

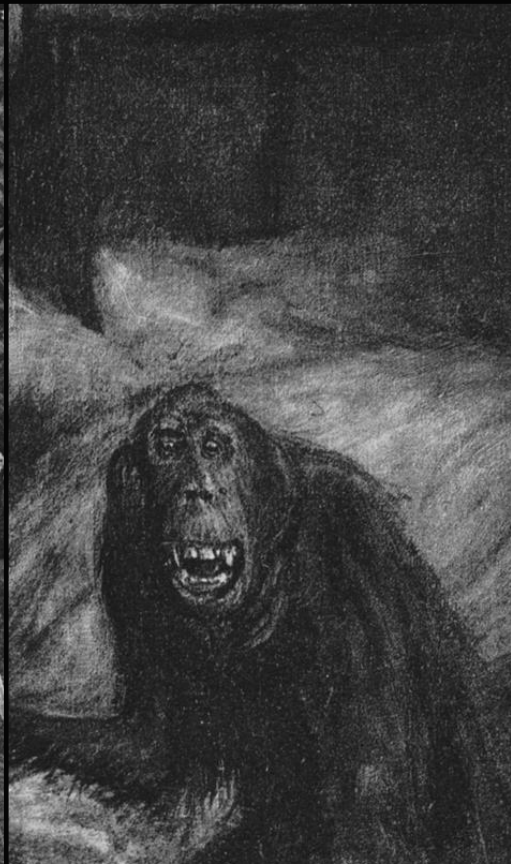


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POSTMODERN BEGINNINGS

EDGAR ALLAN POE





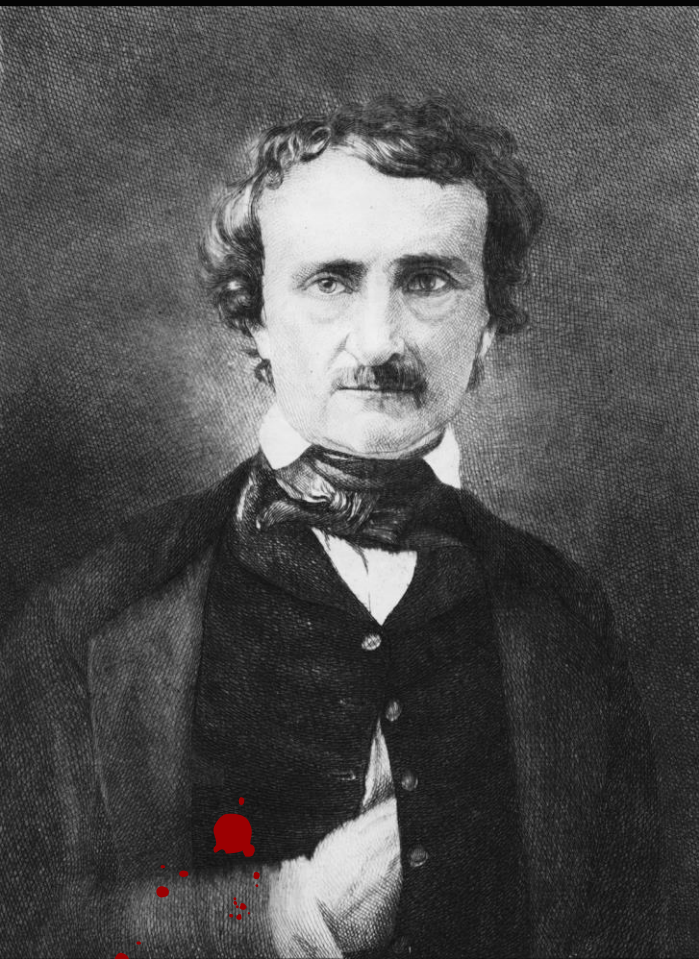
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EDGAR ALLAN POE

“Why does his work from the 1830s and 1840s seem so fresh and compelling to readers in the new millennium? Why does Poe haunt us still?,” asks J. Gerald Kennedy in *Poe in Our Time* (3). The reason is simple: Poe wasn’t merely out to scare. His chief interest lay in that complex mystery called the human mind. In practically everything he wrote, there is an analytical streak, and this makes all the difference. The facts of Poe’s life, however, have been harder to determine: lurid legends about him circulated even before he died, some spread by Poe himself. Two days after Poe’s death his supposed friend Rufus Griswold, a prominent anthologizer of American literature to whom Poe had entrusted his literary papers, began a

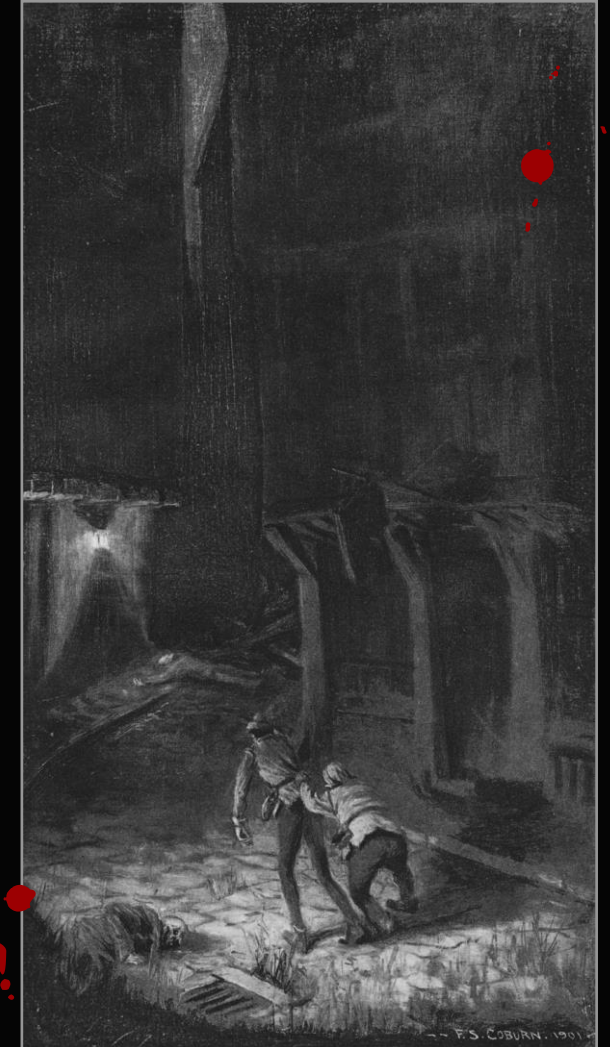
campaign of character assassination, writing a vicious obituary and rewriting Poe’s correspondence so as to alienate the public as well as his friends. Griswold’s false claims and forgeries, unexposed for many years, significantly shaped Poe’s reputation for decades. Biographers do now possess much reliable information about Poe’s life, some of which you will be reading tonight. Kennedy’s Introduction to the life and works of Poe is on pages ix-xxxviii of *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*.

1840

Everything Leads to Poe

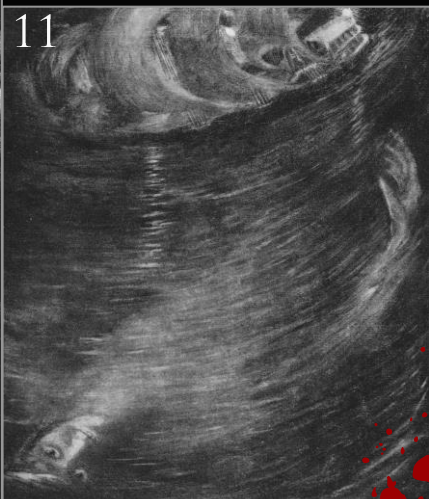
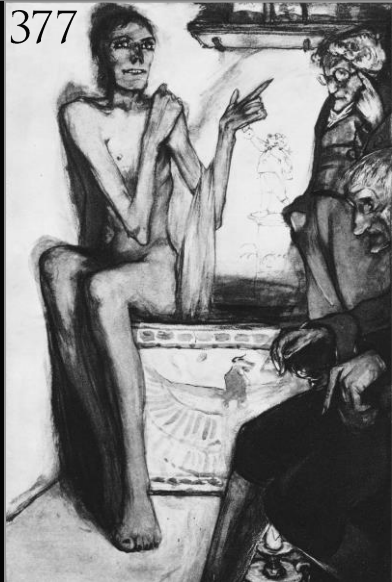
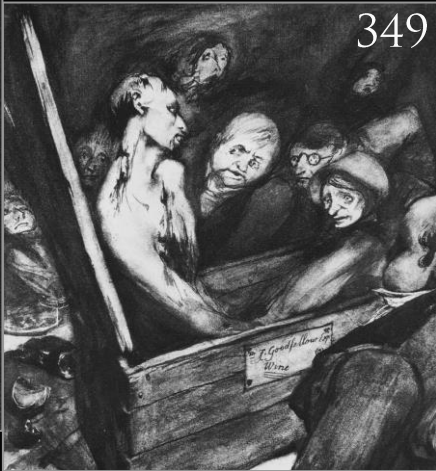
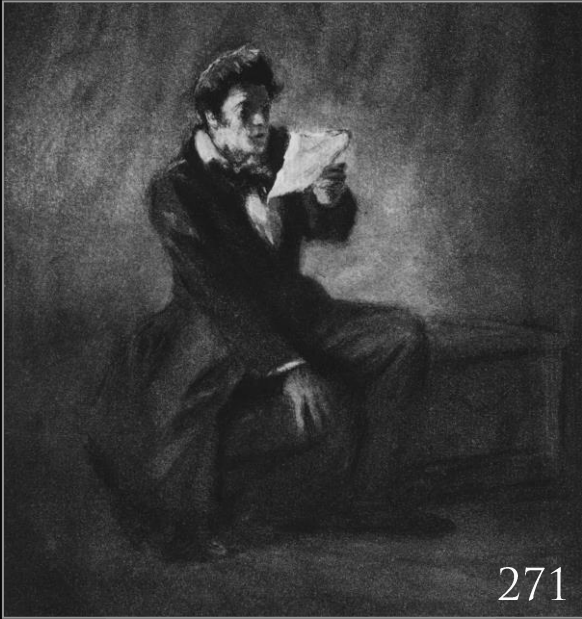
In a checkered career of barely two decades Poe produced more than sixty poems, some seventy-odd tales, one completed novel, a long prose poem of cosmological theory, and scores of essays and reviews. He introduced into poetry, criticism, and prose fiction many innovations that altered literary culture. His first collection of short stories, *TALES OF THE GROTESQUE AND ARABESQUE* (1840), was not a success at the time of its publication, but its long-term influence on American literature is incalculable. Poe (in the words of Sarah Helen Whitman) “came to sound the very depths of the abyss,” articulating in his tales and poems “the unrest and faithlessness of the age.” As compellingly as any writer, Poe intuited the spiritual void opening in an era dominated by a secular, scientific understanding of

life and death. Poe, furthermore, originated such key generic tropes as the armchair detective, the purloined letter, the spurious text, the gumshoe, and the missing person. Indeed, Poe may well have invented not only classical detective fiction and its offshoot, the metaphysical detective story, but also the kind of playfully self-reflexive storytelling that we now call “postmodernist.”



Tales of Mystery & Imagination

EDGAR ALLAN POE



- Required:*
- | | |
|-----|--|
| 126 | The Fall of the House of Usher |
| 168 | William Wilson |
| 187 | The Tell-Tale Heart |
| 192 | The Black Cat |
| 202 | The Imp of the Perverse |
| 208 | The Cask of Amontillado |
| 215 | Hop-Frog |
| 229 | The Man of the Crowd |
| 238 | The Murders in the Rue Morgue |
| 306 | The Oblong Box |
| 327 | The Purloined Letter |
| 359 | The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether |

- Recommended:*
- | | |
|----|-----------------------------|
| 37 | The Masque of the Red Death |
| 43 | The Pit and the Pendulum |
| 57 | The Premature Burial |
| 97 | Berenice |

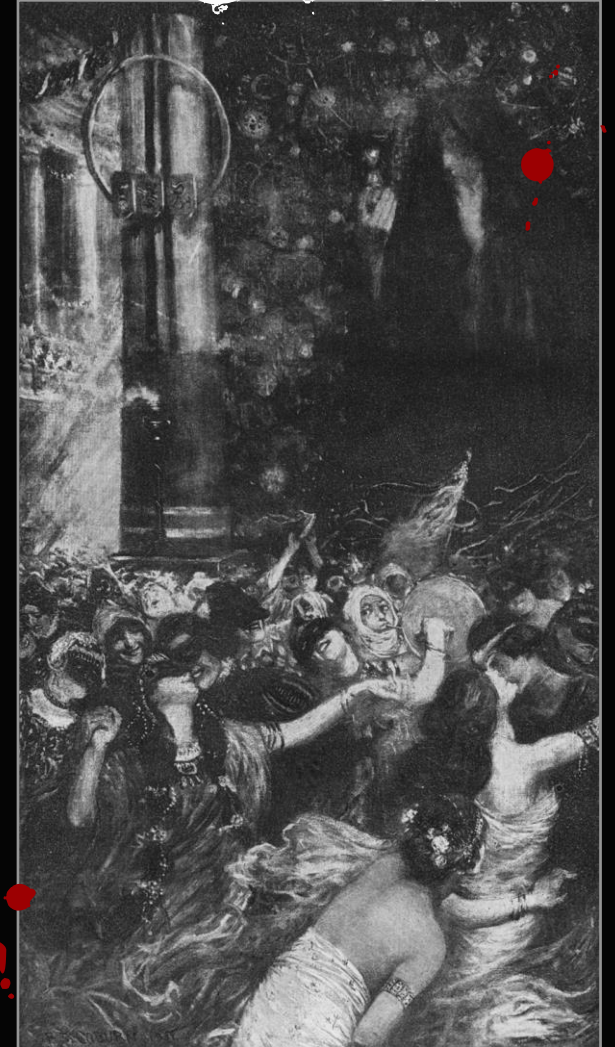
Gothic

Not of Germany but of the Soul

"I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul—that I deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources and urged it only to its legitimate results,"

Poe wrote in the preface to *TALES OF THE GROTESQUE AND ARABESQUE* (1840). The word **Gothic** originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe, then came to signify "germanic," then "medieval." The first gothic stories were set in the middle ages. The locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences. Gothic writers opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of

the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind. More recently, "Gothic" has been extended to works which lack the exotic setting of the earlier romances, but develop a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror, represent events that are uncanny or macabre or ultra-violent, and often deal with aberrant psychological states.



Tim Burton's Vincent

The nightmarish realm of uncanny terror, violence, and cruelty opened by the early Gothic novels continues to be explored by writers of horror fiction such as Stephen King and Anne Rice, and by the writers and directors of horror films. VINCENT is a 1982 stop-motion short horror film written, designed, and directed by Tim Burton. It is narrated by Vincent Price, a lifelong idol and inspiration for Burton. What Gothic elements does Burton use to achieve VINCENT'S pseudo classic horror film look?



“The Haunted Palace” was first published by itself in the Baltimore American Museum, April 1839—five months before it appeared in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” The poem very possibly suggested the tale.

THE HAUNTED PALACE

I.

In the greenest of our valleys
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought’s dominion—
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair!

A
B
A
B
C
D
C
D

II.

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
On its roof did float and flow;
(This—all this—was in the olden

Why do you think Poe began his poem with slant rhymes and would proceed to use them throughout “The Haunted Palace”?

Time long ago)
And every gentle air that dallied,
In that sweet day,
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
A winged odor went away.

III.

Wanderers in that happy valley
Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tuned law,
Round about a throne, where sitting
(Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen.

IV.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
And sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,

A word of Greek origin, meaning "born to the purple," or "of royal blood." Porphyry was a purple dye prepared from mollusks and reserved only for the royal family. The O.E.D. cites Poe for the first use of this form of the word.

In one of his letters, Poe writes, "By the Haunted Palace I mean to imply a mind haunted by phantoms—a disordered brain." Read the poem again, focusing on each stanza as an allegorical representation of the human head and mind. How does the poem now suggest the development of madness in a poet?

In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.

V.

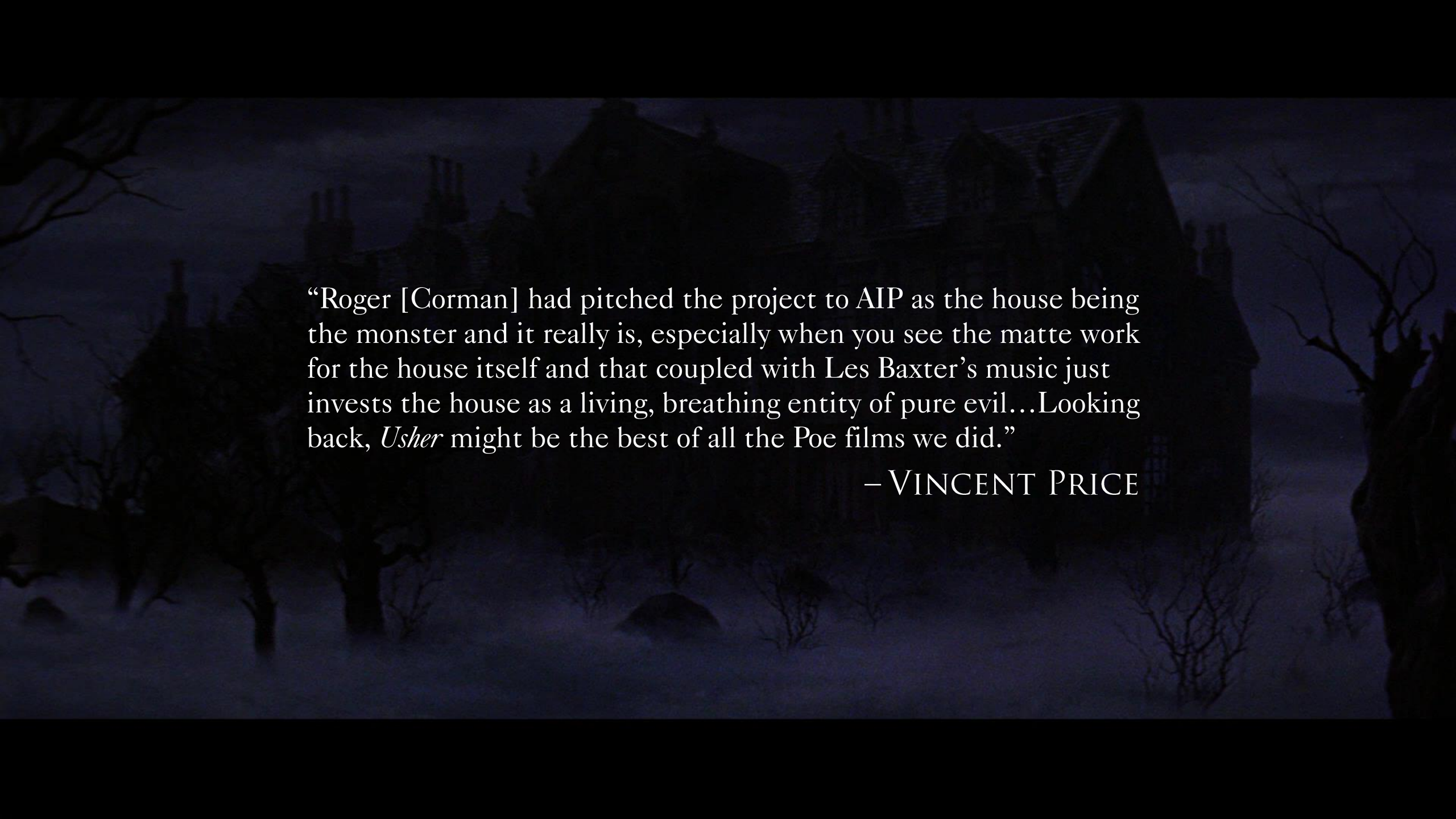
But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And, round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

VI.

And travellers now within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows, see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
Through the pale door,
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh—but smile no more.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER





“Roger [Corman] had pitched the project to AIP as the house being the monster and it really is, especially when you see the matte work for the house itself and that coupled with Les Baxter’s music just invests the house as a living, breathing entity of pure evil...Looking back, *Usher* might be the best of all the Poe films we did.”

– VINCENT PRICE

WILLIAM WILSON







POE'S UNRELIABLE NARRATORS

Point of view signifies the way a story is told—the mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction. Poe's tales are usually told in the first-person, which limits the matter of the narrative to what the narrator knows, experiences, infers, or can find out by talking to other characters. We ordinarily accept what a narrator tells us as

authoritative. Poe's narrators, on the other hand, should rarely be trusted. The **fallible** or **unreliable narrator** is one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share. *The Tell-Tale Heart* is a 1953 American animated short film directed by Ted Parmelee and narrated by James Mason. Seen through the eyes of the nameless narrator, the

surrealistic images in the film help convey his descent into madness. It was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film but lost to *Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom* from Walt Disney Productions. In 1994, animation historian Jerry Beck surveyed 1000 people working in the animation industry and published the results in *The 50 Greatest Cartoons: As Selected by 1,000 Animation Professionals*, in which *The Tell-Tale Heart* ranked number 24.

THE TELL-TALE HEART & THE BLACK CAT



THE DARK EYE

The most common postmodern practice in video games is self-reflexivity, when a work of art raises questions about itself as a created construct. Self-reflexivity most often manifests as the “breaking of the fourth wall,” when on-screen characters seemingly become aware of their existence in an electronic game and engage with the player directly. *The Dark Eye* is a 1995 computer game by the software company Inscape. It features combined 3-D graphics, clay animation, and video segments. Also notable was the use of author William S. Burroughs as a voice actor: Burroughs provided not only the voice for the character of Edwin, but also voiceovers of two slide-show sequences illustrating the short story “The Masque of the Red Death” and the poem “Annabel Lee.” In what ways is *The Dark Eye* a postmodern artifact?





F. S. CUBURIN - 02

Perversity

Blurring the line between madness and sanity in tales like “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” Poe seems to anticipate the instability of the postmodern narratives of the twentieth century. J. Gerald Kennedy, the editor of our text, even goes as far as to say, “When the narrator of ‘The Black Cat’ describes the ‘spirit of perverseness,’ he may be said to describe a defining force in modern culture”(7). Review the narrator’s fervent explanation of perverseness on page 194. Do you agree with Kennedy that perverseness is a defining force in our world?

THE IMP, THE CASK, & HOP-FROG





Playing with Fire

For, only five years away from bringing **THE LION KING** to life, directed an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's "Hop-Frog" titled **FOOL'S FIRE**, starring Michael J. Anderson and a slew of intricate puppets. "FOOL'S FIRE is the world where theatre meets magic," Taymor explains. "It was inspired by those first masters of cinema, the Lumiere Brothers, Murnau, and Melies, who not only through their art but also through the love of a magical medium played with the world of reality by transforming it." First broadcast on PBS in 1992, **FOOL'S FIRE** consumed nearly two years of planning and production. The elaborate sets, the precise wardrobe and masks, and the intricate puppets were all the result of a painstakingly detailed process managed by two hundred individual artists.

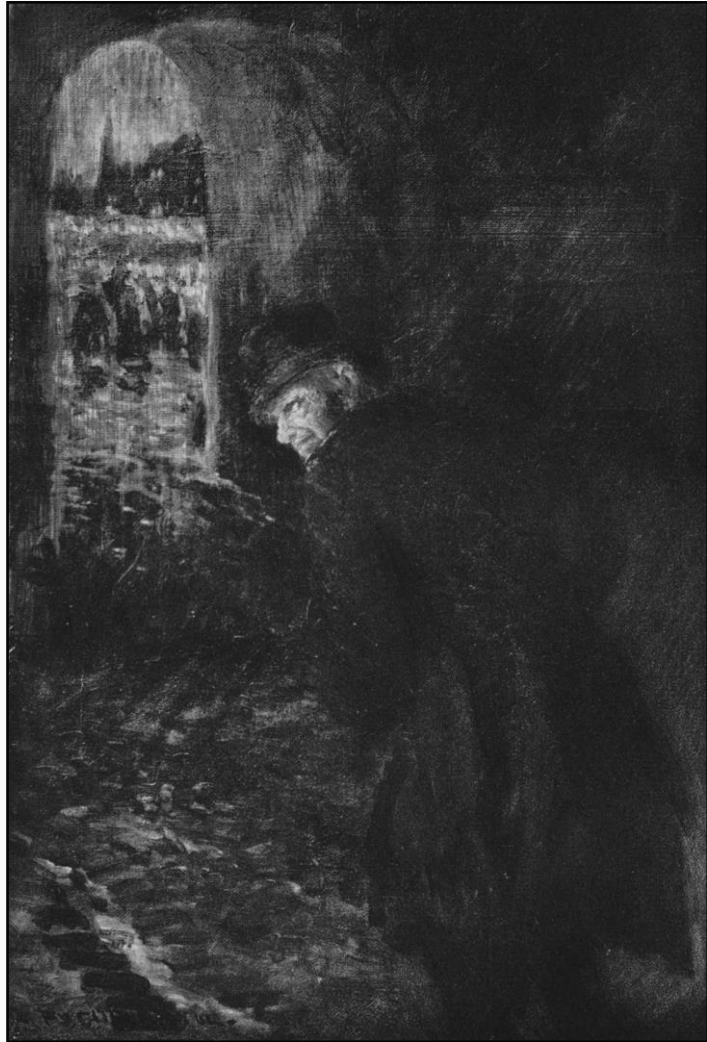




g Box



The Man of the Crowd

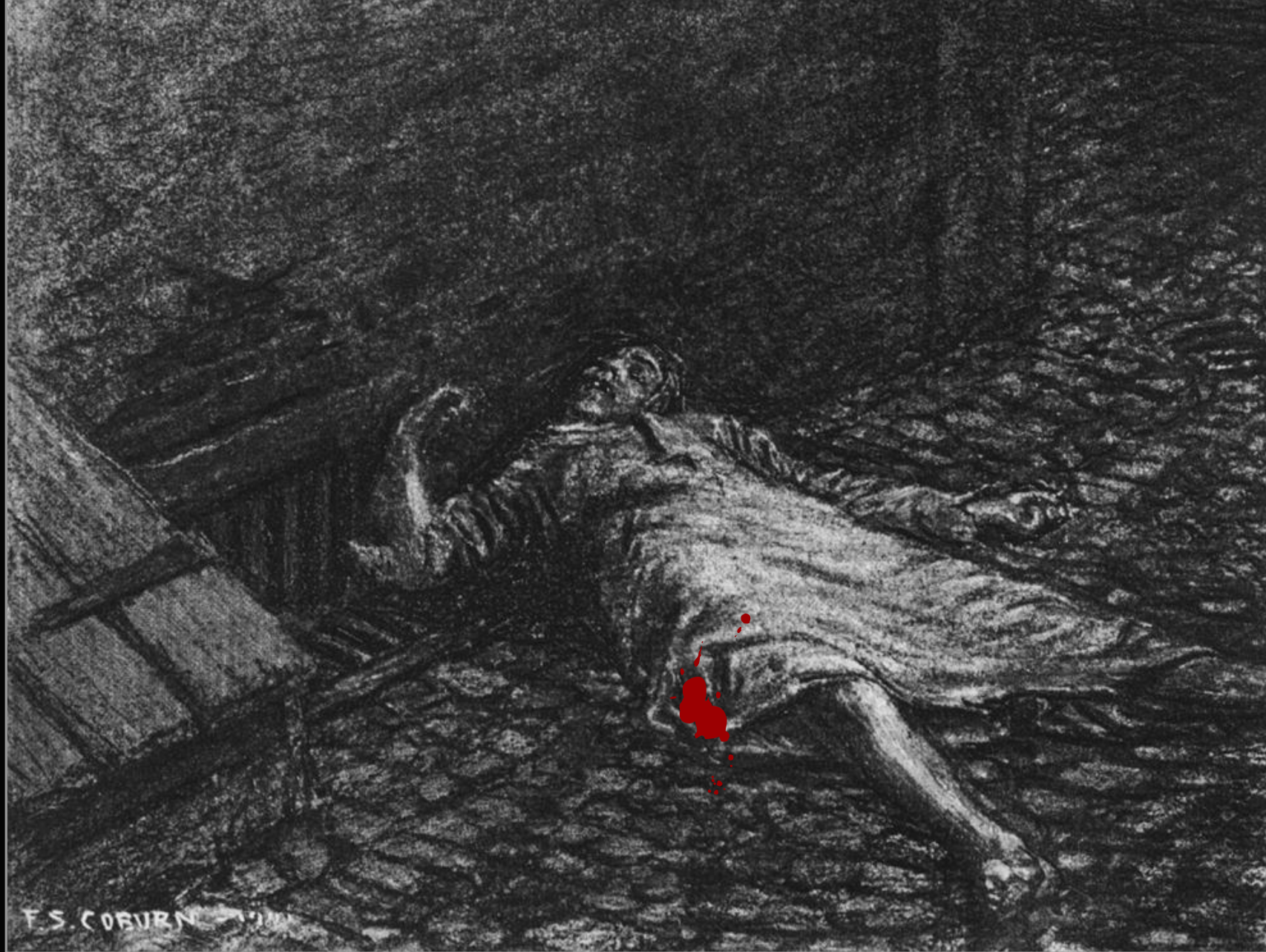


and The Oblong



Watching the DETECTIVES

What gives the analytical detective genre its special appeal is that quality which the Goncourt brothers noted on first reading Poe. In a 1936 journal entry they described Poe's stories as "a new literary world" bearing "signs of the literature of the twentieth century--love giving place to deductions... the interest of the story moved from the heart to the head... from the drama to the solution" (qtd. in Irwin 28). Poe's contribution to the modern detective story stems from three basic innovations. THE FIRST is the analytical detective himself, a man who is an intellectual, a true genius (complete, as all geniuses should be, with eccentricities) whose deductive



powers allow him to seize upon almost invisible clues and thread them together into a solution. POE'S SECOND INNOVATION is the narrator who is as mystified as the reader by the intricacies of the plot and the actions of the detective. Often accompanying the narrator in his bewilderment is an inept police chief. THE THIRD INNOVATION is Poe's establishment of the focus of the detective story. It is not in the mystery itself that the author seeks to interest the reader, but rather in the successive steps whereby his analytical observer is enabled to solve a problem that might well be dismissed as beyond human elucidation.

“The apartment was in the wildest disorder—the furniture broken and thrown about in all directions. There was only one bedstead; and from this the bed had been removed, and thrown into the middle of the floor. On a chair lay a razor, besmeared with blood...”

“Four of the above-named witnesses, being recalled, deposed that the door of the chamber in which was found the body of Mademoiselle L. was locked on the inside when the party reached it...”

“UPON reaching the first landing, the witness heard two voices in loud and angry contention--the one a gruff voice, the other much shriller--a very strange voice...”

“Of Madame L 'Espanaye no traces were here seen; but an unusual quantity of soot being observed in the fire-place, a search was made in the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom; it having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance...”

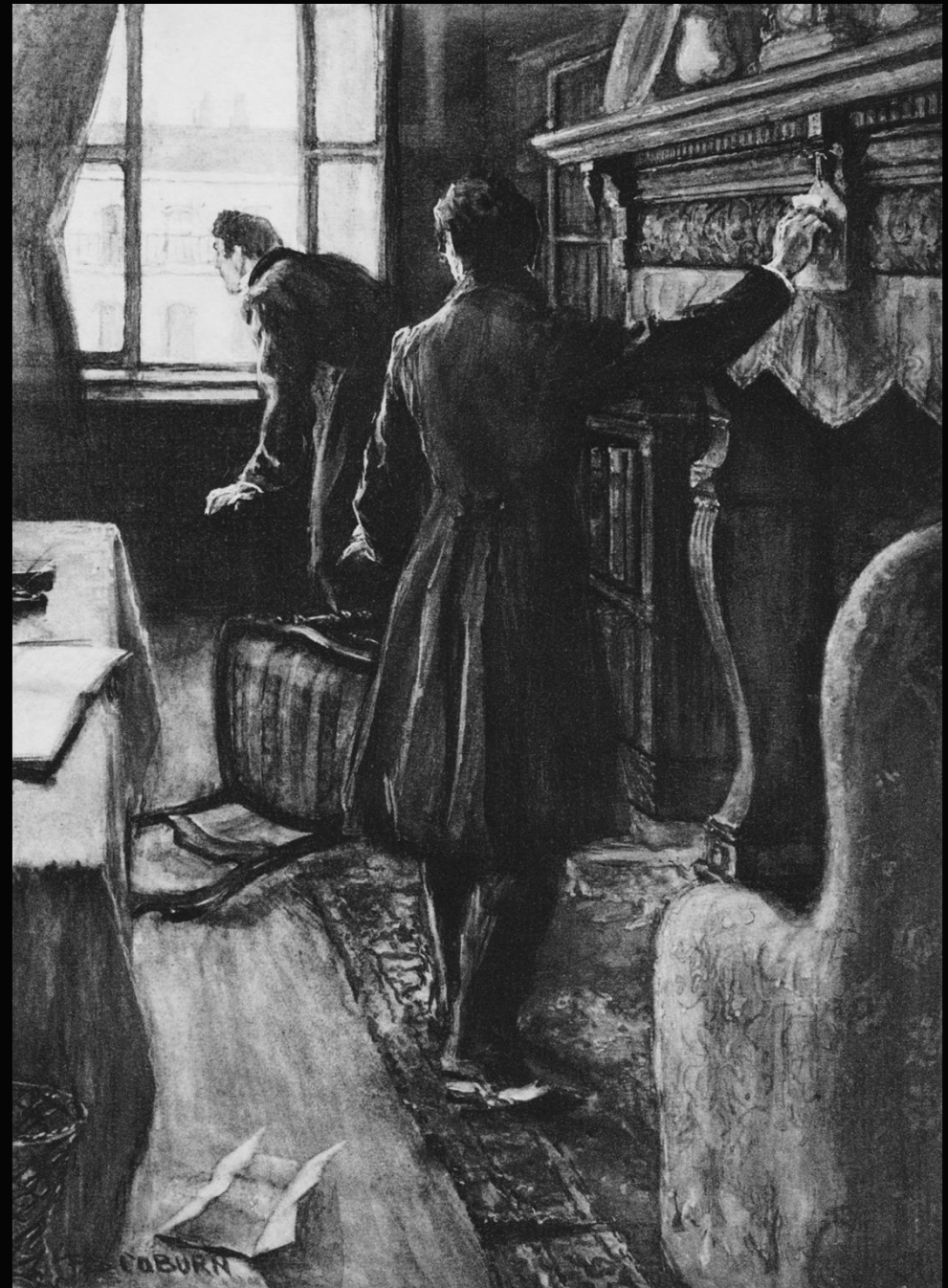
“Henry Duval, a neighbor, and by trade a silver-smith, deposes that he was one of the party who first entered the house. As soon as they forced an entrance, they reclosed the door, to keep out the crowd, which collected very fast, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour...”

“The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated--the former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity...”

THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE



THE PURLOINED LETTER





THE SYSTEM OF DOCTOR TARR & PROFESSOR FETHER

Treehouse of Horror

In this trilogy of horror-themed Halloween stories, Bart and Lisa Simpson attempt to scare each other with tales of the macabre. In the third segment, a satire of Poe's "The Raven," a grief-stricken Homer is tormented by a raven which resembles Bart. The special Halloween episode aired on October 24th, 1990 and features the guest voice of James Earl Jones as the narrator of "The Raven."



“ALONE” PAGE 408

Read by MARIANNE FAITHFUL (1:30)

“THE RAVEN” PAGE 422

Read by CHRISTOPHER WALKEN (8:30)

“ULALUME” PAGE 426

Read by JEFF BUCKLEY (6:13)

Poe's Death Rewritten as Rabies

By The Associated Press

Edgar Allan Poe did not die drunk in a gutter in Baltimore but rather had rabies, a new study suggests.

The researcher, Dr. R. Michael Benitez, a



cardiologist who practices a block from Poe's grave, says it is true that the writer was seen in a bar on Lombard Street in October 1849, delirious and possibly wearing somebody else's soiled clothes.

But Poe was not drunk, said Dr. Benitez, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Maryland Medical Center. "I think Poe is much maligned in that respect," he added.

The writer entered Washington College Hospital comatose, Dr. Benitez said, but by the next day was perspiring heavily, hallucinating and shouting at imaginary companions. The next day, he seemed better but could not remember falling ill.

On his fourth day at the hospital, Poe again grew confused and belligerent and died.

That is a classic case of rabies, the doctor said. His study is in the September issue of The Maryland Medical Journal.

In the brief period... continued on A4»





PowerPoint Presentation Written and Designed by

MATT QUERINO

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