

## Analyzing Poe's Work Biographically and Psychologically

It is fair to say that at many times, authors use instances from their own lives and incorporate them into their work. Even in the most basic writing setting, the classroom, students are asked to write about what they know. On the other hand, some authors choose to travel a different path; they tend to manipulate the psychological aspects of their characters, without using instances from their own lives. Most often, an author will stick to one of these two methods of writing, or perhaps even venture down an entirely different channel. Every now and then, however, a writer emerges that manages to produce works that can be analyzed biographically or psychologically. Edgar Allan Poe, a renowned nineteenth-century Gothic writer, is one example, composing over one hundred literary works, which summed to a nearly even division of poems and tales. At first glance, his writings give off a dark and gloomy vibe - one that instigates feelings of doom for the protagonist. If you investigate the life of Poe, however, questions begin to arise about the underlying themes in his work. It becomes evident after some reading of his stories and poems that Poe relied plenty on occurrences in his life for inspiration. After looking at other pieces of his work, however, other questions arise of possible analytical approaches besides a biographical one being used; quite possibly a psychological one. In this paper, I will investigate some main ways to approach Poe's work, particularly biographically and psychologically, providing detailed examples of each method.

To begin, one way to better understand Poe's work is to analyze it biographically, relating it directly back to events in his life. Some critics have gone so far as to believe that "with respect to Poe's tales (. . .) the central figure there, however disguised, is always the image of the romancer himself," indicating Poe's tendency to parallel the protagonist to himself (Campbell, K. 130). Obviously, it is pertinent to first be familiar with a summary of Poe's life, particularly main events that would have had a significant impact on themes in his work. Poe led a rather troubled life, which premiered with both of his parents dying before he reached the age of three, his mother of the dreaded tuberculosis (Literature Network). After being adopted by the wealthy Allan family, Poe eventually studied at the University of Virginia, where his adoptive father refused to pay his debts, thus causing Poe to be removed from the University (Regan). Within a couple of years, Mrs. Allan, Poe's adoptive mother passed away from the common tuberculosis. In 1835, Poe married his 13-year old cousin, Virginia, who, a few years later, coincidentally like his mother, also acquired tuberculosis and died (Bedford). After this devastation, Poe began to do many drugs and drink heavily, developing an alcohol addiction (Literature Network). Clearly, simply from this abbreviated biography of Edgar Allan Poe, he experienced many things in his lifetime that others would never have to deal with. As an artist, Poe used his pen and paper to emote following most of these troubling events.

A prime example of Poe incorporating his personal life into his work can be found in his 1842 short story "The Masque of the Red Death." Throughout Poe's life, tuberculosis presented an imminent threat to society. As mentioned previously, Poe lost his biological mother, adoptive mother, and wife to the clutches of tuberculosis. In the "Masque of the Red Death," Poe shows how this dreaded disease has taken hold of all aspects of his life and how there is no way to escape it. At the time this story was written, he had already lost both of his mother figures to tuberculosis, and his wife, Virginia, had just contracted it. The "Red Death" that is described in this tale is a relatively accurate representation of tuberculosis and its effects. According to the Center for Disease Control, symptoms of tuberculosis include "pain in the chest, coughing up blood . . . [and] weakness or fatigue." In keeping with the traits of tuberculosis, Poe's Red Death

is characterized by “sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores.” After reading these vivid descriptions that Poe employs in this tale, it becomes quite clear that he was intending to use the Red Death as a means of embodying this horrible epidemic that had somewhat taken hold of his life.

The magnitude of the grip that tuberculosis had on society during Poe’s life was very strong. Commonly referred to as “consumption” at that time, tuberculosis had no known treatment until 1854, and even after that, many further advances were needed to uncover a complete cure (Brief History of Tuberculosis). The way Poe saw it, the reign that tuberculosis seemed to have over the loved ones in his life could be personified by this mysterious hooded character in “Masque of the Red Death.” After killing the three most important women in Poe’s life, the tuberculosis could indeed be compared to this strange character who seemed to murder Prince Prospero’s guests within a matter of minutes. Just as this strange character corresponds to the tuberculosis in Poe’s life, Prince Prospero fills the role of Poe himself. Throughout his life and even today, over a century after his death, Poe has been described by many as strange, odd, and outright bizarre. In a similar sense, as he illustrates his main character in “The Masque of the Red Death,” Poe feels no restraint in subtly describing Prince Prospero’s “eccentric yet august taste” and his “love of the bizarre” (Poe 269). Later in the tale, Poe further emphasizes the eccentricities of Prospero in saying “his plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre” (Poe 271). One could perceive Prospero’s decorations as his own expression of art, similar to Poe’s writings being his expression of art. In describing Prospero’s decorations at the party (including the actual masqueraders, whom Poe stresses it was Prospero’s “own guiding taste” that influenced their costumes), Poe uses such words as “grotesque” and informs the reader of the “piquancy and phantasm” that was evident in the design (Poe 271). Likewise, Poe received much criticism of this kind throughout his career and even far after his death. James Russell Lowell describes Poe’s work as stretching “from the utmost limits of the probable into the weird confines of superstition and unreality” (13). These comments can be pooled into the same realm of adjectives as those Poe used to express Prospero’s art. Lowell goes on further to compare Poe’s work to “the impalpable shadows of mystery” and possessing a “minuteness of detail which does not leave a pin or a button unnoticed” (Lowell 13). Just as Prospero paid careful attention to his works of art, instating within them a grotesque sense of mystery, Poe takes much consideration in choosing the precise words to induce optimal obscurity and strangeness. Poe designed Prospero in this way either to make Prospero more bizarre simply for the sake of the story or to ensure the reader is aware of Poe’s attempt to make this main character as much like Poe as possible. Assuming the case is the latter, Poe’s characterization of himself in Prospero is evident not only in their similar sense of detail and the grotesque, but also, more clearly, their loss to an undefeatable monster that overcomes their loved ones. In “The Masque of the Red Death,” Prospero watches helplessly as his closest friends are murdered by this plague, eventually falling himself to the inescapable clutches of the epidemic. After losing his two mother figures to tuberculosis and watching his beloved wife slowly contract the disease, Poe presents Prospero as an exaggerated image of himself; although Poe had only lost two close ones to tuberculosis at the time he wrote this story, the pain and sorrow almost feels like he lost a thousand loved ones, just as Prospero had. In a similar sense of overstatement, Poe describes the death of Prospero to the infamous Red Death. Although Poe himself did not die of tuberculosis, perhaps he felt that through the losses he endured, the ailment that had killed his loved ones had also destroyed a significant part of him, a comparison to Prospero’s death after watching his dear friends begin to fall to the Red Death. The sequence of events and character traits that are

presented in “The Masque of the Red Death” were portrayed by Poe in such a manner that they paralleled the events in his life that dealt with his struggles with the tuberculosis epidemic and his critiques by others as being dark and intricate.

While stories such as “The Masque of the Red Death” illustrate examples of the incorporation of Poe’s life into his work, many of his poems show even more convincing evidence of such attempts made by this author. Often, poems are indeed written as a response to an occurrence in the author’s life or emotions they may be encountering. As would be expected, Poe shared this quality. Although it is quite common among authors to use poetry as a channel for manifesting occurrences in their lives, it is still important to examine Poe’s ability to do so in order to fully understand the magnitude of this incorporation of life events into all of his works. The most obvious example of Poe exhibiting this behavior in his poetry is detectable in his final poem, “Annabel Lee.” Written in 1849, mere months before Poe’s death, “Annabel Lee” is clearly a love poem, using the metaphor of a boat for the woman he adores. While various women have claimed to be the inspiration for this renowned sonnet, most critics agree that the true focus is none other than his beloved Virginia, who had died two years prior to the writing of “Annabel Lee” (“Annabel Lee”). Poe wed Virginia when she was extremely young, only thirteen years old. When she died, she had just reached the age of 25; Poe was already 38. Clearly, Poe felt that age should be no limitation to love. The bond between Poe and his beloved wife was strong, and it broke his heart to see her succumb to tuberculosis. In fact, a close friend of Poe, Frances Osgood, shared once that Virginia “was the only woman whom he ever truly loved” (Huang). “Annabel Lee” enforces this point, further indicating that it was written about his Virginia. In the second stanza, he writes that they were both children, but the love between them was so strong that the “winged seraphs of heaven coveted her and” him (Poe 958). The poem goes on to describe how Annabel Lee is taken away from him by “a wind [that] blew out of a cloud” (Poe 958). This removal of the narrator’s boat which he loves with all his heart parallels Poe’s loss of Virginia. What seems even more interesting is the choice of a boat as the representation for his beloved wife. In a very symbolic sense, the boat can be seen instead as a vessel, which, taken a step further, could be a metaphor for the womb of a woman being a vessel for life. Perhaps to Poe, the death of Virginia meant not only the loss of his true love, but also the collapse of the possibility of fatherhood for Poe. Even after Virginia’s death, Poe cannot rid himself of the power that their love had over him. Richard Wilbur writes that in “Annabel Lee,” “the angelic mediatrix is physically lost, but never is she lost to her lover’s spirit” (Wilbur 164). Other critics have made a connection between this poem and not only Poe’s late wife, but also his two mother-figures whom he lost earlier in his life. J. Gerald Kennedy looks at “Annabel Lee” and other poems and stories that focus on women or love, such as “Ulalume” and “To Helen,” as Poe’s declarations for his mourning of all the women he has lost. Kennedy believes that “the male persona’s absolute dependence on Woman’s love and the bliss of female presence exposes the terrifying threat of loss (or rejection) and the withdrawal of gratification” (Kennedy 117). More or less, with the completion of “Annabel Lee,” Poe is continuing his pattern of writing to or about women, which is evident in a number of his works. Earlier on, Poe wrote many letters which he addressed directly to whom he intended them to be read by, such as “To Helen,” “Lenore,” “To My Mother,” and “For Annie.” Taking into consideration the emphasis that Poe placed on women in general throughout his work, many have noticed that “Poe and his narrators typically anatomize women, inventorying their bodies, often reducing them to a single, fetishized body part or a single word” (Person 142). Clearly, the impact that women had on his life played an important role in much of Poe’s writing.

Besides the many poems that Poe wrote as biographical releases, yet another story shows this tendency he possessed. “Ligeia,” published in 1838, shows signs of being slightly descriptive of Poe himself. This tale, which Poe “sometimes spoke of as his finest story,” begins by describing this beloved Ligeia, whom is portrayed as sharing a close resemblance to Poe (Walker 14). With her “lofty . . . forehead,” “raven-black . . . naturally-curling tresses,” and “turn of the short upper lip,” Ligeia has a physical appearance that shares a striking resemblance to that of Poe’s (Poe 655). Poe fills an entire paragraph with description of Ligeia’s eyes, specifically “the brilliancy of the features” of “those divine orbs” (Poe 656). Poe even proceeds to describe her beauty as having a “strangeness pervading it” with some “irregularity” (Poe 655). Poe’s physical appearance can be shown to correspond to these descriptions of Ligeia he employs in this story. T. H. Chivers once described Poe’s hair to be “dark as a raven’s wig,” which directly parallels to that of Ligeia (“Poe’s Appearance, etc.”). Furthermore, Thomas Wentworth Higginson relays his memories of Poe’s “ample forehead” and “brilliant eyes” (“Poe’s Appearance, etc.”). In a similar autobiographical fashion, Poe goes on to describe the strangeness that beheld Ligeia; the invisible power that she had over him. Just like Ligeia, Poe consistently was characterized as bizarre and odd. Another indicator that Poe intended “Ligeia” to be an autobiographical device is that “the tale originated in a dream;” this fact was included on “one of the printed texts of the story” (Campbell, K. 137).

While the biographical approach can lead one to examine this story as if Ligeia is in fact a personification of Poe, an entirely different method exists of analyzing “Ligeia.” After examining Ligeia’s physical traits, it is legitimate to say that she possesses the characteristics of a traditional, gothic heroine, and, customarily, this same heroine is dark and evil. Ligeia, on the other hand, represents the narrator’s light of his life; she seems to bring him only happiness until her death. On the other hand, Lady Rowena, the narrator’s wife after Ligeia’s death, physically encompasses the traits of a traditional fairy-tale princess, being “fair-haired and blue-eyed,” and, again, customarily, this character represents light and good in the world (Poe 660). Once more, however, the physical traits do not match with the feelings they invoke in the narrator. The narrator, in fact, “loathed [Rowena] with a hatred belonging more to a demon than a man” (Poe 661). The traditional roles of good and evil have been switched in this story. After the narrator brings his Ligeia back to life in his memory and has Rowena locked away in the bridal chamber out of his despise for her, the two entities are brought together, and it seems that they are one and the same person. In fact, the pair “reconstruct themselves in the form of a single, terrifying female body with the power to paralyze and chill [the narrator] to the stone” (Person 145). While the narrator allows himself to fiercely hate the existence of Rowena, he also finds himself to be horrifically consumed with the beauty and lust of Ligeia. In a sense, Rowena and Ligeia unite to produce a sort of insanity inside of the narrator, but each woman does so in an entirely different manner.

After noting the two ways of analyzing Poe’s “Ligeia,” connecting the two approaches provides an even better understanding of the story. It is certainly possible to make connections to see the physical similarities between Ligeia and Poe himself. Alternatively, the figurative unification of Ligeia and Rowena presents obvious psychological distress for the narrator. As I have presented in examples from prior stories, Poe had somewhat of a fetish for women – not purely in a sexual sense, but more of a fascination, shown by their constant influence on his work. Thinking in a way to combine the two analytical approaches of “Ligeia,” consider Poe to be representing himself as not only Ligeia, but also Lady Rowena, based on the psychological reasoning that the two characters are opposite sides of the same coin. One can use Poe’s evident

enthralment of women as an explanation for his personifying himself as two women. In the biographical sense, perhaps Lady Ligeia's death represents an effort by Poe to follow the social standards of his time by repressing this bizarre and dark side of him, despite his love for this type of personality. Then, the narrator tries his best to enjoy his life with Rowena, the representation of the traditional "fairy-tale princess," but finds this task to be painful as he develops a strong sense of hatred towards this character. In this same manner, Poe possibly tried to conform to the customary image of something that was good and accepted in the world during his time by repressing the strange and dark side of himself, or, in the story, killing off the Lady Ligeia. Although he may have put forth effort, trying to fit in with this image that was unnatural to him only made him appreciate that darker, more bizarre side of him. Pulling him away from Rowena and the persona that caused him so much discomfort, Ligeia eventually encompasses the mind of the narrator, leaving him stuck in a struggle between two entirely different women. Perhaps Poe had been finding himself in the same struggle, but rather inside of himself, which was divided in the story into the two characters of Ligeia and Rowena.

Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," first published in 1846, exhibits yet another example of Poe combining psychological elements of two seemingly distinct characters and follows this theme of personality repression. Critics believe that many similarities exist between Fortunato and Montresor. Critic Charles A. Sweet Jr. notices that both names "Montresor" and "Fortunato" "refer to wealth," the first sign of subtle similarities between the two characters. In the story, both men also don costumes of sorts. Fortunato "has donned the costume of the fool," and Montresor "assumes not only the guise of a friend but subsequently 'a mask of black silk'" (Sweet). Intriguing enough, throughout the story, it is found that the men also seem to repeat each other's words at times, leading the reader to believe yet again that they might be mirror images of each other. Sweet again notes that as Montresor informs that he has "received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado," Fortunato almost immediately follows with "Amontillado? A pipe?" and then "repeats the name of the wine three times" (O'Neill 667). Other instances occur where the two men are found echoing each other, such as when Montresor notes that the damp plant nitre lines the walls of the catacombs, and Fortunato simply follows by repeating the word "nitre" (Sweet). After the two are deep in the catacombs, and yet before they reach Fortunato's final destination, they do enjoy tastes of a wine separate from the Amontillado, leaving them slightly intoxicated. As the reader makes the connections between the similarities of Montresor and Fortunato, it seems that Montresor is perhaps "repressing that dilettantish side of himself he can no longer endure, that side symbolized by Fortunato" (Sweet). Clearly, Poe portrays Montresor and Fortunato as different people, but hidden similarities lead one to believe that they are quite possibly two sides of the same person.

A final example of psychologically approaching Poe's work is relevant in regards to his famous tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," first published in 1840. One of Poe's most symbolically complicated stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher" has been interpreted in many different ways psychologically. I will primarily focus on analyzing Roderick and Madeline Usher as a single entity, decaying within this body that is the House of Usher. Critics have continued to find links between the Usher siblings that lead one to believe they are in fact, symbolically, parts of the same person. As stated in the story, the entire Usher family "lay in the direct line of descent;" the lineage is very direct and branchless, leading one to believe that relations such as incest have occurred (Poe 232). The malady that has so heavily struck Roderick and Madeline can, therefore, probably be explained by this incest in the family. Continuing this trend of incestuous relationships, Roderick and Madeline "loved each other

passionately and exclusively,” but, being duplicate results of previous incest, they are enduring the same life-altering illness which is slowly killing each of them (Lawrence 99). Possibly caused by this same ailment, madness slowly manifests itself in Roderick’s world, and he releases it on Madeline. Just as Montresor slowly entombed Fortunato in “The Cask of Amontillado,” Roderick buries his sister while she is still alive. Again, this theme of repression surfaces itself in Poe’s work, yet on this occasion, Roderick, at least on a conscious level, is unaware of the grave mistake he is making. After some time of “a madness of unspeakable terror and guilt,” Roderick comes to the realization that he has subconsciously known all along: he has buried his living sister (Lawrence 99). Following Madeline’s rise from “death,” both she and Roderick fall to the ground in death, and the actual House itself too crumbles to the ground. This simultaneous fall of first the twins and then the House of Usher contributes to the idea that the two objects – the siblings and the house – are encompassed within each other.

The mansion that houses Madeline and Roderick has remained in this limited family line for decades, further showing its strong relationship with the Usher clan. Poe uses this house to parallel the lives of the twins that reside inside; with the fall of the House comes the fall of the siblings. As Martha Womack relates, while Roderick and Madeline “represent the mental and physical components of a single being or soul, there is also a connection between the family mansion and the remaining members who live within” (Womack). As one examines this idea of Roderick and Madeline being a single soul that resides in the physical body of the House of the Usher, other subtle signs of this throughout the story become clearer. While Madeline and Roderick, the final generation of the Usher descent, deteriorate as they approach their deaths, the House of Usher decays with them but in the way a house appropriately would, exhibiting “simple landscape features . . . bleak walls . . . vacant eye-like windows . . . [and] white trunks of decayed trees” (Poe 231). By analyzing “The Fall of the House of Usher” with these facts in mind, the reader can again notice in a Poe tale the psychological theme of personality repression. Roderick has gone mad and tries to push away this incestuous relationship that he has inherited through being born into the Usher family by burying his twin sister (and possible lover) Madeline Usher. Instead of the relief he had hoped to attain by ridding himself of this relation, Roderick’s condition worsens rapidly in the week that passes after Madeline’s unnecessary burial. When the House crumbles upon the unified deaths of Roderick and Madeline, it is clear to see that the repression that Roderick had attempted was very unsuccessful and only led to the true deaths of Madeline, himself, and the House that embodied the two of them.

Using these five stories as templates, one can begin to understand that Poe’s stories can be sufficiently analyzed either biographically or psychologically. Biographically, Poe incorporated the women of his life into much of his work. “The Masque of the Red Death” emphasizes his perception of tuberculosis, particularly through its capture of his beloved wife and two mother figures. Of his poems, “Annabel Lee” most accurately depicts Poe’s feelings for his late Virginia. Using a psychological approach, much of Poe’s work exhibits one character repressing another identity, which is meant to symbolize a personality repression. In “The Cask of Amontillado,” hidden hints show striking similarities which lead one to believe the Fortunato and Montresor are one and the same, yet Montresor wishes to suppress the side of him that is represented by Fortunato. Likewise, in Poe’s famous “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Roderick Usher subconsciously desires to push away the incestuous relationship that is represented by his twin, Madeline, attempting to bury her alive. Employing both of these analysis methods, studying Poe’s “Ligeia” is helpful in uncovering his fetish for women and furthering his theme of repression. As quoted in the introduction of Carlson’s 1987 book

*Critical Essays on Edgar Allan Poe*, “Robert Regan suggested calling Poe ‘the Captain Kidd of Literature’ because of the number of ‘treasure-maps’ he left to decoders” (Carlson 17). Inevitably, Poe’s stories are meant to be analyzed and searched for answers and symbolism. The biographical and psychological approaches are two ways to begin this endeavor, and I believe they provide the most promising methods.

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#### Cask of Amontillado (Poe 274-279)

This story is told by Montresor, who, for some reason unbeknownst to the reader, possesses an insurmountable grudge against Fortunato. Montresor's anger has built up for so long, that he is searching for a way to terminate Fortunato. After disclosing to the reader that Fortunato's weakness was that he "prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine," Montresor proceeds to

tell the story of the poor drunk's defeat (O'Neill 667). Montresor, in his rage against Fortunato, tricks him into "the catacombs of the Montresors" by telling him that he has "received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado," which is stored by the underground tombs, but he is unsure if it is genuine Amontillado (O'Neill 667-8). Fortunato immediately becomes entranced by the mere thought of drinking the sweet wine of Amontillado, but Montresor, in an attempt to divert Fortunato away from any ulterior motives he might have, assures him that it is perfectly fine if Fortunato is busy; he's sure that Luchesi, another wine-lover, can identify true Amontillado (O'Neill 667). Fortunato is consumed by the thought of Amontillado, and argues that Luchesi "cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry" (O'Neill 667). Eventually, Montresor's gives in, and his plan is brought into realization. He leads the unsuspecting Fortunato deep into the catacombs, just to chain him up in a catacomb and, then and there, build a wall to permanently seal Fortunato away (O'Neill 671). Fortunato, "his head . . . surmounted by the conical cap and bells," was led to his death not only by the mischievous mind of Montresor, but also by his obsession with drugs and their effects (O'Neill 667).

#### The Masque of the Red Death (Poe 269-273)

This story has very few articulated actions, but the theme of death lingers throughout. Poe introduces "The Red Death," a devastating ailment, which involves "sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores" and a death within thirty minutes of obtaining the disease (Poe 269). Prince Prospero, the only character in the story with a name, however, has managed to avoid the clutches of the Red Death in his protective castle. In celebration of this feat, and as an attempt to also protect his friends, he holds a grand "masked ball of the most unusual magnificence" (Poe 269). The party is held in a long hall with seven separate, yet connected, rooms. Each room entertained a different color scheme and was filled with people dancing lively. The only room without such festivities was the seventh and final room, which was decorated with "black velvet tapestries," and the windowpanes were "scarlet – a deep red color" (Poe 270). Also in this room was a "gigantic clock of ebony" which struck on each hour and echoed throughout the ball (Poe 270). Hours pass and the party remains a thriving success as its guests dance and celebrate. As the clock strikes midnight, however, a hooded, mysterious figure is noticed. Before long, it becomes evident that this uninvited guest has brought with him a possession of the dreaded Red Death. The party immediately loses its strength, as the Red Death sweeps through the crowd, killing the innocent guests. Prince Prospero, "maddening with rage," chases after the intruder with a dagger, but the hooded figure proves to be more powerful, as in the end, the Prince also falls victim to the Red Death.

#### "Annabel Lee" (Poe 957-8)

It was many and many a year ago,  
In a kingdom by the sea,  
That a maiden there lived whom you may know  
By the name of Annabel Lee;  
And this maiden she lived with no other thought  
Than to love and be loved by me.

*I* was a child and *she* was a child,  
In this kingdom by the sea:  
But we loved with a love that was more than love –

I and my Annabel Lee;  
 With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven  
 Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,  
 In this kingdom by the sea,  
 A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling  
 My beautiful Annabel Lee;  
 So that her high-born kinsman came  
 And bore her away from me,  
 To shut her up in a sepulchre  
 In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,  
 Weny envying her and me-  
 Yes!-that was the reason (as all men know,  
 In this kingdom by the sea)  
 That the wind came out of the cloud by night,  
 Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love  
 Of those who were older than we-  
 Of many far wiser than we-  
 And neither the angels in heaven above,  
 Nor the demons down under the sea,  
 Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee,

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams  
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
 And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
 And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
 Of my darling-my darling-my life and my bride,  
 In the sepulchre there by the sea,  
 In her tomb by the sounding sea.

#### Ligeia (Poe 654-666)

The story begins with the narrator describing the love of his life, Ligeia. He spends much time discussing her physical features and his infatuation with her that has existed for many years. The actual story begins as the descriptions end, and Ligeia passes away on her death bed. After

Ligeia's death, the narrator weds the Lady Rowena. He obviously still very much loves Ligeia, but seems to be forced into marrying Rowena, whom he nearly despises. After they are married for two months, Rowena "was attacked with sudden illness (Poe 662). She seemed to have fevers and hallucinations that plagued her. On one particular night as Rowena complained of sounds and images in the house, her condition seemed to be worsening, so the narrator rushed to get her wine which had been prescribed by the physician. As he crosses the room he too felt something strange – "a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect" (Poe 663). Four nights later, Rowena's condition is so bad that the narrator is preparing her tomb. After her supposed death, Rowena is put to rest in this tomb, but the narrator realizes a few days later that she is, in fact, still alive as he hears faint sounds coming from the burial site. He rushes into the tomb to see her and notices "color had flushed up within the cheeks and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids" (Poe 664). Within minutes, however, Rowena returns to her deathly state. About an hour later, the lifelike sounds return, and the narrator returns to the tomb. Each time he witnesses these lively symptoms, he "sunk into visions of Ligeia" (Poe 664). Throughout the night, this cycle continues to repeat itself. Come the end of the night, the Lady Rowena wakes from her death and appears to have been transformed into the narrator's long lost Ligeia.

#### The Fall of the House of Usher (Poe 231-245)

This story premieres with the narrator riding horseback to the House of Usher. The House is dark, and looking at it instigates "a sense of insufferable gloom" inside the narrator (Poe 231). As the story continues, the narrator shares that he is visiting his childhood friend, Roderick Usher, who is suffering from a mysterious illness. When the narrator enters the House of Usher, he immediately notices the effects of this illness on his friend, particularly the "ghastly pallor of the skin" and how his hair "had been suffered to grow all unheeded" (Poe 234). Roderick wishes to spend his final days with his only friend, which explains the narrator's presence. Roderick's twin sister, Madeline, is also suffering from this strange ailment. As a few days pass, Madeline dies, and Roderick and the narrator arrange for her burial. The week following this burial, Roderick's condition worsens, and he eventually realizes that he has mistakenly buried his sister alive. Madeline rises from her tomb, covered in blood and showing "evidence of some bitter struggle," and falls "heavily inward upon the person of her brother," killing both of them (Poe 245). After this occurrence, the narrator rushes out of the house in time to watch the building itself collapse.