

# *The Great Problem Is At Length Solved!\**

---

an interview with edgar allan poe

By Peter A. Wright

Advisor: Ellen Lesser  
Winter-Spring 2013

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program at  
Vermont College of Fine Arts

Edgar Allan Poe's final poem, "The Bells," was published a month after his death in October, 1849, yet his relevance more than a century and a half later cannot be refuted. Dozens of his stories have been turned into films, television programs, and stage productions. Most recently, Chicago Opera Theatre adapted "The Fall of the House of Usher," which opened in February, 2013, and Chicago's Chopin Theatre staged a live performance of the same tale in September, 2012. Poe's stories have been interpreted by musicians from Britney Spears in her *Dream Within a Dream* tour in 2001 to Blues Traveler, whose 1994 song, "Run-Around," begins with Poe's most famous line from "The Raven": "Once upon a midnight dreary," (Poe "The Raven," 72) to heavy metal bands like Iron Maiden, whose song, "Murders in the Rue Morgue," released in the Eighties, twists the plot by replacing the orangutan with the unnamed narrator, [C. August Dupin], as the murderer with the line: "Well I've got to say I've done it before." (Iron Maiden, "Murders in the Rue Morgue") These performances not only further Poe's legacy, they keep his writings alive and vibrant by inspiring artists to craft their art through his creations. His lure crosses international borders as his stories are introduced to generation after generation of school children as a stepping stone to classic literature. Beyond his refusal to be dismissed as outmoded even this long after his death, Poe's simple yet profound theory of "Unity of Effect" (Poe, "Philosophy of Composition," 980) has influenced countless writers by directing them to focus on what matters in their stories; to ensure everything contained within a piece pertains to its singular purpose.

My struggles have been with the "Why," and not only on the level of Story. My issues with writing fiction drill even deeper into the question of "Why do I write?" Yes, I've been writing stories since the fifth grade, but it wasn't until I matured that I

questioned why my stories needed to be told and, more specifically, why I needed to tell the particular stories I'm drawn to writing. I sought insight into this monumentally significant question the way writers of the early twentieth century did: by reading what other writers had already written and attempting to write like them until I developed my own style. I looked to great writers for clues into why they wrote what they wrote. Lord Byron once said: "If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad." (Byron, "Letter 404. To Mr. Moore," 113) Richard Bausch simply stated: "That needed to be a story." Daily life in Cuba moved Achy Obejas so much she had to write *Ruins*. I sought an author as a mentor to learn how he did what he did that made his stories so compelling. I then went a step further and chose a master who had not only learned the rules of the game, but had invented several throughout his career.

I extended an invitation to Mr. Poe for a drink. Our discussion took many twists and turns for, when he gets excited, Mr. Poe tends to convey a lot of information, and when he is suspicious his habit of withdrawing into himself to elude answering is frustrating if not infuriating. What follows, then, is my interview with the great Edgar Allan Poe in my home, but on his terms.

PETER A. WRIGHT: Welcome, Mr. Poe. I am very pleased you decided to appear at my humble request. Please, sir, have a seat.

*Mr. Poe is elegantly dressed with a white shirt beneath a black wool waistcoat, of which only the upper buttons are fastened, making his jacket resemble a cape. His white cravat intimates a noose when the sunlight, through the picture window behind me, is blocked by tree branches and casts shadows that crawl into the wrinkles of the bound*

*cloth round his neck. His pants and shoes are also black. He stands in my dining room whose sole side window looks out upon a brick wall. Between us are two partially closed pocket doors that separate the main rooms in my apartment. Poe's prominent brow wrinkles and relaxes and tenses again. His eyes are afire with fear and delight. He sits on a high-backed wooden chair at my octagonal dining room table.*

WRIGHT: How are you feeling? You must have had quite a journey.

*Poe looks at me with a sadness so profound I am nearly entombed by loss.*

WRIGHT: You may sit anywhere you like, sir. Would you prefer a more comfortable seat, like this cushioned armchair?

*Poe's eyes dart to the tanned leather chair. He lowers his gaze to the amber-colored floor whose wide planks were milled in the same century in which he lived. He raises his gaze as though a former lover's finger were placed beneath his narrow chin. He shakes his head.*

WRIGHT: All right. Then how about I begin using one of your own devices when telling a story? That is, let's begin at the ending, as you yourself have said. So, first I must ask, how is it that the clothes you wore while dying –

EDGAR ALLAN POE: No.

*He says this demurely, politely. As if the volume of his voice can shatter the illusion of his surroundings. Indeed, he does look round him at the picture window behind my back, at the gas fireplace occupying one wall of my small living room, at the intricately woven rug covering the middle of the floor. Finally, he seems satisfied that, for the moment at least, this world seems intact.*

POE: What I said, I believe, was [Italics Poe] “Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *denouement* before anything be attempted with the pen.” (Poe, “Philosophy of Composition,” 978) Yes, I believe those are my exact words.

*He frowns and scratches at his mustache. He halts and looks at his palm, wriggling his fingers as if surprised to be embodied. A thought flashes through his eyes, and I can almost hear his words.*

POE: What I mean is that an author must always keep in mind the effect he is seeking to convey to his reader. I asked myself, for almost every tale I wrote as I expanded my experience as a writer, to what purpose am I writing? Am I seeking to involve the heart, the soul, or the mind with my plot? Once I have determined whether to engage the emotional, the spiritual, or the intellectual, I must then choose again. I must decide whether I am to explore my effect through either incident or tone. Questions, yes. I know. I see on your face, your inquisitive upturned brow, the pained look in your eye that this is not how you have gone about telling your stories. Is this not true? No. Do not reply, for to answer would be to give credence to whatever method you have chosen to this date. I will, however, decipher your particular affliction so as to bring it into being in my words and – oh my.

See how my arm waved almost of itself? I’d forgotten. I have forgotten so much. This plane is very flat; three-dimensional, yes, but flat. Oh, how I’ve missed movement and, atop that, physicality – on another plane, as it were. That marvelous ability to describe the movements of my characters, for it is through action that a character deceives only himself, because what he does conveys to the reader what he knows, and

what he is hiding. Would that I were a character in a fictional world – which I most assuredly am not – I would describe myself and my actions orally. That is, I will tell you what I am doing as if you are reading this and unable to see that I am now pacing the rug before your hearth and occasionally flipping the switch that ignites fire in the grate below then just as quickly extinguishes said flames. What a clever idea!

Now, let us perform an exercise to establish the root of your affliction. What say we compose a story about an aspect of my life heretofore unexplained to those few who understood the import of my works? What would be your narrative?

WRIGHT: Wow, Mr. Poe. That’s an enormous opportunity. While I ponder my answer would you care to reveal exactly how you died?

POE: That is it right there! I am pointing at you with the import of a detective seizing upon the most damning element a criminal has left carelessly behind. You, sir, are seized with the notion of Incident. Ergo, your vision of the death of a master poet is focused on the ‘What.’ What do you see? That is rarely a good place to begin a story. No, Mr. Wright, I say as I outstretch my palm to you in firm rebuttal. You must ask yourself but one question before the writing of a story, and that question is simple: “Why must this story be told?”

*It is my turn for incredulity, yet I am unable to ruminate on this as Mr. Poe virtually leaps behind the chair I offered a moment ago and speaks as if he realizes his time is limited. I glance furtively at the round analog clock on the mantel and see both hands point straight up.*

POE: Observe then, how I stand behind this leather armchair and use it as a pulpit from which to offer my insights into the craft of writing. If I were to ask you to explain

the process by which you are writing your current tale, would you be able to tell me without using words such as ‘inspiration,’ ‘intuition,’ ‘happenstance,’ or ‘luck?’ I see by the shaking of your unnecessarily long hair that you could not even come close to how you arrived at your current draft without using at least a relative of one of those nouns.

*Mr. Poe’s eyes gleam with a pleasant intensity that is completely at odds with the histories I have read about his somber tenor and depressing demeanor.*

Allow me to tell you why: You begin your stories with an idea, a situation, or an event. Good beginnings, all. But not enough for you to complete your manuscript without putting it down for a little while or, at best, running “pell-mell, [with ideas that are] pursued and forgotten in a similar manner” (Poe, 979) through your telling and retelling of a story. Whereas I approach such a query differently. “I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor, at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions...” (Poe, 979) It is not I who struggles through beginning after rejected beginning, draft after draft, all the while trying to discover what I want to say and how I want to say it with no idea as to its conclusion and thus confuse both myself and the characters in my story. “It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.” (Poe, 979)

*Mr. Poe walks round the chair, flips on the fireplace like he’s played with fire a thousand times, and sits beside me on the leather couch. His presence prickles my skin yet swells my heart. His proximity allows me to see beyond the sadness in his eyes eternally belied by his photographs and portraits into the emotions roiling in his mind*

*that are not those of a madman, but of a man whose genius was recognizable only to himself and his elite peers, and unheralded to the point of near-absolute destruction by his enemies.*

POE: You are thinking: ‘Why are you telling me this? Writing is not math! I already know how to plot a story before I write it.’ Indeed, sir. You most likely imagine you do know how to plot your tales before you write them, but are you aware of what all I have just described to you? For if you have examined the effect you wish a reader – your reader – to experience and to what aspect of man you wish to influence – the heart, soul, or intellect – only then do you have the meager beginnings of story.

Let us say, for example, that you wish to tell the tale of a dying poet. Up to this point in your writing career, you have begun your story with a fact: A poet is on death’s doorstep. What does that give you? What effect are you seeking from your tale? Now, now, sir. Do not let your eyes glaze over as your mind wrestles with so plebeian a question. Come, pour us a drink, and I will explain my philosophy.

*I gesture to the open bottle of whiskey and twin crystal glasses on the table.*

We have established “the circumstance – or say the necessity – which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing a [tale] that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste. ¶ We commence then with the intention:” (Poe, 979) A poet is dying. Let us retreat and determine what effect we are seeking to convey. Death is a sadness visited upon man. I know all too well to where the Reaper directs; and yet while living I experienced far too often for a mortal man the excruciation of a loved one’s passing. Yet, I argue, in Sadness there exists Beauty. [Emphasis mine, italics Poe] “Regarding, then, **Beauty** as my province, my next question referred me to the tone of its

highest manifestation – and all experience has shown this tone is one of *sadness*. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.” (Poe, 981)

So we have sadness. And we have beauty in this sadness. What effect can you glean from the impoverished poet lying on the cobblestones? Please remember, sir, we are striving for a “unity of effect” (Poe, 980) with this piece. The story shall neither be too short not too long. Every element contained within is seeking to embody this unity. Can the circumstances allow for a sunny, brightly lit morning upon which the poet’s dying self is found, or do the elements have to contribute in any, nay, in every way they can to the effect we strive to convey? Yes. You are nodding. You are understanding, or beginning to discern how this works. And we have yet to write one word on the page. Not one drop of ink has been wasted in our efforts, and look how far we have come! So, then, what is our initial tableau? What does the reader see?

WRIGHT: Mr. Poe, sir. What I need to know is why you wrote your stories. That is what I need to learn.

*He pauses. He walks across the small room to the table and lifts a clear glass of brown whiskey to his lips. His eyes mist with a familiar heat apparently long denied when the elixir washes over his tongue. He impatiently waves his hand as if telling me to ignore my question and answer his.*

*I shrug.*

WRIGHT: The time is early morning. The sun wouldn’t be up yet. It is October, so the fall leaves coat the cobblestones. No, the cobblestones are wet from a cold overnight rain, as are the leaves. The leaves are soaked, pliable. They cover the

windowsills like the browned carcasses of lace doilies. The air is chilly. Passersby wear coats buttoned to their necks. Their hands are in their pockets. Many wear hats. We see the poet lying face down on the cobblestones. His clothes are soaked through. He is gaunt. His face is drawn as if he has forgotten the taste of happiness. His vacant gaze takes in a storefront where a boy sweeps leaves into the gutter.

*Poe is standing at the far end of the sofa on which I sit. He peers through the window at the cars parked at the curb. His brows furrow then rise when he sees the cobblestone alley across the street. He smiles as if comfortable in the knowledge that something of familiarity still exists to welcome him to this strange time. And yet, he simultaneously appears vexed as though the presence of something from his time disturbs him for reasons I cannot comprehend.*

POE: That is a fair beginning. Personally I don't see why a doily would be on a windowsill or how it has earned a position within our unity of effect, but we are only envisioning how the story will begin –

*Mr. Poe's index finger creates a cleft in his chin.*

Perhaps, removing the metaphor entirely and leaving the sentence as 'The brown carcasses of leaves covered the dank windowsills.' Ah, well, we have yet to employ ink to our musings. We can improve upon that anon. Let us consider the tone of the piece. What element would inspire the sadness that arises from death? And here, we must make another choice. How are we viewing the poet's death throes? Is he a célébrité? How could he be if the moments leading to his demise included lying in the street like a beggar? Even paupers have a roof over their heads when breathing their last. Now, say instead of wet leaves – an excellent image by the way – have the boy sweeping trash

from the storefront. Instead of pushing the detritus into the gutter, have him direct it toward the dying fool. Do you see where I am headed with this effect? Yes, I see you are nodding your head. Light is beginning to illumine the dark crevices of your mind. Let us continue. Be a good man and refill my glass.

While I was constructing my most well-known poem, “I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem – some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn.” (Poe, 981) Upon which pivot may our story turn? No, we are not to name the tale yet. We have but mere wisps of a story. Have you learned nothing? We have no idea even of the story’s denouement! How can we be so brash as to label something without first knowing what it is we have? Ah, yes. You were the Master of Revision. Note my use of tense. Surely you know enough about English to recognize tense? Which to work on first: the pivotal point, or the denouement? Very good. Let us envision the ending of our tale and work backwards to identify our pivotal moment or action.

The denouement is the single most important aspect of story for it is the image that lingers in the reader’s mind upon completion of the tale. In “The Cask of Amontillado,” the final sentences are Montresor remembering what must be bones after his live burial of Fortunato: “For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!” (Poe, “The Cask of Amontillado,” 671) Montresor has vanquished his enemy and has eluded blame for the murder, if not guilt.

How then should our tale of the feckless poet end? Should he die on the street like a rabid cur, or be moved to hospital where medical care is available but impotent?

WRIGHT: How about we let the ultimate ending be a mystery, akin to your story “The Fall of the House of Usher?” We, your readers, know how the story ends – with the collapse of the house on the bodies of Roderick and Madeline – but we aren’t given the reasons why Roderick buried his sister alive or why he succumbed to the insanity as if maggots were eating his mind from the inside out.

*Mr. Poe collapses onto the far side of the couch.*

POE: That tale may well have been one of my least favorites, if not my most successful incorporation of unity of effect. I endured the slanderous accusations that my marriage was the origin of that story, yet I still believe Roderick to be my most complete protagonist, even as his mind impelled him against himself, against his family for whom he had only love. But I digress. The story’s ending had a simple reason for happening: once the pillars of the home had lost all sense of the persons they once were, of who they had been their entire lives, the structure could no longer stand erect. The building had to collapse and thus entomb its inhabitants within its remains. The mysterious ending of the poet’s story which you suggest has no legs to withstand the arguments of even the weakest critic.

*He pauses here as if he has an individual in mind.*

No, sir. A suitable ending must be crafted if we are to identify the pivotal moment.

WRIGHT: What if, to protect the poet’s reputation from scandal, the friends and family summoned to the hospital decide to shroud the poet’s death in mystery and thus elevate his status after death?

POE: I do not think you are so foolish, sir, as to believe a person on his deathbed could concoct such a scheme and have it carried out by others who shall always remain uninvolved, or uninterested in such an audacious attempt.

WRIGHT: Lord Byron died from a fever. I consider the idea well within the realm of possibility for the poet to imagine a similar ending, especially when he was such an ardent fan of Byron's.

POE: Nevertheless! A different ending would prove more advantageous to our dear poet's crisis. Have you any other theories?

WRIGHT: What if the poet had gone mad? He had lost all that was dear to him and, at the whim of one with money in his pocket after such prolonged destitution, he celebrated his impending success too heartily.

POE: Yes, yes. Continue.

WRIGHT: The poet thus believed in his heart that his drinking had once again severed his connection with the woman with whom he had fallen in love in his youth. The poet may have been so devastated that he had performed such an idiotic deed that he sought to remove any possible connection with himself. He knew, as few others will ever know, that the Reaper stood in his shadows awaiting him. The poet then gave in to madness. His mind shrieked inside his cranium with such volume he couldn't believe no one else heard. Like the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the poet succumbed to his own hallucination. The more he drank surrounded by fellows at the tavern the more he thought his daemons: "... grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! – no, no! They heard! – they

suspected! – they knew! – they were making a mockery of [his] horror!” (Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” 448)

For every scream only he heard, the poet “drank of a glass of *big* whiskey (I believe this was his favorite tippie)” (*The Poe Log*, 689) until, lost in intoxication, he finally released his grip on this plane and freed his mind from its corporeal confinement. In his lunatic condition, the poet swapped his clothes with a beggar, perhaps out of guilt, shame, or in a vain attempt at pleasing a punishing deity. His money wasted, he physically ran from the pub until his besotted brain turned out his lights, as it were, and he collapsed on the cobblestone street where he was found and transported to a poor man’s hospital then, once his identity was established, to a higher quality institution where he babbled incoherently until his mind convinced his heart there was no reason to continue beating.

POE: That is an interesting ending you have concocted. Extremely dismal, I might add. Does your opening tableau fit in with this ending?

WRIGHT: Yes, I believe it does. No, wait. I have to change the opening scene for the poet dying on the cobblestones is only an image in the story. It won’t serve as the pivotal moment for the story because the poet’s preceding actions led him to that spot where he lay on the street in front of the boy sweeping the storefront.

POE: You might perhaps include that information as backstory which you may explore in the poet’s mind as he lay dying.

WRIGHT: I didn’t think you were a fan of backstory.

POE: I do not particularly believe in heavy-handed backstory; however, a few select inclusions can provide enough information to satisfy a curious reader without

interrupting the story's trajectory. This time flow, as it were, retains the reader's attention while also giving credence and weight to the tale at hand. Again, there must be the right amount – not too much nor too little – backstory to achieve the maximum unity of effect. For instance –

WRIGHT: Excuse me, sir. Let me take a crack at this. In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the second and fourth paragraphs are backstory. The opening paragraph begins in the present with this line: “True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am! But why will you say that I am mad?” (Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart,” 445) This is an excellent pivotal moment – again, right in the opening line of the story. The reader is in the story right away! The paragraph concludes five sentences later with the line: “Hearken! and observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story.” (Poe, 445) This smooth shift introduces the backstory, and blatantly includes how the madman arrived at the present moment as part of the story.

This backstory is introduced in the second paragraph which contains ten sentences. The first sentence contains twenty-one words: “It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night.” (Poe, 445) What follows is a splendid orchestration of sentences, constructed in an intricate pattern. The paragraph's second and third sentences contain four words each and establish the narrator's confusion while both finish with a negative that echoes the story's effect: [Underline mine] “Object there was none. Passion there was none.” (Poe, 445) The next sentences are each comprised of five words yet the fourth sentence contains another negative: [Underline mine] “He had never wronged me.” (Poe, 445) while the fifth sentence includes the emotion ‘love’ which, in this story, is the exact opposite of

negativity: [Emphasis mine] “I **loved** the old man.” (Poe, 445) The sentences’ word-count then increases by just one word and returns to the negative but now in a more active format: [Underline mine] “He had never given me insult.” (Poe, 445) which would, given the times, partially allow for retribution. The seventh sentence disallows what should be a positive but isn’t in this context: [Underline, emphasis mine] “For his gold I had no desire.” (Poe, 445) The inciting incident propels the entire story forward and gives the reader a solid image on which to feast: “I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this!” (Poe, 445) Ten words, one comma, and two exclamation points announce the narrator’s doubt and immediate acceptance of his justification. The paragraph concludes with two final sentences that expand as if to take in the whole of the situation with sixteen and then thirty-five words that inform the reader there is no turning back: “He had the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees – very gradually – I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.” (Poe, 445)

*Poe uncrosses his legs. The spats on his shoes are dirty and worn. He rises and pours more whiskey into his glass. He sits in the easy chair this time, facing me directly. The autumn day is already fading. The small side window that lets in too little light as a precedent, now fails miserably as the back half of my apartment is gradually submerged in darkness. But I am too excited to switch on a light in any room and must allow only the firelight to flicker on the master and myself.*

WRIGHT: The narrator jumps back into the present tense that then merges with the past tense of the story’s previous week which led to the narrator’s actions with a quick five-sentence paragraph that walks down a set of literary stairs only to rise again as

the narrator's glee is expanded. "Now this is the point." [5 words] "You fancy me mad." [4 words] "Madmen know nothing." [3] "But you should have seen me." [6] "You should have seen how wisely I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work!" [21 words] (Poe, 445)

This is fantastic stuff at the sentence level, Mr. Poe! You are absolutely correct that backstory can be woven into a tale.

"The Cask of Amontillado," in which the narrator lures his enemy to entombment with the promise of a "rare" wine, opens with one of my favorite lines: "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured on insult, I vowed revenge." (Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado," 666) This twenty-one-word sentence sets up the entire story, and also serves as the pivotal point that engages the reader. This is followed by another twenty-one-word sentence – I'm starting to see the pattern by which you construct your stories as you are writing them! – that intimately associates the reader and the narrator: "You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat." (Poe, 666) You follow with well-crafted sentences that begin another pattern that affects the reader on a subconscious level: [Italics Poe] "*At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled – but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded the idea of risk." (Poe, 666) Two nine-word sentences serve as declarations from which the narrator will not be swayed. "I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser." (Poe, 666) The final statement, another twenty-one word stroke of genius, injects a villainous tone – the narrator allowing himself a bit of arrogant glee for the completion of his crime – into the narration. "It is equally

unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.” (Poe, 666) So, to summarize, the sentences are constructed in the following pattern: 21-21-26-9-9-21. What does this mean?

POE: Didn't you just question the inclusion of math in writing?

*I freeze, my hand raised as if I were about to speak but forgot the reason. I could neither tell the great author he had put the words in my mouth nor could I question his acuity.*

WRIGHT: Good point. But, seriously, what does the pattern mean? This couldn't have been by chance; you had to have had something in mind when you wrote these lines.

POE: You are proving to be an apt student, sir. Why don't you tell me what effect I was seeking?

WRIGHT: There's definitely a rhythm happening in the sentences. The opening sentence smoothly brings the reader into the scene with soft sounds and only two hard consonants: [Caps mine] “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as BEST I could, but when he ventured on INSULT, I vowed revenge.” (Poe, 666)

POE: This is true. However, it is not what I asked. You were onto something when you mentioned “rhythm.” Will you return to that notion and see where the idea takes you?

WRIGHT: I'm getting to that. The ensuing sentence descends into darkness by repeating the hard “T's”: [Caps mine] “You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will NOT suppose, however, that I gave UTTERANCE TO A THREAT.” (Poe, 666)

The next sentence stomps around and litters the page with hard consonants: [Caps mine, italics Poe] “*At length* I would be avenged; this was a POINT DEFINITELY SETTLED – BUT the very DEFINITIVENESS with which IT was resolved, PRECLUDED the idea of RISK.” (Poe, 666)

This flowing rhythm is interrupted harshly by the three “P” punches in the first nine-word sentence. [Caps mine] “I must not only PUNISH, but PUNISH with IMPUNITY” (Poe, 666) conjures the image of spitting on Fortunato. The next sentence forces the reader into his own throat with the repetitive “RE-” sounds: [Caps mine] “A wrong is UNREDRESSED when RETRIBUTION overtakes its REDRESSER.” (Poe, 666)

The last sentence in the paragraph is the strongest of them all in terms of vocal imagery: “avenger” in this instance can be construed as a sinister person, and the paragraph’s first active verbs stand out: [Caps mine] “IT is equally unredressed when the AVENGER fails TO MAKE himself felt as such TO HIM who has done THE WRONG,” (Poe, 666) with this final sound effectively ringing in the reader’s mind.

So, to summarize, by opening the paragraph with three long sentences, you tease the reader with what is coming through the use of hard consonants. You build to the marrow of the paragraph that punches the reader’s throat and finishes the moment with a strong promise of what is to come.

POE: You have identified a rhythm to my writing. Excellent. Do you now fathom the many benefits of rhythm in story? Perhaps with a large amount of studying and practice you will learn to include this additional layer within your own tales.

*He drains his glass with a definitive snort and shakes his head as if some foul memory associated with the liquor's taste has formed in his mind. His body shudders as if casting out the thought.*

WRIGHT: Mr. Poe, sir. Don't you think you should slow down just a bit?

POE: Nonsense. Instead of worrying about something over which you have no control, you ought to remember what we were discussing before our subject devolved into word counts.

*He pours himself another drink, and I see the whiskey in the bottle disappearing as my time with the master must surely run out. Thunder booms after a lightning bolt breaks from the dense clouds and disappears in a flash. The streetlights blink on. More cars are parked at the curb as the workday has apparently ended and the neighborhood residents are returning from their places of employ. I glance at the clock, but it appears frozen at high noon, though with the darkness outside I wonder if it could be midnight.*

WRIGHT: Backstory, sir. We were discussing how to work backstory into a narrative.

POE: Of course we were. To summarize my own words: a few select inclusions will satisfy a reader's curiosity. How will we determine which details to supply to the story?

WRIGHT: By identifying what effect we seek to establish with the story about the dying poet?

POE: Precisely.

*Mr. Poe grins at me. I'm slowly realizing that he regards Story-telling as a well-wrought exercise of his mind and that the effects he sought in his stories dictated which*

*tools, devices, and layers he employed to create his imagined worlds. There doesn't appear to be a specific "Why" he told his tales. His attitude seems to be that he wrote because he had to write, and that he possibly hatched ideas based on personal experiences, challenges he'd given himself, or what stories he knew would sell. His confidence in himself and his abilities is strongly evidenced once one learns Poe's sole source of income came from being a man of letters. I vow to continue to press him for an answer but am content for the time being with the mental challenges he's proffering for they ignite areas of my brain that aren't exactly dormant but until now have not been regularly engaged. I glance again at the bottle on the table and hope there is enough whiskey left to finish our discussion.*

WRIGHT: I want sadness to be a theme of the story so I'll have to include depressing images to set the tone of the piece right from the beginning. The fact that the poet has accomplished so much yet has never honestly felt requited love will be the underlying truth of the tale. His attempts at beauty have all failed leaving only anger, yet not just anger but sorrow and regret – all of which either lead to sadness or result from it.

POE: Good. This is well and good for a fresh look at our tale. The challenge is to include your aforementioned effect while also penning our dear poet's backstory. Now, given our opening tableau, create the pivotal moment to propel us in such a way that the reader has absolutely no choice but to read until the ending of the story.

WRIGHT: Okay. How's this:

Of all the women the poet had loved, none was more special than the woman who he had loved twice and whose love he was about to lose again, this last time more painful than the first and in whose certain disappointment he now existed. The blur of his

debauched actions fretted him less than the cold, wet cobblestones which gave no mattress-like comfort as his blackout turned to sleep then to painful consciousness. He remembered running first from a tavern where he had overdrunk his money, though it was not his money but investors' from whom he'd collected with the promise of a new magazine publication; then fleeing with stumbling steps from the scene where he had fought one of the men who was less gentle than he was large and who had knocked the poet to the ground a number of times before the poet brutally attacked the man with an object he could not recall. The lasting image in his head was of the larger man dead, possibly on a nearby street.

Passersby wear coats buttoned to their necks. Their hands are in their pockets. Brown leaves coat the dank windowsills of the shops on both sides of Lombard Street where he lays. A stiff breeze off the harbor invades the threads of his wet clothes – clothes that are not his own and stink, though he won't be sure the vomit is his – and wakes the poor poet to the dim prospects of the day. His gaunt frame should not have withstood the October night's chill yet the poet somehow opens his eyes. His face is drawn as if he hasn't tasted happiness in forever. A shopkeeper's boy sweeps trash and dead leaves from the sidewalk onto the poet's legs in the gutter. The poet stares vacantly at the cut flowers displayed in front of the shop behind the robust boy. The poet wonders what it would take to sever his life from this earth and thus rid himself of the ungodly misery which has haunted him since childhood. The dead have no cares; he'd seen their visages oft enough to desire from the depths of his soul the peace showing on their faces, all lovely as if kissed by angel.

That's a difficult challenge, and I have yet to start in on the word counts!

POE: Let us focus on that then and also rhythm while we're at it, shall we?

WRIGHT: All right. Based on my studies of your writing, my sentences count out thusly: Opening paragraph, first sentence: 45 words, followed by 29, 84 & 17. Yeow! Four sentences for a total of 175 words. Second paragraph, first sentence: 7 words, followed by 6, 17, 42, 18, 12, 18, 18, 29 & 32.

POE: Have you observed that the ensuing paragraph has ten sentences for a total of 199 words? And, if you'll stop rolling your eyes like I've demanded that you understand this device mere moments after your introduction, you'll see that you already have a small pattern occurring naturally in the second paragraph. What can we deduce from this?

WRIGHT: That I need more practice?

POE: That, sir, goes without saying. May that you have enough time to write all the stories you can dream up before your soul is due. What else?

WRIGHT: That by writing these paragraphs with the goal of having my words affect the reader on multiple levels – visual, story, word-pattern, rhythm, theme – I found an initial pattern without worrying about it.

POE: Excellent. Now we can go back and revise these sentences and see what we may make of the words.

WRIGHT: I thought you didn't do revision?

*The master looks at me like I have lost my sense of logic.*

POE: Of course there are revisions. My vision for each of my stories or poems is clearly conceived, as we have done with these paragraphs before we chose to write

anything. Now that the words exist, we must awaken them and make them not just breathe but sing, scream, grovel, pray, hope, beg, shout, love. Now the real work begins!

WRIGHT: I'll look at my first sentence and compare my words and rhythm with your first sentence from "Cask" and see what I can find.

"The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured on insult, I vowed revenge." (Poe, 666)

Of all the women the poet had loved, none was more special than the woman who he had loved twice and whose love he was about to lose again, this last time more painful than the first and in whose certain disappointment he now existed.

Too convoluted? How about this:

The poet was in grave danger of drinking away the one woman he truly loved, but by his third whiskey he knew she would never again open her arms for him.

POE: Not bad. You have removed the superfluous reference to the previous relationships, which you assuredly can include later in the story as it is relevant, and also introduced the main elements, these being: the poet, liquor, the woman, and loss.

WRIGHT: They do sort of echo yours: the narrator, injuries, Fortunato, and revenge.

POE: Quite correct. Now, further tighten the sentence.

WRIGHT: The poet drank his third whiskey while the fading echoes of his beloved's threat died.

POE: You're too far away. Get closer; change to the first person.

WRIGHT: The devil ordered the drinks; though I drank them if only to drown my beloved's tearful promise to leave.

POE: This last has merit! How did you arrive at such a sentence?

WRIGHT: I wanted to keep it short, so less than twenty words. The silent consonant at the beginning slips through the next words and comes to a hard stop at “drink,” which I follow with a semi-colon to set apart the sentence’s opening. By using different forms of drink so close together, I’m emphasizing that he’s been drinking for some time. The rest of the sentence slides through “drown” and “beloved” to hit a figurative wall with “tearful,” both in terms of a hard consonant and a powerful image. I send the sentence to its conclusion suggesting to my reader that the fiancée has already begun packing, as if she predicted the poet’s actions.

POE: Interesting. It appears you now possess an initial understanding of my points on time flow, pivotal moments, backstory, rhythm, and revision. Yours, of course, need some serious work, but they have been conceived. In our tale, the dying poet has already killed a man, and he is on the precipice of choosing death over life. See there, how we have established, seemingly blithely yet with significant toil, five of the techniques which will impel the reader forward?

Note that you have been successful only with that first sentence, but can you now fathom how incredibly delicious this crafting of a tale is? Where else can such work be simply delightful? Tell me you see even a mote of a pittance of what is possible?

WRIGHT: Yes, sir. I do, indeed. These devices certainly help show the reader what’s at stake in the –

POE: What’s at stake? Are you a fool? Have you not been listening? What is at stake for the character is relevant only insofar as it satisfies the singular effect of the tale!

*Poe doesn't appear drunk, but neither is he sober. He's refreshed his glass and stands at the window with a hand in his pocket. Ignoring me, he watches the rain fall. Men and women sprint from their cars, their feet splashing through the growing puddles on the sidewalk as they hurry home. I am unable to discern if Poe is surprised by the activity or the vehicles.*

WRIGHT: All right, all right. What is 'at stake' is directly related to the unity of effect we seek within our story and, as such, is secondary or tertiary to the overall feel and tone and setting of the narration. This will actually make things easier since I'm working backward instead of taking an idea and building the groundwork around it. If I instead create the environment and the emotional, spiritual, or intellectual impact I am seeking, the circumstances will arise from within.

POE: Basically, that is it, man. Bravo!

*He toasts me yet I am unsure of the veracity of his gesture; whether he is mocking me or complimenting me. I realize I don't care.*

POE: I must say what an interesting return to the basics of writing this is for me. I appreciate your humility in this matter; for to assume you know everything about writing would not only be folly, but disadvantageous to you as a writer.

A few moments ago you referenced the word 'image' that we have briefly touched upon during our discourse. I request you explore more fully the concept of images within a story. You obviously know something about images and inserting them into your stories to achieve a particular effect. What is the value of images?

WRIGHT: Mr. Poe. Sir? I'm really concerned about the time. You've been here quite awhile, and we have yet to discuss why you wrote your poems and stories, whether

it is the genre of stories you penned or the more general question of why you wrote in the first place. Will you elaborate on your reasons for writing what you wrote, and why you wrote your stories at all?

*Poe's gaze is cold as he stares at me as if I have learned nothing.*

*I remain silent.*

*He peers into his crystal glass and swirls the liquor as if divining its properties.*

POE: Very well. Consider "The Cask of Amontillado." I was having a bit of a dispute with a fellow whose name I no longer recall, although he was rather dimwitted and his stories quite difficult to follow. Regardless, I had tired of his babblings and decided to fix one of his books by reducing it to its very substance. Its singular effect: Revenge. That is why the story had to be written. I wanted to symbolically and with zest rid myself of an annoying pest. I could not name the simpleton directly. Nor could I involve anything as pedantic as mid-nineteenth-century America. However, I had to make known the nature of the tale was a direct result of this man's foolhardiness, so I dug my own grave as it were. What was that? A joke? I haven't told a joke in such a long time. I suppose I hadn't needed to. Ah, I stray again. This fool, this ill-talented writer, had as part of his story an underground vault. Since we know the plot of the story, how was I going to create a unity of effect based on revenge?

WRIGHT: You set the story in a country that is an ocean and a sea away from your home so there was no way a reader would immediately decipher your intent. You stated in the first lines of your story almost exactly what you were going to do to Fortunato although I, the reader, have no idea what is in store for the clueless enemy, which in effect puts me almost square in his shoes as the plot unfolds. I believe you

angled for the intellect while also involving the narrator's soul, as evidenced by his retribution for his crime. By leading the doomed man into the catacomb, you effectively shut off anything familiar to the character, and the reader. You inject fear into the story via this unknown path we're traveling. You effectively place Montresor in the position of strength and basically neuter Fortunato. Then you have your narrator repeatedly beg to return Fortunato to the carnival occurring directly above them. Obviously, as the character's life slowly passes from his body, he will review a thousand times the many opportunities he had to change his direction, when instead he allowed his arrogance to cloud his vision to the danger around him.

POE: Well, we at least can ascertain that you, my friend, have at your disposal quite a bit more knowledge than my forgotten foe. Have I satisfied your query?

WRIGHT: Yes, you have. Thank you.

*Poe is drunk, I realize as he raises his brow above a besotted eye at me knowing I will rise to his challenge. I grin broadly for the master called me his friend!*

Images. Got it. "The Fall of the House of Usher."

"During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of that year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher." (Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," 262-263)

*I pour myself two fingers of what's left of the whiskey, draining the bottle into Poe's glass before replacing it on the table. He nods, but I'm not sure his gesture is one of appreciation or wonderment at the natural violence occurring outside as tree branches*

*snap under the blistering winds. Gale after gale blasts down the one-way street, the rain pummeling the pavement like strafing gunfire, quite different than the single-shot weapons available in 1849.*

POE: What does that sentence provide?

WRIGHT: An abundance of images, all saying much the same thing: something is really sad and wrong with this house and the people who live there, and that something bad will happen. We know this because of: a dull, dark, soundless day, autumn, oppressive clouds, the narrator passing alone on horseback riding through a singularly dreary tract of country, shades of evening, and the gloomy house.

POE: There is one more, quite important image. Look again.

WRIGHT: I don't see it.

POE: Where were the clouds hanging low?

WRIGHT: In the sky?

POE: [Underline mine] "...the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens."

(Poe, 262) Do you think this detail is in the story so the reader would remember that clouds float in the sky?

WRIGHT: No, probably not.

POE: Of course not! How do these images resonate throughout the story?

WRIGHT: The next two lines continue in the same vein:

"I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible." (Poe, 263)

Something bad is definitely going to happen.

POE: How do you know that?

WRIGHT: There are only two – maybe three if we include “heavens” – positive words in the first three sentences. The first, “unrelieved,” cancels itself out, and the other, “half-pleasurable,” is cleaved in two and also comes behind a repetition of “insufferable,” a severely negative word. These images recur throughout the opening paragraphs instilling – along with the necessary backstory given in the second and third paragraphs – an ominous sense of foreboding, of the doom the owners of the house will soon meet.

POE: Very good, but why the look of perplexity?

WRIGHT: How do you know how many images to put into a story? I don’t want to give away the ending by hinting at it extensively in the story’s opening – the ending of the story being contained in the first line notwithstanding. How do you know?

POE: Tell me, how does “The Fall of the House of Usher” end?

WRIGHT: With the deaths of Roderick and Madeline, and the narrow escape of the narrator.

POE: Do any of the images specifically cast light on the ending for the reader at first glance?

WRIGHT: ‘Heavens’ could mean someone is going to die, but that’s a stretch, and the reader would have to know the ending in the first place. ‘Melancholy,’ yes, but, again, not without knowing the ending. ‘Unrelieved’ reveals ... nothing. No. You’re right. Nothing written here specifically relates to the demise of the Ushers.

*Poe is smiling yet his eyes appear focused on something only he can see, as if he’s fondly remembering the magic.*

POE: Read the opening lines of the second paragraph and tell me what adds to the story's effect and what gives away the ending.

WRIGHT: "Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter had lately reached me in a distant part of the country – a letter from him – which in its wildly importunate nature had admitted of no other than personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness – of a mental disorder which oppressed him – and of an earnest desire to see me ..." (Poe, 263)

"Mansion of gloom" further cements the overall effect. "[B]oon companions" gives the depth of their friendship and the reason why the narrator would travel so far after such a long separation. Additionally, the following images give insight into Roderick's mental state but nothing more: "wildly importunate nature," "nervous agitation," "acute bodily illness," and "mental disorder."

POE: You're getting it, sir. I do believe you're getting it.

*Poe stumbles as he rises from the sofa. Did his hand just pass through the mantel? Is the alcohol in my system blurring the poet's image or is our tenuous relationship concluding? If I want answers to my questions, I must ask them now.*

WRIGHT: Why did you include so many images in the opening of this tale? Sure, the images are readily apparent now as if they were written in glowing ink: "No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old woodwork which

has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability.” (Poe, 264-265) But, what is the ultimate purpose of having such a plethora of images?

POE: A painter does not leave out certain details because he assumes his artwork’s viewers will see them as he the artist sees them. I strove to create a complete world where every aspect related back to the story’s central theme of moral, mental, and physical decay.

The largest image is the fissure connecting the top of the mansion’s façade with the bottom. Note how I join this image with emotional impact on the third page:

“Perhaps the eye of the scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front made its way down the wall in a zig-zag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.” (Poe, 265)

How does this effect resound later in the story? I ask you thus.

WRIGHT: You repeat yourself verbatim so to, I believe, lock the import of that original image in the reader’s mind: [Underline mine] “The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely-perceptible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zig-zag direction, to the base.” (Poe, 277)

POE: Yes, this does effectively anchor the reader in the image I want him to envision when reading my story.

WRIGHT: I'm still a bit confused. The story teems with images. How can they possibly all be contained in the story's unity of effect?

POE: Have you examples?

WRIGHT: The current state of the house: "upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon the few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees..." (Poe, 263)

POE: Must I explain them to you? Fine.

*He stands before the fire, and I swear I can see the flames through his clothes!*

"Bleak walls" refers to the ultimate fate of the Ushers. They will not survive the end of the story. Their outlook is, therefore, 'bleak.'

"Vacant eye-like windows" doubly serves to symbolize the emptiness of the house and its denizens while also linking with Roderick's condition. When the reader first meets the man, he has: "A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid. ... The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me." (Poe, 266) The man is not well and I chose to show this from the outside in.

"Rank sedges – "

WRIGHT: – introduce smell into the story! Their odor alludes to a decaying corpse, or how one might imagine a body might smell. The stench is linked to sedges, which grow in shallow water and establish the lack of roots, or overall weakness of the Ushers, since the "stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth at no period, any enduring branch." (Poe, 264) Later in the story the reader learns that

Madeline is "... a tenderly beloved sister – his sole companion for long years – his last and only relative on earth." (Poe, 267) Thus, Roderick and Madeline are the "last of the ancient race of the Ushers." (Poe, 267)

You further hammer home your theme with the introduction of the "few white trunks of decayed trees" (Poe, 263) that deftly tie together the whiteness of a body in which no blood flows and the imminent decay of such a body through the image of not trees, but "trunks of decayed trees." (Poe, 263)

I assumed these many images would overwhelm the story, but instead they provide the requisite detail to color your literary painting in a way the reader has little choice but to see exactly what you had in mind when you wrote the tale.

*The master poet's unsteadiness is apparent when he uses the wall beside a pocket door to remain upright. The conclusion of our time together is imminent. I ruefully skip to the story's conclusion to examine how Mr. Poe tied everything together in the story's final line.*

"The Fall of the House of Usher" closes with a seventy-three-word sentence that builds to a heady climax while delivering the whole of the tale into a denouement that can almost stand alone:

[Italics, quotation marks Poe] 'While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind – the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight – my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder – there was a long, tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters – and the deep and dark tarn at my feet closed suddenly and silently over the fragments of the "*House of Usher*.'" (Poe, 277)

It is amazing to see how everything relates back to your unity of effect, Mr. Poe.  
Thank you for your tutelage.

*Poe traces his finger around each of the panels in the heavy pocket door. He leans over to peer at the date clearly stamped on the black iron latch: 1837. A grin spreads beneath his mustache and his brow smooths even more. Apparently he's too relaxed, and he loses his balance. As his hand reaches out to grab the door, his palm touches the iron.*

*Immediately it feels as if every window in my home has been thrown open and the roaring wind that is tearing the dying leaves from the trees in the parkway beyond my window invades my domicile. A gust rushes through the chimney and beats at the flames that are fighting for life but are steadily losing.*

*The glass falls from Poe's hand and smashes onto the white marble hearth. A stricken look appears on his face. His eyes widen. His lips tremble. His hair violently whips like he is being electrocuted. His skin turns blue. Now gray. He scratches at the pocket door like Madeline in her coffin. The table's steel legs rattle on the floor. The bottle falls on its side and rolls back and forth ever closer to the table's edge. I have barely set my glass on the floor beside the couch when the air is sucked from the room. I struggle to stand. The room feels like a vacuum where we speak in real-time yet our physical actions occur in slow motion. The great poet turns away from my offered hand.*

WRIGHT: Please. Mr. Poe! You have to tell me before you go. Did you orchestrate your own death?

*He turns to face me though his glare is weak, and his teeth chatter. There is a pause in the storm, as though we are in the eye of the maelstrom surrounding us.*

POE: Why would I?

WRIGHT: Because I believe that from the moment you could, you controlled everything that happened to you. From your adult beginnings at the University of Virginia where you washed out because you had no money, you must have resolved to be the master of your fate. Your first step was to join the US Army which you prematurely left to attend West Point, from which you forced your own expulsion because you couldn't pay your debts.

POE: The only good use for money is to burn for warmth.

WRIGHT: You aspired to be named Editor of every publication that would hire you. Your substantial collection of critiques of other authors is astonishing. Your total mastery of the short story and the poem; these and many of your other, some might say egomaniacal, traits point me in the very specific direction that you choreographed – at least when you were positive the end was coming – your own exit from this plane.

POE: You've read my critiques?

WRIGHT: A few, yes.

POE: My stories, and poems. These are still being read?

WRIGHT: Mr. Poe, several of your stories and poems are required reading for students across the country. The ones we've discussed are the most popular; but "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter" established you as the 'Father of the Detective Story' because of C. August Dupin.

POE: Truthfully?

WRIGHT: Yes! Everything I've related is fact. However, I find the events surrounding your death suspicious – even more so than how you arrived inebriated and

unconscious on a street – and question your motivations. I don't believe your fame has withstood the test of time by accident. Just as everything in a story must refer back to the overall effect, I believe you orchestrated your own death to further heighten your own mystery.

As I see it, you were alert enough to have the physician summon Dr. Snodgrass who took you to Washington College Hospital, a much nicer place I imagine than Ryan's 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Polls, the public house in which you had landed after the discovery of your inebriated body on Lombard Street. Yet the next day, you were too delirious for a visit from your own cousin Neilson. I find that highly suspicious given your intellect and cunning. So tell me the truth.

*A black bird alights on a tree branch outside my window. I look back to Poe whose eyes are closed. His skin dulled into a deathly pallor.*

*The storm returns more ferocious than before. I want to kneel beside the great poet and comfort him. I am too close to the answer! He can whisper in my ear! I will tell no one, but as my knee bends to the floor there comes a shattering explosion from the firepit, and I am hurled onto the sofa. I fight to remain alert. I need to ask him again. I need to know the answer. Just before I lose my hold on the moment, the Master smiles at me. He speaks, but I can't hear him over the deafening noise that seems as if the storm is both within my home and without. His visage softens as he looks to the heavens. I lapse unconscious.*

*When I awake all is calm. The large tome Complete Tales of Edgar Allan Poe rests upon my lap. The book is open to a particular page, and my finger placed directly on the closing lines of the first stanza. Before my eyes can focus enough to read, I glance*

*up at the whiskey on the table. The empty bottle lays on its side. My glass on the floor  
beneath me is empty. I blink a few times before I gaze down at the page. [Italics, Poe]*

“All that we see or seem

Is but a dream within a dream.”

(Poe, A Dream within a Dream, 24)

## Works Cited

- Iron Maiden. "Murders in the Rue Morgue." By Steve Harris. *Killers*. EMI, 1981. .FLV
- Moore, Thomas Esq., ed. "Letter 404. To Mr. Moore." *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of His Life from October, 1820 to November, 1822*. Vol. V. *Life of Lord Byron: His Letters and Journals*. New York. Little, Brown, 1851. 113.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*, Ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
- "A Dream Within A Dream." 24-25.
  - "The Balloon-Hoax." 522-532 (\* Title quote, 522)
  - "The Cask of Amontillado." 666-671
  - "The Fall of the House of Usher." 262-277
  - "The Philosophy of Composition." 978-987
  - "The Raven." 72-74
  - "The Tell-Tale Heart." 445-448
- Thomas, Dwight and Jackson, David Kelly. *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 1809 – 1849*. New York: G. K. Hall & Co, 1987. Also available at <http://www.eapoe.org/geninfo/poealchl.htm>

## Works Consulted

- Bloom, Harold. Bloom's Critiques: Edgar Allan Poe 1809 – 1849 Criticism and Interpretation. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002.
- Celebrity Morgue. Mountain View: Rotten Dot Com.  
<http://www.celebritymorgue.com/edgar-allan-poe/>
- Giordano, Robert. "Biography of Edgar Allan Poe" Fort Lauderdale: Design215 Inc.  
<http://www.poestories.com/biography.php>
- Google play. Mountain View: Google  
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=fZNTAAAcAAJ&rdid=book-fZNTAAAcAAJ&rdot=1>
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. Edgar Allan Poe: A Study in Genius. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965.
- Lange, Karen E. Nevermore: A Photobiography of Edgar Allan Poe. Washington DC: National Geographic, 2009.
- Sova, Dawn B. Edgar Allan Poe A to Z, The Essential Reference to His Life and Work. New York: Checkmark Books, 2001.
- Spy Pond Productions and Clearpath Entertainment. "The Poe Legacy." Baltimore: Cinema Group. <http://www.mysteryofpoe.com/index.cfm?page=legacy>
- Thompson, Gary Richard. Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews. New York: Viking Press, 1984.
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar\\_Allan\\_Poe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Poe)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killers\\_\(Iron\\_Maiden\\_album\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killers_(Iron_Maiden_album))
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Cask\\_of\\_Amontillado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cask_of_Amontillado)