

Dictionary of Unusual Words: Poe Stories

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)