



The Masque of the Red Death

Poe, Edgar Allan

Published: 1842

Categorie(s): Fiction, Horror, Short Stories

Source: <http://en.wikisource.org>

About Poe:

Edgar Allan Poe was an American poet, short story writer, playwright, editor, critic, essayist and one of the leaders of the American Romantic Movement. Best known for his tales of the macabre and mystery, Poe was one of the early American practitioners of the short story and a progenitor of detective fiction and crime fiction. He is also credited with contributing to the emergent science fiction genre. Poe died at the age of 40. The cause of his death is undetermined and has been attributed to alcohol, drugs, cholera, rabies, suicide (although likely to be mistaken with his suicide attempt in the previous year), tuberculosis, heart disease, brain congestion and other agents. Source: Wikipedia

Also available on Feedbooks for Poe:

- *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843)
- *The Raven* (1845)
- *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839)
- *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841)
- *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842)
- *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840)
- *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846)
- *The Black Cat* (1842)
- *The Purloined Letter* (1844)
- *A Descent into the Maelström* (1841)

Note: This book is brought to you by Feedbooks

<http://www.feedbooks.com>

Strictly for personal use, do not use this file for commercial purposes.

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avator and its seal — the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the "Red Death."

It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven — an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite.

These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example in blue — and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange — the fifth with white — the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet — a deep blood color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering

vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be sure that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fete; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm — much of what has been since seen in "Hernani." There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these — the dreams — writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away — they have endured but an instant — and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven, there are now none of the maskers who venture; for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appals; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulge in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments.

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at

length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled. And thus too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise — then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood — and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

"Who dares?" he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him — "who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him

and unmask him — that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise, from the battlements!"

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly — for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder, who, at the moment was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker. But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple — through the purple to the green — through the green to the orange — through this again to the white — and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry — and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of

the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

Loved this book ?
Similar users also downloaded

Edgar Allan Poe

The Pit and the Pendulum

"The Pit and the Pendulum" is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe and first published in 1842. The story is about the torments endured by a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition, though Poe skews historical facts. The narrator of the story is deemed guilty for an unnamed crime and put into a completely dark room. He passes out while trying to determine the size of the room. When he wakes up, he realizes there is a large, deep pit in the middle of the room. He loses consciousness again and awakens strapped on his back, unable to move more than his head. He soon realizes there is a large blade-like pendulum hanging above him, slowly getting closer to cutting through his chest. He finds a way to escape but the walls of his prison start to move and close in on him, pushing him closer and closer to falling into the pit.

The story is especially effective at inspiring fear in the reader because of its heavy focus on the senses, such as sound, emphasizing its reality, unlike many of Poe's stories which are aided by the supernatural. The traditional elements established in popular horror tales at the time are followed but critical reception has been mixed.

Edgar Allan Poe

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe published in Graham's Magazine in 1841. It has been claimed as the first detective story; Poe referred to it as one of his "tales of ratiocination". Similar works predate Poe's stories, including *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (1819) by E.T.A. Hoffmann and *Zadig* (1748) by Voltaire.

C. Auguste Dupin is a man in Paris who solves the mysterious brutal murder of two women. Numerous witnesses heard a suspect, though no one agrees on what language was spoken. At the murder scene, Dupin finds a hair that does not appear to be human.

As the first true detective in fiction, the Dupin character established many literary devices which would be used in future fictional detectives including Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Many later characters, for example, follow Poe's model of the

brilliant detective, his personal friend who serves as narrator, and the final revelation being presented before the reasoning that leads up to it. Dupin himself reappears in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter".

Edgar Allan Poe

The Cask of Amontillado

"The Cask of Amontillado" (sometimes spelled "The Casque of Amontillado") is a short story, written by Edgar Allan Poe and first published in the November 1846 issue of Godey's Lady's Book.

The story is set in a nameless Italian city in an unspecified year (possibly sometime during the eighteenth century) and concerns the deadly revenge taken by the narrator on a friend who he claims has insulted him. Like several of Poe's stories, and in keeping with the 19th-century fascination with the subject, the narrative revolves around a person being buried alive – in this case, by immurement.

Edgar Allan Poe

The Tell-Tale Heart

"The Tell-Tale Heart" is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe first published in 1843. It follows an unnamed narrator who insists on his sanity after murdering an old man with a "vulture eye". The murder is carefully calculated, and the murderer hides the body by cutting it into pieces and hiding it under the floorboards. Ultimately the narrator's guilt manifests itself in the hallucination that the man's heart is still beating under the floorboards.

It is unclear what relationship, if any, the old man and his murderer share. It has been suggested that the old man is a father figure or, perhaps, that his vulture eye represents some sort of veiled secret. The ambiguity and lack of details about the two main characters stand in stark contrast to the specific plot details leading up to the murder.

The story was first published in James Russell Lowell's *The Pioneer* in January 1843. "The Tell-Tale Heart" is widely considered a classic of the Gothic fiction genre and one of Poe's most famous short stories.

Edgar Allan Poe

The Fall of the House of Usher

The tale opens with the unnamed narrator arriving at the house of his friend, Roderick Usher, having received a letter from him in a

distant part of the country complaining of an illness and asking for his comfort.

Edgar Allan Poe

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque is a collection of previously-published short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, first published in 1840.

Edgar Allan Poe

The Black Cat

"The Black Cat" is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. It was first published in the August 19, 1843, edition of The Saturday Evening Post. It is a study of the psychology of guilt, often paired in analysis with Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart". In both, a murderer carefully conceals his crime and believes himself unassailable, but eventually breaks down and reveals himself, impelled by a nagging reminder of his guilt.

Edgar Allan Poe

The Purloined Letter

"The Purloined Letter" is a short story by American author Edgar Allan Poe. It is the third of his three detective stories featuring the fictional C. Auguste Dupin, the other two being "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". These stories are considered to be important early forerunners of the modern detective story. It first appeared in The Gift for 1845 (1844) and was soon reprinted in numerous journals and newspapers.

Edgar Allan Poe

The Raven

"The Raven" is a narrative poem by the American writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe. It was published for the first time on January 29, 1845, in the New York Evening Mirror. Noted for its musicality, stylized language and supernatural atmosphere, it tells of the mysterious visit of a talking raven to a distraught lover, tracing his slow descent into madness.

Edgar Allan Poe

A Descent into the Maelström

Inspired by the Moskstraumen, it is couched as a story within a story, a tale told at the summit of a mountain climb. The story is told by an old man who reveals that he only appears old - "You suppose me a very old man," he says, "but I am not. It took less than a single day to change these hairs from a jetty black to white, to weaken my limbs, and to unstring my nerves." The narrator,

convinced by the power of the whirlpools he sees in the ocean beyond, is then told of the "old" man's fishing trip with his two brothers a few years ago.



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind