Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-49) - American poet, short-story writer, and critic who is best known for his tales of ratiocination, his fantastical horror stories, and his genre-founding detective stories. Poe, whose cloudy personal life is a virtual legend, considered himself primarily a poet. Morella (1835) - A husband's description of his wife Morella and how they relate to one another — a tale of reincarnation.
MOREELLA

Itself, by itself, solely, one everlasting, and single.

PLATO: SYMPOS.

WITH a feeling of deep yet most singular affection I regarded my friend Morella. Thrown by accident into her society many years ago, my soul from our first meeting, burned with fires it had never before known; but the fires were not of Eros, and bitter and tormenting to my spirit was the gradual conviction that I could in no manner define their unusual meaning or regulate their vague intensity.

Yet we met; and fate bound us together at the altar, and I never spoke of passion nor thought of love. She, however, shunned society, and, attaching herself to me alone rendered me happy. It is a happiness to wonder; it is a happiness to dream.

Morella's erudition was profound. As I hope to live, her talents were of no common order- her powers of mind were gigantic. I felt this, and, in many matters, became her pupil. I soon, however, found that, perhaps on account of her Presburg education, she placed before me a number of those mystical writings which are usually considered the mere dross of the early German literature.

These, for what reason I could not imagine, were her favourite and constant study and that in process of time they became my own, should be attributed to the simple but effectual influence of habit and example.

In all this, if I err not, my reason had little to do. My convictions, or I forget myself, were in no manner acted upon by the ideal, nor was any tincture of the mysticism which I read to be discovered, unless I am greatly mistaken, either in my deeds or in my thoughts. Persuaded of this, I abandoned myself implicitly to the guidance of my wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of her studies. And then- then, when poring over forbidden pages, I felt a forbidden spirit enkindling within me- would Morella place her cold hand upon my own, and rake up from the ashes of a dead philosophy some low, singular words, whose strange meaning burned themselves in upon my memory. And then, hour after hour, would I linger by her side, and dwell upon the music of her voice, until at length its melody was tainted with terror, and there fell a shadow upon my soul, and I grew pale, and shuddered inwardly at those too unearthly tones. And thus, joy suddenly faded into horror, and the most beautiful became the most hideous, as Hinnon became Ge-Henna.

It is unnecessary to state the exact character of those disquisitions which, growing out of the volumes I have mentioned, formed, for so long a time, almost
the sole conversation of Morella and myself. By the learned in what might be
termed theological morality they will be readily conceived, and by the
unlearned they would, at all events, be little understood. The wild Pantheism of
Fichte; the modified Paliggenedia of the Pythagoreans; and, above all, the
doctrines of Identity as urged by Schelling, were generally the points of
discussion presenting the most of beauty to the imaginative Morella. That
identity which is termed personal, Mr. Locke, I think, truly defines to consist in
the saneness of rational being.

And since by person we understand an intelligent essence having reason, and
since there is a consciousness which always accompanies thinking, it is this
which makes us all to be that which we call ourselves, thereby distinguishing us
from other beings that think, and giving us our personal identity. But the
principium individuationis, the notion of that identity which at death is or is not
lost for ever, was to me, at all times, a consideration of intense interest; not more
from the perplexing and exciting nature of its consequences, than from the
marked and agitated manner in which Morella mentioned them.

But, indeed, the time had now arrived when the mystery of my wife’s manner
oppressed me as a spell. I could no longer bear the touch of her wan fingers, nor
the low tone of her musical language, nor the lustre of her melancholy eyes. And
she knew all this, but did not upbraid; she seemed conscious of my weakness or
my folly, and, smiling, called it fate. She seemed also conscious of a cause, to me
unknown, for the gradual alienation of my regard; but she gave me no hint or
token of its nature. Yet was she woman, and pined away daily. In time the
 crimson spot settled steadily upon the cheek, and the blue veins upon the pale
forehead became prominent; and one instant my nature melted into pity, but in,
next I met the glance of her meaning eyes, and then my soul sickened and
became giddy with the giddiness of one who gazes downward into some dreary
and unfathomable abyss.

Shall I then say that I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the
moment of Morella’s decease? I did; but the fragile spirit clung to its tenement of
clay for many days, for many weeks and irksome months, until my tortured
nerves obtained the mastery over my mind, and I grew furious through delay,
and, with the heart of a fiend, cursed the days and the hours and the bitter
moments, which seemed to lengthen and lengthen as her gentle life declined,
like shadows in the dying of the day.

But one autumnal evening, when the winds lay still in heaven, Morella called me
to her bedside. There was a dim mist over all the earth, and a warm glow upon
the waters, and amid the rich October leaves of the forest, a rainbow from the
firmament had surely fallen.

“It is a day of days,” she said, as I approached; “a day of all days either to live or
die. It is a fair day for the sons of earth and life—ah, more fair for the daughters
of heaven and death!” I kissed her forehead, and she continued: “I am dying, yet
shall I live.” “Morella!” “The days have never been when thou couldst love me—
but her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore.” “Morella!” “I
repeat I am dying. But within me is a pledge of that affection—ah, how little!—
which thou didst feel for me, Morella. And when my spirit departs shall the
child live—thy child and mine, Morella’s. But thy days shall be days of
sorrow that sorrow which is the most lasting of impressions, as the cypress is the
most enduring of trees. For the hours of thy happiness are over and joy is not
gathered twice in a life, as the roses of Paestum twice in a year. Thou shalt no
longer, then, play the Teian with time, but, being ignorant of the myrtle and the
vine, thou shalt bear about with thee thy shroud on the earth, as do the
Moslem in Mecca.” “Morella!” I cried, “Morella! how knowest thou this?” but
she turned away her face upon the pillow and a slight tremor coming over her
limbs, she thus died, and I heard her voice no more.

Yet, as she had foretold, her child, to which in dying she had given birth, which
breathed not until the mother breathed no more, her child, a daughter, lived.
And she grew strangely in stature and intellect, and was the perfect resemblance
of her who had departed, and I loved her with a love more fervent than I had
believed it possible to feel for any denizen of earth.

But, ere long the heaven of this pure affection became darkened, and gloom, and
horror, and grief swept over it in clouds. I said the child grew strangely in
stature and intelligence. Strange, indeed, was her rapid increase in bodily size,
but terrible, oh! terrible were the tumultuous thoughts which crowded upon me
while watching the development of her mental being. Could it be otherwise,
when I daily discovered in the conceptions of the child the adult powers an
faculties of the woman? when the lessons of experience fell from the lips of
infancy? and when the wisdom or the passions of maturity I found hourly
gleaming from its full and speculative eye? When, I say, all this became evident
to my appalled senses, when I could no longer hide it from my soul, nor throw it
off from those perceptions which trembled to receive it, is it to be wondered at
that suspicions, of a nature fearful and exciting, crept in upon my spirit, or that
my thoughts fell back aghast upon the wild tales and thrilling theories of the
entombed Morella? I snatched from the scrutiny of the world a being whom
destiny compelled me to adore, and in the rigorous seclusion of my home,
watched with an agonizing anxiety over all which concerned the beloved.

And as years rolled away, and I gazed day after day upon her holy, and mild,
and eloquent face, and poured over her maturing form, day after day did I
discover new points of resemblance in the child to her mother, the melancholy
and the dead. And hourly grew darker these shadows of similitude, and more
full, and more definite, and more perplexing, and more hideously terrible in
their aspect.

For that her smile was like her mother’s I could bear; but then I shuddered at its
too perfect identity, that her eyes were like Morella’s I could endure; but then
they, too, often looked down into the depths of my soul with Morella's own intense and bewildering meaning. And in the contour of the high forehead, and in the ringlets of the silken hair, and in the wan fingers which buried themselves therein, and in the sad musical tones of her speech, and above all- oh, above all, in the phrases and expressions of the dead on the lips of the loved and the living, I found food for consuming thought and horror, for a worm that would not die.

Thus passed away two lustra of her life, and as yet my daughter remained nameless upon the earth. “My child,” and “my love,” were the designations usually prompted by a father’s affection, and the rigid seclusion of her days precluded all other intercourse. Morella’s name died with her at her death. Of the mother I had never spoken to the daughter, it was impossible to speak. Indeed, during the brief period of her existence, the latter had received no impressions from the outward world, save such as might have been afforded by the narrow limits of her privacy. But at length the ceremony of baptism presented to my mind, in its unnerved and agitated condition, a present deliverance from the terrors of my destiny. And at the baptismal font I hesitated for a name. And many titles of the wise and beautiful, of old and modern times, of my own and foreign lands, came thronging to my lips, with many, many fair titles of the gentle, and the happy, and the good. What prompted me then to disturb the memory of the buried dead? What demon urged me to breathe that sound, which in its very recollection was wont to make ebb the purple blood in torrents from the temples to the heart? What fiend spoke from the recesses of my soul, when amid those dim aisles, and in the silence of the night, I whispered within the ears of the holy man the syllables- Morella? What more than fiend convulsed the features of my child, and overspread them with hues of death, as starting at that scarcely audible sound, she turned her glassy eyes from the earth to heaven, and falling prostrate on the black slabs of our ancestral vault, responded- “I am here!” Distinct, coldly, calmly distinct, fell those few simple sounds within my ear, and thence like molten lead rolled hissingly into my brain. Years- years may pass away, but the memory of that epoch never. Nor was I indeed ignorant of the flowers and the vine- but the hemlock and the cypress overshadowed me night and day. And I kept no reckoning of time or place, and the stars of my fate faded from heaven, and therefore the earth grew dark, and its figures passed by me like flitting shadows, and among them all I beheld only- Morella. The winds of the firmament breathed but one sound within my ears, and the ripples upon the sea murmured evermore- Morella. But she died; and with my own hands I bore her to the tomb; and I laughed with a long and bitter laugh as I found no traces of the first in the channel where I laid the second.- Morella.

THE END