

Edgar Allan Poe: Buried Alive (Gothic Tales)

(male narrator) In his career, Poe would write nearly 70 stories in a range of genres, aiming to reach the widest possible audience.

(male #1) A third of his short stories are comedies. He liked a romantic comedy.

(narrator) Only a dozen of Poe's tales are horror stories, but they remain his most popular.

(Describer) In an animation, a door opens.

Among them, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Mask of the Red Death," "The Black Cat," "The Premature Burial." Poe was writing in the old-fashioned genre of the gothic tale, but the terrors he was tapping into were very much of the moment.

(male #2) Premature burial was a real fear in the 19th century

(Describer) A headline: Man Buried Alive.

because people seemed dead but they weren't.

(Describer) J. Gerald Kennedy:

(male #3) As odd as that seems, during periods of epidemics-- and there were several during Poe's lifetime-- there were lots of public interments taking place very hastily without proper medical examination, and there were many instances of people actually being buried before they were dead.

(Describer) An ad mentions "doubtful cases of death".



(narrator) Coffin makers provided gadgets to allow the victim to ring an alarm on the surface.

(Describer) Illustrations show the gadget.

Poe devoured the sensational accounts and would work the horrifying idea into several stories.
Premature interment is the ultimate claustrophobia.

(Describer) Gravestones stand.

Title: The Premature Burial.

(Poe) "The unendurable oppression of the lungs, "the stifling fumes of the damp earth, "the clinging to the death garments, "the rigid embrace of the narrow house, "the blackness of the absolute Night, "the silence like a sea that overwhelms the unseen but palpable presence of the Conqueror Worm."

(Describer) In an illustration, someone buried lies on their side.

(male #5) Poe is talking about the subject that makes him so universally interesting.

(Describer) Jerome McGann:

Except for sex, you can't get anything more human and fundamental than fear.

(Describer) The buried person's eyes are open.

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