

Dictionary of Unusual Words: Poe Stories

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| acumen | keen intelligence; insight |
| aperture | opening |
| atomies | tiny particles, analogous to atoms |
| buskin | (a) a boot reaching halfway to the knee (b) relating to theatrical tragedy (Dupin is repeatedly punning on the “mender of soles” who has become an actor) |
| bye-street | side street |
| cant | hypocrisy |
| charlatanerie | fakery; puffery |
| clew | English spelling of “clue” |
| deposes | testifies |
| diable | devil |
| draughts | checkers |
| egress | escape; exit |
| excoriated | condemned; here used as a metaphor, meaning violated |
| expostulating | trying to convince someone, through reason, not to do something |
| fain | glad |
| fervor | feelings of great warmth and intensity |
| gendarmes | French police |
| gimlet-hole | a hole bored with a hand-tool |
| habiliment | clothing |
| ingress | entry (see “egress” above) |
| intractable | untrainable; unmanageable |
| involute | tightly coiled about itself |
| Jardin des Plantes | Botanical Garden |
| livid | ashen; gray, as in bruises |
| Maison de Santé | insane asylum |
| mon dieu | My God! |
| Napoleons | coins |
| outré | grossly unconventional; bizarre |
| Pasquinaded | made fun of; satirized; given a bad review |
| patrimony | family money; inheritance |
| phrenologists | 19 th century pseudoscientists who thought they could determine personality and propensities by studying the unique features of people’s skulls |
| preclude | rule out; make impossible |
| Prefect | Chief of Police or chief magistrate |
| preternatural | beyond the usual physical possibilities; heroic |
| profound | deep |
| quondam | one-time; former |
| récherché | lavishly elegant and refined |
| rencontre | encounter |
| resolvent | a liquid capable of dissolving solids or other liquids; a solvent |
| retrograde | moving backward; backsliding |
| sable | dark; black |
| sacre | holy |
| Stereotomy | stone-cutting |
| untoward | inappropriate; not proper |
| whist | a card game similar to modern bridge or hearts. Four players form two teams; the pack of cards is dealt and the teams earn 1 point for each trick they take. Teamwork and betting were a big part of whist-playing, which was a popular social game with the upper classes in the 18 th and 19 th centuries, and one where betting was a big element. |
| Perdidit antiquum litera prima sonum | The first letter destroys the antique sound. |
| Xerxes et id genus omne. | Xerxes and all of his kind |
| pour mieux entendre la musique | the better to hear the music |
| Je les menageais | I put up with them (with his foibles) |