*Edgar Allan Poe*

*Multimedia Study of Horror*

*Mrs. Rosen*

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| Who is Edgar Allan Poe?PoeThe name Poe brings to mind images of murderers and madmen, premature burials, and mysterious women who return from the dead. His works have been in print since 1827 and include such literary classics as “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Raven,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher.” This versatile writer’s oeuvre includes short stories, poetry, a novel, a textbook, a book of scientific theory, and hundreds of essays and book reviews. He is widely acknowledged as the inventor of the modern detective story and an innovator in the science fiction genre, but he made his living as America’s first great literary critic and theoretician. Poe’s reputation today rests primarily on his tales of terror as well as on his haunting lyric poetry.Just as the bizarre characters in Poe’s stories have captured the public imagination so too has Poe himself. He is seen as a morbid, mysterious figure lurking in the shadows of moonlit cemeteries or crumbling castles. This is the Poe of legend.  But much of what we know about Poe is wrong, the product of a biography written by one of his enemies in an attempt to defame the author’s name.The real Poe was born to traveling actors in Boston on January 19, 1809.  Edgar was the second of three children. His other brother William Henry Leonard Poe would also become a poet before his early death, and Poe’s sister Rosalie Poe would grow up to teach penmanship at a Richmond girls’ school.  Within three years of Poe’s birth both of his parents had died, and he was taken in by the wealthy tobacco merchant John Allan and his wife Frances Valentine Allan in Richmond, Virginia while Poe’s siblings went to live with other families. Mr. Allan would rear Poe to be a businessman and a Virginia gentleman, but Poe had dreams of being a writer in emulation of his childhood hero the British poet Lord Byron. Early poetic verses found written in a young Poe’s handwriting on the backs of Allan’s ledger sheets reveal how little interest Poe had in the tobacco business. By the age of thirteen, Poe had compiled enough poetry to publish a book, but his headmaster advised Allan against allowing this.  In 1826 Poe left Richmond to attend the University of Virginia, where he excelled in his classes while accumulating considerable debt. The miserly Allan had sent Poe to college with less than a third of the money he needed, and Poe soon took up gambling to raise money to pay his expenses. By the end of his first term Poe was so desperately poor that he burned his furniture to keep warm.  Humiliated by his poverty and furious with Allan for not providing enough funds in the first place, Poe returned to Richmond and visited the home of his fiancée Elmira Royster, only to discover that she had become engaged to another man in Poe’s absence.   The heartbroken Poe’s last few months in the Allan mansion were punctuated with increasing hostility towards Allan until Poe finally stormed out of the home in a quixotic quest to become a great poet and to find adventure. He accomplished the first objective by publishing his first book Tamerlane when he was only eighteen, and to achieve the second goal he enlisted in the United States Army. Two years later he heard that Frances Allan, the only mother he had ever known, was dying of tuberculosis and wanted to see him before she died. By the time Poe returned to Richmond she had already been buried. Poe and Allan briefly reconciled, and Allan helped Poe gain an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point.  Before going to West Point, Poe published another volume of poetry. While there, Poe was offended to hear that Allan had remarried without telling him or even inviting him to the ceremony. Poe wrote to Allan detailing all the wrongs Allan had committed against him and threatened to get himself expelled from the academy. After only eight months at West Point Poe was thrown out, but he soon published yet another book.Broke and alone, Poe turned to Baltimore, his late father’s home, and called upon relatives in the city. One of Poe’s cousins robbed him in the night, but another relative, Poe’s aunt Maria Clemm, became a new mother to him and welcomed him into her home. Clemm’s daughter Virginia first acted as a courier to carry letters to Poe’s lady loves but soon became the object of his desire.  While Poe was in Baltimore, Allan died, leaving Poe out of his will, which did, however, provide for an illegitimate child Allan had never seen. By then Poe was living in poverty but had started publishing his short stories, one of which won a contest sponsored by the Saturday Visiter. The connections Poe established through the contest allowed him to publish more stories and to eventually gain an editorial position at the Southern Literary Messenger in Richmond. It was at this magazine that Poe finally found his life’s work as a magazine writer.  Virginia ClemmWithin a year Poe helped make the Messenger the most popular magazine in the south with his sensational stories as well as with his scathing book reviews. Poe soon developed a reputation as a fearless critic who not only attacked an author’s work but also insulted the author and the northern literary establishment. Poe targeted some of the most famous writers in the country.  One of his victims was the anthologist and editor Rufus Griswold.At the age of twenty-seven, Poe brought Maria and Virginia Clemm to Richmond and married his Virginia, who was not yet fourteen. The marriage proved a happy one, and the family is said to have enjoyed singing together at night. Virginia expressed her devotion to her husband in a Valentine poem now in the collection of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and Poe celebrated the joys of married life in his poem “Eulalie.”Dissatisfied with his low pay and lack of editorial control at the Messenger, Poe moved to New York City. In the wake of the financial crisis known as the “Panic of 1837,” Poe struggled to find magazine work and wrote his only novel, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym.  After a year in New York, Poe moved to Philadelphia in 1838 and wrote for a number of different magazines. He served as editor of Burton’s and then Graham’s magazines while continuing to sell articles to Alexander’s Weekly Messenger and other journals.  In spite of his growing fame, Poe was still barely able to make a living. For the publication of his first book of short stories, Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, he was only paid with twenty-five free copies of his book. He would soon become a champion for the cause of higher wages for writers as well as for an international copyright law. To change the face of the magazine industry, he proposed starting his own journal, but he failed to find the necessary funding.In the face of poverty Poe was still able to find solace at home with his wife and mother-in-law, but tragedy struck in 1842 when Poe’s wife contracted tuberculosis, the disease that had already claimed Poe’s mother, brother, and foster mother.  Always in search of better opportunities, Poe moved to New York again in 1844 and introduced himself to the city by perpetrating a hoax. His “news story” of a balloon trip across the ocean caused a sensation, and the public rushed to read everything about it—until Poe revealed that he had fooled them all. Sarah WhitmanThe January 1845 publication of “The Raven” made Poe a household name. He was now famous enough to draw large crowds to his lectures, and he was beginning to demand better pay for his work. He published two books that year, and briefly lived his dream of running his own magazine when he bought out the owners of the Broadway Journal. The failure of the venture, his wife’s deteriorating health, and rumors spreading about Poe’s relationship with a married woman, drove him out of the city in 1846. At this time he moved to a tiny cottage in the country. It was there, in the winter of 1847 that Virginia died at the age of twenty-four. Poe was devastated, and was unable to write for months. His critics assumed he would soon be dead. They were right. Poe only lived another two years and spent much of that time traveling from one city to the next giving lectures and finding backers for his latest proposed magazine project to be called The Stylus.While on lecture tour in Lowell, Massachusetts, Poe met and befriended Nancy Richmond. His idealized and platonic love of her inspired some of his greatest poetry, including “For Annie.” Since she remained married and unattainable, Poe attempted to marry the poetess Sarah Helen Whitman in Providence, but the engagement lasted only about one month. In Richmond he found his first fiancée Elmira Royster Shelton was now a widow, so began to court her again. Before he left Richmond on a trip to Philadelphia he considered himself engaged to her, and her letters from the time imply that she felt the same way. On the way to Philadelphia, Poe stopped in Baltimore and disappeared for five days.  He was found in the bar room of a public house that was being used as a polling place for an election. The magazine editor Joseph Snodgrass sent Poe to Washington College Hospital, where Poe spent the last days of his life far from home and surrounded by strangers. Neither Poe’s mother-in-law nor his fiancée knew what had become of him until they read about it in the newspapers. Poe died on October 7, 1849 at the age of forty. The exact cause of Poe’s death remains a mystery.Rufus GriswoldDays after Poe’s death, his literary rival Rufus Griswold wrote a libelous obituary of the author in a misguided attempt at revenge for some of the offensive things Poe had said and written about him. Griswold followed the obituary with a memoir in which he portrayed Poe as a drunken, womanizing madman with no morals and no friends.  Griswold’s attacks were meant to cause the public to dismiss Poe and his works, but the biography had exactly the opposite effect and instead drove the sales of Poe’s books higher than they had ever been during the author’s lifetime. Griswold’s distorted image of Poe created the Poe legend that lives to this day while Griswold is only remembered (if at all) as Poe’s first biographer.  |

# Literary Style, Themes, and Genre

# Poe's best known fiction works are Gothic, a genre he followed to appease the public taste. His most recurring themes deal with questions of death, including its physical signs, the effects of decomposition, concerns of premature burial, the reanimation of the dead, and mourning. Many of his works are generally considered part of the dark romanticism genre, a literary reaction to transcendentalism, which Poe strongly disliked. He referred to followers of the movement as "Frogpondians" after the pond on Boston Common and ridiculed their writings as "metaphor-run mad," lapsing into "obscurity for obscurity's sake" or "mysticism for mysticism's sake."

# Beyond horror, Poe also wrote satires, humor tales, and hoaxes. For comic effect, he used irony and ludicrous extravagance, often in an attempt to liberate the reader from cultural conformity. In fact, "Metzengerstein", the first story that Poe is known to have published, and his first foray into horror, was originally intended as a burlesque satirizing the popular genre. Poe also reinvented science fiction, responding in his writing to emerging technologies such as hot air balloons in "The Balloon-Hoax".

# Poe wrote much of his work using themes specifically catered for mass market tastes. To that end, his fiction often included elements of popular pseudosciences such as phrenology (study of bumps on the skull) and physiognomy (study of facial features).

## More on the Genre (Horror or Gothic Fiction, Southern Gothic, Psychological Thriller and Suspense)

Horror or Gothic fiction can also be "sensation" fiction, a popular genre in Poe's day. Sensation stories were designed to work on the readers' *senses*. The characters experience scandalous feelings and desires, commit dire acts, and find themselves in extreme situations. Violence, imprisonment, death, dismemberment, and live burial are meant to shock us into feeling.

In "The Black Cat," most of the drama occurs in the home, and revolves around the narrator's relationship with his wife and pets. Like so many narratives of terror and depravity, this one combines the family drama with the horror or Gothic. This taps into some of our deepest fears – fears of what can go wrong at home. Home is where we are *supposed* to be most comfortable and safe, and is also where we are most vulnerable. As in "The Tell-Tale-Heart," however, home for the characters in this story is anything but safe.

A psychological thriller tries to get into *our* heads, but also plunges us inside the twisted mind of an abusive killer detailing the stages of his breakdown. We keep reading because we want to see what happens next, and because we want to find out *why* or *how* this person got so twisted. The suspense of "The Black Cat" extends beyond the end of the story, since the ending doesn't give us many answers. The possibility that supernatural forces are at work adds another layer of suspense, and, perhaps, another layer of terror.

The Southern Gothic is a sub-genre of the Gothic. It usually features a southern setting, and deals with issues of slavery, or the American South after slavery. Poe was writing before the Civil War. As you know, the institution of slavery was still legal in the US, and was a part of southern life. Critics and readers have been debating Poe's stance on slavery and race for a long time. Because Poe was virtually silent on the issue, this debate will most likely continue for a long time.

**“The Black Cat”**

Pre-reading question: What does the black cat symbolize in our culture? Why do you think this is?

Discussion questions: Answer the questions in complete sentences. Use evidence from the story to support your responses.

1. Is the narrator reliable? Why or why not? Provide evidence to support your answer.

2. Describe which literary devices (characterization, diction, mood, imagery, etc.) Poe used in order to establish an atmosphere of fear in the story.

**“The Tell-Tale Heart”**

Answer the following questions in complete sentences:

1. Is the narrator a woman or a man? Evidence?

2. Who is the narrator having a conversation with? Evidence?

3. What could the eye symbolize in this story?

4. What did the narrator likely really hear at the end? Possibilities?

5. Is the narrator reliable? Why or why not?

6. What specific words does Poe use to appeal to your senses (imagery) throughout the story?

**“The Masque of the Red Death”**



**Background:** Poe’s fictional red death resembles a real disease that occurred in Medieval and Renaissance Europe–septicemic plague. Within hours after infecting a person, this deadliest form of plague caused high fever and turned the skin purple. A victim of septicemic plague sometimes got up in the morning hale and healthy, without an ache or a pain, and went to bed in a grave.
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Plague was spread from rats to humans by fleas. The disease manifested itself in three forms: bubonic plague, which caused painful swellings (buboes) in the lymph nodes of the armpits and groin; pneumonic plague, which filled the lungs with fluid; and septicemic plague, which poisoned the bloodstream. Septicemic plague was far less common than the other two forms of the disease. Sometimes one form of the disease killed by itself; at other times, it progressed into another of the forms before claiming a victim. Together, these three manifestations of plague were known as the Black Death because of the livid hue of corpses caused by subcutaneous hemorrhaging. Black, of course, is the color of the seventh room in “The Masque of the Red Death.”

**Pre-reading Question:** No man or woman can escape death. It is human nature, of course, to attempt to escape death, and many of us in the modern world resort to extreme measures to postpone it for as long as possible. What are some of those measures?

**Study Questions:**

1. Use five vivid words to describe the Red Death image.

2. Prospero and his courtiers abandon the rank-and-file citizens of the realm, welding shut the iron gate of their refuge so that no one from the outside can get in. Do the members of a community–especially the leaders–have a duty to help those in need? Why or why not?

3. How does Poe develop the theme that no one escapes death through the use of symbolism in the story?

4. Discuss Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" in terms of how it portrays a societal or group response to illness and plague. What is the attitude of the privileged guests of Prospero's castle toward those outside the castle who are more vulnerable to and afflicted by the Red Death? In what ways can this story function as a parable, or story with a moral, for understanding contemporary societal responses to the disease of AIDS and those infected with HIV?

5. What are some other stories or movies that also center on the idea of an inescapable illness or plague? Why are these stories so frightening?

**“The Raven”**



What gives a scary story its dark and gloomy characteristics? Looking closely, it becomes apparent all scary stories have the same elements in them, and these features are all aspects pertaining to Gothicism. The focus on death, the question of reality, and mysterious or scary settings all make up these bleak, frightening stories.

**Key Motifs:**

* Madness
* Love
* Man and the Natural World
* The Supernatural

**Study Questions:**

1. Do you think this poem is supposed to be funny? Do you find the speaker's tale intense and dramatic, or ridiculous and over-the-top?

2. What are the conflicts in "The Raven"? What types of conflict (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) do you see?

3. On that note, do you think the speaker of this poem has really lost his mind, or does he just seem very, very sad to you?

4. Do you trust the speaker? Do you think he gives us an accurate version of reality?

5. Have you ever known someone (or been someone) whose love turned into obsession? Describe that experience.

6. How is the word “nevermore” related to the narrator's emotional state at the end of the poem?

## A Gothic Comparison:

## The Stories of Edgar Allan Poe vs. *Se7en*

**Assignment:**  “The Black Cat”, “Tell-Tale Heart”, “Masque of the Red Death”, and “The Raven” by Edger Allan Poe, and the movie, *Se7en*, all contain the bleak and ominous moods prevalent in Gothicism, and although these works contain the themes that define this genre, they each present these themes in unique ways.

Compare the similar gothic mood, plot, imagery, characterization, symbolism, etc. that appear in any or all of Poe’s stories and the movie *Se7en*.

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***Notes page:***

# “The Black Cat” (1845)

***by Edgar Allan Poe***

    FOR the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not -- and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified -- have tortured -- have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror -- to many they will seem less terrible than barroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place -- some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

    From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man.

    I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

    This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point -- and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

    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, during which my general temperament and character -- through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance -- had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me -- for what disease is like Alcohol ! -- and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish -- even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

    One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket ! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

    When reason returned with the morning -- when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch -- I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

    In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart -- one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself -- to offer violence to its own nature -- to do wrong for the wrong's sake only -- that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree; -- hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart; -- hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence; -- hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin -- a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it -- if such a thing were possible -- even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

    On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

    I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts -- and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire -- a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words "strange!" "singular!" and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

    When I first beheld this apparition -- for I could scarcely regard it as less -- my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd -- by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

    Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

    One night as I sat, half stupified, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat -- a very large one -- fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

    Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it -- knew nothing of it -- had never seen it before.

    I continued my caresses, and, when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

    For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but -- I know not how or why it was -- its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually -- very gradually -- I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

    What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

    With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly -- let me confess it at once -- by absolute *dread* of the beast.

    This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil -- and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own -- yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own -- that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimæras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow degrees -- degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my Reason struggled to reject as fanciful -- it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. 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 of Crime -- of Agony and of Death !

    And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. And *a brute beast* -- whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed -- *a brute beast* to work out for me -- for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God -- so much of insufferable wo! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight -- an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to shake off -- incumbent eternally upon my heart !

    Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates -- the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

    One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.

    This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard -- about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar -- as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

    For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect any thing suspicious.

    And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow-bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brick-work. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself -- "Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain."

    My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night -- and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

    The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a freeman. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted -- but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

    Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

    "Gentlemen," I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, "I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this -- this is a very well constructed house." (In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.) -- "I may say an *excellently* well constructed house. These walls -- are you going, gentlemen? -- these walls are solidly put together;" and here, through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

    But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend ! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb! -- by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman -- a howl -- a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the dammed in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

    Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. 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 Tell-Tale Heart” (1850)

***by Edgar Allan Poe***

   TRUE! -- nervous -- very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses -- not destroyed -- not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. 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.

    It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture --a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees -- very gradually --I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

    Now this is the point. 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. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it --oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly --very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! --would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously --oh, so cautiously --cautiously (for the hinges creaked) --I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights --every night just at midnight --but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

    Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I *felt* the extent of my own powers --of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back --but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

    I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out --"Who's there?"

    I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; --just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

    Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief --oh, no! --it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself --"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney --it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: 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 --although he neither saw nor heard --to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

    When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little --a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it --you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily --until, at length a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.

    It was open --wide, wide open --and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness --all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

    And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses? --now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

    But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror *must* have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! --do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me --the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once --once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

    If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

    I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye -- not even *his* --could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out --no stain of any kind --no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all --ha! ha!

    When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock --still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, --for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

    I smiled, --for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search --search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

    The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct: --it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness --until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

    No doubt I now grew very pale; --but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased --and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound --much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath -- and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly --more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men -- but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed --I raved --I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder --louder --louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! --no, no! 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! Anything 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! *louder!* --

    "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! --here, here! --it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

# “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842)

***by Edgar Allan Poe***

   THE "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avator 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. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

    But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the "Red Death."

    It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

    It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven — an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue — and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange — the fifth with white — the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet — a deep blood color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

    It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused revery or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

    But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be sure that he was not.

    He had directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fete; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm — much of what has been since seen in "Hernani." There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. 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 the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away — they have endured but an instant — and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven, there are now none of the maskers who venture; for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appals; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulge in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments.

    But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled. And thus too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise — then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

    In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. 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.

    When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

    "Who dares?" he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him — "who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him — that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise, from the battlements!"

    It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly — for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

    It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder, who, at the moment was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker. But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple — through the purple to the green — through the green to the orange — through this again to the white — and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry — and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, 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.

    And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

# “The Raven” (1845)

***by Edgar Allan Poe***

  Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door-
                Only this, and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;- vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow- sorrow for the lost Lenore-
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore-
                Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me- filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating,
"'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door-
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;-
                This it is, and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you"- here I opened wide the door;-
                Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"-
                Merely this, and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice:
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore-
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;-
                'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door-
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door-
                Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore.
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore-
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
                Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning- little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door-
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
                With such name as "Nevermore."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered- not a feather then he fluttered-
Till I scarcely more than muttered, "Other friends have flown before-
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."
                Then the bird said, "Nevermore."

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore-
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
                Of 'Never- nevermore'."

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;
Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore-
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore
                Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
                *She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then methought the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee- by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite- respite and nepenthe, from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
                Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! -
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-
On this home by Horror haunted- tell me truly, I implore-
Is there- *is* there balm in Gilead?- tell me- tell me, I implore!"
                Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us- by that God we both adore-
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore-
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
                Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend," I shrieked, upstarting-
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken!- quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
                Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
                Shall be lifted- nevermore!