

POSTMODERN BEGINNINGS

EDGAR ALLAN POE

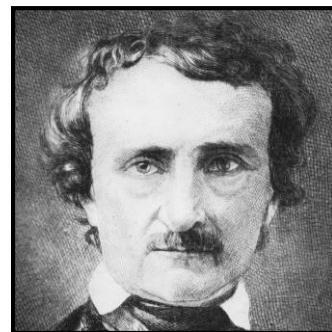


ILLUSTRATIONS (1902) BY
FREDERICK SIMPSON COBURN

POSTMODERN LITERATURE
ALGONQUIN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

THE POE AUDIO COLLECTION

- 1-1 The Pit and the Pendulum – 40:45
- 1-2 The Black Cat – 27:01
- 2-1 William Wilson – 51:00
- 2-2 The Masque of the Red Death – 15:47
- 3-1 The Fall of the House of Usher – 46:25
- 3-2 The Imp of the Perverse – 16:01
- 4-1 The Cask of Amontillado – 20:35
- 4-2 The Premature Burial – 44:82
- 5-1 The Tell-Tale Heart – 19:28
- 5-2 The Man of the Crowd – 29:97
- 6-1 Hop-Frog – 27:15
- 6-2 Metzengerstein – 30:21
- 7-1 Berenice – 27:20
- 7-2 The Oblong Box – 28:16



THE DUPIN STORIES

- 1-1 The Murders in the Rue Morgue – 62:43
- 2-1 The Murders in the Rue Morgue – 27:05
- 2-2 The Mystery of Marie Rogêt – 30:01
- 3-1 The Mystery of Marie Rogêt – 61:41
- 4-1 The Mystery of Marie Rogêt – 25:30
- 4-2 The Purloined Letter – 43:85



Name _____

Date _____

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

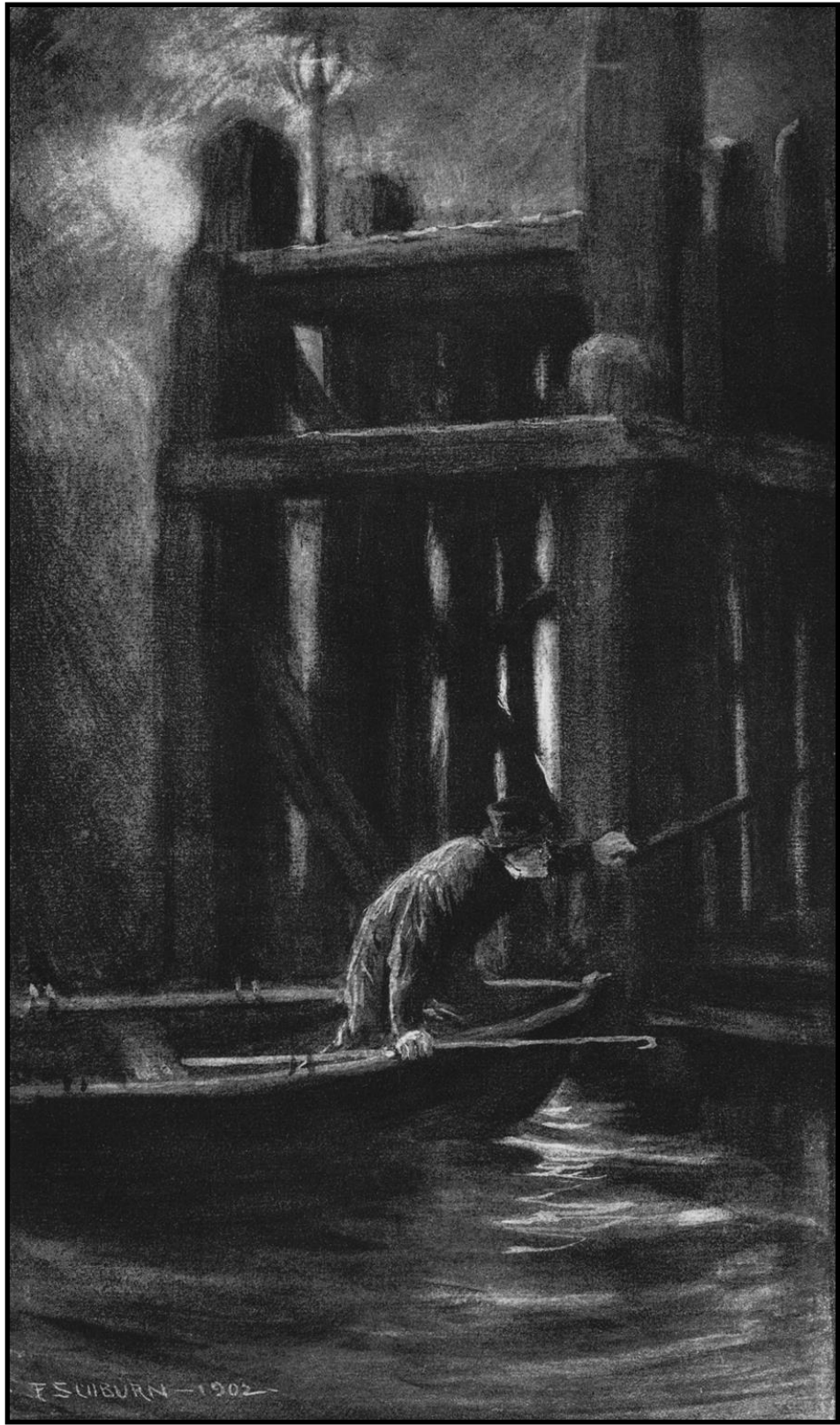
Why, more than 150 years after his death, does Edgar Allan Poe continue to haunt our imaginations? Why do his writings seem so modern?

In a 1985 article Jorge Luis Borges rhetorically asks, “How many things begin with Poe?” How many innovations in literature do begin with Poe?

What is Gothic literature?

First published in 1841, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is a literary landmark: the first modern detective story. What are the basic conventions of detective stories?

Do the many contemporary adaptations of Poe’s work change the meanings of his original writings, or has the heart of Poe’s work endured despite only cosmetic changes?



Name _____

Date _____

Read Edgar Allan Poe's obituary, which was first published in *The New York Daily Tribune* on October 9, 1849, and then answer the questions which follow.

Death of Edgar Allan Poe.

"Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore!'"

EDGAR ALLAN POE is dead. He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was well known personally or by reputation, in all this country. He had readers in England and in several states of Continental Europe. But he had few or no friends. The regrets for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art lost one of its most brilliant, but erratic stars.

The character of Mr. Poe we cannot attempt to describe in this very hastily written article. We can but allude to some of the more striking phases.

His conversation was at times almost supra-mortal in its eloquence. His voice was modulated with astonishing skill, and his large and variably expressive eyes looked repose or shot fiery tumult into theirs who listened, while his own face glowed or was changeless in pallor, as his imagination quickened his blood, or drew it back frozen to his heart. His imagery was from the worlds, which no mortal can see, but with the vision of genius.

He was at times a dreamer, dwelling in ideal realms, in heaven or hell, peopled with creations and the accidents of his brain. He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayers for the happiness of those who at that moment were objects of his idolatry, but never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was already damned. He seemed, except when some fitful pursuit subjected his will and engrossed his faculties, always to bear the memory of some controlling sorrow.

He had made up his mind upon the numberless complexities of the social world and the whole system was with him an imposture. This conviction gave a direction to his shrewd and naturally unamiable character. Still though, he regarded society as composed of villains, the sharpness of his intellect was not of that kind which enabled him to cope with villainy, while it continually caused him overshots, to fail of the success of honesty.

Passion, in him, comprehended many of the worst emotions, which militate against human happiness. You could not contradict him, but you raised quick choler. You could not speak of wealth, but his cheek paled with gnawing envy. The astonishing natural advantage of this poor boy, his beauty, his readiness, the daring spirit that breathed around him like a fiery atmosphere, had raised his constitutional self-confidence into an arrogance that turned his very claims to admiration into prejudice against him. Irascible, envious, bad enough, but not the worst, for these salient angles were all varnished over with a cold repellant cynicism while his passions vented themselves in sneers. There seemed to him no moral susceptibility. And what was more remarkable in a proud nature, little or nothing of the true point of honor. He had, to a morbid excess, that desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition, but no wish for the esteem or the love of his species, only the hard wish to succeed, not shine, not serve, but succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit.

We must omit any particular criticism of Mr. Poe's works. As a writer of tales it will be admitted generally, that he was scarcely surpassed in ingenuity of construction or effective painting.

As a critic, he was more remarkable as a dissector of sentences than as a commenter upon ideas. He was little better than a carping grammarian.

As a poet, he will retain a most honorable rank. Of his "Raven," Mr. Willis observes that in his opinion, "it is the most effective single example of fugitive poetry ever published in this country, and is unsurpassed in English poetry for subtle conceptions, masterly ingenuity of versification, and consistent sustaining of imaginative lift."

In poetry, as in prose, he was most successful in the metaphysical treatment of the passions. His poems are constructed with wonderful ingenuity, and finished with consummate art. They illustrate a morbid sensitiveness of feeling, a shadowy and gloomy imagination, and a taste almost faultless in the apprehension of that sort of beauty most agreeable to his temper.

We have not learned of the circumstance of his death. It was sudden, and from the fact that it occurred in Baltimore, it is presumed that he was on his return to New York.

"After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well."

- LUDWIG

What is unusual about this obituary?

Shortly before his death, Poe named Rufus Griswold his executor, and Griswold, whose relationship with Poe was always tenuous, set about to destroy Poe's reputation once and for all. Griswold was responsible for the mysterious obituary signed "Ludwig." The next year, he wrote a "memoir" of Poe's life that was published in a magazine and a collected edition of Poe's works. Griswold generally praised Poe's work but attacked his character, making up several stories and forging letters from Poe to do so. Griswold's memoir remained the only major biography of Poe for almost 25 years. The lies he created were taken up and perpetuated by other biographers. Even today, much of the popular knowledge of Poe and his life is actually misinformation, spread by his "friend" Rufus Griswold. Why would Poe leave one of his adversaries in charge of his legacy?

POE VOCABULARY

These words which appear in the works of Edgar Allan Poe have been identified as words or derivatives of words that have appeared on past SAT tests.

1. **Acuity** – sharpness of perception.
2. **Affinity** – a likeness, a natural relationship, a kinship.
3. **Anomalous** – out of place, abnormal.
4. **Antiquity** – the quality of being ancient.
5. **Apathy** – a lack of concern or feeling, indifference.
6. **Desolate** – deserted, without inhabitants, barren.
7. **Dirge** – funeral hymn, lament.
8. **Discern** – to differentiate between two or more things.
9. **Discord** – lack of agreement, tension, strife.
10. **Dissolution** – disintegration, decomposition and dispersion.
11. **Emaciated** – very thin (usually as a result of starvation), wasting away.
12. **Equivocal** – ambiguous and intended to mislead.
13. **Fervid** – ardent, burning, impassioned.
14. **Goad** – to urge on in a negative sense.
15. **Hideous** – very ugly, offensive, shocking.
16. **Impetuous** – violent, hasty, rash, impulsive.
17. **Insipid** – boring and stupid.
18. **Interred** – buried.
19. **Malady** – a disease or unwholesome condition.
20. **Melancholy** – depression of spirits.
21. **Morbidity** – unwholesomeness and gloominess, gruesomeness.
22. **Munificent** – very generous.
23. **Orthodox** – conforming to established standards, conventional.
24. **Pallor** – extreme paleness usually referring to the face.
25. **Palpable** – tangible, perceptible, easily noticeable.
26. **Paradoxical** – something that appears false or contradictory but is actually correct.
27. **Pertinacity** – stubborn persistence or act of refusing to yield on an opinion or belief.
28. **Ponderous** – very heavy, unwieldy from weight.
29. **Potent** – powerful, having a strong effect.
30. **Precipitous** – marked by great rapidity, haste, or lack of caution.
31. **Prodigious** – extraordinary in bulk, quantity, or degree, great in size, enormous.
32. **Profuse** – extravagantly abundant, flowing freely.
33. **Protract** – to prolong.
34. **Quaint** – unusual in character or appearance.
35. **Rend** – to tear violently, to split.
36. **Reverie** – daydreaming.

- 37. **Stealthy** – acting in a secret and sneaky way.
- 38. **Sublime** – exalted, noble, uplifting.
- 39. **Tarry** – to delay in coming or going, to linger.
- 40. **Tempestuous** – turbulent, stormy.
- 41. **Tenuous** – flimsy, barely attached.
- 42. **Trepidation** – fear, trembling, agitation.
- 43. **Trifling** – not significant, frivolous.
- 44. **Trivia** – insignificant matters.
- 45. **Unobtrusive** – not readily noticeable, inconspicuous.
- 46. **Upbraid** – to scold harshly, to reproach.
- 47. **Utter** – to express by speaking.
- 48. **Vivacious** – full of life, very animated.
- 49. **Vivid** – bright, distinct, and clear.
- 50. **Wan** – very pale and sickly.



Date _____

In one of his footnotes to *Arkham Asylum*, Grant Morrison explains how the asylum's extensive series of hidden, torturous passageways, gloomy interiors, underground vaults, and mysterious rooms are symbolic of the labyrinth of the human mind: "The construction of the story was influenced by the architecture of a house—the past and the tale of Amadeus Arkham form the basement levels. Secret passages connect ideas and segments of the book. There are upper stories of unfolding symbol and metaphor. The journey through the book is like moving through the floors of the house itself. The house and the head become one" (2). Apply Morrison's premise for *Arkham Asylum* to Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." How could the events and characters in the tale be symbolic of the workings of the human mind on the brink of insanity?

[illegible]

Date _____

In *Batman Begins* (2005), Dr. Jonathan Crane (Cillian Murphy) explains that “patients suffering delusional episodes often focus their attention on an external tormentor, usually one conforming to Jungian archetypes.” Is the narrator of “The Raven” suffering from a delusional episode? Psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961) believed that humans interpret the world by sorting people, places, things, and experiences into archetypes. Compare the way the Bat haunts the characters in *Arkham Asylum* to the way the Raven haunts Poe’s narrator. What do the Bat and the Raven represent to the characters in these works? Do the creatures fit the same archetype?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is a small dark smudge or mark near the top right corner. The paper appears to be part of a bound volume, as a portion of another page is visible underneath at the bottom edge.



POE'S BLACK SWAN

First published in *The Gift*, Christmas 1839, "William Wilson" is one of Poe's undisputed masterpieces, a compelling portrait of a man at war with his own conscience. In this tale, Poe anticipates much of what concerned the psychological movement later in the century and has continued to our own day. He writes, of course, before Freud, Jung, or Adler, and thus his vocabulary is not the same. He uses age-old symbols and myths to frame the tale, but so emphatically that "William Wilson" remains one of the most forceful parables of the divided self. Thomas Mann has called this the classic story of the *Doppelgänger*, or double, a theme that occurs again and again in folklore and literature through the centuries and in widely differing cultures around the world. In this shorter, analytical essay, you are going to compare Edgar Allan Poe's classic short story, "William Wilson," to Darren Aronofsky's contemporary film, *Black Swan*. Your completed essay will count as a homework assignment grade. This is not a film review. You are going to take a critical approach to two works that we have studied. Because the length is only 1-2 pages, you will want to focus on detail on one or two parallels between the works.

Here are some ideas for you to consider: *Black Swan* is a postmodern film, and Poe's work seems to anticipate much of the postmodern movement. Your essay could highlight the prominent postmodern features of the works, including: altered states—the drug use and the hallucinatory nature of the narrative; the high and low culture divide; and the parts of these works which show a pastiche of previous material. You could focus your attention on the *Doppelgänger* theme in these works. The endings of both of the works are remarkably similar; your essay could show a side-by-side comparison of the scenes, focusing on the details and what the endings mean to the works as a whole. You could explain how both works use gothic elements to create an unsettling atmosphere. Alternately, if you are a Chuck Palahniuk fan, you could use *Fight Club* as your referent film instead of *Black Swan*.

Requirements: The essay must be at least one page long but no longer than two (1 and ½ pages). You must properly introduce and explain at least one direct quotation from "William Wilson" and one quotation from the film. So, a total of two quotations are required. The paper must have your own original thesis in the first paragraph (usually the last sentence or sentences before the transition into the next paragraph). Remember, a thesis is not a question; it is an answer to the question. A thesis is not a fact; it is an opinion or theory—one worth arguing. As always, the paper should follow MLA format. Use white 8½ X 11-inch paper. Font size should be 12 and Times New Roman. Margins should be one inch around (top and bottom, left and right) on each page. Paper should be double spaced throughout. Your last name and the page number should appear in the top right corner of each page. The Purdue OWL website has sample papers written in MLA format: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

Due Date _____

POE AUDIO RECORDINGS

Closed on Account of Rabies (1997) is a double-CD with poems and tales of Edgar Allan Poe performed by various artists. The album was produced by Hal Willner and Michael Minzer with cover art by Ralph Steadman. It is dedicated to Jeff Buckley and Allen Ginsberg, both of whom died shortly before the CD went to press. For this assignment, you and your group members will adapt one of Poe's poems or tales into an audio performance with music and sound effects. Think of our class's compilation album as a *Closed on Account of Rabies 2*. Working with four or five of your classmates, you will want to first choose your poem or short story. Because the length of the recording should be around six to eight minutes, Poe's poetry seems like the more obvious choice. Although I can provide your group with an outdated tape recorder and blank tape to complete the assignment, most of you probably have superior technology for recording and editing audio files on your phones and computers. The easiest way to play your recording for the class is to format it as an MP3 file or a CD. Each member of the group will receive the same grade for the assignment, which will count toward your class participation grade.

Names of Group Members: _____

Title of Poem or Short Story: _____

_____ / 20 **The adaptation**—what lines did your group decide to emphasize or not to stress? Which parts of the poem or story did you decide to omit? Perhaps after omitting something, you had to then add something to your script...

_____ / 20 **The primary reading and performance**—consider the member of your group who reads the poem or story to be the lead actor or actress in the play. Is their performance impassioned and sincere, or does it sound like they are reading line-for-line from a book? Are all of the words pronounced correctly?

_____ / 20 **Background music and sound effects** are appropriate to the tone of the selected work. Music and sound effects do not drown out the primary reading.

_____ / 20 **Sound quality and production value** are of high standards.

_____ / 20 **Preparedness**—is your group's audio performance ready to be played either on your own device or the teacher's computer?

