 7-9pm first run of *Politian*. Tonight's run was a disaster, as I had expected but had still hoped otherwise. It kills me that certain actors (Peter, Steve, and Cameron) are still using their scripts. Our show opens in nine days and I have actors reading from their scripts. It kills me. I wanted tonight to be a serious run-through but everyone laughed through the love scene and duel scene. Neil got angry and stopped the scene and asked everybody to kindly shut up. I can't say that I disagreed with him. I took notes and was quiet during rehearsal when I got home I waited three hours before sending out notes. I criticize nearly every scene for voice control, pace, memorization,

interaction. Scenes i, ii, iii, v, and x are disastrous, it's as if I never did scene work with them. I tried to keep a light tone but I came off more sarcastic than I had meant. I think I was too hard on them, but I feel I had made an important point: if they don't want to look stupid come opening night, then they might want to stop acting stupid during rehearsals.

1/13/03 4-5pm with Jon, Peter, and Steve for scene i. The three actors run the scene once and then I dismiss Jon because his character is solid (plus he is designing the show's set and he is needed elsewhere). Peter and Steve are angry with me for coming down on them for not knowing their lines. They're both still on script. Something feels stagnant with this scene and we decide to have Peter remain seated, Jon will stay on the floor, and Steve will walk around the audience as he recounts the misery of Castiglione and Lalage. This is critical information for the audience, it is the background of this show and right now it sounds garbled and incoherent. It's tough to make Peter understand that he can't just regurgitate the story of Castiglione and Lalage. The story he tells must be interesting so that an audience will listen. Right now he's just spewing it out, and I suspect this has more to do with the fact that he's still reading off a script. Steve is still talking too quickly and we've started working outside of rehearsal in the dorm to slow him down.

1/13/03 6-7pm with Jeanine and Neil for scene vii and xi. Both actors are angry about last night's run. They both worked really hard to make the scene work and having their fellow actors laugh at them didn't help. We cut out one kiss and leave the near kiss at the end. We tone down the declaration of love a little. To get their minds off of last night, I suggest that we work on the last scene. Neil isn't ready with his monologue,

which is fine because it is incredibly long and I'd rather see something finished than fragmented anyway, so we just work on the small, but integral exchange at the end. The movement of Jeanine sweeping on in her black skirt and grabbing Neil looks dramatically interesting but the dialogue doesn't work. I promise to go home and work on it. The actors are right: the show is still missing something.

1/13/03 7-8pm with Cameron and Neil for scene ix. We run the duel scene once and then I dismiss Neil to go work on his monologue. Cameron and I exchange words about memorizing lines and coming to rehearsal prepared. He comments that I'm being too negative. My problem, I tell him, is that I don't think he's putting in any effort during rehearsal. This conversation clears the air between us and now Cameron is ready to work. We run all of his monologues again and again. The one at the end of the duel isn't working but the two in scene ii are looking better. Scene v is almost there but not quite.

1/13/03 8-9pm with Cameron, Christiana, and Peter for scene iii. This scene looks horrible. They know it and I know it. Peter is just too tall and he blocks Christiana and Cameron. He is still using a script. We rearrange the blocking but the scene still looks bad and I'm frustrated with the sheer awkwardness of the actors.

1/13/03 9-10pm with Cameron and Jon for scene ii. This scene is looking much better now that Cameron's monologue is more polished. We change Jon's movement so that it is more open to the audience.

1/14/03 I cancel rehearsal for the evening because I'm sick and the actors need a break from me and each other.

1/15/03 4-5pm with Andrea and Jon for scenes i and viii. The intensity of the chemistry between these two is remarkable. When Jon grabs Andrea in the end of scene i it really feels to an observer that something important is at stake. We choreographed the final few lines of scene viii. Andrea seems a little reluctant about striking Jon, which is understandable because she's never had any kind of stage combat instruction. Jon and I go through the premise of stage fighting with her. The one who receives the blow is always in charge, although it always looks otherwise to an audience member. I show her how I make eye contact with Jon as I go to strike him. She watches my hand come up against his chest and he pretends to stagger from the blow when in reality all I've done is apply pressure to him. We add five blows to the scenes and slowly go through them. We run the sequence a dozen times until Andrea feels comfortable going through them at a faster rate. To an audience member it looks as though she slugs Jon in the chest, then pushes him on the right shoulder to throw him off balance, then another blow to the chest, a swing and miss as Jon ducks a blow at his head and the final push to his back that sends him off stage.

1/15/03 6-7pm with Jeanine, Mike, and Neil for scene vi. We run the scene twice and I make one small adjustment to a gesture that Mike makes during Neil's speaking. One doesn't want to over direct a scene because there comes a point in scene work where you've made a scene as tight as it can be and after you've hit that point you can only run the scene into the ground. So I let Mike go early so I can work with Jeanine and Neil.

1/15/03 7-8pm with Jeanine and Neil for scene xi. Both actors are anxious about the last scene and how it looks. Something still feels unfinished about it. I have an idea then to write a final scene using Lalage's dialogue from the previous scene. It starts to

form in my head as they run the scene over and over again: a final tableau followed by Lalage's farewell to Castiglione and her hopes in Heaven.

1/15/03 8-9pm with Cameron and Neil for scene ix. This is my last rehearsal block with these two actors, alone, for this critical scene. Neither one of them seem necessarily into it. So I throw out the question: are you really listening to each other's lines? Do you hear them? Are your lines reactions to what's being said or are you just reacting because it's your turn to speak? They look insulted, of course they are listening to each other. So prove it, I say. Switch roles. Cameron is now Politician and Neil is now Castiglione. They just stare at me. I don't say a word. They sigh and begin the scene. They surprise me and each other when they hit each other's line pitch perfectly. They become excited and start to do their best Kenneth Brannagh and make fun of the way the other delivers his lines. Neil is especially good at mocking Cameron's accents on certain words. When it's over, they look smugly at me. Good, I tell them. Now go back to your own roles and make it that good. The scene runs a lot tighter, though something still is lacking from Cameron.

1/16/03 Second full run through. I'll admit, I'm expecting a lot from my actors. After the first abysmal run through and then a week of solid, productive rehearsals, I'm hoping for a better performance than I saw last time. I'm not sure what it is, but apparently everything I worked to fix over the week has gone out the window again. After the run is over, I sit them down and say very seriously, this is unacceptable. We have one more run through before we start technical integration. When tech starts, there is no acting; the actor becomes a chess piece that the lighting operative moves about.



The show is in shambles, I say, and I get to sit in the audience. It's you who will look stupid on stage. I'll see you on Sunday. Come ready to work.

1/19/03. We're missing a scene, two actually. I had already worked one out in my head, the final tableau that would depict the death of Castiglione. But there is another one missing: Poe didn't give us a scene between Politian hearing the voice and Politian wooing Lalage. Over the weekend, while I had some distance from the actors, I began to think about a transition scene. I've always wanted to explore Alessandra more. In the first scene, she is described as the "bosom friend of the fair Lady Lalage." How does she feel about Lalage's isolation? Does she care? Politian is too high profile to ask her about this but Baldazzar isn't. Maybe Politian has Baldazzar go to Alessandra to find out what she knows. Politian's objective is the delivery of love letters to Lalage, but he doesn't know how to get them to her without causing notice in the palazzo. I think Baldazzar finds out from Alessandra that Jacinta, who tends to Lalage, is not kept sequestered like her mistress and that Jacinta can be the deliverer of the letters.

When I begin writing the scene I try to essentially cut lines from other scenes or mimic the word choice so that I can be as honest to Poe as possible. I send a draft of the script to Mike and Christiana, who are playing Baldazzar and Alessandra, respectively. They seem enthusiastic about it and make a few minor adjustments. We meet over lunch and finish the scene. When I get home I send a copy of the script to Steve who plays San Ozzo, and Cameron, who plays Castiglione. Both will be in the scene as will Politian and Jacinta. To everybody who is involved with this new scene I send an email letting them know they need to come an hour earlier than everyone else.

1/19/03 Last run through before tech 6-9. The actors look unreal in their full costumes. Leah R., our wardrobe, has expertly arranged their hair and make-up. In my own experience, sometimes a great costume can make a performance that much better. There is hope for this show yet.

The run goes more smoothly than ever before, and the new scene, which is inserted right after intermission, is a huge success with the actors. But what is more striking to them is the addition of the fight combat to scene ix. On Friday, I arranged for Neil and Cameron to meet with a fight coordinator. They've been practicing all weekend and the sequence is seamless. The show feels almost complete, but I have one more surprise in store for them. After Neil's monologue I call every actor on stage. I've already tipped Neil and Jeanine off about the final tableau. I start physically moving people about the space. I clump San Ozzo, Jacinta, and Baldazzar in one corner of the stage. I place the Duke and the Monk kneeling on the floor. Lalage I set downstage, apart from the others, alone. Politian already knows what he needs to do and he waits offstage. I deliberately place Castiglione last because the actors are clearly intrigued; you can tell this by the fact that for once, they're quiet. I whisper something to Cameron and he nods. I place Alessandra across from him holding his hands. I tell them not to move and Rachel turns the stage lights off. A small sliver of light comes up on the actors. Politian advances toward Castiglione, whose back is turned. He slowly raises a knife above his head and plunges it into Castiglione's back. Castiglione groans and falls to the floor. Politian turns and flees. I love the look on the actors' faces. They look disoriented and unsure of themselves. This is exactly the look I want for the end. Lalage begins

speaking in a dead monotone. Politian enters and they embrace. Lights fade to black.  
Show over.

I'll admit that I'm immensely pleased with myself. Sometimes, it's nice to pull a fast one on your actors. Tonight I've pulled three: the new added scene, the fight coordination, and the final tableau.

This doesn't mean I think the show is ready, it's just that most elements have finally fallen into place. Any scene with Peter and Steve in it still looks gross. Peter and Steve cannot act, cannot carry a scene, and cannot be believable. I'm hoping to hide this from the audience.

1/20/03 Tech integration. Tech integration is the night that the technical people arrive who will control the rest of my show while I sit in the audience, mute. The most important technical person is the lighting operator who lights the actors. Without light, actors cannot be seen, it's that easy. Brad S. is the best lighting operator that Colby has had in a long time. He's unique because he thinks of lights in terms of moods and how a light cue often coincides with what sentiment an actor is portraying. Most lighting operators don't consider this; they only care that an actor looks good. Brad's perception makes the show look so much better.

Rachel, our stage manager, calls all cues and runs the sound. We have decided that there be no sound in the show but only entrance, intermission, and exit music. Poe didn't write any sound cues and I'm not convinced that the show needs any. I've also designed the pre and post show music myself so I'm not in for any surprises. The last person of the technical crew who is important is the technical head, Andrew V., who looks for safety concerns and violations.

Tech integration goes well. Since our show has no sound cues, no safety concerns other than the sword fight, which has been approved by the department, and Brad is so adroit at working the lighting board that our tech is relatively short and painless. I have sat through eight-hour tech integrations before. This one was under three hours.

### **Final words on the performance of *Politian***

In retrospect, *Politian* isn't ready for the stage. It doesn't read any better on the stage than it does on the page. My hypothesis that *Politian* warranted a closer look, that a true performance would reveal its hidden merits, was ultimately incorrect.

First and foremost, the plot is riddled with holes. For instance, how did the Duke find out about Castiglione's affair with Lalage? Why is Politian coming to Rome? Why is Lalage allowed to remain in the palazzo? Politian hears the voice of Lalage and in the following scene he is wooing her in the garden with no intermediate relationship. Do they meet before that? How does Lalage sneak out of the palazzo? However, the most troubling plot issue is if Castiglione has no intention of fighting Politian, why does he come to meet him in the Coliseum and then antagonize and mock Politian until Politian resolves to fight?

Sometimes weaknesses in the plot can be masked by strong characters. Poe has three distinctive characters, the hero, the heroine, and the villain, and then he has a slew of underdeveloped ones seemingly unconnected to the plot. San Ozzo, while funny, is transparent as a character, as is the shrewish Alessandra. The servants and the monk are

justifiably stock characters. Finally, Jacinta, a vicious vixen of a servant maid, is well developed as a character, but seems somewhat extraneous to the plot.

Even his three main characters are full of flaws. Politian never demonstrates himself to be a hero, though he is described as one by the Duke and later Castiglione. He arrives on the stage, unlikable, moody, and melancholy, not the best of traits for a hero. As for the villain, there seems to be little difference between him and the hero. Castiglione is unlikable, always moody and melancholic. Finally, Lalage is an erratic, neurotic, weepy heroine whom an audience would have a tough time feeling any kind of pity or admiration for.

To make the play more unbearable and unworkable, Poe has no ear for dialogue. I made massive cuts to the dialogue (see attached line changes) prior to giving the actors the script, and then after my actors repeatedly struggled with certain lines, we had to cut more lines and reword some so that they could be spoken on stage. For example, trying to get out the line "I do devote thee to the untimely sepulchre in the name of Lalage (ix)" is difficult to deliver during a sword fight. Poe has needless repetitions all over the place, such as "and dost thou lovest me, Lalage" (xii), which is then repeated three times in a row after the initial one. In addition to making some of the interchanges appear coherent, we had to add lines, which I was reluctant to do. The argument could be made that Poe would have gone back and edited these lines; however, if one goes on that assumption, then one might say Poe would have fixed all the plot problems as well.

*Politian* isn't a finished piece either, and unfortunately the most evident piece that is missing is the ending. Instead of writing a true ending, I spliced some of the dialogue from the previous scene, and ended the play with a tableau. Luckily, because Poe based

his drama on the Kentucky Tragedy, I had some idea as to how the play should end. However, as one of the actors pointed out, while it is most certainly true that Sharp (Castiglione) is slain by Beauchamp (Politian), it is unclear if Poe meant to follow the Kentucky Tragedy all the way to its conclusion, which would have ended with the hanging of Beauchamp and the suicide of Ann Cook (Lalage). I eventually decided that rather than build in a completely new scene where the Duke apprehends Politian and Lalage takes her life, it would be enough to end the play with the death of Castiglione.

Some theatergoers would consider the silent tableau a cop-out. However, I felt that this method of showing the audience, without words, the action that transpires would be the easiest way to achieve an ending without taking too many liberties with the text. I knew that I wanted as many characters on stage as possible at the end to react to the death of Castiglione, even though this was inconsistent with the actual death of Sharp, who was stabbed outside his door in the middle of the night with no one but his wife to hear. The most realistic way to accomplish this objective was to stage the wedding of Castiglione and Alessandra. The wedding was a feasible way to have all characters on stage as guests. In the previous scene, during a dialogue between Politian and Lalage, Politian declares that he will “mar this bridal if at the altar’s foot. The bridegroom dies” (xi).

The decision to have Politian stab Castiglione in the back and then flee was not popular with the actors, especially the actor playing Politian. However, I decided it should unravel that way because Politian had never proved himself to be a hero and certainly Castiglione did not deserve a hero’s death. Castiglione deserved the knife in the back, unseen, and Politian did not deserve to watch the surprise and death steal across his adversary’s face. The decision to have Lalage apart from the tableau but still sharing the

stage was one of practicality rather than an artistic choice. She has so few lines that if we had to bring the lights down and then up again, the spell over the audience might have been lost and for such a short speech, it didn't seem quite worth it.

In addition to the final scene, another piece was added after scene vi and before scene vii. Scene via, as we called it, was to be performed right after the intermission. I wrote it as an information scene to link the previous scene in which Politian encounters the voice of Lalage to the scene in the garden where Politian woos Lalage. I did not add the scene until the day before the final dress rehearsal, even though all along I would watch these two scenes and realize that a step was missing. Politian needed to meet or contact Lalage. I didn't add the scene earlier because I was ever reluctant to alter the text. However, my decision to maintain the integrity of the text was eventually overruled by a director's responsibility to his actors and his audience. *Politian* lacked an ending. How could I knowingly send my actors out to perform an imperfect piece that would leave an audience feeling unfulfilled? The answer is I couldn't. A director has a responsibility to the audience to deliver the best show possible. *Politian* needed an ending and at least one more scene to make it coherent.

When I wrote the intermediate scene, I decided to use the characters of Alessandra and Baldazzar to carry it. I had already added Alessandra to scene v because I felt her appearances in the play were so disconnected and seldom that she was an awkward fixture. I also thought trying to write a first dialogue scene between Politian and Lalage would prove difficult and that I would somehow wreck the relationship that Poe had created for them. Using Baldazzar as the messenger of Politian and Alessandra as the unwitting accomplice would give me more room to play with lines. My two

objectives were to make the scene seamless so that the audience couldn't tell what was Poe's and what was mine, and the second objective was plausible transition, so that this new scene would be believable enough to justify the love scene in the garden.

**\*ADDED SCENE\***

*[An apartment of the palazzo. ALESSANDRA and CASTIGLIONE are playing at cards. They do not talk, but rather look at one another uncomfortably. After some silence SAN OZZO appears so that CASTIGLIONE can see him but not ALESSANDRA. ]*

ALESSANDRA

Must you always sigh so?

CASTIGLIONE

Madam, must you always find fault?

ALESSANDRA

Surely sir...I...

*[Enter SAN OZZO]*

SAN OZZO

Ah, madam, and good day to you both. Pray excuse me,  
But a word I crave, if you please, with the Count.

ALESSANDRA

Most singular, this interruption!  
Indeed, you may not, as you can plainly see,  
The Count, is otherwise engaged.

SAN OZZO

T'is true. Most true, my fairest,  
That the Count is otherwise engaged.  
But matters of a most pressing, nay, a most urgent nature  
Do await him.

ALESSANDRA

Pray, with whom?

SAN OZZO

Why madam, with, well, tis with, well  
The Count's affairs are with...

CASTIGLIONE

Baldazzar. Yes, the good sir, Baldazzar.  
Why San Ozzo, methinks that you have saved me, sir,  
Saved me, sir, from forgetting such a pressing engagement.  
Cousin, my apologies, but I must take my leave,  
Lead on, San Ozzo *[Exit SAN OZZO and CASTIGLIONE]*



ALESSANDRA

But sir, 'tis most unnatural that you should leave me thus!  
Pshaw! Truly, I am most vexed! Most vexed indeed!  
That rake, such an air about one so lowly born as he,  
And the Count, so easily led by such,  
When I am mistress, the Count shall bind himself to my side.  
And gone will be such monstrous fools.

[Enter BALDAZZAR]

Why, 'tis the Duke of Surrey!  
A sight I had not looked to see.  
Pray lord, don't let me keep you.

BALDAZZAR

Gracious lady,  
Pray, keep me, fair Alessandra  
For all through Rome, the citizens speak  
Of the fair and gentle Alessandra.

ALESSANDRA

Good sir, you flatter  
And though I like to hear it  
Baldazzar, I believe your business, lies with the Count.

BALDAZZAR

Methinks that you're mistaken  
Business, I have not, with the Count.

ALESSANDRA

Vile wretch!

BALDAZZAR

My lady?

ALESSANDRA

I thought your lordship had business with the Count.  
Never mind. Sit, I pray you.  
What was it you said of talk through Rome?

BALDAZZAR

Only that you are the fairest and most gentle of ladies.  
I have heard much of this wedding, soon is it not?  
But to speak the truth my lady,  
Ugly rumours are floating on the wind.  
Amidst the talk of revels and merriment  
A solemn name is spoken.

ALESSANDRA

I'm sure that I do not know what you speak of, sir.

BALDAZZAR

I speak of one they call Lalage. [*seeing her face*]  
Madam, forgive my rudeness, for I am but a guest  
And I have intruded upon your sensitivities.

ALESSANDRA

No, I am not ignorant to what you speak of.

The Duke's ward and folly.  
Bosom friends we were, and yet we are no longer.  
She is kept sequestered in yonder chambers,  
With naught but a servant maid.

BALDAZZAR

Sequestered, say you, but for a maid?

ALESSANDRA

The servant maid, Jacinta, what of it?

BALDAZZAR

And this servant maid suffers the same fate?  
Such a monstrous position must be for her.

ALESSANDRA

Jacinta, as you may plainly see, is free to go as she pleases.  
But Lalage?  
Of lowly rank was she,  
How could she hope?  
How could she think that the Count,  
The high Count might wed her as his own?  
That honor to which she aspired, was meant for another.  
But speak no more to me of Lalage.  
I loathe that name, that banished creature.  
Forgotten and unhonored, may she descend into the dust.  
Pray, excuse me sir, for I have suddenly hearkened  
Upon unfinished matters and methinks I hear the voice of the Duke.

Farewell, good Baldazzar. [Exit ALESSANDRA]

BALDAZZAR

Farewell.

[*softly*] My lord. [*enter POLITIAN, who unseen to ALESSANDRA has heard the conversation.*] What will you have me do?

POLITIAN

Friend, you will find the servant maid, Jacinta, and bring her these letters.  
Sealed, for her mistress, who alone will break my seal.  
Oh Baldazzar, the beauty of that name, that voice, that woe.  
Lalage, and her name is enchantment on my lifted lips.  
Oh what a story, wronged and gentle lady,  
How could she have known of the Count's base intentions?  
You will go down for me, Baldazzar, and give these to the servant maid.

BALDAZZAR

My lord, I do not think this course most wise.  
We are but guests in the Duke's palace.  
Nay, we must not be so rash. Most unwise. [*enter JACINTA*]

POLITIAN

Here doth come of whom we speak.  
Hurry, Baldazzar. Hurry,  
For life will freeze and cease to pass

While such a lady sits imprisoned and forgotten.

BALDAZZAR

As you wish, Politian. As you wish. [exit POLITIAN]

[To JACINTA] You there, a word. [JACINTA *turns around as the lights down*]

### ***Politian at Colby***

Ultimately, *Politian* worked at Colby College because of the set, the costumes, and the incredible effort of the actors to make it work. There is something to be said for actors who will believe in a play, even when they know that it is flawed, and be able to convey complete conviction to an audience. The set dazzled students and faculty alike because the cellar had never been any color other than black. The cream and maroon tones combined with the checkerboard floor pattern, and the detail on the walls created a new effect that left many marveling at the transformation of the cellar rather than the play. Finally, if the set didn't dazzle the audience, the ornate and elaborate richness and flash of the costumes, which were so big and grand that they seemed to swallow the room, certainly stole their attention.

It's the old "razzle-dazzle" effect described in *Chicago*. Give the audience the glamour and the spectacle and they'll forget what you're doing. People forgot that *Politian* doesn't necessarily make much sense. It's rather commonplace when you consider the play is essentially about two men fighting over one woman and the better man wins out. I think the Colby students forgave the faults of the play because lately so many of the plays have been modern, disconnected plays with boring sets and drabber costumes. It's been awhile since the audience was treated to an unabashedly old play with meaning that isn't hidden in the absurdity of it all as so many of the new plays are.

People have conceptions of what a play should be, and I think that for a lot of Colby students, *Politian* was the old-fashioned high drama they had hoped for.

The reviews were kind and good. To my dismay, though I'm flattered, they focused more on my directing choices than on the performances turned in by my actors. I wish the review could have provided them with some much-needed praise. Colby Professor Emeritus Richard Sewell hit the right note when he noted that:

I could see and admire not only the many, many things you have done well, but (from my own often less than successful attempts over the years) I could see how many pitfalls, how many awkward choices you shrewdly AVOIDED. You made a truly intriguing product and a valuable evening out of a very flawed text!

*Politian* worked at Colby because audiences at Colby aren't looking for what's wrong with a performance. They aren't critiquing for plot problems or dialogue or tempo or dramatic resolution. They look at what they specifically can see: the acting, the set, and the costumes. They evaluate an entire performance based solely on those three criteria. *Politian* can work at the collegiate level and perhaps even at the Repertory or Regional theatre level. People will forgive its fault because it is a novelty: Poe's only attempt at the stage. But at the true theatre level? *Politian* would surely be exposed for all its flaws and pitfalls, and all the acting, flashy costumes, and magnificent sets wouldn't save this play.

## Conclusion

*Politian* lacks the grand scope that Poe had hoped for and this is perhaps why he laid it aside, unfinished. Poe didn't fair any better than Hoffman or Simms in the attempt to chronicle the Beauchamp-Sharp tragedy. Perhaps the events were simply too sordid, too easy to over-dramatize into the stuff of bad fiction. Poe fell into the poor plot decisions and over-sentimental dialogue that he was completely intolerant of as a theatre critic. He couldn't make the Beauchamp-Sharp tragedy transcend time as he had hoped, and ultimately *Politian* is a reflection of Poe's inability to raise the tragedy up.

But *Politian* isn't without merit. In writing, Poe serves to further preserve the spirit, if not the actual events, of the Beauchamp-Sharp tragedy. The play may still hold its own on a collegiate or an amateur stage, especially in Baltimore or Virginia where Poe sentiment still reigns. *Politian* is a work by Poe, long neglected, which warrants our attention in some sheer moments of excellence. Poe's use of the poem, "The Coliseum" is exemplary as a soliloquy.

*Politian* was a beginning, a start, an experiment and not the finished, polished genius that we have come to expect from Poe. This is precisely why we should teach *Politian*; examine it for both its merits and its flaws, which showcase the flawed nature of the writer. In the words of Richard Garnett, who wrote about the dramas of Dryden and Byron, "it is not well to slight any work of a great man" (Mabbott iv). Rather than hide *Politian* away like a fatherless child, we should examine the beginning and experimental processes of Poe.

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sion. Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strove to decipher them, but in vain; while ever and anon, like the spirit of a departed sound, the shrill and piercing shriek of a female voice seemed to be ringing in my ears. I had done a deed—what was it? I asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering echoes of the chamber answered me, "what was it?"

On the table beside me burned a lamp, and near it lay a little box. It was of no remarkable character, and I had seen it frequently before, for it was the property of the family physician; but how came it there, upon my table, and why did I shudder in regarding it? These things were in no manner to be accounted for, and my eyes at length dropped to the open pages of a book, and to a sentence underscored therein. The words were the singular but simple ones of the poet Elia Zaiat. "*Diebstahl nicht verdammt, er verdammt den Diebstahligen*." Why then, as I perused them, did the hairs of my head erect themselves on end, and the blood of my body become congealed within my veins?

There came a light tap at the library door, and pale as the tenant of a tomb, a muffled entered upon the scene. His looks were wild with terror, and he spoke to me in a voice tremulous, husky, and very low. What said he?—some broken sentences I heard. He told of a wild cry disturbing the silence of the night—of the gathering together of the household—of a search in the direction of the sound;—and then his tones grew thrillingly distinct as he whispered me of a violated grave—of a disfigured body enshrouded, yet still breathing, still palpitating, still alive!

He pointed to my garments;—they were muddy and caked with gore. I spoke not, and he took me gently by the hand;—it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall;—I looked at it for some minutes;—it was a spade. With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and in my tremor it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor.

EDGAR A. POE.

PROSPECTS OF THE DRAMA.—MRS. MOWATT'S COMEDY.—So deeply have we felt interested in the question of Fashion's success or failure, that we have been to see it every night since its first production; making careful note of its merits and defects as they were more and more distinctly developed in the gradually perfected representation of the play.

We are enabled, however, to say but little either in contradiction or in amplification of our last week's remarks—which were based it will be remembered, upon the original MS. of the fair authoress, and upon the slightly modified performance of the first night. In what we then said we made all reasonable allowances for inadvertence at the outset—lapses of memory in the actors—embarrassments in scene-shifting—in a word for general hesitation and want of finish. The comedy now, however, must be understood as having all its capabilities fairly brought out, and the result of the perfect work is before us.

In one respect, perhaps, we have done Mrs. Mowatt unintentional injustice. We are not quite sure, upon reflection, that her entire thesis is not an original one. We can call to mind no drama, just now, in which the design can be properly stated as the satirizing of fashion as fashion. Fashionable follies, indeed, as a class of folly in general, have been frequently made the subject of dramatic ridicule—but the distinction is obvious—although certainly too nice a one to be of any practical avail to the authoress of the new comedy. Abstractly we may admit some pretension to originality of plan—but, in the representation, this shadow of originality

vanishes. We cannot, if we would, separate the *dramatis personæ* from the moral they illustrate; and the characters overpower the moral. We see before us only personages with whom we have been familiar time out of mind;—when we look at Mrs. Talfay, for example, and hear her speak, we think of Mrs. Malaprop in spite of ourselves, and in vain endeavour to think of anything else. The whole conduct and language of the comedy, too, have about them the unmistakable flavor of the green-room. We doubt if a single poet either in the one or the other, is not a household thing with every play-goer. Not a joke is any less old than the hills—but this conventionalism is more markedly noticeable in the sentiments, so called. When, for instance, Gertrude is quitting the stage, it is made to say, "if the fall in a certain scheme she will be the first woman who was ever at a loss for a stratagem," we are affected with a really painful sense of the antique. Such things are only to be ranked with the stage "properties," and are inexpressibly wearisome and distasteful to every one who hears them. And that they are sure to elicit what appears to be applause, demonstrates exactly nothing at all. People at these points put their hands together, and strike their knees against the floor for the reason that they feel these actions to be required of them as a matter of course, and that it would be ill-breeding not to comply with the requisition. All the talk put into the mouth of Mr. Truman, too, about "when honesty shall be found among lawyers, patriotism among statesmen," etc. etc. must be included in the same category. The error of the dramatist lies in not estimating at its true value the absolutely certain "approbation" of the audience in such cases—an approbation which is as pure a conventionalism as are the "sentiments" themselves. In general it may be boldly asserted that the clapping of hands and the rattling of canes are no tokens of the success of any play—such success as the dramatist should desire;—let him watch the countenances of his audience, and remodel his points by these. Better still—let him "look into his own heart and write"—again better still (if he have the capacity) let him work out his purposes *a priori* from the infallible principles of a Natural Art.

We are delighted to find, in the reception of Mrs. Mowatt's comedy, the clearest indications of a revival of the American drama—that is to say of an earnest disposition to see it revived. That the drama, in general, can go down, is the most untenable of all untenable ideas. Dramatic art is, or should be, a concentration of all that which is entitled to the appellation of Art. When sculpture shall fail, and painting shall fail, and poetry, and music;—when men shall no longer take pleasure in eloquence, and in grace of motion, and in the beauty of woman, and in truthful representations of character, and in the consciousness of sympathy in their enjoyment of each and all, then and not till then, may we look for that sink into insignificance, which, and which alone, affords opportunity for the conglomeration of these infinite and imperishable sources of delight.

There is not the least danger, then, that the drama shall fail. By the spirit of imitation evolved from its own nature and to a certain extent an inevitable consequence of it, it has been kept absolutely stationary for a hundred years, while its sister arts have rapidly fitted by and left it out of sight. Each progressive step of every other art seems to drive back the drama to the exact extent of that step—just as, physically, the objects by the way-side seem to be receding from the traveller in a coach. And the practical effect, in both cases, is equivalent;—but yet, in fact, the drama has not receded; on the contrary it has very slightly advanced in one or two of the plays of Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer. The appa-

(Figure 1.1) The Broadway Journal  
Review of Fashion by Poe

(Albert H. and Shirley Small Special Collections Library)





(Figure 2.1) Sharp's Gravestone

*(The Kentucky Encyclopedia, by Gilbert)*



(Figure 2.2) Colonel Solomon P. Sharp

*(The Kentucky Encyclopedia, by Gilbert)*

Images resized at a lower resolution.

THE VIRGINIA PLAYERS  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
THE RAVEN SOCIETY  
PRESENT FOR THE FIRST TIME  
POLITIAN  
By  
EDGAR ALLAN POE



CABELL HALL, 8:30 P. M.  
JANUARY 19th, 1933

(Figure 3.1) Program from 1933 *Politian*  
Charlottesville, VA

(Albert H. and Shirley Small Special Collections Library)



(Figure 3.2) 1933 *Politian* Production Picture  
"Jacinta and Ugo"

(Albert H. and Shirley Small Special Collections Library)



(Figure 4.1) The Villan Giulia, Rome  
Italian Dress 1550-65

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*

Image resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.2) Italian Girl  
Standing collar with low neckline

*(European Costume, Varrood)*



(Figure 4.3) Italian Jewelry

*(European Costume, Varrood)*



(Figure 4.3) Italian Boy  
Velvet Hat with plume

*(European Costume, Varrood)*



(Figure 4.4) Italian Man  
Modest Ruff

*(European Costume, Varrood)*

All images resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.5) Pumpkin Pants

*(Theory of English Costume, Brooke)*



(Figure 4.6) English Gentleman  
1570

*(Theory of English Costume, Brooke)*



(Figure 4.7) Italian Gentleman  
1587

*(Theory of English Costume, Brooke)*

Images resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.9) Alessandra  
Optimal Sketch

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*



(Figure 4.10) Alessandra  
Optimal Sketch

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*



(Figure 4.11) Alessandra  
Actual Costume

*(photo: Paul Krummen, Getty Images)*

Images resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.12) Lalage  
Optimal Sketch  
(add higher neckline for mourning)

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*



(Figure 4.13) Lalage  
Optimal Sketch (Full)  
(add higher neckline, no ruff)

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*



(Figure 4.14) Lalage  
Actual Costume

*(from Dead Season at Colby College)*

Image resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.15) Politian  
Optimal Sketch  
(Add cape)

*(History of English Costume, Brooks)*



(Figure 4.16) Politian  
Actual Costume

*(History of English Costume, Brooks)*



Image resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.16) Baldazzar  
Optimal Sketch  
(lose hat)

*(History of English Costume, Brooke)*



(Figure 4.17) Baldazzar  
Actual Costume

*(photo: Brad Setton/Cathy Edler)*



(Figure 4.18) Jacinta  
Actual Costume

(photos: Brad Seymour / Gailly Eiche)



(Figure 4.19) Ugo  
Actual Costume

(photos: Brad Seymour / Gailly Eiche)



(Figure 4.20) Benito  
Actual Costume

(photos: Brad Seymour / Gailly Eiche)



(Figure 4.22) Monk  
Actual Costume

(photos: Brad Seymour / Gailly Eiche)



(Figure 4.21) Rupert  
Actual Costume

(photos: Brad Seymour / Gailly Eiche)

Image resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.23) Duke Di Broglio  
Optimal Sketch

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*



(Figure 4.24) Duke Di Broglio  
Actual Costume

*(European Costume, Yarnwood)*

Image resized at a lower resolution.



(Figure 4.25) Castiglione  
Optimal Sketch

*(European Costume, Vermeer)*



(Figure 4.26) Castiglione  
Actual Costume

*(photo: David Seymour / Getty Images)*





(Figure 6.1) Politian Poster (designed by Neil Reynolds)

# *Politician*



*An Actor's Handbook*

Hello and welcome to the cast of Politian. Attached are your script and handbook for you to better understand Politian. Politian, is not an easy play, by any standards, and I've tried to include pertinent information to make your understanding of the play as a whole and your individual character(s) more complete.

This production is a piece of my Senior Scholar Project. My whole first semester has been a preparation for this production. The entire second semester will be spent analyzing this production. So please (and no pressure really) don't screw up. I picked you all because you are the very best people for the roles. Politian will be performed January 23<sup>rd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup>. You will need to be here every day of Jan Plan, unless you clear it with me first. I'm not a bully and I'm perfectly willing to let you go home on certain weekends or skiing or whatever, but you need to let me know up front. I'm hoping that you've guessed by now you will need to be here the 23<sup>rd</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup>. The 26<sup>th</sup> will be our strike date. Strike is mandatory for all actors; it is the day when we break down the set and return costumes and restore the acting space to its original condition. Our acting space is the black box theatre.

Politian, like its playwright and to some extent your director, is neurotic. The dialogue is written in poetic form (Poe was going for a Shakespeare motif), this makes the delivery and execution of lines extremely difficult. It is your job to find the rhythm in your lines; I will help you with this. There are eleven scenes, although scene X may be cut as it seems a bit extraneous to the plot and raises far more questions than it answers. It is important to remember that Politian is an "unfinished drama," two pages have been lost forever and Poe surely intended to add another scene. This makes your task as an actor complicated in that you must fill in the gaps that Poe had left. That sound you're hearing is the sound of your jaw dropping to the floor as your brain wonders why on earth you auditioned in the first place for this crummy play with difficult lines...

The experience, of course. You will be some of the few actors to have ever performed Poe's only attempt at the stage. You will wear some of the best costumes Colby has ever made or seen. You will wear tights and you will like it. We will have fun in the cellar, groan over inconsistencies in the plot, bond with fellow actors, and have a cast party this campus has never seen. You are the few, the proud, the actors of Politian.

## **What's my motivation?**

**or**

**Help! I've just read the play and I have no idea who my character is and what the heck he or she is doing, (help me out here or I swear I'm not coming to rehearsal).**

**\*LALAGE\*** is the young orphaned ward of DUKE DI BROGLIO. She is the play's heroine. (And sometimes she appears to be on heroin). For our purposes though, she is distraught because the COUNT CASTIGLIONE, son of DUKE DI BROGLIO, has seduced her. When the DUKE found out of their illicit liaison he cast LALAGE out of society. This is a real problem because this doesn't leave her with much to do all day. She is confined to her apartment of the palazzo with her maid, JACINTA. Along comes POLITIAN, handsome stranger from a strange land, who falls desperately in love with her. He is the ticket out for LALAGE, as he proposes nothing less noble than marriage to her. In return for her hand all LALAGE wants is revenge against CASTIGLIONE...

**\*JACINTA\*** is the snake in the grass. She is an overtly sexual woman who uses people to get her way. She uses UGO, her current love toy, for information, while she pulls the strings of her mistress LALAGE, convincing her to give her jewels for her upcoming wedding to UGO. The joke is on LALAGE and UGO, as JACINTA has no intention of marrying him. She's got her eye on the prize and when she sees a chance to move up in the world to become the maid of ALESSANDRA, a more powerful mistress with better connections, she takes it...

**\*ALESSANDRA\*** is the betrothed cousin to Count CASTIGLIONE and noble by birth. Marrying your cousin in those times was viewed as socially acceptable. Even Poe did it. To translate her character into modern terms just picture the typical Colby girl. She is attractive with the best clothes, and overly concerned with her image and reputation. She is confident and stuck-up. Good money, bad breeding. However, she is a tad worried about her marriage to CASTIGLIONE because she knows about LALAGE...



...**\*POLITIAN\*** is the play's protagonist. He is a thinly veiled version of Poe himself. The only difference between him and Poe is money. POLITIAN is England's own, Earl of Leicester. He is on loan from the Brits to visit the nobility in Rome. He never goes anywhere without his traveling companion, BALDAZZAR, who is everything SAN OZZO isn't: sober, serious, a giver of good advice, a true friend, and the only voice of REASON in this play. POLITIAN is a man's man, who knows of art and arms, wealth and poetry, a charismatic, dashing sort of man. However, when he gets to Rome, he loses all these wonderful qualities and becomes melancholic. He is contemplative about life and death, he is desperately seeking purpose in his terrible, rich life when he hears a phantom voice that turns out to be none other than...LALAGE. He is bewitched by her beauty and woeful situation. He offers to marry her and she accepts on the condition that POLITIAN will first avenge her honor by doing away with CASTIGLIONE. After hearing what the villain has done, POLITIAN challenges him to a duel...

**\*CASTIGLIONE\*** is one of the play's most complex characters. He had fallen in love with LALAGE but when discovered by his father; he refused to forsake honor and family duty to marry her. He is plagued by his decision one second and revels in it the next. However, he is not excited in the least about having to marry his cousin, ALESSANDRA. CASTIGLIONE enjoys quarreling with his father and being rude to his bride-to-be. Every man needs a male buddy and his is the rake, SAN OZZO. CASTIGLIONE instinctively dislikes POLITIAN from the beginning, is slightly impressed by him later on, and then fights him in duel for his honor during the play's climax. CASTIGLIONE is both cowardly and pitiable to the audience. In the end, he comes to repent his wanton ways but it's too late for him...

**\*BALDAZZAR\*** is the play's wet blanket. He spoils all the weirdness and is the audience's only link to sanity. This is a very key role because we need the audience to maintain some semblance of reality and sanity. He is the responsible, dependable, Duke of Surrey and confidant of POLITIAN, the Earl of Leicester. BALDAZZAR is disturbed by his friend's state of depression and is worried when POLITIAN begins to hear phantom voices. He is the one sent to CASTIGLIONE with the challenge of the duel...

**\*SAN OZZO\*** is a rake and a lover of the finer things in life. He's a fop not to be taken seriously. SAN OZZO is jovial and does show some real concern for CASTIGLIONE'S pensive moods; he is the proverbial devil on the shoulder and proposes the solution to all CASTIGLIONE'S problems: alcohol. He should be suave, svelte, and dashing.

**\*UGO\*** serves as comic relief. A play like this needs that kind of relief. Similar to the role of the grave diggers in Hamlet (another nod to Shakespeare) his humor is drunken and perverse. UGO is the most trusted, yet incompetent of CASTIGLIONE'S servants and is in a love/lust relationship with JACINTA, who will ditch him by the play's end. UGO is always drunk and rarely coherent.

**\*DUKE DI BROGLIO\*** like so many fathers is out of touch with his son. He is loaded in the two best senses of the word, full of money and full of wine and spirits. He is a jovial man determined to keep his wayward son, CASTIGLIONE, out of trouble. This coming wedding of his son to ALESSANDRA brings him great pleasure as it means festivities for all and the end of CASTIGLIONE'S days of cavorting with young women of no consequence. The DUKE, though he shows bad manners, is very put out by people who have bad manners. He feels exceedingly snubbed by POLITIAN

**\*RUPERT\*** is the most respectable of the three servants. He is the only one with something between his ears. He is a minor character mainly used for exposition in the first scene. Make him slightly older and dignified with an air of knowledge.

**\*BENITO\*** is neither the drunken nor the most respectable of the three servants. He's the Larry of the Stooges. He is a minor character mainly used for exposition in the first scene.

**\*MONK\*** is the man with a job to do: advance plot. Dress in brown monk duds and act pious, LALAGE will do the rest. Look shocked when she swears off God in front of you. Offer her your ebony cross. Be creepy and mysterious.

## AM I TAKING CRAZY PILLS...OR DOES THIS PLOT NOT MAKE SENSE?

The scene lies in Rome. The DUKE'S son, CASTIGLIONE, has seduced LALAGE, the young, orphaned ward of DUKE DI BROGLIO. Upon discovering the affair, the DUKE banishes LALAGE from society and keeps her confined to her apartment in the palazzo with only her maid, JACINTA to keep her company.

Meanwhile, the DUKE has arranged a marriage to his cousin, the noble, haughty ALESSANDRA for his son to keep him from seducing other young innocents. Lately, CASTIGLIONE, as we learn from the servants, UGO, RUPERT, and BENITO, has been in a downward spiral: drinking and gambling to excess. CASTIGLIONE, not quite over his love, LALAGE, but not ready to cast off his title to marry her, is not excited about his coming nuptials to ALESSANDRA, who is already nagging him about his dress, drinking, and gambling habits. He turns to his male friend, SAN OZZO, a fun loving fop with a penchant for life's finer pleasures. SAN OZZO gives him a choice: mourn LALAGE and become a sinner or forsake her and forget her with wine. CASTIGLIONE opts for the wine.

CASTIGLIONE, recovering from his latest drunken debauch, finds himself alone with ALESSANDRA who proceeds to nag and nag and nag some more, all the while making it apparent to the audience that CASTIGLIONE'S character has fallen on hard moral times. Enter DUKE DI BROGLIO, in good spirits upon seeing the two love birds; he strikes up a conversation about the arrival of POLITIAN, Earl of Leicester, a nobleman from England. He hopes that POLITIAN will do him the honor of attending the wedding. The DUKE and CASTIGLIONE quarrel over the character of POLITIAN, the DUKE insists that POLITIAN is a fine, learned man of good repute and CASTIGLIONE insists that he is a most melancholic man. The argument is not resolved and they all go strolling off into the garden.

Meanwhile, LALAGE is pining away for her ill-fated love in her apartment. JACINTA, has told her that she will marry the servant, UGO and LALAGE heaps onto her gifts of jewelry, including a ring from CASTIGLIONE (proof of the affair). JACINTA has no real intention of marrying the uncouth, constantly drunken fool, UGO but he doesn't know that and neither does her mistress. JACINTA has a plan. After

pinning some more and recounting some very pretty stories of other ill-fated maidens like Cleopatra, a MONK appears. He urges her to reconcile herself with the DUKE, repent her sins, and come back to God. LALAGE doesn't just refuse, she swears off God entirely (which was a really radical thing to do at the time) and instead tricks the MONK into watching her swear vengeance against CASTIGLIONE.

Again, CASTIGLIONE and the DUKE are speaking of POLITIAN. CASTIGLIONE, who has just met POLITIAN and his confidant, BALDAZZAR, DUKE OF SURREY, retracts his former judgment and declares POLITIAN a fine man indeed. Now enter POLITIAN and BALDAZZAR. POLITIAN is ill and leaning upon BALDAZZAR for support. CASTIGLIONE calls for the servants to give him a room. The DUKE is very put out by POLITIAN'S lack of manners while BALDAZZAR attempts to make apologies for his friend.

In his quarters, POLITIAN complains to BALDAZZAR of his sickness, not a physical ailment but a mental one. POLITIAN is bored with life. He's got no love, no purpose, and no reason for living. BALDAZZAR, picking up on his friend's hints at suicide, tries to rouse him, blaming ROME and the strange air for the change in humor. His entreaties are interrupted by a singing phantom voice, which only POLITIAN hears at first. BALDAZZAR is sure that POLITIAN has gone off the deep end until he hears it himself.

The ghostly voice belongs to LALAGE. (Here is the BIG jump in scene, POLITIAN goes from hearing the voice of LALAGE to wooing her in the very next scene. No introduction. Nothing. We'll figure this out). POLITIAN makes loves (not that kind) to her in the garden. His lines here are just pure poetry, literally, and LALAGE makes the case that someone as noble as he cannot marry someone as lowly as her. POLITIAN does what CASTIGLIONE can't and swears off honor and duty. LALAGE, heartened by his response, boldly accepts his love in return for one small favor...she can never be happy while CASTIGLIONE lives. POLITIAN, who somehow knows the entire story (another logical slip we'll have to cleverly fix or do something with) agrees and sets off to kill CASTIGLIONE.

During the plot of murder, other arrangements have been taking place; the wedding night has come. The servants bumble out while JACINTA comes out for a

monologue. She has exacted revenge on LALAGE by paying her the worst insult: becoming the maid of the woman who is to marry CASTIGLIONE. ALESSANRA is a true noble woman, whose connections will enable JACINTA to marry more highly than to a servant like UGO. She's got her eye on an apothecary. In stumbles UGO who JACINTA lashes severely with her sharp little tongue in a moment of physical comedy.

POLITIAN waits for BALDAZZAR, whom he has sent to tell CASTIGLIONE of POLITIAN'S challenging him to a duel. POLITIAN is faint with anticipation. BALDAZZAR enters and explains that since CASTIGLIONE knows of no wrong against POLITIAN, he will not accept the challenge. BALDAZZAR then tries valiantly to talk POLITIAN out of this whole silly nonsense, but POLITIAN, as if under a spell (a womanly one I venture) does not hear him. POLITIAN dismisses BALDAZZAR in the nick of time as CASTIGLIONE arrives on the scene to see what is rotten in...Rome.

The two quarrel and finally POLITIAN calls him a villain (again, another nod to Shakespeare in the Romeo, Mercutio, Tybalt scene), the worst possible insult, which gets CASTIGLIONE to draw his sword. They duel for a bit, mincing words and blows, until POLITIAN devotes this fight in the name of LALAGE. This mention of her name stops CASTIGLIONE dead in his tracks. He drops to his knees and cannot recover. He begs for POLITIAN to kill him. POLITIAN calls him a coward. CASTIGLIONE springs to his feet with his sword, only to fall down again. Instead of killing him though, POLITIAN tells CASTIGLIONE that he will suffer a fate worse than death (this is very Princess Bride Like), POLITIAN will taunt and haunt him to the end of time so that he will know that a love that could have been his will never be and all the world will know what a coward he is. POLITIAN leaves him on his knees.

Back at the palazzo, there is a weird exchange between SAN OZZO and UGO, which doesn't make sense at this point in time. We may cut it unless its meaning drops from the sky. This is scene X if any of you want a crack at it...

The final scene is LALAGE and POLITIAN. POLITIAN is musing over life and love when a wild LALAGE enters and really upbraids him for not dispatching CASTIGLIONE. POLITIAN looks at her and realizes that she will never love him until CASTIGLIONE is dead. POLITIAN forsakes his first mercy of letting CASTIGLIONE live and dashes out to kill him. FINIS.

**Did this whole play fall out of the sky or does it have MEANING?**  
**Yes it does have meaning. The play is based on the Kentucky Tragedy.**

In 1818, while Poe was just nine years old and living with the Allans, the events that were to become the inspiration for his drama were unfolding: Colonel Solomon P. Sharp seduced a young Kentucky woman of good family, Miss Ann Cook. Although the affair was concealed by Sharp, a rising star in Kentucky politics, it was not to stay secret for long, as Miss Cook became pregnant. She was forced to retire from polite society forever and bear the child alone in shame. Although the child was stillborn, negating the necessity of Colonel Sharp to wed Miss Cook, it still became the proof, which would later damn Sharp and lead to disaster that was the Kentucky Tragedy.

Sharp was dead seven years later, stabbed through the heart in the night by an assassin. The state was in an uproar, Sharp was a prominent figure at this time, in 1820 he had been appointed attorney general by the governor and during that same year Sharp had won a seat representing his county, Franklin, in the legislature for the New Court party.

Sharp had political enemies. The politics of the time were bitterly split between the Old and New Court Party. Sharp had made foes in the highest ranks of Old Court. His most passionate adversaries were Patrick Henry Darby, a prominent Old Court editorialist, John U. Waring, the Old Court party member who had lost the county seat to Sharp in 1820, and a young lawyer and Old Court supporter, Jeroboam O. Beauchamp, who vehemently despised Sharp and had been quoted as saying "anyone who would vote Solomon P. Sharp ought to be damned" (Johnson). That wasn't Beauchamp's only connection to Sharp however, Beauchamp had married Ann Cook in 1824 after her retirement from society, well aware of Sharp's seduction of her. He had vowed to Miss Cook, before she would accept him, that he would avenge her honor.

The law suspected a political assassination and turned to the Old Party. Waring had the best excuse, he had been shot through both hips during a duel and was unable to walk, never mind stalk about in the night and assassinate Sharp. This left Darby and Beauchamp; Darby, in an attempt to save his own skin, led authorities to Beauchamp. Beauchamp confessed and was tried for the murder of Solomon P. Sharp in 1825.

The trial, widely celebrated and followed, was short and swift. The jury would not look the other way on what Beauchamp claimed to be an act to restore honor to his wife. Beauchamp was found guilty and sentenced to die on July 17, 1826. His wife, Ann, was brought before the court on accessory to murder charges. She was found not guilty and was instead granted the request to share her husband's cell until his execution.

The night of July 16 arrived and with it, the suicide attempt of the condemned man and his wife. Ann had smuggled a knife under her dresses into her husband's cell. According to the jailer, he first turned the knife on himself, stabbing himself in the stomach, and gave the knife to his wife who quickly did the same. Despite efforts of doctors to revive Ann, she died of her wounds; her husband survived his own but was so weak at the gallows he had to be held up while the rope was put around his neck. The two were buried in one grave with a poem engraved on it penned by Ann herself.



## Rehearsal Guidelines

- I had to beef up our **rehearsal schedule** slightly. As a result I've typed up nerdy color-coordinated graphs and timetables so you can see how much of your time per week is going to the show. The timetable is a worst-case scenario, hours will probably be considerably less than what's listed. Plus the color-coordinated spreadsheet shows you who you are rehearsing with and what scene. I hope you will find this useful. Three weeks, that's all we have. If you see something you can't make now, let me know **prior** to cast dinner on 1/6. I mean it. Things are tight and most scenes we'll only get to rehearse TWICE before our first run-through.
- **Rehearsal blocks** are only an hour long. This means every minute counts. However, some nights I may need just a half hour of that block, sometimes forty. I'm willing to let you go early. And most nights you will get out early. However, if one actor is late to his/her scheduled rehearsal block (and if Rachel and I don't buy your excuse, and trust me we've heard them all) then every actor will stay the duration of that block in its entirety. Don't let your cast mates down by showing up late or you all will miss out on the opportunity to leave early.
- **Monologue run-throughs** will rarely ever take a full hour so don't despair. When you've run it to the stage manager's satisfaction, you can depart. I've tried to schedule them nicely for you too so you can do your scene then your monologue and leave early.
- **Cast dinners** are mandatory and important. Unless you contact me personally with your reason for missing one ahead of time, you're not excused.
- Check your **email notes** prior to your rehearsal block(s), you may find them helpful.
- **Runs** will probably not take three hours, (with the exception of tech, which will be endless, because techies are inherently slow). We will never go more than three; we will just shut down at three hours every time, even if we're not finished. Most likely though, runs will go under two hours.



**Politian Time Table**  
**WEEK ONE 1/6-1/12**

Week 1	Cast Dinners	Monologues	Scene Work	Runs	Total hours
Andrea	3	2	3	3	11
Cameron	3	-	6	3	12
Christiana	3	-	2	3	8
Jeanine	3	2	5	3	13
Jon	3	-	6	3	12
Mike	3	-	6	3	12
Neil	3	2	8	3	16
Peter	3	-	3	3	9
Steve	3	-	3	3	9

**WEEK TWO 1/13-1/19**

Week 2	Cast Dinners	Monologues	Scene Work	Runs	Total hours
Andrea	3	1	2.5	9	15.5
Cameron	3	-	7	9	19
Christiana	3	-	2.5	9	14.5
Jeanine	3	2	4	9	18
Jon	3	-	6	9	18
Mike	3	-	3.5	9	15.5
Neil	3	1	7.5	9	20.5
Peter	3	-	3.5	9	15.5
Steve	3	-	4	9	16

**WEEK THREE 1/20-1/26**

Week 3	Tech	Shows	Strike	Cast Party	Total hours
Andrea	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Cameron	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Christiana	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Jeanine	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Jon	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Mike	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Neil	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Peter	15+	9+	4	1+	29
Steve	15+	9+	4	1+	29

# Martin provokes with "Politician"

By **TIMOTHY CLARK**  
STAFF WRITER

After countless hours pondering seemingly mundane trivia such as the worth of Bernoulli's equation and memorizing the finer details of the Peloponnesian War, Powder & Wig's Jan Plan production of Edgar Allan Poe's "Politian" is a breath of fresh air.

"Politian" was Poe's only work written for the stage, and he never even finished it, abandoning his effort for more profitable ventures. The play is rarely printed in compilations of the author's work, and is not frequently produced. Colby's production was probably one of the most scholarly, thorough and complete renditions the show has ever known.

Everything from the set to the lights and the costumes was well thought out. In a unique use of the Cellar Theater space, Rachel Damon '05 and Jonathan Allen '03, the set designers, painted the whole theater with a Roman court motif. A bright checked floor, surrounded by audience on all sides, defined the playing space.

Frequently such a theatre-in-the-round design leads to difficulties addressing all the members of the audience. Director

Jessica Martin '03 skillfully avoided these potential problems by alternating the direction of the scenes with respect to the audience, and by varying the blocking so the actors were constantly moving about the space. The efforts were executed in a subtle manner, leaving the audience to enjoy a smooth and well-paced show.

The cast was well-crafted, and despite



BRAD SEYMOUR/THE COLBY ECHO

Neil Reynolds '03 and Jeanine Duffy '03 are love struck in "Politian."

the potential handicap presented by a mere three-week rehearsal period,

seemed very familiar with the material they were presenting. Poe's language was flowery, reminiscent of Shakespeare, but the cast as a whole delivered the metered lines with little apprehension. Neil Reynolds '03 offered a particularly convincing performance as Politian, the Earl

of Leicester. The character's melancholy, longing spirit was clearly portrayed by this Powder & Wig veteran.

The character of Alessandra, who is constantly nagging her betrothed Castiglione about his excessive behavior, was well done by Christiana Salah '03. Everything from her high-class costume to her vocal intonation and her very manner of movement was tuned to

presenting a slightly annoying, know-it-all character.

Despite the skilled efforts of the whole cast, the star of the show remained off-stage. Martin spent months planning the costumes, the scenery, the props and countless other aspects of the show. Poe never finished "Politian" and he left many damaging plot holes. These difficulties did not phase Martin, who filled the holes and, through extensive research into Poe's work and his influences, extrapolated her own ending. Where there were scenes missing, she wrote them in with a command of language that made her scenes virtually indistinguishable from Poe's. More than anyone else, her efforts are to be commended.

It was truly a pleasure to witness, first hand, the fruits of a Colby education. Sitting in the audience I felt as if I were on the cutting edge, seeing something for the first time, and watching the realization of a 175-year-old work. Congratulations to Martin. Her hard and intense work have paid off.

**Despite the skilled efforts of the whole cast, the star of the show remained off-stage...Congratulations to Martin. Her hard and intense work paid off.**