# Stories of Edgar Allan Poe Book Notes

## Stories of Edgar Allan Poe by Edgar Allan Poe

BOOKRAGS

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# Author/Context

Born in the Boston, Massachusetts, on January 19, 1809, Edgar Allan Poe was the son of actors David Poe, Jr. from an aristocratic family in Baltimore and Elizabeth Hopkins Poe, who had immigrated with her actress mother from England as a child. Edgar's elder brother, William Henry, had been born two years earlier in 1807, and his younger sister would be born in December of 1810. After David Poe presumably died in 1810, Eliza continued to perform on her own in Richmond and Charleston, South Carolina. Her eldest son was entrusted with grandparents in Baltimore to ease the cost of supporting her family for this reason, but Eliza soon became ill, presumably from tuberculosis, and died on December 8, 1811. William was taken in by the Mackenzie family, and the three year old orphan Edgar Poe was raised by John and Frances (Fanny) Allan, from whom he would take his middle name. The Allans had become wealthy from John's tobacco business, and they lived contentedly in Richmond, where Poe was sent to a local school at an early age. In spite of the tragic circumstances surrounding his biological parents, it would be the world of opportunities made available primarily by John Allan, which would provide Edgar with the experiences and training that he needed to become a unique literary master.

This American life was suddenly disrupted in 1815, when the Allans took Poe to visit relatives in Scotland and soon moved to London, England, where John was seeking to expand his business. Edgar attended various grammar schools there at the insistence of John and Fanny Allan, and much of the European figures discussed there would manifest themselves later on in his writing. Often, nearby Paris, France or Italy or Norway are chosen as settings for his most popular stories. Had Poe not been exposed to this new place, it is questionable if he would have incorporated such European elements into his writing. However, in the spring of 1820 John Allan was forced to return his family to America after the collapse of the tobacco market, and he would grapple with his resulting debts for many years afterward. Edgar would never have another opportunity to travel abroad again, yet these experiences formed a lasting impact upon his psyche, shaping his artistic style in such a way that distinguished him from his contemporaries.

Upon returning to Richmond in 1820, Poe was nevertheless enrolled at a private academy, where he became very attached to Jane Stannard, the mother of his schoolmate Robert. Stannard died in 1824, pushing Poe into a depression at having lost someone whom he had cared about yet again. In early 1826 he entered the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, where he excelled in his studies at first but later became a gambler and drank excessively, due to the sudden lack of financial support imposed by John Allan, who had inherited a fortune in 1825 and had plenty of money at this point. Edgar's behavior led to his dismissal after only a year and, after a heated falling out with John Allan after it was revealed that he had engaged in an extramarital affair without Fanny's knowledge, Poe boarded a ship destined for Boston in hopes of pursuing his literary talents. There, he worked for a short while for a newspaper and published *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, his first book of verse, although it did not sell very well due to Poe's obscurity. Disenchanted by his life on Boston, Poe joined the United States

Army under the name of "Edgar Perry" in May of 1827, because he was too young to legally enlist. Stationed first at Fort Independence in Boston Harbor, Poe was transferred to Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island, where he gained the inspiration to later write "The Gold-Bug."

Poe eventually grew tired of army life and, despite his successes there, wished for a discharge early in 1829, craving instead the more academic atmosphere of West Point. Discharged soon after Fanny Allan died early in 1829, Poe lived for awhile with his Aunt Maria Clemm (David Poe's sister) in Baltimore and young cousin Virginia, who would later become his wife. He was eventually entered New York's West Point Academy in June of 1830, but as John Allan continued to distance himself from Edgar, Poe lashed out by purposely getting into trouble, with the intention that he be expelled from the Academy. Having realized that John Allan's refusal to formally adopt him as his own son would ban him from claiming any right to John Allan's fortune, Poe decided to focus upon his own dreams. After his disgraceful exit from West Point early in 1831, Poe returned to Baltimore where he lived again with his Aunt Clemm, sister Virginia, and his brother William Henry, who had begun to drink excessively and was quickly dying, presumably from the same disease that had killed Eliza Poe: tuberculosis. Freed from the stresses of living in the Allan household or the military, Edgar Allan Poe then pursued his writing much more intensively, winning first prize in a contest with "MS Found in a Bottle," which led to a relationship with the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond, where he had also submitted his stories for publication. John Allan died a year later, in 1834, and left no inheritance to Poe, thus severing Poe's entire connection to the surrogate family that had offered him so many benefits as a child.

This man, Thomas White, later offered Poe a job in Richmond as assistant editor of his magazine, which the young Poe eagerly accepted. Then at the age of twenty-six, Poe excelled at his responsibilities at first, and secretly married his cousin Virginia a few months later, in September of 1835; Aunt Clemm soon joined them there. In spite of Edgar rambunctious social life, he excelled as assistant editor, increasing the publication's circulation considerably during his tenure, until his abrupt dismissal in 1837 due to his continued substance abuse, principally due to alcohol. He then relocated his family to New York City for about a year and a half, where Poe continued to write fervently and was published in several magazines of his day. In August of 1838, he moved his family again, this time to Philadelphia, where they would spend the next four years. Poe supported his wife and aunt this time primarily through his work as an editor first for *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* and then *Graham's Magazine* afterward, the latter of which became widely popular under Poe's leadership. A collection of short stories entitled *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* was released successfully in December of 1839. Although Edgar Allan's work at *Graham's* would come to a close in 1842, he continued to publish fervently in the next two years. He was also greatly troubled by the declining health of Virginia, who had begun spitting blood while singing in 1842, revealing the early stages of tuberculosis.

Seeking new opportunities, the Poe family relocated to New York City yet again on April 6, 1844, where "The Balloon-Hoax" earned Poe some fast cash. Poe then composed hi

infamous poem, "The Raven," said to lament the dying state of Virginia. Several months later, Poe worked at the *New York Evening Mirror* but became restless due to the lack of responsibility and control over publication that was placed upon him, and sought more challenging opportunities with *The Broadway Journal* in 1845. Purchasing this periodical in October of 1845, Poe was given the chance to prove the abilities that he was restricted from at the *Mirror*, and he failed, because of his excessive drinking that caused him to miss a printing deadline. The *Journal* discontinued circulation early in 1846, and a depressed Poe decided instead to focus upon his writing and increasingly gave lectures about various literary topics. He also moved a declining Virginia Poe to the farming community of Fordham during the summer of 1846. That fall brought with it a harsh cold, however, and Poe was unable even to afford coal to heat their cottage, no doubt accelerating the impending death of this twenty-five year old woman at the end January, 1847. Poe's life afterward is one of attempted recovery and gradual decline. He wrote little in the months following Virginia's death and desperately sought to marry again, replacing the continued desire for a female figure in his life that had persisted since he was a young child.

Recovering somewhat professionally, Poe went on a lecture circuit to reestablish himself. Throughout 1848, he had written many critical essays, rather than creative pieces, and his role seems to have been transitioning from that of a writer to a literary critic, analyzing the work of his contemporaries. Having reacquainted himself with a childhood sweetheart named Elmira Shelton in Richmond and eventually set marriage plans for October of 1849, and overcome by repeated periods of illness and heavy fits of drinking, begins the trip by ferry steamer back to New York to bring Maria Clemm back down to Richmond for his wedding, made a rest stop in Baltimore, Maryland, on September 29, 1849. There, Poe mysteriously disappeared before being found, delirious, in front of "Ryan's Saloon" in the building known as "Gunner's Hall," a polling place since there was a political election in progress. Common perceptions assume that Poe was manipulated and purposely made drunk by the locals and forced to vote multiple times in support of a political candidate.

However, given that there is no evidence that he was drunk at all, the location of his collapse is more than likely, a mere coincidence. The fact that it was a polling place suggests that people were probably congregating in the area, and the Saloon, being the closest public place, would have been the obvious location to which Poe would be brought. It does not automatically reveal that Poe was there getting drunk, and lapsed into an alcohol-induced comatose. Following his stay at this place, Poe was transported to Washington College Hospital, where he refused to drink any alcohol, since it was merely assumed that he was going into alcohol withdrawal. Edgar Allan Poe's final words were "Lord help my poor soul" before he expired on October 7, 1849. His remains are buried beside his beloved Virginia (who was moved from New York following Edgar's death) in Baltimore, Maryland in Westminster Burying Ground.

Although the common perception is that Poe died as a result of some alcohol-related disease, such as cirrhosis of the liver, a more modern interpretation of the recurring bouts of sickness in the months preceding his death suggests that Poe possibly died as a result of rabies. The physicians even ruled Poe's exact cause of death to be

"congestion of the brain," which is consistent with victims of rabies; the fact that he declined alcohol while in the hospital further refutes the possibility that alcohol had been the cause of his death, since had he been the raging alcoholic at the end of his life as is often portrayed, then he surely would have guzzled the liquor down. Rabies is a viral infection affecting the central nervous system, or which the brain is the chief organ. Given that the cause of death was located in his brain suggests again that rabies may be a more plausible cause of death.

Whatever the exact circumstances, Edgar Allan Poe's life of forty years that stretched from Boston to Richmond to London, and back to Richmond again, then ended. The pain that he carried with him throughout his life, balanced by those occasioned moments of joy, is something that Poe's readers still detect all too well in reading Poe's stories. It is something all too human that we can all recognize, but Edgar Allan Poe was one of those few people who knew how to capture these feelings, and encase them down upon paper beneath his words. The persisting fear of death that is recounted numerous times in his writing thus became a demon which he was forced to face in those final noble moments, at last venturing there where so many loved ones had gone before: Eliza and David Poe, Fanny Allan, his brother William Henry, Jane Stannard, and of course his beloved Virginia. October 7, 1849 was finally Edgar Allan Poe's day to die.

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# Plot Summary

The varied stories of Edgar Allan Poe clearly reveal the complexity of the man who created them. Popularly known for such poems as "The Raven" or 'The Bells," Poe's primary source of income was from selling his stories for publication. Although the *18 Best Short Stories by Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by Vincent Price and Chandler Brossard, does not include all of these tales, it includes a strong overview of those for which Poe was best known. Generally, Poe himself grouped his stories into two categories, that of the surreal, the supernatural, which he termed to be "arabesque," and the horrific, gruesome tales which he entitled "grotesque," as when he published his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1840.

Poe's extensive work was the forerunner for much of the literature that was to follow, writing science fiction before Jules Verne, or composing the first detective stories featuring the infinitely observant Dupin, before Doyle's Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. As with Poe, the narrator of these later stories is the "sidekick" of the brilliant detective mind. Poe's satire in "The Gold-Bug" or "The Man That Was Used Up" comes before another famous southern gentleman who came to live in the North, Mark Twain. He is also known for further defining the genre of "horror" that had already been established with the European Gothic literature of Mary Shelley and others, as Poe does in "The Pit and the Pendulum" or "The Fall of the House of Usher."

However, these term denote a certain literary style or tone and do not explicitly reveal the far-ranging ideas that his tales pursue. Some focus upon death, as in "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Tell-Tale Heart," or "The Premature Burial." Several tales focus upon crime or acts of murder, "The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," or "The Cask of Amontillado," while Poe focuses on the process of solving a crime in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter." Characters are often portrayed as being in a vicious struggle to escape death as depicted in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," "The Sphinx," "A Descent into the Maelstrom," or "The Pit and the Pendulum." This quest for survival succeeds in some instances and fails in others. Then there are the more whimsical tales that tend to amuse and sometimes satirized popular figures of Poe's day. Some may find such comical stories as "The Gold-Bug," "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," and "The Man That Was Used Up" to be completely uncharacteristic for the Gothic horror tales for which Poe is commonly known. In spite of this common perception, these stories form yet another facet of Poe's complicated personality.

In regard to format, the stories always reflect a keen attention to details, bringing together every event at the story's conclusion and leaving no question intentionally unanswered. In tales such as "MS Found in a Bottle," the ending remains unknown and is left to be determined by the reader's own imagination. This use of flavorful details to illustrate a certain setting, such as that of Sullivan's Island for "The Gold-Bug," or the Shenandoah River Valley for "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" reflects the use of "local color," a technique instituted increasingly by many authors in Poe's generation of authors. The narration is always first person, with the narrator himself sometimes being

the focus of events, as in "The Black Cat," but often the narrator is merely an impartial observer, merely recording the words of the main storyteller, as in "The Purloined Letter," where Dupin is the center of attention. Sometimes the format purports to be a mere short story, while Poe employs more engaging scenarios ranging from the text being a letter found in a bottle, as in "MS Found in a Bottle," a newspaper report in "The Balloon-Hoax," or a murderer's confession composed on the eve of his execution, as in "The Black Cat."

Poe's general modus operandi was to meld together facts with fiction. Those facts are derived from current events, history, or personal experiences in Poe's life. Such examples can easily be found throughout these eighteen stories and are extensively documented throughout the main text, and so elaborate detail shall be omitted here. However, his lifelong struggle for a female figure in his life manifests itself in several stories, as does the impending sense of death that overcomes many characters, because Poe himself had lost so many important people from his own life that included his mother, stepmother, and his wife, Virginia Poe. The stories also reveal a sharp wit, embodied in such complicated characters as Auguste Dupin, the quiet genius who has fallen from prestige and only regains it by using his acute powers of observation. In many ways, Dupin models Poe's own personality, aware of the importance of every discernible detail in his own stories. Simultaneously, Poe is also the drunk from "The Black Cat" and "The Masque of the Red Death," reveling to escape from more pressing realities. Poe is the man who lives in fear like the narrator of "The Premature Burial" but has discovered renewed hope to live.

A man of intense emotion, the innermost recesses of Edgar Allan Poe's soul are clearly visible through the varied emotional states of these characters. They explore all facets of humanity, ranging from the intellectual, the spiritual, and the physical. Some stories have a greater personal significance than others, which were written for commercial purposes. However, it is Poe's entire life that is pulsing between the words, revealing his dreams and his failures, his loves and his regrets, the people and places whom he encountered during his journey through the first half of nineteenth century America. As much as this multitude of characters is entirely a product of Poe, so too is he a subconscious product of each of them. Thus, this last, surviving piece of Edgar Allan Poe is reborn while these stories are still being read, and his world is reawakened in full force. It is then that one can again hear the pounding voice of Poe's very own tell-tale heart.

Finally, although the arrangement of the tales throughout the text is not chronologically presented, it is important to note the parallel between the story's theme and events occurring in Poe's personal life, as well as in society, when the work was composed. It will be useful in better understanding the inspiration behind each of these works to order them according to publication date which presumably would follow near the date of composition. The proper chronological list reads thus:

"MS Found in a Bottle," published on October 19, 1833
"The Man That Was Used Up," published in August of 1839
"The Fall of the House of Usher, published in September of 1839

"The Murder in the Rue Morgue," published in April of 1841
"A Descent into the Maelstrom," published in April of 1841
"The Pit and the Pendulum," published in September of 1842
"The Tell-Tale Heart," published in January of 1843
"The Masque of the Red Death," published in May of 1843
"The Gold-Bug," published in June of 1843
"The Black Cat," published on August 19, 1843
"A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," published in April of 1844
"The Balloon-Hoax," published on April 13, 1844
"The Premature Burial," published on July 31, 1844
"The Purloined Letter," published in September of 1844
"The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," published in November of 1845
"The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," published in December of 1845
"The Sphinx," published in January of 1846
"The Cask of Amontillado," published in November of 1846

# Major Characters

**Narrator of 'The Black Cat':** Claiming himself to be an animal lover, his story is a confession of how he came to murder his wife because of a cat. He drinks alcohol heavily, but he blames the black cat for what has happened, rather than himself; he owns his own house and, as such, appears to be a fairly wealthy man. He dies the morning after telling the tale.

**Pluto:** The black cat so despised by the Narrator. Although he claimed to love Pluto at first, one day he stabs a penknife into the cat's eye after returning home in a drunken stupor. Later, he hangs the cat from a tree by the neck, although his house burns down soon after. The narrator assumes Pluto to have supernatural powers and, eventually, he finds a cat that looks similar and becomes afraid that this cat is Pluto returned from the grave to haunt him; when his wife tries to stop him from slicing the second Pluto with an ax, he slices her instead. The cat is accidentally buried alive with the murdered wife, and its meowing draws the police to this hiding spot.

**Narrator of 'The Fall of the House of Usher':** A friend of Roderick Usher from their schooldays, the narrator visits Roderick's house after hearing unsettling news that his friend needs to be comforted. Their, he encourages Roderick to read and play music, activities that lift him out of his depression because of Madeline's illness. After Madeline dies, however, Roderick becomes very afraid however, which also infects the Narrator, although he had been skeptical that there was anything to be afraid of there. He hurriedly flees when the House of Usher crumbles down into the earth, soon after Roderick Usher is attacked by an angry, living Madeline.

**Roderick Usher:** A old friend of the Narrator from their schooldays, although the Narrator no longer knows him that well. Sullen and shy, the Roderick believes that the House of Usher in which he resides is a living creature; he is depressed because he and his twin sister, Madeline, are the last surviving members of the Usher family. The Narrator's presence comforts him until the death of Madeline, and then Roderick is overcome with grief that the Usher line is nearly ended. When Madeline attacks him in anger for burying her alive, the Narrator flees. Just as Roderick had said, the House seems to come alive, crumbling apart and falling into the earth, along with the presumably murdered Roderick and deceased Madeline, the last of the House of Usher.

**Prince Prospero:** A great prince of an unnamed kingdom, Prospero hides from the suffering outside in his kingdom from the Red Death by inviting one thousand friends to live in the sanctity of his palace. No one comes in or leaves, to avoid the disease from getting inside. There, Prospero hosts wild masquerade parties, designing an elaborate system of colored rooms in which these events take place. He is rather arrogant to think that he can escape the Red Death, as he discovers one day when a figure resembling a victim of the Red Death enters the palace and, when Prospero angrily attempts to stab this figure with a knife, he immediately drops dead. The same fate soon befalls his partygoers, and the Red Death proves to be inescapable for even a wealthy Prince.

**Narrator named P.:** This Narrator P. claims to be a physician who has a great interest in Mesmerism. His story describes a Mesmeric experiment he conducted upon a man named Valdemar from Harlaem, in the moments before his death. The Narrator was able to hold Valdemar in a trance for several months, delaying his death. Finally, when the Narrator does release Valdemar from the trance, his body immediately decomposes. The Narrator also invokes various pieces of factual scientific information, in order to make his story seem more credible.

**Valdemar:** A resident of Harlaem, NY, and a well-known scholar. Upon discovering that he has a terminal illness, Valdemar eagerly agrees to assist the Narrator in a Mesmeric experiment to analyze how a trance will affect the process of dying. Upon entering the trance, Valdemar mutters various words, and he lays in such a state for several months. Eventually, Valdemar mutters that he 'is dead' and demands to be awakened. When the Narrator does this, Valdemar immediately decomposes into a pile of body fluids.

**Narrator of 'The Premature Burial':** A wealthy man overwhelmed by his own fear of being buried alive. The Narrator first relates numerous instances when people were mistakenly buried alive, and then he describes how he installed safeguards in his tomb to prevent this from happening to him. One day, he awakens feeling trapped, his face covered, and assumes that he has been buried alive! Soon he realizes that he has merely fallen asleep on a boat, and from this experience he learns not to live his life in constant fear and abandons his earlier worries, living life to its fullest without being afraid to stray far from his home like before.

**Narrator of 'MS Found in a Bottle':** A self-professed skeptic, this man describes his entire life story, that he does not easily believe in religion or supernatural events; he is a man of science. An antiques dealer who travels widely, the Narrator’s story is found written down on paper encased in a bottle from the sea. A journey beginning in Java leads to his coming aboard a strange ship that sails to the South Pole, where a mighty whirlpool consumes the ship. The Narrator’s story in hurled into the sea at the last moments before the ship’s descent, and his exact fate or whereabouts are unknown.

**Narrator of 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains':** This Narrator from Charlottesville was friends with Augustus Bedloe and Doctor Templeton for awhile; he relates the strange Mesmeric relationship that exists between these two men, as Templeton easily controls the sickly Bedloe. One day, Bedloe disappears and upon his return, describes an odd occurrence where he traveled back in time to an earlier life and died. Soon after that, Bedloe himself does die when Templeton accidentally treats him with poisonous leeches. The Narrator is mystified and confused by these unexplainable events.

**Augustus Bedloe:** A sickly man from a wealthy family, enabling him to hire a full-time physician to treat his unknown illness. Augustus Templeton is completely controlled by Doctor Templeton, who can make Bedloe’s body move by using his mind. One day Bedloe has an odd experience in the Ragged Mountains outside of Charlottesville, and Templeton admits that Bedloe resembles a man whom he had once befriended but who had died. Judging from Bedloe’s experience, he remembered this event from the previous life, for he and Templeton‘s friend are one and the same -- he has been

reincarnated. Soon after, Bedloe dies when Templeton mistakenly treats him with poisonous leeches.

**Doctor Templeton:** A skilled doctor and student of Mesmerism, who first met Augustus Bedloe in Saratoga, Virginia. Templeton was drawn to Bedloe because he resembled his old friend Oldeb so closely. Templeton conducts Mesmeric experiments on Bedloe until he gains total control over him. Many years before in India, Templeton failed to save Oldeb from death, and after Bedloe tells about his adventure in the Ragged Mountains, triggering a memory from an earlier life, Templeton accidentally kills Bedloe by treating him with poisoned leeches.

**Narrator of 'The Sphinx':** A man overcome by his fear of Death because a cholera epidemic is spreading through New York City, where he resides. A kind family member invites him to visit his home outside of the city for awhile, to ease some of these worries. Even there, the Narrator mistakes a tiny bug for an enormous monster crawling down the hillside to take his life away. Even though this is proven wrong by his host, the Narrator remains petrified.

**Narrator of 'The Murders at the Rue Morgue' and 'The Purloined Letter':** A wealthy man who agrees to allow Auguste Dupin live with him for free, because Dupin is such a fascinating individual. The Narrator allows himself to become absorbed by Dupin, reading throughout the daylight hours and taking walks at night. In many ways, Dupin is his intellectual mentor, teaching the Narrator how to use his analytical abilities. The Narrator listens patiently to Dupin’s elaborate explanations of how he solves first the murder mystery at Rue Morgue, and also recovers a stolen letter several years later. The Narrator is never directly involved in these operations and is left in the dark until Dupin reveals his methodology to him. The Narrator is a relative observer to apparent Dupin’s majesty and brilliance.

**C. Auguste Dupin:** A brilliant man who is creative but also analytical, much like the Minister D-- who is a poet and a mathematician. Dupin is highly observant and enjoys having the Narrator around as an audience to his abilities, and also to pay for his lodging, since Dupin himself somehow lost all of the money he had. The relationship is equal, as the Narrator provides material comforts and Dupin provides intellectual ones; they compliment each other, and Auguste enjoys the mentoring role. He is also very arrogant, showing disdain for those who are not as observant or skilled as he is, particularly the Parisian Prefect of Police. Dupin never admits any mistakes of his own, thus contributing to his inflated ego. He regains wealth once more as a reward from the Prefect after obtaining the 'purloined letter' back from the unsuspecting Minister D---.

**Narrator of 'The Tell-Tale Heart':** A psychotic man who murders his roommate, an old man, because the old man’s eyes frighten him. He then cuts up the old man and buries his body under the floorboards. What he then perceives to be the incessant beating of the old man’s heart is the beating of his own, because the old man is very dead. The police arrive, and the Narrator acts nonchalant, before he maniacally confesses the murder due to the heartbeat he hears. He reasserts his sanity again and again, insisting to the reader that he is not a madman at all.

**Old Man from 'The Tell-Tale Heart':** A kindly old man who trusted the Narrator to take care of him and help him out. During the evenings, the Narrator watched this Old Man while he slept, plotting to murder him because his eye scares the Narrator. One night he makes noise and the Old Man awakens, at which the Narrator soon lunges upon him, suffocating him under the bed. The Old Man is then cut into pieces and stored beneath the floor, until the Narrator admits to police that he murdered the Old Man, because he thinks that they can hear the Old Man‘s heart beating throughout the room, even though it is in fact his own.

**Walter Legrand:** An eccentric resident of Sullivan’s Island near Charleston, South Carolina and student of shells. Legrand’s name means 'The Great,' and he is from an old French family based in New Orleans, although he had fled there due to financial worries. Walter Legrand acts strangely after discovering a Gold-Bug on the island and takes it back to his tiny shack; his black servant, Jupiter, thinks that Legrand has some illness because he sneaks around during the day, but eventually Legrand reveals himself to be a brilliant man who discovers the long lost treasure of Captain Kidd, due to the manual labor provided by the Narrator and Jupiter. In doing so, Walter Legrand relieves those financial worries that had initially caused him to flee New Orleans.

**Narrator of 'The Gold-Bug':** An acquaintance of Walter Legrand from Charleston, South Carolina. The Narrator is very skeptical of Legrand’s behavior just like Jupiter, thinking that Legrand has gone insane because of his odd behavior. The Narrator helps Legrand decipher the map unknowingly when he points out that there is an image on the parchment that Legrand did not even draw, which appeared after the dog jumped on him, and he held the parchment closely to the fire. Later, the Narrator helps to dig up the treasure and gets a share of these riches for himself as well, proving that he was wrong in judging Legrand to be mentally ill.

**Narrator of 'The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether':** A French physician from Paris who spontaneously decides to visit a famous 'Maison de Sante' in southern France. There, the Narrator mistakenly believes that Monsieur Maillard and his guests are really sane people, even though these individuals are psychiatric patients who have taken over the hospital and imprisoned the real hospital staff. At one point Maillard indirectly refers to the Narrator as a 'stupid-looking gentleman,' and even after the truth is revealed, the Narrator searches for work by Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether, even though it’s obvious Maillard was just referring to how he had tarred and feathered the hospital’s staff. This clueless narrator is perceived as a subtle satire of Charles Dickens, whom Poe eventually disliked.

**Monsieur Maillard:** Once the director of the 'Maison de Sante' in southern France which used the famous 'soothing system,' Maillard has since gone insane himself and became the hospital’s patient. The Narrator does not suspect this, assuming Maillard to have always been the director; Maillard led the successful rebellion against the hospital staff, and he instituted the new 'system of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,' referring to how he tarred and feather the hospital’s employees, confining them. Maillard is overthrown again by the hospital staff during the Narrator’s visit, and peace is restored

with the reinstatement of this 'soothing system.' Maillard thinks that the Narrator is a very stupid person.

**Narrator of 'The Man That Was Used Up':** This frustrated Narrator from an unnamed place seeks to discover more about John Smith by conducting an investigation. He asks many different individuals about Smith, because he has the feeling that Smith has some secret that he's concealing. After asking people from church, the theater, and at a dinner party, he goes to Smith's house himself. There, he discovers that Smith is almost entirely made out of fabricated body parts, because he has been so badly injured during his wars with the Kickapoo and Bugaboo Indians. Satisfied, the Narrator's frustration immediately goes away.

**Brevet Brigadier-General John A.B.C. Smith :** A mighty war hero whose features appear to be so perfect that it seems too good to be true. His hair is perfect, he has broad shoulders and a melodic voice, beautiful eyes, and his moustache is trimmed perfectly. The Narrator discovers that this image is fake, indeed, because Smith's body has been so badly damaged during his fierce battles with the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indians. Everyone seems to know Smith's secret except for the Narrator, and nobody really likes to talk about it because it unsettles them. Without his mechanisms, John Smith is just a 'large bundle,' which the Narrator kicked out of his way upon entering Smith's bedroom. This bundle does not even appear to be of a human form, for he is all used up.

**Thomas Monck Mason:** A historical figure and famous balloon aviator who sailed in the 'Nassau Balloon' from London to Germany in 1836 along with Robert Holland and Charles Green. Poe pretends that Thomas Monck Mason is writing much of this tale in the form of diary entries to give the tale more credibility, mimicking the narrative style Monck had employed in his Account of the Late Aeronautical Expedition from London to Weilburg. Mason is the man in charge of this supposed balloon flight across the Atlantic Ocean, as he is the chief designer of this balloon as well. Monck's supposed words in 'The Balloon-Hoax' simply describe changes in the weather, the condition of the balloon, and general details of their feelings during the journey before landing on Sullivan's Island.

**Harrison Ainsworth:** A historical figure who was born in 1805 and died in 1882, Ainsworth was a popular writer of 'historical romances.' Jack Sheppard, published in 1839, portrays a fugitive running from the law seeking to prove his innocence; Ainsworth was also well-acquainted with Charles Dickens, whom Poe had some correspondence with. Poe makes Ainsworth a part of this tale to gove it credibility, as with the addition of Monck Mason. Ainsworth provides a more 'creative' description of events to contrast the technical details related by Mason, creating the same duality as is embodied in Poe's Auguste Dupin, uniting the 'analytical' with the 'creative,' the mathematician and the poet.

**Old man from 'Descent into the Maelstrom':** An old Norwegian fisherman whose two brothers drowned in the Moskoestrom, although he managed to escape from the sea through his own ingenuity. None of the other fishermen believe his fantastic tale

however, nor does he expect the Narrator to believe him either. He has children of his own now, but his body is horribly damaged from the horror nearly drowning in the sea, and his hair has turned from black to white.

**Narrator of 'The Pit and the Pendulum':** Presumably a Frenchman, the Narrator is imprisoned by judges in Toledo, Spain, as part of the Inquisition. He describes his explorations of his prison, where he nearly falls into a large pit, but then later he is tied up beneath a swinging blade that shall soon cut him. His ingenuity saves him, as the hungry rats chew through his bindings while devouring the meat juices the Narrator has spread upon it. Then the walls come together and force him into the pit, until he is saved at the last possible moment by a French general, who catches his hand as he falls.

**Montresor:** Presumably an Italian, Montresor is overcome with hatred for Fortunato because he does not treat him as an equal. Monstresor claims that Fortunato has insulted him countless time, and now he will have his revenge, wishing to have 'freedom from impunity,' or 'punishment.' A wealthy man, Monstresor seeks social equality from the arrogant Fortunato, who refuses to give this to him. Luring Fortunato to his home with promises that he can taste test his Amontillado wine, Monstresor then chains Fortunato to a far wall underneath his home where there are poisonous fumes from saltpeter, and then he buried him inside of the wall there. Joyfully, Monstresor declares that nobody has found Fortunato’s body, even after fifty years. He obtained his revenge, and he did not receive any punishment for this murder either.

**Fortunato:** An arrogant Italian who drinks alcohol heavily, especially wine. This is the weakness that Monstresor exploits in his plot to murder Fortunato to avenge the many injuries that Fortunato has committed against him. Fortunato does not suspect his plan at all, selfishly wishing only to have the Amontillado. Upon realizing what Monstresor has planned for him as his is being buried behind the wall, a sober Fortunato pleads with Monstresor to release him, but it is already too late. Rather than forgive Fortunato, Monstresor decides nevertheless to take away this arrogant man’s life, declaring simply, even fifty years later, 'May he rest in peace.'

**Minor Characters**

**Wife from 'The Black Cat':** The Narrator’s wife tolerates her husband’s excessive drinking habits, even after he stabbed Pluto’s eye with a penknife. She is later chopped by an ax when she tries to save their second cat from being slain, and her body is buried in the basement’s wall.

**Madeline Usher:** The twin sister of Roderick Usher. She suffers from some terminal illness which no doctor can cure and, upon being placed in a tomb after she dies, this woman returns to kill Roderick, since she apparently was not dead yet at all! Roderick and Madeline are pulled beneath the earth with the collapsing house, presumably to die together.

**Ethelred:** A fictitious character from a fictitious book called Mad Trist by a fictitious author named Sir Launcelot Canning. A 'trist' or 'tryst' is a meeting between people. In

the story this Narrator reads from, Ethelred was meeting a hermit initially, who transforms into a dragon, whom Ethelred slays. The book's title, meaning then 'The insane meeting,' would be applied to Roderick's situation with Madeline, whom he patiently awaits at his chamber's door.

**Friends of Prospero:** One thousand friends of this Prince Prospero who are invited within the gates of his palace to escape the Red Death that rages outside. Every night they dress up and have wild parties, but the Red Death enters the palace nevertheless, and all of these friends then quickly die.

**Doctors D--- and F---:** Two doctors who are invited to participate in the Narrator's experiment upon the dying Valdemar by holding him in a Mesmeric trance. These doctors depart on Saturday and return on Sunday, surprised to see that Valdemar, although suspended, is still living.

**Theodore L---l:** A medical student presumably from New York City, Theodore joins the Narrator around eight o'clock in the evening after the doctors leave. Later, when Valdemar utters aloud that he is dead, Theodore faints, falling onto the floor in shock.

**Congressman's wife:** This woman died and was buried in her family tomb. Three years later, upon reopening the tomb they found her skeletal remains near the doorway, revealing that she had been buried alive and put up a vain struggle to escape from this tomb.

**Mademoiselle Victorine Lafourcade:** A woman who married Monsieur Renelle for his money instead of Julien Bossuet, but Renelle treated her badly. Eventually, she died and was buried beneath the ground. A grieving Julien dug up her grave to have a lock of her hair, only to discover that she was really alive! Victorine escapes with Julien to America and returned to France after many years, where the courts ruled that she was no longer obligated to live with Renelle, because she had been gone for so long. Her love with Julien is legitimized.

**Monsieur Renelle:** A wicked but wealthy man who treats his wife poorly and mistakenly has her buried alive in the ground. Twenty years later, he tries to force Victorine to live with him again but the judges declare that their marriage is nullified because it has been so long.

**Julien Bossuet:** A virtuous man who never lost his love for Victorine, even when she married Renelle instead of him. He accidentally saves Victorine from certain death after digging up her buried body for a lock of hair. The two travel to America and return to France after many years, their mutual love untainted.

**Officer of the artillery:** A man spoken about in The Chirurgical Journal of Leipsic who appeared to be dead after falling off of his horse. He was buried beneath the ground, but while there he regained consciousness and started screaming; someone heard his cries, and coffin was soon dug up, and he appeared to be fine. Unfortunately, after later tests with the galvanic battery, he somehow died after his body had an adverse reaction to it.

**Mr. Edward Stapleton:** A young lawyer who appeared to die because of typhus fever. After his body as stolen by dishonest doctors who wanted to conduct experiments on it, Edward Stapleton regained complete consciousness and was perfectly healthy!

**Captain:** This captain of the Narrator's ship decides to cast anchor after leaving Java because of a storm. This turns out to be a terrible idea, because huge waters then pour over the ship, drowning nearly everyone on board, including the captain. Only the Narrator and an old Swede survive.

**Oldeb:** An old friend of Doctor Templeton who served with him in the army during the administration of Warren Hastings in India. He died during an uprising, however, and his spirit was later reincarnated as Augustus Bedloe, whom Templeton was immediately drawn to because of his resemblance to Oldeb, also spelled by reversing Bedloe.

**Warren Hastings:** A historical figure from British history, Warren Hastings (1732-1818) was the governor of Britain's colonial territory in India from 1774-1784. Poe includes him to provide a sense of factual immediacy to his tale, and the fictitious Oldeb was a military officer under Hastings' command. Hastings did actually repel this factual uprising in which Oldeb was slain by the natives' arrows.

**Host:** A relative of the Narrator who lives outside of New York City near the Hudson River who invites the Narratir to his home to escape the cholera epidemic. His sommon sense overshadows that of the Narrator, who believes that a tiny insect is a monster coming to take hi life. This host points out that it is only an insect, after briefly reading about it out loud from a book.

**Chantilly:** A short actor in the opera Xerxes, whom Dupin and the Narrator believe to be poorly cast in his role. The opera is about this Persian king's attack against Athens.

**Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye:** A brutally murdered woman who resides on the Rue Morgue. Her body was found decapitated on the street after it was thrown out of the window of her home. She had just withdrawn four thousand francs from the bank shortly before she was murdered, but this money was left at the murder scene, untouched by any intruders. Her death baffles the Parisian police.

**Madame L'Espanaye:** The young daughter of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye, who resided with her mother at the Rue Morgue. Her body, too, was found brutally murdered with bruises on her neck and her body stuffed up the chimney.

**Adolphe Le Bon:** A man falsely accused of murdering the L'Espanaye women, because he has been the clerk who accompanied the older woman home from the bank with her large sum of money. Desperate for a suspect, the police arrest him. Dupin admits that Le Bon is a friend of his, and he is eager to see this man freed from all charges against him.

**Vidocq:** Eugene Francois Vidocq was a historical figure upon whom Dupin's character is based. A lifetime criminal, Vidocq (1775-1857) eventually was released from prison with the help of Parisian authorities and was hired as the Prefect of police in 1811 due

to his wit and understanding of the criminal world. After working for many years in this capacity, he resigned his position after a number of scandals emerged, among those being accusations that he was responsible for committing many of the crimes that he supposedly solved. Dupin criticizes Vidocq in 'The Murders at the Rue Morgue' for having certain personality flaws. As always, Auguste Dupin is better than everyone else.

**G--, The Parisian Prefect of Police:** The Parisian chief of police. Dupin disdains this man for his shallow investigative abilities, going so far as to arrest Adolphe Le Bon. G-- is angry when Dupin solves the Rue Morgue murders, declaring that he must mind his own business. In 'The Purloined Letter,' he is shallow as well, paying Dupin fifty thousand francs for the restoration of a letter his police had been searching for over a period of months. The Prefect is so happy to get the letter that he doesn't even thank Dupin for helping him.

**Sailor:** The owner of a runaway Ourang-Outang that he had captured in Borneo. When the monkey committed the murders before his eyes, the sailor fled in fear. He goes to Dupin's home after reading Dupin's newspaper advertisement falsely declaring that he had captured a lost Ourang-Outang in Paris. After confessing this, the sailor does soon recapture the animal on his own.

**Jupiter:** A black servant of Walter Legrand who resides with him on Sullivan's Island. His name is also the Roman king of gods, forming quite a paradox for his own poor state of mind. He is often the subject of ridicule because of his incessant worrying, thinking Legrand to be mentally ill. Jupiter was once a slave, but even after he was freed by his master, he insisted on remaining with Walter to take care of him.

**Newfoundland dog:** This large breed of dog startles the Narrator shortly upon entering the Legrand's shack on Sullivan's Island, causing him to put the parchment near the fire and illuminating the hidden ink that describes Captain Kidd's treasure. Later, the dog breaks free of his rope and digs the last few bits of soil to reveal the skeletal remains of one of Kidd's men. In tune with the humor of this story, the dog is probably drawn to those buried bones.

**Three policemen:** These three policemen investigate a neighbor's noise complaint about the apartment shared by the Narrator and the old man. They are nearly prepared to depart, convinced that everything is fine, when the Narrator screams aloud that the old man is buried beneath the floor. He assumes that the policemen can hear the old man's heart beating, even though only he can hear this beating of his own heart. At this, the police undoubtedly uncover the dead body and take the Narrator into custody.

**Lieutenant G--:** An officer on Sullivan's Island from Fort Moultrie. Legrand allows Lietenant G-- to borrow the gold-bug that he discovers, and he thus has to wait until the next day to get it back from him and show the Narrator.

**Captain Kidd:** A famous historical figure known for his work as a protector of ships from pirates, but then he decided to become a pirate himself. Born in Scotland in 1645, William Kidd later moved to New York in America. He would attack all sorts of merchant

ships stealing and secretly reselling merchandise. Eventually, he sought protection from the colonial governor of New York after traveling to America from the West Indies, but this man sent him to go on trial and be executed in England. Legends abound of Kidd's treasure buried along the East Coast before, much of which was never recovered, aside from some which was found hidden on Long Island. Poe uses this popular legend in his tale of 'The Gold-Bug,' suggesting that Kidd's treasure is hidden on Sullivan's Island.

**Woman:** A strange and beautiful woman elegantly wears mourning clothes upon the Narrator's entrance into the Maison de Sante. Maillard declares that she is in fact his niece and not a patient at all.

**Monsieur De Kock:** This dinner guest makes a scene when he eagerly describes an asylum patient who thought he was a donkey, which he then begins to enact. De Kock's eagerness in explaining this man behavior would suggest that this man is himself that very patient!

**Mademoiselle Laplace:** Laplace reminds guests at the dinner table, such as De Kock, to behave appropriately and not get carried away with their descriptions of former patients at the asylum. Her name means 'The place.'

**Madame Joyeuse:** A female dinner guest who describes one patient named Madame Joyeuse who thought she was a rooster. This dinner guest then begins to crow loudly at the dinner table, until she is strictly reprimanded by Monsieur Maillard to behave properly. Her last name means 'Happy.'

**Eugenie Salsafette:** The first woman dressed elegantly now dresses in clothes too big for her with a dirty cap unbefitting her beauty. She eagerly describes a patient who used to always get undressed all of the time and then undresses herself at the dinner table.

**Friend of Brigadier-General John Smith:** This unnamed friend introduces the Narrator to John Smith, noting him to be a great and noble warrior. He does not reveal Smith's secret to him, that most of his body is formed from fabricated mechanisms.

**Miss Tabitha T.:** A woman whom the Narrator talks to at church about Smith. Her words are cut off when the reverend's sermon begins, however.

**Reverend Doctor Drummummupp:** This reverend's loud sermon about the shortness of human life prevents Tabitha from finishing her sentence about John Smith.

**Miss Arabella Cognoscenti:** Arabella is Miranda's sister, and just when she is about to make an important statement to the Narrator about Smith while they're at the theater, the play begins, cutting off her words. Her last name means in Latin, 'Knowing' or 'Understanding.' In many ways, this mocks the narrator who seeks to know what she knows but cannot.

**Miss Miranda Cognoscenti:** Miranda is Arabella's sister, and just when she is about to make an important statement to the Narrator about Smith while they're at the theater, the play begins, cutting off her words. Her last name means in Latin, 'Knowing' or

'Understanding.' In many ways, this mocks the narrator who seeks to know what she knows but cannot.

**Climax:** An actor who infuriates the Narrator because he screams his lines from Othello so loudly that the Narrator can't even hear what the Cognoscenti sisters are saying. The Narrator then goes and beats Climax up as a punishment for being so loud.

**Kathleen O'Trump:** Kathleen hosts a soiree (party) at her home after the play performance, and the Narrator asks her about John Smith. She readily replies, until another guest interrupts their conversation and the frustrated Narrator storms away.

**Captain Mann:** A female guest interrupts Kathleen O'Trump to ask about Captain Mann. Historically, Mann was a military officer in the early nineteenth century who established For Mann in Kansas (not far from the modern day Fort Leavenworth) to defend against the local Kickapoo Indians, who are discussed in this tale. Poe probably mentions Mann to give his tale some historical immediacy for his readership.

**Miss Pirouette:** A guest at O'Trump's dinner party who is about to make some statement about Smith before the Narrator is called away by another woman to settle some intellectual debate. Upon his return, Pirouette is gone!

**Mr. Theodore Sinivate:** Sinivate has plenty of time to explain his impressions about John Smith, but he resists the Narrator's questioning. He is evasive and willfully refuses to give the Narrator the answers about what secret Smith is hiding from him. This suggests that everyone else, too, whom the Narrator had spoken too became distracted purposely so that they could avoid discussing this subject. The fact that Smith is made mainly of fake body parts is an unsettling thought to them.

**Pompey:** A black slave belonging to Brigadier-General John Smith. Named after a great Roman general, Pompey assembles Smith's assorted fabricated body parts to help him get 'dressed' during the morning of the Narrator's visit. Observing this in progress, the Narrator's persisting confusion about Smith is dispelled at long last.

**Robert Holland:** A famous aviator who accompanied Charles Green and Monck Mason during the Nassau balloon flight. He also reportedly was onboard this fictitious trans-Atlantic balloon flight from Wales to Sullivan's Island.

**Mr. Henson:** William Henson designed a famous 'aerial steam engine' in 1842, which was then out on display at the Adelaide Gallery (this is historical fact). Poe also makes this man as a traveler aboard the his fictitious flying machine, Victoria, which supposedly landed on Sullivan's Island in South Carolina.

**Sir Everard Bringhurst:** A fictitious gentleman, who plays little role other than supposedly being a scientist who can witness the majesty of Monck Mason's balloon, Victoria.

**Mr. Forsyth:** Reportedly, this is the name of the informant from Charleston, South Carolina, who has put together this article about the nonexistent 'balloon landing.' One can assume that Forsyth's existence is as real as the rest of this story, i.e. not at all.

**Mr. Osborne, nephew of Lord Bentinck:** Lord Bentinck was a famous historical figure who was governor of Britain's colonial India territory from 1828-1835. However, he did not have a nephew named 'Osbourne,' so this is apparently another attempt by Poe to create immediacy for his readers, since Bentinck was undoubtedly well-known to American readers, since he had ended his position as governor only ten years before this tale's publication.

**Two sailors from Woolwich:** No explanation is given for their involvement in the trip of this balloon from Wales to Sullivan's Island. Woolwich is a well-known town in England located on the Thames River, known as the site of the Royal Dockyard and the Royal Arsenal.

**Charles Green:** Historically, Green (1785-1870) accompanied Robert Holland and Thomas Monck Mason on the Nassau flight from England to Germany in November of 1836. He also invented the tail rope system which Poe describes in this tale, to conserve more gas by lifting or lowering the guide rope accordingly. Historical reality is blended into Poe's work to make it believable.

**Narrator from 'A Descent into the Maelstrom':** An outsider who knows little about Norway's Moskoestrom. The fisherman he meets there tells of his near-death experience, declaring that he does not expect the Narrator to believe his tale, because none of his fellow fisherman do.

**Elder and younger brother of the old man:** The old man's younger brother drowns as soon as the storm throws waves across the boat, but the elder brother holds on for dear life. Later, the elder brother forces the old man away from his hand hold at the Astrolabe ring, choosing to save himself rather than working with his brother for a solution. The old man thus escapes alone, as his elder brother is pulled into the Maelstrom along with their tiny boat.

**Marie Roget:** A character in another short story by Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Mystery of Marie Roget.' Auguste Dupin had received further fame for solving this murder mystery after the Rue Morgue murders. Several years later, the Prefect asks for help yet again in recovering 'The Purloined Letter.'

**Royal personage:** An unnamed woman of royalty whose family name begins with the letter 'S,' from whom a scandalous letter was stolen by Minister D---. As a result, he is blackmailing her, and she enlists the Prefect to retrieve it for her. Having failed, the Prefect asks for Auguste Dupin's assistance, and in a rare display of loyalty, Dupin declares that in the end that he retrieved the letter to preserve her integrity.

**Minister D---:** A poet and a mathematician, the Minister D--- is a brilliant man, much like Auguste Dupin himself. In many ways these two are very much alike, for they are both opportunists and disdain those who are weaker than them. His combination of poet and

mathematician reflects Dupin’s own combination of the 'creative' and 'analytical' as described by the Narrator. Once the Minister D--- had somehow beaten Dupin, and now Dupin reasserts himself and has his revenge by outsmarting him. Heralding D--- as a man of ingenuity, Dupin nevertheless feels no pity for the fate that shall befall D--- when he discovers that his blackmail letter is gone. Whereas D--- has used his brilliance to commit crime, so too had Dupin used his own brilliance for good purposes.

**General Lasalle:** A French general who appears at the last moment to save the Narrator from plunging into the pit of his prison. His name means 'The room' in French.

**Men wearing black robes:** Judges of the Spanish Inquisition. These unnamed men pronounce a death sentence upon the narrator, carrying him down to a dark prison. They are not seen again, although they are presumably responsible for strapping the Narrator down as he sleeps, leaving food and water for him, etc. These men are attacked by the French army, and the Narrator is saved from their torturous cruelty.

# Objects/Places

**Pen knife:** The drunken Narrator used this small knife to stab Pluto's eye after returning home late one night.

**Gallows:** A gallows is a structure used customarily to hang criminals. The Narrator hung Pluto from a tree in his yard, and his house is engulfed in flames soon after. In the wreckage of his house, a shadow resembling the cat hanging from the tree is visible. His second cat has a white patch of fur underneath resembling a gallows, and when the Narrator's crime is discovered he is sentenced to death, presumably by being hung on a gallows as well.

**House of Usher:** This term refers to the 'Family of Usher,' of which Madeline and Roderick are the last survivors. In a literal sense, it also refers to the Usher family mansion, which collapses with the dying Roderick and Madeline Ushers. Both Houses of Usher thus fall, as a family and an old structure die together.

**Red Death:** A highly contagious disease, suggestive of the historical 'Black Death,' the Red Death causes individuals to cough up blood, soon leading to internal bleeding and a rapid death. Prospero hoped to escape the Red Death, but the disease, personified through the presence of a sinister figure, still somehow entered his palace, instantly infecting everyone within Prospero's palace. The Red Death is superior to everything else, even Time itself.

**Ebony clock:** The clock is in the blood-red room at the end of the corridor in Prospero's palace. Whenever this black clock chimes, the revelers stop partying, as if struck by fear. The clock remind them of their own mortality, that in spite of their revelry, their time is limited. The black color is suggestive of death, and even Time itself stops at midnight, the end of the day, after the Red Death consumed everything.

**Pierre Jean de Beranger:** A contemporary French poet who lived from 1780-1857, during Poe's time.

**Mesmerism:** A movement begun by German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), who believed that all objects have a natural 'animal magnetism' between them. According to his research, this magnetism could be used to heal people. Doctor Templeton uses this method upon Bedloe in 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,' and Mesmerism keeps Valdemar alive for many months, delaying his inevitable death. Edgar Allan Poe was also personally very interested in Mesmer's research.

**Harlaem, NY:** A town above Manhattan which, like the town of Fordham, had not yet been incorporated into the greater community of New York City. Harlaem, or Harlem, is where Valdemar resides.

**Passage of the Beresina:** During Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in November of1812, the French army eventually decided to retreat from Moscow. To

accomplish this, they had to cross the Beresina River, but the Russians had already destroyed the bridge! Napoleon's men created a makeshift bridge to cross, but In the process of crossing many French were slain by Russians patiently waiting on the other side of the river.

**Earthquake of Lisbon:** A catastrophic earthquake that devastated the Portugese capital city of Lisbon on November 1, 1755.

**Black Hole of Calcutta:** A Bengalese leader captured the Indian city of Calcutta and Fort William in 1755, after which he imprisoned 156 men in a tiny dungeon. The next morning, 123 of these men had suffocated due to the tiny space. Recent studies suggest that these facts are exaggerated, but in Poe's day people no doubt based their opinions upon these events reported by survivor John Holwell, whom some say has distorted the facts.

**Plague of London:** The Black Death struck England with a violent epidemic in 1665, paralyzing the city and causing at least one hundred people to die in London alone during one year.

**Massacre of St. Bartholomew:** On August 24, 1572, Protestant worshippers were slain by at the order of the King Charles IX of France. This massacre Began this day and continued for an entire week, during which over one hundred thousand people were slain by the French military. Those who fled from France because of this persecution were called 'Huguenots,' such as the ancestors of Walter Legrand in 'The Gold-Bug.'

**Baltimore, Maryland:** Poe lived here with his Aunt Clemm and cousin Virginia soon after leaving West Point.

**Chirurgical Journal of Leipsic:** A chirurgical or 'surgical' journal from the town of Leipsic in Germany. This town is mentioned as having a group of notable physicians including Dr. Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843), the founder of modern homeopathic medicine. The fact that a medical journal was published in Leipsic is not clear, but it may be plausible.

**Galvanic battery:** A device used to send an electric charge through a person's body in order to observe the body's reaction. The artillery officer died when he was experimented upon with this mechanism.

**Catalepsy:** The Narrator is diagnosed with this psychosomatic disorder known as 'catalepsy' in which the muscles become unusually tense or rigid, probably due to anxiety. The Narrator's catalepsy disappears when he discards his fears of being buried alive.

**Richmond, Virginia:** The capital city of Virginia founded in 1737 and place where Edgar Allan Poe spent most of his formative years as a child and an adolescent.

**Buchan:** Scottish writer William Buchan (1729-1805) published a medical book in 1785 entitled Buchan's Domestic Medicine. Presumably, the Narrator burns this book in suddenly dispelling all of his hypochondria.

**Night Thoughts:** A book by British novelist Edward Young published in 1742. Its focus is primarily upon the deep contemplation of life, with the full title reading: Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality.

**Carathis:** A character from William Beckford's The History of the Caliph Vathek, published in 1786. Carathis is a wicked witch who casts spells on people; the Narrator's warning suggests that such frightened visions abound in everyone's mind, and we are not to explore such violent thoughts.

**Afrasiab :** A character from Persian poet Firdausi's The Book of Kings. Afrasiab is an evil sorcerer whom the Narrator compares himself to. His fears will no longer surround him as Afrasiab surrounded himself with demons. The Narrator wishes to be free.

**Atys by Quinault:** A tragic opera by French poet Philippe Quinault and Jean-Baptiste Lully, which features a love story in which the hero Atys mistakenly murders his beloved Sangaride.

**Pyrrhonism:** The teachings of Greek philosopher Pyrrho (died circa 270 BC) that advise people to be skeptical of all things. According to Pyrrhonism, there are no finite truths in the world.

**Batavia, Java:** The modern day city of Jarkarta, on Indonesia's island of Java, once called Batavia by the Dutch, who had conquered this territory in the Dutch East Indies from the Portuguese. The Narrator's ship sets out from here before sinking during a mighty storm.

**Phosphorescent fish and seaweed:** This phenomenon of glowing fish and seaweed is factual and occurs throughout the many seas and oceans of the world.

**Balbec, Tadmor, and Persepolis:** Balbec is an ancient city in Syria, as is Tadmor. Persepolis is an ancient city located in modern Iran. Note that all three of these cities are mentioned in Edgar Allan Poe's poem 'Al Aaraaf' as well.

**Mercator's maps:** Gerardus Mercator (1512-1594) was a Flemish mapmaker who added lines of latitude and longitude to maps. Poe references one map where the Polar areas of the Earth is portrayed as having water rushing down into it, wishing to point out that his own vision of the South Pole was created independently from Mercator.

**Charlottesville, Virginia:** A city located southwest from Virginia's capital city of Richmond. Poe attended the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, in Charlottesville when he was a young man.

**Saratoga, Virginia:** A city located near Richmond, north of Charlottesville. It is here that Doctor Templeton and Augustus Bedloe met for the first time.

**Morphine:** A drug used in medicine primarily to kill pain. Overcome by constant pain because of his illness, Bedloe consumes large quantities of morphine on a regular basis.

**Ragged Mountains:** A particularly rocky section of the Appalachian Mountain range that extends into the Shenandoah River Valley in Western Virginia near Charlottesville. Augustus Bedloe has a strange experience while walking through these mountains.

**Arabian Tales:** A collection of tales told by a Queen Shehezad attempting to prevent her execution at the hands of the Caliph. Augustus Bedloe encounters a city that looks as if it is taken right out of this ancient collection of stories.

**Calcutta:** The Indian city that has since been renamed to Koltata. It is here that the 'Black Hole' incident occurred, and where Warren Hastings put down an uprising of the native population against British colonial rule.

**Cholera epidemic:** An epidemic of this fatal disease struck New York City in 1832, suggesting that it is around this time that 'The Sphinx' takes place. The Narrator escapes from the city in order to avoid being infected by cholera.

**Death's-headed Sphinx:** Whereas the Narrator had thought that a giant monster was coming from outside to murder him, his host reveals that there is an insect called the 'Death's-headed Sphinx,' which bears markings similar to a skull upon its back. In reality, there exists a kind of moth similar to that which Poe describes from the family 'Sphingidae,' from which he probably receives his inspiration for this tale.

**Sir Thomas Browne:** Browne (1605-1682) was a famous British author and physician whose writings philosophize about the meaning of life and death, among other things.

**Draughts:** The British name for the game of checkers. The Narrator mentions playing games as a way to mold the analytical powers of the human mind.

**Whist:** A four person card game similar to the modern Backgammon. The Narrator compares playing card games such as whist to using analytical powers of the human mind.

**Hoyle:** Edmund Hoyle (1672-1769) published his first Short Treatise on the Game of Whist in 1742, and ever since that time the Hoyle Company has published officials rulebooks for many different kinds of games.

**Orion:** A constellation in the night sky named after the Greek hero Orion the hunter, who forever chases Scorpio the Scorpion through the heavens. This image models the behavior of Dupin, who is forever seeking answers of his own to problems.

**Razor:** A sharp object grabbed by the curious Ourang-Outang wishing to mimic the sailor's act of shaving. Fleeing with the razor, the creature uses it to decapitate the elder L'Espanaye woman before the sailor's own eyes.

**Cuvier:** George Cuvier (1769-1832) was a famous French scientist, known especially for his work in studying organisms of the world.

**Ourang-Outang:** An archaic spelling of 'orangutan,' a breed of large monkey. The sailor captured this creature in its native Borneo and brought it to Paris to recover from an injury before selling it away. However, the monkey escapes and commits two murders before it is eventually captured again.

**Borneo:** A city located in modern day Indonesia, where the sailor captured the Ourang-Outang and brought it to Paris.

**Goddess Laverna:** The Roman goddess of thieves. Dupin compares the Prefect to a statue of Laverna he has seen, which appear to lack a body.

**Rue Morgue:** Literally, this means 'The Pride Street' or also, ironically, 'The Morgue Street.' It is here that the bodies of the L'Espanaye women are discovered at their home.

**Rousseau:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778 was a French political philosopher who expanded Thomas Hobbes' social contract theory to suggest that if government does not uphold its bargain to protect citizens, then those citizens are justified to rebel against the ruling sovereign. He also wrote extensively about human nature's three basic desires for fulfillment: life, liberty, and property.

**Eye:** The Narrator is obsessed with the old man's eye, deciding to murder him so that the eye cannot look at him any more.

**Lantern:** A mechanism used to shed light usually fueled by kerosene, or perhaps whale oil in Poe's day. An inner chamber is surrounded by metal doors, permitting any amount of light to exit. The Narrator closes this chamber except to allow a sliver of light to shine through on the old man's face.

**Heart:** A large muscular organ located in the human body. The Narrator mistakes the beating of his own heart for that of the old man, as he maniacally confesses his gruesome act of murder to the policemen.

**Arthur Murphy:** A well-known Irish dramatist, Murphy (1727-1805) whose first acting role came in Othello, also featured in Poe's 'The Man That Was Used Up.' He was educated in France and was known for deriving the inspiration for his own writing from themes and figures already existing in literature, much as Poe had done. Interestingly, in addition to being a literary figure, Murphy went on to become a lawyer as well.

**Charleston, South Carolina:** Founded in 1770, this coastal city in South Carolina is next to Sullivan's Island. The Narrator lives here, on the mainland. It is also the supposed city where Mr. Forsyth lives, who supposedly reported to the New York Sun about 'The Balloon-Hoax.'

**Sullivan’s Island:** Site of a famous Revolutionary War battle, Sullivan’s Island is separated from the mainland and the nearby city of Charleston by a shallow marsh. Its length is about three miles and is only about a quarter of a mile wide, as Poe describes. The island’s shape is similar to a peninsula, with only a small marshy creek separating its fourth side from the mainland. Although Charleston is some distance away across the harbor from the southern section of the island, as the Narrator notes well, the northern section is separated from that rural section of mainland only by a creek, and it is in this forest that Legrand discovers Captain Kidd’s treasure beneath the tulip tree.

**Fort Moultrie:** Named after Revolutionary War figure Colonel William Moultrie (1730-1805), Fort Moultrie was built on June 28, 1776 at the southern end of Sullivan’s Island. Poe was stationed here during his time in the U.S. Army, and it is here that a lieutenant friend of Legrand is stationed as well.

**Beetle, or scarab:** A large type of insect, usually bearing a black exterior shell, biting mouth parts, and hard, horny front wings. The 'gold-bug' of Legrand is highly unusual because of its uncharacteristic gold color and is put into a jar, where it dies. Jupiter believes that the bug had bitten Legrand, making him become mentally ill. Legrand later admits that his pretended obsession with the 'gold-bug' is fake, because he was purposely mocking the Narrator and Jupiter.

**Tulip tree:** A type of tree from the magnolia family, which bears cup-shaped flowers. Reaching a height of 150 feet and a trunk diameter of 4 feet, these large trees abound in Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and Alabama. Legrand discovers the skull nailed to a branch at the top of a tulip tree.

**Paper:** The paper picked out of the sand by Jupiter is not really paper at all, but is parchment, which is much more durable. Legrand draws a picture of the gold-bug on this, but a skull appears instead when the Narrator holds it too close to the fire, revealing secret instructions of how to find Kidd‘s treasure.

**Skull:** Also called a 'Death’s-head.' The skull of some unnamed individual was nailed in a tree by Captain Kidd to mark the location of his buried treasure. A skull appears on the parchment paper once it is put close to the fire. A skull also appears on the back of the insect in 'The Sphinx.'

**New Orleans, Louisiana:** Founded in 1718, this is a popular coastal city located in Louisiana. It became United States territory after the Louisiana Purchase in 1808.

**Huguenot Family:** Huguenots were a class of French Protestants who fled France beginning on the day of St Bartholomew’s Massacre on August 24, 1572. The name possibly originated because the Protestant followers of Martin Luther sued to gather near a gate at Tours named after a Count Hugon. Apparently, Legrand‘s family immigrated to New Orleans during this time, which had been a French colony in Louisiana (named after French King Louis XIV who lived from 1638-1715) before being sold to the United States in 1808 by Napoleon.

**Paris, France:** The capital city of France. The site of the Jacobin club house mentioned in 'The Pit and the Pendulum,' it is also the home of C. Auguste Dupin. The Prefect is in charge of the Parisian police force.

**Maison de Sante:** Literally translated, it means 'House of Health.' Poe defines this as a :private madhouse,' or a psychiatric hospital. It is important to note that this establishment does not have a specific name, the term 'Maison de Sante' is just a general term to explain that this is a hospital.

**Vincenzo Bellini:** Bellini (1801-1835) was a very famous Italian composer, who primarily wrote operas that ended in tragedy, such as 'I Capulet e I Montecchi,' which was based upon Shakespeare's sad story of love, Romeo and Juliet.

**System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether:** A new system of treating patients at the Maison de Sante (House of Health) created by Monsieur Maillard. The narrator seeks to understand what this system is exactly, compared to the 'soothing system' which allows patients to wander around uninhibited. In contrast, Tarr and Fether's system requires patients to be tarred and feathered daily, which is then rinsed off with a huge flow of water poured out of pipes. The narrator searches for research about this system, because he doesn't realize that these two men -- Prof. Tarr and Doctor Fether -- do not exist. Their names merely reveal the nature of this system.

**Yankee Doodle:** A British song originally written to mock the colonialists. It was played as the Redcoats marched from Boston to Lexington and Concord, but later it was the rallying cry for colonialists fighting for freedom during the American revolution, particularly in the North where people enjoyed being called 'Yankees.' Interestingly, this sing, too, mentions 'put a feather in his cap' (reminding us again of tar and feather), and an alternate verse is known to read: 'Yankee Doodle came to town/for to buy a firelock/We will tar and feather him/and so we will John Hancock.' Tarring and feathering are mentioned here, too. The song mocks the British while it also lauds the Yankees of the American North in contrast to the more old-fashioned South.

**Cape of Good Hope:** The southernmost tip of Africa. This area was originally founded by the Dutch, including the large city of Cape Town, which is located at the base of the Cape of Good Hope.

**Bugaboo Indians:** A fictitious Indian tribe created by Edgar Allan Poe. He uses the word 'Bugaboo' elsewhere, in 'The Premature Burial,' in writing 'no bugaboo tales…' (72). Reportedly this is the first literary use of this word with such a spelling; previously the word appeared as 'buggybow' in 1747.

**Kickapoo Indians:** An authentic Indian tribe native to the Great Lakes region but now present in northeastern Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma. The original spelling was 'Kiikaapoa,' which European settlers transformed into 'Kickapoo.' In 1838, the Battle Creek Fight engaged Kickapoo Indians with determined Texans, and these struggles continued throughout 1839, as the Kickapoo, Cherokee, and Shawnee united together

against Texans. These struggles were ongoing as Poe composed 'The Man That Was Used Up,' no doubt influencing his inclusion of the Kickapoo Indians.

**Pierre Corneille's Le Cid:** Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) was a French dramatist and chief rival of noted playwright Jean Racine. His tragedy, Le Cid, focuses upon a valiant knight named Rodrigue, Le Cid ('The Conqueror'), who experiences a conflict when he must choose between preserving his family's honor or pursuing his more personal feelings of love for a woman. This theme reflects Smith's own situation, for he has sacrificed himself for his country in battling against the Indians. His body is a remnant of what it was as a result.

**Shakespeare's Othello:** A tragedy by British playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616) featuring a soldier named Othello, his lover Desdemona, and his jealous enemy Iago, whom Climax portrays here in Poe's tale. This reflects the theme of soldiery yet again, in tune with Smith's military background.

**Man-Fred:** A Gothic dramatic poem written in 1816 by British poet Lord Byron (1788-1824), in which the main title character, Manfred, dies in the work's conclusion.

**Man-Friday:** A character from the 1791 classic novel, Robinson Crusoe by British writer Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). The story features a man shipwrecked on an island with no one to aid him until 'Man Friday' appears. The narrator purposefully misinforms the woman that 'Man-Friday' was the name of Byron's poem 'Man-Fred' because he is angry that she interrupted his conversation.

**Nassau balloon:** Originally named 'The Royal Vauxhall Balloon,' this balloon successfully traveled from the Royal Vauxhall Gardens in London to Weilburg, Nassau, in Germany, on November 7, 1836. It was renamed in honor of its landing place. Four men participated in this flight including Thomas Monck Mason, M.P., Charles Green, and Robert Holland. Poe uses Mason and Holland as participants in this fictitious trans-Atlantic balloon flight to Sullivan's Island from North Wales.

**Victoria:** The name of the balloon that supposedly made a trans-Atlantic passage in 1844. 'Victoria' means 'Victory' in Latin, but more likely, just as the Nassau balloon was named to honor the Nassaus, who ruled the province where the Monck Mason had landed in 1837, here it honors Britain's Queen Victoria, who ruled England from 1837 until her death in 1901.

**New York Sun:** A periodical founded by Benjamin Day In New York City on September 3, 1833. In addition to 'The Balloon-Hoax' in 1844, the New York Sun started 'The Great Moon Hoax of 1835.' At this time, the new journal published a series of articles claiming to be written by a Sir John Herschel, reporting that he witnessed aliens on the moon through a large telescope at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. The hoax only increased readership, rather than damaging the newspaper's popularity.

**Polytechnic Institution:** London's Royal Polytechnic Institution was founded by Charles Payne, formerly of the Adelaide Gallery, in 1838 to create 'a practical knowledge of the various arts and branches of science connected with Manufactures,

Mining Operations, and Rural Economy.' The Polytechnic Institution hosted many displays, lectures, and events until it was closed in 1881.

**Archimedean screw:** A mechanism whose creation has been attributed to the ancient Greek mathematician, Archimedes. This screw is based on a screw inserted into a cylindrical tube used for raising and lowering water levels. The same technique is applied here to control the flow of gases into the balloon.

**Willis' Rooms:** A famous complex of London ballrooms and assembly rooms affiliated with the social club entitled 'Almack's,' built by William Almack in 1765. After his death in 1781, his niece Mrs. Willis inherited them, and they were thus renamed in accordance to the new owner. This complex continued to host a variety of events until its conversion into a mere restaurant in 1890, although the social club disbanded in 1863.

**Adelaide Gallery:** In 1830, Jacob Perkins founded a museum dedicated to putting new inventions on display in London. This establishment was called the 'Royal Adelaide Gallery.'

**Guide rope:** An innovation to the hot air balloon added by Charles Green, which simply involves dangling a rope from the balloon and raising or lowering it in order to adjust the balloon's height. This conserves the gas, because it is not necessary to add or take away gas into the balloon as often, if the height can be first adjusted in this manner.

**Wheal-Vor House:** The fictitious estate of Poe's fictitious character, 'Mr. Osbourne,' where the balloon 'Victoria' is assembled before they fly off to Sullivan's Island. It is supposedly located in North Wales.

**Bristol Channel:** A dangerous waterway to navigate by ship located in the southwestern corner of England, bordering the town of Bristol for which the Bristol Channel is named.

**Cotopaxi:** Mount Cotopaxi is an active volcano located in the Cotopaxi province of Ecuador, in South America. Cotopaxi has a summit elevation of 19,388 feet (approximately four miles) and has erupted fifty times since 1738. Ainsworth notes that even the balloon is as high as this mountain, they can still breathe without any difficulty, because air is usually thinner and thus harder to breathe in higher elevations.

**Joseph Glanville:** A merchant and ordained minister, Joseph Granville (1636-1680) was well-known for his strict religious beliefs and scientific writings such as Scepsis scientifica, and Plus Ultra. He was a chaplain, vicar, or acted in some church capacity for the duration of his life. His name is also spelled 'Glanvill,' without the 'e.'

**Well of Democritus:** Democritus (460 BC -370 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher who moved in the same circles as Socrates. His ideas laid the foundation for the modern atomic theory, since he declared that matter cannot be destroyed and space is an 'infinite Void' with no limits. This appears to be the 'bottomless well of Democritus,' this concept that space has no limits to it. In his Critique of Pure Reason published in 1781, German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) mentions the bottom of 'the well

of Democritus,' using this as an elevated allegory for the attainment of ultimate knowledge, since the well of Democritus was supposed to be infinite.

**Norway:** A country located in eastern Scandinavia, a region that also included Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. Norway's Moskoestrom is a true natural phenomenon that continues on less exaggerated terms to this present day. Fishing remains the base of its economy.

**Helseggen:** The mountain named Helseggen at Lofoden appears to be a fabrication of Poe, unless the spelling has been changed due to other transliterations of this Norwegian word. Lofoden, Moskoe, and Vurrgh are all real geographic places, however.

**Vurrgh:** An island located between the Norwegian Sea and a waterway called the 'Vestfjorden.' The nearest mainland is at Lofoden. The island of Moskoe is between Vurrgh and Lofoden.

**Moskoe:** A Norwegian island located off of the coast of Lofoden, around which the Maelstrom or 'Moskoestrom' occurs periodically.

**Maelstrom (also called the 'Moskoestrom'):** A naturally occurring whirlpool located at approximately sixty-eight degrees latitude off of the western coast of Norway near Lofoden. It is also called the 'Moskoestrom' because the island of Moskoe is located in the middle of the sea area in which this phenomenon occurs. In reality, this whirlpool is not as dramatic an event as that described by Poe's character. However, it has possibly inspired many other stories such as those featuring the fabled 'Charybdis' from Homer's The Odyssey, and the more recent 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea by Jules Verne.

**Niagara Falls:** A large, naturally occurring waterfall located on the border between New York, USA, and Ontario, Canada.

**Jonas Ramus:** Ramus was a Norwegian priest whose own description of the Maelstrom in 1715 was incorporated into Pontopiddan's Natural History of Norway in 1752, which was later reprinted into the sixth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1823. It is from this latter source that Poe obtains the bulk of his information about this natural phenomenon.

**Lofoden Point:** The area known as Lofoden (also spelled Lofoten) is on the Norwegian mainland across from the islands of Moskoe and, farther out, Vurrgh. It is from this vantage point on the mainland that the old man tells his amazing story to the Narrator.

**Encyclopedia Britannica:** A collection of books detailing various pieces of information first published in 1768, by Colin Macfarquhar and Andrew Bell in Edinburgh, Scotland. Its purpose was to redefine scholarship for the changing scientific world of the Enlightenment. Edgar Allan Poe used the Encyclopedia Brittanica as a source for information that he later infuses into his own writing, as he does in 'A Descent into the Maelstrom.'

**Kircher:** Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680) was a German philosopher, scientist, inventor, professor, and linguist whose writings greatly influenced the academic world. He was especially interested in underground forces, such as volcanoes. The Museum Kircherianum at the College of Rome in Italy is named in his honor. Poe's mention of Kircher's theory appears is rooted in fact, as Kircher did argue that this Moskoestrom in Norway was the entrance to an underground network of passages. The Gulf of Bothnia located off of the eastern coast of Norway, and the Berents Sea located north from all of Scandinavia were mentioned as two connecting points for this subterranean passageway.

**Water cask:** A barrel-shaped vessel designed for holding water. The old man ties himself to this to avoid being drowned in the Moskoestrom.

**Archimedes' 'De Incidentibus in Fluido':** Archimedes (287 BC - 212 BC) was an ancient Greek inventor, scientist, and mathematician. He was mistakenly killed by a Roman soldier who did not know who he was. The particular work mentioned here, 'De Incendibus in Fluido' is Latin for 'Concerning Falling Things in Fluid.' However, this work appears to be another fabrication of Edgar Allan Poe, as no record of such a document exists.

**Seneca:** Ancient Roman statesman, dramatist, and philosopher who lived from 3 BC until 65 AD. Among many others, he wrote the tragedy Thyestes featuring the deadly sibling rivalry that occurred between the Greek brothers Atreus and Thyestes. He died in 65 BC after reportedly slitting his wrists at the banquet table of Emperor Nero, whom he had tutored as a child. Seneca the Younger is known for founding the ancient philosophy of stoicism.

**Abernethy:** John Abernethy (1765-1831) was a renowned British physician, professor, and surgeon. A cancerous tumor is named in his honor, 'Abernechy's sarcoma.'

**Jacob Bryant:** An English mythologist, Jacob Bryant (1715-1804) wrote extensively about religious history and ancient times, embodied in his greatest work, the ten volume A New System, or, an Analysis of Ancient Mythology, with volume one released in 1774, the next three released in 1775-1776, and the final six were available in 1807. This work focuses on the idea that all of mythology connects to the same great religious understanding of the world that is revealed through the teachings Christianity. It is for this masterpiece that he is best known, and Poe makes reference to Bryant's work through Auguste Dupin.

**Green-tinted spectacles:** Dupin craftily wears tinted glasses to avoid being noticed by Miniter D--- as his eyes search his apartment for the location of the purloined letter.

**Snuffbox:** A container designed for holding snuff, which is powdered tobacco sometimes mixed with opium, designed to be inhaled through the nostrils.

**Atree by Crebillon:** A tragedy written by French poet Prosper Joylot de Crebillon (1674-1762), reflecting the events in Seneca's Thyestes. It describes the rivalry between two brothers, Atreus and Thyestes, for the same woman's love, and for the

right to rule a kingdom. Dupin invokes this work as an allegory for his own relationship to Minister D---.

**Catalani:** A famous Italian opera singer, Angelina Catalani (1780-1849), whose life ended when she died of cholera on June 12, 1849. She was known for her beautiful voice and, after retiring from opera singing in 1828, devoted the rest of her life to running a free singing school for girls in Florence, Italy, which she had also founded.

**Jacobin Club House:** The meeting house of the Jacobins, a French political club that existed during the Reign of Terror that began in 1789. They met at a Jacobin monastery in Paris, from which their name is derived. The club fell apart with the defeat of its chief leader, Maximilien Robespierre, on July 27, 1794. This group was responsible for the vicious massacre of most of the French monarchy and provided the window of opportunity for Napoleon Bonaparte to seize control of the government.

**Toledo, Spain:** City located in central Spain and the chief place of operations for the ruthless persecutions that occurred during the Spanish Inquisition from 1478-1834. Spain capital city, Madrid, is located nearby.

**Father Time:** Ancient personification of the phenomenon of Time that goes back to the Greek Titan Cronus, father of Zeus. Cronus used a sickle to castrate his father Uranus, and he is often portrayed throughout literature as having a long beard. He also often bears a scythe or sickle in his arms, reflecting that Time's eroding force cuts down everything. Poe's image of the swinging pendulum invokes both the swinging of a clock, representing the passage of time, and it also literally portrays Father Time's sickle. It is ironic that the sickle and the clock become one and the same, combining more modern inventions with ancient ideas.

**Pendulum:** A hanging object set to swing back and forth between two extremes. Attached to the end of this pendulum is a sharp blade designed to slice into the Narrator's body.

**Pit:** The Narrator narrowly avoids falling into this deep hole of his prison after he trips on his gown. Water fills the bottom, causing him to also describe it as a 'well.' At the last possible moment, the Narrator is saved from falling into the pit after his hand is seized by the French general Lasalle.

**Spanish Inquisition:** A historical event beginning in 1478 at the order of Spanish King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, with the blessing of Pope Sextius IV. Its purpose was to eliminate non-Catholics and heretics from Spain, mirroring the later persecution of Protestants that would occur in France. The Spanish Inquisition continued for centuries with its base of operations located at Toledo, until it formally came to an end in 1834.

**Carnival Season:** An annual event occurring throughout Italy usually beginning in October and ending right before Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the holy season of Lent.

**Nitre (saltpeter):** A strong chemical compound known as 'potassium nitrate' formed naturally as a reaction between minerals in the earth and water. It is very common in underground caves formed by water dripping from stalactites. Nitre, or niter, is also used to manufacture gunpowder. Whether Fortunato died from his close proximity to the saltpeter in the underground vault, or if he was in fact buried alive, remains unclear.

**Astrolabe ring:** A nautical instrument used to measure the altitude of stars and planets in the sky in order to determine a ship's exact direction. It is shaped like a ring, as the name implies. The old man's elder brother throws him off of the ring, because it holds a better grip than the water cask, where he had been hiding. Ironically, it is the water cask that is the old man's salvation!

# Quotes

Quote 1: "Pluto -- this was the cat's name -- was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets. Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years." Poe, pg. 12

Quote 2: "Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is the *Law* [sic], merely because we understand it to be such?" Poe, pg. 13

Quote 3: "It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name --and for this, above all, I loathed and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster *had I dared* [sic]--it was now, I say, the image of a hideous--of a ghastly thing--of the GALLOWS!--oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and Crime--of Agony and of Death!" Poe, pg. 17

Quote 4: "The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb." Poe, pg. 20

Quote 5: "The discoloration of the ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled webwork from the eaves...No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones." Poe, pg. 24

Quote 6: "In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old woodwork which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability." Poe, pg. 24

Quote 7: "And travelers now within that valley,/Through the red-litten [sic] windows see/Vast forms that move fantastically/To a discordant melody;/While, like a rapid ghastly river,/Through the pale door;/A hideous throng rush out forever,/And laugh -- but smile no more." Poe, pg. 31

Quote 8: "There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold -- then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated." Poe, pg. 40

Quote 9: "Blood was its Avatar and its seal -- the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution...And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour." Poe, pg. 40

Quote 10: "Be sure they were grotesque...There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the *bizarre* [sic], something of the terrible...To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams." Poe, pg. 44

Quote 11: "And these -- the dreams -- writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of velvet...The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away...And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever." Poe, pg. 44

Quote 12: "The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments from the grave. The mask...was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse...But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in *blood* -- and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror." Poe, pg. 45

Quote 13: "[Prince Prospero] gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask, which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form." Poe, pg. 47

Quote 14: "For some months previous to my becoming acquainted with him, his physicians had declared him in a confirmed phthisis [tuberculosis of the lungs]. It was his custom, indeed, to speak calmly of his approaching dissolution, as of a matter neither to be avoided nor regretted." Poe, pg. 49

Quote 15: "The left lung had been for eighteen months in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right, in its upper portion, was...ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purelent tubercles, running one into another. Several extensive perforations [holes] existed; and, at one point, permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place." Poe, pg. 50

Quote 16: "The glassy roll of the eye was changed for that expression of uneasy *inward* [sic] examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-walking, and which it is quite impossible to mistake. With a few lateral passes I made the eyelids quiver, as in incipient sleep, and with a few more I closed them altogether." Poe, pg. 52

Quote 17: "The eyes rolled themselves slowly open, the pupils slowly disappearing upwardly; the skin [resembled] not so much parchment on white paper...The upper lip, at the same time, writhed itself away from the teeth, which it had previously covered

completely; while the lower jaw fell with an audible jerk, leaving the mouth widely extended, and disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue." Poe, pg. 54

Quote 18: "As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of "dead! dead!" absolutely *bursting* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once -- within the space of a single minute, or eevn less, shrunk -- crumbled-- absolutely *rotted* away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of lothsome [sic] -- of detestable putridity." Poe, pg. 57

Quote 19: "The boundaries which divide Life from Death, are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and the other begins? We know that there are diseases in which occur total cessations of all the apparent functions of vitality, and yet in which these cessations are merely...temporary pauses in the incomprehensible mechanism." Poe, pg. 59

Quote 20: "When we reflect how very rarely, from the nature of the case, we have it in our power to detect them, we must admit that [these incidents] may *frequently* occur without our cognizance. Scarcely, in truth, is a graveyard ever encroached upon, for any purpose, to any great extent, that skeletons are not found in postures which suggest the most fearful of suspicions." Poe, pg. 64

Quote 21: "I was mortal, but am fiend. I was merciless, but am pitiful. Thou dost feel that I shudder.-- [sic] My teeth chatter as I speak, yet it is not with the chilliness of the night -- of the night without end. But this hideousness is insufferable. How canst *thou* tranquilly sleep? I cannot rest for the cry of these great agonies. These sights are more than I can bear. Get thee up! Come with me into the outer Night, and let me unfold to thee the graves. Is not this a spectacle of woe?--Behold!" Poe, pg. 67

Quote 22: "I endeavored to shriek; and my lips and my parched tongue moved convulsively together in the attempt -- but no voice issued from the cavernous lungs, which, oppressed as if by the weight of some incumbent mountain, gasped and palpitated, with the heart, at every elaborate and struggling inspiration." Poe, pg. 70

Quote 23: "There are moments when, even to the sober eye of Reason, the world of our sad Humanity may assume the semblance of Hell -- but the imagination of man is no Carathis, to explore with impunity its every cavern. Alas! the grim legion of sepulchral terrors cannot be regarded as altogether fanciful -- but, like the Demons in whose company Afrasiab made his voyage down the Oxus, they must sleep, or they will devour us -- they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish." Poe, pg. 72

Quote 24: "My notice was soon afterwards attracted by the dusky-red appearance of the moon, and the peculiar character of the sea. The latter was undergoing a rapid change, and the water seemed more than usually transparent...The air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron. As night came on, every breath of wind died away, and a more entire calm it is impossible to conceive." Poe, pg. 74

Quote 25: "Her huge hull was of a deep dinghy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from their polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns, which swung too and fro about her rigging. But what mainly inspired us with horror and astonishment, was that she bore up under a press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane." Poe, pg. 78

Quote 26: "A man passed by...His knees tottered beneath a load of years, and his entire frame quivered under the burthen. He muttered to himself, in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand, and groped among a pile of singular-looking instruments, and decayed charts of navigation. His manner was a wild mixture of the peevishness of second childhood, and the solemn dignity of God." Poe, pg. 79

Quote 27: "Although well armed, she is not, I think, a ship of war. Her rigging, build, and general equipment, all negative a supposition of this kind. What she is *not*, I can easily perceive -- what she *is* I fear it is impossible to say...[B]ut in scrutinizing her strange model and singular cast of spars, her huge size and overgrown suits of canvass, her severely simple bow and antiquated stern, there will occasionally flash across my mind...an unaccountable memory of old foreign chronicles and ages long ago." Poe, pg. 80

Quote 28: "But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny -- the circles rapidly grow small -- we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool -- and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and -- going down." Poe, pg. 83-4

Quote 29: "He was singularly tall and thin. He stooped much. His limbs were exceedingly long and emaciated. His forehead was broad and low. His complexion was absolutely bloodless. His mouth was large and flexible, and his teeth were more wildly uneven...His eyes were abnormally large and round like those of a cat...their ordinary condition was so totally vapid, filmy and dull, as to convey the idea of the eyes of a long-interred corpse." Poe, pg. 85-86

Quote 30: "In the quivering of a leaf -- in the hue of a blade of grass -- in the shape of a trefoil -- in the humming of a bee -- in the gleaming of a dewdrop -- in the breathing of the wind -- in the faint odors that came from the forest -- there came a whole new universe of suggestion -- a gay and motley train of rhapsodical and immethodical thought." Poe, pg. 88

Quote 31: "Beyond the limits of the city arose, in frequent majestic groups, the palm and the cocoa, with other gigantic and weird trees of vast age and here and there might be seen a field of rice, the thatched hut of a peasant, a tank, a stray temple, a gypsy camp, or a solitary graceful maiden taking her way, with a pitcher upon her head to the banks of the majestic river." Poe, pg. 91

Quote 32: "My host was of a less excitable temperment, and, although greatly depressed in spirits, exerted himself to sustain my own. His richly philosophical intellect

was not at any time affected by unrealities. To the substances of terror he was sufficently alive, but of its shadows he had no apprehension." Poe, pg. 96

Quote 33: "[The creature had] two pairs of wings -- each wing nearly one hundred yards in length...and all thickly covered with metal scales; each scale apparently some twelve feet in diameter...but the chief peculiarity of this horrible thing was the representation of a *Death's Head*, which covered nearly the whole surface of its breast, and which was as accurately traced in glaring white, upon the dark ground of the body, as if it had been there carefully designed by an artist." Poe, pg. 98

Quote 34: "[The Sphinx] is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it; for the fact is that, as it wriggles its way up this thread, which some spider has wrought along the window-sash, I find it to be about the sixteenth of an inch in its extreme length, and also about the sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye." Poe, pg. 100

Quote 35: "What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among the women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture." Poe, pg. 101

Quote 36: "Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from things external to the game. He examines the countenance of his partner, comparing it carefully with that of each of his opponents...A casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks, with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation, eagerness, or trepidation -- all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs." Poe, pg. 103

Quote 37: "Let it not be supposed, from what I have just said, that I am detailing any mystery, or penning any romance. What I have described in the Frenchman was merely the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased, intelligence. But of the character of his remarks at the periods in question an example will best convey the idea." Poe, pg. 106

Quote 38: "The throat was greatly chafed. There were several deep scratched just below the chin, together with a series of livid spots which were evidently the impression of fingers. The face was fearfully discolored, and the eyeballs protruded. The tongue had been partially bitten through. A large bruise was discovered upon the pit of the stomach, produced, apparently, by the pressure of a knee." Poe, pg. 115

Quote 39: "In his wisdom is no *stamen*. it is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna -- or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature after all. I like him especially for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained his reputation for ingenuity. I mean the way he has 'de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas.'" Poe, pg. 137

Quote 40: "I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily -- how calmly I can tell you the whole story." Poe, pg. 138

Quote 41: "You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded -- with what caution -- with what foresight -- with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him." Poe, pg. 138

Quote 42: "Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself...but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel...the presence of my head within the room." Poe, pg. 140

Quote 43: "They heard!--they suspected!--they *knew*--they were making a mockery of my horror!--this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Any thing was more tolerable than this derison! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!--and now--again!--hark! louder! *louder!*--" Poe, pg. 143

Quote 44: "Todder day he gib me slip 'fore de sun up and was gone de whole ob de blessed day. I had a big stick ready cut for to gib him deuced good beating when he did come -- but Ise sich a fool dat I hadn't de heart after all -- he looked so berry poorly...I'm berry sartain dat Massa Will bin bit somewhere 'bout de head by dat goole-bug." Poe, pg. 149

Quote 45: "It was a species of tableland, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill, densely wooded from base to pinnacle, and interspersed with huge crags that appeared to lie loosely upon the soil, and in many cases were prevented from precipitating themselves into the valleys below, merely by the support of the trees against which they reclined. Deep ravines, in various directions, gave an air of still sterner solemnity of the scene." Poe, pg. 155

Quote 46: "I dug eagerly, and now and then caught myself actually looking, with something that very much resembled expectation, for the fancied treasure, the vision of which had demented my unfortunate companion...when we had been at work perhaps an hour and a half, we were again interrupted by the violent howlings of the dog." Poe, pg. 162

Quote 47: "There were diamonds...a hundred and ten in all, and not one of them small; eighteen rubies of remarkable brilliancy;--three hundred and ten emeralds, all very beautiful; and twenty-one sapphires, with an opal...there was a vast quantity of solid-gold ornaments: nearly two hundred massive finger- and earrings; rich chains--thirty of these, if I remember; eighty-three very large and heavy crucifixes...a prodigious golden punch bowl" Poe, pg. 164-5

Quote 48: "A good glass in the bishop's hostel in the devil's seat -- forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes -- northeast and by north -- main branch seventh limb east side -- shoot from the left eye of the death's-head--a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out." Poe, pg. 177

Quote 49: "Perhaps a couple of blows with a mattock were sufficient, while his coadjutors were busy in the pit; perhaps it required a dozen -- who shall tell?" Poe, pg. 181

Quote 50: "[The men enter a] small and exceedingly neat parlor, containing...many books, drawings, pots of flowers, and musical instruments. A cheerful fire blazed upon the hearth. At a piano, singing an aria from Bellini, sat a young and very beautiful woman, who, at my entrance, paused in her song, and received me with graceful courtesy. Her voice was low, and her whole manner subdued." Poe, pg. 183

Quote 51: "We put much faith in amusements of a simple kind, such as music, dancing, gymnastic exercises generally, cards...We affected to treat each individual as if for some ordinary physical disorder, and the work 'lunacy' was never employed. A great point was to set each lunatic to guard the actions of all the others. To repose confidence in the understanding or discretion of a madman is to gain him body and soul." Poe, pg. 185

Quote 52: "[B]ut my surprise was great to see her wearing a hoop and farthingale, with high-heeled shoes, and a dirty cap of Brussels lace, so much too large for her that it gave her face a ridiculously diminutive expression. When I had first seen her, she was attired, most becomingly, in deep mourning." Poe, pg. 187

Quote 53: "His cunning...is proverbial and great. If he has a project in view, he conceals his design with a marvelous wisdom; and the dexterity with which he counterfeits sanity presents, to the metaphysician [psychiatrist], one of the most singular problems in the study of mind. When a madman appears *thoroughly* sane, indeed, it is high time to put him in a straitjacket." Poe, pg. 196-7

Quote 54: "[N[othing could be more richly flowing, or possess a brighter gloss [than his head of hair]. It was of a jetty black; which was also the color...of his unimaginable whiskers...it is not too much to say that they were the handsomest pair of whiskers under the sun...Here were the most entirely even, and the most brilliantly white of all conceivable teeth. From between them, upon every proper occasion, issued a voice of surpassing clearness, melody, and strength...[His eyes] were of a deep hazel exceedingly large and lustrous." Poe, pg. 202

Quote 55: "There is nothing at all like it...we are a wonderful people, and live in a wonderful age. Parachutes and railroads -- man-traps and spring guns! Our steamboats are upon every sea...And who shall calculate the immense influence upon social life -- upon arts -- upon commerce -- upon literature -- which will be the immediate result of electromagnetics! The most wonderful...Mr. -- Thompson, I believe...mechanical contrivances are daily springing up like mushrooms." Poe, pg. 204

Quote 56: "'[Damn] the vagabonds! they not only knocked in the roof of my mouth, but took the trouble to cut off at least seven eighths of my tongue. There isn't Bonfanti's equal, however, in America, for really good articles of this description. I can recommend you to him with confidence,' [here the General bowed] 'and assure you that I have the greatest pleasure in so doing.'" Poe, pg. 211

Quote 57: "Astounding News by Express, via Norfolk!--The Atlantic Crossed in Three Days! Signal Triumph of Mr. Monck Mason's Flying Machine--Arrival at Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, S.C., of Mr. Mason, Mr. Robert Holland, Mr. Henson, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, and four others, in the Steering Balloon, "Victoria," after a Passage of Seventy-Five Hours from Land to Land! Full Particulars of the Voyage!" Poe, pg. 212

Quote 58: "The balloon is composed of silk, varnished with the liquid gun caoutchouc. It is of vast dimensions, containing more than 40,000 cubic feet of gas; but as coal gas was employed in place of the more expensive and inconvenient hydrogen, the supporting power of the machine, when fully inflated, and immediately after inflation, is not more than about 2500 pounds. The coal gas is not only much less costly, but is easily procured and managed." Poe, pg. 216

Quote 59: "The waters give up no voice to the heavens. The immense flaming ocean writhes and is tortured uncomplainingly. The mountainous surges suggest the idea of innumerable dumb gigantic fiends struggling in impotent agony. In a night such as is this to me, a man *lives*--lives a whole century of ordinary life -- nor would I forego this rapturous delight for that of a whole century of ordinary existence." Poe, pg. 222

Quote 60: "This is unquestionably the most stupendous, the most interesting, and the most important undertaking ever accomplished or even attempted by man. What magnificent events may ensue, it would be useless now to think of determining." Poe, pg. 225

Quote 61: "The ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not as our ways; nor are the models that we frame in any way commensurate to the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus." Poe, pg. 226

Quote 62: "Just opposite the promontory upon whose apex we were placed, and at a distance of some five or six miles out at sea, there was visible a small, bleak-looking island; or, more properly, its position was discernible through the wilderness of surge in which it was enveloped. About two miles nearer the land, arose another of smaller size, hideously craggy and barren, and encompassed at various intervals by a cluster of dark rocks." Poe, pg. 227

Quote 63: "Never shall I forgot the sensation of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference...whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony...as the rays of the full moon, from that circular rift amid the clouds which I have already described, steamed in a flood of golden glory

along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss." Poe, pg. 239

Quote 64: "[The Prefect] grasped [the letter] in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check." Poe, pg. 253

Quote 65: "Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation* -- of form and quantity -- is often greatly false in regard to morals, for example...But the mathematician argues from his *finite truths*, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability -- as the world indeed imagines them to be." Poe, pg. 257

Quote 66: "For eighteen months the Minister has had [the royal personage] in his power. She now has him in hers -- since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction...I have...no pity...for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius." Poe, pg. 262

Quote 67: "Impia tortorum longas his turba furores/Sanguinis innocui, non satiata, aluit./Sospite nunc patria, fracto nunc funeris antro,/Mors ubi dira fuit vita salusque patent, [meaning]...'Here the impious clamor of the torturers, insatiate, fed its rage for innocent blood. Now happy is the land, destroyed the pit of horror; and where grim death stalked, life and health are revealed.'" Poe, pg. 264

Quote 68: "I now observed -- with what horror it is needless to say -- that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel, about a foot in length from horn to horn; the horns upward, and under the edge evidently as keen as that of a razor. Like a razor also, it seemed massy and heavy, tapering from the edge into a solid and broad structure above. It was appended to a weighty rod of brass, and the whole *hissed* [sic] as it was swung through the air." Poe, pg. 273

Quote 69: "The measured movement of the pendulum disturbed them not at all. Avoiding its strokes, they busied themselves with the anointed bandage. They pressed -- they swarmed upon me in ever-accumulating heaps. They writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my own; I was half stifled by their thronging pressure; disgust, for which the world has no name, swelled in my bosom, and chilled, with a heavy clamminess, my heart. Yet one minute, and I felt that the struggle would be over." Poe, pg. 277

Quote 70: "It was that of General Lasalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies." Poe, pg. 279

Quote 71: "I took from their sconces two flambeaux [torches], and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he

follows. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors." Poe, pg. 282

Quote 72: "At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size." Poe, pg. 284

Quote 73: "The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre [sic] of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not...connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity." Poe, pg. 25-6

Quote 74: "He who has never swooned is not he who finds strange palaces and wildly familiar places in coals that glow; is not he who beholds floating in midair the sad visions that the many may not view; is not he who ponders over the perfume of some novel flower; is not he whose brain grows bewildered with the meaning of some musical cadence which has never before arrested his attention." Poe, pg. 266

# The Black Cat

The narrator, declaring that he will die tomorrow, describes himself as a caring and loving man, who from the earliest days of his youth was mocked by others for his timidity and concern for all living things. He married a woman who shared this same good natured attitude for all living things, and she brings many animals into the house because they share this in common. These creatures included "birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a *cat*." In regard to the cat, "Pluto -- this was the cat's name -- was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets. Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years" Poe, pg. 12. The man and his cat built a close bond that was nurtured for years, and the fact that not even his wife feeds the cat suggests this. As time went on, however, this changed and he became prey to certain wicked human emotions as "Intemperance" and "Perverseness," and these feelings of excess and cruelty began to consume him. The narrator then began to drink alcohol heavily and stay out during the nighttime, staggering home very late.

On one such occasion, the narrator notes that Pluto is trying to hide from him because he is in such a violent state of mind; as a result, the narrator grabs Pluto abruptly and, when the startled cat bites his hand, he stabs its eye with a penknife, blinding it. The next day after he awoke from his drunken slumber, tired and hung over, the man is horrified to recall what he has done, and this guilt only drives him to drink even further, in an attempt to erase these feelings. Later, he grew infatuated with being violent again towards the cat merely because it is forbidden, asking the reader "Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is the *Law* [sic], merely because we understand it to be such?" Poe, pg. 13. As a result, one morning he gleefully wrapped a rope around the poor cat's neck and dangled it from a tree, killing it. That night, however, a stroke of bad luck attacked the narrator as he awoke with his house ablaze, which he narrowly escaped with his wife before the entire property was burnt to the ground.

Only one small section of wall remained towards the center of the building which he had only recently covered in a fresh coat of plaster, where his bedroom had been, and it is here that onlookers discovered the large outline of what appeared to be a cat dangling from a noose scarred upon the wall. Frightened at first, the narrator finds a complicated explanation in his mind of how this could be, since in trying to grab his attention, a neighbor surely cut down the cat's dangling body outside, threw it through the window to grab his attention, and which then was embedded into the limestone wall and outlined as the building shifted and crumbled. As time went on, the narrator and his wife moved into a new house, but the man remains tormented by the guilt of what he has done. His drinking habits continued, and he spent his time searching the taverns and apartments where he would go for a new cat to replace Pluto, as if this would make everything right again. He finally did see a black cat laying upon a large barrel of rum or gin, and upon approaching it the cat began to purr affectionately. After the landlord told him that he

didn't know who it belonged to, the narrator decides to take it home, noting its close resemblance to Pluto except for the white fur this cat had ran along his chest.

A short time passes before the man began to dislike this cat too, as he had done towards Pluto, especially since this cat has an eye missing just like Pluto, from when he had stabbed it with a knife. Reminded of this and restrained from hurting this cat because of his guilt at what happened to Pluto, the man's rage built up over time, increased when the cat would try to follow him around or get in his way underfoot. His wife pointed out what an interesting design that the cat's white fur bore underneath, and the man declares that the shape of the fur changed over time, "It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name --and for this, above all, I loathed and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster *had I dared*--it was now, I say, the image of a hideous--of a ghastly thing--of the GALLOWS!--oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and Crime--of Agony and of Death!" Poe, pg. 17. The shape of a gallows upon the cat's breast caused the narrator to hate and fear it alike, reminded perhaps of when he himself had hung Pluto from a tree, and now it is a gallows again that is depicted upon the cat's fur. As the days passed again, the man became more cruel and violent, although his wife did not complain, being "the most patient of sufferers."

One day, the wife accompanied him into the basement to get something, and upon walking down the stairs, the man flew into a frenzy when the cat followed them. He raised an ax to kill it, but his wife's hand held him back from driving the ax down, so he smashed her with the ax instead, driving it into her skull. Rather than feeling guilt or horror, the man only ponders how to hide her body from detection, wondering if he should chop it up into little pieces and burn it, bury it, or just toss it into a deep well. Finally he decided to tear apart a hollow wall in the basement, which concealed an old non-working fireplace beneath, and to hide her body there and reseal it, "as the monks of the Middle Ages are recorded to have walled up their victims." This deed done, he plastered the wall so that it blended with everything else around, and then looked around for the cat so that he could kill it, too. However, the creature is no where to be found. Assuming it to be a miracle that the cat has at last left him alone, the man slept deeply and soundly without fear, because the cat was gone.

For two more nights he slept as such, but on the fourth day a group of policemen came in search of his missing wife. Inviting them into his home, the narrator was proud at what a clever job he has done at concealing his wife's body, going out of his way to show them around the basement, gloating that they don't know her dead body to be so nearby. In my final display of pride at his workmanship, the man knocked on that very wall behind which his wife was hidden, declaring how well-constructed the house was, just as the policemen are on their way up the stairs. Proceeding, he knocked again, louder, repeating the same statement. At this, a low howl escapes from behind the wall, and the policemen pause to turn around and begin immediately to tear the wall apart. When this task was completed, "The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the

monster up within the tomb" Poe, pg. 20. The man is thus set to die the next day because of this terrible murder, and the story he has related serves as a confessional of why the deed was done. Had he not trapped the cat within the wall as well, the police would not have known that the body was there. Once again, the black cat is blamed for all of his troubles.

# Commentary

The tale of "The Black Cat" was first published on August 19, 1843, in the *United States Saturday Post*, later called the *Saturday Evening Post*, in Philadelphia. The story's placement of a murderer as the narrator embodies much of Edgar Allan Poe's stylistic method, using words to manipulate the mind of his readers. It is this fresh approach to storytelling that caused Poe's writing to find such appeal amongst a developing America still searching to define itself. Poe's work contributed to this quest very much, as in "The Black Cat." Here, a rather sick man blames everyone else for causing his behavior. When he becomes a violent alcoholic, it is "Intemperance" that causes him to behave as such, and later it is another personification that causes him to hang his cat, that of "Perverseness." It is the cat's fault that his wife murdered, for if the cat hadn't gotten in his way, he would never have swung the ax. Finally, it is the cat's fault that his crime is discovered, for it is the cat's howls that the policemen hear, causing them to tear apart the wall concealing her body. The setting and human characters are non-specific; only the black cat bears a name, Pluto. The focus is thus upon the man's inner world, and the psychology of why a crime is committed remains a central key to understanding the story.

Furthermore, the man is afflicted by paranoia and distrust of all that is around him, which started after he began staying out all night to get drunk. He first grew paranoid that the cat was following him, which is why he would become violent towards it, eventually causing it to die. The man's fears were reaffirmed when the cat's shape was burned into the wall in his ruined house, which he desperately sought to explain away by an elaborate course of events. After moving to a new residence, the man found a new cat, but quickly feared this creature because it had a white patch on its breast that resembled a gallows, where men are hung. The man's paranoia increases to the point that he murdered his wife when she prevented him from killing the cat. He felt relief only when the cat had disappeared and did not get nervous at all when the police came to investigate his wife's disappearance. Indeed, it is his overconfidence which leads to the discovery of the body, as he gloats that they don't know her body to be buried so nearby in the basement. It is this false security that led to her discovery, and the man is again consumed by paranoia and fear towards the "monstrous cat" which he had wanted to kill.

By means of these detailed descriptions, Poe paints a portrait of how the criminal thinks and comes to rationalize his crimes. In this instance, the man did not make a conscious decision to kill his wife, but instead was consumed by a sudden and violent outpouring of human emotion. Perhaps this is the lesson that Poe makes of the story, contrasting the mention of blacks cats as "witches in disguise" to the actual darkness that exists within the human heart. The first is rooted in superstition and paranoia, whereas the second is evidenced at length within the story because of the narrator's actions. The reader is left to decide between the narrator's narrow perception of the world, where black cats set out to destroy a man's life, and the wider lens of common sense which suggests that this is a disillusioned man who becomes violently abusive when under the influence of alcohol.

# The Fall of the House of Usher

An epigraph opens the tale, with words quoted from the French poet Jean Pierre de Beranger: "Son coeur est un luth suspendu;/Sitot qu'on le touche il resonne." Once translated, this means "His heart is a tightened lute; as soon as one touches it, it echoes." The narrator describes how he embarked on a long journey to visit a boyhood friend named Roderick Usher, whom he has not seen in many years. However, a strange letter that the narrator has received from Roderick declares that he is in terrible need of companionship and assistance, because both his body and his mind have become very sick. Wishing to come to the rescue, the man thus sets off at once to reach Roderick's isolated family estate located deep in the forest of some unknown country. As he arrives, a certain fear infects his entire body, and he recalls that this place is called the "House of Usher" because it has always been inhabited by the Usher family, and also the phrase refers to the family itself as one single house. The reason for this is that only one direct line of descent has survived from its earliest founder, with no siblings having survived to start new families of their own.

Additionally, the narrator suddenly recalls how little he really knows of Roderick; even though they were the best of friends as schoolchildren and played together, he knew little of this man's past and his family history. The appearance of the house itself mirrors this same air of mystery that shrouds the man who inhabits its walls, "The discoloration of the ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled webwork from the eaves...No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones" Poe, pg. 24. The man goes on to describe how the building appeared to have a thin crack running from the roof down the building's length and into the ground, and overall "In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old woodwork which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability" Poe, pg. 24. The narrator feels as if he is peering into a vault, because everything is so tranquil, but it is still slowly rotting nevertheless.

Upon arriving, a servant takes his horse, and the man enters the "Gothic archway of the hall," where he is then led through a labyrinth of corridors to Roderick Usher's room, where he is seen lying upon a couch. Usher rises quickly at the narrator's entrance, pleased to see his old friend again, and the two men sit down together. After an awkward silence during which the narrator marvels at how much Usher's appearance has transformed as "The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre [sic] of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not...connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity" Poe, pg. 25-6. Roderick is very disheveled, his skin is pale, and the very expression upon his face is inhuman. His voice is like that of a "lost drunkard" or an opium addict, as he hurriedly tries to explain that he has inherited some sort of Usher family curse, and this is the cause of his sickness. The narrator is doubtful,

secretly considering him to be a hypochondriac when Roderick states dramatically "I must perish," and how he will die after losing his "struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR [sic]."

Usher adds that the grim, decaying surroundings of the family mansion are partly to blame for his depression, as well as the gradual decline of his sister Madeline, who will soon be dead because of her illness, which no doctor has been able to identify or treat effectively. When Madeline's name is mentioned, she wanders through the room as if on cue, and then slowly disappears once again, causing Roderick to start crying violently, burying his face into his hands. The fact that Roderick will be the last remaining member of the Usher family after his sister is dead compounds the problem even more, and it is this loneliness that has caused him to seek comfort in this old friend. Understanding the situation well, the narrator encourages Roderick to engage in various activities to cheer him up, which include reading, painting, and playing music. The pictures that Roderick creates are abstract and colorful, mirroring the complexity of his mind, as on one occasion when the man he paints an image of a long white hallway with light pouring down it, emanating from an unknown source.

The man's music is just as exotic. One mournful song he plays upon his guitar and sings aloud, called "The Haunted Palace," tells the tale of a beautiful palace that was once respected for its wealth, beauty, and respect for those who lived therein, as "In state his glory well befitting,/The ruler of the realm was seen." The song ends on a sad note, however, as the glory eventually becomes a mere memory "Of the old time entombed." The palace becomes a feared and decaying place, much like the House of Usher, "And travelers now within that valley,/Through the red-litten [sic] windows see/Vast forms that move fantastically/To a discordant melody;/While, like a rapid ghastly river,/Through the pale door;/A hideous throng rush out forever,/And laugh -- but smile no more" Poe, pg. 31. The once grand palace becomes haunted by ghosts and lives in the shadow of its former triumphs, until the last people depart the palace forever and there is no one left. Similarly, Roderick lives alone in the House of Usher with his sister Madeline, soon to be dead, surrounded by the remnants of his family's long and proud legacy. Usher also knows that this family legacy shall die with him because he is the last Usher.

Impressed by this song, the narrator converses with Roderick about its meaning, and he rambles for awhile about how he believes the moss and fungi growing on the rocks of his mansion, as well as other inanimate objects, are really sentient, thinking beings, much like humans are, and that the very House of Usher itself is causing his sickness. The narrator humors him and listens patiently, finding little cause to believe this as fact. Wishing to distract him from this mania, the narrator reads many books with Roderick, which works for awhile in focusing the poor man until Madeline abruptly dies. Usher is not overly distraught, for he already knew this to be inevitable, yet he insists on delaying her burial for two weeks. Instead, her body will be placed in a coffin in a room of the house, and the narrator helps to move her body into a dark vault once used perhaps "in remote feudal times" to store gunpowder, laying Madeline's coffin within. Then they unscrew the lid and admire the woman's face, which still shows a reddish hue, suggesting that she has died before her time, lacking the pale emptiness that many

dead faces typically tend to carry. The narrator notes now much she resembles Usher, and the man declares that she was his twin sister, and they had always had a special connection between them. The lid is replaced, and the men leave the vault.

As the days go by, Roderick's behavior changes radically. His paranoia increases, and all of the progress the narrator has made during the past weeks in assisting his old friend is lost, and Roderick's fear starts to rub off on him! About a week afterwards, the narrator is trying to sleep in his room and cannot. Deciding to walk around his room for a bit until he is sleepy, the narrator is interrupted by Roderick Usher knocking on his door. When the man enters, he acts very strange, asking "And you have not seen it?" as the wind outside gets louder and fiercer. The narrator notices that the clouds outside are moving very quickly and shine with an unearthly light as well, which begins to surround the House of Usher. Suppressing his fear, he consoles Roderick by assuring him that the odd lighting is just "electrical phenomena," insisting instead that he will read a book to him that lies nearby, called *Mad Trist* by Sir Launcelot Canning to distract Roderick from his paranoia. However, upon reaching a point in the story where a character named Ethelred hears the cracking of wood as he breaks down a hermit's door, a similar sound of cracking wood seems to echo within the House of Usher.

Ignoring this, the narrator reads on to Roderick, reaching a point in the story where Ethelred kills a dragon, which releases a shriek in death. At this moment, a horrible shriek fills the House of Usher. Petrified but resistant, the narrator continues to read, even as Roderick has moved his chair to face the door of that room, as if waiting for someone to enter. His face is buried in his hands, but he is neither sleeping nor crying, and his body rocks from side to side rhythmically. The narrator reads a section about how Ethelred approaches a shield hanging on the wall and falls crashing to the floor as he approaches. A loud metal clanging echoes throughout the mansion, and the narrator at last gives up his reading, standing quickly. Roderick explains mournfully that the sounds are all from his sister -- the opening of her coffin and the release of the door in her vault, and that she is in fact still alive! Consumed with fear, Roderick screams out that he can hear the beating heart of his twin sister as she approaches, declaring that she will punish him for entombing her so soon.

He shouts out abruptly, "Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door," and at this the door opens and a dark figure stands there, although the narrator insists that the wind has caused the door to open. Entering the room, the narrator saw that "There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold -- then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" Poe, pg. 40. Witnessing his childhood friend murdered before his very eyes, the narrator quickly flees from the scene in horror and shock, making it just outside of the mansion before turning around to observe the House of Usher. The storm grows fiercer, and the "blood-red moon" shines brilliantly over the house, as a large crack on the side of the house increasingly widens, causing the building to split apart and fall to the ground in pieces. The wind bears down upon the building as well, until suddenly after the "shouting sound like the

voice of a thousand waters," there is an abrupt silence. The House of Usher is no more, swallowed up by the earth upon which it had once stood.

# Commentary

"The Fall of the House of Usher" was first published in September of 1839 by *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in Philadelphia, where Poe was also working as the magazine's assistant editor. This complex and horrific story was a tremendous success, and it is for this ghastly tale that Poe is probably best known and admired. It is important to note that Roderick Usher's family name comes from the real-life couple, Noble Luke Usher and Harriet L'Estrange Usher, who had worked onstage with Edgar's parents David and Eliza Poe, clearly suggesting the importance of personal experience in providing an impetus for Poe to write. The phenomenon of being buried alive was also a frequent phenomenon in Poe's day, so it is no wonder that he would choose this as a central theme, mirroring a later story entitled "The Premature Burial," to be published in July of 1844 that addresses this same topic. In addition to this idea of Madeline being erroneously lain to rest while she is still alive, there are some other important details to be discussed.

First, there is the stubborn resistance of the narrator to accept that he is experiencing any sort of supernatural phenomenon. He is very skeptical throughout the story to the very end, as he attempts to explain away every occurrence by some logical scientific reasoning. When Roderick complains of so many ailments, the narrator considers him to be a simple hypochondriac; when Roderick lectures him about the sentient qualities of moss and fungi, the narrator is doubtful, but he listens patronizingly. When Roderick sees odd lights beginning to surround his house and the clouds rushing by outside, the narrator turns him away from the window, dismissing this as a mere storm and the light as "electrical phenomena," choosing instead to escape into a book, which he reads aloud. When the narrator reads and hears frightful sounds, he ignores them and continues reading; and as Madeline opens the door to the room, the narrator says this is because of the wind. Only after witnessing the murder of Roderick does he flee for his life, and after observing the House of Usher swallowed entirely by the earth finally offers no explanation for this event.

Thus, the story may be seen as an ongoing struggle of the logical, rational human mind, and the primitive fears and worries that lurk deeper within, of which Roderick becomes a victim. The very thing which he had most feared, that he would be slain by the House, comes true in the form of his very sister Madeline. The narrator struggles to resist this frame of thinking, although eventually it "infects" him as well, so much that he cannot sleep at night. Poe thus sends a message that no matter how much we may rationalize and suppress our fears in light of logic, the fear is still there within all of us, however hidden, and any traumatic event such as what befell the narrator, may cause it to emerge at any given time, and consume us, as it had done to Roderick. One may wonder what the mental state of the narrator may have become after observing the House of Usher pulled into the ground; perhaps he, too, is as maniacal and as much of a hypochondriac as Roderick had been. At the same time, one may wonder whether the narrator would have even escaped from the house had he not maintained some hold on logic, for Roderick did not even attempt to escape death. Instead, he waited for it

expectantly, going so far as to turn his chair to face the door, since his sister would soon enter the room.

Indeed, the fact that Roderick cannot seem to survive without Madeline points out another quality of the story's author. Throughout Edgar Allan Poe's life, he was forever searching for a female counterpart with whom he could share his thoughts, much like Roderick's close attachment to his twin sister Madeline. Poe had been lacking such a bond for much of his life, with the premature death of his mother Eliza and the loss of two other maternal figures in his life, Jane Stannard and Fanny Allan. He desperately sought female companionship and married his cousin Virginia in 1837, who would later die from the same illness that had taken his mother: tuberculosis. This craving for female companionship is evident throughout "The Fall of the House of Usher." The narrator's companionship is inadequate for the Roderick's needs, and after Madeline's death Roderick becomes sullen and depressed. Like Poe, Roderick himself is very artistic, singing a poetic song about "The Haunted Palace," and his love of other arts such as painting and literature is to be noted as well. Like Poe, Roderick is perceived by the "rational" mind, embodied in the presence of the narrator, as delusional and eccentric. Yet it is this man who in the end proves his point as the house crumbles as soon as he dies alongside Madeline. With Roderick's inability to function without his sister, the House of Usher thus comes to a magnificent end.

The destruction of the house mirrors the deceased Roderick, who had felt so much that the structure itself was a living creature. What the narrator had assumed to be baseless madness is revealed as truth. Also of note is the epithet that begins the tale from the poet de Beranger, meaning again "His heart is a tightened lute; as soon as one touches it, it echoes." Oddly, the original text from de Beranger's "Le Refus" read "Mon coeur," so Poe had changed this from "My heart" to "His heart," leaving one to wonder why this was done. Again, since the first person narrator is clearly not the artist of the story and "Mon" would hardly be appropriate, the reference is made to, again, Roderick Usher, whose heart craves the female companionship of his twin sister Madeline. Roderick mentioned the presence of a deep spiritual connection between the two, which would no doubt be broken once Madeline died. Roderick shouts out at one point "Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart?" revealing this close connection as his inner heartbeat and that of Madeline seem to become one and the same, a technique Poe also uses in "The Tell-Tale Heart." The only resolution is that Roderick die with her, since they are as much a part of each other as the House of Usher is a part of them.

# The Masque of the Red Death

In an unknown country, a ruler named Prince Prospero has quarantined himself and one thousand of his closest friends within his castle to escape from the widespread Red Death which is plaguing the land. In describing the unique nature of this illness, "Blood was its Avatar and its seal -- the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution...And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour" Poe, pg. 40. Those who bear any of these symptoms are not offered any assistance, because it is so contagious and attacks the body so very quickly. As such, Prospero has been very careful about whom he has allowed to enter his castle, which he has customized himself, and this man has decided to ignore these problems outside in his kingdom, thinking that "The external world could take care of itself." The castle is surrounded by a metal fence, and all of the entrances to it are welded shut by some of his servants to prevent anyone from coming or going. Within the castle a wild party is going on all day, every day. Prospero has hired dancers, musicians, and many other such forms of entertainment to amuse his guests and keep them occupied, as they stay drunk in a wine-filled alcoholic haze. These circumstances make the people forget their worries about the Red Death, and they instead develope a deep feeling of peace and security here.

After about six months of living in such a way, Prince Prospero organizes an enormous masquerade ball which all of his one thousand friends participate in. The palace where this wild party occurs is oddly arranged, however, with a series of seven rooms that twist and wind beyond the view of the other. Each room is unlit from within, and instead has a brazier blazing forth from the hallway that runs on either side of the rooms; the fire's light shines through the colored stained glass that decorates each room in a different shade. The first room upon entering the palace is the blue room, which is filled with blue light, and is inhabited by blue curtainsm rugs, tapestries, and so on. Next there is a purple room arranged in a similar fashion, followed by a third green room, an orange room, the fifth white room, and the sixth violet room. Finally, the seventh room is different than the rest because it has black velvet curtains, but the windows are of a blood red color. In this room also stands a "tall ebony clock" that chimes loudly every hour, its deep ring reverberating throughout the palace. At these moments, the partygoers all pause from their revelry to listen, their faces becoming worried and strained. As soon as the chime has ended, everything resumes as normal until the next hour strikes again, when the same worries shall flood these people's bodies, however brief.

After each chime, the people vow that they will not fear this sound again, but when the time comes "after the lapse of sixty minutes," the same thing would occur and involuntary fear would assault everyone again. Because of this odd arrangement, some people outside in the kingdom think that Prince Prospero, a duke, is a mad man, but those one thousand followers who do respect and admire him do not share this opinion. That is probably why it is these who have been chosen to escape from the pestilence that reigns outside of those iron gates. Prospero also encouraged the people to wear

wild costumes, "Be sure they were grotesque...There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the *bizarre* [sic], something of the terrible...To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams" Poe, pg. 44. Prospero is a man who is obsessed with the grotesque, as he encourages his people to dress up like monsters and inhuman creatures, things that a "madman" would envision. However, even though he may have an unusual imagination that he wishes to recreate within the walls of the palace, Prospero is considered to be quite sane by his guests, and they are no doubt grateful that he has chosen to protect them.

The people are called "dreams" as they wandered throughout the palace, "And these -- the dreams -- writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of velvet...The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away...And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever" Poe, pg. 44. The narrator describes this odd scene, that the people, called "dreams" methodically pause every hour when the clock chimes, only to reanimate themselves with a renewed energy afterwards. However, they now no longer go into the seventh, black-curtained room "which lies most westwardly," bathed in a bloody light because they are inwardly afraid. The guests dance fervently in the other six rooms however. When the night is nearly over and the early morning hours are about to begin, the clock finally strikes midnight. As the twelfth ring sounds out, the guests do not resume their festivities this time, because they sense that there is someone new among them who does not belong there. Immediately they notice him due to the poor taste of the costume that makes it stand out.

The person is dressed like a dying victim of the Red Death that ravages the people without the castle, that they had all sought to escape, "The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments from the grave. The mask...was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse...But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in *blood* -- and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror" Poe, pg. 45. The partygoers are awestruck at this costume, too stunned even to move, or to continue on with the revelry. Outraged that his party has been interrupted and offended at this costume just like everyone else, Prospero cries aloud that this is "blasphemous mockery" and orders his guests to unmask him, declaring that he will be hung at sunrise outside of the castle. Standing in the blue room, the costumed form walks forward untouched by anyone, because they are so afraid, and it walks directly in front of Prospero out of the room and into the purple room, and on through the green, orange, white, and white rooms. The duke awakens from his spell and, realizing that nobody is going to stop this figure, decides to go after it himself. He is their leader, after all. Rushing forward and enraged, Prospero holds a long dagger in his outstretched hand as he prepares to stab the intruder, who has now not only dressed in such a ghastly outfit, but has also entered the palace chambers without his permission.

Reaching the westward and final seventh, "bloody" chamber with the ebony clock, Prospero prepares to lunge at the figure, until it abruptly turns around to gaze at the man. Prince Prospero screams abruptly and drops down dead upon the floor of that seventh room. Angered that their leader has fallen, the partygoers all rush into this bloody chamber at once and assail the figure, tearing off his costume and "gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask, which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form" Poe, pg. 47. The figure has nothing beneath the costume; it is not even a human at all! Upon discovering this, the people know that this is the Red Death, "come like a thief in the night" to steal their lives away from them. In spite of the barricades and grand plans that Prince Prospero had devised for himself and one thousand guests, it proves futile to escape this wretched disease. Soon after, the people drop down dead one by one in that seventh room, and the ebony clock dies the last person. With no one to keep the burning braziers lit, these, too, burn out soon after, and the entire palace grows dark, cold, and empty of any movement except for the Red Death that "held illimitable dominion over all."

# Commentary

"The Masque of the Red Death" is a gothic story, so named for the dark and supernatural landscape and the mysterious sequence of events that occur within the story. Gothic literature was prominent in England throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and there is little doubt that Poe was exposed to it during his school days in London. This particular story was first published in Philadelphia's *Graham's Magazine* in May of 1843 while Poe served as this publication's editor. There are several items of importance to mention about this story.

First, the overall plot focuses upon the hubris of an upper class that thinks itself above the powers of mortality. In many ways, Prospero believes that he is invincible and enjoys being in control of all that occurs; he goes so far as to create his own little universe and grotesque people to inhabit it, as they dress up for the parties that he sponsors. Prospero thinks that he is god, holding power over life and death. These people are unaffected by the suffering and death they know occurs outside of the castle, for they trust that Prospero will protect them from danger, nor does Prospero care about those people either. He only wants to save himself. These class distinctions are also raised in a lengthier work entitled *The Decameron* by Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio. Here, too, a group of nobles from Florence, Italy flee from the bubonic plague and tell stories along the way, letting the rest of the people in the city to suffer unaided. The idea of a selfish ruling class that abandons the masses in times of misfortune or suffering is hardly a rarity, but instead recurs throughout literature. In the end, Poe makes it clear that neither money nor royalty can save one from death and destiny. All class distinctions are quickly stripped away as the Red Death consumes Prospero as readily as it had the poverty-stricken people outside of the castle. Prospero, like Noah, thought that he could save his "chosen people" from the Flood, only to realize that he, too, was fated to die with everyone else. The story is very humbling in scope.

Furthermore, the very layout of the castle suggests a progression towards death and decay, forming a microcosm for the very process of life itself. Most obvious is that the first, blue, room is in the east, and the final, "bloody" room is in the west, mirroring the life of the day. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west; or in other words, the sun is "born" in the east and "dies" in the west. This idea is applicable in understanding human life too, as we see in the story. All of the partygoers die in the black room as they try to overtake the masked figure. Prospero falls first, and his entire kingdom then crumbles around him and dies. It is no mere coincidence that this is in the westernmost room; as the sun expires in the west, so too do these people. Similarly, the colors of these rooms represent a progression from beginning to end as it roughly appears on the color spectrum of a rainbow from lighter colors such as blue, green, and purple, and which ends in the color red. The "bloody" red room thus becomes a place of ending not only due to the westward location, but also because of its color. Finally, there is the fact that there are seven rooms and that this room with the ebony clock is also the seventh, and final, room. All of these symbols point out that the palace layout moves from a beginning to an end, from life into death.

The presence of a black clock in this seventh room is the only instrument to connect the partygoers to reality; its chime is the only thing that breaks Prospero's spell. After the clock stops ringing, the people are described as "dreams," wandering around throughout the palace's ornate rooms, only to be reawakened when the chime sounds again. Indeed, the guests lose themselves within Prospero's fantasy, thinking that alcohol and dancing can save them and make the Red Death just disappear. They all think that they can escape, but the clock always reminds them that time is still ticking onwards, that they will not live forever, and their lives are measured by simple numbers and nothing more. The clock reminds them that they cannot escape, and that their lives are still being measured, and that is why they fear it and wish to forget it. Like the rhythmic beating of a heart, the clock reminds them also that they are human, that they are not dreams, and reminds them that Prospero is not a god, and nor does he control Time and its power over life. Finally, these people fall victim to the Red Death, as the clock told them that they all would, and then with the death of the last person, the clock, too, stops ticking, since there is no mortal life left to measure or record, nor is there any heart left that beats. With the death of the last person, even Time disappears, with nobody left to record it or to remember it. As the story says, only the Red Death ticks onwards in the end, and the Red Death makes no distinctions between rich and poor, common or royal, old or young, virtuous or wicked -- that Red Death is all that remains.

One final point to make is to recognize Poe's own lifelong infatuation with death and dying. While only two years old, Edgar witnessed the death of his mother from tuberculosis, and was forced to spend the rest of his life as an orphan cared for by a surrogate father who refused to formerly adopt him. Later, the mother of a school friend, Jane Stannard, also died after he became quite attached to her. More significant, in 1842 around when this story was published, Poe's wife Virginia had become increasingly ill, and she was diagnosed with tuberculosis, the same disease that had killed his mother. "The Masque of the Red Death" thus takes on a central meaning, that Death follows you everywhere as it followed him throughout his entire life. Perhaps he recalls the "Prince Prospero" from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which is another very supernatural tale filled with faeries and magic, although that play has a happier ending. One cannot help to note that there is also a close resemblance to "Prospero" and "Poe." Edgar Allan was known to drink heavily to escape from his fears, from his failures, and from his financial woes; it was a lifelong battle. Like the revelers in Prospero's castle, perhaps it is Poe who still recognized through the alcoholic haze and grand dreams which intoxication inspires, that there is always an inevitable end that lurks out there from which there is no escape. In many ways, the "Red Death" is another name for the degenerative disease of human mortality that afflicts us all.

# The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar

An unnamed narrator whose first name is P. describes that he has an increasing interest in a process known as Mesmerism, to be more commonly interpreted as hypnotism, or rather, to put someone into a trancelike state of mind, and to thus cause an increased responsiveness to questions. The narrator is presumably a doctor as well, but this does not appear to be directly established in the story. The main problem that the narrator wishes to solve in his quest for knowledge is that nobody has ever been mesmerized right before death, "in articulo mortis," and he wonders if perhaps death could even be avoided if this were done. Next, he tries to find someone who would be willing to subject themselves to mesmerism while dying, and he recalls his friend Ernest Valdemar, who is a well-known scholar and book author that has resided in "Harlaem, N.Y., since the year 1839" is in poor health, and "For some months previous to my becoming acquainted with him, his physicians had declared him in a confirmed phthisis [tuberculosis of the lungs]. It was his custom, indeed, to speak calmly of his approaching dissolution, as of a matter neither to be avoided nor regretted" Poe, pg. 49. Valdemar does not fear his own death, but rather accepts it as an inevitability. Prior to this, the narrator had tried to mesmerize him, but it did not work very well, possibly because of his poor health.

However, the narrator asks this man if he would agree to be mesmerized at the brink of death, and Valdemar readily consents and looks forward to this event, declaring that he will send a message to the narrator when he is within twenty-four hours of death. Soon after, Valdemar sends such a note on a Saturday, adding that his two physicians "D--- and F---" have given him only a short time to live, not "beyond tomorrow midnight." The narrator P. rushes over to Valdemar's bedside in Harlaem within fifteen minutes, where the dying man is calmly writing down some final words on paper, attended to by his two doctors. They relate that his lungs are rapidly deteriorating and ossifying, or hardening, "The left lung had been for eighteen months in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right, in its upper portion, was...ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purelent tubercles, running one into another. Several extensive perforations [holes] existed; and, at one point, permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place" Poe, pg. 50. The detailed description reveals the grave nature of his condition, as his lunsg have become nearly useless and additionally, the doctors think he has an aneurism in his heart. The doctors both say good-bye to Valdemar for what they think will be the last time, since there is nothing more to be done. The narrator, however, asks them to come back on Sunday around ten o'clock.

Afterwards, a male and female nurse remain behind to watch the dying man, but the narrator does not want to mesmerize Valdemar with only these people, just in case something goes wrong. As eight o'clock approaches, a medical student named Theodore L---l arrives, and the narrator decides to mesmerize Valdemar with this man as a credible witness that Valdemar gives permission for this. The narrator begins to mesmerize Valdemar by touching his forehead and continues to mesmerize the dying man until the arrival of the two physicians D--- and F--- at around ten o'clock. His breathing becomes very hoarse and slow, as does his heartbeat. After fifteen minutes,

Valdemar sighs deeply, his skin becomes cold to touch, and the breathing returns more to normal. Shortly before eleven o'clock, the narrator describes more changes, "The glassy roll of the eye was changed for that expression of uneasy *inward* [sic] examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-walking, and which it is quite impossible to mistake. With a few lateral passes I made the eyelids quiver, as in incipient sleep, and with a few more I closed them altogether" Poe, pg. 52. He then causes Valdemar's body to straighten out and to lift his head slightly, until around midnight the doctors examine the man, discovering that he is in a complete "mesmeric trance."

At three o'clock in the morning, the narrator inspects Valdemar yet again, only to find him in exactly the same condition and position that he had left him in nearly three hours before, still breathing and obviously not dead; he has outlived the midnight deadline put forth by his doctors! Standing next to the bed, the narrator manipulates Valdemar's arm by moving his own arm over his head, like a magician, and Valdemar mirrors these actions, which no change in his facial expression. Now the narrator asks him if he is asleep several times, until finally the man replies, "Yes;--asleep now. Do not wake me!--let me die so!" He adds afterwards that he feels no pain. Later the narrator returns again before sunrise and with both physicians present, asking again if he is still asleep, to which Valdemar replies "Yes; still asleep -- dying." Everyone then agrees that the best thing is to leave him in this trancelike state of mind, until death will at last fall upon him and he will speak no more. The narrator, fascinated and curious, wishes to speak with him yet again, and this time "The eyes rolled themselves slowly open, the pupils slowly disappearing upwardly; the skin [resembled] not so much parchment on white paper...The upper lip, at the same time, writhed itself away from the teeth, which it had previously covered completely; while the lower jaw fell with an audible jerk, leaving the mouth widely extended, and disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue" Poe, pg. 54.

There is no response from the man, but suddenly his tongue begins to vibrate rapidly and after a few minutes from the tongue comes Valdemar's voice, "Yes;--no;--I *have been* sleeping--and now--now--*I am dead*" at which the nurses flee in fear, and Theodore faints. After this medical student is revived, they decide to inspect Valdemar again and try unsuccessfully to draw blood from his arm; they no longer see any sign of breathing; and the narrator can no longer make the arm move around with his mesmeric powers. The only indication that Valdemar is not dead, is because his tongue continues to vibrate when a question is asked, as if it is trying to respond but cannot. They hire new nurses because the other pair is too frightened to ever return, and at ten o'clock in the morning the narrator leaves with the physicians and Theodore. After making another visit later that afternoon, the men observe that Valdemar is still in his trance and has not yet died; at this they conclude that the mesmeric trance has, indeed, delayed Valdemar from dying indefinitely. To revive him from the trance would mean that he would die instantly, for it is the only thing keeping him alive right now.

In the days and weeks that follow, the narrator visits Valdemar's house daily, and this routine continues for about seven months during which Valdemar stays in exactly the same position as he had been on that first day, with his eyes opened and tongue

protruding from his gaping mouth. He is cared for by the two new nurses throughout these months. Seeing no change in his condition, the narrator decides at last to awaken Valdemar from his trance and allow him to die. He goes to Valdemar's bedside and proceeds to wave his hands over the man's head as he had done once before in putting the trance upon him. The first detectable change in Valdemar as he comes out of his trance, is that his eye starts to leak a flood of yellow pus which smells very unpleasant. Next, he tries to move his arms and receives no response at all and decides to speak with Valdemar, "M. Valdemar, can you explain to us what you are feelings or wishes now?" at which the tongue vibrates again and shouts out "For God's sake!--quick!--quick!--put me to sleep--or, quick!--waken me!--quick!--*I say to you that I am dead!*" The narrator P. hesitates before continuing the process of revival, expecting Valdemar to just wake up again and return to his old self.

However, "As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations of "dead! dead!" absolutely *bursting* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once -- within the space of a single minute, or eevn less, shrunk -- crumbled--absolutely *rotted* away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of lothsome [sic] -- of detestable putridity" Poe, pg. 57. Valdemar finally dies after seven long months of avoiding this, and his body quickly decomposes as if he had in fact lain there on the bed for seven months, dead already. Nobody was expecting this to happen, and as a result many people gossip about this event as a result, because of its gruesome nature, and perhaps to wonder whether putting Valdemar in a trancelike state while on the verge of death was really such a good idea after all. Although in the beginning Valdemar had been very much in agreement, it seems that after seven months of being suspended from both life and death, his voice frantically pleads to be revived. Once perceived with indifference as an inevitability, death instead becomes a welcomed blessing.

# Commentary

When this story was published in the December 1845 issue of New York's *The American Whig Review*, the idea of Mesmerism, or hypnotism, was still rather popular, given that its founder, Franz Anton Mesmer, had only just died in 1815. During Poe's early years in London from 1815-1820, he no doubt had exposure to this man's teachings, which originated from nearby Paris, France. Mesmerism is also the central topic of "A Tale of the Rugged Mountains" which also depicts a man controlled by another who later dies, similar to the narrator's attempts to control Valdemar's dying body. Certainly this was a subject of great interest to him. Poe wrote "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" while serving as editor of *The Broadway Journal* in New York City, where he had moved to from Philadelphia. not so very far from the Harlaem, or "Harlem" where Monsieur Valdemar resides. The first letter initial of the narrator is "P." thus matching the first letter of Poe's last name, which is an interesting detail to make note of. Poe obviously draws from a geography that is familiar to him in composing this story, and given that the story was published for a mainly New York readership, the immediacy that the story creates could be a marketing strategy as well.

Furthermore, it was around this time that Poe's wife, Virginia, had taken a turn for the worst. Like Valdemar, Virginia had been battling a terrible bout of tuberculosis since her initial diagnosis in 1842, and both names even begin with the same initial, "V." Poe's detailed descriptions of the symptoms that this painful disease carries are hardly based upon guesswork or research, because he was able to observe and experience this illness and the suffering it brings, on a firsthand basis. The doctors standing at the lingering patient's bedside, and the accepted inevitability that there is nothing to be done in preventing death for the tuberculosis patient are stark realities that Poe knew all too well. His own mother, Elizabeth, had died from this same ailment when he was only a small child. Poe no doubt had a particular hatred for tuberculosis while simultaneously accepting, as is reflected in "The Masque of the Red Death," that there is nothing to be done to save the infected victims from death. The narrator P. puts forth a concerted effort to delay or event prevent the onset of Valdemar's death, while later realizing that nothing anyone can do to save Valdemar; this man himself, frozen in his trance, even begins to beg for death to come.

Both of these stories reflect the same theme in different ways; Prospero hopes to escape death by locking himself within the walls of his castle, whereas the narrator mesmerizes Valdemar to prevent this from happening. In both instances, these attempts fail; Prospero is the first to fall at the hands of the Red Death, followed by all of his partygoers, and Valdemar's body collapses into a melted mass of fetid body fluids once his trance has been lifted. The significance should be clear: in spite of Poe's inward yearning for Virginia's recovery, he understood that her premature death was an undeniable reality. Mrs. Poe did expire at their cottage in the Bronx on January 30, 1847, at the age of 24. There is no documented report of Virginia being placed into a mesmeric trance in the hours preceding her death. Another interesting item of note is that, due to the extremity of details that he used in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," including quotations, visual descriptions, and the use of scientific

terminology, many readers in the public assumed that Poe's story related events that had actually happened when it is published. Later, when Edgar Allan Poe revealed that it was merely a fictional story of his own creation, he explained that the factual presentation of events was merely a tool to direct the reader's attention toward mesmerism, a topic with which he was very interested.

# The Premature Burial

A narrator begins by mentioning several horrific events in history that have captured people's attention, including the Passage of Beresina, the Earthquake of Lisbon, the Black Hole at Calcutta, the Plague of London, and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, reminding the reader that "it is the fact -- it is the reality -- it is the history which excites." He continues that, although he has mentioned many very important catastrophic events, individual stories of suffering are of even greater importance, and greatest among these are the stories of those who have been buried alive, and the narrator asks the reader, "The boundaries which divide Life from Death, are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and the other begins? We know that there are diseases in which occur total cessations of all the apparent functions of vitality, and yet in which these cessations are merely...temporary pauses in the incomprehensible mechanism" Poe, pg. 59. The man comments that there are illnesses where the victim may appear to be dead, when in fact the body is still very much alive. At these times the person may even be buried, because everyone thinks that he's dead, and it will not be until later that the individual will awaken, locked in a coffin and unable to escape.

Next he tells of several specific instances during which these exact situations have occurred. First of these was in the city of Baltimore when a congressman's wife became very ill and appeared to die, as her skin was pale and cold, and she was not breathing. After three days she was buried and rested in her family vault undisturbed until three years later, when this tomb was reopened to put another body into it. The living were horrified to find the women's body dangling in front of the door, where it appeared she had been banging for help. Her coffin had been broken open from the inside, and it was assumed that she had awakened within two days after she had been laid to rest. Doubtless, this poor woman had been buried alive. Another incident occurred in the year 1810 in France, where Mademoiselle Victorine Lafourcade decided to marry Monsieur Renelle instead of Julien Bossuet because Renelle was a wealthier man. Her marriage was very unhappy, however, and Victorine later died, and she was buried in a graveyard underground.

Hearing of her death, Julien found her grave and lamented for his lost love, that she did not choose to marry him all those years ago; he digs up her grave to have a piece of her hair as a final reminder of his love. However, the woman's eyes suddenly opened! Julien took her back to where he is staying and soon after, the woman is miraculously restored to good health, for she was not in fact dead at all! Grateful to have been saved, and recalling her wicked husband, Victorine proclaimed her love for Julien, and the two travelled together to America and does not return to France for twenty years. Upon their return, Victorine was recognized by her husband, and he demanded that she come live with him again, which she protests. The court decided that their marriage is no longer valid because they had not been together for so long, and the triumphant Victorine was permitted to remain with her true love, Julien. In this instance, being buried alive turned from a tale of horror into one of romance, for it brought two estranged lovers together again and healed a broken woman's heart. The terrible mistake she had made was

undone, and she chose Julien Bossuet not for his money, but instead for the beauty of his soul.

Yet another incident (related in The *Chirurgical Journal* of Leipsic) involved a tall officer of artillery man who fell off of his horse and fractured his skull, but he appeared not to have anything wrong with him. Draining blood from the wound did not solve the problem, and his condition worsened until he died, or so the doctor thought! His body was then buried underground on a Thursday, but three days later on Sunday a peasant sitting on the soldier's grave felt the earth moving beneath him and ran off to find some help. The body was dug up and, indeed, his coffin had been stirred from within, although the man was unmoving at that time. Rushing him to the hospital, he was later revived and made a full recovery. Unfortunately, when later being experimented upon by some doctor with a galvanic battery, his body experienced an adverse reaction to the battery's electrical charge, and the man really died as a result.

In 1831 there was an instance during which a man named Mr. Edward Stapleton, a lawyer, whom everyone thought had died of typhus fever. As a result, he was buried in the ground without even getting an autopsy at the request of his friends. The greedy physicians insisted on cutting open Stapleton's body and had his body snatched from its grave so that they could experiment on it privately, three days after the funeral. Carried to a hospital, and the doctors experimented with the body while it laid on an operating table; one medical student who was present decided to make a cut into the man's chest, and he jabbed in a wire connected to a galvanic battery. Edward then sat up and got off of the table, collapsing in the middle of the room after speaking some unintelligible words which were "I am alive." Those present soon set to work treating the poor man, realizing that he was in fact very much alive, and after some amount of time Edward is recovered and fit to continue his normal life again. He explained that he was never dead at all, that he was aware of everything that happened to him from when he was first declared dead by the doctors until he was revived once again. This evidences the fact that, although the body may appear to be dead, the mind may still be very much awake.

Next the narrator expresses his own fear because "When we reflect how very rarely, from the nature of the case, we have it in our power to detect them, we must admit that [these incidents] may *frequently* occur without our cognizance. Scarcely, in truth, is a graveyard ever encroached upon, for any purpose, to any great extent, that skeletons are not found in postures which suggest the most fearful of suspicions" Poe, pg. 64. He believes that people are being buried alive all of the time, without anybody ever knowing about it, and the man relates his own experience with being buried alive. Admittedly, he suffers from a strange illness which doctors merely call catalepsy, when the muscles become stiff and rigid. During such attacks, his body appears to be lifeless for a period of weeks or even months, as the limbs stiffen, and the heartbeat is hardly noticeable. The illness gets worse and worse as time passes, and the periods of stasis last increasingly longer. The narrator fell into this trance for a few weeks alone, so nobody knew about his state. However, upon waking the man obsesses only upon what would have happened had his family or friends discovered him like that, for surely they would have thought that he was dead and buried him beneath the ground!

As a result, the man obsesses about death and waking up one day only to find himself locked up in some coffin underground. To combat these worries, he tries to avoid falling asleep for fear that he will fall into one of these trances, but nevertheless his eyes close on one such occasion. A terrible nightmare preys upon his fragile condition while resting, as the man dreams that an icy hand is touching his head, commanding him to "Arise." Frightened, he sits up and cannot see anything, and the unknown speaker again commands him to "Arise," after which it states that "I was mortal, but am fiend. I was merciless, but am pitiful. Thou dost feel that I shudder.-- [sic] My teeth chatter as I speak, yet it is not with the chilliness of the night -- of the night without end. But this hideousness is insufferable. How canst *thou* tranquilly sleep? I cannot rest for the cry of these great agonies. These sights are more than I can bear. Get thee up! Come with me into the outer Night, and let me unfold to thee the graves. Is not this a spectacle of woe?--Behold!" Poe, pg. 67. Presumably this figure is that of Death, or the Grim Reaper, and next all around the narrator sees opened graves glowing, and many figures within these graves are moved from when they had first been buried, probably because they has been buried alive. Death thinks that this is a pitiful sight in the nightmare, and then the graves abruptly close before the man can say anything.

Thus, the narrator is haunted by his own inner fear, even during what should be the peaceful hours of sleep; he is afraid to leave his house, because unknowing strangers might find his body paralyzed while under attack by catalepsy, and bury him. To prevent this, he tries to place other safeguards down as well, in addition to staying near his home, including a renovation to his family vault, allowing it to be opened from within. He includes food and water in the tomb, adds adequate ventilation for someone to breathe uninhibited within, makes a spring loaded cover for his coffin, and even adds a long rope extending into the coffin that is connected to a bell on top of the tomb. This way, if he is buried alive he can ring the bell to tell everybody in the world that he is very much alive. In spite of these many safeguards, one day the man awakens in total darkness, and he thinks that his worst fears have come true! He finally opens his eyes after hesitating for fear of what he would see, and next "I endeavored to shriek; and my lips and my parched tongue moved convulsively together in the attempt -- but no voice issued from the cavernous lungs, which, oppressed as if by the weight of some incumbent mountain, gasped and palpitated, with the heart, at every elaborate and struggling inspiration" Poe, pg. 70.

He is unable to speak or call out for help, because a heavy weight is upon his chest, nor can he even open his mouth because it has been somehow tied up, as is customary with the dead; a heavy wooden cover sits six inches from his face, nor is any rope to be found to call for help with the ringing bell as he had planned. Realizing that he must have fallen into a trance while away from home, the man cries out for help at the top of his lungs finally, and surprisingly there is a voice that replies, "Hillo! hillo, there!" Then the narrator is picked up, and the men present remind him of exactly what had happened after all. He had not been buried alive at all! Instead, while on a hunting trip near Richmond, Virginia he was caught in a rain storm and decided to seek shelter on a small boat that was anchored in the James River in a small berth right beneath the deck. In fact, the wood above his face was the deck of the ship above him, his tied mouth was caused by a handkerchief he had wrapped around his head because he

didn't have a nightcap, and the men who picked him up were members of the ship's crew. Rather than lying dormant for weeks or months, the man had a normal night of sleep after all!

This experience changes the narrator's life, however, as he sees how ridiculous it is to live in fear, as he next travels abroad without worry, he burns literature by Buchan, and he no longer reads from a book entitled *Night Thoughts*. The catalepsy disappears as well, and he wonders if this illness was in fact caused by his paranoia, leaving the reader with the grand statement that "There are moments when, even to the sober eye of Reason, the world of our sad Humanity may assume the semblance of Hell -- but the imagination of man is no Carathis, to explore with impunity its every cavern. Alas! the grim legion of sepulchral terrors cannot be regarded as altogether fanciful -- but, like the Demons in whose company Afrasiab made his voyage down the Oxus, they must sleep, or they will devour us -- they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish" Poe, pg. 72. The narrator declares that the human mind can be very dark indeed, and this mind is not to be fully explored lest the darkness of fear, wickedness, paranoia, and sickness will consume us. To prevent this, one must dispel these fears and turn from the inside world towards that of the outside, as he has done. Although this darkness can never be conquered because it is part of what makes us human, we can ignore it and put these fears to sleep, in order to truly revel in these short lives we lead, before the imposing figure of Death does actually come to take us away.

# Commentary

First published in the July 31, 1844 edition of Philadelphia's *Dollar Newspaper*, "The Premature Burial" reflects a similar theme to that of "The Fall of the House of Usher" which had been published five years earlier: being buried alive. In the first tale, Madeline Usher is buried alive by Roderick Usher and later murders her brother because she is so outraged; in this later tale the narrator is consumed by fear of being buried alive, although this does not actually occur at any point. The symptoms of his illness resemble those of Madeline as well, in that the illness gives the appearance of being dead for long periods of time. However, as the narrator points out all too clearly, in the later story fear is seen as the cause of his illness; it is a psychosomatic, when the body is affected by a person's mental state. In the tale of Madeline Usher, the sister appears to have a genuine malady; fear is felt only by Roderick Usher, who experiences similar bouts of paranoia very much akin to the narrator in "The Premature Burial," by reading dark literature and living every moment in melancholy, as a hermit refusing to stray far from home. The parallel between these two men is striking, except an abrupt departure from the earlier story occurs now.

Whereas Roderick was consumed by his fears and merely waited for his sister to slay him, embracing this moment as an inevitability as that story's narrator is devoured by his own terror, this story ends with the narrator's discovery of reason as a cure for his suffering. He realizes the vitality and preciousness of life, and decides to use whatever time he has to enjoy himself while living, rather than wishing for himself to be already dead. This is an odd departure in theme for Poe, especially since this story ends on such an rather optimistic note, that a man can indeed conquer his inner demons. Perhaps the uniqueness of the tale reveals the emotional highs and lows experienced by Poe throughout his lifetime, forever haunted by a flurry of childhood deaths that included his mother Elizabeth Poe, Jane Stannard, Fanny Allan, and soon his wife Virginia Poe, wasting away after being diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1842. Poe also forever sought an escape, as is reflected in "The Masque of the Red Death" or "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," where the characters try to flee from death. Now, while still accepting death as an inevitable reality, the narrator in "The Premature Burial" conquers his fears by also learning to accept life, a task which Poe's characters had largely failed to accomplish thus far.

It is prudent to also add that Edgar Allan Poe makes many references to a geography that is familiar to him: the first instance of premature burial featuring the congressman's wife occurred in Baltimore, a city where he had lived for a few years with his cousin and future wife, Virginia; the narrator is on a hunting trip near Richmond, Virginia, where Poe had been raised in John Allan's household, after his mother's death; the tale of Julien and Victorine occurred in Paris, France, a place Poe no doubt had been familiar with due to his childhood years in London. Rather than choosing areas such as Philadelphia, Albany, or Budapest, Poe impels his stories with personal experience and empathy, thus creating a plot that is both believable and effective. Once again, the only female in the story, at the center of a love triangle, carries the name "Victorine," beginning again with the same letter as his beloved real-life wife, "Virginia," a pattern that was also observed

in the name of the male "Valdemar" in an earlier example. All in all, the brilliance and vibrancy of Edgar Allan Poe's tales are derived from a world that he knew all too well. This quickly expanding lens into mid-nineteenth century America is resurrected every time that his stories are read and understood, disinterred from the steely grip of Time.

# MS Found in a Bottle

A quotation begins this tale, from a French play entitled *Atys* written by Phillip Quinault, "Qui n'a plus qu'un moment a vivre/N'a plus rien a dissimuler." The translated words mean, "He who doesn't have another moment to live, does not have anything more to hide," suggesting that this story will feature someone telling a story soon before his death. An unnamed narrator then introduces himself as a man from a wealthy family and a strong education, although he has always been an underachiever who does not really apply himself, referring to the "aridity [lacking interest] of my genius" and "a deficiency of imagination," because he resists being creative. In spite of his aristocratic upbringing, he does not fit into this lifestyle; rather than accepting life and its givens at face value, he refers to his Pyrrhonism, or skepticism, about the ways of the world. To this we can attribute his supposed lack of creativity, for to do so would mean to use the human imagination, and as such, to deviate into fantasy. This would certainly contradict his skeptical philosophy. He is also doubtful of superstition for the same reason, choosing instead to seek a firm hold on a deeper reality by refusing to blindly accept the world as people believe it to be, filled with baseless fears that their minds have merely conjured up.

Having introduced himself, the actual story begins. After traveling all over the world, in 18-- the narrator embarks on yet another trip out of Batavia, Java to go to the Sunda Islands, because he feels inwardly restless and chooses to move around as a way to cope with this anxiety. The ship itself was strongly built in the Indian city of Bombay, and it is well provisioned for the journey that lies ahead. Upon departing from Batavia, initially the narrator notices an odd cloud far away in the water, but gives it little thought until later, when another strange phenomenon occurs. Later, once out of sight from land, "My notice was soon afterwards attracted by the dusky-red appearance of the moon, and the peculiar character of the sea. The latter was undergoing a rapid change, and the water seemed more than usually transparent...The air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron. As night came on, every breath of wind died away, and a more entire calm it is impossible to conceive" Poe, pg. 74. The narrator already mentioned his skepticism, and as such, this makes his claims of how the weather at sea transformed in such an unusual way, more believable. As a result, the ship's captain decides to pull up the sails and cast anchor for awhile until the wind returns.

However, the narrator later has a terrible premonition that something is going to happen, and wanders up on the ships' upper deck. Sure enough, the ship is suddenly pulled down under the water and overwhelmed without explanation or warning by a massive explosion of waves. The man is nearly swept off of the deck where he had been standing but gets wedged in between the sternpost and the rudder. Recovering, he explores the boat only to discover that every other member of the crew has been swept overboard and apparently drowned, except for one old Swede. Gazing around, the men discover that the sea is still ablaze with fierce waves and sea foam, as if a storm has suddenly struck. The anchor rope had been snapped off because of the gale's force, and the ship haphazardly tumbles amongst the waves, while these two survivors cling

on for safety. The ship begins to slowly break apart, as the mast snaps in half along with the other sectors, rendering it unable to be navigated and completely at the mercy of the ocean. The ship suffers a terrible beating for five days straight without any end at all, and on this fifth day the weather becomes extremely frigid, and the sun looks strange, glowing with a dull light until the nighttime approached and "It was a dim, silver-like rim, alone as it rushed into the unfathomable ocean." The sun appeared to be swallowed up by the sea, except its light was already dull and extinguished before it even set. The ship continues to be carried along by the wind and current to some unknown destination.

However, this night is very black, and there was not a single spot of light to shine forth the way to them, as they "had been accustomed in the tropics," where the sea had always glowed in certain areas, due to the presence of phosphoescent fish and seaweed. The storm continues to rage nevertheless in this darkness, and the Swede becomes very afraid, while the skeptical narrator is merely curious and amazed at what is happening to them, watching each enormous wave as it threatens to overturn the ship. The ship rises and falls with these waters, and when the ship descends at one point, the Swede cries out violently at another approaching vessel which looks unlike any other ship the narrator has ever seen before, "Her huge hull was of a deep dinghy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from their polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns, which swung too and fro about her rigging. But what mainly inspired us with horror and astonishment, was that she bore up under a press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane" Poe, pg. 78 . In spite of the storm, this enormous and exotic black ship nevertheless manages to stay afloat and steady on its course. The narrator's broken ship is lower than the waves at this point, and the huge ship towers above him at the crest of the waves, preparing to fall down on top of these two survivors.

The ship quickly descends, smashing down upon the ship and causing the narrator to be catapulted onto this strange black vessel, while the narrator's sinking ship is completely destroyed, apparently drowning the old Swede as it sinks beneath the waves. Not wanting to be noticed, the narrator hides on this ship just underneath the deck in the ship's hold, observing also how odd the crew are as well, like no one whom he has ever seen before, "A man passed by...His knees tottered beneath a load of years, and his entire frame quivered under the burthen. He muttered to himself, in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand, and groped among a pile of singular-looking instruments, and decayed charts of navigation. His manner was a wild mixture of the peevishness of second childhood, and the solemn dignity of God" Poe, pg. 79. This crew member appears to be very old and uses unusual tools. More time passes as the narrator remains hidden on the ship, noting how much this experience is changing him very much from the person who he was before, and that "A new sense -- a new entity is added to my soul."

The man later adds that much time has passed since he first arrived on the ship, and his presence has still gone unnoticed by members of this strange crew; he decides to sneak into the captain's quarters and steal some paper and writing materials, upon

which he is writing this entire story. If he does not survive the voyage, then he will put the paper into a bottle and hurl it into the sea, hoping that someone will at least know what has happened to him. On another day he randomly decides to paint the word "Discovery" upon the ship's furled sail, and when it is hoisted up the mast the words billow in the wind upon the sail. Later still, he explains some observations about the ship, that "Although well armed, she is not, I think, a ship of war. Her rigging, build, and general equipment, all negative a supposition of this kind. What she is *not*, I can easily perceive -- what she *is* I fear it is impossible to say...[B]ut in scrutinizing her strange model and singular cast of spars, her huge size and overgrown suits of canvass, her severely simple bow and antiquated stern, there will occasionally flash across my mind...an unaccountable memory of old foreign chronicles and ages long ago" Poe, pg. 80. He doesn't think that the ship is going to war, but nor does he know what its purpose is; everything on the ship including the vessel itself and the crew, is very old and aged, however, as if from a different time.

On another day, the narrator emerges from hiding and walks within full view of the ship's crew, but they don't even notice his presence; he notes that they are all very old, as "their shriveled skins rattled in the wind" and the deck of the ship was covered yet again with the strange mathematical instruments that he had once seen upon first arriving on the ship. Surely these men have embarked upon some mission, but it remains a mystery! The ship continues to be propelled southwards by some strong underwater current after the wind leaves them and the sails hangs limply, roughly pulling the ship along and making the narrator fear that he'll fall off of the ship's deck, so he hides down below in the hold again. Then he finally gets to see what the captain of the ship looks like, and he is very aged and wise with gray hair, "his grayer eyes are Sybils of the future." The narrator has become fascinated and even envious of the old age that these men all seem to have, because they appear to be so enlightened and calm. The captain's cabin is filled with maps and more of these strange instruments; he mutters to himself in an unknown language like the rest of the crew have done. Next the narrator calls the crew "ghosts of buried cemetaries," noting that the lanterns on the ship are so old and unlike anything he's ever seen, even though he has been an antiques dealer for much of his life and has explored such ancient places as Balbec, Tadmor, and Persepolis. As the ship progresses on its journey to the south, the water becomes icy and the air becomes very cold, and the ship is violently tossed about upon the waves to and fro, until suddenly the ship begins to spin in a huge circle around a gigantic whirlpool.

Lower and lower the ship is pulled, nor do the crew members try to avoid being pulled into it. Rather, this is obviously the end result that they have sought for so long, thus ending their long journey. The narrator, expecting that such an end would come to him, finishes writing his message with the words "But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny -- the circles rapidly grow small -- we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool -- and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering, oh God! and -- going down" Poe, pg. 83-4. Apparently, the message is hurled into a bottle as the narrator plunges into the abyss, and the message is published and made available for the reader once the bottle is discovered washed up upon shore, or while floating at sea. In spite of the narrator's initial

skepticism, he learns to embrace the supernatural and the unknown, as his entire understanding of the world is cast away into darkness, while he is transformed into someone new, embracing true discovery after having lapsed into a restless and lethargic period in his life. Although the black ship's final journey cures him of this restlessness, the price to be paid is his life. Only ink and paper preserve his last words, in hopes that his revelations may not remain unknown and unnoticed, as the supernatural world had once been to him. A note from Poe follows the story, declaring that he did not know about Mercator's maps, which show the Earth's Polar region not as a whirlpool, but rather as four rushing mouths of water from the four corners of the world and surrounding a tall black rock at the pole's center.

# Commentary

Poe's "MS [Manuscript] Found in a Bottle" was first entered into a writing contest during 1833 while he was residing with his Aunt Maria Clem in Baltimore, Maryland, after being expelled from West Point. This story won first prize for its arabesque, or surreal, depiction of events and was then published on the front page of the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*'s October 19, 1833 issue. Poe later submitted the story for publication again in 1835 for *The Gift* while serving as assistant editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, and also ten years later while working for New York's *Broadway Mirror*, in 1845. The story is one of Poe's earliest works, lacking the ominous and consuming preoccupation with death that he infused into his later work such as "The Masque of the Red Death" or "The Fall of the House of Usher." At this time, Virginia was only eight years old; he would not marry for five more years, and Poe no doubt was filled with a certain enthusiasm after having escaped the gloomy ranks of West Point, from which John Allan had refused to let him withdraw.

Most noticeable in "MS Found in a Bottle" [Note: The word "manuscript" traces its etymological origins to the Latin "manus," or hand, and "scriptum" which means written. Thus, the title's meaning simply indicates that this story was found "written by hand" on paper and stuffed into a bottle.] is the creation of a faraway landscape. Although Poe never visited the East Indies, the vivid descriptions of the landscape, specific references to port names, and the implementation of nautical terms are largely the cause of the story being so popular. Rather than focusing upon a central course of events or a plot, where the mystery is explained, as in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," here the reader is left with a sense of bewilderment. Whatever did in fact happen to the story's author? Did he perish in the whirlpool? Who were these strange old men? Why would they purposely steer the ship into certain destruction? Given that the ship's crew appear to be of a certain and exotic intelligence due to their use of ancient scientific instruments, one may draw two potential conclusions.

First, the old men were obviously old and decrepit, at the end of their days. Their bodies are frail and thin, and even their knowledge base is old and outdated -- the narrator notes how ancient their scientific instruments are. The men also appear to be in their own little world, disconnected from reality; they remain unaware and unconcerned about the narrator's presence on their ship, presumably because he does not pose a threat to them, and because they have more pressing concerns. They must reach their destination! Taking all of this into account, that all of the men on the ship do in fact drown in the end could be an acceptable condition, given that all of them seem to be on the threshold of death anyway. Perhaps Poe suggests a fantastic metaphor for the process of death as a natural event of human life. Rather than showing death as a swift heart attack, or a sudden bout of disease, here the experience may be transformed into an oceanic odyssey that leads inevitably towards the same, eventual destination that awaits everyone. The allegory of death as a forward journey across the ocean is at once both beautiful and engaging. The narrator had always been skeptical of everything he encountered in life, but Death becomes an undeniable reality that he can neither ignore nor escape, if this interpretation is to be accepted. Even if the crew is seeking merely to

find what the South Pole looks like, there is the lingering idea that there is to be a price to be paid for knowledge as well, that "curiosity killed the cat." Although the men reach their destination after such careful navigation, it is to be the ship's final voyage, if it is assumed again that the men are drowned in these raging waters.

Yet another, more open-ended, analysis of the story lies in the mystery of what exactly happens next. No character is named in the story, and those places names that are mentioned bear the same familiarity to Poe's readership as if he had been discussing a voyage to the moon. Given that these old men are wise, and certainly hold great focus and direction in their task of steering the great black ship, it would be extremely silly to travel for so many thousands of miles only to plunge to their deaths into a whirlpool at the South Pole. This interpretation gives hope to the fact that some greater destiny awaits these seafarers, and the narrator as well after their ship is forced down into the waves. The ship itself appears to bear a certain supernatural quality in its immense size, and in the exotic nature of its crew. To simply decide that they have all drowned may be accepting the story's events at face value, rather than digging into its deeper implications. The reader may thus be as skeptical as the narrator had once been about the plausibility of surviving such a plunge into the sea. Poe challenges the reader, through the narrator's words, to look towards other unexpected conclusions. The narrator undergoes a self-described "rebirth" during his journey, and perhaps this is what Poe urges onto the reader as well, to embrace new understandings, and to find "Discovery" everywhere, recalling the words the narrator inscribed upon the ship's sail. To merely accept that all of the crew and the narrator have perished, may be taking events at face value, from the skeptic's point of view.

The strength in this tale lies in its unresolved ending, where the reader is encouraged to draw his own conclusions, and to wonder at what sort of fate has befallen the ship. Did it go inside of the Earth? Has the whirlpool spared the crew after all? Was another ship waiting inside of the whirlpool to pick them up at the last minute? The ocean of Poe's time was the place of mystery that much of the Outer Space holds for us today, where possibilities seem to be endless. He taps into this human drive for knowledge in crafting this tale of one man's journey from reality into the unexplored regions of human experience. The author's note that Edgar Allan Poe makes afterward is curious as well, as he appears to be almost be apologetic in not representing the Polar regions as Mercator had depicted three hundred years earlier, while at the same time there is a sense of triumph in that he had no knowledge of Mercator when he imagined the Pole to be an area where water is pulled down deeply into the Earth. Poe envisioned a whirlpool, while Mercator had drawn four rushing rivers. Historically, the North Pole would still not be discovered for another eighty years, in 1909, and the South Pole would not be explored until even later, 1911. The author's note written after the story's publication in 1833 again makes clear that areas of the world still remained largely a mystery to the common man, thus dubbing "Discovery" an appropriate theme for this tale and for this entire time period of which Poe was a part.

# A Tale of the Ragged Mountains

An unnamed narrator from Charlottesville, Virginia introduces an interesting acquaintance from a wealthy family named Augustus Bedloe, whom he had met in 1827. Although this man claims to be young in age, his body has been aged and oddly transformed due to some illness, causing him to appear at times to be one hundred years of age, "He was singularly tall and thin. He stooped much. His limbs were exceedingly long and emaciated. His forehead was broad and low. His complexion was absolutely bloodless. His mouth was large and flexible, and his teeth were more wildly uneven...His eyes were abnormally large and round like those of a cat...their ordinary condition was so totally vapid, filmy and dull, as to convey the idea of the eyes of a long-interred corpse" 85-86. Augustus' skin is very pale, his teeth are set apart, his eyes appear to be dead at times, and the bone structure in his limbs is disproportionate to his body. Although initially discomforted to see the weird appearance of Augustus' body, the narrator adjusts to this over time, and he learns that this is due to "neuralgic attacks," or diseases that attack his nervous system, thus causing his body to transform far beyond its actual age.

To assist him, Augustus hired Doctor Templeton to be his full-time private physician after they had met up in Saratoga many years ago. Templeton is not the traditional sort of doctor, since he follows the teachings of Mesmerism, or hypnosis, which believes in the mind's ability to control the body. Augustus had at first been resistant to Mesmerism as well, and Templeton accordingly insisted that he experiment on this young man in an attempt to convince him otherwise. At first there were few results, and Bedloe showed little reaction to Templeton's experiments using the power of his mind and magnets to control Bedloe's body. However, as time went on Bedloe became more and more repsonsive, until eventually the two developed an interdependence, a "magnetic relation" that was extremely powerful. According to the narrator, Templeton can put Augustus to sleep at a moment's notice without warning, even when the doctor was not within Bedloe's sight. He adds that in his present year of 1845, such events are more well known than when he had first met Bedloe and Templeton nearly twenty years before, when this story takes place.

Augustus also takes lots of morphine on a daily basis in order to alleviate some of the pain he experiences from his illness, and each morning he likes to go out walking in the Ragged Mountains that are outside of Charlottesville. On one particularly warm day in November, he leaves for his usual walk but does not return until nearly eight o'clock in the evening. The narrator and Templeton were very worried about Augustus Bedloe and had even gotten ready to go out searching for this sickly man. However, Augustus has a fascinating story to tell; after leaving his home he walked for awhile and decided to take a new path he discovered along the way that led through a gorge. The area there was very pure, with the "green sods and grey rocks" that had never been walked upon before by any other human. Walking onwards, Augustus followed a winding path for several hours, and "In the quivering of a leaf -- in the hue of a blade of grass -- in the shape of a trefoil -- in the humming of a bee -- in the gleaming of a dewdrop -- in the breathing of the wind -- in the faint odors that came from the forest -- there came a

whole new universe of suggestion -- a gay and motley train of rhapsodical and immethodical thought" Poe, pg. 88. Possibly influenced by the morphine, Augustus' senses were enhanced and he imagined that the world around him was suddenly so much more alive there than it has ever been before. The leaves, the trees, and in the bugs around him, everything seemed to suddenly be transformed than how it was before.

At this point Bedloe recalled that the Ragged Mountains have a reputation for being mystical, and that a dangerous race of mountain men supposedly lives there. At that moment, a drum beat rang out through the air to his surprise, and a strange half-naked man ran up and abruptly thrust an object with many steel rings upon it into Augustus' hand. Continuing to run ahead, a large hyena followed this man without giving Bedloe a moment's notice. Stunned, Bedloe pinched himself to make sure that it wasn't a dream and found a stream where he could get some water, sitting nearby under a palm tree. Noting that pine trees don't grow in the Virginia woods, Bedloe stood up, confused at where he was. Walking ahead, the air became very hot, and reaching an open space he found himself at the bottom of a huge mountain. Below there was a large exotic city, designed as if from *The Arabian Takes*, filled with minarets, busy bazaars, beards, turbans, mosques, and "Beyond the limits of the city arose, in frequent majestic groups, the palm and the cocoa, with other gigantic and weird trees of vast age and here and there might be seen a field of rice, the thatched hut of a peasant, a tank, a stray temple, a gypsy camp, or a solitary graceful maiden taking her way, with a pitcher upon her head to the banks of the majestic river" Poe, pg. 91.

Whatever city that Augustus Bedloe saw, it certainly was not any place in Virginia; this city had men who wear robes and turbans, and the weather has even become extremely hot as well. It seems as if he had walked to India or some far off land in the Middle East, rather than remaining in America. At this moment, Bedloe pauses from his story to affirm that he was not dreaming at all whether from the morphine, or from fatigue. He strongly asserts that everything he is describing actually occurred, and that he is not mistaken or disillusioned, in an attempt to seek validation from the narrator and Doctor Templeton, who are patiently listening to this tale. Templeton merely urges Bedloe to continue his story, declaring that he does not doubt Bedloe, and suggesting next that Bedloe went down into the city to explore. Augustus confirms this, adding that he walked down into the city, where an extraordinary event was occurring, as a huge mob of native people were attacking a small group "officered by gentlemen in a uniform partly British." Diving in to assist, Bedloe picked up some weapons from a fallen soldier and joined the pack, fleeing away as the mob pursued them. They finally found safety for a bit in a small building, observed an "effeminate-looking person" crawl out of the window of a nearby palace, jump into a boat, and run away across the river.

Next Bedloe's group dashed out of their hiding place, running down the street while the mob still pursued at full force, tossing spears and poisoned arrows. One of these arrows hit Bedloe in his head and he fell down, dying. The narrator interrupts at this point, declaring that it must have all been a dream because Bedloe obviously is not dead. Augustus does not reply, and Templeton, who is now visibly shaken, shouts out "Proceed" without regard to the narrator's comment. Bedloe recalled that he laid there

for awhile in the dark, dead, until all of the crowd had departed. Bedloe merely feels as if this has occurred, for he cannot see it because he is dead. Then he rises up and feels that his body is lying dead there with an arrow through his brain, and then he climbed up the hill again overlooking the city, and he walked back the entire route whence he had come, until he arrived at the strange gorge again, at which point his body was violently jolted and he could see again and became his old self. He then returned to his home in Charlottesville, where he met Templeton and the narrator. Augustus declares once again that this experience, although very strange, was not a dream at all.

With the conclusion of Bedloe's story, Templeton agrees that this was not in fact a dream at all, taking out an old picture that exactly resembled the fact of Augustus Bedloe. The narrator still isn't sure what this means. Templeton now tells a tale of his own; the picture was taken of an old friend named Mr. Oldeb, in 1780, whom he had known in Calcutta, India when Warren Hastings was in charge of that country. Templeton adds that Bedloe's experience in the Ragged Mountains is exactly what he and Mr. Oldeb had endured in Bedares, India, when a group of natives led by Cheyte Sing had tried to overthrow the colonial British government. Sing was the man fleeing from the palace by boat; Hastings led the smaller group of which Templeton and Mr. Oldeb were a part, and of which Bedloe was a part during his experience. Oldeb was shot and killed by a poisoned arrow while fleeing the natives, much to Templeton's dismay. In fact, it was because of Augustus Bedloe's keen resemblance to Oldeb that Templeton had befriended him in the first place at Saratoga; Templeton was in the process of writing this memory down upon paper, while Bedloe was walking in the mountains. Certainly, the presence of a mesmeric connection between these two men is even clearer after hearing this revelation. Somehow Bedloe lived through the events in Templeton's mind as he was himself recalling them.

Several days after these events occurred, the narrator read Augustus Bedloe's obituary in the newspaper, learning that this man had a bad fever and a buildup of blood in his head as a result. Templeton had applied leeches to his head to relieve some of this pressure, although Templeton accidentally applied a poisonous leech to Bedloe's head, which poisoned his blood and killed the poor man. The article notes that the poisonous and friendly leeches of Charlottesville is different because the poisonous one is darker, and its body looks like a snake. The narrator is stunned to read this article, but he is even more concerned to observe that Augustus Bedloe's name is spelled "Bedlo" in the obituary. Arriving at the newspaper's office to ask for an explanation from the editor, the man responds merely that it is just a mistake that the "e" was omitted from his last name. Dissatisfied with this response, the narrator mutters aloud that "Bedlo" spelled backwards is "Oldeb," the very same name as the young friend of Doctor Templeton who had been slain in India by the poisoned arrow while fighting the rebellion. The narrator remains confused and baffled as he walks away from the newspaper's office, still trying to understand exactly what exactly the relationship is between Bedloe, Oldeb, and Doctor Templeton. However, the answers he receives only provoke more questions.

# Commentary

"A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" is both Augustus Bedloe's tale, but also it is the tale of the confused narrator, as he can make no more sense of what happened to Bedloe than the reader. First published in *Gordey's Magazine and Lady's Book* during April of 1844 when Poe was still residing with Virginia in Philadelphia, this has a surreal or arabesque tone to it, because of the mysteriousness of events that occurs. Like "MS Found in a Bottle," the ending here is left open-ended, for the reader to draw his own conclusions. However, the focus of the mystery in this instance is Augustus Bedloe in this instance, rather than being the narrator himself, as in the earlier story. However, the similarity lies in that they both describe mysterious and supernatural events as they occur, both of which remain resolved at the story's end. In "MS Found in a Bottle," the narrator's destiny remains unknown after plunging into the whirlpool, and in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" there is no explanation as to how Bedloe could have relived events that Doctor Templeton had experienced fifty years before, or even that Augustus Bedloe could so resemble Templeton's dead friend Oldeb.

As a final point, Bedloe dies as a result of poison entering his head, just as Oldeb had died after being shot in his head by a poisoned arrow. The misspelled "Bedlo" reversed is "Oldeb," and these two figures resemble each other exactly. In understanding the unique nature of Bedloe's illness, which makes him appear to be "corpse-like," one can assume that somehow, Bedloe and Oldeb are one and the very same. Given that Oldeb had lived nearly fifty years earlier than when the story takes place, in 1827 (revealing that Templeton is about seventy years of age), Bedloe was in fact born after Oldeb had died because he always spoke about his youthfulness. Recalling the choice of India as the setting for Bedloe's strange journey into the past, one must also note that the major religion of India, Hinduism, holds a central belief in reincarnation, that one person's soul may be born later on into another person, or into any other living thing. This is no coincidence, for common sense reveals that it is impossible to travel from Virginia to India in a few hours, or in a few days for that matter. Thus Bedloe's journey is one that occurs within his mind, no doubt spurred on by the effects of morphine he had ingested that very morning in large doses.

This inner journey obviously triggered some memories of an earlier life to emerge, perhaps catalyzed by the one strand that connects him to that former life: Doctor Templeton, who had known both Oldeb and now Bedloe. Templeton had already had a profound influence over Bedloe's body during mesmerism and putting him to sleep; it would seem logical then, that this connection could extend even deeper than the body, and go so far as to dig into Bedloe's mind. That Bedloe dies due to accidental poisoning at Templeton's hands echoes the timeless theme again that one cannot change destiny; just as Templeton had once failed to save Oldeb from being hurt, so too does he now fail to save Bedloe from death and, in fact, inadvertently causes it to occur. Admittedly, his reasons for staying so close to Bedloe were to enjoy the company of a man whom he had once cared for greatly, and lost. The tale is a testament to the fact that the past cannot be reclaimed once lost.

A second, more sinister interpretation could no doubt suggest that, given Templeton's control over Bedloe and the likeness to Mr. Oldeb could have been a mere coincidence, and, incidently, the good Doctor used his mesmeric powers to control Bedloe in a vain attempt to regain the Doctor's lost friendship with Oldeb. He is driven by guilt at having failed to protect Oldeb fifty years earlier, and now he feels obligated to protect Bedloe. In this interpretation it could be Templeton who is the villain, having altered Bedloe's mind with his strong mesmeric powers. Like Doctor Frankenstein's creation in the popular tale by Shelley, Templeton's patient became a victim of his own poor judgment, in placing poisonous leeches upon the sick man.

There are a few other interesting details to make note of. First, Poe sets his story a year into the future from when it was actually published in April of 1844; the events with Templeton occurred around 1780, and the events of Augustus Bedloe occurred around 1827, but it is not until 1845 that the narrator writes this story down, just as Templeton had been writing down his own story when Bedloe relived the entire sequence of events. As in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," written only a year later in 1845, mesmerism plays a large and pivotal role in the story as well. Poe also chooses a geography he is familiar with, given that much of his teenage years were spent residing with John Allan in Richmond, Virginia, not far from Charlottesville in western Virginia where this story takes place. Charlottesville is also near the Shenandoah Valley in the Appalachian Mountains, where Poe attended the University of Virginia in 1826, and the Ragged Mountains referred to in this tale are no doubt the same tall mountains that still tower above this area of western Virginia today. Furthermore, the location of Bedloe and Templeton's first meeting was in Saratoga. Virginia, located just a bit further north from Richmond, Virginia, where Poe spent much of his childhood and adolescence with the Allans.

The name of "Doctor Templeton" suggests the high importance that Templeton takes in Bedloe's life, holding such control over him that he could put Bedloe to sleep at a moment's notice. Templeton is like a temple for Bedloe, a place of highest reverence where deities are worshipped. In many ways, Templeton is like a god for Bedloe, holding the power over sleep, over memories, and even over death, which he causes. Bedloe is wholly dependent upon Templeton for everything in life. The name also foreshadows that Oldeb was in fact shot by the poisoned arrow in his "temple" on the side of his head. Doctor Templeton is not mentioned at the end of the story again as well, although this man could no doubt provide some of the answers that the narrator is seeking, even as he implores the newspaper editor. Then again, it is evident that Templeton would have pronounced his belief that Bedloe was Oldeb reincarnated. All in all, there is no finite explanation for the reader in comprehending "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," and the story's appeal lies not in its clearly stated lessons, but instead in the nagging questions that it poses. Poe provides room for the reader to draw his own conclusions, whether Doctor Templeton had exerted undue influence upon Bedloe, or if this was a true instance of reincarnation, or if everything was a mere coincidence and Bedloe merely suffered from some sort of morphine-induced drug trip. Poe's strength as a writer lies in his ability to manipulate his audience, and in this instance he does so by allowing the reader to finish the story.

# The Sphinx

During the cholera epidemic that occurred in New York City presumably during the summer of 1832, the narrator decides to visit a relative living near the Hudson River north of the city for two weeks. There, the two men observe the massive destruction that cholera is causing from afar, as they hear news each day of one of their friends who has died from this terrible illness down in the city. The narrator's host tries to cheer up his friend however, "My host was of a less excitable temperment, and, although greatly depressed in spirits, exerted himself to sustain my own. His richly philosophical intellect was not at any time affected by unrealities. To the substances of terror he was sufficently alive, but of its shadows he had no apprehension" Poe, pg. 96. The host is a very rational person, who does not allow his fears to get the best of him; he is also a calming force in the narrator's life as he is extremely upset because of the epidemic. It is for this reason that he fled from the city in the first place.

One day during this visit, the narrator is busy reading a book near the window revealing a scenic view of the Hudson River. His attention is focused upon the cholera epidemic nevertheless, and when he glances up from th pages of his novel, the man sees a ghastly sight in the distant hills. There, an enormous creature larger than any oceangoing ship is climbing down! Its trunk is about seventy feet long, it has two tusks at its base like an elephant, surrounded by a huge mass of black hair, with a pair of "staffs" forty feet long sticking out on either side parallel to the trunk. The creature also has "two pairs of wings -- each wing nearly one hundred yards in length...and all thickly covered with metal scales; each scale apparently some twelve feet in diameter...but the chief peculiarity of this horrible thing was the representation of a *Death's Head*, which covered nearly the whole surface of its breast, and which was as accurately traced in glaring white, upon the dark ground of the body, as if it had been there carefully designed by an artist" Poe, pg. 98. The monster opens its jaws and clamps them shut, causing a loud roar as it disappears at the bottom of the hill, and the narrator faints away onto the floor in total shock. He fears that this monster is coming to claim his life, as the cholera epidemic has already stolen so many lives already.

Later that evening, the narrator really wants to tell his relative about the monster, but he decides not to, probably because he is afraid of what his friend will think. However, a few days later the two men are sitting together in the same room from which the narrator saw the monster out of the window, and he decides at long last to reveal what he witnessed. The jovial host listens curiously, laughs, and then says little more; the narrator becomes paranoid, assuming that this relative thinks that he is crazy. Soon after, the narrator witnesses the monster yet again outside of the window, crawling down the hill from afar, bearing the "Death's Head," like a skull, upon its body, describing exactly what he sees. But the host doesn't see anything, and he then lapses into a monologue about how people often "underrate or overvalue the importance of an object," picking up a book from his bookshelf about Natural History. As an example, he adds that although political theorists often write about the power of democracy and how great it would be if every government in the world was democratic, they do not mention how long it would be before this could become a reality. As such, this would be an

example of how the importance of democracy may be overvalued, because it has not yet become widespread.

Taking the narrator's seat near the window, and asking the narrator to sit upon the sofa, the host then reads from the book, discussing a type of creature "of the genus *Sphinx*, of the family *Crepuscularia*, of the order *Lepidoptera*, of the class of *Insecta* -- or insects." He continues on to read a description of this creature as portrayed in this science book, describing exactly the creature that the narrator has witnessed upon the hillside, "The Death's-headed Sphinx has occasioned much terror among the vulgar, at times, by the melancholy kind of cry which it utters, and the insignia of death which it wears upon its corslet." The narrator listens intently as his friend peers more closely to the window in search of the "monster," after closing the book. Noting that it is an amazing creature to look at, he adds that "it is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it; for the fact is that, as it wriggles its way up this thread, which some spider has wrought along the window-sash, I find it to be about the sixteenth of an inch in its extreme length, and also about the sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye" Poe, pg. 100.

In this instance then, the narrator's fear of death has consumed him, and he thought that a tiny insect that was nearby was in fact an enormous monster that was very far away. The narrator has overvalued the importance of this tiny insect. The relative also suggests a sense of disdain that the narrator has made such a mistake, in reading from his book that it is the "vulgar," or "unrefined, crude" people who fear the scary symbol the sphinx has on its body and the hideous shriek that the insect makes. Rather than being considered insane as the narrator had previously feared, he is now taken to be a fool for making such a silly, ridiculous mistake as to be frightened of a tiny insect. This event only reveals further that the narrator is a very paranoid individual; he fled from New York City for fear of getting cholera and dying; he had been afraid to tell his kind host what he thought he saw initially because he thought the man would think that he was crazy; and finally, the object of his fear was really just a tiny insect that he had assumed to be a tremendous monster hundreds of feet long that was descending down from the hillside to take away his life, much like the Grim Reaper. This wise relative remains the only source of comfort and voice of reason throughout this tale, saving the narrator from drowning in a raging sea of his own false fears. This suggests that common sense is not a genetic trait.

# Commentary

"The Sphinx" was only published once, in Philadelphia's *Arthur's Ladies Magazine* during January of 1846. Although Edgar Allan Poe was residing in New York City at this time with his wife Virginia, whose health was quickly deteriorating, it was around this time that *The Broadway Journal*, a journal of which he was the editor, went out of business. As a result, Poe would be strapped for cash and send stories to other journals with which he had established relationships such as *Arthur's Magazine*, later to be taken over by *Godey's Lady's Book*, and also *Graham's Magazine*, both in Philadelphia where Poe had once lived. The story takes place right outside of New York City, where Poe was living with Virginia at the time. Once again, Poe uses a geography that is all too familiar to his own life experience. Yet the time is set fourteen years into the past in 1832, when a terrible epidemic of cholera had indeed infected the people of New York City. This is a historical fact, and thousands of people died as a result. The relevance to Poe's time is that, in 1846, a new sort of epidemic had infected the populace, principally his very wife, Virginia. The horror that the narrator reflects throughout his tale for his dying friends no doubt reveals Poe's own fears about the imminent death that is soon to claim Virginia's life, which shall be taken a year later on January 30, 1847.

It is historical fact that a cholera epidemic did sweep through New York City and State beginning in June of 1832, a year after Poe had left the Hudson River Valley north of the city where he had been a military cadet at West Point; the disease of course spread more quickly in the city, however, due to the denser population and increased risk for infection. The "Sphinx" is in fact an actual type of insect. The scientific names that are quoted by the host from his book appear to be factual, "Insecta" is a phylogenic class, Lepidoptera is an order of creatures, although Crepuscularia appears to be a descriptive term merely meaning "twilight." However, "Sphinx" denotes a genus of moths that is native to North America; although it does not appear to make a screeching sound or bear a skeletal mark upon its body, this moth called "Sphinx ligustri" was first identified in 1758 by Linnaeus. It has two pairs of wings and has two antennae, much like the creature the narrator sees from the window. Whatever vision Poe had in mind, it was probably inspired by an insect from this family of moths, for it is from this that the tale takes its name, "The Sphinx," although this actual moth is much larger than the "sixteenth of an inch" attributed to this fictional insect. Poe thus blends together fact and fiction.

This arabesque, or surreal, story shows some resemblance to "The Masque of the Red Death," in which Prospero believes that he can escape the Red Death by isolating himself within his castle and getting as far from the disease as he can. In his situation, the Red Death knows no boundaries, entering the palace and infecting Prospero and all of his guests, killing them in a matter of minutes. In "The Sphinx" however, the host does not reflect the same arrogance as Prospero, and instead appears to be a very virtuous fellow. Regardless of his own worries, the host puts his guest first, choosing instead to comfort the narrator as he battles paranoia. Unlike Prospero, who thought that he could flee death by revelry, the host follows the news closely for which friend has died, hoping that cholera does not make it to his home. Rather than isolating himself,

this relative had in fact invited the narrator to visit from the city -- a poor decision to make if the narrator was infected with cholera already. Yet the relative shows little concern or worry, choosing instead to give some solace from the narrator's fears. As a result, the narrator's fears consume him, and what he thinks to be Death is merely an insect; this is exactly the opposite of Prospero, who would not recognize the presence of Death until his last moments of life, and the lesson to be learned is simple. Arrogance is punished, while the humble are spared.

The narrator's obsession with death and the paralysis that his fears cause him to endure are themes also seen in "The Premature Burial," during which the narrator there is afraid of being buried alive. When it appears that he, too, overreacts on one occasion and thinks that he is in a coffin when he has merely fallen asleep on a boat, the narrator abruptly casts aside his obsession with death and chooses to live as one who is alive, rather than one who has already died. In "The Sphinx" it is not exactly clear what the narrator shall do next, or if he shall even learn from his mistake in thinking an insect to be a monster of Death. Certainly, his fears are more justified due to the presence of the lethal cholera that abounds without, whereas in 'The Premature Burial" there is not really such a justification, and the narrator's fears are mainly inner demons. It can be assumed that, with the help of this wise relative, the narrator from "The Sphinx" may learn to be more cautious next time before accepting things as they appear to be without any further investigation. Poe also offers professed scientific evidence as fact in this tale when the host reads from a book of Natural History, an indisputable authority, whereas in "The Premature Burial" Poe mentioned many professed real-life examples of being buried of live. Although both the science definition and the examples are from Poe's imagination, the literary effect is the same: to draw the reader deeper into the story by convincing him that Poe is describing events that have actually occurred.

Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher" also experienced such a dreaded paralysis of fear that consumed his entire being, much like that of the narrator in "The Sphinx," who also tries to escape from his worries by reading books and spending time with a companion. Certainly, the consistency of this theme suggests that Poe was very much afraid throughout his own life and was especially preoccupied by his fear of being left alone. Poe was abandoned throughout his life by his father, by his dead mother, by John and Fanny Allan, and now he would be abandoned by Virginia when she died. This was his greatest fear and, unlike the characters of "The Sphinx," nobody pointed out that his monstrous worries were minuscule and that his hideous monsters were really just flies to be swatted away. Edgar Allan Poe only had himself and the many characters of his creation; they were his reassurance, and they became the voice of reason that he craved so much.

# The Murders in the Rue Morgue

The epigraph from Sir Thomas Browne reads, "What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among the women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture" Poe, pg. 101. This passage sets the tone for the rest of the story as a reminder that nothing is beyond discussion or reason. Although it is not common knowledge what song the Greek hero Odysseus heard when passing the beautiful Syrens (Sirens) during his odyssey, it is still possible to suggest or deduce what song he might have heard. The mind is a very powerful tool, and to use its skills of analysis are highest above all other. The unnamed narrator then explains that analytic abilities are very important to have, but not everybody is analytical. As an example, he mentions the game of chess, in which the players must be calculated, but they are not necessarily analytical. The "analyst" enjoys being analytical in even minuscule matters, just as the "strong man exults in his physical ability." Games that do actually use skills of analysis include draughts and whist. Both of these games require analyzing other players' reactions about what their next move will be, although the card game of whist uses such powers more than any other. One can memorize the card rules of Hoyle, but that does not make you a good player, as automatically knowing all the calculated rules of chess can do.

In whist, "Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from things external to the game. He examines the countenance of his partner, comparing it carefully with that of each of his opponents...A casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks, with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation, eagerness, or trepidation -- all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs" Poe, pg. 103. Chess is bound down by "fanciful" rules that do not test the true powers of an analytical mind, as whist does. To assure victory in whist, a player must carefully observe and interpret the behavior of his opponents; doing so will determine what move he should make next during the game. A good analyst will win the game by knowing whether his opponents have a good set of cards or not, carefully based upon observing their every move. The narrator adds that an analyst is always ingenious, but an ingenious person (like the chess player) is not always a good analyst.

The narrator next tells a story to illustrate his ideas about the extreme powers of analysis that takes place in Paris, France during the summer of 18--, when he decided to share an old, quiet house he was renting with a friend named C. Auguste Dupin. Dupin was from a wealthy family, but somehow he had fallen into debt and didn't have a lot of money left for anything except for the many books that he owned. The narrator was enchanted by Dupin's personality and decides to let Dupin live with him for free, because he enjoys his company so very much, calling his presence "a treasure beyond price." During that summer, the two had no visitors and enjoyed the solitude very much in that enormous but dilapidated building that the narrator had chosen for them to occupy, declaring "We existed within ourselves alone." Dupin exercised a profound influence upon the narrator, urging him to close all the shutters when the daylight is out,

and at night they would wander out into the streets, enjoying the beauty of "the wild lights and shadows of the populous city." Having settled into such a routine, the narrator comments on what a great analytical ability that Dupin possesses.

At times Dupin would appear to be outgoing and talkative, while at others he would become quiet and thoughtful, masking his emotions and causing the narrator to wonder what exactly is on his mind. Because of this duality of moods, the narrator declares that Dupin has a "Bi-Part Soul," one that is creative and one that has great resolve, or focus. As such, Dupin embodies the very two qualities that the narrator had just celebrated in humanity through his introductory words: being imaginative and analytical. He goes on to reassure the reader, "Let it not be supposed, from what I have just said, that I am detailing any mystery, or penning any romance. What I have described in the Frenchman was merely the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased, intelligence. But of the character of his remarks at the periods in question an example will best convey the idea" Poe, pg. 106. The narrator is not in love with Dupin, nor is there a mystery that exists about Dupin. Rather, his own "diseased intelligence" has given him greater insight into Dupin's personality. Dupin fascinates the narrator, although the narrator feels somewhat ashamed of this; in spite of his shame, he cannot resist Dupin's presence.

Dupin reveals his extraordinary skills of analysis one night when the two are walking together near the Royal Palace in Paris. Out of the blue, Dupin comments on something the narrator had been thinking about, that an actor named Chantilly should, indeed, act in some other opera besides *Xerxes* because he is so short. The narrator is stunned that Dupin has read his mind and known exactly what he was thinking, insisting on an explanation. Dupin launches into a long monologue detailing each movement that caused him to assume that the narrator was thinking about Chantilly; first was when he bumped into a fruiterer; the trail then led from thought to thought, tracing backwards "Chantilly, Orion, Dr. Nichols, Epicurus, Stereotomy, the street stones, the fruiterer." From the fruiterer, the narrator slipped on a piece of dropped fruit, straining his leg; as a result the narrator stared at the street stones as they continued to walk, noting that it was cut a certain way, causing him to utter "stereotomy" aloud, another word for stone cutting.

Other kinds of science came into his mind, such as the theories of the Greek Epicurus who had many theories about outer space, a topic that Dupin had recently discussed with the narrator. Next, with Greece on his mind, the narrator gazed up at the sky to see the constellations, seeing Orion shining brightly above their heads. Dupin noted this and recalled that recently a quotation they had seen in the newspaper about Chantilly "Perdidit antiquum litera prima sonum," meaning "He has ruined the old sound with the first letter," which was a Latin quotation referring to Orion. The article was mocking Chantilly's role in the play because his appearance was so comical; Dupin knew then that upon seeing the constellation, noting that the original quotation referred to Orion. Seeing the constellation, Dupin saw a smile emerge on the narrator's lips and assumed that he had been thinking about Chantilly's tiny height. This example reveals the depth of Dupin's analytical abilities. Although he is not psychic and cannot read minds, like the

player of whist, Dupin observes a person's every behavior in an attempt to understand what is occurring in the individual's mind.

These extraordinary skills are soon to put use again when an article appears in the French newspaper describing a terrible murder that occurred on the "Rue Morgue," or "Morgue Street" when two women were found horribly slain in the fourth story of their house. The room was locked from the inside, confusing the investigators as to how exactly the murderer was able to escape. The younger victim, Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye was found strangled to death with deep bruises still embedded in her neck from the assailant's fingers; her body was stuffed upside-down into the chimney of the bedroom. Her mother, Madame L'Espanaye, was found completely decapitated, her body hurled from the fourth story window down to the street below. While the murders were in progress, much screaming emerged from the apartment, but nobody could get inside to help out because it was locked; the front door was not finally broken down until it was already too late to save anyone. As they climbed the stairs, however, a number of odd screams were heard from the upstairs, but when they entered the room finally, no one was left alive.

The room was completely ransacked, and on a chair a bloody razor was lying. On the hearth of the fireplace, large tufts of bloody hair had been tossed, and on the floor was some jewelry and four thousand francs in gold. The daughter's body was found stuffed into the chimney, and upon exiting the house and going into the backyard, the mother's mutilated body was found; the head came off completely when they tried to pick the body up, since it had apparently been severed with the bloody razor found upstairs. Another article is published the next day detailing eyewitness accounts of what exactly each person observed while at the crime scene. The police still had no idea even where to begin in solving this murder, especially because there is no motive -- the assailant had in fact left many valuables untouched, including that four thousand francs that was just lying on the floor for the taking. Additionally, the room has been locked up from the inside, confusing police as to how exactly the murderer made his escape.

The first to give her opinion was the victims' laundrywoman, who reported that the pair were always very kind, and the house had no furniture except for the fourth floor. A local tobacconist said that the elder woman owned the house, and she had evicted her tenants after they did not treat the property well. She thus decided to live in it herself, refusing to rent it out to anyone else. The couple also had few visitors, and the house was fairly new. A policeman testified that he arrived at the house around three o'clock in the morning only to find the doorway blocked by about thirty concerned neighbors. Breaking the door down and rushing upstairs, he heard two voices yelling, one that sounded like a shrill Spanish speaker, and the second gruff voice of a Frenchman yelling out "sacre," "goddam" and "diable," "devil." A neighbor noted that the the first voice sounded more like an Italian, noting that it could have been a woman's voice because it was so high-pitched. A Dutch man who could not speak French thought that the shrill voice sounded French, and the second gruffer voice said the words "sacre," "diable," and also "mon Dieu," "my God." A banker recalled that Madame L'Espanaye had withdrawn four thousand francs from the bank three days before her gruesome murder.

A clerk who accompanied the old woman home with her money added that the daughter took one bag from him when they arrived at the house on Rue Morgue, and the elder woman took the other; he was not invited into the house. A British man who entered the house after the murders stated that the gruff voice was French, but the shrill voice sounded German. The bedroom where the murders occurred was also locked from the inside and, once broken down, the terrible scene within the room was laid bare for all to see. A Spanish witness added that the gruff voice was definitely French, but the shrill voice sounded English to him, although he doesn't know English. An Italian man who entered the house as well stated that the gruff voice was French, but the shrill voice sounded Russian to him. The investigators then searched the chimneys of the house to see if anyone was hiding there, but there was no way anyone could have escaped that way; a trapdoor on the roof was also firmly nailed shut. It also took six people to pull Mademoiselle's battered body out of the chimney, since it had been wedged in there so firmly. Finally, the testimonies of two physicians is published as well, describing their conclusions about cause of death.

The daughter definitely died because of strangulation, as "The throat was greatly chafed. There were several deep scratched just below the chin, together with a series of livid spots which were evidently the impression of fingers. The face was fearfully discolored, and the eyeballs protruded. The tongue had been partially bitten through. A large bruise was discovered upon the pit of the stomach, produced, apparently, by the pressure of a knee" Poe, pg. 115. This young woman's body was in a terrible condition, although she has escaped the violent death faced by her mother, decapitated and hurled out of the building's window into the street below. Having presented all of this evidence, the newspaper added that the police are completely clueless about the murders. One final note mentioned that Adolphe le Bon, the clerk from the bank who accompanied the older woman home with the four thousand francs, had been arrested for the murders and put into prison, although there was no direct evidence against him. Auguste Dupin becomes extremely interested in this story, mocking the inability of the police to solve the crime and invoking the name of a former police chief named Vidocq, who often made uneducated guesses and did not look at the big picture when solving a crime; these mistakes led to his resignation as chief. Dupin adds that he owes Adolphe Le Bon a favor, and that he must solve this crime in order to free his friend, adding that he knows G---, the Prefect of Police and will get permission to examine the crime scene.

Immediately, the pair go to the Rue Morgue, after receiving this promised authorization from the police Prefect. Dupin first investigates the neighborhood surrounding the house before even going inside, noting the streets and alleys around, as well as the types of buildings that are next to the house. Going to the front door, they enter the house after being shown inside by the police. The bodies were still lying upstairs on the fourth floor, noting that every detail was exactly as the newspaper had described. They next examine the rest of the rooms in the house, as well as the yard outside once again. As night falls, the narrator and Dupin leave the scene and walk home, stopping briefly at a local newspaper office along the way. They then go home. No further discussion is made about the Rue Morgue until about noon of the following day. Dupin first asks the narrator if he noticed anything odd about the crime scene, to which the narrator replies that he does not. Dupin then says that the nature of the murder is very violent and

exaggerated, and that the newspaper failed to express the extreme violence of the murder in its pages. He adds that the body being found upside down, as well as the odd pair of voices, have all made the police become baffled. Dupin adds that just as much as the police are confused, he is just as confident that he can solve the mystery himself, declaring that he is waiting for a man to arrive at their house who can solve the murders. He adds that, although this man may not come at all, it is necessary to be prepared in case he does, taking out two pistols and giving one to the narrator.

Dupin's voice then continues to drone on in an explanatory sort of way, as if he were giving a "soliloquy," reflecting the "resolvent" and analytical part of his soul that the narrator had mentioned earlier. Beginning from the very onset of the murders, Dupin points out that a third party has committed the murders, since the two women surely did not kill each other. Therefore, in spite of the locked room, somehow the perpetrator must have exited out of there after these crimes were committed; he then adds that of the two voices heard, the first gruff voice was described by all witnesses as being from a Frenchman, but the second voice was shrill. Its language of origin had varied from Russian to Spanish to Italian to English, with little consistency or consensus. Dupin points out that it was also called "quick and *unequal*." Noting this, Dupin next explores how the room could have been exited, adding that the two women were not slain by supernatural forces and that there is a reasonable explanation for what happened. The doors were firmly closed, and the chimneys are too small for anyone to fit through; therefore the only other possibility was through the windows.

One window is partly blocked by the headboard of a bed that is in front of it, and the second window is nailed shut from the inside, as is the first. Noting that the windows' sashes had been tied back, Dupin states that they must be able to tie themselves, since opening the window would have caused them to come undone; he pulled the nail out of the second window that was unobstructed by the bed, lifted the window, and noted that there was a spring mechanism that caused the sash to refasten when the window went down. However, the nail was not refastened by this mechanism. Therefore, it had to be the first window from which the murderer fled; examining this window, he touched the nail and felt it break in half beneath his fingers from rust. Replacing the nail, he opened the window and watched the nail lift up with the sash, and when he lowered the window the spring mechanism forced the nail back into its place again. Thus, itt was in fact the spring and not the nail at all that kept the window shut so tightly. Gazing out of the window, Dupin noted that a lightning rod is right outside of the window, and the building's shutters have a special design with an opened lattice on the bottom half, allowing for a strong handhold; if the shutter was wide open, it would be easily reachable from the lightning rod, allowing someone to swing around into the room through the window, especially if it was already open.

Recalling all of this information, Dupin then goes back to his conclusion of who this criminal could be, stating again that the murderer had a shrill, unusual voice, and unusual strength would be required to jump from the lightning rod into the room. Also, the murderer did not even touch the money or jewelry lying around on the floor; he thus dismisses the presence of the money as a mere coincidence and not a motive at all. The strength of the assailant was so mighty as to rip out the hair from Camille's head

from its very roots and to slice off her mother's head with a single swipe of the razor. The narrator replies that surely a madman has committed these murders then, someone lacking compassion. Dupin then displays a hank of hair he recovered from the dead hands of Madame L'Espanaye, to which the narrator exclaims that "this is no *human* hair." Dupin then shows a drawing of the finger marks bruised into Camille's neck, asking the narrator to place his fingers in an identical way, yet there is no way for his human hand to fit over these finger marks. Dupin then reads a passage from a book by Cuvier describing an Ourang-Outang, native to the East Indies amd known for its "wild ferocity." The narrator is excited but confused nevertheless as to who the second voice in the room could have been, if the shrill voice was that of this species of monkey. Dupin states that the man was trying to stop the Ourang-Outang with his cursing and cries of "mon Dieu," concluding that this animal must have escaped from him and he had been attempting in vain to recapture it.

Auguste Dupin shows a newspaper bearing an advertisement in the classified section that he had placed on their way home from the Rue Morgue the evening before, declaring that he had captured a lost Ourang-Outang and that the owner, presumably a sailor, should come to claim his creature at the home which Dupin and the narrator shared. Yet again, the narrator is confused, because he doesn't understand how it could be a sailor after all. Dupin brushes this criticism aside, since he is not certain that it is in fact a sailor, but in all likelihood it would be a sailor out of the entire Parisian populace who would have such a creature in his possession, probably brought back from a trip to the East. Also he found a ribbon at the scene near the lightning rod, which is tied in a sailor's knot and is greasy as if it had tied someone's hair back, as sailors tend to do. Utilizing his skills of analysis again, Dupin assumes that the man will want to reclaim his animal in spite of the risk, because it is worth a lot of money, and he had reported in the advertisement that it was found far from the Rue Morgue, minimizing any suspicion that it could be connected with the murders. With these final words spoken, the two men merely wait for this mysterious sailor to arrive, if he dares to come at all.

They finally hear some footsteps upon the stairs below, and a man knocks on the door after hesitating briefly. Dupin urges the man to come inside and have a seat, declaring that the captured Ourang-Outang has been placed into a stable down the street, and that the reward he requests is to know the details of the Rue Morgue murders. At this, Dupin locks the door and casually places his pistol on the table in plain view of this sailor, assuring him that he means no harm and that he knows the sailor had no part in actually committing the murders himself. However, he adds that Adolphe Le Bon is innocent, and his name must be cleared of these murder charges that are pending against him. The sailor agrees to speak, saying that he is innocent. Recently, he was in Borneo and captured a wild Ourang-Outang there with the help of a friend, who later died of undisclosed causes. Left alone, the sailor brought the creature across the ocean and over land until he arrived at his own home in Paris, where he hid it away in his bedroom closet until it recovered from a splinter cut it received during the sea voyage, hoping to then sell it once restored to full health.

One night the sailor came home only to find that the Ourang-Outang had broken out of the closet and had begun to mimic the act of shaving as it had no doubt seen the sailor

do himself. Its face lathered up and razor in hand, the monkey posed a danger to the sailor, and he began to hit it with a whip he had. Frightened, the monkey dashed out of the window, razor in hand, pursued by the sailor. They ran all the way to the Rue Morgue, and climbing up the side of Madame Espanaye's building to find a place to hide, the Ourang-Outang swung from the lightning rod to the shutters, and then it entered the fourth story bedroom. The sailor pursued the animal to teh lightning rod but couldn't reach inside of the room and only watched in horror as the Ourang-Outang grabbed Madame L'Espanaye by the hair, holding back her head as if to shave her; yet the woman's struggles angered the monkey and he sliced off her head, turning next to the daughter who had fainted upon the floor. It attacked Camille L'Espanaye ferociously, strangling her with its long fingers. Then, realizing that it would be in trouble if the sailor found out, the creature tried to hide any evidence of its crime, stuffing the daughter into the chimney with enormous force and tossing the mother's body headlong out of the window.

Observing these deeds, the sailor fled in horror, giving up his quest to recapture the monkey. The gruff voice was that of this sailor from outside of the window, and the shrill screams were those of the Ourang-Outang; no one could place the exact language of this voice, because it was not even human. The creature then fled from the window near the bed whence it had come, and the spring-loaded sash placed the nail back into place, hiding the place of exit. After relating this story and getting the guilt off of his chest, the sailor recaptured the Ourang-Outang on his own and sold it right away. Adolphe Le Bon also was released once Dupin told the police exactly how these murders really occurred, clearing the bank clerk of any and all charges. The Prefect of Police is jealous that Dupin has solved the case and made the police squad look like a bunch of fools, adding that people should mind their own business. Dupin is unconcerned, adding that "In his wisdom is no *stamen*. it is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna -- or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature after all. I like him especially for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained his reputation for ingenuity. I mean the way he has 'de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas'" Poe, pg. 137.

Dupin criticizes the Prefect for his lack of analytical abilities, because he is too caught up in his head and does not use his imagination, or his body; like the chess player of the narrator's introduction, the Prefect is bound by calculated rules. When it is necessary to become more creative, the Prefect is at a loss, as the police were completely paralyzed with no real leads when investigating the murders at the Rue Morgue. Dupin takes a certain satisfaction and pleasure in knowing that he has beaten the police at this game of wits, and that he has cleared an innocent man in the process. He generally perceives the police with an eye of disdain, especially since the Prefect dared to say that Dupin and the narrator should mind their own business. However, Dupin has the last laugh in his comment from a work by Rousseau, that the Prefect is very talented at "denying what it is, and explaining what it isn't." The narrator has very good reasons for admiring Dupin so much, because this man evidently possesses amazing powers of observation that overshadow those of the common man, or of any man. Such an enigmatic character could only exist in the literary world and in this world of Edgar Allan Poe nonetheless.

# Commentary

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was first published in the April 1841 issue of *Graham's Magazine* in Philadelphia, where Edgar Allan Poe was living at the time. Because of it was different than many stories that were popular, publishers were at first reluctant to accept this story. Poe had even tried to include it in a second edition printing of his two-volume short story collection, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, with this being a grotesque tale due to the gory murder scene that C. Auguste Dupin investigates and solves. However, the publisher was not willing to include this story, given that the collection had sold rather slowly and did not want to risk making it even less marketable with such a gruesome tale as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Thus, the story was finally published soon afterwards in *Graham's Magazine*, where Poe had begun on a job as editor during the same month this story was published, in April 1841. The general reaction from Poe's readers was favorable overall but, as his book published had feared, the gruesome murder scene and vivid imagery that Poe employs in detailing the condition of Madame and Mademoiselle L'Espanaye's bodies (the former having been stuffed into the chimney, and the latter decapitated and tossed out of a fourth story window) tended to disgust some people and led to criticism. This did not prevent the story from being published again several times, with French-translation versions of the story being sold overseas as well.

Overall, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" holds an extremely crucial place in the evolution of literature. it breaks from previously established literary traditions and forges new territory for Poe's own style and theme. Before the word "detective" had even been created, Poe has written the very first detective story. It is from this dynamic created between the observant Auguste Dupin and the awestruck narrator, eluding the Parisian chief of police, that would later lead to the "detective-sidekick" combination that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would employ in his stories of Sherlock Holmes and Watson, outperforming Inspector Lestrade from Scotland Yard; Agatha Christie does the same in her own stories featuring Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, assistant Hastings, outperforming Inspector Japp. These later characters remain popular in both literature and television today, although few recall that it was Poe's Auguste Dupin who really laid the foundation for these tales that would follow. Unlike many of the earlier tales, which occur in isolation, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is the first in a series of three tales; "The Mystery of Marie Roget" was published serially in *Snowden's Ladies Companion* during November and December of 1842, concluding February 1843, and finally, "The Purloined Letter" was published in the 1845 issue of an annual periodical entitled *The Gift*, released in September of 1844. These later stories also feature Dupin, the fascinated narrator, and the clueless French Prefect of police.

The sole inspiration for Poe's Dupin appears to be derived not from any fictitious figure, but rather from a real-life Frenchman named Eugene Francois Vidocq (1775-1857); doubtless Poe heard of this man while he was in London as a child, and he followed this man's memoirs detailing the events of his life. Vidocq had been a talented criminal whom the Parisian police had decided to hire as a spy. Pleased with his work, police officials arranged for his release, and soon after Vidocq, once relentlessly pursued by

the police, became police chief himself in 1811! As time went on. Vidocq hired his own network of undercover spies to capture criminals, but eventually a series of scandals forced him to resign his position in 1827, due to public suspicion that he was in fact responsible for planning many of the crimes that his police squad appeared to solve, just to make themselves appear to be skilled investigators. The belief was that, if Vidocq was removed from his post, then the crime rate would in fact decrease. Five years later he took this job again, but he resigned after only one month, and he accordingly spent the remainder of his days writing his own fiction and memoirs relating the details of his life, as well as running his own private detective agency called "Reseignements," probably derived from the French "Renseignements," meaning "information."

Edgar Allan Poe evidently knew about Vidocq, because Auguste Dupin makes reference to Vidocq's flaws in "The Murders at the Rue Morgue," stating that Vidocq was an intelligent man, but he was limited nevertheless by his own inability to look at the "big picture," thus leading to his resignation. Although inspired by Vidocq, Poe nevertheless tries to distance his own creation Dupin from Vidocq by criticizing this real-life figure, thus elevating Dupin to levels of epic proportion. In his day, Vidocq was admired for his investigative skills, or else he would not have been police chief in Paris for over fifteen years, nor would his private detective agency have had any business. Yet Poe casts all of this praise into the wind with Dupin's offhanded comment that Vidocq is in fact flawed and limited; the statement is very effective not only in distancing Dupin from his real-life predecessor, but also in elevating Dupin to mythic proportions because he does not give Vidocq much thought at all, for he is better than even the best investigator in Paris.

This same arrogance comes through in his disdainful treatment of the Parisian Prefect as well. Like Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Christie's Poirot, it is this forward arrogance that makes these characters so heroic and fascinating; in many ways the reader remains as awestruck as the narrator upon hearing the microscopic scrutiny with which Dupin views the world; the fact that Dupin had followed the narrator's internal thought processes merely by observing his external behaviors clearly evidences this fact. These characters remain arrogant but unflawed, contradicting the age-old ideal of tragic hubris, that one must live life humbly. Like Holmes and Poirot, Dupin knows little humility; he is extremely talented, and he uses these abilities to their furthest extent. Again, it is this perfection that makes these fictional detectives so appealing, unlike the real-life Vidocq whose integrity and virtue remained in question. Interpreting evidence directly as it appears, Dupin is the voice of truth, speaking only what he sees and perceives. Certainly, there is a margin of error in his analysis, but given the many signs observed from the narrator, for example, during their walk through the street at night, Dupin became confident that he was following the narrator's thought processes accurately, and the narrator only confirmed this upon revealing his astonishment.

Although some may find fault in Dupin's conclusions because they may seem to be quite a stretch from reality, or so unusual -- such as how a spring mechanism was installed in the fourth floor of the ladies' house -- it is important to recall that nobody exists who is so perfect and observant as Dupin, Holmes, or Poirot. The observations and the logic that follows them are *supposed* to be unusual, for that is what makes these figures so interesting for the reader. Would one rather read a tale about a man

who just breaks into a house and murders two women, or a tale about an escaped monkey from the East Indies that accidentally hacks a woman apart with a razor that it has been carrying around? Although unusual, the second plot is more interesting, however far from the truth it may seem. Like Edgar Allan Poe's many other short stories, it is this creativity, artistic imagination, and close attention to detail that sets "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" apart from the mainstream literature of his contemporaries, and that is why these tales continue to be popular today.

# The Tell-Tale Heart

An unnamed narrator defensively declares that he is not insane, "I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily -- how calmly I can tell you the whole story" Poe, pg. 138. He insists that the story he tells is logical and not insane at all, although the very pattern of his language is a bit irrational, saying that he has heard heaven and hell, and the very pattern of his language is uncontrolled and rapid. The story then begins, describing how he had lived with an old man and eventually became obsessed with his eye, adding that he never wanted to steal the old man's gold; because of his strange eye, the narrator decided to kill the old man. Once again he becomes defensive towards the reader, "You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded -- with what caution -- with what foresight -- with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him" Poe, pg. 138. The narrator prides himself on his intelligence and the calculated nature of his crime, stating that a madman would not have acted as brilliantly as he had done, since "madmen know nothing."

Every day of that week before he committed the murder, the narrator quietly opened the door of the old man's room around midnight, taking an hour to gradually get his head through the doorway without making any noise. Then he would extend a mostly closed lantern container except to allow a tiny sliver of light to shine through upon the old man's sleeping face, searching for that eye which he so despised. However, for seven nights the eye was closed, and the narrator could not bear to murder the man. It was the eye that he hated, and since the eye was not visible, there was no reason to commit violence; it was not the old man he wanted to destroy, but it was instead this "Evil Eye." He would return to the room in the morning to happily greet the old man, priding himself on how well he disguised his cruel intentions and the violent thoughts he kept hidden deep within his mind. These descriptions are supposed to support the narrator's sanity, because of how carefully he planned everything out and deceived the old man.

On the eighth night, however, the narrator opened the door very cautiously, gleeful to think that the old man had absolutely no idea that he was there; yet just when everything was proceeding as planned, his hand slips on the lantern, making a noise and causing the old man to wake up, asking who's there. For an hour he stayed there in the doorway, motionless and listening, while the old man did the same in his bed. Finally, the old man moaned softly out of fear since, "Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself...but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel...the presence of my head within the room" Poe, pg. 140. Although he professes his sanity, the narrator equates himself with Death, waiting to take the life of this old man there in the doorway. Then he decided to open the lantern anyway, sending a sliver of light upon the old man's face to reveal the hated eye! The narrator adds that his own body had an increased sensitivity, since his ears could hear the pounding of the old man's heart in

that room. The beats became faster and faster, louder and louder, until the narrator was afraid that it would wake up the neighbors in their building.

The narrator then yelled gleefully, entering the room, dragging the old man out of bed, and dragging the heavy bed on top of him, no doubt causing the victim to suffocate. Eventually, the heartbeat sound was not heard again, the bed was removed, and the narrator found no pulse in the old man's body. Pleased that the eye would not torment him any more, the narrator cut off the head, arms, and legs, sticking all body parts beneath the floor boards in the bedroom, replacing the boards and proud that there was no blood left behind anywhere since he had cut the body up in a tub. By this time it was four o'clock in the morning, and suddenly there was a knock at the door. The narrator was unafraid, since he had cleaned up so well and hidden the body flawlessly beneath the floor. Thus, he was not at all bothered when three policemen wanted to come inside to investigate a noise complaint from a neighbor. The narrator told them that he himself had screamed aloud during a dream, causing the noise, and encouraged these officers to search the entire apartment, pointing out that the gold was still there, providing chairs in the old man's bedroom to sit upon, since the narrator was so proud of how deceptive that he has been. He added that the old man had simply taken a trip into the country and was not at home.

The policemen then became friendly, deciding that everything is fine there, chatting informally. The narrator, however, began to hear a pounding sound again that slowly built in intensity and strength, filling his ears more and more. His face grew pale, rising from his seat and pacing around the room quickly, dragging his chair against the floor, as the policemen continued to calmly chat with each other, and the narrator became paranoid again, fearful that they could hear the noise, "They heard!--they suspected!--they *knew*--they were making a mockery of my horror!--this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Any thing was more tolerable than this derison! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!--and now--again!--hark! louder! *louder!*--" Poe, pg. 143. The narrator then screamed aloud that he murdered the old man, commanding them to tear up the floor to discover his body and shouting out that he the pounding sound is the dead old man's heartbeat, thinking that they can hear it, too.

In recalling these events, the narrator can still hear the beating of the heart, in "and now!--again!" suggesting that murdering the old man did not solve his problem after all. He had thought that the old man's eye would leave him alone once he was slain, but now the old man's heart consumes him, nor is he able to murder the old man to solve this problem because the old man is already dead! Because it is not possible for a heart to beat when the body it inhabits has been cut apart and drained of much blood, nor is it possible to hear someone else's heartbeat from afar in the first place, it should be clear that the narrator is a madman after all, and his worries, fears, and paranoia that he directs towards the old man and even the police, is in fact all inside of his very head. While trying so determinedly to assert his sanity, the narrator has succeeded in revealing that he truly is insane.

# Commentary

It should be no surprise that this grotesque tale was written in late 1842 around the same time as 'The Black Cat," which also features a murderous narrator relating the circumstances that led up to his crime. In fact, both of these stories show close resemblance in theme and plot. "The Tell-Tale Heart" was published with the assistance of Massachusetts poet James Russell Lowell in his magazine, *The Boston Pioneer* in January of 1843. In comparison, "The Black Cat" was published in Philadelphia on August 19, 1843, later that same year. It is important to also note that "The Tell-Tale Heart" would be printed again with some minor changes in *The Broadway Journal*'s August 23, 1845 edition, when Poe was residing with Virginia in New York City.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" utilizes storytelling techniques similar to "The Black Cat," as the action is filtered through the eyes of a delusional narrator. Just as one narrator fixates upon the old man's eye and determines to commit a conscious act of murder, the second narrator is obsessed with a cat that he cannot get rid of. The narrator prides himself on his careful planning and mastery at deceiving others. While he acts friendly towards the old man and the police, dark secrets are hidden deep inside of him. This leads to a false confidence, much like the man in "The Black Cat." Just as the narrator from "The Tell-Tale Heart" insists on seating the policemen in the very room where he had slain the old man just a few hours before, the other narrator knocks on the wall in the basement, proud of his own abilities at concealing his wife's body. Just as the old man's body was revealed to be beneath the floorboards at the narrator's own admission, the man's knocking on the wall caused the cat to meow from the other side, causing the policemen to tear the wall apart. In the first, the narrator admits his crime because of the loud beating of the heart, whereas in "The Black Cat," the narrator does not control the discovery of his crime. Rather, once the cat meows the course of events is quite beyond the man's control, and he is tormented by the knowledge that the cat still lives after all and he is to be executed for his wife's murder.

The narrator's fate in 'The Tell-Tale Heart" is unclear, although it is probable that he, too, faces execution or certainly some sort of hefty punishment for what he has done. Perhaps he has been committed to an insane asylum, which would explain his constant need to declare that he is not insane; he does not show remorse for his crime, but rather expresses a sense of glee that the old man was murdered, coupled with a new sense of defeat since the heartbeat sound continues to torment him. Its presence affirms the narrator's madness, that his fears are not of supernatural origin, but rather are internalized conditions within his own mind. The narrator's strict refusal to acknowledge this clearly reveals the unsolved problem at the real heart of the tale. It is probable that the heartbeat that the narrator hears all around him in the outside world, is in fact the beating of his very own heart. Thus, he projects internal struggles out into the world that is around him. He kills the old man, screams at the policemen, and begs for the heartbeat to stop, instead of trying to solve the real problem that is within himself. By blaming everything that is in the outside rather than what is within him, he is merely perpetuating this internal disease.

In contrast, the narrator of "The Black Cat" speaks with a bit more eloquence and understanding of events; he admits that he has a drinking problem that causes him to become violently angry. Rather than trying to deny personality flaws, he acknowledges them and lacks the wicked deceptiveness of the man from "The Tell-Tale Heart," for he does not intentionally deceive people, aside from the police. The cat becomes the object of his obsession, although he admits wistfully that he once cared about animals, showing a genuine desire to be a nicer person. He acknowledges these fits of anger, such as the one that caused him to slay his wife with an ax, but he nevertheless shows some remorse for what he has done. This character is more human, a man who admits he made mistakes and prepares to accept the punishment of death that is then waiting for him. He does not reassert his sanity again and again. A certain progression is thus evident from the earlier story; "The Tell-Tale Heart" shows an unresolved disease within the character's mind, while the narrator in "The Black Cat" states that he has flaws in his personality and takes responsibility for what he has done. That is not to say one should behave as he did, but one could at least understand his frustrations at seeing this black cat following him around everywhere, which led to his violent act of stabbing its eye and later plans to kill the cat. Interestingly, it is the eye of the old man that also causes the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" to eventually commit murder.

These two stories were written and published around the same time and follow a fairly similar format, although the second shows a dramatic progression and growth from the first story, which does not provide any real resolution. There, the narrator's malady is uncured, for he still hears the beating heart that he still refuses to recognize as his own. In "The Black Cat," however, the narrator resolves his inner conflict by confessing his crime to the reader and prepares to receive his execution on the following day. "The Tell-Tale Heart" thus provides a unique lens into the soul of a man that is lost within himself and offers important insight into the thought processes of someone who has fallen completely out of touch with reality. This tale delves deeply into the narrator's sickened mind, hidden beneath a friendly, external guise, and it boldly suggests that anyone can show a fake face in public, while still hiding much darker thoughts deep inside.

# The Gold-Bug

An epigraph from the play *All in the Wrong,* by Irish playwright Arthur Murphy, begins this tale, reading "What ho! what ho! this fellow is dancing mad!/He hath been bitten by the Tarantula." These words set the tone for the story that follows, about a man named William Legrand, whom the narrator assumes is mentally ill because he is obsessed with finding gold after being bitten by a "gold-bug," just as the speaker in the quote refers to somebody bitten by a tarantula spider and driven into a delirium. The narrator describes how he lives in Charleston, South Carolina, and it is on Sullivan's Island in Charleston Harbor that he became friends with William, who lived there in a shack on the eastern end of the three mile long island. After losing most of his wealth, Legrand, who is from an old French Huguenot family had moved there from New Orleans, Louisiana. The island is sandy, with few trees, except for myrtle bushes that grow to about twenty feet of height; the army also has a base on the western side of the island at Fort Moultrie. As a person, Legrand is rather moody, and although he is intelligent and has many books, he would rather spend his time lazily outside, fishing and hunting, rather than engaging in scholarly pursuits. Legrand also has a old Negro named Jupiter, who has been freed from servitude but refuses to leave this beloved man's side and chooses instead to take care of him; the narrator thinks this is a good match, both for the overprotective Jupiter and the "wanderer" Legrand.

In October of 18--, the narrator makes the nine mile trip from his home in Charleston, across the stretch of water separating Sullivan's Island from the city, and he hurries to get inside of his friend's shack because it is so unusually cold outside due to the approaching winter. Finding nobody to be home, he enters and waits patiently in front of a blazing fire until Legrand excitedly enters. While Jupiter cooks dinner; the host excitedly relates how he has recently captured an enormous beetle, or scarab, but he has allowed Lieutenant G-- to borrow it. He invites the narrator to spend the night, since Jupiter will go and get the beetle that following morning, describing it as be gold in color with black spots and antennae. Jupiter interrupts, insisting that it is made of solid gold, but Legrand just tells him to worry about cooking dinner, and he excitedly declares that he will draw a picture of the beetle for the narrator to see, searching for paper around until he pulls a folded piece of paper from his pocket, draws an image on it, and hands it to the narrator. Suddenly, Jupiter opens the front door of the house and an enormous Newfoundland dog runs inside and happily jumps upon the narrator, licking his face eagerly.

Afterwards, the narrator admires William's drawing, adding that the beetle almost looks like a skull, to which Legrand agrees that it does have that appearance somewhat, although the narrator insists that it doesn't really look like a beetle at all, and really is a picture of a skull, since there aren't even any antennae in the drawing. Legrand is insulted, declaring that he did include antennae! Confused, the narrator hands back the drawing, and the host looks at it closely, turning it every which way, holding a candle near the paper in one corner of the room. He then sticks the paper into a wallet, and locks it into his desk; the narrator feels uncomfortable with this behavior, deciding not to spend the night at Legrand's hut after all and returns to his own bed at Charleston.

Nothing else is heard from William Legrand until a month later when Jupiter visits his home in the city, worried about his master's health because he has been behaving very strangely since "Todder day he gib me slip 'fore de sun up and was gone de whole ob de blessed day. I had a big stick ready cut for to gib him deuced good beating when he did come -- but Ise sich a fool dat I hadn't de heart after all -- he looked so berry poorly...I'm berry sartain dat Massa Will bin bit somewhere 'bout de head by dat goole-bug" Poe, pg. 149.

Although Jupiter's words are difficult to understand due to Jupiter's heavy accent, they may be interpreted as "The other day he gave me the slip before the sun was up and was gone the whole blessed day. I had a bog stick ready cut for him to give him a good beating when he did come, but I am such a fool that I didn't have the heart after all -- he looked so very poorly...I'm very certain that Master Will has been bitten somewhere around his head by that gold bug." The old man wanted to beat Legrand with a stick because he was so angry that the man snuck away from the house, but the he did not have the heart to hurt this man. Although he was angry, his sense of worry is stronger, and he fears that this mysterious gold bug has bitten his master and made him ill. He explains that when they were first trying to catch the large bug on Sullivan's Island, it attacked William, which is when Jupiter thinks he was bitten, adding that he captured the beetle in a piece of paper he found there on the island. The Negro adds that Legrand has been talking endlessly about gold in his sleep, and that he brought something for the narrator, handing him a note. The message from William Legrand states that the narrator must go at once to Sullivan's Island, "upon business of importance," and that Jupiter has been annoying him lately with his constant worries and accusations that Legrand is mentally ill.

Intrigued, the narrator decides to go after all, following Jupiter to his boat on shore, which is filled with a brand new scythe for clearing overgrown land and three shovels. The old man states that Legrand told him to buy these tools, confusing the narrator even more. Upon arriving on Sullivan's Island, the pair walk to the hut, where Legrand greets them joyfully, although his face is pale, his eyes are aglow with excitement, and he grasps the narrator's hand very strongly, declaring that the beetle will soon make him rich. He takes out a glass case containing the beautiful beetle, with a golden shell, black spots, and antennae, just as he had originally said. The narrator is concerned about his friend, insisting that Legrand is truly ill, and that he will stay there for a few days to take care of him, although Legrand says he is completely fine nevertheless. He states that the only cure for his intense excitement is for the narrator to accompany him on a brief expedition right away, adding that they will be back at his hut by sunrise of the following day. The narrator agrees on the condition that, when they return, Legrand must let the narrator to take care of him until he has recovered, to which he readily agrees.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon the three men and the Newfoundland dog venture out, carrying the scythe and shovels, and ride a small boat across the to the mainland beyond Sullivan's Island, and then venture out into the wilderness, while Legrand carries the beetle as well, swinging from a piece of cord that he has tied it to. This only reaffirms the narrator's conclusion that Legrand is mentally ill. Nevertheless, they walk for two hours, until dusk, and they find themselves in a very isolated place, "It was a

species of tableland, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill, densely wooded from base to pinnacle, and interspersed with huge crags that appeared to lie loosely upon the soil, and in many cases were prevented from precipitating themselves into the valleys below, merely by the support of the trees against which they reclined. Deep ravines, in various directions, gave an air of still sterner solemnity of the scene" Poe, pg. 155. Nearby, Legrand at last stops in front of a large tulip tree, asking Jupiter to climb it, bringing the dead gold-bug along with him. The old man protests, since he's afraid of the bug, but at last he agrees.

Jupiter climbs up about seventy feet, and then goes even higher until he is no longer visible from the ground. Finally, as he reaches near the top of the tree, Legrand shouts for Jupiter to climb out on one of the branches, although Jupiter protests once again because it appears to be a dead limb. Legrand becomes dejected, until Jupiter adds that if he left the heavy beetle behind the branch might not break. Realizing that Jupiter just wants an excuse to drop the beetle, Legrand tells him to just climb out on the branch and stop his complaining, promising that he'll give him a silver dollar as a reward. With this added incentive, Jupiter carefully inches out onto the limb, shouting that there is a skull there nailed to the end of the limb. Legrand is not surprised by this news at all and tells Jupiter to drop the beetle through the left eye of the skull, allowing it to dangle below by holding onto the string. After some confusion from Jupiter about what the difference between "left" and "right" is, the beetle is finally dropped through the left eye according to this old man, since the narrator and Legrand cannot see what he is doing since he's at the top of the tree. Clearing some land with his scythe, Legrand asks Jupiter to drop the beetle and descend from the tree, taking out a tape measure and tracing from the tree to this spot where the beetle landed, to fifty feet more beyond.

There he stops, sticking a peg into the ground, and tells his companions to start digging at that spot. The narrator considers forcing Legrand to go back to his hut, although he knows that Jupiter won't help him at all, and it is a job he cannot do alone. All of this seems to be insane to him, and he is tired since it is already nightfall. Finally, the man decides that the sooner he digs, the sooner he can prove to Legrand that he is mentally ill, since they won't find anything there anyway. With this in mind, the narrator reluctantly digs under the guide of lantern light, thinking of how ridiculous the three of them would look to anybody walking past them. After the dog barks incessantly for awhile, Jupiter rises from the hole and ties the poor animal's mouth closed with some rope to muzzle him, and the work resumes. A total of two hours passes, and the hole reaches a depth of five feet, and then seven feet. Still there is no sign of anything, as Legrand emerges from the hole tired and disappointed, while the narrator feels a sense of accomplishment that this was indeed a big waste of time.

The three men gather the tools with little said, beginning to walk back to the shore, until Legrand abruptly asks Jupiter where his left eye is. Jupiter then touches his right eye, to which Legrand excitedly jumps up and down, and measures the distance of fifty feet, from a location three inches further west than the initial spot, as if the beetle had been actually dropped from the left eye, and the digging begins all over again now at a new spot several yards away from the existing hole. The narrator is less doubtful now and more curious, as "I dug eagerly, and now and then caught myself actually looking, with

something that very much resembled expectation, for the fancied treasure, the vision of which had demented my unfortunate companion...when we had been at work perhaps an hour and a half, we were again interrupted by the violent howlings of the dog" Poe, pg. 162. Jupiter tries to muzzle the dog again, but this time he breaks loose, leaping into the hole and digging furiously, uncovering two skeletons wearing decayed clothes, some coins, and a Spanish sword. Digging deeper, the narrator abruptly falls when his foot gets stuck in the metal ring attached to a wooden chest, which they quicky uncover from the earth. Within the chest is an enormous pile of gleaming treasure! The narrator and Jupiter, both skeptical of Legrand's claims, are shocked!

Legrand then mocks Jupiter, saying "And dis all cum ob de goole-bug," triumphant that he was right all along even while his companions had thought he was insane. The box is far too heavy for even three men to lift, so they empty out about two thirds of its contents onto the ground above to be guarded by the dog, lightening the box so that they can lift it out of the hole. When this task is completed, the narrator and Legrand bring the chest back to Legrand's hut on Sullivan's Island while Jupiter stays with the dog to guard their treasure. Upon returning, the treasure is divided into three piles for each of them to carry and leaving the holes unfilled. They arrive for this final trip back to Legrand's shack just as the sun is starting to come up again, as Legrand had promised to the narrator. The narrator is thus proven to be the fool for doubting Legrand after all. Exhausted after such heavy work, the three men go to sleep for a few hours before examining the treasure any further.

When they awaken, the treasure is sorted and found to be worth about one million and a half dollars, although they learn later that it is worth much more than that, since the chest contains all gold and jewels, "There were diamonds...a hundred and ten in all, and not one of them small; eighteen rubies of remarkable brilliancy;--three hundred and ten emeralds, all very beautiful; and twenty-one sapphires, with an opal...there was a vast quantity of solid-gold ornaments: nearly two hundred massive finger- and earrings; rich chains--thirty of these, if I remember; eighty-three very large and heavy crucifixes...a prodigious golden punch bowl" Poe, pg. 164-5. The treasure is very old and beautiful, and the only question that remains for the narrator to understand the answer to, is how exactly William Legrand knew about this marvelous discovery. Legrand then launches into a lengthy and detailed explanation of how he went about finding this treasure prior to that evening when they had ventured out into the mainland.

First, when the narrator initially came to visit Legrand at his house on Sullivan's Island and insulted his artistic abilities after drawing the beetle on the paper, Legrand was ready to hurl it into the fire, although it was in fact parchment, not paper. Just then he noticed that it did indeed have a skull on it, which he had not even drawn there! His drawing was still there on the other side of the parchment, which the narrator had not even seen. Stunned because the skull was not there before, he locked the parchment away into his desk so that he could think about this some more. Later, after the narrator had departed, he remembered that the parchment was initially found in the sand near a boat on Sullivan's Island, and Jupiter used it to wrap up the flying beetle once it was captured. After he gave the beetle to Lieutenant G--, he stuck the paper in his pocket until he was searching form something to draw a picture on, and rediscovered it. He

also recalls that some types of ink can only be visible once they are exposed to fire, since the narrator was pushed dangerously close to the fireplace when the Newfoundland dog bounded in through the front door of his home, causing the parchment to heat up apparently.

Legrand excitedly recalled that the skull is a symbol of pirates, and parchment lasts for a much longer time than paper. The fact that this parchment had a skull on it, suggests that perhaps it was left by pirates, since the skull is the symbol that pirates used. Realizing that the writing is made from some chemical compound that is only visible when heated up, he kindles a fire and held the parchment nearby, washing off the dirt and grime to see the writing better. Sure enough, Legrand saw other figures appear on the paper, such as that of a goat, adding that it could have been the symbol of the famous pirate Captain Kidd, since a "kid" is also a name for a baby goat. Assuming this to be the signature of Captain Kidd and recalling that there have been many rumors that Captain Kidd had roamed the area with his fellow band of pirates and had buried treasure somewhere on the Atlantic coastline. Legrand continued to heat the parchment, and a series of symbols and numbers eventually appeared in a reddish ink; of course, this was an encoded message which Legrand set about trying to solve.

Counting the frequency of the symbols and numbers, he tried to match the most frequent ones with the most used English letters, knowing Captain Kidd to be a British pirate, and not a man who would have used Spanish or French. Noting that the symbol "8" is used the most times, Legrand matched this with the most common English letter, 'e," replacing "8" in the message with "e" and so on, until an understandable message appeared. Once decoded, the message read "A good glass in the bishop's hostel in the devil's seat -- forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes -- northeast and by north -- main branch seventh limb east side -- shoot from the left eye of the death's-head--a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out" Poe, pg. 177. The narrator is still confused at this message, wondering how that could have possibly led Legrand to the treasure they had dug up. Legrand waited a few days and then asked people around on Sullivan's Island if they heard of "Bishop's Hotel," since "Hostel" is an old form of 'Hotel." Nobody had any information, but suddenly he recalled that there was an old family named "Bessop" that owned a large mansion in town. There, an old woman told him she had heard of a large rock nearby called "Bessop's Castle," and she took him to this spot.

Arriving there, Legrand noted one particular ledge about twelve inches wide and eighteen inches long, several feet below the top of the rock. Acknowledging this to be the "devil's seat" in Kidd's message, he went home to get a "glass," or telescope, through which to view the location specified by the parchment. He returned and sat upon the ledge, gazing out at an angle of forty-one degrees, and moving the telescope around until he saw a spot of white in a far away tree, discovering it to be a white skull on the tree's limb. The rest of the message then made sense, noting that the skull must have been on the seventh limb, and the shot from the left eye meant to drop a bullet down and measure fifty feet further out from it, and to dig at that very spot. Then the only task was to locate this tree, since when he stepped out of the devil's seat the skull was nowhere to be seen again. Although Jupiter had accompanied him that day,

Legrand decided to sneak off alone since Jupiter was becoming an annoyance with all of his worrying, and after much effort he located the proper tree in the forest. This was obviously the worrisome day that Jupiter had told the narrator about, when he had a stick ready to punish Legrand for sneaking away, but then he decided not to after all.

The narrator interjects that Jupiter caused him to miss the correct spot after initially dropping the beetle through the right eye instead of the left one, and Legrand adds that even a difference of a few inches made them fall far from their target once they had measured out fifty feet away. Then the narrator demands to know why Legrand was swinging the beetle along as they walked, and why he dropped the beetle out of the skull's eye and not a bullet, as Kidd had instructed. The man merely responds that he was punishing the narrator and Jupiter for doubting him, by putting on an unusual show of behavior that would feed their perceptions of him as a fool. Yet in the end, it is again the narrator that is made out to be a fool for not believing his friend. Satisfied, the narrator asks one final question, as to why there were two skeletons on top of the treasure chest. Legrand has no definite answer for this inquiry, but he infers that Kidd probably needed some help burying the treasure because it was so heavy.

However, he most likely killed these men afterwards to insure that the treasure's location would remain a secret, "Perhaps a couple of blows with a mattock were sufficient, while his coadjutors were busy in the pit; perhaps it required a dozen -- who shall tell?" Poe, pg. 181. The tale thus ends, with the narrator becoming a wealthy man for his role in the treasure's discovery, and with Legrand having been restored to his full degree of wealth and prestige, which he had lost awhile ago before he had moved to Sullivan's Island from New Orleans. Jupiter no doubt remains at his master's side, ever-willing to scold and reprimand. With its role in the treasure's discovery revealed to be a matter of pure coincidence since his parchment was Legrand's true guide, the exact fate of the gold-bug remains yet another mystery altogether.

# Commentary

'The Gold-Bug" was first published in Philadelphia's *The Dollar Newspaper* in June of 1843, and Edgar Allan Poe was awarded one hundred dollars as a reward for winning first prize in the periodical's writing contest with this entry. Due to the gentle combination of humor and intrigue, this tale was celebrated as a popular success, and Poe himself stated that within a year after its initial publication, over three hundred thousand copies of the story had been printed for readers worldwide. Unlike the more grotesque of his stories, or those like "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" that caused controversy while readers tried to sort fact from fiction, here was a straightforward plot that tapped into the local color of South Carolina's Sullivan's Island. It also used details from the popular legend of Captain Kidd, who was arrested in Boston for piracy after plundering countless ships, whose treasure was never completely recovered. Kidd was then hung in London in 1701. This historical connection no doubt increased Poe's readership; in 1845 Poe even compared this tale to his famous poem "The Raven" because of its tremendous success, adding that "The bird beat the bug, though."

In Poe's time a great deal of pirate literature was available including Daniel Defoe's 1724 *A General History of Pyrates*, Aaron Smith's *The Atrocities of the Pirates* published in 1824, and Charles Elms' 1837 *The Pirates Own Book: Authentic Narratives*, some of which probably influenced his intended plot, using Captain Kidd as a pivotal figure. Another major influence remains the landscape of Sullivan's Island, where Edgar Allan was stationed under the name of Edgar Perry for nearly two years at the same Fort Moultrie that is mentioned in "The Gold-Bug." Obscure references are also made to a mysterious "Lieutenant G--" whom Legrand spontaneously allows to borrow his newly found insect, revealing the military connection that this island holds for Poe. This author became very friendly with a "Lieutenant Howard" during his own days there from 1827-1829. Additionally, Poe befriended a kindly doctor named Edmund Ravenel, who lived on Sullivan's Island and practiced medicine there; he also taught at the local college and was a conchologist, or one who studies shells. Ravenel would search the shores of Sullivan's Island searching for good specimens that he could study, just as William Legrand does in "The Gold-Bug," as he initially comments on how he found a "bivalve" shell before discovering the golden beetle. With this information, the connection should be clear.

The addition of Jupiter into the tale contributes to the comic nature of the story, as Jupiter bickers back and forth with William as he goes off on his treasure hunt. Jupiter is also a source of amusement for the narrator and Legrand, portrayed as an ignorant but loveable figure, perhaps reflecting some racist sentiment, although he is not a slave. Jupiter remains at Legrand's side by choice, in spite of the constant barrage of insults that is thrown at him. Given the personality that Jupiter displays, it is questionable if he could even function in any other environment than at William Legrand's side. Named after the Roman king of the heavens, the named is very much an oxymoron, for Jupiter does not even know his right hand from his left, showing that the bold name does not reflect his gullible personality. Also, the relationship that Jupiter holds with Legrand and the narrator is similar to that of Jim and Huck in Mark Twain's 1884 *The Adventures of*

*Huckleberry Finn*. In the beginning, Huck treats Jim with the same sense of superiority as Legrand, although he later learns to respect and appreciate Jim as an equal. The same cannot be said of Jupiter; when he interjects about the gold bug, Legrand curtly replies for him to just cook dinner for him; Legrand asks Jupiter to risk his life by climbing a very tall tree; Legrand constantly berates Jupiter for being stupid, as when he does not know his right from his left. Rather than reflecting racist sentiment on Poe's part, this depiction is generally consistent with the feelings of his pre-Civil War contemporaries, and in the slaveholding state of South Carolina nevertheless. Harriet Beecher Stowe would not publish her own *Uncle Tom's Cabin* until nearly a decade later, in 1852, and thus the issue of slavery and treatment of blacks had yet to be directly addressed on a national level through literature.

Overall, "The Gold-Bug" also bears some resemblance in literary style to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which also featured a man, Auguste Dupin, living in relative isolation in Paris, as Legrand chooses to live in an old shack on the bleak landscape of Sullivan's Island. Dupin also embarks on a long explanation of how he arrived at some grand conclusion, that of the who murdered the L'Espanaye women. In this tale, Legrand proudly solves the riddle of Captain Kidd's treasure for the narrator, while still showing a sense of annoyance that his expertise and wisdom was to be even questioned for a moment by the narrator and Jupiter. Dupin shows this same feeling when he is instructed by the Prefect to "mind his own business," that of being disrespected in spite of his acute investigative abilities. Both men also have fallen upon hard times financially, as Dupin holds a great deal of debt, just as Legrand was forced to flee his home of New Orleans for similar reasons. Although Dupin predates Legrand's character by two years, his personality shows an uncanny resemblance to this later character. It is also interesting to note that "Legrand" is of French origin, meaning "the great." This parallel reinforces the earlier connection to Auguste Dupin's character.

In recalling all of this information, it should be clear that Poe infuses his work with a smooth blend of his unique writing style and powers of observation, along with personal experience; Poe's past stories had featured characters such as Dupin who are keen investigators and go to great lengths to explain the process of reaching a discovery. Poe had been stationed as a soldier at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island fifteen years before this tale was written, but no doubt the memories had remained with him. It was there he had met Lieutenant Howard and Dr. Edmund Ravenel, the conchologist whose living situation and general demeanor bear a marked resemblance to William Legrand; popular pirate legends fill the work to make it meaningful to the reader as well. Furthermore, Poe had himself edited an academic textbook entitled *The Conchologists First Textbook* published in 1837 as well, contributing to his own knowledge of "conches" as a fleeting topic here. These influences have thus been skillfully merged together to create "The Gold-Bug," which is a powerful but light-hearted story with subtle implications as to how what you see is not always what you get. The narrator had judged Legrand to be a lunatic, when in fact it was Legrand who was the wisest of them all.

# The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether

Far south from Paris in rural France, an unnamed narrator makes a journey accompanied by an acquaintance whom he had only recently met in the year 18--. In passing a famous Maison de Sante and being himself a doctor, he wants to visit briefly to learn more about a special "soothing system" employed at this psychiatric hospital. However, the narrator's companion doesn't want to stop because he's afraid of lunatics, offering instead to introduce him to the asylum's director, Monsieur Maillard before departing. He adds that the two can meet up the next day because he will travel extremely slowly for the narrator to catch up to him. Riding by horseback to the doorstep of this structure, Maillard exits, addresses the narrator's companion, before this man bids farewell to them both, leaving the narrator, who admires Maillard as being a "fine-looking gentleman of the old school" and having a "certain air of gravity, dignity, and authority."

The two men enter a "small and exceedingly neat parlor, containing...many books, drawings, pots of flowers, and musical instruments. A cheerful fire blazed upon the hearth. At a piano, singing an aria from Bellini, sat a young and very beautiful woman, who, at my entrance, paused in her song, and received me with graceful courtesy. Her voice was low, and her whole manner subdued" Poe, pg. 183. The narrator then reflects about the "soothing system" which he has heard so much about, noting that this system involves giving no punishments to any of the mental hospital's patients, and they are all allowed to freely walk around the hospital uninhibited wearing customary clothing rather than hospital garb. He then analyzes this mysterious female, cautiously wondering if she could possibly be a patient, even though she appears to be a rational person. She soon leaves, when the refreshments are brought in by a servant, and Maillard explains that she is in fact his niece and not a patient at all.

Satisfied, the narrator inquires about the "soothing system," but Maillard replies that this system was abandoned several weeks ago. Patients also used to behave poorly whenever inspectors would come over to visit the asylum, and as a result he does not allow many visitors at all any more either, so the narrator is lucky to have been admitted inside. He explains more about this old system, "We put much faith in amusements of a simple kind, such as music, dancing, gymnastic exercises generally, cards...We affected to treat each individual as if for some ordinary physical disorder, and the work 'lunacy' was never employed. A great point was to set each lunatic to guard the actions of all the others. To repose confidence in the understanding or discretion of a madman is to gain him body and soul" Poe, pg. 185. This system is also now used in psychiatric hospitals throughout France as well, even though it is no longer used there for undisclosed reasons. In spite of the narrator's curiosity that there is not other way to cure mania than the soothing system, Maillard does not tell him what new system has replaced the "soothing system," choosing instead to invite him to dinner later that evening at six o'clock. Afterwards, he shall reveal everything. Thus, the narrator eagerly accepts this invitation.

Later that evening, the narrator joins Monsieur Maillard and about thirty of his friends in the dining room of the asylum and admires their expensive clothes and jewelry. However, some guests are dressed with too much of this finery, noting that it is not consistent with current fashion trends in Paris, attributing this to the fact that these people are from the country and are a "peculiarly eccentric people, with a vast number of antiquated notions" for this reason. Also present is the woman whom he had first seen upon entering the asylum, Maillard's niece, "but my surprise was great to see her wearing a hoop and farthingale, with high-heeled shoes, and a dirty cap of Brussels lace, so much too large for her that it gave her face a ridiculously diminutive expression. When I had first seen her, she was attired, most becomingly, in deep mourning" Poe, pg. 187. As a doctor himself, the narrator is slightly disturbed to see such a dramatic transformation in this woman's appearance, since she once appeared to have a lot of eloquence in her demeanor, but now she looks rather silly because of the old-fashioned way she is dressed, with a dress made in a style that went out of fashion over one-hundred years before and a cap that is too big for her head.

Even the dining room is rather ugly with no carpet, no curtains on the windows, and the shutters were barred shut to allow no view of the outside. There was far too much food served as well, and most of it was meat. Wax candles covered the table everywhere, and a group of musicians played nearby on "fiddles, fifes, trombones, and a drum" although they are not very talented; in fact, their songs really bother the narrator throughout his meal. In spite of this, however, he pretends to be having a wonderful time, seated to the right of Monsieur Maillard, noting that his strange companions do seem to be well-educated. They all begin to discuss various patients at the asylum, and unlike the narrator's acquaintance who refused to enter the asylum with him because of his fears, these people embrace the topic of lunacy. One man talks about a patient that thought he was a teapot and polished himself every day; another man excitedly adds that another patient thought he was a donkey, so the asylum staff insisted that he only eat thistles like a donkey as a result and liked to kick his legs as donkeys do. Mademoiselle Laplace cuts in, asking this man, Monsieur De Kock, to stop kicking his legs and to keep his feet to himself. De Kock then kisses the hand of Laplace and they toast their wine together after Maillard reprimands them both for fighting with each other.

Next, Maillard orders that "veal a la St. Menehoult" be brought to the narrator, although it looks like a large monster has been killed and cooked on the plate, but Maillard assures him that it is merely a young calf roasted with an apple in its mouth. Disgusted, the narrator decides to try some rabbit but declines this also upon being told it is called "rabbit au-chat" or "rabbit from cat," adding that he will have ham instead. The guests begin talking about other patients gleefully, describing one man who thought he was a piece of cheese and wanted everyone to slice him up; another man describes a patient who thought that he was a bottle of champagne and used to pop and fizz, at which the speaker inserts his thumb into his mouth and makes a loud pop and fizzling sound to demonstrate for several minutes. Maillard is bothered, but he does not speak up about this rude behavior. Yet another man interjects that one patient thought he was a grog and would make croaking sounds, demonstrating such sounds for everyone at the dinner table. Another guest reminds them of a patient that thought he was a piece of chewing tobacco, and another thought he was a pumpkin, and another thought he had

two heads. Another guest describes a patient who thought he was a spinning top, or teetotum, and liked to spin around, at which the guest prepares to demonstrate before being interrupted by another table guest who whispers into his ear.

An old lady describes a patient named Madame Joyeuse, who thought she was a rooster, demonstrating for everyone the crowing this patient would make, "cock-a-doodle-de-doo-doo-doo-doo-o-o-o-o-o-o" adding that this patient's behavior was "delicious." Maillard reprimands her, stating that she will leave the table if she can't behave appropriately. The young woman from the parlor in the Brussels cap, whose name is Eugenie Salsafette then describes a female patient of the same name who loved to take off her clothes all of the time and be naked, at which SHE starts taking off her clothes. The guests manage to restrain her from accomplishing this deed, however, while a series of loud yells from somewhere in the building fills the dining room. The guests become very pale, and the narrator observes how irrational this seems considering that these people are supposed to be sane. The yells fade away after a fourth time, and Maillard calmly replies that he is "used to these things," since it is merely from the lunatics at that hospital, whenever they are trying to escape. The narrator uses this as an opportunity to find out about the new system employed there, having replaced the "soothing system."

Maillard reveals that they only have about ten patients at that time, adding that they used to have about twenty-seven patients, but now things are very different. When some guests add that things have indeed changed a lot, Maillard tells them to hold their tongues, meaning to stop talking, at which one guest stuck out her tongue and held onto it with her fingers. The narrator inquires about Madame Joyeuse and her crowing, curious if she is a lunatic after all; Maillard insists that she is as "sane as myself." Suspicious that everyone is so strange, the narrator asks about the other guests, at which he replies that they are all his friends. Monsieur Maillard then mentions that they have started to use the system of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether, two famous people although the narrator, an educated man and doctor, has never heard of such a system or such people. Maillard is stunned that he hasn't heard of these two men, throwing his hands into the air with surprise, adding that they should all have a toast of wine together, changing the subject of conversation.

More time passes, and the narrator and Maillard drink several bottles of wine. The noise from guests and the horrible music fills the room, and Maillard has to scream his words aloud to the narrator to be heard. The narrator asks what problems the "soothing system" had, at which Maillard replies that it was too dangerous to allow the lunatics to walk around without any confinement because they were very sneaky, adding a deep understanding of what thoughts go through the mind of a lunatic, "His cunning...is proverbial and great. If he has a project in view, he conceals his design with a marvelous wisdom; and the dexterity with which he counterfeits sanity presents, to the metaphysician [psychiatrist], one of the most singular problems in the study of mind. When a madman appears *thoroughly* sane, indeed, it is high time to put him in a straitjacket" Poe, pg. 196-7. He explains that lunatics are very intelligent, and they can easily conceal their insanity from doctors, and as a result it is difficult to determine who is really sane or insane after all. Maillard supports this statement with an example, that

the patients there at the asylum once behaved remarkably well when they had the "soothing system," until one day they rebelled suddenly against their doctors, tying them up and imprisoning them in the very cells that had once held these patients.

Amazed, the narrator adds that he had never heard of such an event happening before, at which Maillard proudly describes how one patient led the uprising who wanted to create a "lunatic government" at the asylum, with the support of all the other patients, where they would be in charge of everything. He adds that the imprisoned keepers were treated fairly well. The narrator replies that surely these doctors must have taken over the asylum once again afterwards, to which Monsieur Maillard states that he is wrong, because the lunatic in charge was too intelligent, admitting no visitors there except for one "stupid-looking gentleman" who posed no harm. Curious, the narrator asks how long this went on for, hearing that they took over the asylum a month before. He describes the "system of Tarr and Fether" as being delicious but is interrupted by a series of screams and yells, at which Maillard calmly states that the lunatics have escaped, becoming very pale. The room shakes as people outside smash the door and shutters with sledgehammers; Maillard hides down on the floor, while the intoxicated orchestra starts playing "Yankee Doodle" on their instruments.

The guests are totally out of control, as one man spins around the room like a top and knocks everyone else down, while another man makes champagne popping sounds, while another man eagerly croaks like a frog, and another makes donkey sounds. Madame Joyeuse stands in the corner, crowing like a rooster. The narrator feels sorry for her, because her facial expression reveals that she is pouring her heart and soul into crowing, as if it is a matter of life and death. Suddenly, all of the windows are smashed in and in jumped a bunch of scary creatures that look like black chimpanzees from Cape of Good Hope, attacking everyone in the room, including the narrator. Hiding beneath the couch, he made sense of what was happening. Monsieur Maillard had once controlled the asylum a couple of years ago, but he had since gone insane and became a patient himself; the narrator's traveling companion did not know this because he had not seen Maillard for a couple of years anyway. The real doctors and keepers at the asylum had been attacked by the patients about a month ago, led by Maillard, and then they were tarred and feathered and locked up in underground cells.

There they remained for the whole time, unable to walk about freely in the tradition of the "soothing system" and fed only bread. Water was pumped on them daily as well. Eventually, one of these people escaped through the sewer, releasing the others, and they regained control of the asylum on that very evening that the narrator was Maillard's guest. Since this time, the narrator adds that the "soothing system" is now used at the asylum once again, adding that Maillard's "system of Tarr and Fether" was simple enough and prevented anyone from causing any trouble. Indeed, this system was merely to tarr and feather patients, keeping them confined. The "soothing system," as Maillard can no doubt attest to, gives many opportunities for lunatics to misbehave because they are allowed to wander freely. The narrator concludes with a statement that he has searched everywhere for the writings of "Doctor Tarr" or "Professor Fether," but he has failed to discover any references to these men anywhere. Tarr and Fether are fictional figures created by Monsieur Maillard, in an attempt to make his own primitive

system of tarring and feathering people appear as if it is the result of expert discussion and research. Since the narrator does not seem to understand this connection, choosing instead to go vainly searching for these men's research in bookstores and academic libraries, Monsieur Maillard's subtle references to the narrator as a "stupid-looking gentleman" are hardly the rantings of a madman.

# Commentary

Initially published in the pages of Philadelphia' *Graham's Magazine* during November of 1845, Poe hoped to include "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether" in a volume of tales to be published soon after, but this book never emerged from the planning stages. At this time, Poe was residing in New York City with his wife Virginia, whose health continued to deteriorate due to her tuberculosis, and Edgar worked as an editor at *The Evening Mirror* and later, *The Broadway Journal*. The story itself is filled less with details of a personal significance, and serves instead as a humorous satire of various historical and social trends of his time. Although simplistic in nature, the story holds a greater significance due to the underlying message this rare change from Poe's usual morbidity and horror sends forth.

First to note is the one anachronism that emerges in the story, that in this supposedly French setting for the tale, the musicians choose to play the American tune "Yankee Doodle" upon being invaded by the escaped patients. In reflecting also upon the polarization that occurs as well, between the urban elites of Paris, from which the narrator comes, and the old-fashioned ways of dressing and eccentricities of those in this place in the "extreme southern province of France," which is extremely rural, the immediate parallel to America should be clear. Poe is making fun of the elitist North as compared to the old-fashioned Southerners in America, thus explaining the musicians' music, as they frantically play to calm the invaders down. Being from the South himself, it should thus be clear why the urbanite narrator is the subject of much mockery, because he fails to understand the reality that there is no Doctor Tarr or Professor Fether; Poe is subtly attacking the arrogance of many northerners in their perceptions of southerners. Residing in New York City in the North at this time, the differences in outlook and demeanor were all too clear, being himself a southern gentleman raised in Virginia.

Another social trend that emerges is the topic of slavery, that an inferior breed of people, such as the lunatics, can rise up and overthrow the hospital administrators would no doubt remind many readers of the same role reversal between slaves and their masters. Poe may be exploiting the horror and outrage felt by slave owners at the sheer thought that they could be overthrown by their slaves, while at the same time he suggests that those that are inferior are not so different than their captors; in this instance, the doctor-narrator holds less intelligence than the lunatics whom he so disdains. The issue of race relations was also raised in "The Gold-Bug," where the negro Jupiter is seen simultaneously as a figure of mockery and congeniality. Whatever Poe's intentions, the increasing importance of slaves, race, and the southern way of life in this pre-Civil War era are evident through "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," among others. Also noteworthy is that the escaped keepers appear to be "black" because of all the tar that covers their bodies, and the stupid narrator wonders if these are monkeys from the "Cape of Good Hope," which is at the southernmost tip of Africa, the continent from which the early slaves in America had originated. Once again, North and South come into play, as does the color of one's skin. These are engaging themes that should be explored with greater depth and research.

Finally, one must note the more personal nature of this satire. The writing style and dialogue utilized in this tale mirror that contained in British author Charles Dickens' *American Notes* exactly. Dickens holds conversations with people at the asylum he visits, much as Poe relates the narrator's visit to the "Maison de Sante" as holding a dialogue with guests at the dinner table. Dickens' voyage to America occurred in 1842 and the collection of observations was published shortly thereafter, just three years before Poe published his own tale satirizing the tale of Dickens. However, in "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," the narrator is a subject of mockery due to his stupidity. To understand the reasons for mocking Dickens, one must recall that Poe actually met with Charles Dickens during this very visit to America when he had visited the "Insane Hospital" in Boston, followed by another in Hartford, CT. Dickens had promised to help get Poe's work published in England, as Edgar no doubt sought to extend his fame and popularity elsewhere beyond America's shores.

However, nothing came of this, and Dickens failed to give the aid he had once promised to Poe. This tale could thus be perceived as retaliatory, mocking Dickens by contorting his own experiences, criticizing both the northern elite as and his old acquaintance Mr. Dickens. In Chapter Five of *American Notes*, Dickens even says to a mental patient "What a delicious country you have about these lodgings of yours!" mirroring the same adjective utilized here in Poe's tale. Maillard uses the word "delicious" to refer to the "system of Tarr and Fether," and Joyeuse also calls the crowing patient "delicious." These similarities thus bear a close resemblance to Dickens' *American Notes*.

Note also that an alternate interpretation by Richard Benton ("The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether": Dickens or Willis? *Poe Newsletter*, vol. I, No. 1. April 1968, pp. 7-9.) proposes that Poe's satire is directed instead at Boston-born poet and literary critic Nathaniel Parker Willis, who visited a mental hospital in 1833 and later wrote about it in his obscure short story, "The Madhouse of Palermo." Poe had already admittedly mocked Willis in "The Duc De L'Omlette" (1832) and "Lionizing" (1835), because Willis had criticized Edgar Allan Poe's work during the year 1829 in the *American Monthly Magazine* that he edited at the time. Benton dismisses the ten year gap between the showdown with Willis and the publication of "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether" by merely assuming that Poe had in fact written the story soon after Willis' tour of a mental hospital at Palermo, Sicily in 1833 but had never even bothered to publish it. He assumes that the later release of Dickens' *American Notes* and its description of Dickens' visit to a psychiatric hospital in 1842 suddenly reminded Poe of this earlier story, and he decided finally to publish it in *Graham's Magazine* after letting the tale simply lie around, forgotten for over ten years.

This "soothing system" that is the topic of much discussion in Poe's tale is factual as well, having been instituted in the very same "Insane Hospital" at Boston that Charles Dickens visited during his time in America, strengthening the argument even further that this tale is an attack upon this British author. The soothing system was called the system of "Moral Treatment," which did not punish patients but instead provided moral instruction, as its name suggests. Poe also befriended a celebrated gentleman named Dr. Pliny Earle, who facilitated the transition from the old system of incarceration in asylums, to the newer system in America, working in Frankford, Pennsylvania, and later

in Bloomingdale, New York. Earle also helped to found the organization that would later become the "American Psychiatric Association." Having resided in both states, Poe corresponded with this man and was aware of the "soothing system," explaining its central role to this story. Although set in France, the implication of the story is that it refers to happenings in America; the distant locale was chosen to provide creative distance, to distance history from artistry, and to separate reality from the imagination. Here, Edgar Allan Poe has brilliantly molded together a story wrought with humor, seemingly insignificant and simplistic in nature, yet as with all of Poe's stories there is always more than meets the eye. Poe's portrayal of the oblivious and stupid narrator who takes things at face value may well be a message to the reader, who is in many ways a visitor to Poe's universe as much as the narrator is to that of Monsieur Maillard.

# The Man That Was Used Up

Immediately following the title is the subtitle, "A Tale of the Late Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign, referring to wars against two different Native American tribes. An epigraph from French playwright Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* reads "Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux, et fondez vous en eau!/La moitie de ma vie a mis l'autre au tombeau," or "Cry, cry, my eyes, and dissolve yourselves with tears!/The one half of my life has sent the other half to the grave." These words suggest that "The Man That was Used Up" could be about a warrior dying, since a warrior is the central figure in *Le Cid* Next, yet another unnamed narrator describes his admiration for a great war hero named Brevet Brigadier-General John A.B.C. Smith, whom everybody seems to know about. He admits that he is frustrated because he thinks that there is something unusual about Smith, but he does not know what exactly this is.

The narrator embarks on a detailed description of Smith's entire appearance, "[N[othing could be more richly flowing, or possess a brighter gloss [than his head of hair]. It was of a jetty black; which was also the color...of his unimaginable whiskers...it is not too much to say that they were the handsomest pair of whiskers under the sun...Here were the most entirely even, and the most brilliantly white of all conceivable teeth. From between them, upon every proper occasion, issued a voice of surpassing clearness, melody, and strength...[His eyes] were of a deep hazel exceedingly large and lustrous" Poe, pg. 202. The Brigadier-General is very handsome, in addition to be a public hero for his role in fighting against the savage Bugaboo and Kickapoo Native American tribes. More details are revealed about the beauty of Smith's chest, legs, and frame, comparing his shape to that of a perfectly sculpted work of art; the narrator even wishes that a sculptor friend could have seen Smith could have seen such perfection in the form of a living breathing human being. However, he adds that in spite of these remarkable traits, there is something that confuses him about Smith's appearance. These perfect details are too good to be true, and the narrator puzzles over what exactly it is that is bothering him about this veteran soldier.

Accompanying a friend to visit the Brevet Brigadier-General John A.B.C. Smith, the narrator says that Smith was admired by women because of his great courage, as he was a very remarkable man. His friend mentions again the battle between the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indian tribes in the deep South, where Smith emerged victorious. Smith emerges from his room and shakes the friend's hand and that of the narrator, who admires the man's melodious voice. John Smith and the narrator fall into a deep discussion about the current state of war in the world, as the decorated soldier applauds the growth of technology and "mechanical invention." He explains that "There is nothing at all like it...we are a wonderful people, and live in a wonderful age. Parachutes and railroads -- man-traps and spring guns! Our steamboats are upon every sea...And who shall calculate the immense influence upon social life -- upon arts -- upon commerce -- upon literature -- which will be the immediate result of electromagnetics! The most wonderful...Mr. -- Thompson, I believe...mechanical contrivances are daily springing up like mushrooms" Poe, pg. 204, also praising the invention of the Nassau balloon as yet another example of modern technology. The narrator declares later that "Thompson" is

not his name at all but is unconcerned; he is even more interested to learn why the Brigadier-General Smith seems to have some hidden secret about his personality.

Thus, the narrator sets out on a quest for information leading to the solution of this mystery. He asks all of his friends about Smith and especially about his battles with the Bugaboo and Kickapoo tribes. First he asks his friend Miss Tabitha T. who knows all of the gossip, while they are in church together one Sunday. The woman says that "This is a wonderfully inventive age!" adding that Smith is a brave man who fought like a true hero, interrupted when saying "he's the man--" because Reverend Doctor Drummummupp begins his sermon about the brevity of human life and how man "cometh up and is cut down like a flower." The conversation with Tabitha ends, out of respect for the church. During the following evening at the Rantipole Theater, he seeks out two other women during a showing of Shakespeare's *Othello* while the actor Climax is performing the role of Iago. Miss Arabella and Miranda Cognoscenti banter back and forth about Smith when asked by the narrator, as Miranda marvels at his handsome body, while together they recall how savage the Bugaboos had been, declaring "we live in a wonderfully inventive age," just as Tabitha had done. Now again, they are interrupted by the performance on the stage as Climax screams his lines loudly, ending the narrator's conversation.

Immediately afterwards, the narrator goes behind the scenes and soon beats up Climax because he interrupted his conversation. Later that evening he attends <MIN40's soiree, where he asks everyone about Smith once again while they are playing whist. As usual, Kathleen praises Smith's good looks, noting that this "is the age of invention," and is about to say "he's the man --" when there is yet another interruption. This time, a female guest loudly interjects that she must know more about Captain Mann, assuming that he is the topic of conversation. Kathleen easily changes the subject and starts talking about Captain Mann instead, Smith having been forgotten. Frustrated, the narrator walks around the house in search of more information, asking Mrs. Pirouette, who replies that "this is a wonderful age of invention" and ends again with "he's the man --" only to be interrupted by another woman who exclaims aloud something about Man-Fred, insisting she knows the correct title of Lord Byron's poem, and that it is not Man-Friday as another woman insists and calls the narrator over to aid in her defense. However, although the true title is "Manfred," the irritated narrator insists that it is "Man-Friday," just as he had physically thrashed Climax when interrupted during the performance of *Othello*.

When he returns to speak with Mrs. Pirouette, she has of course disappeared. Finally, he asks Mr. Theodore Sinivate, knowing this man to be both focused and informed. Yet Sinivate exclaims again that it is a "wonderfully inventive age" and tries to change the subject by mentioning Captain Mann; the incensed narrator declares "Captain Mann be damned!" and demands to know more about Brigadier-General Smith. Sinivate pauses upon saying "he's the ma-a-an --" and the narrator asks if he is "the man in the mask," but his companion says no, nor is he the "man in the mo-o-on," at which the narrator rushes out of the house, insulted that Sinivate did not give a direct answer to his question, vowing to get revenge upon him as well. He feels as if everyone else knows about some secret, but they refuse to reveal it to him. The more that he seeks an

answer, the more elusive the truth that he craves seems to become. At last, the narrator decides to visit Smith and demand to hear the truth from him directly, rather than darting around with crowds of people who annoy him.

Upon entering the home of the Brevet Brigadier-General John A.B.C. Smith that next morning, a Negro servant declares that Smith is getting dressed but allows entry when the narrator insists that he is there on urgent business. The two go into Smith's bedroom, where Smith is no where to be immediately seen. A "large and exceedingly odd-looking bundle of something" was lying on the floor, and the narrator kicks it away because he has become so irritable. An odd voice suddenly speaks up from the bundle that the narrator is very rude, as the bundle asks for its leg to be put on from a servant named Pompey, at which a fully clothed leg is screwed onto the bundle. This bundle is the Brigadier-General Smith, and he defends his disordered appearance by saying simply that the Bugaboo and Kickapoo tribes really brutalized him during battle, as an arm is screwed into his body by Pompey. Next a chest and shoulders are attached to his body, while Smith names the manufacturers of these creations; a wig is brought forth, as are a set of fake teeth because a Bugaboo Indian smashed out all of his teeth with the bottom end of a rifle, as he cries aloud to Pompey "Now, you nigger, my teeth!" An eye is then screwed into his head as well, and the narrator marvels at what an extraordinary transformation has just taken place before his very eyes.

One of the few things that does not now resemble the Brigadier-General Smith is the odd-sounding voice, until Smith asks for his "palate," or for the roof of his mouth to be put in. When this object is thrust into Smith's mouth, his entire facial structure changes as does the tone and quality of his voice. Fully restored, he explains "'[Damn] the vagabonds! they not only knocked in the roof of my mouth, but took the trouble to cut off at least seven eighths of my tongue. There isn't Bonfanti's equal, however, in America, for really good articles of this description. I can recommend you to him with confidence,' [here the General bowed] 'and assure you that I have the greatest pleasure in so doing'" Poe, pg. 211. Soon after observing these events, the narrator says good-bye to the famous and decorated Brevet Brigadier-General John A.B.C. Smith, since he has at last solved the riddle that has irked him for so long, which everyone had avoided discussing with him because it no doubt made them nauseous to think of what he really looked like. Smith is not the man in the moon or Captain Mann or Manfred, but he is instead "the man that was used up," with nothing left of himself. The handsome personal appearance that he had once admired in Smith is all fake, sacrificed so many years ago when he had fought such heroic battles in the American wilderness. In return for these memories of greatness, Smith is now reduced to live his life inside of an elaborate costume. As the narrator had once guessed correctly to Sinivate, Smith truly is the man in the mask.

# Commentary

"The Man That Was Used Up" was first published in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in August of 1839, a month before the publication of his renowned "The Fall of the House of Usher," written in a very different style. While the story of Roderick Usher is of a highly personal nature in describing his own pining for female affection, this tale of Brigadier-General Smith is intended to be a political satire. It functions similarly to "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," except that the focus of ridicule is directed not at Charles Dickens. To understand the exact context of this tale, one must first recall the political situation in America at the time that this story was written.

In 1839, the United States Presidency and White House were controlled by Martin Van Buren, who had been hand-picked by the former general and seventh President of the United States of America, Andrew Jackson. A Democrat and celebrated war hero himself during the War of 1812, Jackson had also waged many battles in the South against Native American tribes throughout Florida, Mississippi, and Tennessee before his presidential administration of 1829-1837. Following this, he hand-picked New Yorker Martin Van Buren as his successor, who won the election of 1836. Although he did not receive enough votes to officially become Vice-President, Richard M. Johnson was elected to that post by the Senate in accordance with constitutional law anyway. Johnson, too, was a famous military veteran, and he had incurred serious injuries while fighting against British and Native American troops at the Battle of the Thames in Thamesville, Ontario on October 5, 1813.

These injuries led to his great success in politics, especially since he had reportedly killed the great Shawnee Chief Tecumseh at the Thames. Although he had fought side-by-side with retired General William Henry Harrison, a Whig, and political enemy of Andrew Jackson, Richard Johnson nevertheless chose to support Andrew Jackson's political agenda. This support helped him to attain his position as Vice-President under Van Buren. The two filled this office before losing the election of 1840, when Whig nominee William Henry Harrison was elected to become the ninth President of the United States. Unfortunately, Harrison died a month into his tenure, and Vice President John Tyler served out the rest of his presidency, until his term ended in 1845. It is also good to note that Edgar Allan Poe attempted to get a job as a Customs employee with the support of President Tyler, and later he was invited to the White House in March of 1843, to negotiate plans for the government to sponsor his own literary magazine. However, Poe was intoxicated on this occasion and made an embarrassment of himself, ruining any hope of securing government support for his writing.

One final piece of information that should make "The Man That Was Used Up" make more sense, is that, although the Bugaboo tribe is fictitious, the Kickapoo Indians were native to northeastern Texas. Indeed, it was there that the Kickapoo, Cherokee, and Shawnee tribes banded together to wage the Cherokee War of 1839 against the United States military, which was ongoing throughout the spring and summer of 1839 before this tale was published in August. This reveals that the theme of fighting Native Americans was immediate and important to Poe's audience, and reading about a United

States soldier who survived many battles against these tribes such as John Smith, would be a topic of some interest. Furthermore, given that Poe attempted to gain political support from Tyler in 1843, a Whig, may give some clue as to Poe's political allegiances, as Tyler and Harrison had been intense nemeses of the Jacksonian crowd that had included Van Buren and, more importantly, Vice-President Richard Mentor Johnson. It is plausible then that this satire is directed at not only Andrew Jackson himself, renowned for his own fierce fights with Florida's Seminole tribes, but moreover at Richard Johnson who was in office from 1837-1841, a figure of great amusement when he appeared in public upon crutches and tied up in bandages.

It was he who had supposedly slain Shawnee Chief Tecumseh in 1813, and it was from this experience during the War of 1812 when the British allied themselves with Native American tribes, and not necessarily due to his more contemporary accomplishments, that he had attained most of his fame, just as Brigadier-General Smith is defined by his famous battle with the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indians. Note also that in 1839, the Kickapoo and the Shawnee were allied together in Texas during the Cherokee War. That the two are associated directs attention towards Richard Johnson, since Tecumseh was a Shawnee. The deeper implication of this association between Smith and Johnson is that Poe criticizes the Jacksonian crowd. Jackson and Johnson are great war heroes, but they are men that are used up with nothing more to give, going so far as to suggest perhaps that Johnson is useless as a Vice-President. Poe's later support of the administration of John Tyler also suggests that he may be against these Jacksonian Democrats, who were Tyler and Harrison's political rivals.

In many ways, Poe comments on the fact that Johnson is defined by his past victories, rather than by his present successes, because nobody in "The Man That Was Used Up" wants to think of Smith as he is now. Instead they recall his bravery during the Indian Wars, because his wretched appearance now sickens them. In parallel, Edgar Allan Poe comments on Johnson's popularity as well, that his grotesque appearance is not something that people like to talk about, but instead they are polite and courteous due to his past heroism. This generation of nineteenth century readers has long since died out, so it will never be revealed what their true perceptions were of Johnson, especially if, as with Brigadier-General John A.B.C. Smith, it was a topic that nobody liked to discuss. This tale conveys that feeling, however, and the reader can share in the frustrations of Poe's narrator in perhaps not knowing exactly what mystery lies behind "The Man That Was Used Up." More obvious in revealing Edgar Allan's political sentiments is that he published some of his work, such as "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," in *The American Whig Review*, a periodical directed at a Whig audience. Poe wouldn't have done this, if he had shared views of the Democrats, who were the Whigs' political rivals. This revelation further supports the argument that Poe is mocking the Jacksonian Democrats in this humorous tale.

A few interesting items of note that deviate from historical trends refer to literature. Climax performs a scene from *Othello*, a play about a soldier seeking to marry the king's daughter that ends in his death. Additionally, there is mention of Lord Byron's poem, "Manfred," which functions as a long incantation pronounced over the body of a dead soldier. The persistent theme is that of fallen warriors yet again, implying that even

though Smith is able to function with the aid of his many devices, he is essentially dead to the world, a fallen hero much like Othello or Manfred; even *Le Cid* stars a Spanish warrior. Indeed, that opening epigraph from Pierre Corneille effectively reiterates this idea. The one half of a man being dead already has caused the other half to die as well, because of the loss of dignity that accompanies it, as Smith is reduced to a "large bundle" that the narrator kicks out of his way. Being only half the man that he was once, Smith is no longer a man at all.

# The Balloon-Hoax

A newspaper caption announces "Astounding News by Express, via Norfolk!--The Atlantic Crossed in Three Days! Signal Triumph of Mr. Monck Mason's Flying Machine--Arrival at Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, S.C., of Mr. Mason, Mr. Robert Holland, Mr. Henson, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, and four others, in the Steering Balloon, "Victoria," after a Passage of Seventy-Five Hours from Land to Land! Full Particulars of the Voyage!" Poe, pg. 212. Following this is an explanation directly from Poe that these headlines had first appeared in the *New York Sun* and had excited all of the "quidnuncs," or busybodies in New York before they had received verification from Charleston that the story was not true at all. He adds that the mad rush of people to buy the newspaper was beyond description, implying that this was amusing to him. Finally, he states with great pride that even if a balloon named "Victoria" did not actually cross the Atlantic Ocean as the article initially reported, there is not a single flaw in his story to prove otherwise, since it was so convincingly written due to Poe's literary talents.

The full text of the original article thus follows. The article excitedly declares that "The air...has been subdued by science" and reiterates the details in the caption, that the Atlantic has been crossed in only seventy-five hours, adding that this information comes from a reporter down in Charleston named Mr. Forsyth. The trip began at 11 o'clock in the morning on April 6th in Great Britain and ended at two o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday the 9th of April on Sullivan's Island in South Carolina. In addition to famous aeronauts Monck Mason, Holland, and Mr. Henson, there is the famous authors of Jack Sheppard, Harrison Ainsworth, Sir Everard Bringhurst, a nephew of Lord Bentinck named Mr. Osborne, and two sailors from Woolwich, England. The text of the remainder of this article come from the following selections taken from the detailed diaries of Mason and Ainsworth.

First of all, the actual construction of the balloon is explained as being the culmination of many scientists' ideas. Henson and another inventor named Sir George Cayley had both tried to create effective flying machines capable of traveling long distances and had failed prior to this balloon flight; part of Cayley's error was in using propellers to move a hang glider-type object forward, which resulted in the machine crashing into the ground. The propellers did little to move it ahead; modifying this plan, Cayley attached propellers to a balloon instead, displaying it at the Polytechnic Institution in London. However, once tested, this balloon was not able to rise either, because of the propellers. Monck Mason then modified this design, adding an Archimedean screw so that the gas levels could be increased accordingly, allowing for the balloon to rise without depending upon these propellers; Mason displayed his first functioning model at Willis's Rooms, and then to the Adelaide Gallery. The balloon was ellipsical in shape, with a dangling wicker basket for people to ride in. Extremely vivid details are provided of the machine's appearance, from the screw that controls the gas flow to the rudder that steers the craft. Mathematical figures of exact measurements and weights are mentioned as well.

At the Adelaide Gallery, this machine did not interest many people, however, because it seemed so primitive compared to the complicated plane-like "Aerial Steam Carriage"

design of Mr. William Henson. Regardless, Mason's machine flew admirably well and passed all of his initial tests; he thus planned an expedition over to Europe, tracing the route laid out by the original Nassau balloon in 1837. He chose Osborne and Bringhurst because they are scientists reportedly, and Osborne offered to build the full size version of this balloon on his property in North Wales called the Wheal-Vor House secretly, so that nobody will hear about their invention. This fact also suggests why nobody had heard about this balloon before the article was printed in *The New York Sun*, because of Osborne's desire for secrecy. Mason also employs Holland and Henson to assist in this operation, and Henson brings along his friend, the author Ainsworth to join them as well. The addition of two sailors remains unexplained, that it is not at all clear how exactly they became a part of this expedition. The article acknowledges the contributions of scientist Charles Green, whose research has aided these men in properly inflating the balloon with air.

The inflation process is also well-illustrated, "The balloon is composed of silk, varnished with the liquid gun caoutchouc. It is of vast dimensions, containing more than 40,000 cubic feet of gas; but as coal gas was employed in place of the more expensive and inconvenient hydrogen, the supporting power of the machine, when fully inflated, and immediately after inflation, is not more than about 2500 pounds. The coal gas is not only much less costly, but is easily procured and managed" Poe, pg. 216. To control the balloon's course, the men add weighted bags called ballasts, allowing for them to drop these weights out of the balloon when it needs to go higher in conjunction with more gas being released into the balloon. This can occur if moisture builds up on the balloon's outside and makes it heavier than usual, for example. Another tool in controlling the balloon's altitude is a guide rope invented by Charles Green, that drags along the ground behind the balloon as it floats, or that floats across the water using buoys. When the balloon is too low, they pull the rope up to make it rise with less drag beneath it, and when the balloon is too high, they release more of the rope down to the earth to cause it to sink. This way, gas stores are conserved without having to constantly add or take away their limited supplies of coal gas to alter the balloon's height. After the balloon is inflated at Osborne's house in northern Wales, the men climb aboard on the 6th of April and depart at eleven o'clock in the morning.

The full text of Mason and Ainsworth's journal of their three day voyage is included next, as the balloon loaded with those eight men (with the two seamen having mysteriously appeared) heads eastward towards the British Channel bordering the European mainland. The balloon rises much more easily than they had thought, and even when all of the guide rope was released, the balloon continues to rise up to an altitude of about three miles after ten minutes, according to the barometer they have brought along. The view around them is unspeakably beautiful, although the balloon, guided by wind currents, starts to move towards the southeast, where they soon see the Bristol Channel laying beneath them, and then behind them as they are pushed out over the Atlantic Ocean. Concerned that they are being carried off course, the men then try to steer the rudder and use the propeller to turn the balloon around. This attempt appears to work at first, and they write a quick note describing their mission, placing it into a bottle and toss it into the ocean, thinking that they will be leaving the Atlantic Ocean behind them. Soon after, the propeller comes apart, and their course is turned westward

once again at a speed of about sixty miles per hour. Although they manage to fix this problem, the men by this time can already see Ireland's Cape Clear to the north as they speed out of sight from land.

Ainsworth suddenly suggests that they should ride these fierce wind currents, rather than fighting against them, to see if they can fly to North America. The other men think this is a great idea, except for the seamen whose fears are nullified by the others' enthusiasm. They lighten the load by throwing out some ballasts and steer the rudder directly westward, raising the guide rope as well away from the ocean. With this combination of actions, the balloon sped up quickly with the remaining rope sticking straight out behind them. Below, many ships are sailing upon the Atlantic Ocean, and some fire their guns in salute to this balloon they can see speeding across the sky above them, and this revelry continues until night falls and the balloon travels in darkness. Ainsworth then adds his own postscript to the journal entry, "The waters give up no voice to the heavens. The immense flaming ocean writhes and is tortured uncomplainingly. The mountainous surges suggest the idea of innumerable dumb gigantic fiends struggling in impotent agony. In a night such as is this to me, a man *lives*--lives a whole century of ordinary life -- nor would I forego this rapturous delight for that of a whole century of ordinary existence" Poe, pg. 222. Once again, the details are vivid and extreme, describing the compassion that this one man feels as he floats far above the Earth.

Mason's journal entry for Sunday the 7th day of April adds that the propeller has been very helpful in speeding and steering them along with the wind, and the balloon is now at a height of about five miles above the sea, confident that they will make it to North America. He refers to the Atlantic as "this small pond," because they feel so much more stronger than the sea as they soar above, uninhibited and free. Ainsworth adds that he is stunned to have not experienced any difficulty at breathing even though they are at an altitude as high as Mount Cotopaxi. The sky appears to be black, and they can see the stars even though it is daytime, because their balloon is so high in th air, and the sea below them appears to be concave, or curving inward. Poe then lapses into an elaborate mathematical explanation in an editor's note, basically attributing this distorted perception to be the result of the balloon's extreme height in the air. On the third and final day of the trip, Monday April 8th, Mason writes that their propeller has come undone yet again, and now they are at the mercy of the wind. Also they threw more message bottles down to ships in the sea far below. Ainsworth writes that he is exhausted and has to go to sleep, since he has not done so for two whole days. Finally, Mason's entry for one o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday the seventh of April declares that South Carolina is within their sight, and they have obtained the goal of reaching North America from Great Britain.

Mr. Forsyth has included the final details of the landing, reported verbally to him by Ainsworth. Osborne apparently recognized Sullivan's Island and declared that they should land the balloon there, near Fort Moultrie. When the balloon floated over the bach, which showed lots of exposed sand due to the low tide, they dropped a hook to the earth, which stopped the balloon's movement immediately. Residents ran forth to meet the balloon, as the occupants deflated the balloon and descended from it. The

current plans of these eight adventurers is not yet known, but the article promises to report these details within a couple days. It ends by applauding this journey once again, "This is unquestionably the most stupendous, the most interesting, and the most important undertaking ever accomplished or even attempted by man. What magnificent events may ensue, it would be useless now to think of determining" Poe, pg. 225. With the ending of this tale, one may recall again Poe's initial smugness at how easily everyone had believed the events of this story to be facts. Underpinning these closing lines, "What magnificent events may ensue..." one can sense the voice of sarcasm and mockery that occasionally characterizes Poe's writing. Indeed, it was the *New York Sun* that had wanted to outdo its competing newspapers with this "breaking news," but in the end it was Edgar Allan Poe who had beaten them all with his fictitious and infamous tale of "The Balloon-Hoax."

# Commentary

This events described in this story were published as a recount of factual events, on Saturday April 13, 1844, in *The New York Sun* as an insert in its daily edition. In need of money, Edgar Allan Poe had just moved to Greenwich Street on Manhattan Island only a few days before, on April 6, and he was in desperate need of money, since he had brought only $4.50 with him. Composing this entire tale in a short period of time, the *New York Sun* quickly purchased the article from him and sent it to the printing presses without first verifying these events with officials in Charleston, South Carolina, near the balloon's supposed landing spot. That morning, Poe himself reportedly tried to stand outside of the newspaper's offices in New York, trying to tell those people feverishly rushing to purchase copies of the periodical featuring this amazing tale, that it was merely fiction. However, few listened in those first few hours as Poe himself recollects in the opening lines of this story, added later as it was republished not as a newspaper article, but as a part of his later short story collections; he calls these people "quidnuncs (Latin for "What now?")," or busybodies, regarding them with some disdain for believing the story so willingly.

The pandemonium that broke out in the streets of New York on this day was so great, that Poe himself wrote later on that he could not even manage to purchase a copy of the newspaper for himself, because they were sold so quickly to people anxiously anticipating to read about the first transcontinental balloon flight in history. When the dust eventually settled and the *New York Sun* even published an apology on Monday, April 15th, that the information leading to the publication of that article was "erroneous." Due to the absence of lightning-fast e-mail or even telephone as a base means of communication, newspapers were in constant competition to publish current events first as quickly as possible, and it is this "rat race" that is mainly responsible for Poe's story being accepted as fact so readily. The New York *Herald* was the staunchest competitor to the *Sun*, and the Whig newspaper the New York *Tribune* had also only just emerged three years earlier, in 1841. As such, an information war was in full swing when Poe came forward with what was interpreted as a coveted secret weapon to bring more readers to the *Sun*.

It certainly accomplished this feat, according to Poe's descriptions, although the aftermath of embarrassment that followed no doubt caused more harm, as the *Sun*'s accuracy and authenticity was to be no doubt questioned thereafter. Poe's title of this story as "The Balloon-Hoax" was added later as well, for surely the words "hoax" did not appear in the *Sun*, lest everyone would have realized the truth immediately, and in addition to making a sum of money for the sale of this article, Poe also gained fame as the swindler who composed such a convincing article. Other less intentional hoaxes that would derive from Poe also included "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," to be published in New York's *The American Whig Review* a year and a half later, in December of 1845. Due to the detailed intricacies that Poe incorporates into this tale of a dying man held in a hypnotic trance for months, thus delaying his death, many readers assumed these events to be factual as well. Given that a year and a half had

passed, many of those "quidnuncs" had probably forgotten the infamous "Balloon-Hoax" that was also a product of Poe.

Another element that made "The Balloon-Hoax" so believable is its inclusion of popular figures from Poe's time. Although Osbourne appears to be fictitious, his reported uncle, Lord Bentinck was the British Colonial Governor-General of India from 1827-1835, recalling the personage of Warren Hastings, who was also Colonial Governor-General of India and played a minor role in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains." The Nassau balloon was a well-known event, as British Charles Green, British Robert Holland, and Irish Thomas Monck Mason travelled together from London, England to Weilburg, Germany on November 7-8, 1837, naming his balloon "Nassau" after the territory of which Weilburg was a part. Placing Monck and Holland as figures in his own tale increased the story's level of credibility, because these were known balloonists who had already experimented with air travel. Furthermore, William Henson was a British inventor who had designed the plans for what would later evolve into the modern airplane, and Harrison Ainsworth's novels were familiar, even to Americans, most reputedly his *Jack Sheppard* published in 1839, detailing the desperate wanderings of a fugitive from the law.

Like Osborne, the presence of the fictitious Sir Everard Bringhurst is intended merely to vary the flight crew, to prevent there from being an entire cast of celebrities, which would have cast doubt upon the story after all, depriving him of that much-needed payment from the *New York Sun*. Just as Poe mimics Dickens' writing style in "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether," a similar approach is utilized here by borrowing information from Thomas Monck Mason's very own firsthand documentation of his Nassau balloon trip, published in 1837 as an the American edition entitled *Account of the Late Aeronautical Expedition from London to Weilburg*. Poe is able to easily copy Monck's writing style and write a tale as if it were from his point of view, because he had access to other publications about a balloon trip as recorded by Mason. Mirroring the symbolic name of Monck's real balloon as "Nassau," after the German territory in which he had landed, Poe similarly dubs his balloon "Victoria," Latin for "Victory," thus reiterating the great "achievement" this represents for humanity.

In contemplating all of this information, the true discovery relies less upon balloons and more about the personal character of Edgar Allan Poe. Apparently, he did not feel guilty about purposely misinforming a newspaper and the populace of an entire city, but instead felt proud of this accomplishment, as his smug words suggest in his brief introduction. The fact that he needed money superceded all other aspects of journalistic integrity, and if such an event had occurred in these more modern times, Clever Edgar would have been slapped with a civil lawsuit that same day. However, in this instance Poe also chose the needs of his family over those of the society at large, filled with so many quidnuncs. He does not blame himself at all for the scandal that follows but instead faults everybody who bought a newspaper and those at the *New York Sun* for believing such an outrageous course of events. In fact, the first successful flight over the Atlantic Ocean by balloon would not even occur for over a century later, on August 11, 1978 when Larry Newman, Maxie Anderson, and Ben Abruzzo travelled from Pennsylvania and landed in France six days later, on August 17. Poe's endearing lesson

moreover instructs his readers once again, as in "The Man That Was Used Up," that what you see is not always what you get. Everyone had automatically taken the balloon tale at face value, without realizing that this was just a desperate attempt for this poor, starving artist to make some extra money. It worked.

# A Descent into the Maelstrom

An important epigraph from theologian Joseph Glanville opens this tale, declaring "The ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not as our ways; nor are the models that we frame in any way commensurate to the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus" Poe, pg. 226. These words suggest that the wonders of nature will play a central role in the plot that follows next. An unnamed narrator is walking on a rocky path near the sea in Norway with an old man, who declares that although his hair is white, he is in fact not very old at all. He declares that a traumatic event that happened three years ago has "broken me up body and soul," adding that he has led the narrator to that high cliff overlooking the ocean in order to share his story, telling the narrator to quickly overcome his fear of those high cliffs, because they have a perfect view of the sea, the topic of his story.

He explains that they are standing upon Mount Helseggen in Norway at approximately sixty-eight degrees latitude at The Lofoden Point. The narrator admires the scenic landscape around them, noting that there are two islands visible in front of him, one nearer than the other, "Just opposite the promontory upon whose apex we were placed, and at a distance of some five or six miles out at sea, there was visible a small, bleak-looking island; or, more properly, its position was discernible through the wilderness of surge in which it was enveloped. About two miles nearer the land, arose another of smaller size, hideously craggy and barren, and encompassed at various intervals by a cluster of dark rocks" Poe, pg. 227. The water is also rather rough and surges violently around the rocky island, as the old man explains that the islands are named Vurrgh and Moskoe, respectively. After ten minutes of patient waiting, the sea suddenly erupts into a violent explosion of water as the currents begin to spiral together around and around into an enormous whirlpool filling up the entire sea before them, around the island called "Moskoe." The water bordering the pool is angled at forty-five degrees to the surface, and the narrator grows fearful at seeing such a large and powerful phenomenon roaring louder than North America's own Niagara Falls, declaring that this must be the infamous Norwegian Maelstrom.

The narrator also notes that he has heard much of this natural wonder as documented by the Norwegian scholar Jonas Ramus. While rocky Helseggen shakes because of the ocean's force, the old man confirms this statement, adding that it is also called the "Moskoe-strom" because the island of Moskoe lies in the middle of this enormous whirlpool. The guide reveals that the water from Lofoden Point to Moskoe is safe for ships, but on the other side of Moskoe towards Vurrgh the water is too shallow for ships to sail through, and the only time that this is possible is during the short fifteen minute time period when the water of the Maelstrom is calm again, and it is only safe to cross every six hours when the waters calm down, before the waters surge into a vicious vortex once more, swallowing ships, animals, and anything in its path before spitting them out again, crushed, during that fifteen minute period of calm. Reflecting the sentiment of the opening epigraph from Glanville, the narrator marvels at how powerful this whirlpool is, that it could smash apart the strongest ship of his day "as a feather,"

inserting a quotation about the Maelstrom from *Encyclopedia Britannica* and recalling Athanasius Kircher's professed theory that this Maelstrom is the entrance to an underground network of tunnels leading to the Gulf of Bothnia or the Berents Sea.

Noting that the narrator has witnessed this phenomenon, the old man begins to tell a story about a tragic event that happened to him three years ago. He was a fisherman along with his two brothers, and they liked to catch fish near Vurrgh because they are more plentiful, in spite of the shallow waters beyond Moskoe. As a result, they had to calculate their passage through the channel very carefully, during that fifteen minute period when the Maelstrom disappeared for a short while, sailing as quickly as possible to avoid being sucked beneath the waves. When it was safe and they were several miles away, they would cast anchor near some faraway island, until they would wait for the waters to calm yet again and brave the waves where the Maelstrom once had raged at high tide. He describes a couple of close calls he and his brothers had experienced, when they had nearly gotten pulled into the Maelstrom due to bad weather or poor winds. However, his closest brush with death happened on July 18th, 18--, during a tremendous hurricane that attacked that entire region by surprise. The three men had ventured beyond Moskoe near Vurrgh at two o'clock in the afternoon and prepared to return at seven o'clock, just in time for the six hour travel loop, permitting them to cross during that high tide.

Suddenly, as the men turned back towards Lofoden Point, a huge wind swarms upon the boat, throwing it off course and tearing out both of its masts while spectacular clouds flew rapidly across the sky. The old man's younger brother died when the masts were torn off, since he had mistakenly tied himself to one of them for safety, thinking that it would prevent him from being swept overboard. The elder brother clung to the boat, and they both stare in awe as both the water and sky rage around them, even as they both react violently upon realizing that the Maelstrom is reaching full force again, with the fifteen minutes of calm having expired. They were powerless to navigate, due to the heavy winds and their dismembered boat, and even as the hurricane settled down abruptly, it is too late to avoid being pulled into the dreaded Moskoestrom, as the old man gazed at his watch to check for the time, realizing that he had forgotten to wind it! Enraged, he hurled it into the ocean as the boat drifted into those circular currents, daunted by a sudden hole in the cloudy sky revealing "the full moon with a luster that I never before knew her to wear." The ship turned sideways, with its right side overlooking the deep abyss at the center of the Maelstrom, slowly traveling in the water's currents.

Many thoughts went through the old man's mind, and his fear suddenly dissipated in the spirit of discovery that filled his body, realizing that he could boldly go where no one had gone before, and discover at long last what lies at the center of the whirlpool. This soon passed as well as the fear possessed him once more along with a renewed determination to survive. The boat spins slowly around and around for about an hour, slowly descending, while his older brother stood at the back of the ship holding onto a water cask so that he would not be swept overboard. Abruptly, he moved to where the old man was resting, clinging onto the Astrolabe ring and pried it from his fingers. Aggravated that his own brother would do this to try to save himself but understanding

that his brother had gone insane with fear of his own impending death, the old man took over his brother's place at the water cask while the boat tipped over more into the whirlpool's center, "Never shall I forgot the sensation of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference...whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony...as the rays of the full moon, from that circular rift amid the clouds which I have already described, steamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss" Poe, pg. 239.

The boat somehow managed to stay upright because of the nature in which the current was carrying it, and the old man couldn't see anything at the bottom of the abyss except for great clouds of watery mist caused from the waters crashing together far below; an enormous rainbow, inspired by the full moon's bright rays, filled the interior of the Maelstrom. As the boat traveled lower and lower, the old man observed the movement of the current and some derelict objects that were floating around them, such as a fir tree, wrecked ships, furniture, and random barrels. A startling realization flooded the old man, as he remembered that sometimes items would wash up on the shore near Lofoden undamaged, because they had hit the current at exactly the right moment so as to avoid being crushed in the Maelstrom's bottom and merely floated up to water's surface when the whirlpool calmed down again. He saw that out of the objects around him, those that are shaped like cylinders descended the most slowly; with this knowledge, he tied himself to that very water cask which his brother had abandoned, and, after vainly trying to signal to his elder brother nevertheless that he, too, should tie himself to a barrel, cut himself free from the sinking boat and lunged into the raging waters around him.

Events ended exactly as the old man had hoped, as the barrel's descent was greatly slowed due to its cylindrical shape, and an editor's note refers to Archimedes' "De Incidentibus in Fluido" for further information about this phenomenon. Moving at a much faster speed, the old man watched his boat and brother quickly descend within an hour and fall to certain destruction into the foam at the Maelstrom's bottom. Eventually, the barrel and the old man eventually began to rise as the whirlpool's calming period started to arrive at last after nearly six hours of raging, and finally he reached the ocean's surface once again, alive and well, off of the coast of Lofoden. The hurricane continued to attack, however, even after six hours, and he was pushed along in the current towards a fishing boat which rescued him from any further dangers. He knew these rescuers, as they were fellow mariners like himself, and they revealed that his hair had changed from black to white because of his extraordinarily fearful near death experience inside of the Moskoestrom. Yet they refused to believe his tale to be the truth, and the old man says that he does not expect the narrator to trust these events to be the truth, "I can scarcely expect you to put more faith in it than did the merry fisherman of Lofoden." With these words the tale ends, leaving the reader and narrator alike to formulate their own conclusions about the credibility of this old man's painful experience of not only his descent, but also his ascent from the murky depths of the Maelstrom. Now, his even greater burden is that nobody believes these events to be the truth.

# Commentary

The language in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" mirrors that of Poe's "MS Found in a Bottle," first published on October 19, 1833 in its mystical description of an enormous whirlpool, although there are subtle differences. The setting for "Descent" is near the North Pole, while that of "MS" was focused upon the South Pole; in "Descent" the endangered figure manages to escape after feeling that same wonder and excitement of the narrator in "MS," who even wrote the word "Discovery" upon the ship's sail in which he was traveling. Rather than embracing the unknown, the old man here chooses instead to save his own life, quite the opposite of the narrator in "MS," who does not make any attempt to escape from the whirlpool at all and instead embraces whatever fate lies awaiting him within the whirlpool. These close similarities in theme may suggest that, although "A Descent into the Maelstrom" was not published until much later than "MS Found in a Bottle," in the April 1841 issue of *Graham's Magazine*, it was perhaps written much closer to the 1833 date of "MS," and was simply not immediately published. However, the distinct differences in theme underpinning this more recent work suggest that an evolution has occurred in how the old man deals with the whirlpool. That Poe did not in fact compose "Descent" until closer to 1841 is not quite so impossible after recalling these varying details. The two situations are similar, but the respective events that transpire remain very different. Note also that a version of this tale, renamed "In a Maelstrom" was released that same year in England's *Carpenter's Penny Journal*.

This purported "Maelstrom" at the center of this tale is in fact a natural phenomenon as daunting as the "Old Faithful" geyser that many recognize in America's Yellowstone National Park. As Poe describes, it is located along Norway's coast offshore from The Lofoden Point at an approximate latitude of sixty-eight degrees; two islands are visible from this point, with Moskoe (Mosken) nearby, shadowed by Vurrgh in the background. A whirlpool phenomenon continues to occur there periodically to this very day, and the waters around it are rich a rich fishing ground for inhabitants of the neighboring terrain. The Mount "Helseggen," however, does not appear to exist currently according to reasearch, or perhaps it has been renamed since Poe's time. More likely, Poe added this detail to give more liveliness to his tale; in the Norwegian, Finnish, or Swedish tongue there does not seem to be any translation of "Helseggen" that means "Cloudy" as well. Jonas Ramus was a late sixteenth century Norwegian and theologian, whose description of this Maelstrom was rewritten in Pontopiddan's *Natural History of Norway*, first published in 1751; these words were later reproduced in the very same *Encyclopedia Britannica* that Poe cites in this tale, referring probably to the 6th edition first released in 1823. True to form, Poe uses historial and geographical reality as the backdrop for his fiction.

This tremendous whirlpool phenomenon occurring at regular intervals appears elsewhere in literature as well, including the later novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by French author Jules Verne and even the more ancient reference to "Charybdis" in Homer's *Odyssey*. In contrast to these works which purportedly were intended to be accepted at face value, to be taken as fiction or not without declaring

either one specifically, Poe goes to great lengths in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" to affirm that this tale is the truth. The ending lines by the poor old man evoke empathy in the reader upon hearing that nobody believes his story, and the old man's statement that he does not expect the narrator to believe his story either, functions somewhat as a guilt-trip for the reader as well. If you do not believe these events, then you are "just like the rest of them," thus prompting the reader to believe these events to be the truth in fact, out of pity for the old man. Poe employs a similar technique in "MS Found in a Bottle," as the narrator there goes to great lengths to swear that his words are the truth and even explains his entire life to reinforce this fact. Writing convincingly was always Edgar's strength, embodied later by his infamous "Balloon-Hoax" in 1844 and even "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" of 1845, which many thought to be the credible report of an actual doctor. Thus, by mentioning the lack of attention this old man's story receives from his peers undoubtedly increased Poe's eager readership.

Here, perhaps it is the level and depth and detail that is where Poe's story holds some degree of weakness. This story is riddled with abstract academic concepts such as cylinders and spheres, which Poe tries to explain away by saying a "schoolteacher" later told the old man about how cylinders have more resistance to being pulled down by suction. Is it probable that a swarthy Norwegian seaman would be so understanding of mathematical concepts? The narrator, who appears to be fairly well-educated, and who expresses a great interest in this Maelstrom, can procure no other source of factual data for his explanation, than a copy of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*? The names of other theorists such as Athanasius Kircher are mentioned as well; such scientific explanations are consistent in the "Balloon-Hoax" with Thomas Monck Mason as storyteller, and in "Valdemar" with a doctor as narrator, but here such abstract concepts seem oddly out of place. The story is well-constructed, but here it is very obvious that Poe is regurgitating his own sources of accessible information, such as *Britannica*, in order that the reader will be able to go to those same sources and double-check his information for credibility. Even the scientific explanation of cylinders' resistance to suction and the accompanying reference to Archimedes (recalling the reference to the "Archimedean screw" in "The Balloon Hoax") appear to be far from the setting and context of this story, told from the view of a tired seaman. Poe efficiently explains every detail in the story, but it is this thoroughness that makes it less believable.

Finally, one must address the meaning of the opening epigraph from theologian Joseph Glanville and the context it creates for "The Descent into the Maelstrom." The words laud the powers of God shown in the natural world as being greater than anything mankind can possibly imagine, with a "depth in them greater than the well of Democritus." This final reference is of great significance; Democritus was a contemporary of both ancient Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato, and Aristotle wrote extensively concerning Democritus' ideas. Democritus is known for laying the foundation for the modern atomic theory, declaring that matter cannot be destroyed but merely changes from one form to another; space is an infinite "Void," with an infinite number of atoms. Presumably, this is the "bottomless well" of Democritus, for it is a figurative well and not a literal one. German philosopher Immanuel Kant, with whom Poe was probably more familiar, published his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, and an English translation was released in 1838, a few years before "A Descent into the

Maelstrom," and in this he makes reference to the "well of Democritus," as an allegory for the attainment of ultimate knowledge. Although Glanville (1636-1680) predates Kant by over a century, his words here should be interpreted in a similar vein. Hence, Glanville expresses that the powers of God go DEEPER than even the furthest reaches of human knowledge and experience.

Now, this concept can be easily applied to "The Descent into the Maelstrom" by recalling the hesitant moment when the old man considers, like the narrator in "MS," that he can be a pioneer in understanding what secrets lie at the bottom of this great whirlpool, which some theorists, such as Athanasius Kircher, profess is a passage to the other side of the world. Unlike the narrator in "MS," the old man decides not to pursue this course of action, choosing instead to save his own life. He chooses basic survival over the attainment of knowledge. This decision has future repercussions, as he is not taken seriously by his fellow fisherman, and he is forced to lead a life of relative isolation and disgrace, since his body is so wracked with maladies now that he cannot even fish any more. Poe presents an engaging dichotomy, between the first man who embraces knowledge and disappears, never to be heard from again, and the second man who rejects this knowledge and returns to the living world of humanity. One is inclined to ask, who makes the better decision? Recalling that the narrator of "MS" was admittedly a skeptic and not easily led to believe in the supernatural or highly unusual, one may dub him to be a "man of science." The tale of "A Descent into the Maelstrom" opens with a quote heralding the powers of God as greater than any human knowledge, and throughout the old man even made references to God, admiring "so wonderful a manifestation of God's power" (237) as the boat entered the whirlpool.

The later appearance of a rainbow may also recall the biblical appearance of a rainbow after the Forty Days' Flood besieging Noah's Ark in the *Bible*'s "Book of Genesis." This old man may be considered a "man of religion." A contrast of the two figures emerges, as the man of science disappears into the unknown, presumably to die, and the man of religion undergoes a miraculous experience only to be ignored by his fellow fisherman. The final conclusion is fairly evident. The man of science disappeared, with only a floating manuscript to relay his experiences, but the man of religion who attempts to inform others is mocked, capitalizing on the very fact that religion is a matter of faith. The old man has no evidence to show them, for his brothers were all drowned. These other fisherman lack faith, as is sometimes the reaction to religious miracles or even biblical stories, because they do not have faith. Yet the old man's misery is increased because of this lack of validation, and his healthy is deteriorating. In the spirit of Glanville, the old man decided that to descend into the abyss would accomplish little, if this would be an allegory for the very "well of Democritus," because God's power is so much greater; to descend would be an act of hubris, or arrogance, in the eyes of God. Instead, he chose to return to his family, as Kant recalls the words of Persius, "Quod sapio satis est mihi," or "What I know is enough for me." So thought the old man, and although badly traumatized, he is still alive.

The old man speaks wistfully to the narrator, expounding a sense of Christian morality in his tale as well, as the old man has two brothers, mirroring the significant number "three," also the number crucified including Jesus. The fish has long been a Christian

symbol, noting that these men are all fisherman. As with the Bible, two men die, and the third essentially is resurrected from certain death as he escapes from the Maelstrom, perhaps comparable to Jesus' resurrection. The old man is betrayed by his wicked brother, who tears his grip away from where he stands to save himself, as Jesus was betrayed by Judas before death. However, it is the old man who returns to the world of the living, and it is the traitorous brother who dies, like Judas, even as the old man still forgave and tried to save him. Recall that at one point the narrator refers to the Maelstrom as a "Phlegethon" (231), which was the name of one of the five rivers in Hades, Greek land of the dead, suggesting even further that to descend into the Maelstrom is to die; the old man essentially died and was resurrected upon reaching the surface once again. The fact that the old man is not believed by anyone may be synonymous with the initial denial by people that Jesus had been resurrected due to the powers of God. Similarly here, the fishermen (which was also an analogy applied to Jesus' disciples) deny that the old man was able to enter the Maelstrom and escape from it. With all intents and purposes, "A Descent into the Maelstrom" is embedded with historical and geographical realities, perhaps intertwined with subtle biblical references. The biting irony is that, like "The Balloon-Hoax," this tale is also an elaborate fabrication, embodying yet another attack on Edgar Allan Poe's gullible readership of "quidnuncs." In doing so, Poe reveals his own skepticism of religion as fiction.

# The Purloined Letter

A Latin epigraph from Seneca begins this story about a stolen letter, "Nil sapientiae odiosus acumine nimio," meaning "No wisdom is more hated than far ingenuity," no doubt referring to the analytical abilities of C. Auguste Dupin, who stars in this tale along with the same unnamed narrator from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." They are still living together in the dilapidated mansion in Paris, France, even after several years of having first met each other not long before the first mystery that Dupin solved at Rue Morgue; an additional mystery had later followed that, contributing to Dupin's fame, dubbed "The Mystery of Marie Roget." However, business has been fairly slow for Dupin until one day G--, the Prefect of Police in Paris makes a visit to their home. Dupin prepares to light a lamp but aborts this upon hearing that the Prefect is seeking advice about a case he cannot solve, declaring that they can all focus better in the darkness, adding that perhaps the Prefect's error is that he does not see the obvious facts about the case, whatever it may be. G-- bursts into laughter, because this amuses him.

Indeed, he confidently assures Dupin that everything that can be done has been done, but he still hasn't gotten anywhere. It is not a murder or assassination, but merely an important letter has been stolen from a female "royal personage," presumably the Queen, and she is now being blackmailed lest the letter will fall into her enemies' hands. She was initially reading the letter at her palace, when the person who the letter was about entered her room, and she hurriedly put it down; yet Minister D-- also went to visit her, seeing the letter lying out in her room, and decided to casually steal it. He took out a letter of his own, pretended to read it, and laid it down next to her letter, taking her letter away with him instead when he departed from her room. The other person was still in the room, so she couldn't possibly make a scene for fear of this other person discovering the contents of what the letter says. Since then, this royal woman has been blackmailed to do everything that Minister D-- wants, or else he will share this letter to that other individual.

The Prefect's challenge has been in retrieving the letter; his men have searched Minister D--'s living quarters many times during the evenings, when he often is not at home. Every night for the past three months, they have dissembled the furniture, torn up the walls and floorboards, opened books and packages, and even examined every inch of his room and those apartments next to his room with microscopes! Then they did the same with the terrain outside of his room as well. Yet, they have failed to recover this invaluable letter, and the woman continues to be blackmailed mercilessly. The police have even stopped D-- on the street and completely strip searched him on more than one occasion in search of the letter, but to no avail. Dupin adds that he knows Minister D-- personally, and that he is not a fool and wouldn't just carry the letter around with him; the Prefect G-- disagrees, however, boldly insisting that D-- is a poet and all poets are basically fools according to him. Finally, the frustrated Prefect exclaims, "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the hotel [of Minister D--]," and in response Dupin merely says that he cannot offer any better advice. Before G-- departs , Auguste requests to hear a full description of the letter and then does not say anything more.

Nothing else is heard from the Prefect until a month later when he appears at their doorstep yet again, inquiring if Dupin has investigated anything about this purloined letter. Sitting together inside of the house, Dupin casually asks how much the reward is for the restoration of this letter, and he replies that there is a large reward but it is confidential. Dupin then tells a little story about a doctor named Abernethy who knew a rich miser that wanted free medical advice for some illness he was having, although the miser asked for advice indirectly, without wanting to directly consult this doctor and pay a fee. Understanding the moral of this story, the Prefect declares that he will happily pay fifty thousand francs to anyone who can help him to solve this mystery. Dupin calmly tells G-- to write out a check for him for fifty thousand francs, and he will then give him the letter that he has sought for so many months! Stunned, the Prefect performs this deed eagerly, hands the check to Dupin, as Dupin then pulls a letter out of his desk, handing it to the Prefect. This man then "grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check" Poe, pg. 253. G-- is too stunned and overjoyed to even thank Dupin or ask how this letter was obtained.

However, the inquisitive narrator is not too shocked, and he asks Dupin to explain exactly how he accomplished this task, after the Prefect and the entire Parisian police force had failed. He replies first that these people were all looking in the wrong places; the letter was not discovered by them because it was never in any of the places where they were looking. Auguste goes into an elaborate psychoanalysis of his the Prefect does not understand what kind of person Minister D-- is, for he chose to search in places that were deeply hidden, which is where the Prefect would have personally hidden the letter. However, Dupin empathized with D--, declaring that he is a smarter man than the "fool" that Prefect G-- had labeled him to be because he is also a poet. Dupin later adds that being an observant person takes practice, but the Prefect is like an object of small mass in science; objects of less mass move faster, quicker, but there is little substance to them. However, objects of larger mass are more contemplative and cautious, slower to get moving right away; of course, the allegory he creates here is that he has a larger mass, i.e. more intelligence, and therefore proceeds more slowly rather than blindly and haphazardly rushing into situations like the Prefect and his police force.

Considering the Prefect to be of small intellect because he failed to empathize and actually understand Minister D-- as an intelligent individual himself, he responds to the narrator's statement that he had always thought that the Minister was a mathematician, not a poet, "You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet *and* mathematician." He adds that if he had just been a mathematician, then the Prefect would have easily outsmarted him. The narrator replies that he always thought that mathematicians were brilliant thinkers who possess great analytical abilities. Dupin replies that general public opinion is stupid, for mathematicians do not have good analytical abilities because they are too dependent upon their formulas and facts that are accepted as being automatically given. Often, one who is solely a mathematician cannot explain why a formula is the way it is, for their numbers and equations are accepted as the end all and be all of the universe, although these beliefs are victim to the same public opinion that

he had just warned against. He confidently states that "Mathematical axioms are *not* axioms of general truth. What is true of *relation* -- of form and quantity -- is often greatly false in regard to morals, for example...But the mathematician argues from his *finite truths*, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability -- as the world indeed imagines them to be" Poe, pg. 257. Thus, Dupin advocates forging an individual, free-thinking intellect that is founded upon careful observations and practice, rather than upon common opinions or widely accepted beliefs.

He compares mathematicians to a situation described by Jacob Bryant's *A New System, Or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, in which many Christians do not believe pagan fables at all, but they make inferences from them as existing realities. This is not logical or consistent, even though it is a factual element to human behavior in their culture; people supposedly do not believe pagan tales, but they still show an observance to certain pagan or superstitious beliefs. They blindly accept these things as givens without questioning the inconsistency of it, even as the mathematicians blindly accept their formulas and ideas. Anyway, if D-- was only a mathematician, he surely would have hid the letter in some secret place that would have been easily discovered by the Prefect's thorough searches of his apartment. However, Dupin personally knows D-- to be a witty poet, mathematician, and politician. As such, he would have expected the royal personage to send representatives to steal the letter back from him. Thus, he planned for this carefully with a simple solution, as Dupin recalls how much the Prefect had laughed at the mere suggestion that there was an obvious solution to this mystery, because he was probably just trying too hard to solve it; the narrator shares in this memory.

Abruptly, C. Auguste Dupin then asks the narrator about what street signs are most noticeable? He then explains that there is a game played with a map, where one player names a place and the other must locate that place spelled out on the map; the newer players usually assign tiny place names to their opponents, but experienced players choose names that are written very largely on the map because they are more difficult to mind. The moral of this story is that on maps, street signs or in life, the obvious things are always the hardest ones to notice. Recalling this human behavior, Dupin also recalls how D-- wanted to keep the letter nearby so that he could use it immediately if the "royal personage" dared to disobey him, thus leading him to conclude that it had to be somewhere in his apartment. Having drawn these conclusions, Dupin had then decided to visit the apartment himself, since he knew Minister D-- personally, pretending as if it was a casual visit. He also brought along a pair of green tinted spectacles which hid his eyes from view, allowing him to scan the room unnoticed by D-- ; he had also announced that his eyes were very weak to cast aside any suspicions that he could even actually see what was in the Minister's apartment. Immediately he observed a letter rack with several cards and a single torn and dirty letter resting upon it; it bore the seal of D-- in black.

Although it was different than the letter than the Prefect had originally described, the fact that it was in such an obvious place and so out of place compared to the relative cleanliness of his apartment, made Dupin confident that this was the prize which he had been seeking. He subtly memorized what the letter looked like on the rack while

purposely engaging Minister D-- in a vibrant discussion and later went home to create a fake letter exactly identical to that one. Wise as he is, Dupin had intentionally left his snuffbox at the Minister's apartment, using this as an excuse to return there the next day and continued the conversation they had begun the day before. Suddenly, a gunshot exploded outside of the window, and Minister D-- naturally rushed to see what the commotion was about; Dupin quickly switched his own fake letter with the real one of the rack, going to the window with D-- without having been noticed. Dupin had paid a man to fire a loaded gun at that very moment for the sole purpose of creating a distraction for him to switch the letters; outside, the man was acting crazy and the bystanders let him continue on his way uninhibited, since he made no further disturbance and they all assumed him to be a lunatic. Dupin of course knew better.

With his mission accomplished, C. Auguste Dupin finished his conversation with D-- and went home, triumphant and pleased with his recovery of this coveted letter. The narrator asks why he did not merely snatch up the letter during his first visit, and Dupin explains that the Minister would probably have not allowed him to leave that apartment alive if he had done as much. A secretive switch was the only way to assure both his success and his safe exit. He then adds that it is fairly easy to climb up to somewhere, but it is much more difficult to climb down, referring to what fate await D-- in the future recalling that a famous woman named Catalani had made this statement about the art of singing. He foresees the suffering that now lies ahead for D-- but does not feel badly about what he had done, "For eighteen months the Minister has had [the royal personage] in his power. She now has him in hers -- since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction...I have...no pity...for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius" Poe, pg. 262. Dupin asserts that he does not have any sympathy for those whom he has beaten, who fall beneath him and from their current state of splendor, as the Minister had once attained. Now he will fall from this pinnacle of power he has created for himself by using the letter.

Dupin wonders what the Minister's reaction will be once he opens the fake letter, since once upon a time in Vienna, Austria, the Minister had offended him, and he had sworn at that time that he would not forget when D-- crossed paths with him. Now, Dupin has his quiet revenge of sorts, having written into the fake letter some lines that would suggest that it had been Auguste that had outsmarted him. These lines are apparently referenced in Dupin's own writing, saying that the Minister "is well acquainted with my manuscript." The brief message he wrote is an excerpt from the play Atree by Crebillon, "Un dessein si funeste/S'il n'est digne d'Atree, est digne de Thyeste, " or "A plan, if disastrous, if it is not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes." This refers to two brothers, Thyestes and Atreus, who waged a bitter war of revenge against each other. Thyestes had a love affair with Agamemnon's wife; Agamemnon cooked Thyestes' children alive; Thyestes then cursed him, and it was Thyestes' son Aegisthus who would later help to slay Atreus' son Agamemnon. The moral of their story is that the process of revenge is ongoing, referring to this quotation. Even after such a long while since he had been offended by D-- in Vienna, he has now gotten revenge and also earned fifty

thousand francs from the Prefect. In spite of his apparent stoicism, Dupin must be in good spirits.

# Commentary

This tale is the third in a series featuring the astute and observant investigator, C. Auguste Dupin. Overall, this series that began with "The Murders at the Rude Morgue" published in April of 1841 breaks from previously established literary traditions and forges new territory for Poe's own style and theme. "The Mystery of Marie Roget" was published serially in *Snowden's Ladies Conpanion* during November and December of 1842, concluding February 1843, and finally, "The Purloined Letter" was published in the 1845 issue of an annual periodical entitled *The Gift*, released in September of 1844. All three stories feature Dupin, the fascinated narrator, and the French Prefect of police with his inferior intellectual abilities. Much greater detail is delivered in the "Commentary" for "The Murders at the Rue Morgue" concerning the origins of these characters and their impact upon the literary world in forging a new literary genre, that of the detective story. However, to avoid regurgitation, here we shall focus primarily upon this final story featuring Dupin, "The Purloined Letter."

First, one should notice that it is quite unlike the preceding two stories in that it does not at all involve a murder investigation. Instead, an unnamed royal person of high ranking who is most likely the French Queen is in need of dire assistance, because she is being blackmailed by one of her ministers. This is slightly reminiscent of certain events as related in French author Alexander Dumas' *Trois Mousquetaires* (*The Three Musketeers*) published serially in French in *Le Siecle* from March 14, 1844-July 14, 1844. Poe did not publish "The Purloined Letter" until September, so it is possible that he was partly influenced in theme by the Musketeers' mission to assist the Queen of France from the corrupt Richlieu. A similar course of events occurs here, where Dupin must also come to the rescue of a female "royal personage," probably the Queen of France as well, from the corrupt Minister D--. Whether Poe had access to the actual text in French, or if he would have heard of the storyline by word of mouth is uncertain, but it is an interesting coincidence that Poe would emerge with a new story about aiding the Queen of France shortly after Dumas published *Musketeers* in France, especially since both of Poe's prior stories featuring Dupin had dealt with solving murders. As this tale ends he even declares "In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned," showing an unusual glimmer of loyalty to this royal figure, presumably the Queen of France. This change in plot as compared with earlier tales further suggests that news of Dumas' story may have influenced Poe in composing "The Purloined Letter."

The dialogue employed here, in tune with Dupin's constant use of higher reasoning skills and logic, somewhat resembles the exchange that occurs in works of Plato, especially his *Republic*, featuring an ongoing discussion between a group of men. A problem is presented, in the instance of Plato, "What is justice?" All of the following events in the story involve the exchange of words between individuals seeking to discover this answer in different ways. A similar technique is employed here, principally the question of how exactly C. Auguste Dupin managed to secure the letter from Minister D--. The following discussion centers upon how this discovery came about, supplemented by various allegories and comparisons to other situations in life, such as playing a game with maps or observing street signs. Dupin employs the infamous

"Socratic method" in his explanation at times as well, directing questions at the narrator, "have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop doors, are the most attractive of attention?" Constant questioning is a concept upon which this method is based, inspired by the writings of Plato. Dupin's pointed observation that many people, such as the Prefect, fail to connect genuinely with other people in solving mysteries and instead project their own outlook towards others further suggests Socratic teachings, which discourages finite knowledge. The Prefect's flaws focus upon his shallow judgments such as how "artists are fools." The wiser Dupin disregards such baseless labels. Whether or not Dupin's behaviors are merely characteristic of general investigative techniques, there is a close resemblance in dialogue here to the Socratic dialogue described in Plato's *Republic*. The presence of other classical references -- first an epigraph attributed to the ancient Roman philosopher, Seneca, and an ending with quotations referring to the ancient Greek mythological figures, Thyestes and Atreus, further assert this idea.

In addition, Dupin's inflated ego becomes forevermore evident here, justifying his superiority to mathematicians, the Parisian police force and its Prefect, as well as Minister D--, whom he shows some respect towards as a worthy adversary. He considers mathematicians to be blindly following rules without establishing individual understandings about the nature of the world, much as he had criticized chess players in "Rue Morgue." He compares the Prefect to an object with little mass, resulting in its faster movement. Rather than a strength, Poe considers this to be a severe character flaw due to his quick reaction to events instead of the more contemplative and wiser Dupin. Finally, Auguste praises the wittiness that the Minister possesses, exceeding that of the Prefect, thus allowing him to leave the coveted letter in plain view but undiscovered in his own apartment after it was ransacked dozens of times. Once, D-- had even managed to catch Dupin off guard in Vienna in the past, which is a tremendously difficult feat considering his acute powers of observation. Over time, Dupin had built up a strong profile of what kind of person D-- is, and this is his key to solving the mystery. In many ways, Minister D-- appears to be a twin of Dupin, bearing his same first initial, as well as commanding his respect as well.

Given Dupin's nature, he surely would not respect someone whom he does not regard as his equal; yet he knows the behaviors of D-- so well, that he describes the tiredness D-- shows when greeting Dupin at his apartment for the first time as merely a ruse. Like Dupin, D-- is always on his guard and has developed his intellectual powers as well through practice and perseverance, like Dupin. It is these skills that have allowed him to steal and regain the letter for an entire year and a half, although it took two days of calculated planning on Dupin's part to steal the letter back from him in much the same way as it was initially stolen, by replacing the genuine letter with a fake that he had composed. When D-- had stolen the Queen's letter, he, too, had left a letter of his own in place of the Queen's letter. Even in the closing lines Dupin regards D-- with a rare sense of admiration dubbing him the "*monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius." The Latin translates as "awesome marvel," which along with being a "man of genius" reveals Dupin's feelings towards this man. Like the two brothers, Atreus and Thyestes, whom Dupin invokes in his fabricated letter, C. Auguste Dupin maintains a brotherly bond with Minister D-- both as an equal, but also as an vengeful nemesis;

hence the development of a sibling rivalry. In mythology, after Thyestes had a love affair with Atreus' wife, Atreus invited Thyestes into his home, only to secretly feed him his own children. In "The Purloined Letter," it is the guest Dupin who cunningly takes advantage of his host's hospitality. The monetary award functions merely as an additional benefit for rescuing the letter, but the real motivation in committing such a deed is his need to reassert the superiority of his intellect over that of Minister D--, who had once outsmarted Dupin. This time, he wins.

# The Pit and the Pendulum

Latin words taken from an inscription for the gates of a new marketplace in Paris to be built upon the site of the old Jacobin Club House begin this tale, "Impia tortorum longas his turba furores/Sanguinis innocui, non satiata, aluit./Sospite nunc patria, fracto nunc funeris antro,/Mors ubi dira fuit vita salusque patent, [meaning]...'Here the impious clamor of the torturers, insatiate, fed its rage for innocent blood. Now happy is the land, destroyed the pit of horror; and where grim death stalked, life and health are revealed'" Poe, pg. 264. This phrase suggest that the following story addresses the topic of "torturers" who have since been conquered. An unnamed narrator appears to be in a strange place, adding that he has recently been untied after some unnamed individuals sentenced him to death. Lying a dingy room somewhere, some men wearing black robes talk about the narrator while he cringes in fear, as if he were shocked by a galvanic battery; the seven white candles burning on a nearby table are extinguished, while the narrator embraces death as a pleasant escape to the present situation.

Fainting for awhile, he awakens later on in the darkness and ponders what things he was dreaming about, analyzing the connection between dream and reality, "He who has never swooned is not he who finds strange palaces and wildly familiar places in coals that glow; is not he who beholds floating in midair the sad visions that the many may not view; is not he who ponders over the perfume of some novel flower; is not he whose brain grows bewildered with the meaning of some musical cadence which has never before arrested his attention" Poe, pg. 266. The narrator is still very disoriented about where exactly he is, recalling that he had been carried down to some deep room far from where he was before and how he is merely waiting to die there in Toledo. Opening his eyes, nothing is visible and darkness is all around him; something damp and hard lies nearby, which his hand touches briefly. He stands up, staggering because his body is so weak, and explores the room he is in cautiously, expressing some fears that it could be a tomb where he has been buried alive. The room appears to be safe, and no disasters await him while walking around in the darkness. Abruptly, he remembers horror stories of booby trapped dungeons at Toledo.

Eventually, he finds what feels like a stone wall, seeking to test its material with a knife he had upon arriving at Toledo, but it is no longer in his pocket; his old clothes have been replaced by some kind of robe. He decides to tear his robe apart, fastening one end to the wall and holding onto the other, in order that he can explore the room without getting lost, since he can just follow the cloth scrap back where he started at since it's so dark. In the middle of this task, he trips, falls, and is knocked unconscious yet again. Awakening, he feels a pitcher of water and some bread lying next to him, which he consumes eagerly and resumes his exploration of the room, estimating its size to be about one hundred yards all the way around the perimeter. In the midst of this, the clumsy narrator falls yet again, this time after his legs are entangled by the cloth scrap. His chin on the ground, but there is nothing beneath his upper face, realizing that there is an enormous pit in this section of the room that reeks of pungent fungus and death. He drops a piece of stone into the pit, noting that there is no sound for awhile, before the pit echoes with the sounds of water splashing below, as it finally lands.

To his horror, the narrator realizes that he would have fallen into this pit had he not tripped; rather than being a hindrance, this clumsy act had saved his life! He stays awake, frustrated and upset, before several hours before falling asleep yet again. When he awakens this time, a loaf of bread and pitcher of water are nearby, but soon after he consumes these items he becomes extremely drowsy, assuming them to have been drugged, and passes out. When he wakes up, the room is dimly lit from an unknown source, and he notes that the room looks much smaller than he had first thought, being about only twenty-five yards all around. The room is oddly shaped, somewhat like a square but with rough angles here and there, and the walls are visibly made of metal and not stone at all! Along the room are scary pictures of skeletons and other frightful figures, and the large pit is now fully visible as well, filling the center of the room. The narrator is tied completely to a large wood frame, but he manages to maneuver his body to reach a dish of spicy meat that lies nearby, but to his dismay the narrator discovers that there is no fluid this time to wash down his meal, since the meat has made his mouth feel dry.

Gazing above, the prison is visibly about forty feet tall, and the ceiling has a painted picture of Father Time bearing in his hands a long swinging pendulum high above instead of the customary scythe. Some rats are scurrying around the room after climbing out of the pit, no doubt attracted by the meat that he had eaten; in spite of being bound hand and foot, the narrator manages somehow to frighten these rats away for the time being. An hour passes, and the man sees that the pendulum has lowered by about a yard from the ceiling and now swings faster than before, "I now observed -- with what horror it is needless to say -- that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel, about a foot in length from horn to horn; the horns upward, and under the edge evidently as keen as that of a razor. Like a razor also, it seemed massy and heavy, tapering from the edge into a solid and broad structure above. It was appended to a weighty rod of brass, and the whole *hissed* [sic] as it was swung through the air" Poe, pg. 273. Recalling that this is the worst punishment that "they" use there at Toledo, the poor man suddenly realizes that this bladed pendulum soon will descend upon his immobilized body, slicing him to pieces!

He wishes that he had fallen into the pit initially, rather than having to endure this terrible fate. Days go by, and the narrator lays there staring at the swinging pendulum, since he can't really go anywhere anyway due to the straps that bind him, until he just accepts his imminent death and stares at the blade above him "as a child at some rare bauble." Having awoken from one of his slumbers, only a little bit of meat is left that his captors had brought, devoured hungrily by the monstrous rats. The narrator nibbles the tiny bit that is left, suddenly filled with joy that he can somehow survive this terrible ordeal. He observes that the pendulum will cut at a right angle to his body directly into his chest, where his heart is located, thus cutting him into two pieces. He vainly wishes that to reach up and stop it from swinging; the pendulum gets to be only three inches above him and still descends; that painful end is near! He tries to break the straps somehow, but to no avail! Then he sees that in about twelve more swings back and forth, the pendulum will be cutting his robe; noting that he is tied using the same piece of strap, if he can maneuver his body so that the pendulum cuts a piece of the binding in half, then his entire body should be able to come free. In struggling to move around, the narrator

discovers to his utter horror that the pendulum's cutting path will not intersect with these bindings at all!

The rats scurry around ravenously, and the narrator realizes that they are waiting to devour his warm, dead flesh. Inspired, he soaks his fingers in the crumbs and juices from the plate of meat, and rubs them all over those straps; the result is tremendous, as hundreds of rats swarm across his body to eat the meat, biting into the straps as well in the process of doing this, "The measured movement of the pendulum disturbed them not at all. Avoiding its strokes, they busied themselves with the anointed bandage. They pressed -- they swarmed upon me in ever-accumulating heaps. They writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my own; I was half stifled by their thronging pressure; disgust, for which the world has no name, swelled in my bosom, and chilled, with a heavy clamminess, my heart. Yet one minute, and I felt that the struggle would be over" Poe, pg. 277. As expected, the strap soon came free due to this vigorous activity, even as the pendulum began severing the cloth of his robe and grazed the surface of his skin. The narrator deftly leaps off of the wooden frame, lunging away from the swinging pendulum, noting that he is free from that but still captured by the Inquisition, thus explaining why he has been imprisoned at Toledo in the first place.

Examining the room, he follows the light source that still illuminates the room to a small crack all around the walls of the room near the floor; he decides to look at it more closely. Gazing through it, bright light alone greets his eyes, and he realizes that this is a mechanical chamber, and the metal walls soon become hotter and hotter. The skeletal pictures around the walls now glow with a frightful brilliancy, as "Demon eyes" surround the room! The smell of "heated iron" fills his nose, and the narrator becomes very afraid, lamenting "oh, most demonaic of men!" as he tries to quell these fears. Afraid of being burned by this brilliant light, he runs to the deep pit in the middle of the room, recalling its watery bottom. He hesitates suddenly and breaks down into tears, uncertain of whether he should jump or be burned by the heated walls, with the room becoming hotter and hotter, and now the walls begin to move more closely. The dungeon is changing shape, becoming more circular to enclose him! The narrator now has a choice, to touch those burning iron walls or to dive into the pit. Desperately, he stands as close to the edge of the pit as possible without falling in, but the hot walls continue to press in, closer and closer, until there is no room left upon which to stand, and the wall completely surrounds the pit. His body reels backwards, releasing "one loud, long, and final scream of despair."

At that very moment, voices and trumpets echo throughout the chamber, and the burning walls reverse, returning to their original position, but it is too late to prevent the narrator's own descent into the pit! In midair, as his body prepares to drop down to the depths below, an arm catches him and pulls him back to safety, as the narrator joyfully notes how "It was that of General Lasalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies" Poe, pg. 279. After experiencing the most torturous ordeals such as starvation, hungry rats, falling into a frightening pit, being burnt by heated walls, and having his body sliced into two by a swinging pendulum, this man is ready to go home and return to a life of normalcy. The conclusion reflects the opening phrase, that peace is restored to a place once overrun by wicked torturers, as

the Spanish Inquisition is disrupted here by triumphant French soldiers. Only their unexpected arrival prevents the narrator from becoming yet another victim of the pit and the pendulum.

# Commentary

This descriptive story about one man's sufferings during the Spanish Inquisition was first published in *The Gift of 1843*, which was actually released in September of 1842. Later appearances of "The Pit and the Pendulum" include the *Broadway Journal* on May 10, 1845, and a posthumous collection of short stories *Works*, in 1850. Written while Poe was still residing in Philadelphia, his wife Virginia had already been diagnosed with tuberculosis after spitting blood while singing in January of that same year; surely Edgar was felt a biting concern for her suffering which would only grow worse as the years wore on. Other stories composed at this time reveal a similar preoccupation with pain and death, as does the narrator here in "The Pit and the Pendulum." These stories include "The Tell-Tale Heart" (January 1843), "The Masque of the Red Death" (April 1842), "The Black Cat" (August 1843), and a second murder story featuring Dupin, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," published in October and November of 1842, shortly after this tale was published.

Edgar Allan Poe's unique style and outlook upon the world are strongly revealed in "The Pit and the Pendulum" not only in the general theme of death that characterizes many of his other grotesque and arabesque stories, but also by the specific language he chooses to employ. Phrases such as "galvanic battery" will reappear later on when creating "The Premature Burial," which reflects a similar theme as this. The narrator of that story desperately fears being buried alive, going so far as to install special devices into his tomb to avoid this from happening. With that in mind, it is interesting to point out that the narrator in "The Pit" refers to his dungeon as a "tomb" at one point, wondering if he has been buried alive. Other subtleties include how at one point the narrator awakens and hears "the tumultuous motion of the heart and, in my ears, the sound of its beating" (266). The swinging pendulum is also destined to cut into his heart; these patterns reflect similar sensations described by the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart," as the narrator mistakes his own beating heart for that of the old man.

Additionally, the very concept of descending into an abyss and the narrator's intense fear that accompanies it is shared by "MS Found in a Bottle" written nearly ten years earlier and "A Descent into the Maelstrom" published in April of 1841. In the spirit of this latter story, the narrator in "The Pit" is saved from falling in part by his own ingenuity causing the rats to free him, just as the old man from "A Descent into the Maelstrom" wisely lashes himself to a water barrel. "MS" featured a narrator who did descend into the abyss and was not heard from again, aside from the manuscript that he hurled into the ocean in the moments before those same waters swallowed him. Like the cross-combinations of stories which "The Pit and the Pendulum" utilizes, it is a tale that mixes both the horrific, vivid, and gory elements that characterize such work as "The Tell-Tale Heart," and the supernatural, mysterious, and intriguing elements of "MS" and "The Descent into the Maelstrom." It is both grotesque and arabesque, referring to the two categories in which Poe's work is usually placed.

In regard to the actual events of this story, many interpretations may be made. It is a vivid recounting of one man's suffering at the hands of the Inquisition, yet

uncharacteristically for Poe, it ends on a hopeful note, with the narrator being saved from certain death at the last moment. Even the old man in "Descent," who was nearly pulled into the Norwegian "Moskoestrom" must live out his life not believed by the other fishermen and with a rapidly deteriorating health. The narrator here is not only saved individually, but the entire political machine that had wreaked this suffering is destroyed as well, assuring that no one else will experience such pain. Hope pervades this entire work as the narrator fights to survive, until the very last moment when he screams out still in vain, as if his voice could still save him even then. One must wonder if this utterance even had a hand in calling the General Lasalle to his aid, suggesting that perhaps even this move saved his life. Rather than being a murderous psychotic or doomed skeptic, the narrator here is filled with ingenuity. He uncoils his robe upon initial imprisonment, in order to retrace his steps after exploring the place; he barely manages through good luck to avoid falling into the pit because this cloth tripped his legs during this exploration.

Later, he is able to get meat into his mouth in spite of his arms and legs being bound to a wooden frame; he develops the insightful idea of raising the straps in such a way that the pendulum will perhaps slice them, setting him free. When this plan fails, however, it is replaced by yet another, as he spreads meat juices onto the straps and has the rats chew the straps free, and then in investigating the room, he figures out that the room is mechanized by observing the glowing walls. Even then, as the walls close in to encapsulate him and force him into the pit, the narrator resists until there is no floor remaining for him to stand upon, doing the last thing he can possibly do: scream. With these events in mind, it is extraordinary that a man with his limited resources, loss of sleep, lack of nutriment, and high levels of psychological stress performs so brilliantly. At no point does the urge to die completely consume him; in such fleeting moments when the idea of jumping into the pit emerges, he suppresses these quickly, embracing instead an overwhelming need to survive. These survival instincts do prove very successful after all, enduring until the very end before his final slip backwards into the pit.

Like the narrator whose fleeting moments accept death as an inevitability, as when he stares helplessly as the pendulum descends like a "child at some bauble," or wishes he had jumped into the pit rather than suffer the death by that swinging blade, Poe reveals his own inner struggle against Death, which had already claimed his mother Eliza, stepmother Fanny Allan, and now, one day, his wife Virginia. Poe shows a man stripped of all his luxuries, reduced to the same instinctual behaviors as these ravenous rats, seeking immediate gratification: food and hence, survival. When the narrator allows hundreds of rats to climb atop his body, he becomes one with them and is later restored to humanity only after releasing a final, primal "scream of despair." Thus, although he begins with the freedom to move and uses this freedom to explore his dungeon, assess, evaluate, and calculate such things as the size of the room, these acute observations are later replaced by rapid thoughts as he becomes trapped like a rat. This trend suggests that the narrator undergoes a transformation from man to beast, as reason is replaced by instinct, and logic is abandoned for fear. The ending reasserts that hope exists in the worst of conditions, even if it is from an outside and unexpected force such as that of the French army.

Finally, in recalling the historical significance of 'The Pit and the Pendulum," Edgar Allan Poe draws upon actual historical events that occurred in the Spanish city of Toledo, the central command from which the religious persecution of all Jews, Muslims, and accused "heretics" would be put on trial. Initiated in Spain by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella with the Pope Sextius IV's blessing in 1478, the Inquisition would not be abolished until the capture of Toledo and attack of Spain by Napoleon Bonaparte, who appointed his elder brother, Joseph, to rule over the area in 1808. It is most likely this event that the narrator experiences in the tale, as the French army overruns his prison, freeing him at the last moment. "General Lasalle," whose name is French for "the room," likely represents one Napoleon's more flamboyant generals. As Poe mimics Charles Dickens' style in "The System of Doctor Tarr and Prof. Fether," as well as that of Thomas Monck Mason in "The Balloon-Hoax," so too has he employed a style here very similar to author Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly: Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*, published in Philadelphia (where Poe lived) forty years earlier, in 1799.

Chapter Sixteen of this novel features an episode remarkably familiar to this tale, as a man is lost within a sea of emotions after falling into a pit in the woods outside of Philadelphia; the language and theme are similar, and a detailed description is provided of how a panther's eyes resembled a "fixed and obscure flame," mirroring the mention of "demonic eyes" around the narrator in Poe's story. This chapter of Brown's book also ends with hope, as the man sees a campfire burning ahead of him, just as Poe's narrator is pulled out of the pit just in time. In regard to historical information about the Inquisition and fall of Toledo, Poe reportedly used *Critical History of the Spanish Inquisition* by Juan Antonio Llorente and Thomas Dick's *Philosophy of Religion*. Indeed, the Inquisition continued after the end of Bonaparte's regime in 1812 and did not reach a formal conclusion in Spain until 1834, less than a decade before this tale would be published. In addition to its vivid descriptions of a man seeking survival in the face of adverse circumstances, "The Pit and the Pendulum" is a blend of history, contemporary literature, current events, and Poe's innate skill to unite these pieces into one.

# The Cask of Amontillado

A narrator named Montresor describes how a man named Fortunato has offended him repeatedly, though he never explains how. The narrator carries a grudge against Fortunato, but he does not reveal his hatred. Instead he continues "to smile in his face," secretly gloating over how Fortunato shall soon be dead. This man also has one weakness which the narrator chooses to exploit, that Fortunato is an Italian who loves wine tasting, rather than paintings or gems, which he knows nothing about. The narrator declares that he, too, is a connoisseur of wine, revealing that even in this area Fortunato does not have him beaten. Events reach an apex one day during the Italian carnival season, when the narrator encounters a drunken Fortunato and eagerly shakes his hand, declaring deliberately that he has supposedly received some Amontillado wine, but he is not certain if it really is Amontillado after all. Being a wine taster, the drunken Fortunato quickly becomes interested, demanding to know more about this product.

However, Montresor adds that he is going to ask a man named Luchesi to taste this wine for him, to determine if it is really Amontillado or not. Fortunato insists that he go himself to taste this wine because Luchesi is ignorant, in spite of the narrator's plentiful objections, adding that the wine is in the vaults beneath his home. Donning a black mask as is traditional during carnival season, the narrator leads his drunken companion who wears a cone-shaped hat with bells, to his home. There, he relates how "I took from their sconces two flambeaux [torches], and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he follows. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors" Poe, pg. 282. Gazing around, Fortunato begins coughing due to the nitre, or saltpeter, fumes that fill the air but refuses to go upstairs when Montresor expresses concern, who then says revealingly that it is true after all that Fortunato will not die from coughing.

The narrator then picks up a bottle of Medoc lying there in the wine cellar, adding that its fluid will cure Fortunato's cough. Fortunato drinks to Montresor's dead relatives, and Montresor toasts to his "long life," adding afterward that his family's coat of arms has a human foot crushing a serpent that simultaneously has its teeth sunk into its heel. He states also that the family motto is "nemo me impune lacessit," or "Let no one challenge me with impunity [punishment]," reflecting his own wishes earlier to receive no consequences for his act of revenge against Fortunato. Continuing past bones and barrels of wine, the nitre drips increasingly from the ceiling because there is a river flowing far above them, and this nitre, or saltpeter, is formed as a result. He urges Fortunato to return, but still this man adamantly refuses, requesting more wine; Montresor then gives him a bottle of De Grave wine, which Fortunato quickly consumes in its entirety, laughing and tossing the bottle into the air with an odd hand gesture. When Montresor is confused, Fortunato mocks him by saying "Then you are not of the brotherhood," affirming the narrator's continued dislike for him.

When he hears this "brotherhood" is called the "Masons," the narrator eagerly says that he is, indeed, a mason after all, taking out a trowel, a tool used by stone masons. Fortunato responds that he is joking, and they must continue on to find the cask of Amontillado. Wandering deeper still in these tunnels, the men arrive in an area where "At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size" Poe, pg. 284. Beyond this fourth wall is yet another room, shrouded in darkness, and Montresor directs Fortunato to venture there to find the Amontillado that he so craves, as Fortunato criticizes Luchesi as "an ignoramus." Entering this space, Fortunato proceeds only a few stesp before realizing that there is only a wall there. But it is too late; Montresor quickly straps Fortunato to the wall with "iron staples" as is custom for a dungeon. Locking the padlock to secure this binding, Montresor tells him that the wall is soaked with saltpeter, which shall no doubt cause him some discomfort; Fortunato merely exclaims "The Amontillado!" excitedly, as the narrator uncovers a pile of cement and bricks from beneath the pile of bones lying nearby.

Row by row, he builds a wall of bricks to enclose Fortunato there, buried alive. He continues this task in spite of Fortunato's intense screaming, to which he pays no attention, and when these screams persist Montresor merely screams back at Fortunato, mocking him. When the wall is complete except for one final brick, Fortunato's sad voice issues forth from the room, laughing half-heartedly that Montresor has played a great joke upon him, and asks now that he be set free. Echoing Fortunato's earlier words, he replies "The Amontillado!" to which Fortunato says "Let us be gone," which the narrator repeats yet again back to him. Frightened, Fortunato cries out "For the love of God," to which Montresor excitedly replies "Yes...for the love of God!" although there is then no answer to this for his prisoner. Thrusting a torch through the hole, he hears nothing except for bells jingling from Fortunato's carnival hat. Overwhelmed by the nitre himself, Montresor inserts the final brick into the wall, sealing it in, and covers this newly erected wall with a pile of old bone. He then relates how even fifty years passes, and still no one discovers this murder, triumphantly declaring of Fortunato "In pace requiescat," "May he rest in peace." As desired, Montresor accomplished his deed of revenge skillfully and without impunity from anybody, as his crime remains undiscovered; nor does he feel any guilt for this deed. Instead, he is filled with a great sense of achievement and pride at having slain Fortunato.

# Commentary

"The Cask of Amontillado" is the one of the latest of Poe's popular short stories, published in the November 1846 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*, based in Philadelphia. The cold winter had begun to set upon the Poe family, and Edgar reportedly did not even have money for coal to heat their tiny cottage in the Bronx after *The Broadway Journal*, where he worked as editor, went bankrupt earlier in the year. During the summer months, Poe had also been engaged in a vicious war of words with literary critic Thomas Dunn English after the two get into a fist fight, thus circulating rumors that Poe is a madman; Poe further criticizes English among others in a column entitled "The Literati of New York City," also hosted by *Godey's Lady's Book*. The battle waged back and forth between these two individuals, reaching its apex after *The Evening Mirror* willfully published a message from Thomas English taunting Poe to sue him. After no apology was given from the journal's publisher, Poe decided to file a lawsuit against them for libel, an offense clearly referenced in the Constitution , which forbids abuse of the First Amendment by intentionally defaming others through writing.

In contemplating this ongoing war that was in progress between these two men, it should be little surprise that the central theme in "The Cask of Amontillado" is one of vengeance. Poe had similarly used satirical writing as a catharsis for his inner angst, as with Dickens in "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether" and "The Man That Was Used Up," and a similar theme is engaged here. Beneath the grotesque visions of skeletal remains lying about the underground vault, the reader feels little sympathy for Fortunato, whose elitist attitude clearly reveals itself when he mocks Montresor, saying "You are not of the brotherhood." The narrator wants to be a part of Montresor's "society" but this verbal exchange clearly indicates that such an event is unlikely, because Montresor does not respect him or view him as an equal; the only reason he wishes to follow him home is to drink from this "cask of Amontillado." Also, Amontillado is a type dry sherry manufactured in Southern Spain. The fact it is a rare, imported wine explains Fortunato's eagerness to taste its fluids for himself.

It is important to recall that countless opportunities are provided for Fortunato to leave at the narrator's insistence, but this man disregards them nevertheless, forever sealing his own fate; when the narrator proclaims his family motto to be "Let no one challenge me with impunity," and the description of his family crest as a snake biting into the heel that crushes it, all of these are clues that could potentially allow for Fortunato's escape. In recalling the image of the snake, it is Montresori who adopts this role in lashing out against the man who would relentlessly step upon him, demeaning him, as Fortunato had done so many times. Montresor's later display of a trowel is comical, especially after Fortunato's mention of the brotherhood of the Masons. The story lacks the seriousness of "The Tell-Tale Heart" or "The Pit and the Pendulum," but instead suggests a bit of satire directed at a particular individual for whom the narrator feels increasing disdain. This underlying resentment towards Fortunato could inversely reflect Poe's hostilities toward Thomas Dunn English, whom he had already criticized repeatedly in his critical essays also published in *Godey's Lady's Book* at this same time.

Thematically, this tale pursues many old ideas that Edgar Allan Poe had already adopted, transferred into a new setting, that of Italy during the carnival season, which is a real event that still occurs in celebration of the approaching Lent season, usually beginning sometime in October and continuing until shortly before Ash Wednesday. During these carnivals, people often dress fantastically in costumes, as Montresor dons an ominous black mask here and Fortunato bears what resembles a dunce cap with bells. The image may recall that of "The Masque of the Red Death," while the phenomenon of being buried alive is also witnessed in "The Premature Burial." The idea of a body being entombed in a wall is present in "The Black Cat," although the narrator's premeditated nature of his crime is more similar to "The Tell-Tale Heart" where he, too, concealed his hatred for the old man by gaily smiling, imagining that the old man was already dead. Montresor behaves similarly here as well, in deceiving Fortunato. Finally, the descent beneath the ground and the eerie landscape that greets this pair reflects some images also present in "The Pit and the Pendulum," but now it is the narrator who is the judge, rather than being the victim, and it is he who sentences the arrogant Fortunato to death.

Indeed, that is what sets "The Cask of Amontillado" apart from Poe's other tales, in that the narrator is not a raving alcoholic who becomes violently angry or a psychotic disconnected from reality. He knows exactly what he is doing, and at every moment he maintains that focus. He provides numerous opportunities for Fortunato to escape, but this man's arrogance interferes with his better judgment, blindly labeling Luchesi as an "ignoramus." It is this same arrogance for which Auguste Dupin faults the Prefect in "The Purloined Letter," and Poe draws attention to this human imperfection yet again. This tale stands as a source of dark humor, portraying the sobered Fortunato begging to be released while the narrator merely mocks him until only silence reigns, and that last brick is placed into the wall. It also serves as a warning to those who would tread upon the heads of other people, bullying them, because, like the venomous snake, these individuals will one day lash back in vengeance, as did Poe when he was awarded punitive damages for libel in 1847 by the courts after Virginia had died in January. The fact that he did not resort to murder in addressing his hostilities for Thomas Dunn English is irrelevant; all that matters is this quietly burning human emotion that Edgar Allan Poe conveys so masterfully in "The Cask of Amontillado," one of the final stories by Poe to grace the literary stage.