

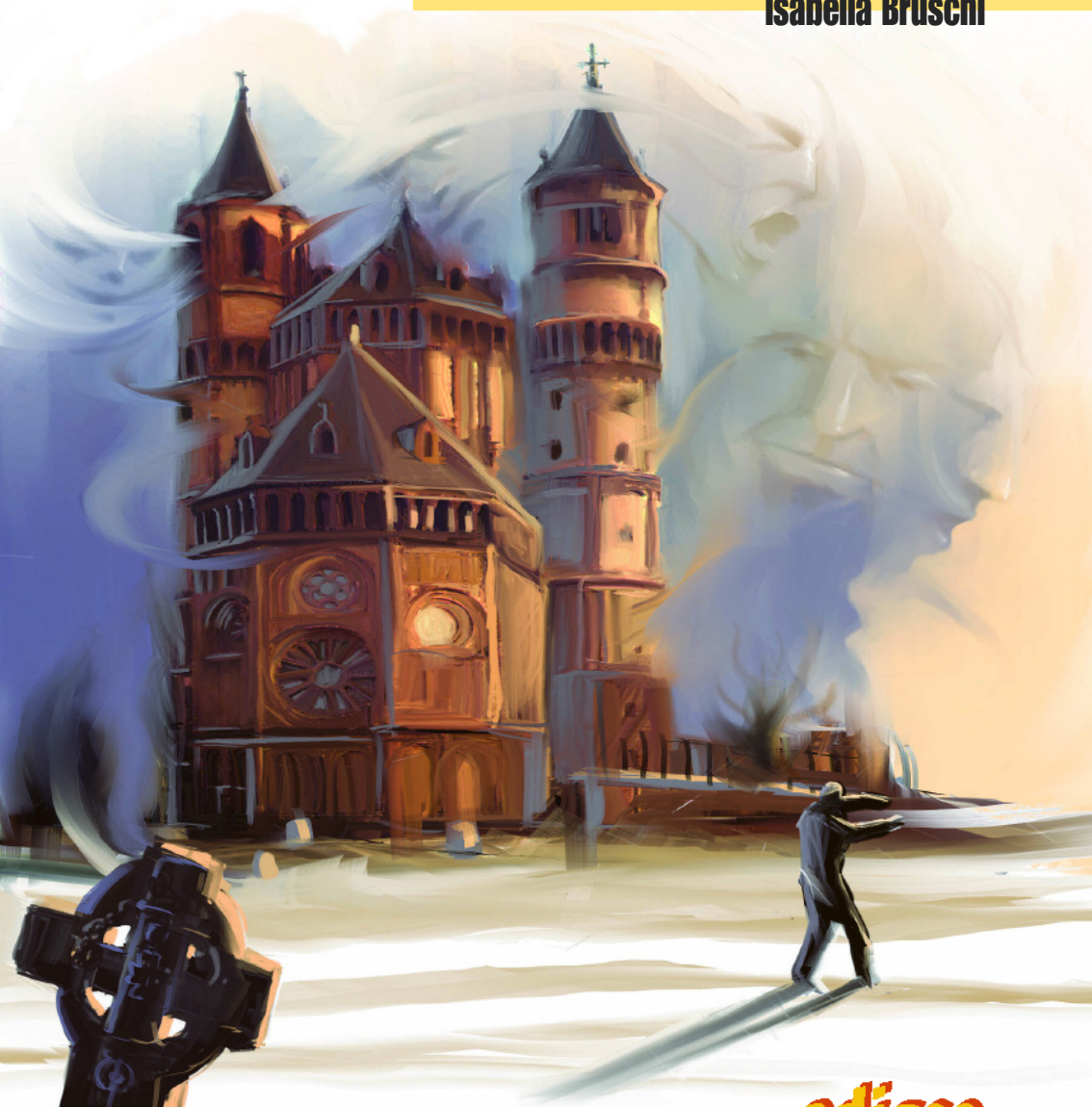


intermediate

R A I N B O W S

Tales of the Supernatural

Isabella Bruschi



edisco

List of the grammar structures per level

BEGINNER • A1 (Breakthrough)

Nouns, short compound nouns, common adjectives, be, have, can, must, countable/uncountable nouns, articles, will future, imperative, basic prepositions of time and place, adverbs, numbers, some/any/no, personal pronouns, possessive adjectives/pronouns, 's, demonstrative adjectives/pronouns, present progressive, present simple, simple wh-questions, was/were.

ELEMENTARY • A2 (Waystage)

Structures of preceding level + longer compound nouns, past simple, past progressive, present perfect simple, could, future with going to/present progressive, some/any/no/every+compounds, comparatives, superlatives, quantifiers (a lot, much/many, a little/a few), conditional sentences (type 1), have to, less common prepositions of time and place, may, simple forms of passive, that/who/which (relative pronouns), would you like/shall we?

PRE-INTERMEDIATE • B1 (Threshold)

Structures of preceding levels + defining/non-defining relative clauses, don't have to/needn't, each other/one another, had to, might/could, should, ought to, question tags, common phrasal verbs, past perfect, more complex forms of passive, present perfect simple and progressive, for/since, reported questions/imperatives, conditional sentences (type 2), reflexive pronouns, will (offer), used to.

INTERMEDIATE • B2 (Vantage)

Structures of preceding levels + had better, have+object+past participle, less common phrasal verbs, indirect questions, have/make/let/get+object+infinitive, past perfect simple and progressive, conditional sentences (type 3), be used to, verbs of perception, wish, would rather, be able/likely to, so/neither, gerund and infinitive.

POST-INTERMEDIATE • C1 (Effectiveness)

Structures of preceding levels + idioms, other uncommon phrasal verbs, future progressive, future perfect, past conditional, inversion.



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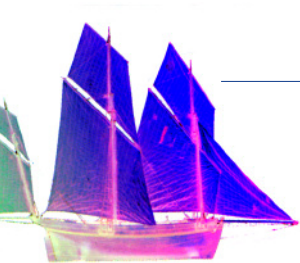


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The Artist's Dream (J. A. Fitzgerald, 1857).

INTRODUCTION



SUPERNATURAL TALES

Stories narrating supernatural or mysterious events became very popular in English and American literature in the period between the mid-19th century and World War II. The interest in ghosts and mystery stories developed from the previous gothic tradition. Gothic fiction had produced novels set in dark abbeys or isolated castles, based on complicated plots revolving around supernatural or mysterious events, where a virtuous hero (more often a heroine) was persecuted by a villain and where an atmosphere of oppression and terror dominated. Unlike gothic novels, supernatural stories are rarely complex: their **plot** is usually linear, leading the reader from the initial situation (a single circumstance or event in the life of the character) to the climax and finally to the conclusion, where a solution of some kind to the situation presented is given; their **setting** is often realistic and their **characters** are usually ordinary people, who, for some reason, come into contact with the world of the supernatural.

THE PLOT

Let's start from the **plot**. In all the stories collected in this book the plot is based on a mysterious circumstance and the climax (that is to say, the supernatural event that comes to upset a pre-existing balance and allows the passage from the initial to the final situation) is built up by a series of elements that contribute to rouse expectation and to create suspense in the reader. So we have a grinning skeleton, moving objects, disquieting dreams, strange telephone calls, an inexplicable illness. The only story in this book where a ghost appears suddenly, with no premonition at all, is the one by J.G. Lang.

The supernatural element itself differs in the stories. While the apparition in *The Ghost upon the Rail* is 'taken for granted' (a trial is even started on the basis of the vision), in other stories the mysterious presence can be interpreted as the result of coincidences (*Bone to his Bone*) or as the product of an overexcited or troubled imagination: the scientist in *A Ghost Story* is oppressed by a sense of guilt; the lady in *The Rose Garden* might be influenced by the tale of an old friend; Ligeia's husband might be hallucinated by his obsessions and by drugs;

the doctor in *The Confession of Charles Linkworth* tries to give a 'scientific' explanation to the events, mentioning theories about the relation between soul and body, but in the end the proof of the 'real' existence of Charles Linkworth's ghost (a rope) disappears, leaving the reader unable to give a definite answer. So most of the stories presented in this book can have opposite interpretations: the supernatural event can be seen either as 'real' or as the result of the character's imagination or disturbed perception. This effect is produced on one hand by the narration itself and by the sequence of the events in the plot, on the other hand, by the setting and by the characters' personalities.

THE SETTING

All the stories are set in – or at least refer to – real places which can be found on a geographic map: London, Essex, Cambridge and Bath, Sheffield, the Rhine and England, Sydney. *The Ghost upon the Rail* is the most precise as for locations: not only is Sydney mentioned but also the places around the city and the reader is given detailed descriptions of the landscape. On the other hand *Ligeia* is the vaguest as far as the setting is concerned. In fact, even though we know that the protagonist moves from Germany to England, no specific information is given: we learn that in Germany the protagonist lived in "a large, old, decaying city near the Rhine", then "in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England". What is more important in Poe's tale is not so much the geographic location as the house (an old abbey) in which the supernatural event takes places. It is described at length and every detail contributes to create the disquieting atmosphere of the story.

THE CHARACTERS

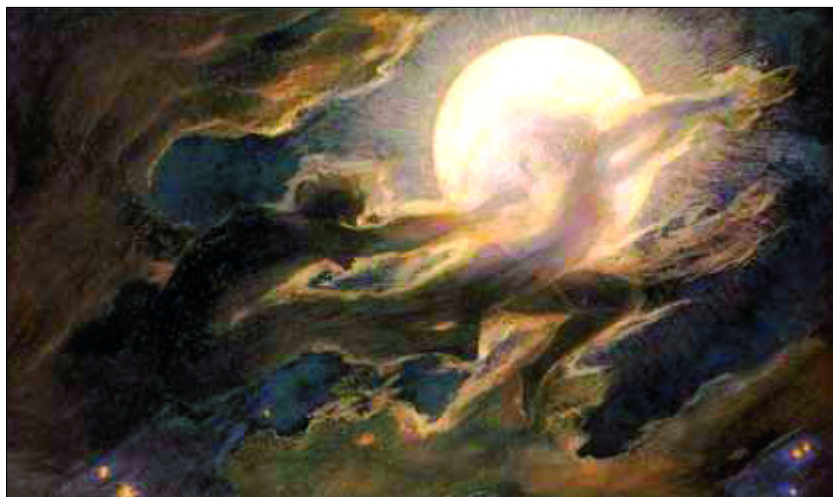
As mentioned before, most of the characters, as well as the places, are very common. They are everyday, rational people: a scientist, a doctor, a shopkeeper, a vicar, a well-to-do lady, a farmer. So both the setting and the characters allow the readers to identify themselves with the situation, which makes the intrusion of the supernatural and the mysterious into life all the more striking. The only exception is the protagonist of Poe's story. Poe presents him as an uncommon person. First of all his occupation ("... metaphysical investigation at which time I was most busily occupied...") is far from being ordinary; then, when he introduces himself at the beginning, he declares that his "memory is feeble". Later we learn that he has been a prey of violent passions and that he makes use of drugs. It seems that Poe warns the reader that what the character tells is not totally credible, that he wants to show us that the horror narrated is not 'real', external, but within the mind of the character himself.

THE NARRATOR

In addition *Ligeia*'s main character is also the **narrator** (first person narration), which makes him even less reliable, as the reader is given a narrow, biased point of view, even though the story is rendered more involving by a first person narrator. Almost all the other stories instead are third person narrations, that is to say, the narrator is not one of the characters. An external narrator generally allows a wider, more balanced and apparently more objective point of view. The only exception is *A Ghost Story*, whose narration is based on a technique called 'the Chinese boxes'. In fact we have two levels of narration: one tells us of a group of friends who meet and discuss about spiritualism, the other is the actual supernatural story. This technique allows the narrator to distance himself even more from the events narrated and consequently it causes a greater perplexity in the reader as to the nature of the mysterious events.

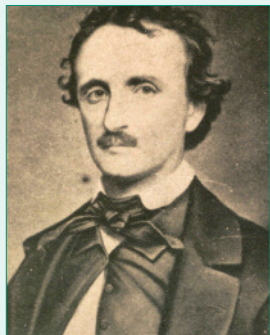
SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES

Finally let's consider the reasons why the supernatural entities mix with the living. Most stories have one in common: the dead come back as spirits among the living to accomplish some unfinished business in life. In one case – *A Ghost Story* – the spirit looks for revenge; in another – *The Ghost upon the Rail* – the ghost of a murdered man seeks justice; in *Bone to his Bone* the soul of a dead vicar demands a decent burial, while that of the sentenced Charles Linkworth wants to confess his crime; in *The Rose Garden*, the spirit – an evil one – is that of a cruel judge who malignantly haunts the people who live in the place where he used to live and work. Again Poe represents an exception: *Ligeia* comes back from death to meet her husband again because of her passionate, intense desire for life.



The author

Edgar Allan Poe



Best known for his poems and short fiction, **Edgar Allan Poe** (born in Boston, January 19, 1809, died in Baltimore, October 7, 1849) deserves more credit than any other writer for the transformation of the short story from anecdote to art. He virtually created the detective story and perfected the psychological thriller. He also produced some of the most influential literary criticism of his time – important theoretical statements on poetry and the short story – and has had a worldwide influence on literature.

Poe's parents, David Poe Jr. and Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins, were touring actors; both died before he was 3 years old, and he was taken into the home of John Allan, a prosperous merchant in Richmond, Virginia, and baptized Edgar Allan Poe. His childhood was uneventful¹, even though² he studied for 5 years (1815-20) in England. In 1826 he entered the University of Virginia but stayed for only one year. In fact, in spite of being a good student, he had to leave university because of gambling³ debts that Allan refused to pay. Allan didn't allow his return to the university and broke off Poe's engagement to Sarah Elmira Royster, his Richmond fiancée. Lacking any means of support, Poe enlisted⁴ in the army. He had, however, already written and printed (at his own expense) his first book, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), verses written in the manner of Byron.

Temporarily reconciled, Allan secured Poe's admission to West Point Military Academy but refused to provide financial support. After 6 months Poe was court-martialled and dismissed from West Point for disobedience of orders. His fellow cadets, however, contributed the funds for the publication of *Poems by Edgar A. Poe, Second Edition* (1831). This volume contained the famous *To Helen* and *Israfel*, poems that show the calculated musical effects of language that would characterize his poetry.

Poe took up residence in Baltimore with his widowed aunt, Maria Clemm, and her daughter, Virginia, and turned to fiction as a way to

1. *uneventful*: ordinario, tranquillo.

2. *even though*: sebbene, anche se.

3. *gambling*: gioco d'azzardo.

4. *enlist*: arruolarsi.

support himself. In 1832 the Philadelphia Saturday Courier published five of his stories – all comic or satiric – and in 1833, *MS. Found in a Bottle* won a \$50 prize given by the Baltimore Saturday Visitor. Poe, his aunt, and Virginia moved to Richmond in 1835, and he became editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and married Virginia, his cousin, who was not yet 14 years old.

Poe published fiction, one of his most horrifying tales, *Berenice*, in the *Messenger*, but most of his contributions were serious, analytical, and critical reviews⁵ that earned him respect as a critic. He praised the young Dickens and a few other contemporaries but devoted most of his attention to devastating reviews of popular contemporary authors. His contributions undoubtedly increased the magazine's circulation, but they offended its owner, who also criticized Poe's drinking. The January 1837 issue of the *Messenger* announced Poe's dismissal as editor but also included the first instalment⁶ of his long prose tale, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, five of his reviews, and two of his poems. This was the paradoxical pattern for Poe's career: success as an artist and editor but failure to satisfy his employers and to secure an income.

First in New York City (1837), then in Philadelphia (1838-44), and again in New York (1844-49), Poe tried to establish himself as a force in literary journalism, but with only moderate success. He succeeded, however, in formulating influential literary theories and in demonstrating mastery of the forms he favoured – highly musical poems and short prose narratives. Both forms, he argued, should aim at “a certain unique or single effect”. His theory of short fiction is best exemplified in *Ligeia* (1838), the tale Poe considered his finest, and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), which would become one of his most famous stories; both tales belong to the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841) is sometimes considered the first detective story. Exemplary among his musical verses are *The Raven* (1845) and *The Bells* (1849).

Virginia's death, caused by tuberculosis in January 1847, was a heavy blow, but Poe continued to write and lecture. In the summer of 1849 he revisited Richmond, lectured, and was accepted again by the fiancée he had lost in 1826. After his return he was found unconscious on a Baltimore street and died shortly after being taken to hospital. In a brief obituary⁷ the *Baltimore Clipper* reported that Poe had died of “congestion of the brain”, even though the real cause of his death remains unknown.

5. *review*: recensione.

7. *obituary*: necrologio.

6. *instalment*: puntata, episodio.



BEFORE READING

1 The title of this story is the name of a woman. What do you think her role in the narration is? Choose from the alternatives given below.

- ☐ the protagonist
- ☐ the narrator
- ☐ the antagonist

2 Look at the pictures and try to guess which one represents Ligeia.



3 Read the following words pronounced by Ligeia and try to guess the circumstance in which they are said. Choose from the alternatives given below.

"O God, O Divine Father! Shall Death, the conqueror, be not once conquered? Are we not part of You, who knows the mysteries of the Will, with its vigour? Man does not yield himself to the angels, nor to death completely, except only through the weakness of his feeble Will."

- ☐ she is praying in a church
- ☐ she is reading aloud from a book
- ☐ she is dying
- ☐ she is at her husband's death-bed