

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

UNABRIDGED

Edgar Allan Poe
The Fall of the House of Usher
The Pit and the Pendulum
and Other Tales of Mystery and Imagination

Read by **William Roberts**



NA428312D

1	The Pit and the Pendulum	8:24
2	'So far I had not opened'	7:30
3	'In the confusion attending my fall'	9:31
4	'I could no longer doubt'	7:28
5	'Scarcely had I dropped my head'	9:48
6	The Tell-Tale Heart	5:09
7	'I kept quite still and said nothing'	5:15
8	'If still you think me mad'	5:23
9	The Masque of the Red Death	7:22
10	'But in spite of these things'	5:23
11	'When the eyes of Prince Prospero'	4:06
12	Ligeia	8:42
13	'There is no point'	5:33
14	'How poignant then'	6:59
15	'She died'	8:11
16	'About the commencement'	6:12
17	'It might have been midnight'	8:56
18	The Raven	9:47
19	The Cask of Amontillado	4:40
20	'There were no attendants'	5:30
21	'At the most remote end'	7:13
22	The Fall of the House of Usher	7:38
23	'Shaking off from my spirit'	5:43

24	'In the manner of my friend'	7:14
25	'I shall ever bear about me'	6:04
26	'I well remember'	7:00
27	'And now some days'	4:08
28	'The impetuous fury'	5:56
29	'Oppressed as I certainly was'	6:32
30	The Black Cat	5:16
31	'One night returning home'	5:25
32	'When I first beheld'	6:58
33	'And now was I indeed wretched'	4:49
34	'My next step'	5:20
35	The Premature Burial	6:35
36	'In the year 1810'	6:25
37	'The mention of the galvanic battery'	5:59
38	'For several years'	5:29
39	'From the innumerable images'	6:07
40	'There arrived an epoch'	3:48
41	'And now, amid all my infinite'	5:47
42	The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar	7:40
43	'When they had gone'	9:45
44	'I now feel that I have reached'	4:44
45	'From this period'	3:43

Total time: 4:52:00

Edgar Allan Poe
**The Fall of the House of Usher
The Pit and the Pendulum**
and Other Tales of Mystery and Imagination

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), the son of travelling actors, was orphaned at the age of two and fostered by a Richmond merchant, John Allan. It proved to be an uneasy relationship, with Allan showing no real understanding for the sensitive and artistic nature of the boy. The temperamental personality and unpredictable talents of Poe saw him sidetrack, inappropriately, to an army career, concluding at the military academy at West Point after a successful early military career. He was dishonourably discharged in 1831 after only a year, and he set out to make his living as a writer.

The seeds of a weakness for drink were embedded by this time. But his artistic talent had also shown itself. His first volume of poetry, **Tamerlane and Other Poems**, had been published in 1827 and demonstrated a clear literary gift, but it was as a writer of stories marked by the grotesque and macabre that he was to make his name.

There was a considerable demand for stories of all kinds. Newspapers and literary magazines carried published short stories and serialised longer works on both sides of the Atlantic. During 1832, the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* published five stories by Poe. The following year **MS Found in a Bottle** won first prize in a contest in *The Baltimore Saturday Visiter*.

By 1835 he was known as a writer and he left Baltimore to become assistant editor of *The Southern Literary Messenger* (a job found for Poe by John Pendleton Kennedy, the judge who awarded the Baltimore prize). Poe felt sufficiently established to marry Virginia Clemm, who was still 13.

The following years saw his career grow steadily despite his bouts of depression and drinking. In 1837, his only full-length novel, **The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym**, was published, though it failed to sell. Financial insecurity dogged him. He became assistant editor on *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, which printed **The Fall of the**

House of Usher, and saw a collection of stories appear titled **Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque** (1840).

In 1841, he pioneered the detective novel with **The Murders of the Rue Morgue**. His creation of Auguste C. Dupin, who appeared in two further tales, **The Mystery of Marie Rogêt** and **The Purloined Letter**, were to lead, half a decade later, to the more famous and more popular detective duo of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

The early years of the 1840s were the high point of Poe's life. He produced a series of fine macabre and suspenseful stories, including **The Masque of the Red Death**, **The Pit and the Pendulum**, **The Tell-Tale Heart**, **The Black Cat** and **The Gold Bug**. And he gained a reputation as a critic. By this time he was editor of *Graham's Magazine* with a regular, if not large, salary.

But in January 1842, his wife Virginia burst a blood vessel while singing, which proved to be the start of a decline in her health, leading to her death five years later.

A venture to start his own magazine failed. Despite some success with stories and poems – **The Raven** was published in 1845 – the worsening of his wife's health, and his own plight as tuberculosis began to take

hold led to straightened circumstances. Drink also played a part. He died, delirious, in Washington College Hospital on 7 October 1849.

Poe's distinctive style placed him undeniably among the leading romantics of the first half of the 19th century, though he never achieved the status of his English contemporaries such as Byron, Coleridge or even De Quincey. As was the case of Melville, it was left to a later generation to rediscover him. Significantly (in view of his decision to place his detective Dupin in Paris) it was the French Romantics, in particular Charles Baudelaire and the later symbolists, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, who championed his work.

Poe's fascination with fantasy, with decay and death, echoed the concerns of a later age too. Certainly, the committed passion of his writing took him beyond his Gothic forbears. He himself lived on the edge of sanity, knowing turbulence in his personal life and his ambitions.

The ten stories in this selection represent most of his best-known. Many pursue similar themes of death, ghostly reappearance, being buried alive and other forms of mental and physical torture. They remain curiously effective even in the 21st century, when it

could be presumed that the excessive style would lose its power to shock or move – in the manner of an ornate Victorian graveyard.

Yet **The Fall of the House of Usher**, **The Masque of the Red Death** and even **Ligeia** create shivers long after the concluding lines have been read; there are the images of premature burial, of the swinging pendulum, of the accusing black cat. But more than all this, the power lies in the way the atmosphere and the horror

linger in the mind, half touching reality.

Poe's work is even more impressive when one considers that these stories came from the pen of a man who was widely read and sufficiently controlled, for all his personal habits, to produce the coolly calculating brain of Auguste C. Dupin – a character about as far from the uneasy mourning husband of **Ligeia** as it is possible to be.

These stories of mystery and imagination will continue to command a key place in the development of horror in Western literature.

The music on this recording is taken from the Marco Polo catalogue

HERRMANN GARDEN OF EVIL Moscow Symphony Orchestra/William Stromberg	8.223841
SALTER GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra/William Stromberg	8.225124
STEINER KING KONG Moscow Symphony Orchestra/William Stromberg	8.223763

Music programmed by Nicolas Soames

Produced by Nicolas Soames
Recorded at Q Sound, London
Edited by Sarah Butcher, SBS Studios

Edgar Allan Poe
The Fall of the House of Usher
The Pit and the Pendulum
and Other Tales of Mystery and Imagination

Read by **William Roberts**

The horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, with its dungeon of death, and the overhanging gloom on the House of Usher demonstrate unforgettably the unique imagination of Edgar Allan Poe. Unerringly, he touches upon some of our greatest nightmares – premature burial, ghostly transformation and words from beyond the grave. Written in the 1830s and 1840s, they have retained their power to shock and frighten even now.



William Roberts has appeared extensively in TV, film and theatre, varying from *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* and *Navy Seals* to *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *A View to Kill*. He is also a familiar voice on radio and audiobooks, with numerous dramas and books to his credit. He has also read *Billy Budd*, *Sailor* for Naxos AudioBooks.

"William Robert's reading does full justice to Poe's subtly contrived effects."

THE INDEPENDENT

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-283-1

View our catalogue online at
www.naxosaudiobooks.com



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE,
BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THESE COMPACT DISCS PROHIBITED.
©2003 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd. ©200 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd.
in Germany.

Total time
4:52:00