Poe's Stories

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

Poe was orphaned at a young age and fostered by the Allans, and grew up with them in Virginia. After dropping out of university and the army, he became one of the first writers of the time to make a living from publishing his work, but he had much financial and mental difficulty throughout his life. His death in 1849 was a much debated tragedy – alcohol, suicide, tuberculosis and many other things have been attributed as causes.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many autobiographical details can be inferred from Poe's work. Narrators that suffer from loneliness, temper and disease are particularly pertinent to his own life. Historical events such as the slavery and poverty of 19th century America also affected the reception of the stories and Poe's insight.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* takes much of its suspenseful plot, opium-induced reveries and doppelganger antagonist from Poe. William Wordsworth, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and even William Blake are part of the Gothic and Romantic legacy that Poe had a hand in inspiring and the wild weather and violent deeds of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for example, are strongly reminiscent of Poe's settings.

KEY FACTS

- **Where Written:** Several cities in the United States, including New York and Baltimore
- **When Published:** "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833); "Ligeia" (1838); "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839); "William Wilson" (1839); "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841); "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843); "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1843); "The Black Cat" (1843); "The Purloined Letter" (1844); "The Masque of the Red Death" (1845); "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846)
- **Literary Period:** Poe is considered an influence in several literary movements and eras, including the Romantic, Gothic and the 19th century, Victorian periods

EXTRA CREDIT

Unfinished Business. An unfinished manuscript of Poe's was found after his death amongst his papers, and writer Joyce Carol Oates was inspired to finish it off. She turned Poe's potential page-turner into a new story called *The Fabled Light-House at Vina del Mar*.

Poe's Pets. Though many of Poe's stories are influences by real events and characters, his violence towards cats in The Black Cat couldn't be further from the truth. Poe was a cat-lover, and his own cat was named Catterina!

PLOT SUMMARY

M.S. Found in a Bottle

The narrator, a self-professed man of reason, has been travelling for a long time, and recently started a voyage on a cargo ship to the Archipelago Islands. Soon the sea and sky grow ominous. It gets very humid and the narrator senses a storm coming. Suddenly one night the ship is pulled by a whirlpool and is wrecked. All of the crew, apart from the narrator and his shipmate, are swept overboard.

The two spend days trying not to succumb to the whirlpool. As they struggle, they encounter the biggest vessel they have ever seen, rising in front of them like a wave. The ship crashes over them and the narrator is flung onto its deck. He hides, stowing himself away in the hold. As the days pass, the narrator writes down his thoughts, hoping to send them out to sea in a bottle someday. He explains how the crew, which is strangely aged and foreign, doesn't seem to sense his presence at all. The ship reminds him of ships he has known, and has something antique about it, just like its crew, but he can't figure it out. He observes the captain in his cabin, murmuring like the rest of the crew in an unintelligible way, and fiddling with what looks like ancient scientific instruments and charts.

Walls of ice rise up around the ship, which is headed due south. The crew seem to be excited, as if they heading for some huge discovery. The narrator is terrified but his curiosity outweighs his terror. He keeps writing down his experiences, but as he does, the ship starts to be pulled into the whirlpool and he scribbles his last words as the ship is swallowed up.

Ligeia

The narrator tells us about his late wife, Ligeia. He has trouble remembering how they met, or her full name, but her spirit and appearance is vivid to him, particularly her **eyes**, which are larger and darker than human eyes should be and have an expression that reminds the narrator of many things, including elderly people and certain passages of literature. Another thing about Ligeia that he loved was how educated she was – she even taught him about metaphysics.

When Ligeia becomes ill, the narrator is at a loss, and the hardest thing is that she herself does not go peacefully to the

grave – she resents dying. On her deathbed she confesses her extreme passion for the narrator. She makes him recite a poem that she wrote called The Conqueror Worm and then pleads for death to be conquered instead of her.

After Ligeia's death, the narrator buys an old abbey in a remote place and marries the Lady Rowena of Tremaine. Their bridal chamber is a tomb-like pentagonal **room** with tapestries whose figures appear to move. The new couple begins married life but it is far from a loving partnership and the narrator begins to be haunted by dreams of Ligeia. When Rowena falls ill, the narrator watches over her, and strange fancies start to disturb him – he believes he sees a shadow on the ground and, when he tries to revive his wife with a glass of wine, he is sure he sees ghostly drops of ruby liquid fall into the glass from mid air, but he has also been taking opium so blames the visions on that.

Rowena's condition worsens and on the fourth night, she dies. As he looks at her corpse, the narrator is overwhelmed with memories of Ligeia. As if these memories have stirred the atmosphere, he suddenly thinks he sees a blush come to Rowena's face, but soon she becomes pale as death again. Memories of Ligeia come flooding back, and again Rowena appears to awaken and this time she sighs, but as before, she is soon corpse-like again. Throughout the night, this pattern continues, memories of Ligeia seem to stir Rowena alive, until near morning, Rowena actually appears to rise from her bed and step towards the narrator, but she seems taller than he remembers. She removes the cloth wrapping covering her and reveals the wild **eyes** of Ligeia.

The Fall of the House of Usher

The narrator approaches The House of Usher, an **incredibly desolate, aged building**, with a crack in the façade from roof to ground, which gives him an awful feeling. He rides on to the house anyway, because he has been called upon by a very sick old friend, Roderick Usher, who comes from a family of eccentrics, famous for works of art and music. The family is also interesting for its pure Usher family line.

Inside the house, the narrator finds Usher himself awfully changed, both physically and in his mood, which alternates rapidly between liveliness and sullenness. Usher explains his condition as inherited, and also believes that it is connected to the **house**. His sister, Madeleine, is also very ill and as she walks through the room, the narrator gets a ghostly feeling.

The narrator and Usher pass their days painting and reading from Gothic books. One day, Usher tells the narrator that his sister has died and they bring her coffin to a heavily reinforced vault below the house. The narrator sees that Madeleine was actually Roderick's twin and that her disease has left an unsettling blush on her face.

After his sister's death, Usher becomes more and more manic, and one night, during an electrical storm, Usher visits the narrator's room him in a distracted state. To comfort Usher, the narrator reads from a story, but the actions described within the story are accompanied by noises from within the house. The narrator at first tries to ignore the coincidence but the noise gets more and more real and Usher has now faced his chair towards the door of the room. He starts muttering about the noises and tells the narrator that they have buried Madeleine alive and she is now standing outside. On cue, Madeleine breaks through the door and falls onto Usher. He dies on the spot and the narrator flees. As the narrator looks back to the dreadful house, the **crack down the façade splits and the house collapses**.

William Wilson

The narrator tells us to call him William Wilson, an alias that he has chosen because his own name is now detestable to him and everyone he knows. He describes the school playground and dorms in which he spent his youth, and tells us that amongst his peers, he was dominant and confident. But the arrival of another boy of the same name changes everything. They are almost identical, sharing both physical appearance and date of birth. Their only difference is the other boy's voice, which is a whisper. They form an inseparable but destructive relationship, always trying to fool each other and pick up on the other's weakness.

One day they have a violent altercation and from then on, the rivalry is intense. One night, the narrator steals into his double's closet-bedroom, but as he sheds light on the sleeping menace, he doesn't recognize the face he sees. He is terrified and leaves the school at once.

William studies at Eton next, and gets into drinking. He manages to forget his past, but during one night of revelry, a stranger enters the party with the familiar whisper of his doppelganger, and he realizes he has not escaped. He moves on to Oxford, and gets into gambling. One night, he tricks and financially ruins a man called Glendinning in a game of cards, but the doppelganger shows up and reveals to William Wilson's friends at the gambling table how William was cheating.

Now shunned by his friends, William flees the country, trying to get away from his double. But everywhere he goes, the other William goes too. In Rome at a masquerade ball, as he is trying to have an affair with a married woman, his doppelganger turns up again. This time William confronts and tries to kill him. The room changes and he sees a mirror before him, and the face of William Wilson, coming towards him, telling him that he has murdered himself.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

The narrator explains the analytic mind, and then describes his friend Auguste Dupin and the time that they spent together in Paris. To show what strange but ingenious company he is in, he explains how Dupin one day broke their silence by continuing one of the narrator's silent thoughts, and then explaining how he did it.

Next the narrator describes a recent unusually brutal murder, of a girl and her mother, which has the police baffled. The witness testimonies suggest that there were two voices heard in the apartment, one shrill, one gruff, and the former so foreign as to be unintelligible to a diverse host of witnesses.

Dupin believes that the police misread the crime scene and arrested an innocent man. He and the narrator investigate the crime scene themselves. Dupin already seems to know something that nobody else does, and tells the narrator that he is expecting a visit from a man involved in the crime.

Dupin explains to the narrator how he has reasoned out the solution: the gruff voice, he says, was not in any human language; an extremely agile murderer could have come into the apartment through a window in a way the police did not consider; and the criminal would have to have had superhuman strength to inflict the injuries upon the victims. Then he reveals his suspicion that the criminal is not human, it is an Ourang-Outang. The man Dupin is waiting for is a sailor, who soon arrives, anxious to get back his troublesome animal. Dupin orders him to tell him everything he knows, and the fearful sailor obliges, telling him exactly what he had suspected. The chief of police is secretly perturbed that Dupin has outdone him.

The Tell-Tale Heart

The narrator insists that what he is about to describe is not an act of madness. He explains that he did not hate the old man that the story is about. The problem was the old man's vulture-like **eye**. When the old man looks at him, he is filled with fury.

So he plots to kill him, and goes every night for a week to his bedchamber, each time, slowly easing a lamp inside the room and letting a tiny ray of light in. But, seeing the **eye** closed each time, the narrator does not do the deed. On the eighth night, when the narrator approaches the old man wakes, and cries out, obviously in fear of his life. They both wait in the dark for a long time. The narrator begins to hear the ticking, ticking of the old man's heart, louder and louder. Then the narrator sneaks a look and sees the vulture eye staring ahead. This does it. The narrator kills the old man, then chops up the body and hides it below the **floorboards**.

The narrator feels a moment of relief but moments later, the police arrive having heard reports of screams. The narrator welcomes the police in and calmly takes them on a tour of the property. He is so confident that he even tells them to rest in the old man's chamber and seats himself over the man's remains as they talk. The narrator's calmness sets the police at ease, but as the small talk continues, he imagines that he can hear the ticking of the old man's heart again. He begins to believe that the police are mocking him, and that they know he is a murderer. As the sound of the heart gets louder and louder, the narrator confesses.

The Pit and the Pendulum

The narrator receives a sentence of death during the Inquisition, and faints. When he awakens, he is in a pitch-black tomb-like **room**. He tries to work out the dimension of the room, and in doing so realizes that it has a deep pit in its center that he could fall into. Now the narrator nervously stays close to the wall and eventually falls asleep. Upon waking, he finds some bread and water, which he consumes. He then falls again into a death-like sleep. He awakens and now light is entering the cell somehow. He realizes too that he has been strapped to a board and there is a descending pendulum, sharp as a razor, descending step by step, coming towards him. There is also a plate of meat beside the bed.

The narrator watches the descent of the razor, alternately panic-stricken and calm. But he notices that the rats in the cell, which are monstrous and come from the pit, are eating the meat. He spreads the oily leftovers of the meat over the ropes tying him down, and the rats chew threw them, freeing him just before the pendulum hits him.

Suddenly, the walls of the room start to inch in, forcing him towards the pit. When he is inches from certain death, the walls stop pushing. He is saved by a French General.

The Black Cat

The narrator explains that as a child, he'd preferred animals to people. When he grew up, he married and his wife filled their home with pets, including a large, clever black cat, Pluto, which was his favorite. Yet the narrator started to become increasingly temperamental and angry. Eventually he even took things out on Pluto and one day was so frustrated that he gouged out the cat's **eye**. Though the cat avoided his master for a while, he soon came back, more affectionate than ever, as if taunting his conscience, until it became too much for the narrator and he killed the animal by hanging him on a garden tree.

That night, the narrator's house caught on fire. The narrator and his wife escaped but when they return the next day, they find that sole remaining wall has on it the shape of the black cat in the plaster.

The narrator starts drinking and one day, in a bar, he sees another black cat sitting on a barrel, an exact double of Pluto apart from a patch of white on its breast. He takes the animal home, but his affection for it is very short lived and its similarity to Pluto soon begins to unnerve him to the point of fury. The patch of white also begins to resemble a gallows and reminds the narrator of his guilt.

The narrator becomes crueler than he's ever been, but the cat is insistently affectionate. One day he tries to kill the cat, but when his wife tries to stop him, he kills her instead. He hides her body in the **wall**. The black cat disappears. Four days later the police come, asking to search the property. The narrator shows them around, confident of his concealment of the body. His bravado increases and he even knocks the wall hiding his

wife's body with his stick for show. A horrible sound comes from the wall. The police knock down the wall and discover the body and on top of it, the black cat, which had been buried alive.

The Purloined Letter

The narrator and his friend Dupin, from *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, get another visit from the Prefect of police. He explains that the Minister D___ has stolen a letter from the royal lady, which he has been using to blackmail her.

The Prefect explains how thoroughly the police has searched the Minister's apartment, but has found nothing. Dupin tells him to search again and the Prefect goes away disappointed. The next month, he comes back. He has performed another search but still found nothing. He admits that he will personally pay a lot of money to have the letter brought to him. Dupin surprises everybody by asking the Prefect to write him a check, and promises to produce the letter, which he does.

The Prefect rushes off to get his own reward from the royal lady, while Dupin explains to the narrator how he got the letter. He went to the Minister's apartment in a pair of dark glasses and pretended to keep up conversation while he looked around, operating with the suspicion that the Minister has hidden the letter by not actually hiding it at all. Eventually he spots it, a letter right on the Minister's desk that has been turned inside out. Dupin distracts the Minister, pockets the letter, and replaces it with a copy that contains a message from Dupin to the Minister. It turns out the Minister once wronged Dupin, and the message is a quote, warning that the first insult is always remembered.

The Masque of the Red Death

The plague of the Red Death has seized the country and Prince Prospero, ignoring the pleas of his people and in an effort to avoid the plague himself, has moved into an ornate abbey of his own unusual design with his entourage. As the disease reaches its height, the Prince decides to hold a masked ball in his imperial suite.

The seven **rooms** of this suite are decorated in various colors and the fires that burn behind the windows of each room make the colors jump and dance. The seventh room is decorated with black drapes and scarlet windowpanes, and has a clock whose chime sends the guests into a dreamlike state. Affected by the colors and the chimes, the dancers writhe around the rooms, until midnight when the clock's twelve chimes bring a deeper reverie than before and an unsettling rumor grows in the crowd that the Red Death is among them.

The figure of the Red Death appears, totally shrouded in grave-like clothes, before the Prince, who orders him to be unmasked and hung. But no one will go near and the figure proceeds through the apartment to the final room. The Prince follows and confronts him but dies as soon as he touches him. The Red Death then takes over the whole party, one by one, with its bloody contamination.

The Cask of Amontillado

The narrator describes his friend Fortunato, a wine connoisseur, against whom he has vowed revenge because Fortunato committed some unnamed wrong against him. The narrator meets Fortunato and tells him about a recent purchase of a case of vintage wine called Amontillado. He needs someone to help him verify that the wine is authentic. Fortunato seems struck by the mention of the Amontillado, but the narrator tells him not to worry if he is busy, that he plans to see another wine connoisseur. Fortunato dismisses this other connoisseur and is keen to see the wine now.

As they head into the narrator's wine cellar, the narrator keeps telling Fortunato to turn back, because the wine is in a **deep vault** with nitre coating the walls and Fortunato is already coughing. Fortunato insists they carry on. They go deeper and deeper into the tombs underneath the Palazzo until they reach a kind of **catacomb**, where the narrator's own ancestors are entombed. Within this chamber is the pitch-black entrance to where the narrator says the Amontillado is stored. A pile of bones lies before this dark entrance, the remains of a fourth wall.

As Fortunato looks into this dark corridor, the narrator locks Fortunato to the stone wall. He then starts to build up the fourth **wall** again, shutting Fortunato in the dark. Fortunato moans in terror, but then he lets out a terrifying laugh as if the whole thing is the narrator's idea of a joke. The narrator laughs in return until Fortunato falls silent, then builds the rest of the wall. He says that the tomb remains undisturbed half a century later.

CHARACTERS

Narrator (M.S. Found in a Bottle) – A traveler, voyaging towards exotic islands for purposes of exploration. He is typical of a lot of Poe's narrators in that he lives a solitary existence, only interacting with his shipmates. But when the seas and skies turn against them, the narrator is well and truly alone, stowed away on a foreign vessel that is so strange and monstrous that its reality seems questionable. On this strange ship, the narrator describes his experiences andtries in vain to communicate – in the end he can make his voice heard only by putting his diary in a bottle and sending it to the elements.

Ligeia – The mystical first wife of the narrator of "Ligeia", her fascinating intelligence and ghostly, wild appearance makes theirs an extreme romance. Though in many ways she seems quite unreal, on her deathbed, Ligeia begs for life and reveals her true love for the narrator. She haunts him thereafter in memories and in moments when the narrator's second wife, Rowena, reminds him somehow of her. At the end, whether it is the narrator's altered state influencing his senses, or whether she really has escaped the grave, Ligeia appears in Rowena's

place and the lasting image of the story is her paranormally large **eyes**.

Narrator (Ligeia) – Describes his lost love, Ligeia, but struggles with his memory. The only thing that remains clear to him is her personality and her appearance. He speaks with awe about her irregular looks and her intelligence and is heartbroken by her death. Afterwards, he is a changed man – he buys a desolate abbey and decorates it in bizarre taste and takes a new wife whom he subsequently hates. Memories of Ligeia come back to him when Rowena is on her deathbed, but he also admits to taking a lot of opium. It is unclear if the final sequence of unnatural events, in which Ligeia appears to return from the dead, where the narrator's drug-fueled delusion ends and where Ligeia's paranormal spirit begins.

Lady Rowena of Tremaine – The second wife of the narrator of "Ligeia", she marries him for the money he inherited from Ligeia. She cannot compare to Ligeia in any way and the marriage is full of hatred. Her death mimics the death of Ligeia, and Rowena undergoes a night-long pattern of awakening and dying until Ligeia (either in fact or the narrator's mind) takes her over completely.

Narrator (The Fall of the House of Usher) – The narrator acts as a pair of eyes observing the goings on within the Usher house, where Usher and Madeleine have been living solitary and in suffering. As the childhood friend of Roderick Usher, the narrator is able to detail the changes in Roderick, and to report on and, to an extent, tend to Roderick as the supernatural events of the story play out.

Roderick Usher – The last descendant of the Usher family, a genetic line that has been obsessively pure through the ages. He suffers from a nervous condition, which seems to be connected with both the degradation of the **house** itself and his twin sister Madeleine. In fact, as Madeleine dies and is entombed, Usher's mood becomes very strange and it becomes clear how fatally connected he is to his sister and the house.Usher is also a talented painter and musical scientist, and Poe weaves these artistic and intellectual pursuits into Usher's eccentric temperament.

Madeleine Usher – The unfortunate twin sister of Roderick Usher, she is infected with the same inherited disease that seems to come from the **House of Usher** itself. As Roderick becomes more and more manic and depressed, Madeleine feels the physical effects and becomes bed-ridden, as if the siblings share the same spirit somehow. Madeleine, by the end, is a paranormal figure, stuck somewhere between death and life, and fittingly, her final collapse into death, causes her brother's death too, and that of their family line.

William Wilson – The name that the narrator assigns himself, knowing that his real name is detestable. The narrator was once a confident, sociable child, able to dominate the playground. But over the course of the story he loses his confidence, turns to drinking, then to gambling, attempts to financially ruin a man who considers him a friend, and to having affairs with married women. He blames his fall on a mysterious double, who shares nearly every attribute with him—name, birthday, appearance—with the exception of their voice. His doppelganger speaks only in a whisper. The narrator ultimately runs from his doppelganger, and in his flight stoops to ever greater levels of degradation. The doppelganger appears at these lowest moments, revealing the narrator's weaknesses, crimes, and sins, and the seemingly supernatural doppelganger begins to seem like perhaps the narrator's own conscience. Ultimately, the narrator attacks his doppelganger, and in doing so kills himself.

Narrator (The Murders in the Rue Morgue; The Purloined Letter) – A close friend of Auguste Dupin. Though the narrator does not possess Dupin's genius, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* he begins to share Dupin's eccentric way of life, and they go out strolling at night through the Paris streets. The narrator responds to Dupin's tricks and solutions with admiration, especially when Dupin seems to inhabit the narrator's own consciousness and know exactly what he's thinking. He joins Dupin in helping to solve the case at the Rue Morgue, though he appears in the narrative as more of a lens through which to observe Dupin's method. The narrator plays a similar role in *The Purloined Letter*.

Auguste Dupin – Appears both in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and in *The Purloined Letter* as the clever companion of the narrator of those two stories. His highly creative, observant and analytical mind allows him to perceive where the police are going wrong, and stay one step ahead of the criminals. He loves of riddles, mathematics and poetry, and the Prefect mocks him a poet (despite the fact that the Prefect is hopeless to solve the cases without Dupin's aid. He has a strange sense of humor and very eccentric habits (his love of nighttime for example). In *The Purloined Letter*, he is rivaled by Minister D___, a man with a similar "poetic" but who acts not to solve crimes but commit them. Dupin does seem to feel a sense of competition with Minister D___, giving him an added incentive to solve the crime with flair.

The Prefect of the Police – The pitiable chief of the police, whose diligent, thorough but uncreative approach to crime-solving is the object of Dupin's ridicule. Though he is more officially important than Dupin, and even handles high profile cases, he shows the official protection of the city to be lacking. It is instead Dupin's undercover genius that secretly keeps the peace. The Prefect is also thoroughly invested in his own importance, and desperately wishes to solve cases not just for the sake of doing so, but for the sake of his own reputation. He appears in both *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*.

Narrator (The Tell-Tale Heart) – A man who declares himself of sound mind before telling his story, yet that story seems to

refute his original assertion. His hatred of the old man's **evil eye** consumes him to such a degree that he spends every night waiting for it to open so that he can feel sufficient rage to kill the old man. But though he calculates and waits, his guilt and paranoia after the crime, which he has hidden perfectly, become too much for him in front of the police and he confesses.

The Old Man – The unfortunate nemesis of the delusional narrator of The Tell-Tale Heart. **His vulture-like, evil** eye torments the narrator. Yet other than his eye there is nothing to indicate that the old man is anything other than a normal, old man. The old man's terror in the moments before the narrator kills him make the old man seem suddenly more human than the narrator, and the murder is chillingly heartless.

Narrator (The Pit and the Pendulum) – A victim of the Catholic Inquisition, he faints upon hearing his death sentence. When he wakes he is in a **dark cell**. He describes his confinement, trying to establish the cell's perimeter, and from then on, his narrow escapes from death keep us fixed on his movements and thoughts, though he often alternates rapidly between calm and panic. It is never quite sure whether he is being watched or not, or whether his reactions are due to him being drugged or scared. As such, he becomes representative of the uncertainty of the time of the Inquisition.

Narrator (The Black Cat) – A man who describes himself as a docile youth with a love of animals, yet it is clear from the beginning of the story that the narrator is telling his story from prison. The duality of his personality, passionate but temperamental becomes clearer and clearer as he loses patience with his loved ones and commits horrific acts of violence. His guilt affects him hugely, as does his paranoia, superstition and, like many of Poe's characters, vices like alcohol and opium. In the end, his crimes haunt and condemn him to the gallows, just as he feared.

Narrator's wife (The Black Cat) – The wife of the narrator of "The Black Cat," she shares his love of animals and fills their house with pets. Though she sticks by the narrator despite his abuse and murder of Pluto, their cat, the narrator ultimately kills her after she stops him from kill the second black cat that mysteriously appears in their life. The narrator shows no grief upon killing her—instead taking pride in how well he hides her body.

The Black Cat – A loyal companion, named Pluto, whom the narrator loves but begins to mistreat when his cruel humor intensifies—the narrator gouges out Pluto's eye and then hangs the cat from a tree. After its death, the cat seems to take on a supernatural existence in the double that the narrator stumbles upon at a den of disrepute. Provoked by the narrator's guilt and paranoia, the cat appears to return in the body of a doppelganger, this time with a white patch on his breast in the shape of a gallows, warning the narrator of his fate. The cat becomes a symbol of the narrator's delusional, altered state.

The Minister D___ – A cunning criminal in "The Purloined Letter" who is both a poet and a mathematician and appears. This dual sensibility allows him to completely baffle the Prefect and the police. He meets his match in Auguste Dupin, whom he once wronged and solves the case as a kind of revenge. The Minister D___ and Dupin are actually very similar, and suggest a split personality, doppelganger theme, if a bit more subtly than some of Poe's other tales.

Prince Prospero – A wild, eccentric character in "The Masque of the Red Death." He has so much money and status that when the Red Death plagues the country, wreaking havoc and killing untold numbers, he can afford to buy an abbey and keep his entourage entertained with elaborate, bizarre parties. But when the mood of his masked ball changes, he becomes trapped in his **suite of rooms** and is struck down by the personification of the plague.

The Masque of the Red Death – A personification of the awful, bloody disease that is killing Prince Prospero's countrymen in "The Masque of the Red Death." At first, he is a background presence, while Prospero's masked dancers forget all about the world outside, but he somehow comes to appear in the abbey, dressed like death and bloodied like his victims. By the end of the story holds "illimitable dominion over all."

Narrator (The Cask of Amontillado) – A man with a vendetta against Fortunato because of an unexplained wrong Fortunato committed against him long ago. The narrator goes to great lengths of manipulation to secure his revenge, showing cunning and intelligence. But the undescribed original wrong, and the narrator's frantic effort to get Fortunato to react in some way as he walls him into a living tomb, raises questions about the narrator's motives, and whether there was even an original wrong in the first place.

Fortunato – The antagonist of the narrator of "The Cask of Amontillado, who (according to the narrator) mysteriously wronged the narrator years earlier. A lover of vintage wines and carnival attire, Fortunato appears as an eccentric character, suited to the eccentric city of Venice. His fate is sealed when the narrator tells Fortunato that he has bought a special case of Amontillado, a legendary wine. Fortunato's bizarre hyperactive nature is shown in his obsession with the word Amontillado, which he repeats like a chant, but as the narrator gains his revenge by walling Fortunato up into a living tomb in **the deepest vault of the narrator's house**, Fortunato's laughter becomes tragic, and then he falls silent.

THEMES

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a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RIVALS AND DOPPELGANGERS

In his stories, Poe creates a narrator faced with some kind of antagonistic person or force—a rival—that propels the plot of the story. In *M.S. Found in a Bottle*, the antagonist is both the supernatural weather and the strange breed of men on the ship. In *The Black Cat*, the rival takes the form of a cat, which seems to have a sixth sense for the narrator's anxiety. Often the source of the rivalry is a mystery, as in *The Cask of Amontillado*, where the narrator explains that a man called Fortunato has wronged him and expresses his desire for revenge without ever explaining the nature of the original wronging. And then the punishment he exacts on Fortunato is so extreme, that it suggests that perhaps the act tells more about how unhinged the narrator is—or how unhinged his sense of rivalry has made him—than it tells about the criminality of Fortunato. In fact, sometimes the rivalry is free of offense entirely. In the case of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the narrator simply can't stand the old man's **vulture eye**. Otherwise, the old man seems to be entirely innocent. The narrator's hatred is built up based on almost nothing. And yet it exists, and overwhelms him.

Poe's use of rivalry does not always exist between a man and some external person or force. Sometimes the rivalry is the self against the self. A *doppelganger* is a German term for a figure, often paranormal, that seems to be the exact double of someone else. It is a phenomenon explored in several of Poe's stories, including Ligeia's doubling of the Lady of Tremaine and the cat in *The Black Cat* which seems almost to be the reincarnated in a ghostly form. But sometimes these *doppelgangers* suggest a condition more complicated than a case of paranormal doubleness. Sometimes the doppelganger is so similar to the teller of the story that it seems to indicate that the narrator is suffering from some kind of split personality or other mental disorder. Psychological insecurity brings about some of the most frightening moments in Poe's stories, and turns the stories on their heads: everything that seemed to be caused by some paranormal force suddenly seems like it might actually be rooted in the mind.

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

In each story, it is the threat of death that pulls the plot along and that creates the suspense that Poe's stories are famous for. In *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the expectation of death, first by hanging, then with the pendulum, then into the pit, forces the narrator to confront his own mortality time and time again. In *The Masque of the Red Death*, death is personified and hangs over the story as a charismatic figure. This obsession with death can lend a menacing, almost masochistic tone to the stories' voices, and a feeling of unavoidable motion in the plot, as if the characters are in a downward spiral towards their ends.

But at times, the difference between life and death is not clear-cut, and this haziness between life and death only adds to the menace of the stories. Sometimes Poe's characters come back from death or are in a constant state of ghostliness or unreality. In *Ligeia*, for example, death is not the end at all, and the line between death and life and ghostly purgatory keeps changing and dissolving, allowing Ligeia and Rowena to slip in and out of mortality. In *M.S. Found in a Bottle*, the whole crew of the ship that the narrator finds himself seems unable to die or really live. Nearly all of his stories explore the way death haunts or impacts the living, and the porousness between death and life, life and death, in these stories makes that haunting feel real to the reader.

THE GOTHIC STYLE

Originating in 18th Century England, Gothic Literature was an important and distinctive movement in literary history, with a body of definite themes and symbols that has grown and changed as the genre has spread across the world and across time. But some core aspects remain definitive of the Gothic style, including: Gloomy settings like **castles, dungeons, prisons and vaults**; haunting figures, ghostly and somewhat unreal; symbols and colors that suggest the gory and supernatural. The Gothic style of Poe's stories ties them all together, with their morbid, gory, suspense-filled plots and solitary, romantic settings, like the location of Prince Prospero's strange masquerade. Colors black and red, and visual symbols like **evil eyes** and black cats, **vaults and cellars**, create a very recognizable gothic world, so that all Poe's stories seem to belong in one collection. Poe is famous for bringing Gothic literature into the Victorian era and incorporating psychology into their themes, making the supernatural more believable and close to home.

SELF, SOLITUDE, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

While many of Poe's characters are married, and others are often visiting with friends or acquaintances, the overriding sense of Poe's stories is one of loneliness and solitude. Each story leaves the character alone to face his destiny, fear, pain, or crime by himself. In *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the narrator is alone in a cell and describing each encounter with mortal terror—he exists in the cell solely with death. In *M.S. Found in a Bottle*, the narrator writes a diary of his struggle aboard a paranormal vessel. The installments of his adventure seem like the narrator is confiding in us, the reader, and we alone are privy to his impending doom when he knows the ship is entering a whirlpool.

The aspect of loneliness to Poe's narrators gives us a window into the mentality of the characters, giving a view of precisely how their consciousness changes, how they go from calm to panic, and a host of other psychological phenomena. For example, when the narrator first enters the House of Usher, he experiences a strange sensation in his mind that he cannot quite explain, which grows stronger and stranger as he looks into the water that surrounds the house and sees its inverted image. But even though the solitary, interior-monologue-led narration provides an intimate view of a character's consciousness, it also accentuates the disconcerting atmosphere of the story when it becomes clear that the narrator is unreliable and can't be trusted. *The Fall of the House of Usher* shows us that as we delve deep into the interior consciousness of Poe's characters, their irregularity and even madness becomes apparent, and the themes of self, solitude and consciousness become tinged with menace and suspicion.

THE POWER OF MEMORY

Many of Poe's narrators tell stories that have already happened. Often, the difference between the situation of the narrator now, and the narrator then, is profound. For example, the narrator of *The Black Cat* begins what seems to be a domestic story about his pets, but it soon becomes clear that, as a result of the events of the story, the narrator is now in jail. This forewarning of the consequences of the tale provides the story much of its suspense. But a symptom of this voice of hindsight is a kind of unreliability. When we, as readers, know that the character talking is now in jail, for example, it raises the question of whether the narrator might be either hiding some aspect of the story or whether the traumatic events that led to the narrator's incarceration might have warped the narrator's memory of his own experience.

Stories like *William Wilson* begin their remembering with a description of the narrator's childhood self. Through the lens of adulthood, childhood selves become tainted with Freudian implications and seem less than innocent. Many of the descriptions of children seem to mirror what Poe himself was like a child—intelligent and overactive and dominant—but they also portray childhood as including an awareness of violence that doesn't seem to belong in a child's world. Viewing childhood in this way, infused with the subsequent psychological deviance of the adult character, produces a version of events that can be deceptive and unclear.

Drugs and alcohol further cloud the reliability of memory. It is mentioned several times, though never explicitly blamed for any of the narrators' troubles, that there is a lot of alcohol drinking and opium taking surrounding the events of the stories, suggesting that the narrator may be under the influence not just of madness but also inebriation, making it impossible for us, as readers, to trust even an interior monologue.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

EYES

Body parts are obviously part of the gory, gothic nature of Poe's world, but eyes are especially noticeable as the medallion of many of the haunting figures in the stories. Ligeia is at first known to us by her large, strangely powerful eyes and it is these 'orbs' that come back to haunt us at the end. In *The Black Cat*, it is the cat's gouged eye that begins the spiral of crime that eventually condemns the narrator. And in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, without any further explanation of the narrator's moral opposition to the old man, it is his evil, vulture-like eye that provokes the whole grisly tale. Eyes appear often as part of the other-worldly realm of Poe's stories and suggest a window to the soul gone-wrong.

ARCHITECTURE

Some of the most classic motifs of Gothic Literature are architectural - castles, dungeons and gloomy, deserted places can create an expectation of mystery, murder and the paranormal. In each of these eleven stories, locations and structures surround and often facilitate the narrative events and play as leading a role as some of the characters. For example, in *The Masque of the Red Death*, the strange trail of seven atmospheric apartments, each decorated in a different color and with ominous billowing curtains and candles, traps the masked partiers in a circle of doom, allowing the figure of the Red Death to close them in. In other stories, it is a domestic house or a schoolroom that forces the enclosure and intensification of the characters' suffering. And especially in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the revelation of the size and shape of the cell, and its subsequent transformation, gives it a life of its own and represents the faceless cruelty of the Inquisition.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe* published in 2006.

Manuscript Found in a Bottle Quotes

A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul – a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which the lessons of bygone times are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key.

Related Characters: Narrator (M.S. Found in a Bottle) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator of the short story has boarded a mysterious ship. As he spends more time on the ship, he decides to write down everything he experiences there. The narrator can't quite put into words *why* he chooses to write down his experiences--all he knows is that a strange feeling has taken over his soul. The narrator refuses to think of the past ("bygone days") or look ahead to the future. Instead, he focuses exclusively on the present, and seemingly remains trapped and confused inside his own consciousness.

The narrator's behavior is characteristic of Poe's isolated, introspective narrators, and also of people in crises in general. The narrator doesn't have the luxury of ruminating on the past, nor does he have the time or hopefulness to think of the future. Every ounce of brainpower he has is devoted to survival in the present moment. The narrator's behavior also foreshadows the frightening end of the story, in which he is pulled down into the depths of the ocean. It's precisely because the narrator thinks he's going to die soon that he's written down his experiences--even if he doesn't survive the shipwreck, his notes, preserved in the titular bottle, will.

The crew glide to and fro like the ghosts of buried centuries; their eyes have an eager and uneasy meaning; and when their fingers fall athwart my path in the wild glare of the battle-lanterns, I feel as I have never felt before, although I have been all my life a dealer in antiquities, and have imbibed the shadows of Allan columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin.

Related Characters: Narrator (M.S. Found in a Bottle) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator of the story meets the crew of his new ship. The crew members are gaunt and intimidating--almost like ghosts. It's also in this passage that we learn that the narrator is a collector of antiques--in other words, the relics of bygone centuries, once owned by people who are now dead. He also describes his own soul as a "ruin," making an important connection between the aging, frightening settings of the Gothic and the psychologies of Poe's characters.

The passage is important because it establishes the macabre mood of the story (and the entire book) by blurring the line between the past and the present. Although the narrator is trying to focus on the here and now, he has a strange sense of being "pulled" into the supernatural; i.e., the world of the dead. Poe will repeat such a dynamic many times in his stories: a lonely, rational narrator will be swallowed up by the sheer bulk of the Gothic world of sinister settings, ghosts, and monsters.

All in the immediate vicinity of the ship is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of foamless water; but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky, and looking like the walls of the universe.

Related Characters: Narrator (M.S. Found in a Bottle) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Poe gives us a flavor of his hidden impulses and desires--in other words, what *he* personally finds frightening. In the story, the narrator is aboard a ship that's slowly being sucked into a whirlpool. And yet all around the ship are huge columns of ice.

It's important to notice the *claustrophobia*of this scene. Even though the narrator is sailing on the ocean--i.e., a completely open place--he has the strong sense of being boxed in by these massive walls of ice. Confronted by the

horror of compression and enclosure, death--or being sucked down by the whirlpool--is almost a relief. (In real life, Poe was terrified of being buried alive, and wrote dozens of stories on the topic. This story is an early sign of Poe's claustrophobia.)

The description of the icy walls is also a good example of the kind of Gothic "architecture" that haunts Poe's stories. Even when nothing directly supernatural or horrifying is happening, the setting itself usually suggests something sinister or beyond human comprehension. These icy columns are reminiscent of the Romantic idea of the "sublime" (an experience, usually in nature, of terror and awe at the vastness of existence), and were perhaps inspirational for the setting of Mary Shelley's classic work of horror and the Romantic: *Frankenstein*.

Ligeia Quotes

❝ They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals – in moments of intense excitement – that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia.

Related Characters: Narrator (Ligeia) (speaker), Ligeia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

In this story, we're introduced to a narrator who's peculiarly obsessed with his bride, Ligeia. Ligeia's eyes are the very embodiment of the uncanny. Traditionally, the eyes are the most human, recognizable thing about a person--they're the "window to the soul," after all. Ligeia's eyes, however, aren't comforting or humanizing at all. On the contrary, they seem alien and bizarre. Thus, Ligeia's eyes are both familiar and disturbingly unfamiliar--in short, they're uncanny.

Ligeia's eyes are an important symbol in the story, because they suggest a strange combination of attraction and repulsion. Much like the whirlpool in the previous story, Ligeia's eyes are both seductive *and* terrifyingto the narrator; they hypnotize him, even as he fears for his life. The narrator's simultaneous attraction and repulsion mirror that of the reader--we're frightened of reading any further, and yet we can't help but read on.

❝ The night waned; and still, with a bosom full of bitter thoughts of the one only and supremely beloved, I remained gazing upon the body of Rowena.

Related Characters: Narrator (Ligeia) (speaker), Lady Rowena of Tremaine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator of the short story has remarried after the tragic death of his wife, Ligeia. The narrator's new wife, Rowena, has fallen seriously ill. Late at night, the narrator keeps watch over Rowena. As he watches, the narrator can only think of Ligeia--dead, yet still very much alive in his mind.

As we gradually realize, however, Rowena seems to be transforming *into* Ligeia. Poe creates the illusion that the phenomenon is something supernatural and horrifying, but also that it's the narrator's own obsession with Ligeia that brings her back to life. The real victim here, of course, is Rowena, who seems to be no more than the empty vessel into which the narrator pours his obsession with Ligeia. Rowena is only a replacement for Ligeia--and here, with the narrator clearly hungering for his dead wife's return, Rowena herself seems "melt away."

The Fall of the House of Usher Quotes

❝ I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Fall of the House of Usher) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

In this famous passage, the narrator of the story looks upon the House of Usher and immediately feels a sense of gloom and horror. The house has been the site of great misery in

recent years, and here, Poe suggests that this misery is palpable--the house itself seems to record and radiate the emotions of the people who lived there.

The passage is a great example of Poe's Gothic style. The Gothic genre, popular in the 19th century, often hinges upon a big, intimidating house full of memories and mystery. The house is practically a character *in* the story, just as it is in the best Gothic novels. The house is like the "Greek chorus" of the story--both witnessing the events of the plot and elevating them to their emotional peak.

William Wilson Quotes

Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has been already too much an object for the scorn – for the horror – for the detestation of my race.

Related Characters: William Wilson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Poe introduces us to William Wilson--a man who's taken on his current, fake name because his real name has become associated with too much scandal and evil. Right away, Poe creates a mood of suspense and excitement--we want to know what, exactly, Wilson did that was so awful. The story also reveals itself to be another "retelling" from memory, as many of the stories in this collection are--and so Wilson is immediately made somewhat unreliable in that he's telling his own story, and may be misremembering or falsifying information.

We should note that William Wilson is the first named narrator in Poe's collection of short stories. And yet the name "William Wilson" is obviously fake--in other words, the fact that we've got the narrator's name doesn't mean that we know anything more about him than we did about the unnamed narrators in the previous stories. And just like the other narrators in the book, William Wilson is an unlikely everyman--even if we can't relate to all of his experiences, we're meant to identify with his point of view, and his horror becomes our own.

A large mirror, – so at first it seemed to me in my confusion – now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait.

Related Characters: William Wilson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

In the finale of "William Wilson," Wilson realizes that he's killed himself. Wilson has spent his entire life fighting with a mysterious doppelgänger (double of himself), who undermines everything that Wilson tries to do. At the end of Wilson's life, however, the truth becomes clear: Wilson's doppelgänger isn't another *person*; it's Wilson himself.

To appreciate the full power of the story, one shouldn't take the ending too literally. One could say for example, that Wilson is schizophrenic, or that he has some other mental disorder that's caused him to hallucinate another person who looks and sounds just like him. But the more powerful and symbolic interpretation of the story is that William Wilson--as his bland, everyman name would suggest--represents the dual nature of all human beings. Like the titular characters of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, all people have a good side and a bad side. William Wilson has fought a constant war with his own soul and conscience, and in the end, he's the first and only casualty of that war.

The Murders in the Rue-Morgue Quotes

Had the routine of our life at this place been known to the world, we should have been regarded as madmen – although, perhaps, as madmen of a harmless nature. Our seclusion was perfect. We admitted no visitors.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Murders in the Rue Morgue; The Purloined Letter) (speaker), Auguste Dupin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator of the story establishes the time that he has spent with Auguste Dupin, the great detective. Dupin is a prototype for Sherlock Holmes--he's smart and sophisticated, but he's also an incredibly odd,

eccentric person (and Poe arguably invented the modern detective story through the character of Dupin). Dupin and the narrator live together in a house and stay up late every night reading and putting their minds to use. While they're both highly intelligent people, their behavior could easily be mistaken for insanity.

It's a mark of Poe's devotion to eccentricity and strangeness that even in a story about a detective--supposedly a paragon of rationality and self-control--the characters seem like "madmen" trapped in a sinister, isolated house. Dupin and his friend use their intelligence to solve crimes, but intelligence is not enough--intuition and eccentricity of imagination are vital in understanding the world, a surprising reminder of Poe's own eccentric worldview.

The modes and sources of this kind of error are well typified in the contemplation of the heavenly bodies. To look at a star by glances -- to view it in a side-long way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the retina (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distinctly -- is to have the best appreciation of its lustre -- a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision fully upon it.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Murders in the Rue Morgue; The Purloined Letter) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

In this symbolic passage, the narrator makes an interesting analogy for understanding the world. The best way to understand a star in the night sky isn't to look at it directly. Indeed, when staring directly at a star, the star's light is dimmer. The best way to truly observe the star is to look just to the *side* of the star, allowing the greatest amount of light to enter the eyes.

The narrator's description of the stars is a clever metaphor for the way that Dupin goes about solving crimes, and perhaps for the way that Poe understands the universe. Total rationality (looking directly at the stars) simply isn't enough. Rather, the greatest insights can be achieved through intuition and free imagination (look to the side of a star). Dupin solves his cases by allowing his imagination and intuition to interact with his conscious mind. By the same token, Poe's stories are so evocative and memorable because they're full of events that have no *rational* explanation--i.e., they can only be understood if one surrenders some rationality in favor of imagination and emotion.

The Tell-Tale Heart Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Tell-Tale Heart) (speaker), The Old Man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator of the story tries to explain why he killed an old man. The narrator's explanation is that he didn't like the man's eye--which, according to the narrator, resembles the eye of a vulture.

For Poe, the eye is the ultimate symbol of man's irrationality and unpredictability. The eyes are the window to the soul, and thus for the narrator to be repelled by an eye is for him to be frightened by an inexplicable, irrational fear of another person's soul. Put another way, there is no rational motive for the narrator's act of murder--as he makes very clear, he *doesn't* kill the old man because he hates him, or to get his gold. As with so many of the bizarre and frightening things in Poe's stories, there is no real *reason* for them to happen; and yet they happen all the same, making them all the more uncanny.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the sense? – 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.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Tell-Tale Heart) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator of the story has now murdered the old man and buried his body underneath the floorboards. As he sits in the old man's room, talking to the police, he begins to hear a strange ticking sound--a sound which he believes to be the beating of the old man's heart.

As we can guess, there is probably no actual heartbeat in the room. One could argue that the narrator, full of repressed guilt for his actions, has projected the sound of the heartbeat, undermining his own carefully planned murder. It's also possible that Poe intends the heartbeat to be a supernatural event--the old man is haunting his murderer from the grave, forcing him to divulge his secret to the police. In either case, though, the narrator's greatest enemy is his own irrational mind and his "over-acute" senses. Try as he might to get away with a crime, the narrator's own fear and anxiety destroy his chances of getting off scot-free.

The Pit and the Pendulum Quotes

I had swooned; but will not say that all of consciousness was lost. What of it there remained I will not attempt to define, or even to describe; yet all was not lost. In the deepest slumber – no! In delirium – no! In a swoon -- no! In death – no! even in the grave all *is not* lost. Else there is no immortality for man.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Pit and the Pendulum) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

In this story, a man is sentenced to torture by the Spanish Inquisition. As he's sentenced, the man faints, and yet still remains somewhat conscious of his surroundings. As the man puts it, it's impossible to be truly unconscious--whether you're awake, asleep, delirious, or dead, some part of you is always at least somewhat aware of where you are and what's going on.

The passage is a grim bit of foreshadowing, because there will be many times in the story when the narrator wishes he were totally unconscious. But there is no relief for the narrator--his dreams are just as terrifying as his reality. The sense of inescapable horror--of being "buried alive," whether literally or metaphorically--is typical of Poe's style.

Looking upwards I surveyed the ceiling of my prison. [...] In one of its panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum, such as we see on antique clocks.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Pit and the Pendulum) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator becomes aware of his torture. In a dungeon, there is a painting of the figure of Time, carrying a large pendulum that resembles a scythe (a symbol of how Time must "reap" the human race via death). Although the narrator doesn't realize it right away, the painting of Time--and the very real, very sharp pendulum that he's carrying--will be the narrator's next form of torture. The pendulum is a symbol of the inevitability of death--just as time brings all human beings closer and closer to death, the pendulum threatens to kill the narrator, who is trapped in his Gothic torture-chamber, with increasingly terrifying force.

The Black Cat Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Black Cat), The Black Cat (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator of the story tortures his own cat by gouging out one of its eyes with his knife. What's interesting to notice in this passage is that the narrator seems both remorseful and remorseless as he describes how he tortured his pet. On one hand, the narrator describes the cat as a "poor beast," and claims that he shudders as he writes about his own actions. On the other hand, the narrator seems to have hurt his cat without any real remorse at the time-it's only later that he begins to regret his actions.

In short, the narrator is a deeply divided person--simultaneously good and evil, attracted and repelled by crime. In Poe's stories, the narrators' greatest enemies are themselves--they're trapped by their own divided natures, and can't commit a crime without later being wracked by their own self-hatred.

The Purloined Letter Quotes

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little too self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha! – ha! ha! ha! --ho! ho! ho!" – roared our visitor, profoundly amused, "oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 328

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Detective Dupin prepares to listen to the Prefect's description of a police case, one which the Prefect has been unable to solve. Dupin's first reaction is that the simplest explanation is the best--without ever having heard the case, Dupin's instinct is to seek simplicity, not a complex, elaborate explanation for the truth (essentially the concept of Occam's Razor--that the simplest explanation is the likeliest).

As we'll soon see, Dupin's emphasis on simplicity is exactly right--the solution to the mystery of the purloined letter is so incredibly obvious that the Prefect couldn't conceive of it. The passage could be interpreted as Poe's criticism of the overemphasis on reason and science in his society. The Prefect, representing the ways of science and rationality, believes that every mystery has a solution, but also seems to think that complex mysteries must by necessity have complex solutions. Dupin takes a different approach to the truth, favoring a loose, intuitive style of detection (he guesses the solution to the mystery before he's even heard the mystery). In the end, it's Dupin's style (and, perhaps, Poe's similarly loose, intuitive creative style) that prevails.

"All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty of a non distributio medii in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 338

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Detective Dupin quarrels with the Prefect over the solution to the mystery described in the story. The Prefect believes that the Minister--the man whom the Prefect suspects of blackmail--is a poet; i.e., he is a creative, nontraditional thinker. The Prefect--a man of science and rationality--naturally dismisses the Minister, claiming that the Minister must also be a fool.

Dupin cites an old rule of logic: the fact that all fools are poets doesn't necessarily prove that all poets are fools (there could be some poets who aren't). Dupin himself claims to be a poet--i.e., he solves mysteries by using his intuition and imagination, not just his analysis of the facts.

Dupin is being intentionally coy and esoteric here, but he's still making a serious point. Dupin suggests that logic and reason by themselves aren't enough to solve every mystery in the universe. While too much intuition and imagination (i.e., too much poetry) are toxic to solving a problem, a little poetry, mixed with a little rationality, form a powerful combination. Dupin himself embodies the mixture of poetry and rationality necessary to solve a difficult case. He's clearly an intelligent man (hence his citing of logical fallacies in the passage) but he's also eccentric enough to think outside the box and solve cases that baffle the Prefect himself.

The Masque of the Red Death Quotes

The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think.

Related Characters: Prince Prospero

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

In this story, a haughty prince, Prospero, holds a grand party in his palace. At the party, the guests try to distract themselves from the realities of their kingdom: all around them, there's a horrible disease called the Red Death, which is killing off many innocent people. The Prince and his guests believe that their joy, wealth, and imagination will protect them from the disease.

Poe is clearly critical of Prospero's ignorance and arrogance with regard to the Red Death. Instead of accepting the reality of the horrible disease, or trying to do something about it, Prospero turns his back on the Red Death altogether. Some critics have suggested that Prospero is Poe's caricature of his literary contemporaries, authors who, unlike Poe himself, ignored the horror and banality of life and tried to focus too excessively on aesthetics or fantasy. (As the story suggests, there was a class element in Poe's critique of his contemporaries: Poe was the first American author to support himself entirely through writing, and seemed to have resented his wealthier peers.) Where other writers try to forget how dangerous and horrifying the world really is, Poe uses literature to address to world's horrors head-on.

❝ […] 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 reverie or meditation.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Poe describes the party that Prospero organizes for his court. At the party (held in a magnificent, mysterious Gothic abbey) there is a room decorated all in black, in which there is a large clock, which tolls every hour. When the clock tolls, the guests at the party become frightened and pale. While Poe never explains exactly why the guests are so influenced by a clock, he implies that the clock is a symbol of the guests' mortality--i.e., the very thing Prospero is trying to forget. By the same logic, the clock is a symbol of impending, inevitable death: the Red Death is coming to Prospero's party to kill everyone there, punishing them for their indifference to suffering.

The Cask of Amontillado Quotes

❝ I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

Related Characters: Narrator (The Cask of Amontillado) (speaker), Fortunato

Related Themes:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

In the final story in the book, a narrator prepares to enact his revenge upon Fortunato. The narrator is obsessed with obtaining revenge upon those who humiliate him in some way (though we're never told how, exactly, Fortunato humiliated the narrator, making us wonder if the narrator is just a sadist or a madman). And yet the narrator also makes it clear that he doesn't want revenge to "overtake" him--he just wants to get even with Fortunato and then move on with his life. At the same time, he wants Fortunato to thoroughly realize that the narrator is taking revenge on *him*--no accidents or sudden deaths.

Revenge, in short, is a kind of balance between becoming too obsessed with getting even, and not being obsessed enough. It's odd that the narrator describes revenge as a form of moderation, since there's absolutely nothing moderate about the revenge that the narrator enacts upon Fortunato (he buries the poor guy alive).

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN A BOTTLE

The narrator of "Manuscript" begins by describing his background. He is from a wealthy family and has a good methodical mind, which leads him to an interest in the German moralists, not from admiration but from pleasure at being able to prove them wrong. In fact, he is so methodical, that he has often been reproached for it. The reason he's telling us this is so that we don't suspect that the fantastical tale to follow is a symptom of a fanciful imagination and so that it will impress us all the more.

The narrator inspires trust by telling us about his background and foreshadows the shocking nature of what's to follow. Note how many of these details echo Poe's own personal experience of childhood: the influences of the moralists, and the competing spheres of literature, science and religion. It also seems likely that Poe was accused of having a fanciful imagination in his day.

The narrator of "Manuscript" spends many years travelling. One day, he took a trip by boat to the Archipelago Islands, with no better reason than his restless disposition. He describes the ship as a massive vessel, carrying lots of Indian produce, clumsily stowed. The ship sets sail with barely a breeze and goes along for a while without meeting anything. Then, a cloud appears in the sky, remarkable not just for its strange form but because it is the first one they've seen. The narrator watches it turn into a band across the sky and also notices a change in the moon and the sea, and everything becomes very humid. There is no breeze at all.

As with many of Poe's Gothic locations, the surroundings and weather foreshadow what is to come – here they transform subtly at first, but definitely, into an unfamiliar, exotic atmosphere. The humidity, stillness and the strange colors and forms of the clouds threaten some kind of storm. The ship's course is lonely, and the narrator lives a solitary, nomadic existence – this, added to the expanse of the sea that surrounds him, brings the Gothic setting from its traditional domestic house to the wide world.

The captain and crew are relaxed but the narrator of "Manuscript" is worried that a storm is coming and can't sleep. He goes out on deck at midnight. Suddenly he hears a humming noise, and then the whole ship seems to shake. A wave of foam comes over the ship and soaks it. Slowly and heavily, the ship rights itself, but the narrator is stuck between the stern post and the rudder. He gets himself out and dizzily assesses the situation. The ship is in a whirlpool, overwhelmed on all sides by water. The narrator hears the voice of a Swedish ship mate, calls to him and he pulls himself over to the man. They think that the rest of the crew have been taken overboard and have surely perished.

The speed and power of the elements make the narrator standing on deck seem small and powerless. Even the large ship, which was a vehicle for freedom and discovery at the outset of the voyage, is dwarfed by the rushing ocean. This time, Poe creates the horror of the story by making the outside world an antagonist to the narrator. Nature is presented as heartless, uncontrollable, and inhuman.

As the water continues to soar and crash above them, the narrator of "Manuscript" and his shipmate spend five days trying to keep the ship away from the brink of the whirlpool. On the fifth day, the skies and sea become cold. The sun seems sickly and does not give out much light, and then disappears at sunset and leaves a dull moonlight and then darkness. This darkness surrounds them and they await the sixth day in vain. They eventually stop trying to take care of the ship and set themselves up in a nook and watch the storm, unable to calculate time and expecting each new burst of storm.

Poe often uses patterns to create his suspenseful plots, and often numbers days and hours to give a sense of impending doom. The loss of sunrise and sunset, which had marked the narrator's voyage, makes this pattern of days a dark, otherworldly time, and the impending doom even more suspenseful and unknown.

The ship rises high on some swells, as if into the sky, and the next moment descends low into valleys between waves. It is in one of these depths that the shipmates see a strange red light, flooding their deck, and realize, looking up, that it belongs to another vessel, the biggest ship they've ever seen, with a huge, black, bare hull and a row of canons. The ship rises on the pinnacle of ocean in front of them, balanced there for a second and then comes down. The narrator of "Manuscript" is thrown onto the deck of the ambushing ship.

The form of the ocean changes unpredictably. The heights and valleys of the ship's course go beyond natural limits. This supernatural transformation takes all the familiarity from the sea and leaves the sailors without any control or expertise. The description then of the foreign vessel and its shocking size makes it seem alien and monstrous.

For some reason, the narrator of "Manuscript" doesn't alert the crew on board this new ship and secretly stows himself in the hold. He cannot explain why he hides himself, other than to say that the crew inspired some kind of awe and curiosity in him that he could not immediately confront. He makes a hiding place by removing some of the boards of the deck and shifting himself into a nook in the hold. Soon the appearance of an old man forces him to use his hidey hole. The man's extreme age and infirmity surprises the narrator, but the man also has a curious manner, of childishness and godliness at once, and he speaks to himself in an unintelligible mutter.

The narrator has introduced himself to us as a traveler and a sailor, always journeying and using the physical laws of the sea to do it, but as the laws of the sea prove themselves to be less predictable than he thought, his skills are useless and we see him hiding away on the ship, giving his fate to this ancient, oblivious breed of sailors.

The narrator of "Manuscript" tells us that an inexplicable feeling has taken hold of him. Some time has elapsed. The narrator has been living on the boat unseen by its crew, but not through effort on his part – the men just seem to wander around deck, speaking this incomprehensible language and do not notice him. He sneaks into the captain's cabin and takes some writing materials, and vows to write down his experiences and put them in a bottle out to sea.

The writing takes on a new kind of urgency. Before, the narrator was measured and descriptive, now his sensations begin to take over and he is absorbed with interest in the new crew and the strange atmosphere. His writing takes the form of diary entries, reporting on his findings on deck. Poe puts the reader in an interesting position – as the recipient of this personal memoir.

The rest of the tale is written in installments like a diary. The narrator of "Manuscript" describes a recent outing from his dwelling onto the deck where he finds a loose sail and paints on it the word DISCOVERY, but the crew raises the sail without noticing the word. He also tries to figure out what kind of ship it is. It seems familiar in so many ways to the kind of vessel he's used to, but has a strange aura of antiquity at the same time. He later realizes that even the raw material the ship is built from is a mystery to him. It looks like some kind of Spanish oak but changed by unnatural forces. It reminds him of a quote from an old Dutch seaman about a ship growing from the sea.

Past and present don't mix easily. The ship's foreignness now seems to do with age – its crew is aged and its wood is antique – not to mention that it is gigantic and unpredictable like a ship from a myth or legend. It is as if the supernatural conditions of the storm brought past and present crashing into each other. The narrator's invisibility shows how out of place he really is.

The narrator of "Manuscript" decides to walk among the crew, but again he goes unnoticed. The men are infirm and grey, and fiddle around with mysterious instruments, speaking in their strange language. The ship is caught in a dreadful wind; its huge sails are not even enough to keep it from heading quickly due south. The journey is rough. The narrator struggles to keep his balance but the crew seem to be immune to the shifting sea. Frequently, the narrator senses doom ahead but the ship survives. The massive vessel seems almost to be supernaturally able to defy gravity, when it should plunge into the depths, it jumps free of danger.

The ship has a strange combination of antique objects and superior sailing power. The crew appear to be almost dead but still manage to guide the gargantuan vessel expertly and are unfazed by the currents. The ship and crew seem to be creatures or objects of the sea itself – one can't imagine them on land or starting out on this voyage. There are depths and layers of explanation that we don't have access to, making the horror that threatens the narrator a massive unknown quantity. The narrator is a self-proclaimed man of reason and methodical thought, but this world is beyond the ability of reason to comprehend.

The narrator of "Manuscript" describes his sighting of the ship's captain, who is similar to him in height and size but looks remarkably ancient. Every feature on his face seems like a record of time. Around his quarters are the same scientific instruments and antique charts that the narrator has witnessed across the vessel, and the captain, too, speaks to himself in an unintelligible mumble, which seems to come from far away even though he is standing near. The whole crew are creatures of an antique time, and they baffle and fascinate the narrator.

Poe often picks out a character to align with his narrator, either as a kind of double, or in this case as a figure of contrast. The captain is also a sailor, accomplished, and academic, like the narrator, but lives in a dreamlike, other world and makes no sense. Even his instruments of science and navigation are unusable. This puts the narrator in a horrible parallel situation—in which reason and scientific inquiry themselves seem to become nonsense.

The ship is surrounded by night and now walls of ice. The narrator of "Manuscript" admits he was silly to be afraid of the rough sea previously, as all of those terrors are mild compared to the sheer force of the ocean here. The ship is rushing headlong as if on an unstoppable tide. The narrator is terrified. But he is also very curious. He knows that they are heading for a vey interesting discovery and the ferocity of the ship's drive forward makes him excited to find out what wilderness they will uncover.

Beyond the strange breed of men that the narrator has found on board the foreign ship, the sea—nature— is still the ultimate force arrayed against him. It is an unbeatable, unsympathetic antagonist. Its ability to transform and present sublime depths and heights that dwarf even this huge ship, shows that the natural world is uncontrollable.

The crew has the appearance of eagerness and impatience, as if they too are waiting for this discovery. But then, the ice around them opens and the ship is being pulled in to the icy current. The narrator of "Manuscript" knows this is it. They are plunging into the whirlpool. He narrates as they go, and the last words are a fearful "going down."

Having set up the form of the story as a kind of diary, Poe stays right in the center of the present action so that when the sea finally turns against the ship, we follow the narrator's monologue to his demise and we, as readers, are ourselves immersed in the horror of the whirlpool.

LIGEIA

The narrator of "Ligeia" cannot remember how he came to know Ligeia. He says his memory has become weak through years of suffering. Or perhaps it is because Ligeia's qualities affected him so gradually and imperceptibly. Anyway, he remembers meeting her in an old city near the Rhine, but cannot place what was mentioned of her family and now struggles to remember even her paternal name.

Like many of Poe's narratives, Ligeia begins with a memory. But the narrator's efforts to conjure the memory of Ligeia—his wife—are unclear. Ligeia's origins are a mystery, even to her husband. The figure of Ligeia is immediately linked to an indistinct, dream-like feeling, and in this way she becomes connected also to all longing or senses of loss.

There is only one aspect of Ligeia that the narrator of "Ligeia" does not ever fail to remember, the form and appearance of her. He remembers how quietly she walked, and could enter a room without one knowing. And he remembers the low tone of her voice. She is radiant like a specter, with pale skin and her beauty is unusual. He knows that her figure is somehow irregular but it seems exquisite to him in its strangeness, and he can't quite place how it is irregular. Her features are fine, delicate, like porcelain. All of her qualities present themselves like those of Greek Goddesses to the narrator. But one aspect shines above the rest – Ligeia's large **eyes**.

The list of descriptors create a powerful impression of Ligeia. Her quietness, her ability to sneak up on the narrator, her low voice, and pale skin—all of these features combine to create an image of a ghostly, ethereal woman. She seems already to be haunting the narrator, in a way.

These **eyes** are larger than human eyes usually are – there is something animal about them. They are usually only slightly noticeable but when Ligeia gets excited, they enlarge and their size and blackness become intensely strange. But though the form of Ligeia's eyes is haunting, it is their expression that he really remembers. The narrator of "Ligeia" says he has spent hours thinking about this expression, trying to understand its power. He calls them "divine orbs", and they seem to have an almost religious power over him.

Ligeia's eyes are an important symbol of the story, because they provide a warning sign of the supernatural, superstitious side of the narrator. Whenever Ligeia's eyes appear in the story, the narrator is under a kind of spell – they fascinate him. Their unnatural size and the way they swell and fill with a superhuman passion put Ligeia into an unknown category, somewhere beyond the other characters, somewhere beyond human. Whether she truly was beyond human, or become so in the narrator's mind after the grief of her death affected him, is not entirely clear.

The narrator of "Ligeia" describes the feeling of almost remembering something, which he thinks is one of the most thrilling human feelings. He has felt this way about the expression of Ligeia's eyes. Sometimes an image will come to his mind that is an exact analogy for the effect that Ligeia's **eyes** have on him. Things like running water and moths, the faces of very elderly people, and particular stars, inspire him to remember Ligeia.

Ligeia has a strange effect on the narrator's mind. His memory of her is made up of ethereal qualities that are neither human nor inhuman. The objects and animals and heavenly bodies that she inspires give her an otherworldly, larger than life character that looms over the narrator and the story.

The narrator of "Ligeia" has also been reminded of Ligeia by music and literature, and a certain book in particular by Joseph Glanville. He gives a quote from this volume, which is also the story's epigram, about the power of the will and how God himself is a will. He has only found the connection between this passage and Ligeia after lots of contemplation, but now he believes it is something about her intensity. He describes how she is outwardly calm but has outbursts of temper like no other, and at these moments, her large **eyes** became huge and her voice took on a melodious, powerful energy.

The connection of Ligeia to the divine gives her a power not just over the narrator but over his whole world. She becomes larger than a human character and transforms into abstract concepts like energy and will. Giving his wife this power and comparing her to a goddess on one hand shows the depth of his love. At the same time, it's unclear if these traits of Ligeia's were real, or are rather products of the narrator's own overpowering sense of loss at her death. It is possible, in fact, to see Ligeia as a kind of embodiment of grief—calm, with outbursts of powerful energy. Poe's triumph in the story is to have Ligeia be both—both a kind of supernatural being and potentially "enhanced" by the narrator's grief-filled memories.

The narrator of "Ligeia" tells us that Ligeia was also very educated – she read all the time and knew many languages fluently. He has never known such knowledge in a woman and can find no fault in her intelligence, which thrills him to remember. She studied metaphysics and seemed so superior to him in her knowledge that he let her guide him and felt the scope of his knowledge expanding.

Poe gives Ligeia not only a physically intimidating character but also an intellectual superiority over the narrator, so that she becomes a kind of ultimate figure, both lover, mother and teacher.

So when Ligeia dies, the narrator of "Ligeia" is left alone, without both his teacher and wife. He is like a lost child. As illness took her strength away, she read less and her once wild **eyes** grew dim. The narrator knew that she was about to die and struggled to reckon with this truth. Shockingly to him, Ligeia also struggles to think of death, and her visible terror as she lies on her death bed is unbearable to watch.

Like a flame about to go out, Ligeia's supernatural qualities begin to wither on her death bed and the narrator suffers a horrible realization of what he is about to lose. The loss of strength in the eyes removes Ligeia's extraordinariness and makes her seem more human, which in turn makes her tragic refusal to accept death all the more upsetting.

It is not until the last moment, that Ligeia becomes still, her voice low and soft again, and confesses the fierceness of her love for her husband. The narrator of "Ligeia" has never imagined her love to be as fierce as this, and he feels both blessed and cursed to be losing her now. Her confessions speak to him of her desire to live, and he cannot express how horrible they are to hear.

In addition to Ligeia's qualities of intelligence and beauty, the narrator finally sees evidence of her affection for him, a quality that he never expected. This show of love in the last hours of her life gives Ligeia more humanity that fills the narrator with sympathy, and with a sense of loss.

At midnight, on the night of her death, Ligeia asks her husband to recite to her a particular poem that she has written herself about the "Conqueror Worm" about a play performed by puppets and watched by angels, in which the hero is a horrible worm, destroying the human characters. As the narrator of "Ligeia" finishes reading this morbid poem, Ligeia cries out appeals to God that the worm be conquered instead of her. She then recites the Glanville epigram. With this, she falls into her husband's arms and repeats to him the last phrase of the Glanville quote – "*Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.*"

As we've heard earlier in the story, there is a special connection between Ligeia and certain volumes of literature and poetry. She shows the force of this connection on her deathbed and seems to especially embody her own words and becomes very frantic with the idea of the worm. The final quote will be instrumental in the story that follows because it alludes to her refusal to submit to death.

After Ligeia dies, the narrator of "Ligeia" can't stand to be in their city by the Rhine and, with no lack of wealth, buys an abbey in a wild, remote part of England. The devastated appearance of the old **building** perfectly describes how he feels, and he doesn't want to repair it. But inside the building, he has hope of lifting the mood, and decks it out with luxurious draperies and carvings and decorations. But the narrator doesn't want to talk too much about these things. He goes on to the most important room of the abbey, the bridal chamber, where he married his new wife, Lady Rowena of Tremaine. He isn't sure how it happened that the family of the bride allowed their daughter to marry him.

Fitting Poe's tendency to connect place and person, the narrator finds the old city tarnished by the memory of Ligeia. But his escape does not free him from this condition. He chooses an old, Gothic abbey, which represents the grieving, maddened state of his mind. By confining himself in this way, and surrounding himself with rich, dark decorations, the narrator only exaggerates his dark mood.

But he can describe the **bridal chamber** perfectly. It is a pentagonal room at the top of a high turret, with a venetian glass window covering one of the five sides. This glass was such a dim color that it transformed the light that entered the room and made everything look sickly. There are vines growing over the walls and the ceiling is carved oak with many elaborate Gothic figures shaped in the wood. There's an incense burner in the center of the ceiling and many other Eastern decorations and granite figures in the corners standing over the proceedings like tomb sculptures.

When we were introduced to Ligeia, the narrative was entirely composed of descriptions of her appearance and intelligence and all the qualities that the narrator loved about her, but in the first months of marriage with Rowena, the narrator is more concerned with the architecture that surrounds them than the woman herself. Ligeia's memory looms in the background.

The major attraction of the **room** besides all these things is the drapery. The huge walls are draped with tapestries with embroidered Gothic figures that only appear normal from one angle, so that as one moved about the room, the figures transformed in turn, so the whole room was in a kind of constant agitation, which was made worse by the wind moving the drapes.

The moving images on the walls of the abbey make the structure itself seem restless—it doesn't feel homely at all. The figures mimic the characters in the story, changing in mood and always on the verge of monstrosity.

In chambers like these, the new couple pass their first month. The narrator of "Ligeia" can't help but notice that Rowena isn't very loving towards him and dreads his moods. He remembers the beauty and spirit of Ligeia and he revels in opium-induced dreams about her and hopes that if his passion is loud enough, she might come back to him.

Grief and the absence of Ligeia has transformed the narrator's experience of love. He is unable to love Rowena. And to make matters worse, his sensations are exaggerated by the effects of opium, making us, as readers, unable to determine what in the story to come is supernatural and what is the product of his opium-drugged state.

In the second month of the marriage, Rowena becomes ill, and she has feverous nights, and mumbles and moans strange words, which the narrator of "Ligeia" puts down to the fantastical images surrounding her in the chamber. She recovers but then becomes ill again, a more serious case, and her doctors can do nothing to help. As her condition worsens she becomes both fiery and nervous and she becomes also very scared of the motion of the tapestries.

The similarity between Rowena and Ligeia continues, and their lives seem to follow the same pattern, with Rowena now falling victim to a similar condition that leaves her bed ridden. But instead of the narrator's love to surround her, there are the tomb-like images and decorations of the abbey's fateful bridal chamber.

One night, Rowena wakes the narrator of "Ligeia", who has been sleeping fitfully beside her. She tells him that she sees things and hears things in the tapestries but none of it appears to him. He wants to show her that her imaginings are caused by the wind alone, but she is in a terrible state. Without the physicians nearby, the narrator goes to find some wine to revive her, but on the way he feels something pass beside him and notices a faint, angelic shadow on the ground. The narrator is under the influence of opium though and he doesn't put much stock in it.

Fitting the description of her as a kind of double of Ligeia, Rowena seems to have a sixth sense for the paranormal menace of this room. The narrator is in an altered state, drugged up on opium, and though his visions appear to him in a hallucinatory daze, they also seem to conjure this angelic presence that are reminiscent of Ligeia's hold on him from beyond the grave.

The narrator of "Ligeia" brings back the wine and Rowena begins to come to her senses again. But as she brings the wine to her lips, the narrator thinks he sees some red liquid drop into the cup, but he doesn't tell Rowena and she drinks down the wine. He imagines he dreamt the strange addition to the cup and the late hour is causing him to hallucinate. But soon after, Rowena's condition changes for the worse and he believes that she will soon die.

The visions that began as dim, hazy mirages become clearer and the red color of the wine is definite now. Though the narrator excuses his visions as a product of the drugs, there is a definite correlation between them and Rowena's state – after the mysterious addition to the wine, she loses all strength. Are these the narrator's drug-filled visions? Is something supernatural going on? Is the narrator himself half-unknowingly killing Rowena and reenacting the death of Ligeia? Nothing is clear.

The fourth night that the narrator of "Ligeia" watches over Rowena indeed turns out to be her last. As he sits with the body, he sees visions and shadows. He looks to see if the angelic shadow is on the ground but it is not so he looks back at the corpse of his wife. Memories of Ligeia flood back to him and he is heartbroken as he remembers watching Ligeia on her own death bed.

A pattern has occurred in the sightings of this angelic presence and the fading of Rowena's spirit. Now, as the hallucinations cease, the paranormal spirit and Rowena are acting as one.

At midnight, the narrator of "Ligeia" believes he hears a low sob coming from the bed. He is filled with superstitious fear and eagerly watches the corpse for any change. Eventually he thinks he detects a slight change in color on Rowena's cheeks. For a moment he is stunned but duty takes over and he knows he must do something, but no one is around, so he tries to call back Rowena's spirit. His efforts are in vain though. Rowena quickly looks even more deathly than before.

The illusion of the wine can be seen in Rowena's blushing cheeks and the ebb and flow of Rowena's strength corresponds exactly with the narrator's dreams about Ligeia. This shows how god-like the narrator's mind (or Ligeia's ghost?) is at this point, and how much of an empty vessel his new wife has always been to him.

The narrator of "Ligeia" falls back down onto his couch and the visions of Ligeia come back to him. Hours of this pass until another sign of life comes to the body of Rowena, a sigh. The narrator rushes to her and sees her lips quiver, then the same coloration on her cheeks, even a heartbeat. There is no doubt that the lady has come back to life. But just like before, as the narrator tries to help her, the color disappears and she seems to go back to death.

These signs of life in Rowena are the most life and beauty we have seen yet in the narrator's description of her. It is as if the thoughts of Ligeia are bringing her back to life, fuelling the narrator's passion so strongly that the dim impression he had of his new wife is erased.

For a third time, the narrator of "Ligeia" dreams of Ligeia and for a third time, Rowena seems to awaken. He can't bear to describe every occasion of this terrible transformation, but he tells us that it goes on all night, and he no longer tries to do anything. He just sits in a stupor of fear. Again, Rowena seems to come back to life, but this time, actually stirs, rises slowly from the bed and walks into the room. The narrator is paralyzed with fear. His mind races. It must be Rowena, but he starts to see some differences – this figure is taller for example. The narrator rushes to the figure and she starts to take off the cloth that enshrouds her, letting loose raven-colored hair, and then revealing a pair of large, wild **eyes**. The narrators shrieks. It is Ligeia.

The narrator cannot get away from Ligeia. His inability to stop thinking about her seems to have resulted in the haunting of his mind becoming a reality – the physical world has formed before him in the image of his grief. His obsession with Ligeia, the influence of opium, and Ligeia's larger-than-life personality have together created an unstable reality, where death and life cannot be separated, where Ligeia can return to him. Whether she truly has supernaturally returned, whether it is in fact the narrator's drug-fueled mind, and whether he is truly an innocent in all this—none of that is clear. But, regardless, and in part because of the lack of clarity, the overpowering, reality-altering, and even monstrous power of his grief for his lost wife is profoundly tangible.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

The narrator of "House of Usher" is passing on horseback through a dull part of the country on a grim day, when he comes across the House of Usher. The sight of the **house** fills him with dread for some reason. He calls this feeling "unsufferable" because it is not accompanied by the romantic feeling that sights of desolation often produce. Looking upon the bleak walls and windows is like waking up to horrible reality from an opium dream.

The Gothic style is apparent from the beginning of this tale, the weather and atmosphere mirror the narrator's dismal mood as if the physical world is connected to him or somehow aware of his presence. This is typical of Gothic literature. The bleak horror of this scene is bound to correspond to greater horrors within.

The narrator of "House of Usher" tries to explain to himself how the house has this effect on him, but it is beyond him. He thinks that perhaps if the parts of the scene were to be rearranged, their effect would be different, so he rides over to the "tarn", an area of dark water around the house, and looks at the inverted image of the house in the water, but this image is even more hideous.

The narrator tries to use reason and science to explain the sensation that the house causes, but the scene's horror is greater than the sum of its parts. This leads the reader into thinking that something unexplained, even paranormal, is afoot.

Despite all this, the narrator of "House of Usher" is planning to stay at this very residence. He has received an urgent letter from the owner, Roderick Usher, who is suffering from a nervous illness and desires the narrator's company urgently. The narrator remembers them being close friends in their childhood but that Usher always had a reserved temperament. But he also remembers that the Usher family is famous for its strange temperaments, and for creating in these moods wonderful works of art, deeds of charity, and contributions to "musical science."

Like the house that shares his name, the character of Usher carries with him an inherent peculiar quality. This quality is exaggerated by the narrator's memory and the fact that he only knew Usher as a child—all he knows of this man is through the lens of childhood memories and rumors of his nervous disorders.

Another illuminating fact about the family is the purity of its lineage – it is one direct descent, with no branches into other families – so the name the **House of Usher**, has come to refer to both the building and the family itself.

The isolation of the Ushers and their fateful connection to the physical property of the family are ominous details. The setting and characters here are some of Poe's most Gothic.

The narrator of "House of Usher" describes looking down into the water and feeling his superstition about the house increase within him. He explains that feelings of terror often increase the more one becomes conscious of them. He thinks it might be this phenomenon that causes the scene to appear even ghastlier and stranger when he lifts his eyes to it again. He tries to shake off the feeling and examine the house properly.

The narrator tries to reason out his sensations. But though it can be comforting to attribute a strange phenomenon to a trick of the mind, here, it adds another psychological element of horror to the tale, and ultimately suggests that the mind can't in fact be trusted.

The narrator of "House of Usher" notices the extreme age of the **property**, but that some parts are crumbling and others are fine. The overall structure seems to be holding up against its age though, apart from a single crack going from top to bottom of the façade. The narrator travels on to the house and is greeted by a servant who takes him to Usher's studio.

Poe uses architecture to portray mystery. The degradation of the house, its fraying surfaces, represent the corresponding suffering of its inhabitants, just as the instability of the building's interior and foundations suggests the Usher's psychological frailty.

On the way, the narrator of "House of Usher" passes many striking objects and images on tapestries and carvings, and he feels again that haunting sensation. Then he meets the family's physician, who has a half cunning, half confused expression. He is led into a huge **room,** whose windows were so high that they could not be reached. The narrator struggles to see everything inside the room because of the light, but sees that it is generally filled with tattered furniture and books and musical instruments. The room fills him with gloom.

Each vision that the narrator passes on the way to see Usher creates a recurring sensation of dread. The images on the walls, the warped height of the room, the objects from the past make a list in the narrative and create the feeling that the narrator has stepped into another world. The familiar is distorted in this house – and the menace of the doctor, a traditionally kind figure, makes the narrator vulnerable.

Usher rises and greets his old friend eagerly, which the narrator of "House of Usher" can tell is very sincere, but he can see that the man is completely changed, has become very pale and thin and his **eyes** have a strange luster. Usher's features are so fearful that the narrator doesn't even recognize him. He also finds his friend's manner worrying. Usher seems to be acting to cover up his extreme nervousness, though the narrator had expected as much based on Usher's letter and what he remembers of Usher's temperament.

A change has come over the narrator's old friend that goes beyond what he has heard about a "nervous disorder". Usher's eyes (remember that Poe uses eyes as a symbol of the soul and the menace of the supernatural) are very noticeable. Lustre is an interesting quality, both shining and unclear, it veils Usher's true expression.

But Usher's condition is severe, at times incomprehensible, one minute full of energy, the other depressed. In this mania, he tells the narrator of "House of Usher" about his illness. He says it is a family complaint. He describes his symptoms as unnatural sensations, like aversions to light and food and a general feeling of terror. He thinks that this terror will kill him. It is not that he fears danger, but the condition of fear itself.

The House of Usher and the Usher family are attached by name. The concept of the family lineage and the building is one and the same, but this connection goes further than the narrator first suspects and seems to have taken over Usher's mind.

Usher also suffers from a superstitious nature, especially related to the House of Usher – he feels that he cannot leave the building, and that the dilapidation and ugliness of its features has somehow affected his own condition, the physical rotting of the **structure** corresponding to his own rotting spirit.

A symptom of the characters' psychological disorder, in fact the main symptom, is their dependency on each other and to the house itself. As the building appears to rot and age, so do the characters.

But Usher also explains that his symptoms can be attributed to a more comprehensible cause, the long term illness of his beloved sister, his only remaining relative and companion. He talks about her with unbearable dread, and just at that moment, the lady Madeleine passes through the room, and the narrator is filled with a similar sensation of horror. As soon as the lady has gone, the narrator looks to her brother and sees him weeping.

Though Usher explains his condition as largely caused by a kind of extreme sympathy and sadness for his sister, there is something more disturbing at work in the connectedness of these two conditions. As Madeleine enters the room, her presence has a physical effect on him.

The lady's disease is unexplained. She seems to be gradually wasting away. She had been able to walk around but on this day, she finally takes to her bed and the narrator of "House of Usher" knows he will probably never see her again. Over the ensuing days the narrator tries to cheer Usher up. But as they get closer and the narrator knows him more intimately, he realizes how useless these attempts are. Usher's spirit is beyond help.

There is a sense of reason and hope associated with a diagnosis of a physical problem—because then maybe it can be cured. But Madeleine's condition seems purely spiritual – Poe uses the horror of the unknown to enlarge and mystify Madeleine's sickness. It is an illness beyond reason.

The narrator of "House of Usher" and Usher paint and read together. These hours stay in the narrator's memory, but he struggles to describe the spirit of Usher's artistic efforts. An air of distemper and supernatural energy controls his artistic spirit. His songs are played wildly, and his paintings are devoid of realistic subject but their abstractions fascinate and terrify the narrator for some reason. Only one painting can be described in words. It presents a long underground room, with no ventilation at all but strange rays of light passing through it. Usher's musical performances use only stringed instruments, as all other sounds terrify him, but his abilities are astounding. The narrator thinks it must be his increased concentration because of his illness that allows him to play such fantasias.

The talented side of Usher is a theme that lies out of the spotlight while the narrator concentrates on the sickness of the family and the plot spirals towards its fated end. But it is well described in the narrator's introduction of his childhood friend and seems to form an inherent feature of the character of Usher. The fact that Usher's talent does not leave the house adds a note of tragedy to the story, and the unexplained origin of his special abilities enhances the mystery of the Usher genes.

The narrator of "House of Usher" distinctly remembers one example of these songs, and perhaps it is the truth of its words that have put it so forcibly in his memory. It is called "The Haunted Palace" and tells the story of a King in a glorious palace who is tortured by evil spirits, and the palace remains as a haunted shell of the family home it once was.

This song echoes the details of Usher's own life and the mention of this haunted, tortured character brings a spooky doubleness to the scene. The melodious quality of this story also makes it linger and float around the house.

This recitation reminds the narrator of "House of Usher" of a strange belief that Usher held about his **house**: that the objects in it and the house itself are sentient, that they feel and perceive things. Usher thinks the stones of the house and the water of the tarn contain a remainder of his ancestors and senses a destructive atmosphere in the house. He believes that this is what has doomed his family to have such awful illnesses and what dooms him now.

This revelation is made more terrible by the fact that we saw evidence of this phenomenon earlier in the story. Even the narrator, who is not part of the Usher family, felt a change in him as he approached the house and felt its gruesome atmosphere affect his mood. He has also already witnessed the similarity in the conditions of the house and its residents, the wasting away, the aging.

The books that Usher adores are in keeping with this superstition. Usher's favorite is a "manual of a forgotten church." The narrator considers the rituals described in this text to have aggravated Usher's state of mind. One evening, while they are engaged in reading, Usher suddenly tells the narrator that Madeleine has died and it is his plan to keep her body preserved for a fortnight in one of the house's vaults. The narrator, remembering the feeling of doom that her presence had caused him, understands that this might be a wise move. Her illness was so strange that the physicians would want to investigate her body before taking her out to the open air to the family burial ground.

Literature is an important feature of this narrative and several others of Poe's collection, like Ligeia. It serves the mystery and horror of the story in several ways. For example, by creating another world, a literary world, into which we delve every so often, Poe increases the sense that Usher's world in the real *one. It also gives us an idea of Usher's impressionable mind, which is worsened by the secrecy and airlessness of the house and his inability to move beyond the house, even when his sister has passed away.*

As Usher's closest companion now, the narrator of "House of Usher" helps him to move the lady's coffin into the dark, musty **vault**. This particular room is directly underneath the narrator's sleeping quarters, and historically, was used to store explosive powder and so the interior is completely coated in copper and has a massive copper door.

The narrator deliberately provides these particular details that give an impression of the vault as an impenetrable fortress, so that it can only be a paranormal, spiritual being that would be able to escape it.

When they have placed the coffin, they remove the lid and the narrator of "House of Usher" is surprised to find a striking resemblance between the sister and brother. Usher tells him that they were twins, and shared a bond that can't be comprehended from the outside. But they don't look for long at Madeleine's body. Death has put an unnatural blush on her cheeks that is awful to behold. They shut up the vault and return to the upper floors.

Usher and Madeleine are something more than twins, they are halves of the same person – so to find out this doubleness at the moment of entombing Madeleine gives an added punch to the sight of the body and implies that Usher's grief will be more complicated than first thought.

After this deed is done, Usher's mood changes. He spends all his time wandering, purposeless. His paleness is even worse and his voice takes on a permanently terrified tone. It often seems to the narrator of "House of Usher" that Usher is burdened with a terrible secret that he wishes to tell. He also hears imaginary sounds and the narrator often finds him staring vacantly ahead.

Now separated from his sister, Usher is diminished, he is unable to concentrate and unable to free himself from his lingering fears and superstitions. It is as if their bodily connection has continued after death, and that Madeleine's descent into the tomb and into a decomposing state is pulling Usher in the same direction.

The mood is so overpowering that the narrator of "House of Usher" finds himself changing a little too. He feels this way especially one night about a week after they have entombed Madeleine, when he goes to bed and cannot sleep. He tries to believe that it is just the gloomy **room** and the swaying of the draperies that makes him feel like this, but he starts to shake with fright and, sitting up, has the urge to peer into the darkness, and he hears some low sounds that don't belong to the storm outside. Fear comes over him and he gets out of bed and paces around.

One of the ways that Poe exaggerates the horror of the House of Usher is by making its effect unclear. Though we have been led to believe that it is a genetic, inherited disorder, passed between building and family, sometimes it seems that if the narrator were to stay long enough, he too would succumb to the sickness – he already feels a change in mood which resembles Usher's nervous condition.

As the narrator of "House of Usher" does this, he hears a footfall outside the room and knows that it is Usher. The next moment, Usher enters, pale as usual but with in a higher state of mania, but the narrator welcomes any company on this gloomy night. Usher asks the narrator if he has "seen it", and finding that he hasn't, comes in to the room and opens the window, letting a gust of stormy air in. Outside, a beautiful, terrible storm is raging, with rapid winds that change direction suddenly and thick clouds. There is no moonlight, but instead an aura of some kind of gas surrounds the building.

True to Gothic form, at the height of the mystery, the weather corresponds with the psychological turmoil of the characters, but Poe puts an interesting twist on the traditional storm, making it electrical and beautiful—much like Usher's art—and its effect ambiguous.

The narrator of "House of Usher" wants to shield Usher from this sight, which he explains is nothing more than an electrical phenomenon. He suggests reading from one of their favorite volumes, called "The Mad Trist". In fact, it is a bit of a joke to call this book one of their favorites, but the narrator hopes it will be different enough from his spiritual fantasies to distract him – he thinks right.

The narrator's idea to read to Usher is a reminder of the childlike Usher, described earlier by the narrator, who had a passion for stories and a big imagination. So at first, the image of the narrator reading to Usher is a sweet image, the narrator taking a kind of mother-like role and comforting him.

The narrator of "House of Usher" comes to the point in the book where Ethelred, during a storm, comes to the Hermit's dwelling and breaks down the door. As the narrator reads these words, he imagines he hears an echo from somewhere in the mansion that fits perfectly with the sound described. He assures himself it must have just been the strange storm and carries on. But again as Ethelred beats the dragon, the narrator pauses again at a sound very like the shriek that he imagines the dragon making. Though this second coincidence scares the narrator, he keeps calm in front of Usher.

But as the storm rages, the house becomes the antagonist again and seems to act against them. Imagination is a dangerous thing in this house, and it is not yet clear at this point how much of this atmosphere is imagined and how much is real. But, again, using lists and patterns of three, Poe gradually builds the suspicion that these interruptions are real and not imagined.

Usher's behavior, as the reading progresses, has altered from being intent on the reader to now watching the doorway, and rocking back and forth. The narrator of "House of Usher" carries on, but again as Ethelred drops his shield, a metallic sound reverberates through the house and the narrator can't help but jump up from his seat. Usher stays where he is, still rocking. As the narrator touches User's shoulder, Usher shudders and begins murmuring. He says he has heard it all, and he knows that Madeleine has been buried alive. Even days ago, he heard the first movements from deep in the vault.

Usher is so in touch with the imagined world of the book and with the sounds of the house that he seems oblivious now to the narrator's presence. He is experiencing something in his mind that has come to possess him and now he is fixed in this posture of madness. As he describes his sister's movements through the house, he is so intent on the door that his nerves and the mood of the house seem to be acting as one.

Usher describes Madeleine coming up the stairs, the sound of her heart, and then, in an absolute frenzy of terror, he cries that she is standing outside the door. As if his energy had made the idea come true, they see the massive door of the room start to open and the lady standing in the threshold, enshrouded and bloody. For a moment, she stands, trembling, and then with a terrible moan falls into her brother's arms. Usher falls down dead.

In a terrible progression of Madeleine coming closer and closer and Usher getting more and more frantic and the storm raging, the Usher nightmare finally concludes and it becomes clear that the genetic connection really was fatal – Madeleine literally dragged Usher down to his rightful place with her, in death.

The narrator of "House of Usher" flees from the house, and through the storm. He sees a flash of light and turns back around. It is the blood-red moon shining through the crack in the wall, which now begins to widen and rip, and with the force of a whirlwind and a thunderous sound, the **house** collapses into the earth, and the still waters of the tarn are all that's left.

The spiritual connection between the Usher lineage and the House of Usher is complete – the building physically cannot stand now that the last of the Usher breed has died.

WILLIAM WILSON

The narrator introduces himself to the reader, asking us to use the name William Wilson instead of his real name, which cannot be uttered because it's too heinous. The man connected with this name is an outcast from the world. The narrator asks whether there will always be such a dark cloud barring him from heaven. He says that it is the latter years of his life that turned to disaster. Most men turn rotten gradually, but for him it happened all at once. The event that provoked such a fall is about to be related to us, he assures, because he is approaching death.

In typical form, Poe begins his tale by showing us a tantalizing glimpse of the man that the narrator will turn into over the course of the story. Here, we know from the outset that the narrator will end up in this tragic, wasted state and this image looms over our reading of what follows. He also starts this story about a doubled identity more complicated by explaining that the name he is giving is not his real name, making it unclear who he really is.

William wishes that people would pity him. If no man has ever been tempted so awfully, and fallen so far, then surely no man has suffered as much as he has. He is surely dying within a nightmare. He goes back to the beginning, to his antecedents, who all had a tendency for imaginative and extraordinary lives. William declares himself typical of this family. As he grew, the willful temper became more established in him. He showed evil tendencies that his parents, being of the same breed, could do little to quash, and William soon becomes the master of his household.

William opens up about his temperament and his family origins, which should invoke our sympathies but it has an opposite effect. His appeal for sympathy sounds a lot like bargaining. And his confession that he has inherited an imaginative, active temper warns us to be weary of his story. The fact that William can dominate his parents as a young child foretells future trouble.

William recalls his school, in a misty, **Gothic village** with shadowy avenues and a haunting church bell. He recalls the place with pleasure, but then says it's ridiculous for one so evil to take relief in memories. But because these memories are of such an important time in his development, William decides to indulge.

Even William's most beloved childhood memories are made suspicious and tainted with the Gothic atmosphere that now haunts his thoughts and the guilt that follows him around as a condemned man.

The **school house** was surrounded by a thick wall. The children were permitted beyond the wall on Saturday and Sunday, when they paraded to church. Young William watches with wonder each time the reverend, who is also the principal of the school, steps up to the pulpit and assumes such a figure of authority. The wall of the school was broken only by an impressive gate and its grounds were extensive and comprised of various nooks. The **house** itself is similarly winding and large, full of quaint crannies and illogical stories, so that one never felt quite at home. The school room was the largest room in the house and held several enclosures used by the principal and other fellows.

Poe creates the architecture of William's world so that it mirrors the eccentricity and disturbing nature of the events that take place inside. Its winding, uneven and untraditional spaces form dark corners and secret places, adding to the Gothic mood that hangs over William's childhood.

This is where William spent his youth. His youth, he says, didn't need grand events. Even the monotony of his childhood's days were more impressive than the crimes and passions of his later eras. He calls himself unusual, in that he remembers vividly even though there is little to remember. The emotions and sensations caused by those tedious daily events have stamped an eternal mark on William's mind.

The vibrancy of William's childhood goes beyond the ordinary vibrancy of childhood memories, because William's childhood stands in stark contrast to his adulthood, which we are told is hellish but is craftily kept a mystery by Poe.

William's energetic character sets him apart from his school mates and he finds himself able to dominate the playground, with the exception of one boy, who coincidentally has the same first and last name as our narrator. Because this original name is so hateful to him, William's rival will also be known as William Wilson. This rival rebels from William's followers and competes with him in everything he does.

William's identity becomes more confused when we are introduced to this double character who, having the same name as William (though William of course has already explained that William Wilson is not his real name) must also be known by the alias William Wilson. The levels of remove from the man telling the story are many at this point, completely blurring the identity of the characters. It's as if William not only has a double in the other boy, but is now a double of himself.

Outwardly, William treats this rebellion with bravado, but he is scared of it, fearing that the ease with which his rival equals him signifies the other boy's superiority. Strangely, none of his other friends seem to notice the rivalry. It is almost a private game, and the rival's efforts mirror William's so precisely that it seems to be his sole purpose to embarrass him. Sometimes, an affectionate side to the battle can be detected, and William puts this down to a certain protectiveness and almost narcissism of a doppelganger.

The fact that none of the other children notice the rivalry between William and his double shows how intimately the rivalry is connected to his own mental state. That no one else notices the rivalry suggests that the rivalry might only exist in William's own mind; or it might even suggest that the double himself only exists in William's mind.

The narrator reveals that he shares so many details of life with the other William that some schoolmates, even older boys, talked about them, and gossiped that they were brothers. They were even born on exactly the same day. But despite the trouble that his doppelganger causes him, William has some kind of affection for him. They have daily fights in the school yard, but they always manage to remain on speaking terms. The narrator can't quite figure out how he feels: sometimes respect, sometimes hatred, sometimes fondness. But whatever it is, they are inseparable.

As the number of identical details and coincidences grows, the character of the second William becomes less clear and the spotlight turns to William's imagination as the possible cause of such an implausible doppelganger, especially when he mentions their inseparable relationship. Theirs is a more personal rivalry than one would expect from a pair of children, and the mix of hatred and love that they share shows that they are more closely connected than rivals.

This troublesome relationship is the focus of William's antics and the outlet of his wits. He plays practical jokes on his double that are sometimes violent. But William's ploys have limited success in taunting his rival, who, it seems, has no weak spot. But there is one thing that causes the other William embarrassment: he cannot speak louder than a whisper.

William's double is the only figure to cause William to doubt his superiority, but the other boy seems more a shadow than a real person. This shadow-ness is further enhanced by the whisper that the other boy speaks in, and again that whisper suggests perhaps that the boy only exists in William's mind.

William's double has also found William's weakness, though how the other boy discovered it is beyond William, because he sees it as a small, petty thing. William is embarrassed about his common last name. The fact that the other William shares it makes him even angrier, and whenever they are confused for each other, or he hears the name repeated, his anger grows. As the rivalry grows more and more severe, it becomes obvious how physically identical the boys are too.

William's embarrassment for his common surname shows an egotistical attitude – he wants to be the unique and special. Note how the rivalry seems to make the other boy more real, more similar. The rivalry, in some ways, seems to be what makes the other boy exist.

William is worried that the older boys at school are talking about this relationship between the two boys, but there is no evidence to suggest they have noticed anything. It is obvious that the second William has noticed their similarity too; William can tell because of how he uses it against him. The other William's favorite trick is to do an imitation of William, mimicking perfectly his dress, mannerisms, and, apart from the volume, his tone of voice. This imitation tortures William. The only consolation is that no one else seems to have noticed it. His double seems to really enjoy the effect he's having. William does not understand why everyone else is ignoring what's going on. Maybe, he thinks, it's because the imitation is so focused at him that it escapes others' notice.

The doubleness of the two Williams becomes increasingly complicated. Not only do they share identical physical features, birthdays, and a host of other coincidental details, but their personalities now become almost identical when William's rival starts mimicking him. Considering their already perfect symmetry, this new hobby must make it impossible to tell the boys apart. We as readers are stuck in the narrator's perspective, though, making it seem like the rivals are in their own little world, so we don't really get a clue as to how they appear to their classmates (who don't even seem to notice the other boy's antics).

Another thing William hates is the way his double talks down to him, offering condescending advice, although he admits that the advice is not immature or misguided, and he knows that if he had followed some of it, he might be a happier man today. But as a boy this counsel infuriates him and the doppelganger's arrogance makes their rivalry become more and more bitter. The narrator had thought that their rivalry was akin to friendship in a way, but now it is all hatred.

William's double annoys him with advice but William knows that he should be listening to it. Some of William's anger comes from the fact that his double might actually have a kind of moral wisdom that William himself doesn't have. In this way, the whispering, possibly imaginary double starts to seem like a kind of conscience, which William (who seems like kind of a psychopath, to be blunt) is trying desperately to ignore.

The doppelganger William notices this change and starts to avoid William. On one occasion around this time, the pair get into a fight, and the tone and openness of the doppelganger astonishes William, because it reminds him so much of his infancy, some barely formed childhood memory that he can't explain. It is a fleeting sensation but he mentions it because it occurred on the day of their last conversation and he wants to remember the day properly.

The pattern of affection and hatred that has driven the relationship of the two William's has become more volatile, and at the same time draws them even closer as William now associates his double with a sense from his infancy.

The narrator reminds us of the awkward shape of the **school building** and all its nooks and crannies. Some of these little alcoves were turned into dormitories, and this is where William's double lives. One night, William gets up when everyone is asleep – he has been plotting a practical joke that will make his double aware of his hatred. He enters the tiny room and when he is sure that his double is asleep, he brings his lamp in and draws back the curtains that surround the boy's bed. But as the light hits the boy's face, the narrator cannot believe his eyes. He had always been a perfect replica but now he doesn't recognize his own double! Terrified, William hurries from the closet and leaves the school house, never to return again.

The facets of the rival William's character that differ from the narrator's character are interesting to collect. The whispering voice is one example, and here's another, the fact that the rival William sleeps in a closet instead of a normal bedroom, as if he has been hidden away. Poe cleverly uses our expectations for more and more doppelganger details and surprises us with the even more horrible idea of finding one's doppelganger transformed. And William's own horror suggests, even as he hates his doppelganger, how much he has come to rely on it being his doppelganger.

After a few months, William starts studying at Eton instead and the strength of the horrible memory fades – he now remembers that night as if remembering a hallucination rather than a real occurrence. And his life at Eton, filled with folly and thoughtless games, promotes his unserious view of life. While at Eton, he passes years of careless misery, and develops bad habits. One night, he invites some peers to drink with him and their revelry is unbridled, and reaches its peak as the sun begins to rise.

William is no longer a child but his traumatic childhood memories haunt him in his new habits. His lively, domineering personality seeks an outlet, which was always filled and flattered by the presence of his double, but now goes into vices like drinking instead.

At the height of the party, William is about to make a toast when he is interrupted by the announcement that someone has arrived to speak with him. In his drunken state, William is excited by the interruption. He goes directly to the small hallway, which is almost completely dark. He makes out a figure waiting for him, dressed in a morning coat just like he is. Then, as he enters the room, the figure rushes towards him and announces himself as William Wilson in a chilling whisper. It is the quality of this voice that shakes William to his core and reminds him violently of his childhood. But when he recovers his senses, the figure is gone.

In the height of the careless atmosphere of the party, William is caught off guard by the appearance of this figure. The sudden switch from the bright loud party to the confined dark corridor and the sudden approach of the double is an explosive reminder that the horrors of the past remain unresolved. The experience also once again suggests the sudden appearance of one's conscience in the midst of doing something wrong.

Though the event remains vivid to William afterwards, it also has a paranormal quality that makes him more curious than frightened. He knows well the form of the apparition but wonders why and how he appeared. The only thing he can find out is that a family accident caused his double to leave the old boarding school on the same day that the narrator did. But he is soon distracted when he moves to the city of Oxford, a move that has been funded by his parents.

Though the narrator fled his old school in fear, the old obsession comes back to him and the doppelganger seems to feel the same way, having sought William out. The meeting is so unfinished and curious that even when the narrator describes himself moving on to Oxford, we know that the rival is still lurking.

The narrator begins this new stage in style and luxury and with an even greater love of danger and revelry. He tells us that we will hardly believe that he could sink to gambling but he does. He knows that his close school mates would rather disbelieve their eyes than think that the sociable, generous figure of their youth had turned to such a base vice.

The narrator's life grows increasingly excessive. He wants more and more wealth and the closer he comes to ruin, the more his vices overtake him. Without his rival (or conscience?), William is free to dominate his social circle.

William introduces a new character, a wealthy young man called Glendinning, whose "weak intellect" makes him the perfect gambling partner. William plays him frequently, letting him win a lot of money in the first games. Then, when he has befriended and soothed Glendinning enough, they meet with other Oxford boys to gamble.

Glendinning appears as another rival figure for William, but this time, he is no match for William's personality. William's active pursuit of Glendinning shows us that, despite his hatred for the other William of his childhood, part of him needs a rival to sustain his power.

William ensures that Glendinning is the only opponent left in the game, and has been, at William's invitation, drinking liberally all evening, so that at one turn in the game, Glendinning proposes doubling the stakes. William feigns reluctance. Everything is going according to plan and Glendinning bets larger and larger sums, and gets more in debt, but his face, which had been flushed with wine, now looks very sickly. William had thought that he had so much money that it wouldn't matter what he lost, but the concerned whispers of his friends tell him that he has effected the man's complete financial ruin.

William is fueled by the presence of a challenger like Glendinning and is so fired up by the rivalry that he becomes heartless, using Glendinning like a pawn in his game and taking his money ruthlessly. But Glendinning is found to be vulnerable. William is used to dealing with his double, who is almost without weakness, so when he finds Glendinning destroyed by his tactics, William is brought down to earth.

Embarrassment and sadness comes over everybody. William is relieved by an unexpected interruption – the doors open suddenly, blowing out all the candles. In the dim light, a stranger enters in a cloak. The room is not totally black but they can sense he is there. Then, in an unforgettable whisper, summoning all present to listen, he says it is his duty to inform them of the true nature of their host, and directs them to investigate William's shirt cuff, which he claims hides some little packages. The room is stunned. The visitor leaves as quickly as he arrived.

Just like at school, the other William knows everything about the narrator – how he could have known about the secret card deck or even planted it there, shows his supernatural presence and connection to the narrator that goes beyond friendship and rivalry to something more intimate. Again, one possibility is that he is an embodiment of William's conscience, that his revelation of William's cheating is in fact William himself revealing that cheating in a sudden fit of conscience.

The narrator can hardly describe his terror when pairs of hands seize him and he is searched by his friends, who find, as predicted, packets of false cards used for cheating. The discovery is greeted with silent contempt by his friends. The host of the party asks him to leave immediately and quit Oxford, and hands him his cloak. William is so embarrassed that he expects he will lash out at the host, but something else occurs to him with more force. He notices that he is already holding his cloak, an unusually expensive one in a strange fashion, and the one he is being offered is an exact replica. He remembers that the figure had also worn a cloak. He thinks on his feet and takes the replica without anyone noticing that he now carries two cloaks. He leaves the room, in painful disgrace, and soon after, leaves Oxford, and the country.

William is now in a position of ridicule and disrespect from his group of peers that he once dominated. This is a shock to the system and William's reputation is ruined. But the real uneasiness of the room is the lingering sensation that William's curse, of being followed by a double character, has returned. The double's ability to know where he is and what he is doing fills William with dread and gives the reader a sense of foreboding now that the figure has disappeared. The double, even in its absence, is inescapable.

William tries to escape his alter ego, but even on the continent, he finds signs of the other William. He flees from country to country, each time pursued by his rival. He again questions with all his might why and how this man is pursuing him but realizes that the only offence his doppelganger is committing is stopping certain immoral deeds that the narrator has schemed, like his cheating of Glendinning. The narrator also notices that, though his double always wears a matching outfit, he never shows his face. William wonders if he really believes that he can avoid being recognized as the original doppelganger.

William is powerless to escape the pursuit of his alter ego, because the scope of this paranormal figure, made, perhaps, somehow from William's imagination, conscience, and disturbed, over-active mind, is limitless. There is no earthly place that William can find that is not immediately accessible to the rival.

William hurries to the final stage of the story. He admits that through all these encounters, he had been frightened of his doppelganger. He had felt deep awe as well as terror, which had stopped him from fighting back. As time goes on, he drinks more and more and his temper worsens, and as it does, he becomes more firm with his rival. He feels that in becoming more courageous he creates the opposite transformation in the other William. He feels hopeful that his curse won't last forever.

So far the two Williams have shared a balance of love and hate and never crossed the line into dangerous violence – they seem to value each other's presence too much to risk harming the other, but the tables are starting to turn, which forebodes that something might happen to get the balance back.

At Carnival time in Rome, William has been drinking and moves, frustrated, through the crowd. He is even more impatient because he has an object of interest in the crowd, a married woman, who had told him what she would be wearing so he could spot her in the masses. But just at this moment, he hears the dreaded whisper again. Enraged, William turns and grabs his rival by the collar of his identical costume and fires insults at him and drags him into an adjoining room. The double is wearing a veil over his face.

Carnivals and masked balls are used by Poe to disguise his characters and also to confront disguises. Here, the climax of the doppelganger plot is full of layers of costumes, veils and disguises. The truth of the double's identity and the explanation of his power over William should be about to be revealed, but the veil blocks us from seeing the double clearly.

Now, William throws him into the room and shuts the door and draws his sword. The other William reluctantly also draws. After a brief fight, William has his double pinned and vulnerable and stabs him repeatedly in the heart. Someone is trying to enter the room but William prevents them. He goes back to the body of his nemesis, but is shocked to find that the room has changed. Now, a mirror stands in the room and presents to him a reflection of his own figure, but covered in blood. As the figure comes to meet him, he sees that it is also the other William, and when he speaks, it is as if he himself is speaking. In a voice, no longer a whisper, he tells William that he has murdered himself.

The true shape of William's almost life-long pursuer becomes manifest to him at last. The disorder of William's childhood mind has transformed his vision of the world. The figure of the other William disappears and shows itself to be a shape-shifting mirage created by William's disordered mind. The outside world and the inside world of William's mind have fused. The double now seems not so much a double as an opposite side of William himself, and in killing it he kills himself.

THE MURDERS IN THE RUE-MORGUE

The story begins with a long description of the “analytical mind”. First, the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" describes how the analytical mind delights in untangling a problem as the athlete enjoys physical exertion. The way he uncovers the truth is so perfectly methodical that it often seems like a natural instinct. He goes on to explain that though mathematics is similar to the art of analysis, it is not pure calculation that he’s talking about.

The narrator’s description of the analytical mind is a mysterious departure from the apparent gore that the story’s title advertises and puts the reader on hold, waiting for the owner of this analytical mind to be introduced.

Take chess and draughts. The chess player’s skill lies in the attention he gives the board, and because the movements of the pieces and the possible layout of the game are so numerous and changing, it is often the player that concentrates best that is victorious. Draughts on the other hand is won by the more inventive move, all pieces being equal and the possible moves not evident before the player. He wins by identifying himself with the opposite player and often can tell what moves are about to be made.

The superiority of a kind of emotional, sensitive, observational kind of intelligence is described here. The narrator is claiming that even in two games that are restricted to squares and pieces, the merely attentive player will only succeed to a certain extent. Sensitive observation of human behavior will become important as the story progresses.

This is similar to whist. Whist is known for being a superior game for an analytical brain. Even the best chess player in the land may find that his talents at chess are only helpful when playing chess, but a good whist player will find that the skills that allow him to succeed at whist, allow him to solve many of life’s problems. The superior whist player, the analyst, is able to not only retain information and play by the book but infer hundreds of things from other places, the opponent himself, the exterior conditions, anything. It is this ability to observe beyond the game and be creative that defines the perfect player. He has an intuition for all the physical and emotional changes of the opposite player and therefore is able to tell what is a trick and what is genuine.

After the headline punch of the title The Murders in the Rue Morgue, *the narrator’s very long-winded description of the logic of games and the analytic mind is a strange twist. He skillfully explains the differences between terms of intelligence, showing how creativity triumphs over methodical thinking and concentration. By using games to show these intricate mental differences, Poe distances us from the traditional content of the Gothic murder story.*

Being ingenious is not the same as being an analyst. An analyst can always be ingenious but an ingenue will sometimes not have the faculty for analysis. The two share a similar character, but creativity shows itself differently in each, as mere fancy or true imagination.

In this story, Poe exaggerates this quality of analysis, making it seem like the most sought-after quality of intelligence, higher even than the flair of an ingenue. This is one of the ways that Poe begins to play with our expectations.

The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" tells us that this discussion will be relevant to the story to follow and now introduces us to Auguste Dupin, his friend, with whom he is spending time in Paris, a man of high class and family but who has lost a lot of his fortune in a series of events. Books are now his highest luxury. This is a love he shares with the narrator and their first meeting was at a library where they bonded over a special volume. The narrator is surprised at how well read Dupin is, and judges that his company during his stay in Paris will be very valuable. So the pair live together, and the romantic but "grotesque" **house** that they can afford with their combined fortunes seems to suit their mood.

Dupin is a fascinating specimen of a character and the narrator treats him with great curiosity and respect. Dupin is a mass of contradictions, very intelligent and educated but with strange whims and eccentricities at the same time, so we are not quite sure how to take him and neither is the narrator. The description of the house that they set up as their bachelor pad in the city is typical of Gothic atmosphere.

The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" tells us that if you could observe their daily routines, you'd think the pair suffered from madness. They kept completely to themselves. Dupin especially was obsessed with night time, and soon, the narrator feels the same way, and even in the day, they recreate the darkness and atmosphere of the Parisien night, keeping their shutters closed. In this false night, they write and read, and then when real night came, they jaunt around town.

Dupin's influence is strong, and soon the narrator is following his eccentric patterns and living a night-owl life. This obsession with darkness and undercover living suggests danger and we suspect that the pair might attract some mysterious goings on.

The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" comments that Dupin has a particular analytic ability and enjoys using it while they are out, observing the human specimens around them. He believes he can see right into a man's soul. The narrator doesn't want to be misunderstood, this isn't a mystery story about Dupin's character, he is just using it an example from their recent strolling to illustrate Dupin's astuteness.

Though the narrator claims that this is not a story about Dupin's passions, we are made to be very intrigued by Dupin's unusual gifts and in light of the exhaustive description we have just heard in favor of the creative, sensitive mind, Dupin's sensitivity alerts us to his superiority.

Both parties are deep in thought, when suddenly Dupin interrupts with a comment strangely matching the narrator's, about a "little fellow", who would do well in a sort of freak show. The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" tests him, and Dupin guesses absolutely correctly that the narrator was thinking about the figure of Chantilly. Dupin then explains how he did it. He says first that it was the fruit-seller they ran into earlier in the street that brought him to the name. The narrator doesn't believe it, though he starts to remember the fruit-seller, who had nearly knocked him down behind a basket of apples.

Dupin begins to reveal himself to be more than just a set of eccentric habits. He has the ability to see the narrator's thoughts, even thoughts that appear to be steps removed from the scene at hand. This supernatural sense gives Dupin the upper hand and we see that the story revolves around his analytical sensitivity.

Next, Dupin explains the series of events that lead him to think of Chantilly. The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" says of this trick that it is just as if he himself has retraced his steps and his thoughts. After the fruit-seller, the narrator had tripped on a flagstone and looked down. Dupin knew he was thinking about the stones, and then they reached a newly paved street and the narrator had said to himself “stereonomy” to describe the pattern. Dupin knew then, that the word stereonomy would connote the idea of atomies and theories of Epicurus, and the next logical step would be to think of the most recent space theorist, Dr. Nichol, and look up towards the constellation Orion.

The description of Dupin’s process of detecting the narrator’s thoughts is long and complicated but Dupin doesn’t seem to put any effort into it, it comes naturally to him. This gives him a very special, intellectual power. Poe's stories often put a man of reason into a supernatural situation that overwhelms him. But Dupin seems to have a mind that combines reason and sensitivity in a way that can understand deeper mysteries, because it is itself mysterious.

Now for the final flourish, Dupin knows that the actor Chantilly recently got a review, in which the reviewer discusses his change of name from shoemaker to actor along with a Latin phrase that means “He has ruined the sound with the first letter”. Dupin knows that this refers to the change of Urion to Orion, and also knows that if the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" was to think about Orion, which he did by looking up to it, his mind would have taken him this route, to Chantilly’s stature.

This is one of the only instances in the story that we are given a glimpse into the narrator’s mind. Unlike many other Poe stories, this narrator seems to exist only to relay the story of Dupin. But as we know Dupin’s intelligence to be the kind that perceives and observes character, he illuminates the narrator’s intelligence here, which we can see is also quite developed.

Remember all this was just an example of Dupin’s skill. Now we skip to the evening in question, when they are absorbed by a report in the paper of two “extraordinary” murders of a mother and daughter at a house on the Rue Morgue. After some awful shrieking heard in the property, police and neighbors broke in and as they ascended the stairs to the fourth floor, heard some roughly spoken phrases and found complete disorder in the apartment, lengths of human hair lying bloody on the floor, two bags of money and some jewels on the floor. The mother was nowhere to be seen and the daughter was found lodged in the chimney by extreme force. A little later, the old woman’s body was found outside, with her throat cut so violently that her head was detached.

The way the narrator has introduced us to Dupin sets us up for a story about analysis and riddles. He has lulled us into a slow, methodical rhythm with his explanations of chess and whist. But now the real gore of the story is revealed. This is not just a murder but an unspeakably nightmarish one, with evidence that suggests the kind of evil antagonist to more than rival Dupin’s wit.

In the next day’s paper, the testimonies of various witnesses are described: some agree, such as that the old woman sometimes gave fortunes for a living, and that the pair had quite a bit of money saved, and that they kept very much to themselves and were hardly seen out. But most of the witnesses say slightly different things about the voices that were heard as they were approaching the scene. A policeman describes the shrieks as coming probably from two people, one rough, one much more shrill, and thought the former could have been French. Others believe they hear an Italian voice, others assume a foreign tongue, are unable to translate.

The narrator draws attention to the disparities in the long list of testimonies. Nobody can decide on what happened or even what language was being spoken, leaving the suspects very much elusive. The description of the women is more stable between the testimonies and paints a picture of a quiet pair. Their isolation as well as the lack of other relatives and friends to care about them begs the question of what motivated the murders.

The testimonies paint a picture of the house as being very difficult to get access to. The young woman's chamber was locked from the inside, and the windows locked too. Everybody is confused, including the police. There does not seem to be a single piece of evidence of the murderer. The follow-up article reports another search, but no further evidence found, and one man called Le Bon arrested but without much reason. Dupin seems very interested in the process of the investigation and asks the narrator for his thoughts, but the narrator can add nothing.

By introducing the idea of an inept police force, Poe introduces the "thorough and well-reasoned" intellect, in contrast to Dupin's sensitive analysis. Such mundane thorough reasoning can do nothing in the face of the inexplicable. Dupin, however, who treats the whole thing like game, seems more confident.

Dupin says that the crime cannot be judged on the inept way that the investigation has been carried out by the police. He says that the police operate with diligence and thoroughness, but when these qualities don't suit the situation, then the police miss the point entirely. He compares it with Vidocq, a detective who often looked at things too closely and missed the bigger picture. Dupin says that by viewing a star in one's peripheral vision, thereby letting its radiance affect you, a far truer picture of the star is gained.

Dupin's description of the creative technique of looking at a riddle employs a metaphor of a star, which expands the visual scope of the story and compares the crime to a kind of beautiful object. And note that Dupin is not motivated by a need for justice—to him the crime does seem like a beautiful object, a fun puzzle. He stands at a remove from the crime.

Dupin suggests they enter into an investigation of their own, for amusement if nothing else, but also because Dupin knows the suspect Le Bon and owes him a favor. He gets permission from the Prefect of the police and they go directly to the Rue Morgue. Dupin pays careful attention to the environs of the house. They enter and go up to the chamber. Everything original to the crime scene is still in place. Dupin looks over everything, including the gruesome bodies. They examine the scene until nighttime, and then Dupin visited a newspaper headquarters. Afterwards, Dupin is silent until the next afternoon.

Dupin's involvement in the crime scene is not clear cut or official; he has several different interests. He alludes to a history with Le Bon, even though Le Bon is said to be innocent. He also has enough respect from the police to be allowed to investigate the crime scene and potentially undermine the police's efforts. The figure of Dupin has a double life, one official and one underground, which are both in play here.

Dupin then asks the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" whether he noticed anything peculiar in the newspaper report. He emphasizes the word 'peculiar' in a way that somehow spooks the narrator. Dupin goes on to say that the paper has not presented the extremity, the unusualness of the murders. He believes that the murders seem impossible to solve to the police, because of the lack of motive and their extreme brutality. But these very factors could be used to the advantage of a detective – it is where the situation deviates from the ordinary, that gives reason a way to solve it, he claims. He advises looking at the unique aspects of the crime, rather than what appears before them.

Throughout all the horrible descriptions of the crime scene, Dupin keeps his cool and analyzes the situation carefully but creatively, which leads us to trust him and gives the narrator a sense of calm and safety.

Dupin tells the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" that he expects to be met by someone who is in part responsible for the crime. He says the man is probably largely innocent but he hopes the man will prove to be the key to the riddle. He gives the narrator a pistol to use should the meeting demand it. Next Dupin goes ahead and explains his reasoning.

Poe uses a theatrical technique in planting a gun in the scene, introducing the potential for explosion and death that builds the suspense. Dupin's manner, which is both focused and unpredictable, also creates a sense of unease that builds the suspense of the scene.

First, the question of the voices heard. Dupin says that the voices couldn't have been the women and the murders could not have been self-suicide because the old woman would never be strong enough to jam her daughter's body up the chimney. Also, the voices heard were foreign, but none of the witnesses could confirm the origin of the shrill voice – only one thing is common in all the testimonies, that the voice was foreign to their own language. Having conveniently gathered statements from diverse nationalities, it seems that this voice must be quite exotic indeed, if it seems foreign to everyone. Dupin admits that an Asian or African accent has not been disproved but that adding up all the comments of the testimonies leads him to believe that the language of the "shrill" suspect is something beyond even the far reaches of the world in terms of its foreignness.

Every piece of evidence collected from the scene and the witnesses now seems to point ominously towards something stranger than an average criminal, which gives the investigation an added element of horror. Even Dupin, with his exceptional skills, is only human and his physical *strength would be no match for a criminal with superhuman abilities. Also, so much of Dupin's method depends on talking things through, thinking, contemplating and finding the logic of the puzzle, but the criminal's unintelligible tongue warns him that communication might be impossible.*

Dupin says that this discovery about the voices leads singularly to the suspicion he is now entertaining, but he won't let on what that suspicion is just yet. He goes on to analyze the exits of the apartment. He knows that neither of them believe in the supernatural, so the material boundaries of the room must have been crossed in a material way. He goes through each means of entry and escape. First, both doors into the apartments were locked, and the chimneys are too narrow for something larger than a cat to pass through, so the only available option left are the windows.

Though the clues seem to point to a superhuman criminal, Dupin insists that it can all be explained solely by looking at the material possibilities of the scene. The narrator's admiration for Dupin is quite clear. He presents his companion as completely in control of even this mysterious situation, to the point that Dupin creates the suspense himself, keeping the identity of his suspect and suspicion hidden.

Dupin says that they must not be deterred by how impossible this option looks. Each of the possible windows is locked and stopped with a nail. It seemed impossible to open them. Seeing these details, the police had abandoned the windows, but Dupin knows that one of them must open, and endeavors to find out some auto-locking device of the windows, since the criminal could not have fastened them from the inside, having escaped. He searches, and finds a spring mechanism that explains everything. The nail in the first window is intact and could not be replaced from the outside, so he knows the criminal must have escaped through the other window, where he indeed finds has a broken spring.

Amid the gore of the crime scene, the focus of the narrative turns to a tiny practical detail, a broken nail. Dupin is beginning to convince us that there might be a reasonable explanation for what happened here. This description of the window and the locking mechanism doesn't sound Gothic or supernatural at all. In fact the ordinariness of the explanation is a little disconcerting.

The next question is how the suspect got down from the window. He sees that there is a way that one could escape onto a lightning rod near the house, if the shutters were open, by climbing out onto the lattice structure – one could also enter this way. But Dupin is eager point out the extreme difficulty of this move. Not only has the suspect got an unintelligible language but also an astonishing physical ability. The narrator feels like he almost understands what Dupin is getting at, but the moment passes.

Between the lines of Dupin's analysis of the scene is a scary picture of an extraordinary criminal. The criminals gibberish language and superhuman strength, not to mention his seemingly remorseless violence, create a palpable sense of impending danger for the narrator and even Dupin.

Dupin is now concerned with the interior of the apartment. Obviously, the women's belongings are strewn and drawers looked to have been emptied of certain things, but Dupin is not so sure. We know that the women were reclusive and wouldn't have need for expensive or many clothes. Also, money that the banker said the old woman had recently withdrawn has been left in the room. The police have looked to this withdrawal because it occurred so close to the time of the murders but it is a complete red herring. There is no motive in this case.

The traditional methods of investigating a murder fall short in this case. Motives, like robbery or revenge, are proven to be irrelevant here – this paints a picture of a criminal who is beyond the law and unmotivated by anything—a cruel-blooded killer.

Now with all this is mind, Dupin draws the attention of the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" to the method of the crime, the extreme force of both the murders. He asks him to imagine the strength of one who can push a body into a chimney. And also, the human hair that was found at the scene, were found with clumps of blood and flesh that also imply that they were taken up with extreme force. He goes on to explain that what had looked on the body of the old woman like an injury from some kind of weapon was in fact sustained from her fall.

Now added to the athletic ability of the murderer, the lack of motive and his unintelligible voice, this superhuman strength completes the impression of a figure that not even Dupin will be able to outwit.

Dupin sums all these details up for the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" and asks him what he thinks now. The narrator can only imagine that the deed was committed by some kind of escaped madman. Dupin admits that his suggestion is not hugely off track, but even madmen have recognizable tones and phrases in their language. To top it off Dupin reveals a tuft of hair found in Madame Esplanaye's clutches and the narrator can tell that it is not human hair. Dupin then shows the narrator a sketch of the hand mark around the old woman's neck and the narrator knows that it is the print of no human-sized hand.

Poe effectively keeps the narrator in the dark just as we are being kept in the dark. As Dupin gradually, step by step, makes his case to the narrator, we are put in his shoes, and feel like we are in the midst of the situation. Dupin uses suspense as if he *is telling a story too, choosing to tell the narrator that the criminal is non-human before explaining what kind of non-human, so that all the possibilities (paranormal or not) go through our minds.*

Dupin shows the narrator of "Rue-Morgue" an excerpt from a Cuvier text about the Ourang-Outang, whose described anatomy and strength match the crime perfectly. He goes on to the question of the voices. The Ourang-Outang certainly fits the description of the shrill, unintelligible voice, but there is one other, thought to have uttered gruff French phrases at the time of the neighbors' intrusion. Dupin decides that there must be a Frenchman involved, who perhaps tried to follow the ape but escaped when he saw the horror. So far, these things seem like profound, educated guesses, but if Dupin is correct, then the Frenchman will be looking for his missing creature. Dupin has put an ad in the paper, saying that the ape will be returned (to the Maltese sailor it belongs to) upon identification.

The revelation of the Ourang-Outan as the long-awaited answer to the riddle is a bit of an anti-climax, having been lead to believe by Dupin's suspenseful storytelling that the criminal was a paranormal figure. Yet seeing all Dupin's puzzle pieces fit together flawlessly makes him look even more impressive and unusual himself. In the absence of a superhuman threat, Dupin becomes the exotic specimen. The wide range of his expertise is shown here. We are reminded that he reads voraciously and has many areas of knowledge to draw upon when making his analysis.

The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" wonders how Dupin knows already that the sailor is from a Maltese vessel. Again, Dupin has made a series of educated guesses, having found a ribbon on the lightning rod outside that he recognizes as being used by Maltese sailors and knotted in a Maltese fashion. He thinks that no harm can come of placing the ad – either the sailor will assume that the writer has made an error about the Maltese vessel or he will see himself described perfectly. And he will be sure to answer the ad, in order to protect his innocence.

Dupin's often reclusive existence in Paris, secretly policing the streets, is paired with a broad, worldly knowledge, but we know very little about Dupin's past and the origins of his insights are mysteries. Though the focus of the investigation is this sailor, the focus of the narrative again turns to Dupin and the enigma that surrounds his unusual qualities.

They hear someone enter, and they ready the pistols. They hear the sailor come hesitantly up the stairs and knock on the door of the chamber. The man has a sailor's appearance, muscular and hardy, and greets them in a French accent. Dupin pleasantly invites him in and compliments him on the species that has brought him here.

The placement of pistols in the scene, and the gradual approach of the sailor, heightens the suspense, but Dupin's cordial tone and the strange release of this pent-up tension when he reaches the room is a disconcerting twist.

The sailor seems worried when Dupin asks how old the animal is. He says he can't be sure. Dupin pretends to have stored the animal nearby and to be sorry to say goodbye to it, but the sailor, eager to get the animal back, says he is prepared to offer a handsome reward. Dupin chooses for his reward to know everything possible about the murders. He has begun pleasantly, but these words come as a threat, and he produces his pistol. The sailor is suitably terrified but Dupin calmly assures him that he trusts he is almost entirely innocent of the murders, but that he surely knows a great deal more than the police and it is his responsibility to tell all he knows – there is more sense in honesty than concealment.

Dupin's abilities to be both poetic and mathematical also correspond to a contrasting set of manners. Dupin can easily switch between kindness and menace in a way that makes us distrust both postures. He has sympathy for the young sailor and knows how badly he wants to be absolved of the crime but in order to get the truth from the sailor he needs to judge the conversation perfectly and use just the right amount of cruelty in his tone.

The sailor tells his story, how he voyaged to Borneo, and with a shipmate, captured an Ourang-Outang, but the shipmate died and left him alone with the ape. With much care, he lodged it with him in Paris, but one night, after the sailor had been out drinking, he returned home to find the beast out of its cage and imitating his shaving routine. He tries to whip the Ourang-Outang, but this only frightens the animal and it escapes. A chase ensues for hours, until, very late, the sailor comes to the Madames' apartment and sees just what Dupin foretold – the ape entered the room using the lightning rod. The sailor followed but got stuck on the rod and could only peer into the room at the catastrophe inside. He witnessed the whole event, each scream of the mother and daughter frightening and enraging the animal more, until it spotted its master and guiltily concealed the bodies, one in the fireplace and one out of the window.

The sailor's version of events and Dupin's analysis of what happened line up perfectly. A vivid image of the secret lodgings of the Ourang-Outan are conjured in the sailor's story and continue the idea of the furtive Paris streets after dark enjoyed by Dupin and the narrator. It is a world away from the police's daytime scrutiny of the crime scene, which yielded nothing and brings a disturbing excitement to the gruesome story.

The narrator of "Rue-Morgue" adds a few closing remarks. The sailor later recaptures the Ourang-Outang and sells it for a good price, and Le Bon is released from prison. The Prefect of the police knows he's been beaten, but he's obviously quite annoyed at Dupin's skill. Dupin knows that the Prefect's wisdom is shallow but that he is a "good creature", and ends with a condescending quote about the Prefect's main skill, "to deny what is, and to explain what is not."

The final passage of the story brings back the narrator as the storyteller. He has been displaced by the persuasive voice of Dupin, but it has been the narrator's eyes through which we have seen the events. The story ends with a summing up of the lessons learned which makes it sound retrospectively like a moral tale, but Dupin's light touch and cutting humor save it from fitting in to a traditional structure.

THE TELL-TALE HEART

The narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" defends his sanity – he says he is nervous, but that he can not be called mad. His senses are in fact quickened, and he is more alert and has heard things from both heaven and hell. He admits that his motives for the act to follow *are* curious, that there was no passion that provoked it. Instead, it was a strange feature of the old man he lives with, that one of his **eyes** was different from the other and had an evil, vulture-like appearance, which convinced him to kill the old man so that he wouldn't have to look at it anymore.

The narrator starts by protesting his sanity but such a forceful declaration immediately raises suspicions that he might be misleading us or under an illusion. His inexplicable hatred of the old man's eye and his fleeting, bizarre mention of heaven and hell create an impression of an eccentric man, who may not be as aware of his own sanity as he claims.

The narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" thinks we must suspect him of madness again, but we will be dissuaded when we see for ourselves the methodical, patient way that he goes about the murder. For seven nights, he creeps to the old man's bedroom door, opens the latch, puts an unlit lantern into the room and carefully puts his head in after. Then he opens the shutter of the lantern so that a single ray falls on the **eye**. Every night, he is annoyed to find the eye closed, because it is its stare that gives him his motivation. The next morning, he always calls to the old man and asks him how he slept.

The narrator seems to think that a person can only be mad if they aren't methodical. But his methodical efforts to kill an old man because he doesn't like the man's eye is crazy! That he needs to actually see the eye to commit the crime makes him seem even crazier. Poe increases and increases the suggestion of madness that he planted at the start of the story.

On the eighth night, the narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" is particularly gleeful about his sneakiness. He marvels at how the old man knows nothing of his plan. He even laughs a little to himself. But then he thinks he hears the man stirring, but he goes on, gradually putting the lantern inside, knowing that the room is pitch black. But he slips and the lantern chimes and the old man calls out.

The narrator's chilling laugh, his inability to act until he sees the eye open and his pleasant tone with the old man each morning, combine to make an impression of the narrator as a madman.

For an hour, the narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" keeps very still and can sense the old man is awake, listening for intruders. The narrator says he knows what this is like. And then the old man lets out a groan, and the narrator recognizes this too, as a sound that comes straight from the soul. The narrator sympathizes but still feels like chuckling. He imagines what the man has been going through since he awoke, trying to explain away the noise and comfort himself but in vain because he feels that Death is in the room.

The strange thing about this rivalry between the narrator and the old man is that it is not really hateful. The narrator seems to have a lot of sympathy for the old man. In fact he knows exactly how scared the old man is, having felt the same mortal terror before. But the narrator's sympathy is perverted by his strange hatred of the old man's eye.

After a while, without any change to the old man's obvious alertness, the narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" opens the shutter a tiny bit and emits a ray upon the man, and sees that the **eye** is open! The narrator's old fury is stirred at the sight. The narrator reminds us about his quick senses, and begins to hear a dull speedy ticking, which he knows to be the sound of old man's frightened heart. The narrator keeps still but the heart beats faster and louder. A terrible anxiety seizes the narrator. The heart's sound increases by the second, until the narrator cannot stand it any longer and rushes into the room with the lantern and pulls the old man onto the floor and kills him by dropping his own bed onto him.

The narrator describes the sight of the eye and sound of the heart as if he is really seeing them, and ascribes the violence of his reactions to his naturally sensitive senses. But Poe engineers the scene so that we suspect that the narrator's disturbed mind is inventing these terrors and acting self-destructively. The sound of the old man's heart could well be the sound of his own heart, getting louder the more anxious the narrator becomes.

As the power of the heart and the eye cease, the narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart"'s calm patience return and he says that if there was any doubt that he is sane, his careful disposing of the body will prove it. He works quickly and quietly through the night, dismembering the body and taking up the planks and hiding everything below the **room**, so that there is no trace whatsoever of the old man.

Each time the narrator has tried to prove his sanity, he has found himself undermining it with confessions of mad behavior. He doesn't seem to realize that being rational and calm in his murder technique is actually more disturbing than his moments of anxiety.

When the narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" is finished, it is four o'clock, and he hears the chime of the clock but also a knock at the door. It is the police, who have been alerted to a worrying sound from the address and want to search the property. The narrator smiles, at ease. He explains that the shriek was his own from a bad dream, and leads them around the house and to the old man's bedroom without nerves, and even places some chairs in the man's room for the police to rest. He places his own chair directly over the remains.

Poe keeps up the suspense with the coincidence of the police's call and the chime of the clock. The reminder of the passing of time is nerve-wracking but even more unsettling is the narrator's apparent calmness. Again, he seems to take his calmness as a sign of his sanity, when in fact it seems to the reader like a signal of his total madness.

The calm manner ofthe narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" puts the policemen at ease, and they sit and talk, and the narrator talks animatedly at first, but becomes pale and nervous as time drags on. He starts hearing things, a ringing in his head, and he chatters more to try to cover it up but as he talks he realizes that the sound is not coming from his head and is in fact inside the room, it is that familiar ticking, that beating, of the old man's heart.

The sounds become more frequent and louder, but they cannot possibly be issuing from the remains under the floorboards – they seem instead to be a figment of the narrator's imagination and we become witness to the true chaos of this man's mental state.

The narrator of "Tell-Tale Heart" talks faster and louder to try to cover it up and now, panicked, paces the floor. But the policemen, still talking casually, don't seem to notice. The sound rises above everything, and still the policemen act as if nothing is wrong. The narrator convinces himself that they are fully aware of the crime and are mocking him. He paces the floor, until he loses control entirely and confesses everything, telling the men to tear up the floor boards and that they will find the beating heart.

This is the perfect example of a character whose mind is acting against itself. The narrator's paranoia leads him to extremely realistic delusions about the suspicions of those around him even though, to the reader, it seems as though they really have no suspicion at all. His psychological instability condemns him before anything else does.

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

The story begins at the moment the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" is sentenced to death at the time of the Catholic Inquisition. The narrator listens to his sentence in a dream-like state, watching the sinister movement of the judges' lips and the swaying black drapes. Then his senses cut out, and he is filled with a shock-like sensation and the figures around him turn into angel-like ghosts. He faints.

Poe uses the real-life nightmare of the Catholic Inquisition to place his narrator in plausible mortal terror. He adds his own brand of supernatural sensations and visions to the historical detail, making the Inquisition doubly Gothic and mystical.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" tries to describe the strange swoon. It is not like sleep or death, it has its own particular sensations which occur in two stages, the first the return of the spirit, then of the body. He believes that if one is able to remember the first stage during the reawakening of the body, then the gulf that the person who fainted has fallen into will be recalled like the details of a dream. He imagines that the inability to recall this dream is what drives many men into madness.

The first person narration places us, as readers, in such close alignment with the narrator that we are able to follow the physical and mental sensations of fainting and awakening as they occur. The really terrifying thing about the "swoon" is how deep and dangerous it feels to the narrator, as if he might disappear into it and not return.

As the "Pit and Pendulum" narrator's body awakens, he tries to remember his own descent into this dream world, and imagines silent figures carrying him into darkness and then a terrible stillness as they pause. Then, sound and motion returns and the narrator comes back to consciousness and remembers the details of the trial. He lays still, terrified to open his eyes, not knowing what state he is in. His worst fear is realized – he can see nothing when he opens his eyes, everything is pitch black.

The figures that appear in the narrator's fainting dream and the judge-like figures of the courtroom together make a ghostly impression of the narrator's enemy—a many-bodied and many-mouthed but sort of faceless entity that can condemn him to death with overwhelming power.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" tries to figure out what has happened. He can't possibly be dead. He knows he is condemned to death but doesn't think they've put him in a cell to await his fate because he knows that the hangings of the auto-da-fees happen swiftly, whenever there is a new victim. He notices the stone floors of the prison and panics suddenly that he has been put in a tomb. He flings his arms and walks around and is relieved to find space and air not befitting a tomb. He remembers the nightmares he has heard about the **Toledo dungeons**. He knows he will die, but the question of when and how torments him.

The fact that the narrator's state is so ambiguous, even to himself, makes clear how disorienting the process of judgment is and how profoundly the authority is controlling his sensations. He doesn't even know if he is dead. This description, of the dark and cold, merges with the rumors of the dungeons that he has heard, and creates a setting that is both nightmare and reality.

Stretching out his hands in the dark, the prisoner finds a wall. He attempts to find out the dimensions of his cell by tearing a scrap from the robe that has somehow replaced his own clothes and putting the scrap on the ground so that by following the wall, he will find the scrap again and know the cell's perimeter. But on his way, he slips and falls into another strange slumber.

Poe gives his narrator qualities of wit and ingenuity, by showing his determination to carefully measure out the dimensions of the cell, but these qualities come to nothing when compared to the power the unknown foe has over him.

When the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" wakes, a pitcher of water and some bread has been placed beside him. He is so hungry and thirsty that he devours the offering without questioning its source. Then, he resumes the tour of the prison wall, and overall, adding together the steps before his faint and after, he makes the perimeter 100 paces. He finds it impossible to guess the exact area of the **cell** however, because the walls are jutting and irregular. He now aims to find his way across the cell. He inches his way across the floor but soon trips on the scrap of fabric and falls.

The idea of the narrator's enemy is stirred again. The fact that the narrator can't see or know what kind of creature is tormenting him makes the situation even creepier (to him and to the reader). In the darkness, all actions are anonymous and the cell's owner can do anything without the narrator's knowledge. The irregularity of the dungeon also exaggerates the idea of the unknown.

As the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" lands and comes to, he realizes that he is in an extremely precarious position – he is inches away from the edge of some kind of chasm. He loosens a small chunk from the edge and lets it drop and, hearing its descent for several second, knows that the death that had been planned for him was a gruesome one. He has heard about this kind of torture from the rumors of the Inquisition **dungeons**. He makes his way back to the wall, now imagining numerous other pits dotted across the prison floor.

This pit is a symbol of the deep unknown realm that the Inquisition has created. The rumors of the Inquisition's torture methods are reigning over its prisoners. It's not even clear whether this room is a cell, or that the pit has an end – it could well be bottomless. In this place, there seem to be no rules.

Eventually the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" sleeps and when he wakes, another pitcher and loaf has been left. He drinks and thinks the water must have been drugged because he falls into a deathlike sleep. When he wakes yet again, the cell is visible from a light coming from somewhere. He can now see the full size of the cell. It is much smaller than he imagined from his pacing. He realizes he must have counted the room twice over, going back the way he'd come after his fainting spell. The cell is also not so irregular as he'd imagined. The alcoves and juttings that he'd felt must have been enlarged by his sensory deprivation. The **walls** are hideously decorated with menacing figures.

The transformation of the light in the cell implies a presence outside and some kind of vent or entrance, or at least some kind of source – but this source remains a mystery. Even though the narrator can now see the size of the cell, this outside source now arrives to torment him. He is in the hands of his captors, who are controlling his experience of the cell, and moreover control his mind by drugging him and generating strange effects of the mind so that as readers we are never sure what version of the truth we are getting.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" now realizes that while asleep he has been put on a wooden board and strapped down. There is some very aromatic meat beside the board, but no water this time and he is unbearably thirsty. It is now that the prisoner looks above him and sees that on the cell's ceiling, the figure of Time has been painted, holding a pendulum. As he looks closer, he sees that the pendulum is moving, in a slow sweep.

Before the narrator was tortured by not being able to see. Now, as he is forced to watch the pendulum descend slowly toward him, swing by swing, the narrator is tortured by being able to see. The narrator's self control has been removed entirely and he is literally in the hands of the enemy.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" is mesmerized by this motion for a minute but then gets distracted by some huge rats that have entered the cell apparently from the well in the center. When he looks back to the ceiling, he is shocked to find that the pendulum has descended. Its weighty metal blade is sharp as a scythe, and he knows that though he has avoided the well-known doom of the pit, he know must face the pendulum.

Between the downward motion of the scythe, the awful presence of the pit and the scuttling rats, the narrator lies helpless. By creating the scene in this way, Poe focuses everything on the narrator's mind, as the only outlet he has left, so we become very intimate with his thoughts as he faces death.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" describes the torture of waiting for the pendulum's slow descent, for days, it seems. One moment, he wishes for it to descend quicker so he can meet his end, the next moment, he struggles to free himself from his restraints. Suddenly, he feels a strange sense of calm, and then the narrator faints again. He wakes paranoid about being watched and sick with hunger, even knowing his impending death. As he strains to reach the meat beside his wooden board, a glimmer of hope occurs to him, a fleeting thought of joy. He struggles to capture this thought but finds his mind is useless with fear.

The narrative follows the twists and turns of denial and acceptance of impending death. What seems a very unnatural circumstance, produces a very natural human response and it is witnessing the human condition awaiting death that causes horror and impatience for the reader. Poe's use of the psychological side of horror is very effective in bringing a new level of fear to the Gothic mystery genre.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" watches the pendulum swaying back and forth, directly over his heart. He contemplates how the blade would cut through the fabric of his robe, forcing himself to imagine the thrill of feeling the rip. The pendulum keeps coming, down and down, and with each motion, the prisoner's emotions vary and he laughs and panics alternately in his frenzy. Each time he feels his nerve fight back against death—it is hope that keeps him going. Hope occurs to him again as a half-formed thought.

The pendulum is both a weapon and a time-keeper. It is a symbol of the destruction of time, and the threat of death, which is a recurring theme in Poe's work. As the pendulum swings, the rhythm mimics the incessant beating of the narrator's heart and forces him to imagine an end-point when time will stop, when he will die.

The rats are ravenous and have already eaten up the portion of meat beside the bed of the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum". Along with the movement of the pendulum, the narrator lets his hand wave over the empty plate and the rats nibble at it. An idea occurs to him. He wipes the oily residue from the meat along the bandages that restrain him. The rats are slow at first but soon hundreds of rats are upon him, eating through the bandages. The scythe is now almost touching his skin but he manages to duck out of its way at the last moment.

The rats' devouring of the narrator's meal forces us to imagine what they will do to his body when he is dead. The rats fuelled only by their desire to eat. But again, the narrator shows his ingenuity and uses the rats to his advantage just in time. In each of these narrow escapes, Poe pushes the narrator right to the last possible minute or inch, pushes him to the bring of death.

Responding to his escape, the pendulum machine stops moving and rises back up to the ceiling, and the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" knows that his every move is being watched. He looks suspiciously around the cell. He notices that something has changed and tries to distinguish what. It becomes clear that the strange light is coming from a small gap between the wall and the floor going around the perimeter of the cell. He tries in vain to look through it.

The dungeon transforms according to the narrator's movement and the narrator interacts with it as if it is the enemy. Poe fills these walls and dimensions with a kind of human consciousness giving them a terrifying insight into the narrator's fears.

There has been another change in the room – the fiends and demons on the walls are now much clearer and brighter. The walls are glowing with these figures and the whole room is full of that metallic light. The atmosphere is quite unreal. Suddenly, the plans of his captors becomes frighteningly clear – the walls are closing in on the narrator of "Pit and Pendulum". As they get closer, the sensation and smell of heat emanates from the glowing **walls.** He knows that he will be pushed into the pit, and begins to wish for any death but the infamous pit.

The antagonist in this nightmare remains unclear. The narrator's faceless foe, the Catholic Inquisition, is represented by many threats all at once, the demon faces on the wall, the strange light, a mysterious source of heat, the walls closing in, and behind all of these dangers, the sensation of being watched reminds us that there is a more tangible human presence running the show.

The narrator of "Pit and Pendulum" tries to withstand the pressure of the closing walls but soon he barely has an inch to stand on. When there is nothing more he can physically do, his spirit lets out a final, mournful scream into the pit. As he lets go and is about to fall to his death, the sound of trumpets wakes him. The walls retreat. He is saved! A man enters, General Lassalle, who has come from the French army. They have defeated the Inquisition and the nightmare is over.

It is rare for Poe to bring his narrator to safety at the end, but in this historical tale, the Inquisition is overcome and the mysteries of the pendulum and the pit are swatted aside by the strength of the French. Yet that did not make the narrator's brushes with imminent death any less overwhelming or exhausting. And while the French have abruptly saved the narrator from the inquisition, somehow there is little joy in it, and no celebration. Perhaps it is because, while the French have saved the narrator from this death, they can't, of course, save him from eventual death.

THE BLACK CAT

The narrator of "The Black Cat" begins by saying that we probably won't believe what he is about to tell us. But he assures us that he is not mad, and because he is about to die the next day, he wants to recount to us these "household events" that have caused so much terror. He suspects that to some people, the events will seem commonplace, and their horror will be explained away with logic and science.

Poe uses this foreshadowing message to increase the sense of horror for what is to follow. We already know that the narrator is on the brink of death, so the fact that the events are domestic and logical makes them even more real and horrific. Horror and the mundane household often come together like this in Gothic literature.

The narrator of "The Black Cat" tells us of his boyhood, which was easy. He had a particular love of animals and had a lot of pets and this love only increased into adulthood. He thinks there is something in the loyalty and unselfishness of a dog that you can't get from a man. But the narrator did marry, and was lucky to find a wife who appreciated his love of pets, and filled their house with a host of them, including a black cat.

The set up of the story is nice and friendly. The narrator's childhood sounds loving and the description of his love of animals paints a picture of a kind household, full of life. But because of the introduction, we know to be suspicious of this happy family scene.

This cat was unusually large and intelligent. The narrator of "The Black Cat" remembers how his wife used to talk about the superstition that black cats are all witches in disguise, but he assures us that this is unimportant to the story. He just remembers the detail. Anyway, the cat's name was Pluto and became a favorite of the narrator, following him everywhere. This special bond lasted several years.

The narrator zooms in on the cat, Pluto. Though he assures us that his wife's superstitions are unimportant, the mention of them increases the sense of foreboding we already have for the titular black cat.

Meanwhile, though, the mood of the narrator of "The Black Cat" became progressively worse. He drank a lot and suffered from bouts of very bad temper, in which he even lost patience with the animals, and even with Pluto. One night, drunk, the narrator returned home, and imagined that Pluto was avoiding him. This sent him into a fit of rage, and, he is ashamed to write it, he attacked the cat and gouged out one of his **eyes** with a quill pen.

Note how the act of violence is particularly directed at the symbolic eye, which Poe often uses to show the supernatural spirit or soul. But there is also another symbolic act at play here – the weapon that the narrator uses is a quill pen, a writing tool, suggesting both the power and the violence that Poe feels towards the written word.

In the morning, the narrator of "The Black Cat" felt horrible about the cruel act. The cat's eye socket healed, but he now knew to avoid the narrator and their bond was lost. At first, this loss saddens the narrator but that feeling of regret gives way to anger and perverseness. He explains this word, perverse. It is a natural phenomenon in human beings, to do the thing that one knows is wrong just because it is wrong. It is this phenomenon that the narrator uses to explain his attack on the animal, and in the spirit of perverseness, he also commits a further act, and hangs the cat from a tree. He cried as he did it. He knows that this sin places him beyond the reach of mercy.

The narrator is tormented by his own mind. It is not the cat's behavior that provokes his feeling of perverseness, it is his own disordered mental state. This is an interesting take on the traditional Gothic genre: adding psychological explanations to the mix, such as the description of perversity, creates the opportunity for the reader to sympathize with the narrator, that isn't traditionally a feature of Gothic tales of past eras.

That very night, the narrator of "The Black Cat" and his wife were awoken by the sound of flames. The house was on fire. They escaped but they saw all their possessions go up in smoke. The narrator resigned himself to despair. He says that he does not try to prove a series of causes and effects but that he must relate a chain of facts. He went back to the house the day after the fire and sees that all the **walls** have caved in except for one. It is the part of wall above the head of the bed, and now has a crowd of people around it. Going closer, the narrator realizes that within the wall, there is a shape in relief, of the murdered cat.

Poe plays with the idea of the power of a disturbed mind. The fire is such a violent coincidence that it seems to have been caused by some supernatural power: like the narrator's rage, or perhaps the cat itself. The coincidences continue as the outline of the cat appears in the only piece of the building not destroyed by the flames. It is impossible to separate the disturbed vision of the narrator and the reality, because we know his mind is guiltily obsessed with the image of the cat.

The narrator of "The Black Cat" tries to logically explain how it could have happened. The cat must have been thrown into the window when people saw the flames and gotten stuck to the recently plastered wall and been preserved there by the compression of the other walls and the substance of the plaster. But though the narrator believes he has explained the incident, he still gets terribly paranoid about seeing the vision again. He gets an urge to find a replacement animal.

The battle in the narrator's mind between delusion and reality rages at this point. He tries desperately to explain what he sees with rational thought, but his mind is already infected with superstition and his explanations begin to sound far-fetched and somewhat insane.

One day, in a den of disrepute, the narrator of "The Black Cat" suddenly spots a cat atop a barrel of alcohol he's been staring at. The cat is large and looks almost exactly like Pluto apart from a white patch on its breast. The narrator starts petting it and finds it very responsive to his touch. Soon, the cat is very attached to the narrator and won't let him leave without him. He takes it home, and soon the cat becomes a favorite of the narrator's wife, but, much to his surprise, the narrator finds a loathing growing within himself for the animal's unwavering affection.

The den setting is filled with alcohol and other substances that provoke illusions and hallucinations. By putting the narrator in this setting, Poe introduces another level of mistrust in our intimacy with him. How far can the narrator be trusted, when the arrival of Pluto's double is a product of these mind-altering drugs and dark, shady atmosphere?

The narrator of "The Black Cat" starts to avoid the creature, partly out of this hatred but also from shame at the way he had treated his last cat. He also hates a particular coincidental feature of the cat: that it too only has one **eye**, though this only endears the cat to his wife. As the narrator's loathing for the cat increases, so does the cat's affection and it springs up on the narrator unawares, looking to be petted, attaching itself with its claws. The narrator, at these moments, wishes he could destroy the animal, but stops himself because of the traumatic memory of Pluto but mostly because of his dread of the new cat.

Poe brings out his doppelganger technique again. The features of this new cat coincidentally make him an exact replica of the murdered Pluto. Now this animal presents the narrator with a bigger challenge – an supernatural (or possibly imaginary) rival is much more difficult to get rid of than a real one. The narrator now battles with his own delusions as well as his violent moods.

The narrator of "The Black Cat" tries to explain that this dread is not because of the apparent evil of the beast, but of the strange transformation of the patch of white on the cat's breast into the shape of a gallows – it is merely a cat, yet it is his most haunting image, and has caused him somehow to be writing from "this felon's cell." The image of the gallows terrifies the narrator. He mourns that such a beast can get the better of a man like him, "made in the image of a High God." Now he can get no rest, because the cat is all over him in the day time and the nights are filled with bad dreams.

The narrator's turn of phrase in this passage is illuminating. By comparing himself to a high God, and therefore superior to other animals, he confesses his delusions of grandeur. He believes that the world is against him and a lot of the visions that we see appear before him, the doppelganger animal, the gallows, the cat in the wall, can all be attributed to this inflated sense of importance.

In this state of permanent torture, all the goodness that the narrator of "The Black Cat" had in his heart has disappeared. His evil instincts take over, and even his wife is feeling his fury. One day, they go to visit their old house on an errand, and when the narrator sees the new cat has followed him he swings an axe at it, but his wife stops his arm. In a rage, he strikes his wife in the head with the axe and kills her. His mind turns immediately to how to dispose of the body. He considers cutting it up, digging a grave in the cellar, but decides that the best way is to hide the body in the wall of the cellar.

From the first attack on Pluto, the narrator's evil deeds multiply horrifically, each one breeding the next. All trace of remorse is gone. Now the narrator cold-bloodedly focuses on concealing the body of his wife, without any sign of grief or of ever having cared for her. Poe uses the domestic environment to amplify the horror – just as the narrator warned at the beginning of the story, the household is now home to murder. In fact, the very walls of the family home are used to hide the bodies.

The plan works. The narrator of the "Black Cat" removes the bricks covering the fireplace, and puts the body in and covers it again. He works hard to replace the wall and recreate the scene just as it was and in the end is satisfied that nothing is amiss. Then the narrator determines to find the cat so that he can at last rid himself of its presence, but he finds it absent for the first time. The sense of relief is extreme. The cat doesn't appear for the whole night and for the first time since its arrival, even with the murder of his wife on his hands, the narrator sleeps soundly. For three more days, this bliss continues.

After the intense activity of the narrator's plan to hide the body in the wall, the silence in the cat's absence is strongly felt. It is the quiet before the storm. We as readers know we have not heard the last of it because the narrator has not been found out (we already know that he is in prison as he writes this). Though the narrator sleeps soundly, Poe keeps up the suspense for the reader.

On the fourth day, some policemen arrive to search the property, but knowing that his stowing place is perfect, the narrator of the "Black Cat" is not embarrassed and leads the officers in a full tour of the house. He roams about the cellar, calmly. The police are satisfied, and in his absolute glee, the narrator stops them as they depart to mention how well-built the **house** is and taps his cane against the brick work that hides the body. But his bravado is short lived. A horrible moan comes from the wall and turns into a shriek, half terrified, half triumphant. The narrator is suddenly faint as the police quickly uncover the corpse inside the wall. It has already started rotting, and on top of the gory figure of the narrator's wife, sits the cat.

The narrator's delusional, arrogant personality has grown out of all recognition from the animal-love we were first introduced to. The narrator feels no fear, all remorse is gone, and he seems to delight in his crimes to the point where he desires to show them off and get credit for them. But this is his downfall. The moment he has been frantically awaiting finally comes and he receives his come-uppance. The cat is both a supernatural rival revealing his crime, and a symbol of his tortured conscience, suddenly revealing all that he has done.

THE PURLOINED LETTER

This story, like "The Murders in the Rue-Morgue," concerns Dupin, and the period of time that the narrator of "The Purloined Letter" spent with him in Paris. One evening, the Prefect of the police calls at their apartment. The pair invite him in. The narrator admits the Prefect is as entertaining as he is annoying.

Dupin's superior but eccentric crime-solving intelligence was made clear from The Murders in the Rue Morgue, so when the Prefect calls the apartment, it is clear that another mystery story of a sort is on tap. It's clear that he chief of police somewhat relies on this rogue detective.

They light a candle but when the Prefect announces that he comes on official business and needs help with a case, Dupin extinguishes the light. It's another of his fancies that good thinking is better done in the dark. The Prefect explains that, while the case he comes to them about is very simple, it is also very odd, which is why it might interest Dupin.

Dupin's analytical intelligence, as indicated when he turns off the light, is associated with darkness. He is not someone who follows straight, simple reason. He is a poet and a mathematician. His reason is one of indirection, of thinking through sensibility and intuition, of darkness.


In fact the case is so simple that its resistance to solution has the police very confused. Dupin suggests that its very simplicity might be what's causing their trouble. The Prefect finds this idea hilarious. When he stops laughing he agrees to tell them the situation, if they swear secrecy. He goes on to explain that an important document has been "purloined" from the royal apartments.

Dupin is obviously operating on a much higher intellectual wavelength than the policeman, and using the Prefect's ignorance about the criminal mind to make fun of him. It looks like Dupin has already figured out where the Prefect is going wrong in this case.

The Prefect then cryptically suggests that he knows that the person that stole the letter still has it, because of a certain lack of fallout that would definitely occur had the letter passed out of the robber's hands. The letter, he says, has the power to bring scandal to a certain person of high honor and give the person with the letter great power. The Prefect reveals that the thief is a Minister, who snuck into the royal bedroom and accosted the royal lady and seeing the contents of the letter, blackmailed her. He then stole the letter, in her full view, and replaced it with his own replica document. Dupin notes that because the royal lady is aware of the theft it gives the thief power over her. The Prefect confirms that the thief has been using this power. Helpless, the lady has come to the Prefect desperate for help.

Poe paints a world of corrupt royal hierarchies and abuses of power. The Prefect, who is considered thorough but simple and uncreative, is in charge of the safety of the most high profile figures in the country. The Minister, who should be protecting the royal family, is seeking to use them for his own ends. And the man who can solve the case is Dupin, an eccentric poet.

The Prefect explains what has been done so far in the investigation, and Dupin comments on the police's habitual thorough investigations. The prefect says it was necessary to search the Minister's apartment, and this could be quite conveniently done because of the Minister's frequent absence at night, and because the prefect is in possession of a master set of keys for the city's properties. He has therefore been engaged in this search for three months, refusing to quit – a handsome reward awaits the finder of the letter.

The police attack the case head on. They search the apartment, over and over, more and more carefully, refusing to quit. The police are living up to Dupin's criticism and the narrator's introductory description of the methodical but uncreative mind.

the narrator of "The Purloined Letter" asserts that it might be possible for the letter to be hidden somewhere other than the Minister's apartment but the prefect is sure that it is not, because the letter holder's power depends on being able to destroy it at a moment's notice. The narrator assumes that the minister is not carrying it with him, and the prefect admits that the police have already stopped and searched him.

The prefect seems to be in possession of every advantage in this case. Not only is the Minister conveniently absent for long portions of the day but the police are also given ample opportunity to search the man himself. And yet they can find nothing.

Dupin thinks they should have known that the Minister would be too clever not to expect to be stopped and searched. The prefect says that though the minister is not a fool, he is a poet, which is a very similar thing. Dupin admits that he too is a bit of a poet.

The Prefect's idea of poetry being equal to foolishness is a significant misconception that bothers Dupin – whose revered intelligence is said to be both poetic and mathematical, just like the Minister (establishing the minister as a kind of double to Dupin).

The prefect describes his method of investigation, how he looked over every inch of the apartment. He knows very well how to uncover **"secret" spaces**, like parts of drawers blocked off, and chair legs that have been hollowed and stuffed with wadding so that the wood seems to have the same density. They studied every rung in the hotel with a microscope to detect any hint of dust, and then the bedclothes and every item of furnishings, and then scrutinized the walls and surfaces of the house in the same way. They did this not just to the minister's building but to the two adjoining buildings too, and the paved grounds.

The police have searched literally every square inch of the Minister's apartment. The long description of each process in the search goes into microscopic detail. The direct and systematic way that the police are able to carry out their search removes the story for a moment from the idea of crime – danger seems far away.

The narrator of "The Purloined Letter" is astonished, but the prefect again reminds him of the large reward. The narrator asks if he checked every single document in the minister's library, and the prefect assures him that they did, and not only that, they checked between every single page of every volume. When the prefect is done with his exhaustive list of investigated areas, the narrator thinks that it must follow that the letter is not after all within the apartment. The prefect agrees. He now asks Dupin for advice but all Dupin can say is to search the apartment again. He asks if the prefect has a description of the letter itself, and the prefect eagerly gives one in minute detail from a notebook. He then leaves, feeling at a loss about the whole case.

At this point the prefect needs Dupin to give him advice but Dupin only tells the prefect to keep doing what the police have already unsuccessfully tried. Knowing how superior Dupin's analytical mind is, his dismissal of the prefect with so simple a suggestion shows the humorous side of Poe's detective story.

The prefect returns the following month and, when asked about the purloined letter, is disappointed to admit no further developments. He made another thorough search but found nothing. Dupin asks how much the reward is and the prefect says that he will personally pay fifty thousand francs to anyone who can bring him the letter. Dupin suggests that there are still further avenues of investigation to go down, and mentions a man called Abernathy, a physician, who, when asked by a miser what to take for a hypothetical condition, told him to "take advice".

Dupin is completely in charge of this situation. Even though he gave the prefect lousy advice the last time, the prefect returns, showing how dependent he is on Dupin. Dupin's response is cryptic and condescending.

The prefect disregards Dupin's story but says that he is serious about the reward. Dupin then calmly asks the prefect to write him a check, and when he has it, he will hand over the letter. The narrator of "The Purloined Letter" and the prefect are in shock at this turn of events. The prefect writes the check for fifty thousand francs, and Dupin, true to his word, produces the letter. The prefect is overjoyed and rushes off immediately.

Though Dupin's manner seems silly and mysterious, the prefect trusts him, and writes him the requested check without questioning his methods. Dupin shows his creative intelligence by understanding and predicting the prefect's behavior as well as the Minister's.

Dupin then explains himself to the narrator of "The Purloined Letter". He says that he had faith that the police would do a completely thorough search of the apartment, as far as their methods allowed. But this method is not suited to the criminal in question – the prefect has been both too shallow and too deep in his search. Dupin gives an example to illustrate his point. He reminds the narrator of a schoolboy game, where one boy conceals marbles in his hand, and the other must guess whether it is an even or odd number of marbles. One boy that Dupin once knew was a master of this game because he knew how to predict the other boys' behavior according to their intellect. The boy claimed that he mimicked the other boy's expression and in doing so, found a natural kind of sympathy for the boy's thoughts and intentions. Dupin compares the schoolboy to famous thinkers like Machiavelli.

One of the most unlikely and intimidating factors of Dupin's intelligence is his understanding of many different kinds of people, to the extent that he seems to inhabit their minds. But his sympathies also allow him to see genius in unlikely places, this child on the school playground for example. This sensitivity to displays of intelligence in many walks of life is significant in making Dupin seem more human.

So, the accuracy of the guess depends on the accuracy with which the opponent is judged. Dupin says that the police only think about what *they* would have done in the situation, where *they* would have hidden the letter, and this is only accurate of a kind of average, Prefect-like intelligence and not of the more unusual kind of the Minister. Their problem is they never adjust their approach, they only exaggerate it, as they did by searching the house over again. By assuming that the letter can be found by something as basic as searching, they are completely disregarding the acumen of the criminal.

There is something about the mind of a criminal and minds themselves that fascinates Dupin. This passion and his unusual sensitivity and sympathy for other minds makes him an intimidating character, because he fills neither the role of detective nor the role of criminal, but somewhere in between or both at once.

The Prefect's short sightedness is also down to his perception of the Minister as a fool, because he is a poet. All fools are poets, says Dupin, but it does not necessarily follow that all poets are fools. The narrator remembers that the minister is a renowned mathematician and wonders if Dupin has misattributed the title of poet, but Dupin claims he knows the man well, and he is both mathematician and poet. If he were only a mathematician, he wouldn't have been able to reason so well, says Dupin. The narrator of "The Purloined Letter" thinks this is a strange theory. It is completely contrary to popular opinion about mathematics. But Dupin responds with a French phrase about how inconsequential an idea's popularity is.

This is an interesting part of Dupin's character. His identification as a poet and a mathematician as well as his obvious ability to tell a good story and create suspense likens him convincingly to Poe himself. The concept of poetry and methodology is what makes up a successful horror story, whose plot must be flawless but creative enough to deceive.

Dupin explains that he finds fault with forms of thinking that are not abstractly logical. He thinks math is only concerned with shapes and quantities, which are truths of the relation of one thing to another, rather than the true quality of things. In a book called 'Mythology', the author discusses the phenomenon where myths are remembered and referred to as if they are real. And the mathematician does this with the theories and equations he holds true, and will listen to no other mode of thought.

Dupin summons the arenas of poetry and mathematics, the scope of mythology and the detail of geometry, so that the range of his knowledge seems limitless. And unlike many other figures of influence in Poe's Gothic stories, Dupin's knowledge has been gained by worldly means, reading widely and learning, which makes an interesting contrast to the paranormal side of traditional Gothic literature.

Dupin returns to the Minister. He knows that, because the minister has fooled the Prefect, he has the abilities of a poet as well as a mathematician, and understood everything that the police were likely to do in response to his crime. Dupin believes that his absences from the apartment were deliberate, and that he knew the prefect's train of thought and knew to avoid any kind of concealment of the letter.

Dupin's understanding of the Minister's techniques shows that he understands the mind of a criminal, which gives him a certain threatening power which he wields throughout the story, just like in Murders in the Rue Morgue. We are made aware that Dupin could probably quite easily commit some crimes himself.

Dupin reminds the narrator of "The Purloined Letter" what he said to the prefect when he visited, about the riddle being too self-evident. He believes that the material world and the metaphorical world are strongly connected. He uses two examples. The first is the principle of inertia being the equal in physics and metaphysics. The second is a game where one player asks another player to find a name on a map, and the clever player will choose an overarching county name or some other broad term that is stretched across the map or placed high up on a sign. Most people expect that the many-lettered, or obscure names will be most difficult to find, but it is often the simplest answer that can be overlooked, just like the case of the purloined letter.

Dupin displays his skill in this speech. He shows us how he is able to consider deep concepts and human observations at the same time, and consider many dimensions and levels of meaning at once. While thinking of the academic realm of metaphysics, he also conjures a simple image of a map and the visual effect of the important names of counties and so on being spread across the terrain.

The more Dupin considered the intelligence of the Minister, the more he believed that the best way he could invent of concealing the object beyond the scope of the prefect's usual search, but also to keep it handy so he could destroy it at a moment's notice, was to not conceal it at all. With this idea, Dupin says that he went to the Minister's apartment himself, and performed his own search.

Even the most obvious deception fools the police. In fact, the best way to fool them is not to hide anything, to expose the crime completely. This makes the police force seem laughable and Dupin, with his own agenda, takes the lead by himself.

Dupin mentions that if you saw the Minister at home, you'd think him one of the laziest men in the world, despite his reputation for being energetic. Dupin, wearing dark glasses so that he could look freely about the apartment, searched the documents lying about, and then noticed a card rack, with several letters in, one of which was very crumpled and used, with the Minister's seal on it. Dupin knew this was the famous letter, even though it differed so radically from the one the Prefect described. In fact, it looked so much like a deliberate ploy to mislead, that Dupin was sure that the Minister had fashioned it to dupe the police, whose methods he knew to be both shallow and thorough enough to overlook such a clue. Dupin stayed for a long time, pretending to be engrossed in conversation, and saw that the letter's edges were chafed – he could tell that the letter had been turned inside out, and resealed.

It is humorous how opposite Poe has made the two searches, the police search and Dupin's, of this apartment. The police searched for months on end, every chair rung and bed sheet, while Dupin enters the room and within an hour or so spots the letter. This shows how in line Dupin's mind and the Minister D___'s mind are. It furthers the notion that they are rivals or in fact doubles. But though they share the same kind of intelligence, Dupin is coming out on top – he is able to see the Minister's tricks before the Minister realizes that Dupin is investigating.

Dupin purposely left a gold snuff box on the Minister's table so that he could return to retrieve it the next day. During this second visit, their conversation is interrupted by the sound of a pistol shot and frightened voices, which of course draws the Minister to the window. Dupin takes his opportunity to take the letter and replace it with a replica he had prepared. He explains that he had planted the gunman outside to create a distraction for just this purpose.

Dupin uses indirection to trick the Minister, who was himself a master of indirection. Dupin bests his rival.

The narrator of "The Purloined Letter" is unclear why Dupin replaced the letter, rather than just stealing it. Dupin explains that the Minister is a bold man with a lot of support around him, so he may have killed him if he learned the truth. Also, Dupin is eager to get revenge for the royal lady, by transferring the political power to her – this can only be done if the Minister is unaware that he no longer possesses it. Dupin comments that it's a popular view to think that it is easy to fall into moral ruin, but he has no pity for the fallen.

Dupin's motivations come into focus in this part. His goal is not so much justice as it is a quest for revenge and success. It is difficult to sort him into a category of good or bad. His morality seems to follow his analytical mind, he favors sense and rationality but also his emotions.


Dupin is, however, curious to know how the Minister will react to the replacement letter, which he filled with a message. He explains now that the minister once personally wronged him and he had warned him at the time that he would remember it. So, wanting to give the minister a clue as to his identity, he wrote a single phrase on the letter, "Un dessein si funeste, S'il n'est digne d'Atree, est digne de Thyeste," which translates to "So baneful a scheme, if not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes." This is from a story by Crebillon about a pair of brothers, who both wrong each other.

Dupin at first appears like an unbeatable detective, looking out for the justice of the city and enjoying the logic puzzle of the crime scene, but now he appears to have a bias too. His personal history is tied up in this crime. In the note Dupin leaves is a reminder that Dupin is a mathematician and a poet. This final act shows his poetic side – he solves the crime with style and, in his note, places himself in a club of literary of characters.


THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

The Red Death, a bloody disease that kills a man rapidly with a seizure and bleeding from the pores, is terrorizing the country. But Prince Prospero is unaffected. Though his people are dying by the hour, he gathers his friends and his knights and shuts himself away in an ornate **abbey**, which he designed himself. He has it fitted with everything they need to avoid the disease and the Prince is determined not to think about it – he fills the abbey with entertainments.

Death and life come up against each other in this story. The figure of Prince Prospero is healthy, wealthy and lives beyond threat and vulnerability, and the Red Death is challenging him for the throne. But though the plague kills the masses easily, Prince Prospero's prosperity (pun intended) is unaffected.



After a few months, the Red Death is at its height. But the Prince holds a fabulous masked ball, throughout the imperial suite, whose **seven rooms** are unusually laid out (fitting the Prince's unusual taste) in sharp turns, so that you can't see further than one room at a time. Each apartment has windows matching the color of the décor, one decorated in orange, another in violet and so on. The seventh apartment is black with scarlet window panes. In the whole suite, there are no lights of any kind, but in the corridors that lay behind the windows of the suite, fires blaze. Shapes dance around the walls from the patterns of the flames.

If Prince Prospero's lively abbey retreat did not show his willful disregard of the plague that has swept his realm and killed his people, then this extravagant display certainly does. The masked ball is both a kind of celebration but also a place of darkness and disguise, providing a setting perfect for mystery. The numbering and thematic colors of the suite's rooms adds a sense of strangeness, and of being trapped, to the party.

The black seventh room becomes so fearsome with the illuminations from the fire that none of the guests venture into it. Also in this room is a giant clock, which, every hour, strikes with a deep, clear note of very strange pitch. This sound sends the masked company into a kind of reverie.

The fated seventh room is the odd one out and the story implies, though only vaguely, that something otherworldly is occurring as the time passes. The passing of time, marked by the eerie chimes of the clock, symbolizes the threat of death that the guests and the Prince are trying to ignore.

But besides these things, the ball is a magnificent event. It is all designed with the Prince's eccentric taste, combining the disgusting and the beautiful, which is so bold that it is almost grotesque. Some think he is mad.

The disgusting and beautiful images are brought together in the Prince's curation of his Imperial Suite. Like other Poe characters, the prince pulses with life, but with a kind of grotesque self-aggrandizing life.

Through the suite, "dreams" pass through, writhing and following the colors and sounds of the room, freezing with each chime of the clock, and moving again as the chime ends. But to the last chamber with the black drapes, none of these masked dreamers go. Here, the chime of the clock sounds solemn and loud, whereas in the other, brighter rooms it has a merry sound.

The architecture of the scene represents the Prince's character and the final seventh room foretells a dark fate. The strange behavior of the masked dancers show how in tune they are to the rhythm of the apartment's music and the uneasy passing of time.

The colorful apartments are full to bursting, and the party goes on feverishly until the strike of midnight, when the music and dancing uneasily comes to a stop and the dancers fall into their strange reverie. Then there are twelve further chimes. Before the chimes die away, the crowd becomes aware somehow of a new presence in the suite. The rumor of this presence travels through the rooms and the company becomes collectively fearful.

Midnight is a well-used hour in Gothic literature – its position between night and day and the magic associated with it makes these twelve chimes a superstitious significance. The revelers are drunk with this mystic atmosphere and the rhythm of the clock keeps them moving in this elaborate show of denial. But when this dream is broken, the sensation that they have been avoiding attacks them all at once.

What kind of figure must this be to cause alarm even in such a strange party? Even in the most reckless person, there is always something that will touch his sensible side, and for Prince Prospero, this figure does that. The figure is completely masked, from head to foot, as if dressed for the grave. Within the crowd, the rumor grows and they become sure that the figure, stained with scarlet, is the Red Death itself.

The Prince has formed an image of himself as an unbeatable, superior creature, above even death. So the deathly figure that now approaches is immediately associated with death itself. The mask is now a sinister object, reminiscent of grave shrouds and bandages.

The figure moves slowly among the waltzers and starts to shake with rage as he sees Prince Prospero. The Prince, also enraged, orders the man to be uncovered and hung from the battlements. His words ring through the **seven chambers.** The group around him begin to approach the figure, but no one wants to seize him, and so he is able to stalk right up to the Prince, and past him, through each room, to the violet room. Then the Prince, angry at his own cowardice, quickly follows the figure and draws a dagger from behind.

Prince Prospero's authority and personality are threatened for the first time here and a battle of wills ensues. The unknown masked character is bent on the Prince and the Prince on him, and the Prince's exuberant party-throwing skills are nothing to the threat of death. Now the layout of the suite comes into play and captures the Prince in a trap of his own design.

Now at the black apartment, the masked figure suddenly turns and the Prince drops to the floor. The revelers rush into the room and the figure in the shadows is now intangible, save for the mask and grave-like robes. The Red Death captures each dancer, one by one, the clock stops and the lights go out, and the Red Death finally rules over the whole realm.

The masked figure is blood-stained and, after stalking ominously, kills the Prince in seconds – the figure is the personification of the plague. His effortless overthrowing of the Prince, who had seemed too big and wild to be vulnerable like an ordinary citizen, shows the power of death over the living.

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

The narrator of "Amontillado" begins by telling us about his friend, Fortunato, who had 'injured' him many times over the course of their friendship, but had now 'insulted' him. The narrator vowed revenge, but didn't make a verbal threat, just secretly plotted. He describes the delicate balance of how to redress a wrong, making sure the wrong-doer knows what he has done but not becoming obsessed. The narrator assures us that Fortunato had no idea of this plot, because he continued to be friendly to his face.

The pattern in which an unknown injury is sustained and becomes the basis for a revenge plot is common in Poe's stories. Because the narrator does not make clear the nature of the original wrongdoing, we as readers have no way of knowing if the punishment fits the crime, which in turn raises the suspicion that the narrator might be unjust, disingenuous, or insane.

Fortunato was a wine connoisseur. For an Italian man, actual connoisseurship was rare – often it was only put on to show up foreigners, but Fortunato's appreciation for Italian vintages is sincere. This is an interest the narrator of "Amontillado" shares. And suitably, it was in a drunken state that Fortunato appeared to the narrator, dressed in a fancy costume of a striped dress and bells, during the carnival season.

Like many of Poe's pairs of rivals, behind the hatred is a level of respect and kinship. The narrator and Fortunato have a lot in common. Whether the narrator and Fortunato run into each other at the carnival, or this meeting was cleverly engineered to seem like coincidence by the narrator, is never explained.

The narrator of "Amontillado" is very excited to see him and tells him about a predicament he has with some Amontillado wine, for which he has paid the price of a special vintage and is now unsure of its authenticity. He compliments Fortunato on his knowledge and says he was silly to buy the wine without his advice. Fortunato doesn't believe that such a wine can be found during the carnival season. He seems to be in a frenzy anyway, and now repeats the name 'Amontillado!' over and over.

The workings of the narrator's plan become clear as he manipulates his rival with flattery and the Amontillado's legendary name. Fortunato's character remains obscured by the costume and drunkenness of the carnival, so it is difficult to form an understanding of him. Yet while his manner is eccentric and tipsy, he does not seem cruel, raising the question of why (or whether) he deserves the narrator's vengeance.

The narrator of "Amontillado" tells him not to worry, that he is going to visit another expert, Luchesi, and he can tell that Fortunato is busy. Fortunato scoffs at Luchesi's knowledge and responds that he himself is not busy. He insists they go to the narrator's vault right away to see the wine. The narrator now changes his excuse and says that Fortunato obviously is not well and mustn't venture into damp, nitre-covered wine-storage **vaults**. Fortunato won't hear of it, and takes the narrator by the arm, covering him with his strange cloak.

Rivalry is the vehicle of this story. The narrator tricks and manipulates his rival Fortunato by mentioning Fortunato's own rival in wine-tasting, Luchesi. The narrator feigns caring and innocence by insisting that the vaults are dangerous, but he is really appealing to Fortunato's sense of competition. He knows that by daring Fortunato, he can make him do anything. Fortunato's rivalry with Luchesi makes him manipulatable.

They arrive at the narrator's house, which is empty of servants, as the narrator of "Amontillado" had expected. He had told them to stay in the house, but he had said that he would not return till morning, so he knew that they would have broken their word as soon as he left. He fetches two torches from the walls and goes right down, through the levels of the house, to the **vaults** below. As they walk toward the Amontillado, Fortunato begins to cough from the damp clinging to the walls. The narrator says they should go back, as he does not want Fortunato to get sick, but Fortunato denies that his cough is serious and demands that they go on.

The narrator has used reverse psychology on his servants, manipulating them in the same way that he manipulates Fortunato. The scale of the narrator's deception comes into focus. He has arranged the whole thing. Now, the solitude of the Palazzo and the vulnerable position of Fortunato heightens the suspense. Furthermore, Fortunato's persistent cough and the confinement of their underground path to the Amontillado is a constant reminder of death.

The narrator of "Amontillado" suggests they drink some Medoc to protect them from the elements. Fortunato proposes a toast to the buried remains that surround them in the vaults, and the narrator proposes one to Fortunato's long life. They journey further and further into the catacombs. The narrator explains that his ancestors, the Montresors were a large, wealthy family. Fortunato asks what the family crest was, and the narrator describes a fancy arrangement of a gold foot stamping a serpent who has bitten it, and the motto '*Nemo me impune lacessit*', which means "No one can harm me unpunished". Fortunato is pleased with this motto and the wine is making him giddy again. It is affecting the narrator too.

Wine is an important symbol in this story. Not only does it provide the narrator with his motive for bringing Fortunato down to the vault, it also shows us Fortunato's obsession when he repeats the word "Amontillado." It also provides the arena that these two men compete in – wine represents wealth and legacy as well as knowledge and sensitivity. And to top it all off, the wine creates a condition of drunkenness that slows the wits and quickens the emotions – perfect for the narrator's manipulations to be successful.

The narrator of "Amontillado" describes how the nitre is increasing as they go further in. They are now under the river bed, and there are bones and remains all around them, dripping with nitre. He suggests they take another drink. Fortunato empties the bottle and then lifts it in a strange symbolic gesture, which he explains is from a brotherhood, the masons. The narrator insists he too is one of the masons, and produces a trowel from under his cloak as his symbolic gesture. Fortunato is puzzled by this joke but they continue on, deeper and deeper, in search of the Amontillado.

The dank catacombs under the river, with nitre dripping from the walls, is a very Gothic setting. Fortunato remains oblivious to the narrator's plans. The narrator's comment that he too is a mason is a dark joke—the narrator is not a member of the masonic brotherhood, but he does plan to act like an actual mason when he walls Fortunato up alive in a top.

They come to the entrance of a dark **crypt**. Inside the crypt is another enclosure, narrower, and three of its walls lined with human remains and the fourth wall exposed and its bone decorations thrown down before it in a pile. Through this entrance is yet another recess which is completely dark and, the narrator says, leads to the innermost vault where the Amontillado is.

Poe ramps up the Gothic atmosphere even further, with tombs within tombs, accessible only through narrow corridors. The final room is the most extreme dungeon.

The narrator of "Amontillado"mentions Luchesi again, but Fortunato is determined to go ahead. He disappears with his torch into the recess and reaches the end, which is stopped with a rock. Quickly, the narrator grabs him, and chains and locks him to the stone wall. He again draws Fortunato's attention to the nitre and tells him to go back, but Fortunato is obviously stuck now and responds in his frenzied voice with 'Amontillado!'

The narrator expertly uses his rival's own vices to carry out his plan, so that it hardly seems like manipulation at all. It is Fortunato's own jealousy of Luchesi, his competitive spirit, and his eccentric passion for Amontillado that makes him step into the innermost vault. The narrator enacts his revenge still without any explanation for why he is doing it. He simply does it, quickly and cleanly. Fortunato's first thought, meanwhile, seems to be for the wine, further reinforcing his obsession with it.

The narrator of "Amontillado" now goes to the pile of bones and digs about until he finds some building materials hidden there and he starts to build a wall blocking in the recess. As he goes, Fortunato begins to make sorrowful noises and the narrator knows that the man is no longer drunk. He builds row after row of bricks until seven rows are in place. Now in the dim glow he can hardly see his captive. Fortunato begins to scream horribly. Suddenly worried Fortunato will be able to pull himself free, the narrator checks the recess with his sword, but the strength of the stony walls satisfies him. He joins Fortunato in screaming, mockingly echoing his terror, until Fortunato falls silent.

The fact that the building materials are all ready shows just how carefully the narrator has planned this revenge. When the narrator pulls his sword to check the strength of the wall it is a reminder that he has been carrying a lethal weapon this whole time. He could have killed Fortunato in seconds. That he did not, that he chose to bury Fortunato alive, shows how important the game of torture is to this narrator's revenge.

At midnight, the narrator of "Amontillado" has almost finished the wall. There is just one brick to place, but as he begins to slide it into position, Fortunato emits a low laugh then speaks in a sad voice, complimenting the narrator on a very impressive joke, but asks when he will be let out, because people are waiting for him. The narrator repeats Fortunato's phrases without answering his questions, but when Fortunato again falls silent, the narrator calls out his name. The narrator is disappointed when Fortunato does not respond. Now feeling ill from the damp, the narrator drops his torch into the recess and place the final stone to close the wall. He then puts the pile of bones in front of the new wall. It is now half a century later, he tells us, and they have not been touched. He ends his story by saying 'rest in peace' in Latin.

The narrator's carefully plotted game comes to its height, and the narrator seems to relish in not responding to Fortunato's despair in any meaningful way. And yet, when Fortunato goes silent, the narrator is disappointed. In this way, Poe engineers an unexpected twist to the murder–the sadness and emptiness that comes for the narrator when Fortunato disappears behind the bricks. Unlike Poe's other murderers, the narrator here is successful in his crime. But his quiet disappointment in the moment of that success raises the question of what the narrator will live for now that he has had his revenge.

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