

POE, TIMES TWO

By Greg Oliver Bodine

Adapted from
The Cask of Amontillado and *The Black Cat*
by Edgar Allan Poe

POE, TIMES TWO

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POE, TIMES TWO

Poe, Times Two was first presented as part of the 'Straight From The Source Summer Showcase Series' at Manhattan Theatre Source in New York City, July 23 - 26, 2007 with the following cast and crew: Cast: Greg Oliver Bodine; Director: Amber Estes; Dramaturgy: DeLisa M. White; Stage Manager: Amber Estes; Lighting Design: Keith Truax; Sound Design: Andy Cohen; Costume Design: Jeanette Aultz; Set Design: Oliver H. Bodine, Jr.; Featured Artwork: Richard T. Scott.

Poe, Times Two received three New York Innovative Theatre Award nominations in a remounted production at The Workshop Theater in New York City, Oct. 26 - Nov. 5, 2011 with the following cast and crew: Cast: Greg Oliver Bodine; Director: DeLisa M. White; Stage Manager: Stefania Diana Schramm; Lighting Design: Richard Kent Green; Sound Design: Charles Jeffreys; Costume Design: Jeanette Aultz; Featured Artwork: Richard T. Scott; Graphic Design: Paula Hoza; Producing Director: Kathleen Brant.

Poe, Times Two received its regional premiere at Cape May Stage in Cape May, NJ Oct. 31 - Nov. 16, 2012 with the following cast and crew: Cast: Greg Oliver Bodine; Director: DeLisa M. White; Stage Manager: Lisa Shames; Asst. Stage Manager: Jenna Ready; Lighting Design: Richard Kent Green; Sound Design: Charles Jeffreys; Costume Design: Jeanette Aultz; Set Design: Oliver H. Bodine, Jr.; Featured Artwork: Richard T. Scott.

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(Greg Oliver Bodine as Montresor in the 2007 production of *Poe, Times Two*. Photo by Charles Jeffreys)

"*Poe, Times Two* sets a high bar for the remainder of Fringe 2016. Greg Oliver Bodine has taken two very difficult but very Fringe-y types of theater, the horror genre and the solo performance form, and hit them both out of the ballpark. If you like horror generally, or Poe specifically, put *Poe, Times Two* on your Fringe calendar."
--Alan Katz, *DC Theatre Scene*, 5/5 Rating: *Pick of the Fringe*

"Bodine expertly brought these two haunting classics off the dusty pages of the textbook and to vivid, breathing life on the stage."
--William Powell, *DC Metro Theater Arts*, 5 Stars: *Best Of The 2016 Capital Fringe*

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Poe, Times Two is a double-bill of one-man plays that should ideally be performed by one actor without an intermission. Only a brief musical interlude is necessary to allow enough time for set and costume changes between *The Cask of Amontillado* and *The Black Cat*.

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

TIME

Evening. Early 1820s.

PLACE

State Inquisitor's Room of the Doge's Palace, Venice.

CHARACTERS

MONTRESOR: a slighted, Venetian nobleman.

THE BLACK CAT

TIME

Past Midnight. October, 1849.

PLACE

The cell of a prison, North of New York City.

CHARACTERS

ALFRED, a condemned man.

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

House lights fade to blackout as Intro music cross-fades to the murmur of low, officious voices, followed by the sound of three gavel strikes. At rise, lights up to reveal an elegant but sparsely furnished room of The Prigioni Vecchi (State Inquisitor's Room) -- formerly of the Palazzo Ducale (Doge's Palace). At downstage center, MONTRESOR sits expectantly in a large, ornately carved mahogany chair, set upstage center. He is dressed tastefully in a linen shirt, dark breeches, black cravat, and a plush, burgundy-colored waistcoat under an elegant tailcoat. Next to him, on top of a small, Renaissance-era table, a goblet and crystal carafe of mineral water are set on a polished, silver tray. The upstage wall is adorned with a large, gild-framed oil painting of Giambattista Ponchino's "The Triumph of Justice Over Rebellion." Montresor indignantly rises from the chair.

MONTRESOR. *(to an audience member)* Signor Luchesi, *(to the rest of the house, with metered deliberation)* esteemed members of the Council...with all due respect, I have answered thus far, without impediment, every question you have asked me. I have freely stated the reasons that precipitated my actions, which I maintain in my defense, were quite warranted. To that of which I stand accused: I confess the deed. But I fail to see your purpose in attempting to ascertain the *exact* means and method of my undertaking. The details are irrelevant -- I have committed no crime! *(pausing to compose himself)* Nonetheless, if it will serve to please your curiosity in the interest of concluding this tribunal, then I will indulge your request. Suffice to say, the thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could. But when he ventured upon *insult* -- I vowed revenge! *(to someone else in the*

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audience) You, who so well know the nature of my soul, what it means to preserve one's honor and reputation, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a vulgar threat. No! *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled. But the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is un-redressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally un-redressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong. *(crossing back to sit in the chair)* Neither by word nor deed had I given Signor Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, *(he does, the smile tapering off to a snarl)* ...and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation. He had a weak point, this Fortunato. Although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in *wine*. Few Venetians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity -- to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like most commoners, was a *quack*. But in the matter of old wines, he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially; I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could. *(lights shift as he rises from the chair)* It was about dusk, almost five and twenty years ago this very night, during the supreme madness of the Carnival season, that I encountered my friend. *(reconsidering his choice of words)* Usurping, gluttonous, gouty, back-stabbing and bourgeois are words I would sooner use to describe the *true* quality of his character, but for outward appearances, by design, and for the record, yes -- at the time I suppose I suffered him a *friend*. *(a pause as he surveys the audience)* Our association was not one of bona fide mutual amity, I assure you. Expedience compelled me to make his acquaintance -- nothing more. What! There is not a soul in this room that has not demonstrated a talent for self-

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preservation! Why should I have exempted myself? (*continuing the story*) He accosted me amidst the throng of revelers in the Campo San Polo with excessive warmth, for he was drunk. The man wore motley: he had on a stained, ill-fitting, party-striped dress of lavender and yellow; his head surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand. I said to him, "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met! How remarkably well you are looking tonight. Still basking in the glow of your post-nuptials, I see. You and the Lady Fortunato are nothing less than the toast of Venice, I'll wager." (*as Fortunato with a boozy wink*): "And the *envy* -- a pity you could not attend the ceremony," he boasted. "I was abroad on business when I heard the news of your betrothal -- my hearty congratulations, all the same! (*confidentially*) But I have received a cask of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts." (*as Fortunato*): "How? Amontillado? A whole *cask*? Impossible! And in the middle of the Carnival!" "I have my doubts," I said, "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado *price* without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain." (*as Fortunato*): "Hmph! A bargain, indeed! I fear you were cheated, Montresor. (*with a playful jab*) But a fool and his money are soon parted, eh? Stupidity is often its own reward, my friend, and *dabbling* in such matters of the grape can prove costly. I pray you learn from your mistake... (*chuckling*) Amontillado. A *cask*, no less. The idea!" "I have my doubts." (*as Fortunato*): "Amontillado, you say?" "And I *must* satisfy them." (*as Fortunato, greedily*): "Hm... Amontillado!" "As you are engaged, I am on my way to Signor Luchesi. If any one has a critical turn, it is he. (*starting to leave*) He will tell me--" (*as Fortunato*): "Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from cooking sherry!" "And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own." (*as Fortunato*): "A match for my own! Come, let us go." "Whither?" (*as Fortunato*): "To your -- your -- ah, AH... (*a violent sneeze*) ...your vaults." "My friend, no -- I will not impose

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upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi will--" (*as Fortunato, wiping his nose*): "I have no engagement. Come." "My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with *nitre*." (*as Fortunato*): "Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Amontillado from *Ammonia*!" Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a cape closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo. There were no servants at home -- they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house -- these orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance as soon as my back was turned! I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of my ancestors. The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode. (*as Fortunato*): "The cask?" "It is farther on, (*pointing upwards*) but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls." He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication. (*as Fortunato, uneasily, suppressing a small cough*): "Nitre?" (*nodding*) "Nitre. How long have you had that cough?" (*as Fortunato, after a violent fit of coughing*): "It is nothing." "Come, we will go back," I insisted -- "your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once *I* was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi." (*as Fortunato*): "Enough!

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The cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough!" (*aside to an audience member*) True... (*then back to Fortunato with a sly smile*) "True! And indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily -- but you should use all proper caution. (*Montresor crosses up behind the table and grabs the carafe of mineral water*) A draught of this Médoc will defend us from the damp." Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould, and poured the wine into a small flagon that lay nearby. (*he fills the goblet, holding it out*) "Drink." (*raising the goblet*) He raised it to his lips with a leer. (*as Fortunato, after uneasily taking in the surrounding bones and skulls of the catacombs*): "I drink, to the buried that repose around us." (*he drinks, swishing the contents in his mouth before taking a pronounced swallow, then passes the goblet to his other hand*) "And I to your long life. Salute." (*Montresor takes a modest sip from the goblet, then sets it on the tray*) He again took my arm, and we proceeded. (*as Fortunato*): "These vaults are extensive." "The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family." (*as Fortunato*): "I forget your coat-of-arms." (*showing the gold signet ring he is wearing*) "A huge human foot of gold in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel." (*as Fortunato*): "And the motto?" "*Nemo me impune lacessit.*" (*as Fortunato*): "*No one wounds me with impunity.* Good!" The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Médoc. (*crossing down and around the chair*) We passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, (*he does*) -- and this time I made bold to seize *Fortunato* by an arm, above the elbow. (*looking above*) "The nitre! See? It increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. (*feigning a shiver*) The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough --" (*as Fortunato*): "It is nothing! Let us go on. (*reaching for the goblet*) But first, another

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draught of the Médoc. (*he taps his forearm twice and thrusts the goblet upward in salutation*) Charge high!" I did not understand. I looked at him in surprise. (*he does*) He repeated the movement -- a grotesque one. (*as Fortunato, with another upward thrust of the goblet*): "You do not comprehend?" "Not I." (*he sets the goblet down indignantly on the table, then as Fortunato*): "Then you are not of the brotherhood!" "How?" (*as Fortunato*): "You are not of the masons." "Yes." (*as Fortunato*): "No." "Yes!" (*as Fortunato*): "You? Impossible! A mason?" "A mason." (*as Fortunato, testing him*): "A sign." "It is this," I said, producing small trowel from the folds of my cape. (*as Fortunato*): "You jest! Ha-ha...(*rubbing his hands*) but let us proceed to the Amontillado, eh?" (*Montresor smiles*) "Be it so." We continued our route (*he starts to cross irregularly downstage, hunched over with the imaginary torch thrust out before him*) -- and passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descended again, arriving at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame. At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another, less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. But from the fourth, the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, creating a mound of some size. Within the exposed wall, we perceived a still *smaller*, interior recess. It seemed to have been constructed for no special use in itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by walls of solid granite. Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depths of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see. (*ushering Fortunato on*): "Proceed," I said, "herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi--" (*as Fortunato*): "He is an ignoramus!" (*as Fortunato, he steps unsteadily forward*) I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche and stood

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stupidly, bewildered -- finding his progress arrested by the rock. In its surface were two large, iron staples distant from each other about two feet. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist and around his wrists, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it -- he was too much astounded to resist. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. (*stepping back*) Withdrawing the key from the padlock, I stepped back from the recess. "Pass your hand along the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is *very* damp. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power." (*as an astonished and confused Fortunato*): "But...the Amontillado." "True," I replied, "the Amontillado." I quickly busied myself among the pile of bones. (*miming*) Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. (*Montresor drops to his knee holding up the imaginary trowel*) With the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche. (*he begins to frenetically lay the mortar and stone with the trowel in mime*) First stone, second stone, third stone, fourth! (*a little out of breath, rising*) I had scarcely laid the first tier of my masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. (*as Fortunato, a few high-pitched cries of panic from the depths of the recess*): "Oh...oh...ah! Ahh!" (*Montresor stifles a giggle*) It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. (*beat*) I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth ; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. (*Montresor crosses up to the table*) The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the *more* satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. (*he takes a sip of water, then sets the goblet down again*) When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption, the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my chest. I again paused,

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and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within. (*ferociously as Fortunato*): "GRR! AHH!" (*Montresor jumps back with fright, holding the hilt of an imaginary sword*) The succession of loud, shrill screams thrust me back! For a brief moment I hesitated. Unsheathing my rapier (*he does so in mime*) I began to grope with it about the recess. But the solid fabric of the catacombs assured me. I felt satisfied and re-approached the wall. (*he does, cautiously*) I replied to the yells. I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. (*as Fortunato*): "Ah! Help! Help me!" (*mimicking him weakly*) "Ah. Help. Help me." (*as Fortunato*): "Somebody, help me!" "Somebody help me." (*as Fortunato*): "SOMEBODY!" "Somebody." (*as Fortunato*): "HELP!" "Help." (*beat*) The clamorer grew still. It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight and placed it partially into its destined position. (*he does, with some effort in mime and stands to examine his work*) But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. (*as Fortunato with a demented chuckle*): "Ha, ha, ha! He, he!" It was succeeded by a sad, pathetic voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the pompously ignoble Fortunato. "A very good joke indeed -- an excellent jest. (*breaking into hysterical laughter*) We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo... he, he -- over our wine -- ha, ha, ha!" "Over the Amontillado?" I asked. (*as Fortunato*): "Yes, yes -- the AMONTILLADO! (*Fortunato's laughter quickly subsides as the sound of a rat scampering past him in the dark is heard, then nervously*): But is it not getting late? Will they not be awaiting us at the palazzo -- the Lady Fortunato and the rest?" (*Montresor takes a deliberate step toward the recess*) "The Lady Fortunato, I presume, will grow old and die childless -- ever faithful to your faded memory. (*then, icily*) Certainly, if I could not have her for a

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wife, Signor, then *nobody* shall." (*as Fortunato*): "For the love of God, Montresor, I beg you... let us be gone!" (*Montresor pulls out his pocket watch*) "Yes, for the love of God, I must be going -- look at the time." But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. "Fortunato?" (*beat*) No answer. "Don Fortunato?" (*he reaches into his waistcoat pocket and removes a small, orphaned bell from a Fool's cap attached by some yellow ribbon to an old padlock key*) There came forth in return...only a jingling of the bells. (*he cups the key and bell in his hand*) My heart grew sick...(with a sudden hearty laugh) -- on account of the dampness of the catacombs! I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position. Against the new

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!!

THE BLACK CAT

Transition music fades out with transition light. The stage is dark. Ghostly choral voices -- perhaps Gyorgy Ligeti's 'Lux Aeterna Fur 16 Stimmigen Gemischten Chor A Capella' -- fade up with dim blue light on the solitary figure of a man, sitting center stage behind a rough-hewn table. He is asleep, hunched over in the chair, his head resting upon his shoulders. The music grows louder, then bumps out under a clap of thunder and flash of lightning -- startling the man, who awakes, sitting up suddenly.

ALFRED. (*calling out, tensely*) Who's there? (*he reaches to adjust the knob of a small oil lamp on the table and brightens the flame. Lights come up on ALFRED in the cramped, stark quarters of a prison cell. He is dressed in dirty, faded, striped, gray prison shirt and trousers, and his wire-framed spectacles give his haggard, unshaven face a gentle, scholarly appearance in spite of*

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the crude, dank surroundings of his confinement. The echo of dripping water is heard and then dissipates. The upstage stone wall contains a large, single center window set with heavy iron bars. A wooden pail is set on the floor, upstage in one corner. Now illuminated on the table: a chipped enamel cup, a feathered quill pen in a pewter inkwell, a crudely fastened manuscript and several sheets of paper set next to the lamp. Alfred gets up holding the lamp and slowly crosses to the upstage cell window in a wide, deliberate arc. He pauses to listen to the soft rain and distant thunder outside. Crossing back to his chair, he takes a quick look under the table before resuming his chair. He looks out again and is startled a second time): Ahh! (to an audience member in a surprised, but familiar tone) Hello, again. I didn't mean to scare you -- I've been on edge and you gave me such a start! The guards... I thought they were coming to... never mind. (he takes an iron nail from his pocket and shows it furtively) While you were away, I removed one of the nails from my chair and took the liberty of scratching my initials into the rafter -- (pointing above and behind him) right next to yours, see? "A.C." Thank you for coming back. I wasn't sure if you would return. I'm frightened. At long last, my hour of reckoning has arrived, and it's a great comfort to have you here with me. It's good to see you. (he acknowledges several more audience members, then to various, empty spaces on stage, with a nod) It's good to see all of you. (looking up at the rafter again) There are so many names and dates etched into the wood up there. I often stare at them and I wonder: Who were you? What were your hopes and dreams? What were your crimes? What went wrong? (with a faint smile) And then I am mutely reminded to be merely content with the pleasure of your company. (taking up the quill pen) A gift from the warden's wife. Good behavior has its small rewards -- even in here. (showing his ink-stained fingertips) As you can see, I've been busy writing... nothing so maudlin as a farewell letter, rest assured. (anxiously) No. My present undertaking is, in content, something closer to a

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journal, a detailed account -- a most wild, yet most homely narrative, of which I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad I am *not* -- and very surely I do not dream. (*pointing to the offstage cell door*) But tomorrow I die, and tonight I would unburden my soul! It's almost complete, but I've grown tired, so very tired, and I fell asleep -- for how long, I can only guess. (*Alfred deposits the pen into the inkwell, gets up holding some pages he's written and crosses down and around the table*) My immediate purpose has been to document, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. (*shuffling through some of the papers*) Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place -- some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive nothing more than an ordinary succession of very *natural* causes and effects. (*he crosses back to the table, placing the papers on it, and turns around, then with a nervous, ironic chuckle*) Locked up in here as I am, I suppose it would surprise you to know that from my infancy I was noted for the *gentleness* and *humanity* of my nature. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my friends. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This affinity grew with me into manhood, and in it I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of an animal, which goes directly to the human heart. (*tenderly touching his wedding band*) I married early, and was happy to find in my wife, Cecilia, a disposition not uncongenial with my own. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a *cat*. (*crouching down to better admire the animal in describing it*) A remarkably large and beautiful animal -- entirely black -- and sagacious to an astonishing degree. My wife, who at heart, was not a little tinctured with

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superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point -- I only mention it just now to be remembered. (*he goes back to his desk to write down some details of the memory, then resumes*) Pluto -- this was the cat's name -- was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets. Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character -- through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance -- experienced a radical alteration for the worse. (*Alfred's tone becomes darker*) I grew, day by day, more moody -- more *irritable* -- more regardless of the feelings of others. "Alfred, darling," Cecilia called one night, as I sat alone with a half-empty bottle. (*as Cecilia*): "Alfred, dearest?" Suffice to say I resented the intrusion. "Alfred?" (*viciously*) "WHAT, damn you!" (*quietly, as Cecilia*): "I'm going to bed," she said. "Please don't forget to put the cat out." (*frowning*) I had suffered myself to use intemperate language to my *wife*. At length, (*clenching his fist, unaware*) I even offered her personal *violence*! (*he is briefly overcome with shame by the admission, then composes himself*) My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. (*matter-of-factly*) I not only neglected, but ill-used them. (*relieved*) For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating *him*, (*with sadistic joy*) as I made *no* scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way! But my disease grew upon me. For what disease is like alcohol? At length, even Pluto, who was now becoming old and peevish -- even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper. Returning home one evening around midnight, and much intoxicated from one of my haunts about town, (*seeing the cat down right*) I fancied that the cat *avoided* my presence. I seized him, (*he does, in mime, grabbing the imaginary cat roughly off the*

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floor by the scruff of its neck) -- when, in his fright at my violence, he bit my hand (*reacting*) "Ouch!" (*Alfred instinctively takes the cat by his other hand, as he shakes off the pain and sucks the wound of his injury*) The fury of a demon possessed me! (*out again*) I knew myself no longer. I took from my waistcoat-pocket...(*he produces the nail from his pants pocket*) a pen-knife. I opened it, and holding the beast by the neck, (*he takes the phantom cat he is clutching up to the stage right table and pins it by the throat on the table-top to demonstrate*) -- I cut one of its eyes from the socket! (*reliving the horror*) I blush, I burn, I shudder at the memory of the atrocity! (*he sinks into the chair, burying his head in his arms upon the table*) When reason returned with the morning -- after I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch -- I experienced a sentiment half of horror and half of remorse, but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed. (*getting up again*) The cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but fled in extreme terror whenever I approached. At first, I was grieved by cat's dislike for me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation and then to a spirit of *perverseness*. Of this spirit, philosophy takes no account. Perverseness is... (*Alfred suddenly has an idea, then goes back to the desk to write it down, speaking aloud as he records his thoughts in ink*) "*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.*" (*putting the pen down, out*) Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or petty act for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? I ask you. (*he points to an empty space between two audience members downright*) Yes, you! In the corner: have we not an inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is Law, merely because we

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understand it to be such? (*beat*) It's a simple question that begs a simple answer -- 'yes' or 'no.' Speak up -- you're not on trial anymore. They can't hang you *twice!* Well? (*with a nod, returning to his chair*) Silence. (*then, dismissively*) I expected as much from a ghost! (*to the audience again*) This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about the cat's neck and hung it to the limb of a tree. Hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offense; hung it because I knew that in so doing, I was committing a sin -- a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it -- even, even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the most merciful and most terrible God! (*beat*) On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was roused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames! (*looking about, frantically*) The whole house was blazing. My wife and I barely made our escape from the inferno. The destruction was complete; our home, my entire worldly wealth -- swallowed up and turned into ashes. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, that stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the *action* of the fire -- a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd was collecting, and many people seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat!* (*a crack of thunder / flash of lightning reveals the fleeting shadow of a cat against the stage right wall*) There was a rope about the animal's neck. When I first beheld this apparition, my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at last, reflection has come to my aid... (*he sits excitedly at the desk and removes the quill pen from the inkwell, attempting to rationalize the phenomenon as he writes*) The cat, I

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remember, yes: "*The cat had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house.... Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been filled by the crowd.*" Someone, yes -- someone must have cut the animal down and thrown it through an open window into my chamber to rouse me from sleep. The impact had compressed the dead animal into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames and the ammonia from the carcass, had created the portraiture as I saw it. Huh. Although I thus readily account this to my reason *now*, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy at the time. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat. I went so far as to regret the *loss* of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile saloons I frequented, for another pet of the same species and appearance, with which to take its place. One night, as I sat, half-stupefied in a seedy, run-down tavern, my attention was suddenly drawn to some dark object, (*gesturing to an imaginary cask set somewhere downstage*) reposing upon the head of one of the immense casks of gin, or of rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the establishment. I approached, and touched it with my hand. (*he does, reaching out to touch it, then looks out again*) It was a black cat. A very large one - - fully as large as Pluto -- and closely resembling him in every respect but one: Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but *this* cat had a large splotch of white covering nearly the whole region of its breast. He immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This was the very creature of which I was in search! I at once offered to purchase it from the landlord; but this person made no claim to it -- knew nothing of it -- had never *seen* it before. When I prepared to leave, the cat evinced a disposition to follow me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping to pat it as I stumbled homeward. When it reached the house, it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife. (*as Cecilia*): "Oh, Alfred -- he's beautiful! Where on earth did you find him?" "He followed me home last night. Must be a stray --

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nobody's made claim to him at any rate." (*as Cecilia*): "Shall we keep him, then? I should ever so much enjoy the company." Cecilia's question, put so sweetly, afforded me the opportunity to make amends for all my past transgressions against her *and* to salve my wounded conscience for the loss of our beloved Pluto. How could I refuse? "If it would please *you*, my dear, then of course he can stay." (*as Cecilia*): "Oh, thank you. Poor, precious thing -- and so remarkably good-natured in spite of its deformity." "Deformity?" (*as Cecilia*): "Why yes, silly -- haven't you noticed? This cat has *also* been deprived of one its eyes." (*collapsing into his chair*) I found a *dislike* to it arising within me immediately! By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature. I did not, for some weeks, strike or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually I came to look upon it with *loathing*. Despite my aversion to this cat, however, *its* fondness for *me* only seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps; would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk, it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down. At such times, although I longed to destroy it, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by the memory of my former crime, but chiefly -- let me confess it -- by absolute *dread* of the beast. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the mark of white hair, which constituted the sole visible difference between *this* cat and the one I had, unbeknownst to her, destroyed. Slowly but surely, this mark began to assume a distinctly rigorous outline -- of an object that I shudder to name -- and for this, above all, I would have rid myself of the monster had I dared -- it was now, I say, an image of... the gallows! (*crouching into a ball*) Beneath the pressure of this torment, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. *Evil* thoughts became my sole intimates -- the darkest and most vile of thoughts! The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind. From the sudden, frequent outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly

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abandoned myself, (*demonically, with clenched fists, he slowly rises*) -- my lovely, uncomplaining Cecilia was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers! One day, she accompanied me upon some household errand into the cellar of our new house. The cat followed me down the steep stairs and (*he crosses down to demonstrate, almost tripping*) -- nearly throwing me headlong -- exasperated me to madness! (*raising his arm*) Uplifting an axe in my wrath, I aimed a fatal blow at the animal.

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