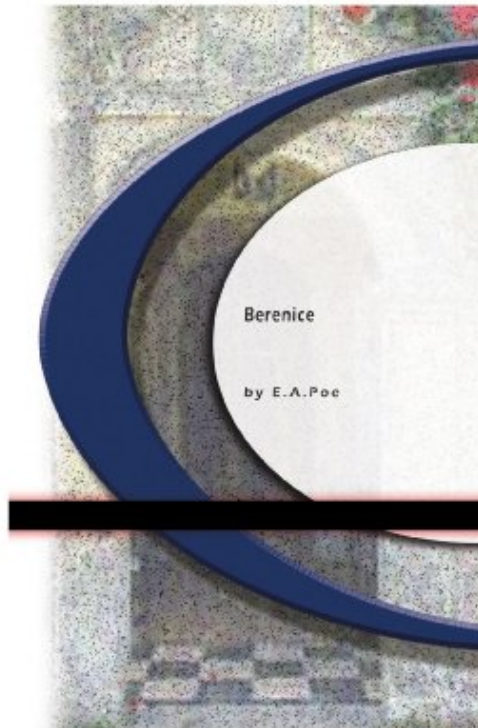


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## Berenice

*Edgar Allan Poe*

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2009-05-01 Format: Large Print Original language: English 10.50 x .6 x 8.251, #File Name: B002AJFGG224 pages | File size: 59.Mb

**Edgar Allan Poe : Berenice** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Berenice:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Difficult to readBy cshans07Difficult to read and hard to determine the significance of any given sentence. I still really don't know what happened.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This tale of horror can still raise the hairs on the back of a reader's neck.By Glenn RussellSince there are a few dozen reviews already posted here, in the spirit of freshness I will compare Poe's tale with a few other tales, each of these other tales picking up on a `Berenice' theme. ObsessionIn `The Gaze' by Jean Richepin, the narrator peers through the window of a cell at a madman, arms spread, head uplifted, transfixed by a point on a wall near the ceiling. The doctor-alienist relates to the narrator how this inmate is obsessed with the gaze of eyes from an artist's portrait. "For there was something in that gaze, believe me, that could trouble not only the already-enfeebled brain of a man afflicted with general paralysis, but even a sound and solid mind." Indeed, as it turns out, the doctor-alienist is, in his

own way, obsessed with the eyes of the portrait. Obsession in this tale is clear-cut and unambiguous, the level-headed narrator encountering two different men obsessed by painterly eyes.

**Teeth**Toward the end of 'At the Death-Bed' by Guy de Maupassant, a tale told by an old man reflecting back on an experience he has years ago when he and a friend sat in a room next to the chamber where lay the corpse of German pessimistic philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer. The old man relates how they both heard a sound and saw something white pass across the death bed and disappear under an armchair. Terrified, they moved to death chamber. We read, "Meanwhile my friend, who had taken the other candle, bent down. Then he touched my arm without a word. I followed his gaze and there, on the ground, under the armchair next to the bed, all white on the dark carpet, open as if ready to bite - Schopenhauer's false teeth." And the next sentence provides the explanation: "The rot setting in had loosened his jaws, and they has sprung from his mouth." A horrifying experience for the old man, to be sure. But as powerful as his experience was, it had a completely rational explanation.

**Split Identity**'The Double Soul' by Jean Richepin is a straightforward tale about a sixteen year-old boy who witnesses his father's death, a witnessing that causes him, psychologically, to live as two separate persons alternately. A doctor-alienist observing the young man in his sanitarium notes, "Undoubtedly, the duplication of personality manifested itself regularly, at two-year intervals: when the two years of one personality came to an end, the other was ready to come into play; between the two of them, one curious phenomenon was indispensable, a kind of mental trigger by which the first self-yielded its place to the second." Richepin's tale is fascinating but the fascination emerges from a telling where the disclosing of psychological facts is direct and unmistakable.

Let's now move to Poe's tale, which is, in many respects, at the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum from all three of the above tales. Rather than a straight-forward story told by a level-headed narrator, Poe's tale-teller conveys how he has been sickly and morose and mentally unbalanced since childhood, which, of course, alerts us to question his reliability. And to add to the eeriness and the Gothic, the tale is told in the gloomy, gray book-lined chamber of the family mansion where the narrator was born and where his mother died. There is something suffocating and ghastly and unreal permeating the atmosphere. We read, "The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn, -- not the material of my everyday existence but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself." In other words, for the narrator, his dream-world is his concrete reality.

**Dark and creepy** is ratcheted up several notches as the narrator goes on to sketch how he and his cousin Berenice grew up together - he cloistered indoors in ill-health, Berenice rambling outdoors in energetic radiant health. Radiant health, that is, until Berenice is stricken by a debilitating illness the narrator describes as a kind of extreme epilepsy. Meanwhile, the narrator's own disease grows, a sickness and intensity of nerves he terms monomania, where he obsesses on objects or words, for hours, for days and sometimes even weeks. We read how his sickness of obsession affects his perception of his cousin: "True to its own character, my disorder reveled in the less important but more startling changes wrought in the physical frame of Berenice - in the singular and most appalling distortions of her personal identity."How does the narrator distort Berenice's personal identity? **Dark and creepy** is ratcheted up yet again as the narrator further mixes his obsession with dream-visions of Bernice. We read, "The eyes were lifeless, and lusterless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, the teeth of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view." Ah, to have your lover's teeth take on a life of their own in your obsessive, monomaniacal, twisted, morbid mind!

I wouldn't want to continue with quotes or relaying the details of Poe's tale so as to possibly spoil the ending for readers. It is enough to point out that Poe didn't stop here. There is ample evidence at the end of the tale that the narrator suffers from another disorder so extreme even he cannot face it squarely - that disorder being split identity or what in medical parlance is known as dissociative identity disorder (and previously known as multiple personality disorder).Is it any wonder at the time of the tale's publication in 1835 Poe's critics and readers said the author went too far, that this Gothic tale was so ghastly and gruesome as to offend good taste? And I didn't even go into the possibility of Berenice being buried alive! Nearly 200 years later this tale of horror can still raise the hairs on the back of a reader's neck.

\*The quotes from the two Jean Richepin stories are from "Crazy Corner" translated by Brian Stableford and published by Black Coat Press. The quotes from Guy de Maupassant's tale come from 'French Decadent Tales', translated by Stephen Romer and published by Oxford University Press.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. As Black as Poe ComesBy DarylWhile I think the award of most upsetting Poe story has to go to "The Black Cat" I think the most violent and gruesome belongs to "Berenice".To say too much of the plot and story would be to spoil it. It's a long, long build up of a series of happenings of seemingly little import or interest - we've seen Poe do the whole separated lovers thing before after all. But the end is where it gets tricky, then dark, and then completely beyond the pale. I read somewhere that despite the fact that Poe censored himself on this one (a few paragraphs that extended the cruelty and deliberation of the final act were removed. I'm glad they were, the story is bad enough without them), there was still a huge out cry from readers upon initial publication that made even poor Eddie admit he'd gone too far this time. I can see why.Over all impressions - nice and dark and gritty. Just the way I like my early horror! Not as down right creepy as Legeia, but still pretty damn good.

Edgar Allan Poe's short story about a young man named Egaeus who lives in a gloomy mansion with his cousin named

Berenice. Egaeus develops an obsessive disorder which makes him fixated on certain objects while in a trance-like state. He ends up being obsessed with his cousin's teeth, which ultimately leads to her murder.