



The Essential Edgar Allan Poe

Stories • Poems • Biography

Read by Kerry Shale • John Chancer • William Roberts



NA692112D

1	The Murders in the Rue Morgue	9:36
2	Residing in Paris during the spring...	5:27
3	We were strolling one night...	6:53
4	Not long after this...	3:45
5	The next day's paper...	7:04
6	Four of the above named witnesses...	9:29
7	This is one of those miserable thoroughfares...	3:58
8	'I am now awaiting,' continued he...	5:32
9	'Let us now transport ourselves...'	7:12
10	'The next question...'	3:42
11	At these words...	5:54
12	I felt a creeping of the flesh...	8:15
13	The front door of the house...	4:35
14	What he stated was, in substance, this...	8:12
15	The Pit and the Pendulum	8:17
16	So far I had not opened my eyes...	7:30
17	In the confusion attending my fall...	9:31
18	I could no longer doubt the doom...	7:28
19	Scarcely had I dropped my head...	9:51
20	The Tell Tale Heart	5:07

21	I kept quite still and said nothing...	5:15
22	If still you think me mad...	5:31
23	The Fall of the House of Usher	7:39
24	Shaking off from my spirit...	5:43
25	In the manner of my friend...	7:14
26	I shall ever bear about me...	6:04
27	I well remember...	7:00
28	And now some days...	4:08
29	The impetuous fury...	5:56
30	Oppressed, as I certainly was...	6:39
31	The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar	7:40
32	When they had gone...	9:45
33	I now feel that I have reached...	4:44
34	From this period...	3:45
35	The Premature Burial	6:36
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...	5:52
42	The Cask of Amontillado	4:40
43	There were no attendants...	5:30
44	At the most remote end...	7:13
45	The Masque of the Red Death	7:21
46	But in spite of these things...	5:23
47	When the eyes of Prince Prospero...	4:08
48	Tamerlane	14:56
49	Dreams	2:19
50	Spirits of the Dead	1:42
51	A Dream	1:01
52	The Lake	1:28
53	The bowers whereat, in dreams, I see...	0:59
54	Fairy-Land	2:03
55	To Helen	0:59
56	Israfel	2:26
57	Lenore	2:56
58	Sonnet: To Zante	1:13
59	The Haunted Palace	2:26
60	Sonnet: Silence	1:17

61	The Conqueror Worm	2:13
62	Dream-Land	3:08
63	Eulalie	1:20
64	The Raven	9:25
65	Not long ago, the writer of these lines...	1:55
66	Ulalume: a ballad	5:10
67	The Bells	5:24
68	A Dream Within a Dream	1:20
69	For Annie	3:46
70	To My Mother	0:57
71	Annabel Lee	2:26
72	Edgar Allan Poe: A Biography	7:56
73	Edgar Poe was born on 19 January 1809...	7:55
74	Edgar Poe was a good student...	7:09
75	By the end of 1828...	8:07
76	The years between 1831 and 1835...	7:12
77	Poe is hardly known for his journalism...	7:11
78	The family moved to New York...	7:24
79	Once Virginia had started to display...	5:52
80	Whatever the truth...	5:47
81	This tangle of emotional attachments...	6:28
82	Later, while still in what can only...	6:57

Total time: 7:30:33

The Essential

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe shared the writer's usual dilemma: the desire to be popular as well as critically acclaimed. He also shared the artist's usual fate: to be popular for the wrong thing. Poe thought his great skill was in poetry, and felt that this was his vocation. He sometimes regarded his newspaper work (which included most of his fiction) as no more than a satisfactory means of earning a living while he directed his artistry towards his verse. Now, however, he is known almost solely for those stories, those tales of mystery and imagination, while his poetry, except for *The Raven* is largely overlooked.

Much of the poetry in fact shares the features of his fictional writing. There is the same brooding Romanticism, the same linguistic richness, the same sense of place and, frequently, foreboding. In the poetry, however, there is more

personal revelation, more evident self-expression, and more abstraction as Poe tackles larger and more nebulous issues than the very concrete matter he deals with in his fiction. The poetry encompasses sonnets addressed to Science as an enemy of imagination, odes to lovers, long Oriental romances, exercises in onomatopoeia, and lyrical, descriptive pieces. They all share the same passionate intensity of feeling and powerful atmosphere; but, until *The Raven* in 1845, they never managed to establish him in the public imagination the way his stories did.

What makes a certain work successful is an enduring and infuriating mystery to anyone who writes for a living. But one element is common to many popular genres: resonance with contemporary tastes and fears. In the 1950s, for example, alien-invasion films were

box-office gold, especially in America, where they combined the thrill of technological advancement with the equally thrilling fear of Communists – transmogrified into aliens – and the threat of nuclear war. Poe was a journalist and professionally alert to the public's appetites; and he was deeply affected by a personal, Romantic fascination with death that amounted almost to ghoulishness. This happened to chime with the public interest. It was this combination that gave his tales their horrifying relevance and appeal.

There was at the time a passionate fear about being buried alive, which led to graves and coffins being fitted with bells to allow the victim to raise the alarm. Poe often exploited that terror (or variations on it), and in a fashion which suited his imagination as much as that of the public. He then added to their immediacy by dressing them in the guise of newspaper stories (such as *The Facts in the Case of M Valdemar*, published in 1845, or *The Premature Burial*, 1844). This, of course, is not original: authors

have used any number of devices for precisely the same reason. But Poe's presence in the newspaper world gave a credibility to many of his fictions, either because they were exaggerations of known events or because they purported to be actual events. All the stories in this CD collection were published in magazines first, and some of those magazines also had a news agenda. On more than one occasion, Poe was criticised for attempting to fool the public with his disguises, leading to retractions or explanations.

But it is more than morbid plausibility that binds this collection of stories and poems. Poe's life (1809–1849) was circumscribed by loss and tragedy, painful familial circumstances, lingering illnesses and the death of most of the significant women in his life. All this, combined with an emotional intensity that approached instability, produced a man for whom the Romantic and Gothic were the natural means of expression. The Gothic had its love of horror, madness and decay; the Romantic its

rich language promoting the right of self-expression to the individual. By 1831, for example, Poe had published three collections of verse, all with more than a hint of the Byronic about them in their wild, Romance-fuelled despair and desire. He had some right to it. His mother, foster-mother and first love (of a sort – a close friend’s mother) had all died before he reached 20, and his brother was to die just three years later. He had seen lingering death and sudden bereavement at first hand, something that would recur either in fact or fiction throughout his life. He had had an engagement called off because the girl’s parents disapproved. He was rejected by his stepfather and effectively cut off without a penny. His sister was suffering from mental illness. Among the results of this series of losses and denials came a powerful sense of the closeness of mortality, and a morbid, complex fascination with the death of a beautiful woman. But Poe was not incapable. He had proved himself an intelligent student, a strong and athletic

man, and was fuelled by a desire to write. It was no surprise that the likes of Byron and Coleridge were such a powerful inspiration for him.

Once again, though, Poe adds to this (already heady) mixture of influences a particular dash of his own. He believed that the role of art was to have a single emotional impact upon the reader. When he wrote about *The Raven*, he claimed that a hundred lines was as long as a single effect could be maintained, and that thereafter an author would have to create a new one to keep up the momentum. With his stories there is a similar intention to create an effect, to have an impact, and to do so in a brief space. What they may lack in psychological insight or eternal truths about the nature of humanity they make up for with immediacy and relished horror, a delight in making the hairs on the back of your neck tingle.

The Pit and the Pendulum (published 1842) and *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843) are both brief, brilliantly imagined horror stories. In one, a prisoner has to find a

way to escape death at the hands of the Inquisition while trapped in a fiendish prison. In the other, a man comes up with a brilliantly simple murder on the slightest of motives, but finds keeping it a secret more difficult than he imagined. It is not impossible to read a metaphysical implication underlying tales like these. The desperate attempt to avoid the pit and the pendulum while imprisoned by unseen guards can easily be seen as an allegory of the human condition. The need to confess, or the sense of being hounded by one's wrongdoings, is at the core of *The Tell-Tale Heart*. There are some stories where an allegory is absolutely intended – *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842) being perhaps the best example. In itself, the moral of the story is relatively straightforward; but the strength of Poe's telling elevates it to an adult fairy-tale. This imaginative power essentially means the lack of plot or character is irrelevant in the stories. Who or what is the cause of the terrors behind *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839)? Who, come to that, are Roderick

Usher and his sister? There is almost no explanation, and this vagueness, as with most of the horror stories, allows for a good deal of interpretative licence. What *Usher* illustrates particularly well, though, is Poe's sense of a spirit of place being somehow responsible for the people in it. His locations are forever dark and damp, decaying, rotten and undermined, and this is reflected in the characters that people them. Several of the poems, too, concentrate on the atmosphere of a place, essentially being imaginative and darkly brooding landscapes, where the words and their sound (as much as their meaning) convey the sense of wonder or delight or despondency.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841) is in a different category altogether. It is credited with being the first detective novel, and it is no exaggeration to say that the history of British fiction was changed by it. The 'detective' (the word was not in use when Poe wrote the story) is an amateur sleuth who baffles the

police by explaining an apparently insoluble murder. The story is told by his sympathetic friend, with whom he lives; and the hero has a coldly logical and idiosyncratic method of deduction that carries with it implications of a slightly damaged personality. If Poe had called him 'Sherlock', he could hardly have been more clearly the fictional prototype of Arthur Conan Doyle's later hero, Sherlock Holmes; and thence to Agatha Christie's Poirot. The public loved the new character, the impossible riddles, and the brilliance that created the insoluble crimes only to solve them at the end. For Poe, however, the solving of the riddles was simple (as the author, he had created them – so solving them was hardly an issue); the stories were opportunities to examine the nature of intelligence – logic versus analysis, for example, or dull cunning versus sophistication. In short, he seems once again to have been slightly out of step with his public.

But the popular vote has given Poe his immortality; and his continuing

appeal allows more people to be introduced to the dark imaginings and rich terrors of his stories. It also people to discover his poetry, and find out whether Poe is rightly celebrated for his prose or wrongly overlooked for his verse.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Kerry Shale has performed his acclaimed one-man shows around the world. Other theatre work includes *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, *The Normal Heart*, *True West* and *The Odd Couple*. His television credits include *Cracker*, *Sharpe's Rifles* and *Sherlock Holmes*. Films include *Yentl*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *102 Dalmations* and *Max*. He has won three Sony Awards for radio acting and writing. For Naxos AudioBooks he has also recorded Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Conquest of Mexico* and *Moses and other stories from the Old Testament*.



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 *The Fall of the House of Usher & Other Tales* and *Billy Budd* for Naxos AudioBooks.



John Chancer is the award-winning narrator of many audiobooks. He is an American who has a long association with the theatre on both sides of the Atlantic. John's recent television appearances have included *Broken News*, *Spooks*, *The Long Firm* and *William and Mary*. Films include *Unstoppable*, *Grim* and *Project: Shadowchaser*. He has also been heard on many radio dramas, documentaries, and cartoons in Britain, the US, and around the world. He has also read *Norwegian Wood* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Read by Kerry Shale

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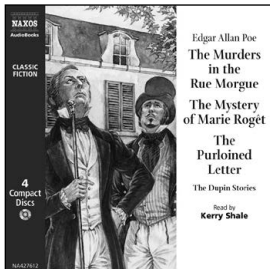
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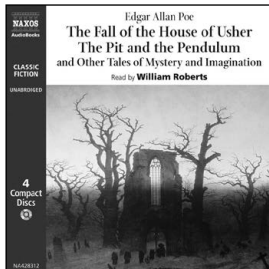
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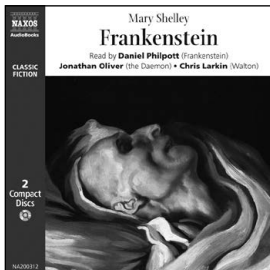
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The Fall of the House of Usher

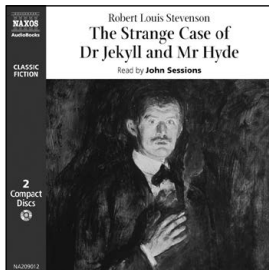
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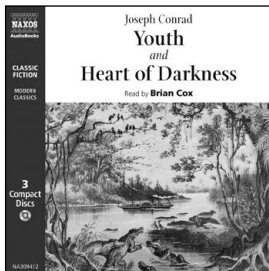
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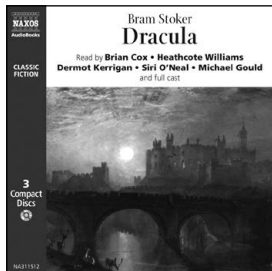
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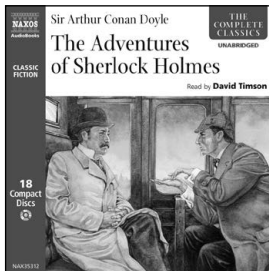
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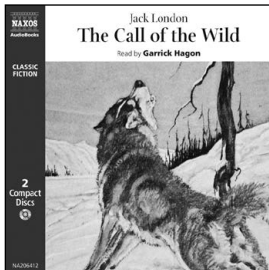
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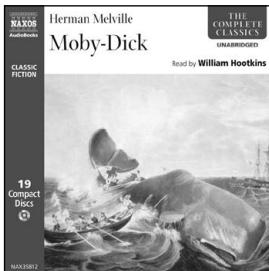
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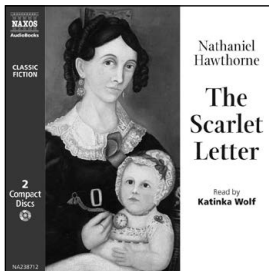
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The first modern detective story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*; the rising terror of *The Pit and the Pendulum*; the dark fable of *The Masque of the Red Death* – this collection of Edgar Allan Poe's finest stories celebrates his genius and marks the 200th anniversary of his birth.

The collection also includes a selection of his poetry – the literary form he himself preferred – including *The Raven*. There is also a specially commissioned biography outlining the tragedies that marked so much of Poe's fiction.

One of the most influential of all American writers, Edgar Allan Poe was a Romantic, a fabulist and a master of imaginative horror.

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