

Top 10 Horror Stories by Edgar Allan Poe

1. The Masque of the Red Death – a Renaissance Prince confronts an embodiment of the Plague in a story that is beautiful, hallucinatory, and disturbing. See my Introduction in Prospero’s Mirror for further discussion.
2. The Casque of Amontillado – who wouldn’t risk murder by immurement in a Venetian dungeon for a nice Amontillado? And what ‘connoisseur’ wouldn’t deserve it, for claiming that Amontillado is not a type of sherry? Poe wreaks grotesque literary revenge on a rival.
3. The Fall of the House of Usher – an opium-dream of a gothic horror with the added classic Poe ingredients of madness, morbid psycho-sexual guilt, incest, re-animation, and premature burial. Now forever associated with Vincent Price.
4. The Murders in the Rue Morgue – often described as the first detective story, and certainly the first locked room mystery, though the solution is utterly bizarre.
5. Berenice – a man develops a disturbing obsession with his cousin/fiancée’s teeth, with horrific consequences. Worryingly Poe had just married his own cousin when wrote the story.
6. The Oval Portrait – what appears as a tiny gothic miniature really opens into a vast canvas of Poe’s own guilt at his wife’s death, and the price paid in the war between Art and Life.
8. The Imp of the Perverse – a Dostoyevskian exploration of guilt and human psychology.
9. The Pit and the Pendulum – an entirely gratuitous but delightfully unpleasant piece of Goya-esq torture-porn. The Roger Corman film took things further by adding a very Poe-esque premature burial twist at the end.
10. The Duc de L’Omelette / Bonbon – I hope I manage as much *sang froid* as the characters of these stories when I encounter the Devil.