



Edgar Allan Poe

(1809-1849)

Life and works

Born in Boston in 1809, Edgar Poe was the son of poor, itinerant actors. His father, who had the reputation of an alcoholic, left his family in 1810, and his mother died of consumption the following year. Edgar was brought up by the Allans, a childless couple, and after 1824 his full name became Edgar Allan Poe. After attending school, first in England and then in the States, he went to the University of Virginia in 1826. Once there, he ran into **debt** by gambling and when the Allans refused to pay, he left for Boston, where he published his first collections of **poems**. These works attracted little attention and brought him no money, so he decided to **join the army**. Mr Allan helped him to enter the military academy of West Point, where he remained only seven months. He then moved to Baltimore where his aunt, Maria Clemm, lived. He fell in love with his **cousin Virginia**, whose pale and fragile beauty, and childlike character embodied the morbid ideal Poe celebrated in his poems. They married in 1836, when Virginia was 13 and he was 27.

The years that followed were very productive: in 1838 he published his only novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*; in 1840 appeared his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, followed in 1845 by another collection of *Tales*, the poem *The Raven*, which made him famous throughout the country, and, in 1846, by *The Philosophy of Composition*, the essay containing his aesthetic theories. Virginia died in 1847 and Poe's health declined rapidly owing to his **alcoholism**. In 1849 he was found in Baltimore, lying unconscious in the street, and a few days later he died.

Poe's reputation in America was spoilt by **accusations of perversion, alcoholism and drug addiction**. It was the French poet Charles **Baudelaire** (1821-67) who increased **European appreciation** of Poe's work with his remarkable translations of his tales. The French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-98), who translated Poe's poems into French, was influenced by him and regarded him as a forerunner of the Symbolist movement. Poe's main contribution to literature, however, was in the field of the **short story** (→ 4.8), where he also began the popular genre of the detective story.

Poe's creative spirit

Poe thought that **art** was the only method to give order to the shapeless world. He saw the human self as divided into intellect, conscience and soul. The first was concerned with truth, the second with duty and the third with beauty. Since **poetry** was a means to the discovery of **beauty**, it had nothing to do with truth or morals. Poe spoke up for beauty in an age when poets liked to instruct and identified the most suitable tone for poetry with sadness and melancholy.

Poe's tales

His tales can be divided into **two groups**. The first group are the '**tales of ratiocination or detection**', that exerted great influence on the development of the **detective story**. Poe created a private detective, Monsieur Dupin, who is aristocratic, arrogant, eccentric but extremely rational. Dupin solves crimes by his capacity of logical reasoning and his power of psychological analysis, which enables him to interpret the thoughts of others even from their gestures. Thus, knowledge based on the **deductive method**, rather than the plot itself, is at the heart of the detective story. Poe paved the way for the future writers of detective stories, like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and Agatha Christie (1890-1976), who drew on his model to create their successful detectives.

The second group are the '**tales of imagination**', where, despite using some conventional **Gothic elements**, Poe went beyond the Gothic tradition to write stories where the '**horror**' does not come from the outside, but **from inside** the self.

Setting and characters

A distinctive feature of Poe's stories is a **closed setting**: his characters are rarely seen in daylight; they often live confined in a small place, some are walled into cellars, others are buried prematurely. The explanation of such aberrations can be found in **madness**, which for Poe was almost an aspect of a higher awareness. All of his most memorable **characters** withdraw from the conventional aspects of life to cultivate a life of their own, so cut off from the world that they **lose contact with reality**. In this condition they develop an exceptional acuteness of the senses and lose their sanity, and often their lives, as a result of expanded consciousness.

Themes

Among the most common themes of the tales is that of '**perverseness**', that impulse to annihilation which rules the dark side of human behaviour and that Poe believed to be hidden in every material and spiritual portion of the universe. In Poe's stories morality is the tension between the creativity of his narrators and the perverse impulse to dissolution that leads them to act as they should not act and to confess their crimes at the end. So conscience becomes the most powerful agent of the perverse because it betrays the self by revealing its deepest secrets. Other themes are the **fusion of beauty and death, of creation and destruction**, and the theme of the **double** which anticipates the modern idea of 'split personality'. Poe was also attracted to **death**: he was aware that man's fear of death is mainly linked to the fate of decay of the body after it stops breathing. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, for example, the narrator's punishment is brought about by the incessant beating of the heart of the man he has killed.

**Style**

Almost all tales are narrated in the **first person**, thus becoming **long interior monologues** which describe a great variety of moods and sensations: sadness, sense of

guilt, claustrophobia, deviation, fear, hatred and desire. Movement is not given by the development of a series of images, each independent of the others, but by the relationship between **cause and effect**.

Key idea**The single effect**

Edgar Allan Poe wrote remarkable short stories (→ *The Black Cat*) in which the world of the imagination coexists with the analytical spirit of reason; he was also the first theorist on the genre. In *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846) he explained his approach: the first principle was brevity; secondly, the story should be read in a single sitting so that the external world could not distract the reader from the unity of the

work. The characters should be shown at some revealing moments of crisis rather than while developing and maturing. The setting was often simplified or circumscribed and the skill of the writer was devoted to rendering atmosphere and situation convincingly. Poe often used the 'single effect', a keynote – a person or an object – to arouse the reader's curiosity and interest.

COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION**1 READ** the first paragraph on page 1 and complete Edgar Allan Poe's ID.

FAMILY:
 EDUCATION:
 EARLY JOB EXPERIENCES:
 MARRIAGE:
 LITERARY CAREER:
 DEATH:
 REPUTATION:

2 READ the rest of the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 What was art for Poe?
- 2 How did he conceive of the human self?
- 3 How are Poe's tales classified and why?
- 4 Where did Poe usually set his stories?
- 5 What is the theme of 'perverseness'?
- 6 How are Poe's stories narrated?
- 7 What were the principles of the short story, according to Poe?
- 8 What was the 'single effect'?



The Black Cat

One of Poe's most impressive stories, The Black Cat is about a man whose behaviour degenerates because of drinking. A black cat haunts him, reminding him of his crime, and finally contributes to his end.

Edgar Allan Poe
*Tales of the Grotesque
and the Arabesque*
(1840)

For the most wild, yet most homely¹ narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not – and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen² my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household³ events. In their consequences, these events have terrified – have tortured – have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound⁴ them. To me, they have presented little but Horror – to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*⁵. Hereafter⁶, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place – some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe⁷, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest⁸ of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged⁹ by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious⁹ dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute¹⁰, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry¹¹ friendship and gossamer¹² fidelity of mere *Man*.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a *cat*.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point – and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto – this was the cat's name – was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character – through the instrumentality of the Fiend¹³ Intemperance – had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself¹⁴ to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me¹⁵ from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me – for what disease is like Alcohol! – and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish¹⁶ – even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

1 homely. Che parla di cose familiari.

2 unburthen. Alleggerire.

3 household. Comuni, domestici.

4 expound. Esporre, spiegare.

5 baroques. Bizzarri.

6 Hereafter. In seguito.

7 awe. Timore, sgomento.

8 jest. Zimbello.

9 sagacious. Intelligente.

10 brute. Bestia.

11 paltry. Meschina, gretta.

12 gossamer. Tenue.

13 Fiend. Lett.: demonio, qui: diabolica.

14 I suffered myself. Mi permisi.

15 restrain me. Trattenermi.

16 peevish. Irritabile.



One night, returning home, much intoxicated¹⁷, from one of my haunts¹⁸ about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured¹⁹, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket²⁰! I blush, I burn, I shudder²¹, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning – when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch²² – I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged²³ into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed²⁴.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow²⁵, the spirit of Perverseness. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart – one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of²⁶ our best judgement, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing²⁷ of the soul *to vex itself*²⁸ – to offer violence to its own nature – to do wrong for the wrong's sake only – that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose²⁹ about its neck and hung it to the limb³⁰ of a tree; – hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart; – hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offence; – hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin – a deadly sin that would so jeopardize³¹ my immortal soul as to place it – if such a thing were possible – even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing³². It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up³³, and I resigned myself thenceforward³⁴ to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts – and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering³⁵ had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire – a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words 'strange!' 'singular!' and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven³⁶ in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

17 intoxicated. Ubriaco.

18 haunts. Covi, luoghi di ritrovo.

19 gin-nurtured. Alimentata dal gin.

20 socket. Cavità oculare, orbita.

21 I shudder. Rabbividisco.

22 debauch. Gozzoviglia.

23 plunged. Mi immersi.

24 deed. Fatto, azione.

25 overthrow. Caduta.

26 in the teeth of. Nonostante, a dispetto di.

27 unfathomable longing. Desiderio insondabile.

28 to vex itself. Di tormentare se stessa.

29 I slipped a noose. Infilai un cappio.

30 limb. Ramo.

31 jeopardize. Messo a repentaglio.

32 blazing. In fiamme.

33 swallowed up. Inghiottita.

34 thenceforward. Da allora in poi.

35 plastering. Intonaco.

36 graven. Scolpito.



When I first beheld this apparition – for I could scarcely regard it as less – my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd – by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime³⁷ of which, with the flames, and the *ammonia* from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling³⁸ fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile³⁹ haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupefied, in a den⁴⁰ of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads⁴¹ of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat – a very large one – fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch⁴² of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred⁴³ loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase⁴⁴ it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it – knew nothing of it – had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and, when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced⁴⁵ a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting⁴⁶ it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favourite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but I know not how or why it was – its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred⁴⁷. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually – very gradually – I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing⁴⁸, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity⁴⁹ which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch⁵⁰ beneath my chair, or spring⁵¹ upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws⁵² in my dress, clamber⁵³, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld⁵⁴ from so doing, partly by a memory

37 lime. Calce.

38 startling. Sorprendente.

39 vile. Ignobili.

40 den. Tana, topaia.

41 hogsheads. Botti, barili.

42 splotch. Chiazza.

43 purred. Fece le fusa.

44 purchase. Acquistare.

45 evinced. Manifestò.

46 stooping and patting. Piegandomi ed accarezzandolo.

47 hatred. Odio.

48 unutterable loathing. Inesprimibile ripugnanza.

49 pertinacity. Ostinazione.

50 would crouch. Si rannicchiava, si acciambellava.

51 spring. Saltava.

52 fastening ... claws. Attaccando i suoi lunghi e affilati artigli.

53 clamber. Si arrampicava.

54 withheld. Trattenuto.



of my former crime, but chiefly – let me confess it at once – by absolute *dread*⁵⁵ of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil – and yet I should be at a loss
160 how otherwise to define it⁵⁶. I am almost ashamed to own⁵⁷ – yes, even in this felon's
cell⁵⁸, I am almost ashamed to own – that the terror and horror with which the animal
inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimaeras it would be possible
to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the
mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible
165 difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will
remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by
slow degrees – degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my reason
struggled to reject as fanciful – it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of
outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name – and for
170 this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself⁵⁹ of the monster
had I dared – it was now, I say, the image of a hideous⁶⁰ – of a ghastly⁶¹ thing – of the
Gallows⁶²! – oh, mournful⁶³ and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime – of Agony and
of Death!

And now was I indeed wretched⁶⁴ beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity.
175 And *a brute beast* – whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed – *a brute beast* to
work out⁶⁵ for *me* – for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God – so much
of insufferable wo⁶⁶! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any
more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I
started⁶⁷, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of *the thing*
180 upon my face, and its vast weight – an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to
shake off – incumbent eternally upon my *heart*!

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good
within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates – the darkest and most
evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things
185 and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a
fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the
most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand⁶⁸, into the cellar of the
old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the
190 steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting
an axe⁶⁹, and forgetting, in my wrath⁷⁰, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed⁷¹
my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly
fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife.
Goaded⁷², by the interference, into a range more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm
195 from her grasp⁷³ and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a
groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith⁷⁴, and with entire
deliberation to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it
from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the
200 neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the
corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig
a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well⁷⁵
in the yard – about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements,
and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered
205 a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up⁷⁶ in the cellar – as
the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely⁷⁷
constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the
dampness⁷⁸ of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of
210 the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled

55 *dread*. Terrore.

56 *I should ... it*. Non riuscirei a definirlo altrimenti.

57 *to own*. Ammettere, riconoscere.

58 *felon's cell*. Cella di criminale.

59 *would have rid myself*. Mi sarei liberato.

60 *hideous*. Spaventosa.

61 *ghastly*. Agghiacciante.

62 *Gallows*. Forca.

63 *mournful*. Triste.

64 *wretched*. Miserabile.

65 *work out*. Essere causa di.

66 *wo*. Dolore.

67 *I started*. Sobbalzavo.

68 *errand*. Commissione.

69 *Uplifting an axe*. Sollevando un'ascia.

70 *wrath*. Ira.

71 *stayed*. Trattenuto.

72 *Goaded*. Spinto, spronato.

73 *grasp*. Presa.

74 *I ... forthwith*. Mi accinsi.

75 *casting it in the well*. Gettarlo nel pozzo.

76 *to wall it up*. Di murarlo.

77 *loosely*. In modo sconnesso.

78 *dampness*. Umidità.



up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crowbar⁷⁹ I easily
215 dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped⁸⁰ it in that position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar⁸¹, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brick-work. When I had finished, I felt
220 satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself – ‘Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain.’

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much
225 wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty⁸² animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to⁸³ present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful⁸⁴ sense of relief which the absence of the detested
230 creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night – and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, *slept* even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a free-man. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises⁸⁵ forever! I should
235 behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted – but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very
240 unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook⁸⁶ or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered⁸⁷ not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of
245 one who slumbers⁸⁸ in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

250 ‘Gentlemen,’ I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, ‘I delight to have allayed⁸⁹ your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this – this is a very well constructed house.’ [In the rabid⁹⁰ desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.] – ‘I may say an *excellently* well constructed house. These walls – are you going, gentlemen? – these walls are solidly put together;’
255 and here, through the mere frenzy of bravado⁹¹, I rapped⁹² heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs⁹³ of the Arch-Fiend⁹⁴! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice
260 from within the tomb! – by a cry, at first muffled⁹⁵ and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman – a howl⁹⁶ – a wailing shriek⁹⁷, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

79 crowbar. Piede di porco.

80 propped. Puntellai.

81 mortar. Malta.

82 crafty. Furbo.

83 forebore to. Si tratteneva dal.

84 blissful. Beato.

85 premises. Edificio.

86 nook. Angolo.

87 quivered. Tremai.

88 slumbers. Dorme, sonnecchia.

89 allayed. Placato.

90 rabid. Lett.: furibondo; qui: intenso, forte.

91 frenzy of bravado. Impeto di spavalderia.

92 rapped. Picchiai.

93 fangs. Zanne, denti.

94 Arch-Fiend. Arcidiavolo, Satana.

95 muffled. Soffocato.

96 howl. Urlo.

97 wailing shriek. Strillo lamentoso.



265 Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning⁹⁸, I staggered⁹⁹ to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling¹⁰⁰ at the wall. It fell bodily¹⁰¹. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore¹⁰², stood erect before the eyes of the spectator. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary
270 eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft¹⁰³ had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman¹⁰⁴. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!

-
- 98 **Swooning**. Svenendo.
99 **I staggered**. Barcollai.
100 **toiling**. Lavorando.
101 **bodily**. Completamente.
102 **clotted with gore**. Con chiazze di sangue coagulato.
103 **craft**. Astuzia.
104 **hangman**. Boia.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ lines 1-40 and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 distinctive characteristic | 6 clearly |
| 2 stop, avoid | 7 indifferent |
| 3 unimportant | 8 felt |
| 4 infused | 9 satisfied, gratified |
| 5 accompanied | 10 with a different appearance |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ up to line 13 and answer the following questions.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 What kind of story is the narrator going to tell? | 3 What does he say about his future? |
| 2 What is his present situation? | 4 Why does he want to tell the story? |

3 READ up to line 36 and complete the following pieces of information about the narrator.

- Since he was a child he was
- His friends used to
- He liked
- He was pleased with
- His wife shared his
- Among his pets there was a who was his and whose name was

4 READ up to line 61.

- Write down the changes in the narrator's character.
- Ring the causes for this radical change.
- Say in your own words what the narrator did to Pluto one night, how he did it, and how he felt afterwards.

5 READ up to line 84.

- The narrator introduces the 'spirit of Perverseness'. What definition do you get from his explanation? Tick as appropriate.
 - ☐ It is the pleasure to inflict pain upon oneself through violence.
 - ☐ It is a human instinct to do wrong for evil's sake.
- Focus on what the narrator did 'one morning'.
Deed: → Reactions: → Reasons:

6 READ up to line 111. Summarise what happened and the explanation the narrator tries to find.



1 Note down

- A where the narrator saw the cat;
- B how he perceived it;
- C what it was like.

2 Fill in the following table with the narrator's actions and the cat's reactions.

Narrator's actions	Cat's reactions

- 1 Identify the cause of the narrator's fear.
- 2 List the consequences of his state of mind.
- 3 Fill in the details of the murder.

Place:

Victim: _____

Weapon:

Reason: _____

10 READ up to line 264 and decide whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

1 The narrator decided to place his wife's body in the fireplace and then wall it up. **T F**

2 He was so accurate in his work that the wall did not show up any recent brick-work. **T F**

3 The narrator felt a sense of hopelessness when he could not find the cat. **T F**

4 He could not sleep because of his sense of guilt. **T F**

5 The police were convinced of the narrator's innocence. **T F**

6 When the narrator hit the wall with a cane, a child's voice answered him. **T F**

➤ COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

- ☐ Dialogue.
- ☐ Description.
- ☐ Narration.

**13 ANSWER** the following questions about the narrator.

- 1 What kind of narrator is it?
- 2 Is he given a name?
- 3 Is he described physically?
- 4 What do you think the effect achieved is?
- 5 What adjectives would you use to describe the narrator's personality?

14 WITHIN the narrative time, that is, the duration of the actions described in the story, there are frequent shifts from the time of narration (i.e. the time of the narrator's actions, feelings and thoughts at the moment of narrating the story) to the narrated time (i.e. the time of the narrator's past actions, feelings and thoughts). Identify the lines related to the time of narration and those concerning the narrated time. Fill in the table below.

Time of narration	Narrated time

15 FOCUS on the setting and the way the author conveys it.

Time of narration →

Narrated time →

- 1 Are the places described in detail or just hinted at?
- 2 To what effect?

16 SAY what characters, besides the narrator, appear in the story. Which is given more relevance? How?**17 DECIDE** what devices the narrator uses to communicate his feelings and thoughts. Choose from among the following and provide at least an example for each.

inversion

exclamation

capitalised words

onomatopoeia

metaphor

words in italics

repetition

alliteration

allegory

18 DEFINE the language used. Tick as appropriate.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highly figurative. | <input type="checkbox"/> Obsessive. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete. | <input type="checkbox"/> Meticulous. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaic. | <input type="checkbox"/> Abstract. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lucidly rational. | <input type="checkbox"/> Vivid. |

19 WORK out the symbolical meaning/s for each of the following details.

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1 The black cat; | 5 the name Pluto; |
| 2 the cat's eye; | 6 the barrel of gin; |
| 3 the second cat; | 7 the white spot; |
| 4 the cellar; | 8 the cat's scream. |

20 REFLECT on the way each theme is dealt with in the story: cruelty; guilt; confinement; descent into the self; madness; anguish; the double; terror/horror.**> COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE****21 DISCUSS.** Poe's works have been widely translated and are still read all over the world. Why do you think the 'spirit of Perverseness' appeals to the public so much? Can you provide some examples of contemporary 'horror' in literature or films?