Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Context

A deep shroud of mystery hangs over the life and character of Poe. The basic facts are known but the truth about his personality remains obscure for many of those who knew him died young and the survivors contributed to spread wrong ideas. Whatever the truth, his life was filled with macabre tragedy as in his tales.

A year after his birth his father abandoned the family and died of tuberculosis. Poe’s mother, the actress gave birth to two more children after her husband’s disappearance. She was able to support the children by touring the theatres of the southern states but her health was declining rapidly. When she died at 24, she left Edgar in the care of a prosperous Richmond (Virginia) merchant. Mrs Allan loved him but his stepfather detested him. When they moved to England, the six-year-old Edgar was sent to a disciplinarian school in Scotland. Later he moved with the family to London where they stayed for five years. Back in Richmond he fell in love with the mother of one of his schoolmates. He was only 14. She died of tuberculosis and inspired Poe’s best poem To Helen. Allan sent Poe to University to study law so that he could help him in his business, but gave him very little money to survive. Poe gambled to improve his finances, but he built up massive debts. By now he was in love and his affections returned, but the girl’s father discovered the letters and pressed her to abandon this unsuitable match. Poe began to drink. His debts infuriated Mr Allan who withdrew him from University. Poe enlisted. Mrs Allan died of tuberculosis and Mr Allan, in a brief fit of contrition, offered assist his application to West Point. Again, he did not give Poe enough money and Poe found a temporary home with his aunt in Baltimore; he shared house with two cousins, a crippled grandmother and his alcoholic, consumptive brother. But Poe achieved his first literary success with his poems Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems. He enrolled as a cadet officer at West Point in 1830 and published his third book of poems. Soon he wearied West Point and neglected his duties, being summarily dismissed. He returned to Baltimore, his brother died and his cousin was becoming a violent drinker. Poe became very attached to his aunt and his cousin Virginia who was nine. In 1833 he submitted a number of tales to a short story competition (Descent into the Maelstrom, Ms Found in a Bottle...) a won it with great success. Mr Allan died leaving no mention of Poe in his will. The following year Poe obtained an editorial post on the Southern Literary Messenger. In 1835 he married secretly his young beloved cousin Sis, not quite 14. Virginia soon began to abandon Poe and he was driven to the bottle. He was suspended from the Messenger and the family moved to New York and then to Philadelphia where he wrote his best tales like The Fall of the House of Usher. Poe became editor of the Gentleman’s Magazine. Success and money came but also a devastating blow. Virginia caught tuberculosis. Poe began to drink again. In 1845 he published The Raven, once again a great success. Poe became a celebrity and met famous poets such as Whitman. Virginia died in 1847. Poe wrote Eureka! Poe tried to marry again and was rejected by several women. His drinking got worse and he was taken in hospital with delirium. He died within two years, aged 40.

Poe is best known by his horror stories but he treated other types of fiction, adventure, detective and science fiction. He shared contemporary enthusiasm for the voyages of discovery and fictionalized the travels of explorers in his novels such as The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Among his detective stories, one of his best known is The Murders of the Rue Morgue, which shows his ingenious detective Dupin.
Poe wrote in the Gothic tradition, that is, his subject matter deals with the macabre and supernatural and his style is heightened and melodramatic. The themes and settings of his poems coincide with those of his stories. Poe's female characters are idealized.

In his poems he aimed to inspire emotion by the musical effect of words. The Raven was immediately popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Poe was often called upon to recite it at social gatherings. The poem was published in 1845 and made him a celebrity overnight. Rich in atmosphere and symbol, the poem tells of a man who, mourning his lost love Lenore late into the night, is visited by the raven which sits above his door speaking but one word. "Nevermore". As he questions the bird further, its singular response begins to seem like a chilling prophecy of doom. The poem ends with the man despairing, "And my soul from out that shadow...shall be lifted—nevermore!"

The early 19th century saw many scientific breakthroughs and discoveries. Dalton's atomic theory in 1808, Faraday's discoveries in electricity and magnetism (inspired many fictional tales, i.e. Frankenstein), Lyell's geological synthesis, Darwin's theory of evolution, in 1838 the first steamship to cross the Atlantic, the first railway line London-Birmingham, the first electric telegraph, the daguerreotype, hypnosis had been discovered by the Austrian Anton Mesmer in the late 18th century (mesmerism). Public experiments and evenings round the microscope became highly fashionable entertainment. When the zoologist Sir Richard Owen went to dinner with the English Prime Minister Robert Peel, he took his microscope along, and, at the end of the meal, the guests gathered round to examine the remains of the joint in an attempt to discover "why cold beef sometimes shines like mother-of-pearl when cut". Few Victorian ladies could not name at least 20 species of ferns and fungi. In the new Regent's Park in London, people flocked to the Diorama, where Daguerre brilliantly recreated illusions of erupting volcanoes and wild storms. At the heart of this scientific interest was a passion for natural history reflected by the thousands of people collection specimens and making observations kept in diaries, fascinated by the power of natural phenomena. Yet there was a certain terror, a fear that the pursuit of knowledge might be as corrupting as eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The idea of the scientist as Faust.

Works: Fiction: The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838); Essays: Eureka (1848), The Rationale of Verse (1848), The Poetic Principle (1850), The Philosophy of Composition (1845); Short Stories: Eleven Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque (1840), Tales of Folio Club; Poetry: Tamerlane and Other Poems, Al Aaraaf (1829).

Themes

In order for literature to be "Gothic," it must fulfill several requirements. First, it must set a tone that is gloomy, dark, and threatening. Then, the events that take place must be strange, melodramatic, or evil. Other examples of Gothic literature are Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights. Poe's short stories are considered Gothic literature because of their eerie atmosphere and strange plot developments.

Since Poe's stories can be classified, generally, as "Gothic" literature, Poe aligns himself, in his stories, with a European tradition. Poe's tendency toward the Gothic is more in line with American literature of the early nineteenth century than it is with American literature of the mid-nineteenth century.

At mid-century, authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Herman Melville were developing a distinctly American style of writing. This movement is often called the American Literary Renaissance. Edgar Allan Poe was writing at the same time as these other authors but, it can be argued, was more interested in continuing the style of European "Gothic" literature than creating an American style. Poe's stories seem European not only in terms of style, but also in terms of content. Often they are set somewhere in Europe or have some reference to European history or politics. Of course, many people have examined Poe's style closely to find a distinctly American type of Gothic writing, and Poe may have indeed been innovating the Gothic style. However, he makes direct references to Europe and attempts to insert himself into a distinctly continental tradition rather than beginning his own tradition, as many of his contemporaries attempted to do.

In the title of an 1840 edition of his collection Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, Poe divided his short stories into those two categories, the grotesque and the arabesque, terms most often used in works of art (painting, etc.). Grotesque art often involves monsters and wilderness, whereas arabesque art usually involves a complex and geometric pattern. In relation to Poe's tales, then, the grotesque could refer to
more realistic stories with human interaction. The arabesque are stories that involve very few people but many ideas, and are frequently set in abstract locations. Of this 1840 collection, the grotesque are (arguably) "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Purloined Letter." "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of the Red Death," and "The Pit and the Pendulum" all seem to be arabesques. "The Tell-Tale Heart," though, does not fit neatly into either category, for while it is a gruesome tale of human interaction, it is also an analysis of the circular and maniacal thinking of a murderer.

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 terms 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

One of the most important themes in Poe's work is doubling, where the same thing happens twice or where characters closely mimic each other. An example of this is in "The Fall of the House of Usher," when the narrator reads from a book and hears similar noises to those he reads about. Another example is in "The Purloined Letter," when Auguste Dupin replaces the thief's letter just as the thief did when first he stole it. Poe's stories are also characterized by explorations of different kinds of horror, psychological and physical. In "The Cask of Amontillado," Fortunato undergoes great physical torture by starving to death and in "The Fall of the House of Usher" Roderick Usher suffers primarily from nerves and fear. In "The Pit and the Pendulum," of course, the narrator undergoes both psychological and physical torture as part of his punishment. Poe often utilizes conflicts between intellectualism and action, or, similarly, science and superstition. Revenge is an important theme in many of Poe's works, such as in "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Purloined Letter."
The Fall of the House of Usher

Characters

Roderick Usher - The owner of the house in "The Fall of the House of Usher," Roderick is the narrator boyhood friend. He is experiencing physical and emotional illness and is, with his sister, Madeline Usher the last of the Usher line.

Madeline Usher – Roderick Usher’s sister in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” she is sick with, and apparently dies from, a mysterious disease.

Narrator -

Plot Overview

The narrator approaches the House of Usher on a "dull, dark, and soundless day." This house--the estate of his boyhood friend, Roderick Usher is very gloomy and mysterious. The narrator writes that the house seems to have collected an evil and diseased atmosphere from the decaying trees and murky ponds around it. He notes, however, that although the house itself is decaying in pieces (for example, individual stones are disintegrating), the structure itself is fairly solid. There is only a small break in the front of the building from the roof to the ground. The narrator reveals that he is to stay in this house because his friend, Roderick, sent him a letter earnestly requesting his company. Roderick told the narrator in this letter that he was feeling bodily and emotionally ill, so the narrator rushed to his house. The narrator also mentions that the Usher family, while an ancient clan, never flourished. Only one member of the Usher family survived from generation to generation, so they were all in a direct line of descent without any siblings.

The inside of the house is just as spooky as the outside. The narrator makes his way through the long passages and to the room where Roderick is waiting. The narrator notes that his friend is paler and less energetic than he once was. Roderick tells the narrator that he suffers from nerves and fear. His senses are heightened. The narrator also notes that Roderick seems afraid of his own house. Further, Roderick's sister, Madeline Usher has taken ill with a mysterious illness that the doctors cannot even identify. The narrator proceeds to spend several days trying to cheer Roderick. He listens to Roderick play the guitar (and makes up words for his songs), he reads to Roderick, he sits with him for hours. Still, he cannot lift his sadness. Soon Roderick posits his theory that the house is unhealthy, just as the narrator had supposed at the beginning of the story.

Soon, Madeline dies, and Roderick decides to bury her temporarily in the tombs below the house. He wants to do this because he is afraid that the doctors might dig up her body for scientific examination (since her disease was so strange to them). The narrator helps Roderick put the body in the tomb. He notes that she has rosy cheeks, as some do after death. Roderick tells the narrator that he suffers from nerves and fear. His senses are heightened. The narrator also notes that Roderick seems afraid of his own house. Further, Roderick's sister, Madeline Usher has taken ill with a mysterious illness that the doctors cannot even identify. The narrator proceeds to spend several days trying to cheer Roderick. He listens to Roderick play the guitar (and makes up words for his songs), he reads to Roderick, he sits with him for hours. Still, he cannot lift his sadness. Soon Roderick posits his theory that the house is unhealthy, just as the narrator had supposed at the beginning of the story.

The narrator decides to read to Roderick in order to pass the night away. He reads the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning. As he reads, he hears noises that correspond to the descriptions in the book. At first, he ignores these sounds as his imagination. But soon he can no longer ignore the sounds; they have become more distinct. He also notices that Roderick has slumped over in his chair and is muttering to himself. Finally, the narrator goes over to him and listens to what he is saying. Roderick reveals that he has been hearing these sounds for days and believes that he and the narrator buried his sister alive and that she is trying to get out. He yells that she is standing behind the door. The wind blows the door open and confirms Roderick's fears: his sister stands in white robes bloodied from her struggle. She attacks her brother as the life drains from her, and he dies of fear. The narrator flees from the house. As he does, the entire house cracks along the zigzag break in the frame and crumples to the ground.
In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Edgar Allan Poe uses the setting to enhance the plot. In beginning
the story with a long description of the house and vicinity, Poe sets the scene for an eerie, diseased, and bleak
tale. The setting not only affects his telling of the story but changes the characters and action, too. Both the
narrator and Roderick question whether the house and its vicinity are naturally unhealthy. After all, in the
nineteenth century, many doctors still believed that a swampy or ancient area of land might make one sick.
The setting itself seems to infect the characters.

Just as the atmosphere and landscape seem translated into the characters, the house, as another
aspect of setting, functions as a symbol for the Usher family. The narrator even mentions at the beginning that
"House of Usher" had come to mean both family and home. Therefore, the house itself can be seen as an
embodiment of the family. Poe emphasizes this symbolism by personifying the house, giving it the anatomy of
humans: "eye-like windows" and clothing: a "veil." Moreover, the house is crumbling just as the family is. The
Ushers have no relatives, only themselves, and both are ailing. Finally, after Roderick and Madeline die, the
house breaks apart, representing the fate of the family.

Family is an important theme in this story. The tale essentially documents the demise of a family name.
The Ushers have been an important family: their house is huge, they are well educated, and they have
servants. But they have not produced enough offspring to continue their name. Further, Roderick claims
that his nervous exhaustion is hereditary. Therefore, not only is this generation unwell, but other generations have
also been diseased. Poe seems to be suggesting, then, that families can pass on terrible traits--like illness and
the house--as well as good ones. Beyond that, families can (intentionally or not) kill off their own kind. Roderick
did not mean to harm his sister, it seems, but did so.

The illnesses in this story, as well as some of the natural phenomena, explore the theme of science
versus superstition. Poe plays with this opposition in much of his work, questioning how many of the strange
things in life can be explained away by science. Generally speaking, the narrator represents a scientific
standpoint: he believes that the house may produce illness and dismisses his own superstitious thoughts as a
"dream." In contrast, Roderick acts as one who believes in the supernatural: he hears noises and is afraid that
he will one day die from fear. The two characters often clash in these beliefs. The narrator dismisses Roderick
as a hypochondriac. Here, then, the narrator seems to be taking on the position that people are only sick if
they can be proven so scientifically. Yet Roderick ultimately dies from what he superstitiously believed he
would: fear. And, when Roderick rushes into the narrator's room on the night he dies, he is afraid of the mist
around the house, which the narrator explains away as a weather phenomenon. The science-versus-
superstition question remains an open one, because it is hard to know whether Madeline actually fought her
way out of the tomb alive after several days or whether she is a ghost that both men see. The physical
collapse of the house makes the reader wonder whether the entire story is a supernatural phenomenon or
whether it is merely a tale of (scientific) coincidence.

The Black Cat (plot summary)

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" 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?". 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!" 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". 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.

The Cask of Amontillado (Plot summary)

A narrator named Montresor describes how a man named Fortunato has offended him repeatedly, and now he wishes to get revenge for these injustices "without impunity," noting that he does not want to have any consequences for this act. However, he does not reveal his hatred to Fortunato at all but instead continued "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." 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 laceret," 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." 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 steps 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 salt petter, 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.

The Masque of the Red Death (plot summary)

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". 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 develop 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 curtains 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". 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". 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". 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". 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.”

The Murders in the Rue Morgue (plot summary)

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”. 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”. 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 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. 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 stonecutting.

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 Camilla L'Espanage 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'Espanage 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". 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, it 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 mad man 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 and 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 the 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 captured 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'".

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.

The Purloined Letter (Plot summary)

   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 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 disassembled 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”. 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". 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

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1 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.
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". 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 Crebillon², "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.

The Tell-Tale Heart (Plot summary)

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". 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". 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". 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.

² 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.
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 derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!--and now--again!--hark! louder! louder! louder!--". 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.

Study Questions

1. How does fear function in the story "The Tell-Tale Heart?"

Answer for Question 1

In "The Tell-Tale Heart," fear acts as the narrator's motive to kill, as part of the murder, and as the reason that the narrator turns himself in. The narrator is clearly somewhat deranged and is horribly afraid of the old man's pale blue eye. This fear of the eye causes the narrator to want to kill the old man. The narrator even reveals that he understands the fear that the old man is feeling at one point because he often feels it himself. Indeed, the murderer seems to want to kill the old man just so that someone besides himself will feel fear. Secondly, fear functions as part of the crime, because the old man wakes up and waits in mortal fear for something to happen to him. This fear seems to be almost worse than the actual death because it torments him so. Finally, we see that even killing the old man has not dispelled the narrator's fear. Now he is afraid that the police will figure out what he has done. In another attempt to end his fear, the murderer turns himself in.
2. How does using a developed character as a narrator in “The Purloined Letter” and in “The Fall of the House of Usher” change the story (given that Poe could have told it from the perspective of someone uninvolved in the story's events)?

Answer for Question 2
In “The Purloined Letter,” the characterized narrator helps to give readers a sense of Auguste Dupin personality and emphasizes the power of intellectualism in the story. As the two men sit in Dupin's library together in silence, it is immediately obvious that Dupin is a confident and intelligent man. Most people cannot sit for an hour simply contemplating a subject, especially with another person in the room. Dupin is not a social man as much as he is interested in intellectual pursuits; the narrator's presence as a figure in the story illustrates this dynamic. In addition, the character of the narrator strengthens the intellectual emphasis in the story because it is the narrator to whom Dupin explains his use of intellectual tricks to solve the mystery. In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the narrator is crucial in developing suspense and horror. When one reads or sees a story through the eyes of a particular person, one cannot help but become more involved (and more frightened). Further, the character of the narrator is established as one skeptical of superstition. Therefore, when even this man begins to be anxious and superstitious, the story becomes all the more frightening.

3. Compare and contrast the ways in which family is important in the stories “The Cask of Amontillado” and “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

Answer for Question 3
Generally speaking, family in “The Cask of Amontillado” is helpful to the protagonist Montressor, whereas family is destructive to Roderick Usher in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” In “The Cask of Amontillado,” Montressor and Fortunato go into Montressor's vaults. These vaults have long been passed down in his family. It is with these vaults that Montressor tortures Fortunato, first with the nitre that makes him cough and second by trapping him inside. Further, Montressor uses his family's crest to foreshadow the revenge he will take on Fortunato. This use of the symbol suggests that it was from his family that he acquired his taste for revenge. Lastly, the bones that decorate the walls of the crypt are those of his family members. These bones hide the body of Fortunato and prevent anyone from ever finding him and discovering Montressor's crime. In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” however, Roderick Usher is hurt by his family. The house that he inherited is falling apart, and due to his family’s failure to produce offspring, Roderick has been saddled with the burden of continuing the family line. And, his family has never been able to produce many offspring, so all of the pressure to pass on a line of Ushers rests on him. Roderick also claims that he has inherited his fearfulness from his family. Of course, it is this fearfulness which ultimately kills Roderick--and the inciting source of fear is similarly the "presence" of a family member (his sister). Therefore, whereas family helps the hero of “The Cask of Amontillado,” it kills one of the heroes of “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

4. Why might the rooms of the palace in “The Masque of the Red Death” be different colors?

Answer for question 4.
The Masque of the Red Death is an allegory. A wealthy and hopeful nobleman, Prince Prospero throws a long, closed party at his palace while most of his country is dying of the Red Death. Ultimately, the disease creeps inside the palace gates and kills everyone there.

5. Which stories of Poe’s seem like grotesque tales and which seem like arabesques? Why?

6. How does Poe’s use of doubling in “The Fall of the House of Usher” increase the scariness of the tale?

7. In “The Pit and the Pendulum,” the narrator almost succumbs to three different kinds of deaths. How is each kind characterized as both a psychological and physical form of torture?
Answer for question 7.
In "The Pit and the Pendulum," the narrator is a prisoner of the Inquisition. He comes close several times to dying a torturous death but is ultimately freed.


Answer for question 8.
In "The Cask of Amontillado" Montressor wants to avenge the insults and injuries that the nobleman Fortunato has laid upon him. He leads his nemesis, Fortunato, into his vaults to taste a special sherry. Once there, however, Montressor chains Fortunato up and traps him in the vaults, killing him.
"The Purloined Letter" is a story of intellectual intrigue, wherein C. Auguste Dupin solves a case of a stolen letter for the police, lead by Monsieur G. the Prefect of the Parisian police who works hard but cannot solve the crime. Dupin does so by outwitting both the police and the thief, placing a great deal of significance not only on intelligence but also on instinct. Minister D. is the man who has stolen the letter and has political aspirations.

9. Discuss insanity in "The Tell-Tale Heart." Why would the narrator insist that he is not mad? What evidence do we have that he is mad (other than the fact of his murderous deed)?

Answer for question 9.
"The Tell-Tale Heart" is a story told from the perspective of the murderer. He plots to kill an old man, does so, and then turns himself in to the police because he believes that they have caught on to his crime. The old man's pale blue eyes haunt his memory and make him feel guilty.
Screen Versions


The first film ever produced of one of Poe's stories was *The Fall of the House of Usher* directed by Jean Epstein in 1928, a French production starring Jean Debucourt, Marguerite Chance & Charles Lamy.

In 1935 Lew Landers & Louis Friendlander directed the first screen version of *The Raven*, with Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Irene Ware & Lester Matthews.


Roger Corman, specialist in Gothic movies, directed:
- *Tales of Terror* (1962), starring Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, Basil Rathbone, Debra Paget & Maggie Pierce.
- *Obsession* (1963), a good adaptation of “A Premature Burial”, starring Ray Milland and Hazel Court.
- *Tomb of Ligeia* (1964), starring Vincent Price & Elizabeth Shepherd.
- *The Raven* (1964), starring Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff, Hazel Court and a very young Jack Nicholson.

The Italian Antonio Margheretti directed two productions on “The Mask of the Red Death”:
- *Castle of Blood* (1964), starring Barbara Steele and Mario Bava.

Another Italian-French co-production was that of Federico Fellini, Roger Vadim & Louis Malle, *Spirits of the Dead* (1968), starring Jane Fonda, Terence Stamp, Alain Delon & Brigitte Bardot.

*The Black Cat* is the tale that has more screen versions:

In 1934 by Edgard G. Ulmer.
In 1941 by Albert Rogell, with Basil Rathbone, Broderick Crawford, Hugh Herbert, Bela Lugosi & Gale Sondergaard, produced by Universal Studios.
In 1966 by Harold Hoffman, with Robert Frost, Robyn Baker & Sadie French.
In 1981 by Lucio Fulci, starring Patrick McGee, Mimsy Farmer, David Warbeck & Al Cliver.

There are two versions of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, one by Robert Florey (1932), starring Bela Lugosi, Sidney Fox, Leon Ames & Bert Roach, produced by Universal Studios.
The second version was produced by Warner Bros in three dimensions. Directed by Roy del Ruth in 1954 and starring Karl Malden, Patricia Medina, Claude Dauphin & Steve Forrest.
The Oblong Box was directed by Gordon Hessler in 1969, starring Vincent Price, Christopher Lee & Alastair Williamson. Film produced by American International Pictures.

The latest screen versión is The haunting of Morella directed by Jim Wynors in 1991, produced by Roger Corman and starring Nicole Eggert & David McCallum in this erotic version of Poe’s classic tale “Morella”.


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