

Quaint and Curious Forgotten (Copyright) Lore

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As we approach October, thoughts often turn to colorful foliage, cozy hoodies, and pumpkin spice everything. Some thoughts also drift toward the spooky season, bringing to mind scary stories and maybe even “many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore.” Nothing in literature is as spooky or as culturally relevant as the afore-quoted Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe’s influence on our culture is mind blowing. His works have inspired and appeared in film, television, theater, comic books, artwork, and music ranging from American folk (Joan Baez set Poe’s “Annabel Lee” to music) to German funeral doom metal (the band Ahab set Poe’s “Evening Star” to music). While Poe created his original works before our current copyright system existed, many thousands of Poe-inspired works have been registered with the Copyright Office.

Several years ago, Library of Congress Junior Fellow Gina Apone researched copyright registration applications from the 1900s and uncovered some amazing artifacts in the Office’s archives. The following is an excerpt from her blog, “The Wandering Sculpture of a Thirsty POET: A Look into Copyright Archives,” which appeared in both the *Library of Congress Blog* and *From the Catbird Seat: Poetry & Literature at the Library of Congress*.

As a Junior Fellow in the Copyright Office, I spent the summer examining copyright registration applications from the 1900s and uncovering various artifacts that have long been waiting in the archives of the U.S. Copyright Office. I repeatedly

found myself surrounded by great people while being offered remarkable resources and unforgettable experiences.

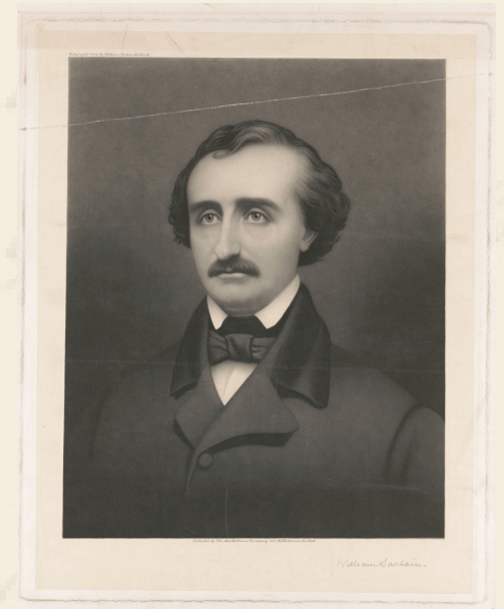
A copyright deposit for a sculpture of Edgar Allan Poe, for example, might not sound very nerve-pinching or thought-provoking to many at a glance, but taking a second look could lead you to think otherwise. The specific photo of a bust that I came across, which is now stationed in the Edgar Allan Poe cottage in the Bronx in New York City, was submitted for Copyright registration on June 22, 1909, by Edmond T. Quinn, an established artist and sculptor from Philadelphia. His prominent work earned him gallery displays in various, well-regarded places like the Art Institute of Chicago and commendations by 1919 issues of the *New York Times* and the *New York Tribune*. He is best known for his bronze sculpture of “Edwin Booth as Hamlet” located in New York’s Gramercy Park.

In Quinn’s application are his handwritten notes describing the piece: “This is a bust portrait of Edgar Allan Poe. The poet is shown in his costume of about 1840...his head is inclined forward in a pensive attitude and the hair is somewhat disheveled.”

The Bronx Society of Arts and Sciences gave a plaster cast of Quinn’s sculpture to the Edgar Allan Poe Museum in Richmond, Virginia, in 1931, where it was on display as a part of the Poe shrine in the museum’s garden – that is, until it mysteriously vanished from its pedestal years later in 1987. Sometime later, the bust turned up at the Raven Inn, where police found it allegedly sitting at the bar with a mug of beer and a transcription of Poe’s poem, “The Spirits of the Dead”:

*And the mist upon the hill
Shadowy, shadowy, yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token.
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!*

Whether a comedic museum thief was exercising a peculiar sense of humor or the post-life Poe just got really thirsty, how and why the bust wandered off in such a puzzling, unexplainable fashion remains to be known. But the dark and haunting demeanor of the poet and his work only adds to the gripping curiousness of this account. [C](#)



Edgar Allan Poe portrait.

PHOTO BY WILLIAM SARTAIN



Edgar Allan Poe sculpture by Edmond T. Quinn.