

## THE TELL-TALE SIGNS OF SIMPLIFYING POE

By Sanford Freedman

The brevity of *The Tales* of Edgar Allan Poe, together with their appeal to the imagination and their popularity among young readers, provide taut, well-written narratives which even in simplified form well serve the needs of language and literary instruction. Adaptations of Poe classics offer the particular advantage of helping students master language skills as they concurrently gain exposure to the masterpieces of a culture. I want to argue, in the following article, against this belief, not simply because doing two things at once leads to bad results, but more importantly because students learn bad habits by reading simplified versions of literary texts, habits which later retard or even hinder their development of critical skills and active, independent reading. A rough pedagogical analogy would recommend training in the school playground for scaling mountains. Certainly, moving through the syntax and vocabulary of any sentence ranks as an accomplishment, as do the skills of dexterity that might accompany working out on a jungle gym. But the jungle gym will not prepare one to abseil a cliff, and if in the passing of his life a student never dares dangerous terrain, can we imagine it possible for him to believe himself a tested mountaineer on the basis of those early encounters with playground climbing structures? Surely, the answer is no. Yet we find such a confusion, I attest, when we substitute simplified texts for literary ones, altering the landscape and adjusting its irregularities, so as to assist the unread, the unsophisticated, or simply the unknowing. The student who has read only the simplified Poe may well discuss a story with some authority and even feel some assurance about "knowing" Poe on the basis of the presentation in a collection like *Edgar Allan Poe: Storyteller*. Let me examine some aspects of the adapted Poe and the genuine Poe in order to articulate more exactly how the process of reading encouraged by simplified texts mitigates against those literary skills that later teachers of literature will try to encourage. I focus on "The Tell-Tale Heart" and allude to analogous problems with the use of simplified versions of other Poe stories.

Though roughly chronological in my attention to the two texts, I want to isolate how three relatively formal and stylistic concerns — rhythm and repetition, diction, and italics — all contribute to reading activities necessary to any coherent overall interpretation and all absent themselves from the relatively flat and unliterary simplified versions. Though the editor of the simplified tale properly glosses the tale's title by noting that "tell-tale" means "telling something of a private or secret nature which one should not tell," he makes no further reference to why the heart discloses, how it discloses, what it discloses that should not be revealed, or even whose heart discloses. The author-editor of this text treats meaning as a localized instant in need of explanation and offers exercises at the end of the narrative which emphasize this idea of reading as a function of immediate comprehension. Yet changes in even local rhythms alter literary effect. The first sentence of Poe's tale appears as follows:

True! — nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad?<sup>1</sup>

The opening sentences of the simplified version read:

It's true! Yes, I have been ill, very ill. But why do you say that I am mad? <sup>2</sup>

The editor's "ill, very ill" replaces Poe's more emphatic repetition and modification of "nervous." In addition to only approximating the meaning of "nervous," the editor's phrase fails to support the rhythmical edginess of the prose, established by both the repetition of "nervous" and the alternating assertion and question. The simplified text also deprives us of the italics and consequently loses Poe's stress on the first italicized word of the story ("*will*"). The heightened voice here communicates two ideas. First, it prevents us from reading the "*will* you say" as the future tense; rather, we understand it as a rhythmic assertion of emphasis consonant with the urgency of direct address. Second, it builds, through syntactical rhythm, to an unmasked but implied enigma: whom does the first-person narrator address; who, in his opinion, falsely assesses him, and why? Yet the simplified version masks the urgency that provides the first clue of the enigma's resolution.

With a similar emphasis on immediate, local comprehension, a question at the simplified story's end asks the student to label as true or false the sentence, "Every day about two o'clock, I opened the old man's door and looked at him." Of course, the question intends to encourage the student to observe that the time is wrong; he looks in on the old man at midnight. But here the issue of narrative time disappears and with it the relevance of the story's multiple references to time ("about midnight," "just at twelve," "for a whole hour I did not move," "It was four o'clock," et al.). The repetition of these time signatures functions to characterize the narrator as someone who adamantly proclaims his precision in carrying out the murder. He keeps exacting account of time, comparing the heart to a watch on two occasions and to the beating of a drum on another. The idea of time passing, of time literally declaring itself, inheres in repeated phrases, figures, and words. Such descriptive language as "louder," "stealthily," "wide, wide open," and "slowly, very slowly" permits us to take prose rhythm as temporal rhythm; thus, the speeding up and slowing down of the tale according to the dictates of a prose clock marks its creative achievement (some might argue that this technique becomes commonplace in Poe's horrific tales). Finally, the chronological time of the narrative functions to give solidity to this fictional world. We know that the "you" addressed in the story "*will* say" that the narrator is mad after four o'clock on the morning of the murder. The time signature, in other words, allows us to see the outside frame, that of the first paragraph. It follows that the "you" both addresses the reader and thrusts the fictional sense of time into our reading space, requiring us to participate silently, as listeners, in these frenetic words. The "you" becomes an unassigned character as well as the reader, perhaps referring to a policeman or to a fellow prisoner who responds as a *captive* audience. The narrator first captures his prey, forcing it into obedience; then, he becomes the *captive* auditor, unable *not* to hear, having himself been caught by the temporal cadences of the prose. Thus, the rhythmic qualities of the story, its frenetic interruptions and repetitions, come to characterize the narrator's increasingly dramatic urgency in telling and his increasingly desperate attempts to control the very sound of his telling as he com-

pulsively attempts to control narrative time.

The problem of diction, a stylistic concern, occurs on the level of every editorial change, yet the contrast between a single Poe passage and its edited version suggests the extent to which seemingly minor changes in wording disguise Poe's fictional logic. Poe's text describes his narrator's waiting mind contemplating murder in the following passage:

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in bed listening; -- just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief -- oh no! -- it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. Many a night, just as midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself -- 'It is nothing but the wind in the chimney -- it is only a mouse crossing the floor,' or 'it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.' Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions; but he had found all in vain. *All in vain*; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel -- although he neither saw nor heard -- to *feel* the presence of my head in the room. (pp. 174-175)

The simplified text reads:

I stood quite still. For a whole hour I did not move. Nor did I hear him again lie down in his bed. He just sat there, listening. Then I heard a sound, a low cry of fear which escaped from the old man. Now I knew that he was sitting up in his bed, filled with fear; I knew that he knew that I was there. He did not see me there. He could not hear me there. He felt me there. Nor he knew that Death was standing there. (pp. 75-76).

We first observe that the simplified text deletes a large portion of Poe's text. We can only speculate as to the grounds for editorial decisions; of course, the publisher might have required that the tale run a certain number of lines. But my guess as to why these particular lines disappear centers on "the death watches in the wall" and the interpretive problems the editor may understand the phrase to represent. Easy-to-read texts, those which simplify language, necessarily "escape" interpretive difficulty as well. Here, the sentence most difficult to parse also lies closest to the interpretive crux of the story. "He was listening ... as I have done, to the death watches in the wall" (p. 174) initially perplexes because "death" may be a general noun and "watches" a third-person verb. The prepositional phrase "to the" turns "death" into an adjective and "watches" into a noun. The interpretive problem of what the old man hears when he listens to "death watches" demands

enough readerly curiosity to look up "death watch" in an etymological dictionary, preferably the *O.E.D.* Here, we learn that "death watch" names a kind of beetle which bores into wooden structures. These insects produce "a noise like the ticking of a watch, supposed by the ignorant and superstitious to portend death." Death as a spectre watching from the wall, death as a noun mentioned only once in the simplified text, eliminates the passage's drama, which results from the initial figure developing to a point where the allegorized figure of Death actually "had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim." Rather than deal with the complication and difficulty of glossing "death watch beetle," the editor deletes all references to death except a final reference to the old man's ignorance that "Death was standing there." Death, in the simplified version, appears unexpectedly, without dramatic preparation or atmospheric logic, to say nothing of the difference between a death the old man does not know "was standing there" and a Death more forcefully personified who "had stalked" a victim aggressively in fated, foreshadowed movement. In Poe, "death watch" beetles linguistically introduce the subsequent allegorization of "Death"; an initially atmospheric detail introduces the figurative spectre that links the sounds of death, its ticking, to those of watch, drum, and heart.

In "The Cask of Amontillado," Poe similarly introduces the "catacombs" of Paris as atmospheric detail by way of an implied simile, only to construct his own architectural emphasis on the way the protagonist's victim will, finally, become part of the catacombs' structure of bones. An active reader of Poe's original would have to consult the *O.E.D.* to discover the distinctive difference of the Paris catacombs from the Roman ones: "1836: The catacombs of Paris could not be called catacombs with any propriety until very recent times, when by a decree of the French government, all the churchyards were emptied of their contents, and the skulls and bones sent to the spacious subterranean quarters, where they are now arranged in a manner that is grotesquely horrible." The simplified version ("We could see the bones of the dead lying in large piles along the walls" /p. 80/ omits the suggestiveness that the architectural design of the Parisian catacombs supplies, crucial for reading the story's end; it does not even justify the piles of bones in any other sense than that of a generally horrific atmosphere. The specifically careful architectural logic that gives Poe's narrator his hyper-rational form of vengeance involves the reader in simulating the narrator's extraordinary logic. This logic becomes only the conventions of horror (piles of bones) in the simplified version. Even the contemporary coincidence of Poe's present tense with the discovery of the Paris catacombs lends a hyper-rational quality to the authenticity of the "made" narrator. The picture illustrating the simplified version, there to help the student imagine, uses a shadowed, chiascuro effect to portray the narrator and his victim, one holding a bottle of wine and the other a trowel. The costuming of the men in top hats betrays the expressiveness of Poe's linguistic description of the victim's dress, clothed in motley as a fool and wearing a fool's cap decked with bells. The tinkling of the bells provides a Poesque detail that recurs significantly when Fortunato disappears *except* for the distant tinkling of those bells. The gentlemanly but debauched demeanor of the two men, in the picture, suggests their mutual intoxication. In fact, the visual image brings to mind the moral convention of a drunken revel that comes to a bad end, rather than the story's

portrayal of the hyper-rational, familial vengeance enacted in ritual ceremony appropriate to the ritual place of the catacombs. The eighteenth-century robe worn by the narrator, the *roquelaire* unmentioned in the simplified text, connects him to the trade of a mason constructing the catacombs (a macabre joke frequently underlined by the narrator's references to the masonic order). The robe signifying the secret society of masons also serves to conceal the trowel, dramatizing the unaware victim's exclamation: "You? Impossible! A mason?" (p. 157). "Nitre," another word absent from the simplified text, invokes specifically contextual meaning in terms of the cough that Fortunato cannot suppress. Similarly, "miasma" in "The Fall of the House of Usher," provides an explanation for the bewildering experiences seen by the narrator, who rationalizes their origin in "the rank miasma of the tarn." He alludes to the nineteenth-century idea that spore-filled air could induce hallucination and madness, an idea that helps him avoid confronting the implications of the tale he tells. In any of these simplified versions' contexts, the absence of Poe's own vocabulary deprives the reader of exactly that frame of reference which supplies the artful coherence, indeed the meaningful expressiveness, of Poe's elaborately designed conceptual worlds.

Lastly, before pulling together the ways in which my isolated examples relate to the teaching of reading, I want to briefly examine the importance of so seemingly minor an issue as Poe's use of italics, how "The Tell-Tale Heart" looks in print. Throughout the story, Poe sprinkles italics on individual words and thus communicates a strong sense of narrative intonation, as in the "Why *will* you say ...?" of the first sentence. "For what had I *now* to fear?," for example, emphasizes the temporal relief of the present; the narrator's words about the police, "I bade them search, search *well*," shows us a man who professes too much; "Oh God! what *could* I do?" and "Why *would* they not be gone" demonstrates the narrator's frenetic intoning of emotion, his frustrated urgency. But the story's only extensive use of italics, applied to a complicated, repeated phrase, becomes a basis for a readerly shock of recognition, one that occurs at the same point as the narrator's different but related shock of recognition. Compare this pair of passages from Poe's story, the latter one of which uses italics to differentiate a dramatic repetition from an earlier line, with a parallel pair from the simplified version, neither of which uses italics. Poe's passages read:

And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses? -- now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well too. (p. 175)

No doubt I now grew *very* pale; -- but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased -- what could I do? It was *a low, dull, quick sound -- much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath -- and yet the officers heard it not. (p. 177)

The simplified versions read:

Have I not told you that my hearing had become unusually strong? Now I could hear a quick, low, soft sound, like the sound of a clock heard through a wall. (p. 76)

Suddenly I knew that the sound was not in my ears, it was not just inside my head. At that moment, I must have become quite white. I talked still faster and louder. And the sound, too, became louder. It was a quick, low, soft sound like the sound of a clock heard through a wall, a sound I knew well. (p. 76).

The italics in Poe's second passage mark our understanding of the narrator's discovery in bewilderment that the heart still beats. The unitalicized phrase in the first passage communicates the controlled response of an intoned rationality. In this first passage, only the "*that*" in the following sentence points to how the narrator uses knowledge of the familiar to restrain emotion (the intimacy of a "watch enveloped in cotton" absent from a "clock heard through a wall"). The word "too" also acts as a barometer of emotion, referring back to "a slight groan" which the narrator hears three paragraphs earlier. (The man's cry connects this narrator to the "mad" narrator in "The Cask of Amontillado"; both narrators respond to groans of terror by measuring them figuratively with an "overacute" sense of hearing, either chuckling or expressing satisfaction at their victims' crying out.) In Poe's latter passage, the emotional repetition *with italics* stresses the narrator's discovery of his own vulnerability, that is, that he cannot control this sound no matter how rational or controlled his behavior; the fact of the sound eclipses his superior knowledge. An initial attempt at ease, shown in his figurative familiarity with the sound, comes back now to haunt him in the very sound of his earlier language. The simplified version includes the notion of familiarity and knowledge only with the second passage and does not connect this second sound with the first, that of the groaning old man. Thus, the reader's discovery of the narrator's mental vulnerability disappears; a flat repetition gives us a narrator as much in control as an earlier self who asserts his knowledge that "Death was standing there."

What kind of interpretation, then, can possibly emerge from a reading of the simplified text, more a reduced than a neutrally "adapted" text. The story's simplified end, in contrast with Poe's ending, serves to focus the problematics of overall interpretation. Poe's tale ends:

'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!' (p. 178)

The simplified tale ends:

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Suddenly I could bear it no longer. I pointed at the boards and cried, 'Yes! Yes, I killed him. Pull up the boards and you shall see! I killed him. But why does his heart not stop beating?! Why does it not stop!?' (p. 76)

The final paragraph of the simplified text, in its literal, plodding manner, makes explicit what remains indeterminate in Poe's original; it transforms "here, here!" into the awkward and ostensive "But why does his heart not stop beating?" In doing so, it intentionally emboldens the supernatural sense of an ending, so much so that we stub our toe on the larger than warranted statements of the final lines. Throughout, the simplified text has highlighted supernatural explanations, making the logic of Poe's

madman incomprehensible (presumably as a symptom of madness). But a coherent reading, the notion of making the atmospheric details of the story cohere outside a merely generalized sense of horror, demands attention to the moments at which the heart beats with most intensity, the inconsistencies in the narrator's presentation, and the suggestiveness of a heart that cannot be killed, an eye that will not stop seeing in the narrator what he wants most to hide. The rhythmic stresses, the narrator's agitation, discloses from the outset the neurotic focus of his telling. He calls attention to his denials of neurosis, he loses credibility immediately when he testifies to hearing sounds in heaven and hell (wilfully invoking the supernatural in the act of arguing for his rationality), and he incessantly repeats his addresses to his audience ("Have I not told you..."). All the aspects of the story's rising pitch matter to any ultimate interpretation of the "tale" the heart's beating tells. The experience of horror accompanies the reader's carefully controlled distance from the perceptions of the narrator, our sense that he tells (his heart tells) more than he knows he tells. His strangeness, that of a man who can so terrify *himself*, impresses with the terror of a hyper-rationality turning on itself.

The density of the original text allows a more comprehensive, psychological explanation of the narrator's state of mind. The "over-acuteness of the senses"; the rising sentence rhythms which climax at the narrative's end; the imagery of beating, pulsating objects (watches, ticking insects, drums, the heart); and the key placement of an italicized phrase ("*a low, dull, quick sound...*") all suggest that the beating heart, the heart that tells the tale and therefore "the tell-tale heart," belongs to the narrator himself. His madness, a heightened awareness of the senses, causes him to confuse his own heart's excitement with that of his victim. More importantly, we cannot otherwise understand why the police do not hear the heart; the police do not hear because there is no supernatural beating of a dead heart. This interpretation makes sense of a diseased mind's mistakenly assigning his own terror to a supernatural phenomenon. The final lines, when taken metaphorically and self-referentially, thus reveal the hideousness of the narrator's own heart when he cries "here, here!" The psychological explanation excites readers who remove themselves from identifying with the desperate mental machinations of the narrator. The reader's superior vantage point allows the irony of the disclosure to the police to be savored; the narrator intends to confront the police with their refusal to admit they, too, hear the sound and instead, at last, fully reveals his own madness.

A third interpretive plateau, which builds upon the psychological reading, does not simply solipse the supernatural beating of the old man's heart after death but requires him to disappear entirely. Such phrases as "He was still sitting up in the bed listening; ... just as I have done" and "I knew the sound well... it has welled up from my own bosom" suggest the weighted logic of why the old man's eye so disturbs the narrator and why he cannot still his heart. Further, inconsistencies in the narrative not explained by the prior interpretations now surface. Note, for example, the contradictory information given in the following two passages:

The old man's hour had come! with a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once — once only. (p. 176)

There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night. (p. 176)

The neighbor reports a single shriek, yet the narrator reports both his own "loud yell" and the shriek of his victim. Here, the discrepancy in number results not from the neighbor's faulty reportage but from an inaccurate reckoning by the narrator. He cannot acknowledge that he and the old man are the same person, such that when he yells out loud he mistakenly separates his own cry into that of the avenger and that of the victim. He cannot articulate what so many aspects of the story suggest, that he suffers from a divided self, haunted by a projected self (the old man) who represents his unconscious and therefore repressed side, the side he cannot bear to have seen. Interestingly, the simplified text so alters the tale ("I rushed into the room, crying, 'Die! Die! ' ") that this third interpretation cannot develop. And only this last interpretation explains the frame of the story; a mentally disturbed man provokes his own arrest and subsequent incarceration on the grounds that he fabricates a story of murdering an old man. He aggressively insists that a corpse with a still beating heart lies beneath his floorboards. The narrative's opening sentence, then, would refer to the logical accusation of any who witness his mad claims, and the story takes on a retrospective coherence that links the reader's witnessing -- his accusation of madness -- with the self-referential unfolding that refers to readerly response before it has yet been made.

To suggest the potential of what's lost when simplified texts take the place of literary texts has direct bearing on pedagogy, since students who begin with weak models so easily mature into weak readers of literature. At its worst, the pedagogy substitutes the simplified text for the original text in wholesale fashion and students fail to differentiate between them. Consequently, discussions of Poe, Bronte, Joyce, James -- whoever -- may take place on the basis of a text which displaces the authorized text. The student internalizes this first encounter as reading "the text." Very rarely do students add the rejoinder, "Of course, I've only read the simplified text," even when that proves to be the case. How often, we should ask, do simplified texts give students the desire to turn to the originals? Too often, they do not. Rather, the substitute becomes the authentic through habitual reference; students discard the notion of "adaptation" even and "remember" texts and authors in a manner that confuses the fraudulent and the genuine; that is, the fraudulent becomes internalized as the genuine. Students accustomed to using such texts speak about them as though they legitimately represent an author, without any intellectual concern for the original.

The heuristic argument for using the great books in simplified form presumes that the ideas of Poe need communicating and that even in simplified form, the classics provide better models than lesser, more accessible texts. This argument presumes that simplified versions offer quasi-masterpieces, that reduced master-pieces have more value than non-literary writing or more accessible literature for the teaching of language skills. Not only does the issue of authenticity slip away, but the idea of a crutch -- what American students call "ponies" -- takes root. The American figure, originally used for translations of foreign texts used without a teacher's permission, at least acknowledges the dubious, unethical nature of such aids. Later, a student looking for answers to an



examination question must perforce assume that the most valuable part of a literary work remains in the texts he has been given, the “content” or the ideas expressed.

The distance between form and content itself represents an analytical tool that goes back to the beginning of literary traditions. But it has become a commonplace of criticism since the time of Oscar Wilde’s “art for art’s sake” movement and A. C. Bradley’s subsequent defence of Wilde in *The Study of Poetry*. Readers of Grierson’s monumental *Songs and Sonnets of John Donne* transformed their reading of Metaphysical poetry – and all subsequent readings – on the basis of a critical consensus that placed form, style, expressiveness – whatever opposed “content” – as the center of literary study. And today, responses to literature from vastly diverse theoretical perspectives nevertheless acknowledge the necessity of facing the implications and consequences of analytical tools that slight the specifically literary qualities of language. Students of language, of course, know nothing of this historical legacy or of contemporary critical trends. What lies most immediately in front of them is passing a course as best they can by showing some objectively measurable comprehension of vocabulary and syntax. However important these immediate concerns for familiarity with English structures, it is often presumed that “literary” study can later supplement more “objectively” oriented study. Yet even at the most elementary of levels, we implant reading methods in our students and must give attention to the nurturing of those skills that will emerge as most important in more advanced study. If the teaching of language reading confines itself to local questions of syntax and vocabulary – literalism – rather than to the intonation of sentences and the expressive variety of contexts in which words may appear, for example, then by the time a teacher says, “Alright, now we will look at style and formal qualities,” the student has already developed habits of reading that mitigate against such emphasis. The earlier academic demands on students provide a kind of crutch with which to get through English courses with a functional comprehension, but they provide no background for developing literary understanding.

Heuristic arguments for using simplified texts resemble those sometimes used to justify audio-visual materials as aids to stimulate an interest in reading. Such materials may encourage students to reflect on the differences between cinematic and narrative art, but should never encourage seeing film and text as somehow rough equivalents, vehicles of the same “content.” When the film precedes the book, the consequences are that the student may see nothing but the filmic images in his reading. Film as interpretation offers instruction only if it takes its place in the context of plural interpretations; otherwise, students may use even film as a crutch, failing to gain independence as readers, the ability to imagine from a literary text. The literary imagination constructs the atmosphere for a Poe story from a specifically linguistic frame of reference; language frames an atmosphere, not the particular visual images present in film. Words act as arbitrary place-holders for sense, but they also participate in the construction of verbal worlds.

Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons for using simplified texts remains partially hidden behind the pedagogical need for easier, more accessible models for students of language. After all, even experienced teachers of literature teaching native speakers frequently feel a pedagogical pull towards a literal, bare-bones relationship

between subject and object. C.S. Lewis exposes the presence of this literal impulse in his *An Experiment in Criticism*. He describes the literal reader as one who reads the text with the primary desire of finding out "what happened," and who finds the intensity of his quest a function of that demand for a secure knowing. Roland Barthes, in *S/Z*, also describes readers who consume texts, and having devoured them throw them away because only literal consumption matters to them. Suspense, "getting the point," becomes the rationale of bad reading, whatever the level of linguistic facility. No easy relationship can exist between such readers and the verbal text, the actual language of literature. Both elements of time and standards of entertainment become their measure of how long one should spend with a book; rereading, the act of increased attention to diverse detail so necessary to literary study, disappears.

Finally we must face the question of what might replace the practicality of simplified texts. Their popularity and wide-spread use, no doubt, attest to some kind of classroom success. If, however, we acknowledge the extent to which they distort the original and misinform those drawn to their titles, then such practicality is weakened, such popularity undermined. Our goal is to teach and pass on the craft of reading, the skill of making print come alive on the page. Therefore we ought first to plan a literary development where matters such as narrative diction, length, complexity, and sophistication most concern us. Students ought not to read the "Tell-Tale Heart" at this particular time, we reason, but follow, rather, a sequence leading them through Steinbeck's "The Pearl," London's "The Law of Life," Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," Anderson's "Death in the Woods," and then "The Tell-Tale Heart." And concern for these matters ought even to permit our taking risks. Though we find bonafide literary texts whose readerly difficulty is no greater than the simplified texts they replace, we theoretically ought to choose a text whose vocabulary and organization just exceeds the comfortable reading range of the class, the adage being that a laborious terrain trains better readers. With that in mind, those mountains of which I first spoke, seem not so very distant.

#### NOTES

1. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Tales* (New York: Signet, 1980) 173. All subsequent references to this edition are cited in the text.
2. *Edgar Allan Poe ... Storyteller: Seven Stories Adapted From the Original of Edgar Allan Poe*, Rptd. ed. (Taipei: New Asia Publishing Co.) 75. All subsequent references to this edition are cited in the text.