

Poe Meets Shaw

**The Shaw Alphabet Edition
of
Edgar Allan Poe**

Sample

Transliterated by

Tim Browne

Eldorado

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old —
This knight so bold —
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell, as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow —
'Shadow,' said he,
'Where can it be —
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The shade replied, —
'If you seek for Eldorado!'

׳לעפנטלע

דאס איז ליטל,
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The Philosophy of Furniture

“PHILOSOPHY,” says Hegel, “is utterly useless and fruitless, and, *for this very reason*, is the sublimest of all pursuits, the most deserving of our attention, and the most worthy of our zeal” — a somewhat Coleridegy assertion, with a rivulet of deep meaning in a meadow of words. It would be wasting time to disentangle the paradox — and the more so as no one will deny that Philosophy has its merits, and is applicable to an infinity of purposes. There is reason, it is said, in the roasting of eggs, and there is philosophy even in furniture — a philosophy nevertheless which seems to be more imperfectly understood by Americans than by any civilized nation upon the face of the earth.

In the internal decoration, if not in the external architecture of their residences, the English are supreme. The Italians have but little sentiment beyond marbles and colours. In France, *meliora probant, deteriora sequuntur* — the people are too much a race of gadabouts to study and maintain those household proprieties of which, indeed, they have a delicate appreciation, or at least the elements of a proper sense. The Chinese and most of the eastern races have a warm but inappropriate fancy. The Scotch are *poor* decorists. The Dutch have merely a vague idea that a curtain is not a cabbage. In Spain they are *all* curtains — a nation of *hangmen*. The Russians do not furnish. The Hottentots and Kickapoos are very well in their way. The Yankees alone are preposterous.

How this happens, it is not difficult to see. We have no aristocracy of blood, and having therefore as a natural, and indeed as an inevitable thing, fashioned for ourselves an aristocracy of dollars, the *display of wealth* has here to take the place and perform the office of the heraldic display in monarchical countries. By a transition readily understood, and which might have been easily foreseen, we have been brought to merge in simple *show* our notions of taste itself.

To speak less abstractedly. In England, for example, no mere parade of costly appurtenances would be so likely as with us, to create an impression of the beautiful in respect to the appurtenances themselves — or of taste as respects the proprietor: — this for the reason, first, that wealth is not, in England, the loftiest object of ambition as constituting a nobility; and secondly, that there, the true nobility of blood rather avoids than affects costliness in which a parvenu rivalry may be successfully attempted, confining itself within the rigorous limits, and to the analytical investigation, of legitimate taste. The people *will* naturally imitate the nobles, and the result is a thorough diffusion of a right feeling. But in America, dollars being the supreme insignia of aristocracy, their display may be said, in general terms, to be the sole means of the aristocratic distinction; and the populace, looking up for models, are insensibly led to confound the two entirely separate ideas of magnificence and beauty. In short, the cost of an article of furniture has at length come to be, with us, nearly the sole test of its merit in a decorative point of view — and this test, once established, has led the way to many analogous errors, readily traceable to the one primitive folly.

חזוניה · רחל שרעא · ק

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There could be scarcely any thing more directly offensive to the eye of an artist than the interior of what is termed in the United States, a well-furnished apartment. Its most usual defect is a want of keeping. We speak of the keeping of a room as we would of the keeping of a picture — for both the picture and the room are amenable to those undeviating principles which regulate all varieties of art; and very nearly the same laws by which we decide upon the higher merits of a painting, suffice for a decision upon the adjustment of a chamber. A want of keeping is observable sometimes in the character of the several pieces of furniture, but generally in their colours or modes of adaptation to use. Very often the eye is offended by their inartistic arrangement. Straight lines are too prevalent — too uninterruptedly continued — or clumsily interrupted at right angles. If curved lines occur, they are repeated into unpleasant uniformity. Undue precision spoils the appearance of many a room.

Curtains are rarely well disposed, or well chosen in respect to the other decorations. With formal furniture, curtains are out of place; and an excessive volume of drapery of any kind is, under any circumstance, irreconcilable with good taste — the proper quantum, as well as the proper adjustment, depends upon the character of the general effect.

Carpets are better understood of late than of ancient days, but we still very frequently err in their patterns and colours. A carpet is the soul of the apartment. From it are deduced not only the hues but the forms of all objects incumbent. A judge at common law *may be* an ordinary man; a good judge of a carpet *must be* a genius. Yet I have heard fellows discourse of carpets with the visage of a sheep in reverie — “*d’un mouton qui rêve*” — who should not and who could not be entrusted with the management of their own moustachios. Every one knows that a large floor should have a covering of large figures, and a small one must have a covering of small — yet this is not all the knowledge in the world. As regards texture, the Saxony is alone admissible. Brussels is the preterpluperfect tense of fashion, and Turkey is taste in its dying agonies. Touching pattern — a carpet should *not* be bedizzened out like a Riccaree Indian — all red chalk, yellow ochre, and cock’s feathers. In brief, distinct grounds and vivid circular figures, *of no meaning*, are here Median laws. The abomination of flowers, or representations of well-known objects of any kind, should never be endured within the limits of Christendom. Indeed, whether on carpets, or curtains, or paper-hangings, or ottoman coverings, all upholstery of this nature should be rigidly Arabesque. Those antique floor-cloths which are still seen occasionally in the dwellings of the rabble — cloths of huge, sprawling, and radiating devices, stripe-interspersed, and glorious with all hues, among which no ground is intelligible — are but the wicked invention of a race of time-servers and money-lovers — children of Baal and worshippers of Mammon — men who, to save trouble of thought and exercise of fancy, first cruelly invented the Kaleidoscope, and then established a patent company to twirl it by steam.

Glare is a leading error in the philosophy of American household decoration — an error easily recognised as deduced from the perversion of taste just specified. We are violently enamoured of gas and of glass. The former is totally

inadmissible within doors. Its harsh and unsteady light offends. No one having both brains and eyes will use it. A mild, or what artists term a cool light, with its consequent warm shadows, will do wonders for even an ill-furnished apartment. Never was a more lovely thought than that of the astral lamp. We mean, of course, the astral lamp proper — the lamp of Argand, with its original plain ground-glass shade, and its tempered and uniform moonlight rays. The cut-glass shade is a weak invention of the enemy. The eagerness with which we have adopted it, partly on account of its *flashiness*, but principally on account of its *greater cost*, is a good commentary on the proposition with which we began. It is not too much to say, that the deliberate employer of a cut-glass shade, is either radically deficient in taste, or blindly subservient to the caprices of fashion. The light proceeding from one of these gaudy abominations is unequal, broken, and painful. It alone is sufficient to mar a world of good effect in the furniture subjected to its influence. Female loveliness, in especial, is more than one-half disenchanted beneath its evil eye.

In the matter of glass, generally, we proceed upon false principles. Its leading feature is *glitter* — and in that one word how much of all that is detestable do we express! Flickering, unquiet lights, are *sometimes* pleasing — to children and idiots always so — but in the embellishment of a room they should be scrupulously avoided. In truth, even strong *steady* lights are inadmissible. The huge and unmeaning glass chandeliers, prism-cut, gas-lighted, and without shade, which dangle in our most fashionable drawing-rooms, may be cited as the quintessence of all that is false in taste or preposterous in folly.

The rage for *glitter*—because its idea has become as we before observed, confounded with that of magnificence in the abstract—has led us, also, to the exaggerated employment of mirrors. We line our dwellings with great British plates, and then imagine we have done a fine thing. Now the slightest thought will be sufficient to convince any one who has an eye at all, of the ill effect of numerous looking-glasses, and especially of large ones. Regarded apart from its reflection, the mirror presents a continuous, flat, colourless, unrelieved surface, — a thing always and obviously unpleasant. Considered as a reflector, it is potent in producing a monstrous and odious uniformity: and the evil is here aggravated, not in merely direct proportion with the augmentation of its sources, but in a ratio constantly increasing. In fact, a room with four or five mirrors arranged at random, is, for all purposes of artistic show, a room of no shape at all. If we add to this evil, the attendant glitter upon glitter, we have a perfect farrago of discordant and displeasing effects. The veriest bumpkin, on entering an apartment so bedizzened, would be instantly aware of something wrong, although he might be altogether unable to assign a cause for his dissatisfaction. But let the same person be led into a room tastefully furnished, and he would be startled into an exclamation of pleasure and surprise.

It is an evil growing out of our republican institutions, that here a man of large purse has usually a very little soul which he keeps in it. The corruption of taste is a portion or a pendant of the dollar-manufacture. As we grow rich, our ideas grow rusty. It is, therefore, not among *our* aristocracy that we must look (if at all,

in Appallachia), for the spirituality of a British *boudoir*. But we have seen apartments in the tenure of Americans of moderate means, which, in negative merit at least, might vie with any of the *or-molu'd* cabinets of our friends across the water. Even *now*, there is present to our mind's eye a small and not ostentatious chamber with whose decorations no fault can be found. The proprietor lies asleep on a sofa — the weather is cool — the time is near midnight: I will make a sketch of the room ere he awakes.

It is oblong — some thirty feet in length and twenty-five in breadth — a shape affording the best (ordinary) opportunities for the adjustment of furniture. It has but one door — by no means a wide one — which is at one end of the parallelogram, and but two windows, which are at the other. These latter are large, reaching down to the floor — have deep recesses — and open on an Italian *veranda*. Their panes are of a crimson-tinted glass, set in rose-wood framings, more massive than usual. They are curtained within the recess, by a thick silver tissue adapted to the shape of the window, and hanging loosely in small volumes. Without the recess are curtains of an exceedingly rich crimson silk, fringed with a deep network of gold, and lined with silver tissue, which is the material of the exterior blind. There are no cornices; but the folds of the whole fabric (which are sharp rather than massive, and have an airy appearance), issue from beneath a broad entablature of rich gilt-work, which encircles the room at the junction of the ceiling and walls. The drapery is thrown open also, or closed, by means of a thick rope of gold loosely enveloping it, and resolving itself readily into a knot; no pins or other such devices are apparent. The colours of the curtains and their fringe — the tints of crimson and gold — appear everywhere in profusion, and determine the *character* of the room. The carpet — of Saxony material — is quite half an inch thick, and is of the same crimson ground, relieved simply by the appearance of a gold cord (like that festooning the curtains) slightly relieved above the surface of the *ground*, and thrown upon it in such a manner as to form a succession of short irregular curves — one occasionally overlaying the other. The walls are prepared with a glossy paper of a silver gray tint, spotted with small Arabesque devices of a fainter hue of the prevalent crimson. Many paintings relieve the expanse of paper. These are chiefly landscapes of an imaginative cast—such as the fairy grottoes of Stanfield, or the lake of the Dismal Swamp of Chapman. There are, nevertheless, three or four female heads, of an ethereal beauty—portraits in the manner of Sully. The tone of each picture is warm, but dark. There are no “brilliant effects.” *Repose* speaks in all. Not one is of small size. Diminutive paintings give that *spotty* look to a room, which is the blemish of so many a fine work of Art overtouched. The frames are broad but not deep, and richly carved, without being *dulled* or filagreed. They have the whole lustre of burnished gold. They lie flat on the walls, and do not hang off with cords. The designs themselves are often seen to better advantage in this latter position, but the general appearance of the chamber is injured. But one mirror — and this not a very large one — is visible. In shape it is nearly circular — and it is hung so that a reflection of the person can be obtained from it in none of the ordinary sitting-places of the room. Two large low sofas of rosewood and

crimson silk, gold-flowered, form the only seats, with the exception of two light conversation chairs, also of rose-wood. There is a pianoforte (rose-wood, also), without cover, and thrown open. An octagonal table, formed altogether of the richest gold-threaded marble, is placed near one of the sofas. This is also without cover — the drapery of the curtains has been thought sufficient. Four large and gorgeous Sevres vases, in which bloom a profusion of sweet and vivid flowers, occupy the slightly rounded angles of the room. A tall candelabrum, bearing a small antique lamp with highly perfumed oil, is standing near the head of my sleeping friend. Some light and graceful hanging shelves, with golden edges and crimson silk cords with gold tassels, sustain two or three hundred magnificently bound books. Beyond these things, there is no furniture, if we except an Argand lamp, with a plain crimson-tinted ground glass shade, which depends from the lofty vaulted ceiling by a single slender gold chain, and throws a tranquil but magical radiance over all.

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The Sphinx

DURING the dread reign of the Cholera in New York, I had accepted the invitation of a relative to spend a fortnight with him in the retirement of his *cottage ornée* on the banks of the Hudson. We had here around us all the ordinary means of summer amusement; and what with rambling in the woods, sketching, boating, fishing, bathing, music and books, we should have passed the time pleasantly enough, but for the fearful intelligence which reached us every morning from the populous city. Not a day elapsed which did not bring us news of the decease of some acquaintance. Then, as the fatality increased, we learned to expect daily the loss of some friend. At length we trembled at the approach of every messenger. The very air from the South seemed to us redolent with death. That palsying thought, indeed, took entire possession of my soul. I could neither speak, think, nor dream of anything else. My host was of a less excitable temperament, and, although greatly depressed in spirits, exerted himself to sustain my own. His richly philosophical intellect was not at any time affected by unrealities. To the substances of terror he was sufficiently alive, but of its shadows he had no apprehension.

His endeavors to arouse me from the condition of abnormal gloom into which I had fallen, were frustrated in great measure, by certain volumes which I had found in his library. These were of a character to force into germination whatever seeds of hereditary superstition lay latent in my bosom. I had been reading these books without his knowledge, and thus he was often at a loss to account for the forcible impressions which had been made upon my fancy.

A favorite topic with me was the popular belief in omens — a belief which, at this one epoch of my life, I was almost seriously disposed to defend. On this subject we had long and animated discussions — he maintaining the utter groundlessness of faith in such matters — I contending that a popular sentiment arising with absolute spontaneity — that is to say without apparent traces of suggestion — had in itself the unmistakable elements of truth, and was entitled to as much respect as that intuition which is the idiosyncrasy of the individual man of genius.

The fact is, that soon after my arrival at the cottage, there had occurred to myself an incident so entirely inexplicable, and which had in it so much of the portentous character, that I might well have been excused for regarding it as an omen. It appalled, and at the same time so confounded and bewildered me, that many days elapsed before I could make up my mind to communicate the circumstances to my friend.

Near the close of an exceedingly warm day, I was sitting, book in hand, at an open window, commanding, through a long vista of the river banks, a view of a distant hill, the face of which nearest my position, had been denuded, by what is termed a land-slide, of the principal portion of its trees. My thoughts had been long wandering from the volume before me to the gloom and desolation of the neighboring city. Uplifting my eyes from the page, they fell upon the naked face

of the hill, and upon an object — upon some living monster of hideous conformation, which very rapidly made its way from the summit to the bottom, disappearing finally in the dense forest below. As this creature first came in sight, I doubted my own sanity — or at least the evidence of my own eyes; and many minutes passed before I succeeded in convincing myself that I was neither mad nor in a dream. Yet when I describe the monster, (which I distinctly saw, and calmly surveyed through the whole period of its progress,) my readers, I fear, will feel more difficulty in being convinced of these points than even I did, myself.

Estimating the size of the creature by comparison with the diameter of the large trees near which it passed — the few giants of the forest which had escaped the fury of the land-slide — I concluded it to be far larger than any ship of the line in existence. I say ship of the line, because the shape of the monster suggested the idea — the hull of one of our seventy-fours might convey a very tolerable conception of the general outline. The mouth of the animal was situated at the extremity of a proboscis some sixty or seventy feet in length, and about as thick as the body of an ordinary elephant. Near the root of this trunk was an immense quantity of black shaggy hair — more than could have been supplied by the coats of a score of buffalos; and projecting from this hair downwardly and laterally, sprang two gleaming tusks not unlike those of the wild boar, but of infinitely greater dimension. Extending forward, parallel with the proboscis, and on each side of it was a gigantic staff, thirty or forty feet in length, formed seemingly of pure crystal, and in shape a perfect prism: — it reflected in the most gorgeous manner the rays of the declining sun. The trunk was fashioned like a wedge with the apex to the earth. From it there were outspread two pairs of wings — each wing nearly one hundred yards in length — one pair being placed above the other, and all thickly covered with metal scales; each scale apparently some ten or twelve feet in diameter. I observed that the upper and lower tiers of wings were connected by a strong chain. But the chief peculiarity of this horrible thing, was the representation of a *Death's Head*, which covered nearly the whole surface of its breast, and which was as accurately traced in glaring white, upon the dark ground of the body, as if it had been there carefully designed by an artist. While I regarded this terrific animal, and more especially the appearance on its breast, with a feeling of horror and awe — with a sentiment of forthcoming evil, which I found it impossible to quell by any effort of the reason, I perceived the huge jaws at the extremity of the proboscis, suddenly expand themselves, and from them there proceeded a sound so loud and so expressive of wo, that it struck upon my nerves like a knell, and as the monster disappeared at the foot of the hill, I fell at once, fainting, to the floor.

Upon recovering, my first impulse of course was to inform my friend of what I had seen and heard — and I can scarcely explain what feeling of repugnance it was, which, in the end, operated to prevent me.

At length, one evening, some three or four days after the occurrence, we were sitting together in the room in which I had seen the apparition — I occupying the same seat at the same window, and he lounging on a sofa near at hand. The

association of the place and time impelled me to give him an account of the phenomenon. He heard me to the end — at first laughed heartily — and then lapsed into an excessively grave demeanor, as if my insanity was a thing beyond suspicion. At this instant I again had a distinct view of the monster — to which, with a shout of absolute terror, I now directed his attention. He looked eagerly — but maintained that he saw nothing — although I designated minutely the course of the creature, as it made its way down the naked face of the hill.

I was now immeasurably alarmed, for I considered the vision either as an omen of my death, or, worse, as the fore-runner of an attack of mania. I threw myself passionately back in my chair, and for some moments buried my face in my hands. When I uncovered my eyes, the apparition was no longer apparent.

My host, however, had in some degree resumed the calmness of his demeanor, and questioned me very vigorously in respect to the conformation of the visionary creature. When I had fully satisfied him on this head, he sighed deeply, as if relieved of some intolerable burden, and went on to talk, with what I thought a cruel calmness of various points of speculative philosophy, which had heretofore formed subject of discussion between us. I remember his insisting very especially (among other things) upon the idea that a principle source of error in all human investigations, lay in the liability of the understanding to under-rate or to over-value the importance of an object, through mere misadmeasurement of its propinquity. “To estimate properly, for example,” he said, “the influence to be exercised on mankind at large by the thorough diffusion of Democracy, the distance of the epoch at which such diffusion may possibly be accomplished, should not fail to form an item in the estimate. Yet can you tell me one writer on the subject of government, who has ever thought this particular branch of the subject worthy of discussion at all?”

He here paused for a moment, stepped to a book-case, and brought forth one of the ordinary synopses of Natural History. Requesting me then to exchange seats with him, that he might the better distinguish the fine print of the volume, he took my arm chair at the window, and, opening the book, resumed his discourse very much in the same tone as before.

“But for your exceeding minuteness,” he said, “in describing the monster, I might never have had it in my power to demonstrate to you what it was. In the first place, let me read to you a school boy account of the genus *Sphinx*, of the family *Crepuscularia*, of the order *Lepidoptera*, of the class of *Insecta* — or insects. The account runs thus:

“ ‘Four membranous wings covered with little colored scales of a metallic appearance; mouth forming a rolled proboscis, produced by an elongation of the jaws, upon the sides of which are found the rudiments of mandibles and downy palpi; the inferior wings retained to the superior by a stiff hair; antennæ in the form of an elongated club, prismatic; abdomen pointed. The Death’s-headed Sphinx has occasioned much terror among the vulgar, at times, by the melancholy kind of cry which it utters, and the insignia of death which it wears upon its corslet.’ ”

He here closed the book and leaned forward in the chair, placing himself accurately in the position which I had occupied at the moment of beholding “the monster.”

“Ah, here it is!” he presently exclaimed — “it is reascending the face of the hill, and a very remarkable looking creature, I admit it to be. Still, it is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it; for the fact is that, as it wriggles its way up this hair, which some spider has wrought along the window-sash, I find it to be about the sixteenth of an inch in its extreme length, and also about the sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye!”

[illegible][illegible]

The Shaw Alphabet – 𐄀 𐄁 𐄂 𐄃 𐄄 𐄅 𐄆 𐄇 𐄈 𐄉

Tall	𐄀	𐄁	𐄂	𐄃	𐄄	𐄅	𐄆	𐄇	𐄈	𐄉
	<i>peep</i>	<i>tot</i>	<i>kick</i>	<i>fee</i>	<i>thigh</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>sure</i>	<i>church</i>	<i>yea</i>	<i>ha-ha</i>
Deep	𐄊	𐄋	𐄌	𐄍	𐄎	𐄏	𐄐	𐄑	𐄒	𐄓
	<i>bib</i>	<i>dead</i>	<i>gag</i>	<i>vow</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>zoo</i>	<i>measure</i>	<i>judge</i>	<i>woe</i>	<i>hung</i>
Short	𐄔	𐄕	𐄖	𐄗	𐄘	𐄙	𐄚	𐄛	𐄜	𐄝
	<i>loll</i>	<i>mime</i>	<i>if</i>	<i>egg</i>	<i>ash</i>	<i>ado</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>wool</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>ah</i>
	𐄞	𐄟	𐄠	𐄡	𐄢	𐄣	𐄤	𐄥	𐄦	𐄧
	<i>roar</i>	<i>nun</i>	<i>eat</i>	<i>age</i>	<i>ice</i>	<i>up</i>	<i>oak</i>	<i>ooze</i>	<i>oil</i>	<i>awe</i>
Compound	𐄨 𐄩 𐄪 𐄫 𐄬 𐄭 𐄮 𐄯 𐄰 𐄱									
	<i>are or air ermine perceive ear Ian yew</i>									
New letters (proposed)	𐄲 𐄳 𐄴 𐄵 𐄶 𐄷									
	<i>fix exact whip learning for</i>									

All character names are directly below the character they relate to. Their pronunciations are the characters in bold/italics. Of the above characters, four of them can also be used as words in and of themselves: 𐄈 and, 𐄆 of, 𐄎 the and 𐄁 to. Although not official (yet), omniglot.com also lists J for, so I've included it here with my other proposed characters. Characters should be written in such a way as to end at the right if possible, and usually start at the top. The only ones that you should start writing at the bottom left are ha-ha, woe, mime, ash, ado, ah, ooze, are, ermine, perceive and whip. Unlike traditional spelling, there are no capital letters in the Shaw Alphabet. Whenever a proper name is used, the namer dot 𐄀 is used instead eg. 𐄀𐄛𐄈𐄁𐄛𐄈𐄛 = Edgar Allan Poe.