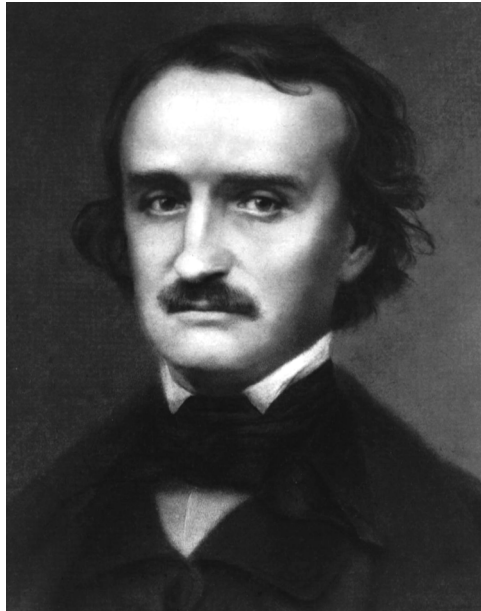


98 QUOTATIONS



Edgar Allan Poe

(1809-1849)

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most influential writers in history—in short stories, poems and criticism. Striving for economy, unity and a single effect, he helped to originate and define genres that continue to be popular, including the detective story and the horror story. He most fully expresses his vision and his own psyche in his allegories “The Fall of the House of Usher” and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Although his styles in both prose and poetry are out of date, his atmospheres, his sense of form and his techniques continue to be instructive. He was (1) a Romantic who wrote in (2) the Gothic tradition; (3) was the first Existentialist in American literature; (4) had a bipolar psyche; and (5) projects an Expressionistic, materialist “Postmodern” vision.

ORDER OF TOPICS: God, metaphysics, rejects Platonism, empiricism, rejects absolute empiricism, religion, Existentialism, Gothic determinism, relativism, Democracy, progress, reformers, human nature, bi-part soul, race, perversity, drugs, terror, madness, truth, obscurity, beauty, Victorian fair lady, ideal woman, poetry, genius, art, popularity, criticism, transcendentalism, New England Transcendentalists, Emerson, Margaret Fuller, definition of short story, single effect, sensations, death, immortality:

GOD

God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness.

Matter escapes the senses by degrees—a stone, a metal, a liquid, a gas—the luminiferous ether...if we proceed sufficiently far in our ideas on rarefaction, we shall arrive at a point where the particles (or atoms) coalesce... The [rarified] unparticled matter permeating and impelling all things is God.

The gigantic curtain ranged along the whole extent of the southern horizon. It emitted no sound.... A sullen darkness now hovered above us—but from out the milky depths of the ocean a luminous glare arose, and stole up along the bulwarks of the boat.... The summit of the cataract was utterly lost in the dimness and the distance. Yet we were evidently approaching it with a hideous velocity.... Many gigantic and pallidly white birds flew continuously now from beyond the veil... And now we rushed into the embraces

of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow. [*Pym*]

METAPHYSICS

The Universe is a plot of God.

All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream.

It is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain forever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery.

REJECTS PLATONISM

If the question be put to-day, what is the value of the Platonian philosophy, the proper answer is, “exactly nothing at all.” We do not believe that any good purpose is answered by popularizing his dreams; on the contrary we do believe that they have a strong tendency of ill—intellectually of course.

EMPIRICISM

In the return to life from the swoon there are two stages; first, that of the sense of mental or spiritual; secondly, that of the sense of physical, existence.

REJECTS ABSOLUTE EMPIRICISM

I could now find room to doubt the evidence of my senses.

RELIGION

All religion, my friend, is simply evolved out of fraud, fear, greed, imagination, and poetry.

A strong argument for the religion of Christ is this—that offences against Charity are about the only ones which men on their death-beds can be made—not to understand, but to feel—as crime.

EXISTENTIALISM

Each soul is, in part, its own God—its own Creator.

GOTHIC DETERMINISM

I would fain have [you] believe that I have been, in some measure, the slave of circumstances beyond human control.

MORAL RELATIVISM

So strictly comparative is either good or ill.

DEMOCRACY

[No] one soul is inferior to another.

Democracy is a very admirable form of government, for dogs.

I cannot agree to lose sight of man the individual, in man the mass.

The nose of a mob is its imagination. By this, at any time, it can be quietly led.

PROGRESS

I have no faith in human perfectibility. I think that human exertion will have no appreciable effect upon humanity. Man is now only more active—not more happy—nor more wise, than he was 6000 years ago.

The ninety and nine are with dreams content, but the hope of the world made new, is the hundredth man who is grimly bent on making those dreams come true.

To the glory that was Greece, / And the grandeur that was Rome.

REFORMERS

The fact is, that in efforts to soar above our nature, we invariably fall below it.

Your reformist demigods are merely devils turned inside out.

HUMAN NATURE

Stupidity is a talent for misconception.

I have great faith in fools; self-confidence my friends call it.

Man's real life is happy, chiefly because he is ever expecting that it soon will be so.

To vilify a great man is the readiest way in which a little man can himself attain greatness.

There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man.

There are moments when, even to the sober eye of Reason, the world of our sad humanity must assume the aspect of Hell.

To be thoroughly conversant with Man's heart, is to take our final lesson in the iron-clasped volume of Despair.

BI-PART SOUL

I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent.

It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the truly imaginative never otherwise than analytic.

RACE

The [black] islanders for whom we entertained such inordinate feelings of esteem, were among the most barbarous, subtle, and blood-thirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe. [This in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in 1838 was probably inspired by the slave rebellion led by Nat Turner near Poe's home in Virginia in 1831.]

There were a great many [black] women and children, the former not altogether wanting in what might be termed personal beauty. They were straight, tall, and well formed, with a grace and freedom of carriage not to be found in civilized society.

I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection.... The fullness and the spirituality of the Greek...the beauty of the fabulous Hourii of the Turk.

[Dirk Peters, the exemplar in *Pym*] was the son of an Indian woman.... His father was a [white] fur-trader.

PERVERTSITY

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.

I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

DRUGS

I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium.

TERROR

Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things that escape those who dream only at night.

I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror.

That man is not truly brave who is afraid either to seem or to be, when it suits him, a coward.

MADNESS

I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.

Science has not yet taught us if madness is or is not the sublimity of the intelligence.

I have sometimes amused myself by endeavoring to fancy what would be the fate of an individual gifted, or rather accursed, with an intellect *very* far superior to that of his race....he would make himself enemies at all points. And since his opinions and speculations would widely differ from those of *all* mankind—that he would be considered a madman is evident.

TRUTH

Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object, Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion a homeliness (the truly passionate will comprehend me), which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement or pleasurable elevation, of the soul.

Experience has shown, and a true philosophy will always show, that a vast, perhaps the larger portion of the truth arises from the seemingly irrelevant.

It is the nature of truth in general, as of some ores in particular, to be richest when most superficial.

OBSCURITY

In one case out of a hundred a point is excessively discussed because it is obscure; in the ninety-nine remaining it is obscure because it is excessively discussed.

BEAUTY

That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect; they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul—not of intellect, or of heart...which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful."

Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all poetical tones.

The death of a beautiful woman, is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world.

VICTORIAN FAIR LADY

In a moment of mental alienation, I led from the altar as my bride—as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine.

I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man.

IDEAL WOMAN

I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead—it was faultless...and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses... nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded her sweet mouth...the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under... An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech, was possibly, in her, a result...of that gigantic volition...during our long intercourse... Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion.... I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation.... For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry.

POETRY

Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem.

Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words.

The silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain.

With me poetry has not been a purpose, but a passion.

The rudiment of verse may, possibly, be found in the spondee.

The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical—but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* is permitted distinctly to be seen.

GENIUS

The true genius shudders at incompleteness—and usually prefers silence to saying something which is not everything it should be.

The *highest* genius...is but the result of generally large mental power existing in a state of absolute proportion—so that no one faculty has undue predominance.

ART

Were I called on to define, very briefly, the term Art, I should call it “the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul.”

The mere imitation, however accurate, of what is in Nature, entitles no man to the sacred name of “Artist.”

POPULARITY

There are few cases in which mere popularity should be considered a proper test of merit; but the case of song-writing is, I think, one of the few.

CRITICISM

The generous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire, / And taught the world with reason to admire.

In criticism I will be bold, and as sternly, absolutely just with friend and foe. From this purpose nothing shall turn me.

It is with literature as with law or empire—an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession.

If we carefully examine those poems, or portions of poems, or those prose romances, which mankind have accustomed to designate as *imaginative*...it will be seen that all so designated are remarkable for the *suggestive* character which we have discussed. They are strongly *mystic*, in the proper sense of the word.

We have very few American tales of real merit—we may say, indeed, none, with the exception of *The Tales of a Traveller* of Washington Irving, and these *Twice-Told Tales* of Hawthorne.

[Hawthorne] is infinitely too fond of allegory, and can never hope for popularity so long as he persists in it. This he will not do, for allegory is at war with the whole tone of his nature.[!]

Of puns it has been said that those who most dislike them are those who are least able to utter them.

Some of the finest tales are tales of ratiocination.

TRANSCENDENTALISM

Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed. ["Ligeia"]

NEW ENGLAND TRANSCENDENTALISTS

[advice to Hawthorne]: Come out from the Old Manse, cut Mr. Alcott, hang (if possible) the editor of *The Dial*...

It is the excess of the suggested meaning—it is the rendering this the upper instead of the under current of the theme—which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

It is not impossible that he was affected with the transcendentals. I am not well enough versed, however, in the diagnosis of this disease to speak with decision upon this point; and unhappily there were none of my friends of the *Dial* present.

There are various other tones of equal celebrity, but I shall mention only two more—the tone transcendental and the tone heterogeneous. In the former the merit consists in seeing into the nature of affairs a very great deal farther than anybody else. This second sight is very efficient when properly managed. A little reading of the *Dial* will carry you a great way. Eschew, in this case, big words; get them as small as possible, and write them upside down... Put in something about the Supernal Oneness. Don't say a syllable about the Infernal Twoness. Above all, study innuendo. Hint everything—assert nothing.

EMERSON

Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson belongs to a class of gentlemen with whom we have no patience whatever—the mystics for mysticism's sake.... His love of the obscure does not prevent him...from the composition of occasional poems in which beauty is apparent by *flashes*.

MARGARET FULLER

The most favorable estimate of Miss Fuller's genius (for high genius she unquestionably possesses) is to be obtained, perhaps, from her contributions to the *Dial*, and from her *Summer on the Lakes*... Her manner...is infinitely varied. It is always forcible...the style of Miss Fuller is one of the very best with which I am acquainted. In general effect, I know of no style which surpasses it. It is singularly piquant, vivid, terse, bold, luminous; leaving details out of sight, it is everything that a style need be...eyes a bluish gray, full of fire; capacious forehead [in the 19th century an indication of great intellect and idealism]; the mouth when in repose indicates profound sensibility, capacity for affection—for love—when moved by a slight smile, it becomes even beautiful in the intensity of the expression; but the upper lip, as if impelled by the action of involuntary muscles, habitually uplifts itself, conveying the impression of a sneer... Miss Fuller has erred, too, through her own excessive subjectiveness. She judges woman by the heart and intellect of Miss Fuller, but there are not more than one or two dozen Miss Fullers on the whole face of the earth.... More lately she has published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, a work which has occasioned much discussion, having had the good fortune to be warmly abused and chivalrously defended.

DEFINITION OF THE SHORT STORY

A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbrining of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be not one word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.

SINGLE EFFECT

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*.

The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length... As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*.

In almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting.

If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression; for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed.... What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychical necessity, brief.

SENSATIONS

Sensations are the great things after all. Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations—they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet.

DEATH

The play is the tragedy “Man,” / And its hero the Conqueror Worm.

We devoured the rest of the body, piecemeal.

With one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head from her body.

And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall.

The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman.

On his back, from which a portion of the shirt had been torn, leaving it bare, there sat a huge sea-gull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood.

For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold—then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated. [body and soul]

The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?

IMMORTALITY

It is by no means an irrational fancy that, in a future existence, we shall look upon what we think our present existence, as a dream.

The *only* irrefutable argument in support of the soul’s immortality—or, rather, the only conclusive proof of man’s alternate dissolution and rejuvenescence *ad infinitum*—is to be found in analogies deduced from the modern established theory of the nebular cosmogony... This cosmogony demonstrates that all existing bodies in the universe are formed of a nebular matter, a rare ethereal medium, pervading space; shows the mode and laws of formation, and proves that all things are in a perpetual state of progress; that nothing in nature is perfected.

Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.

