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Dramatic Publishing

NEVERMORE!

Edgar Allan Poe • The Final Mystery

By
JULIAN WILES



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(NEVERMORE!)

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This play is dedicated to its original cast and crew, who suffered through revision after revision and took each one as a challenge. The final version, published here, is a tribute to their dedication, creativity and friendship.

The opening performance of *NEVERMORE!* took place on October 14, 1994 at the Charleston Stage Company, Charleston, South Carolina, with the following cast:

Agatha Blackwell Lady in Mourning
William Brown Homer Walker, Roderick Usher,
 Viscount Valequez, Priest
John Carroll Captain Jeremiah Reynolds
Marianne Clare Young Annabel
Donald Curry Dr. Nicolai
Allston DuPre Cabin Boy, Acolyte
Nancy Fiedler Aunt, Mrs. Reilly, Duchess Ulrica, Barmaid,
 Mourner
Margaret Ford Lady in Crimson, Mourner
Janice Friedman Lady in Green, Madame L’Espanaye,
 Mourner
Dominique Gillard Cabin Boy, Hopfrog, Acolyte
Sid Katz Aaron Abrams, Inspector Grimke, Prince Prospero,
 Bartender, Mourner
Christopher Kolb Rusty, Pallbearer
Brooke Haynie Jake, Legrand, Pallbearer
Aaron Heisler Pallbearer
Josiah Longshanks Gravedigger
Jennifer Metts Annabel Lee
Byron J. Miller Master of Ceremonies, Constable Ross, Query
Barbara Nicolai Mrs. Prothero, Mrs. O’Leary, Mourner
Dustan Nigro Edgar A. Perry
Hadley Owen Lady in Purple, Hannah O’Leary,
 Mademoiselle Camille L’Espanaye, Mourner
Frank Parsons Dr. Fleming
Rowand Robinson Miguel, Pallbearer
Don K. Savelle Captain Nimrod
Ian Walker Edgar Allan Poe
Sarah Wyckham Mourner

NEVERMORE!

A Full-Length Play
For 12 Men and 7 Women, playing 52 roles

CHARACTERS

Five lead characters are disguised as other characters:*

YOUNG POE *(Edgar A. Perry)
YOUNG ANNABEL LEE *(Disguised Mourner)
ANNABEL LEE *(Disguised Lady in Mourning)
EDGAR ALLAN POE *(Disguised Gravedigger)
CAPT'N. NIMROD *(Disguised Dr. Nicholai)
CAPT'N. JEREMIAH REYNOLDS *(Disguised Dr. Fleming)

Also, several characters double roles:

HOMER WALKER / RODERICK USHER / VISCOUNT
VALEQUEZ / PRIEST / CABIN BOY / ACOLYTE
AUNT / MRS. REILLY / DUCHESS ULRICA / BARMAID /
MOURNER
LADY IN CRIMSON / MOURNER / LADY PROSPERO /
MRS. QUERY
LADY IN GREEN / MME L'ESPANAYE / MOURNER
CABIN BOY / HOPFROG / ACOLYTE
AARON ABRAMS / INSPECTOR GRIMKE / PRINCE
PROSPERO / BARTENDER / MOURNER
RUSTY / PALLBEARER
JAKE / LEGRAND / PALLBEARER
FATHER / PALLBEARER
MASTER OF CERMONIES / CONSTABLE ROSS /
MR. QUERY
MRS. PROTHERO / MRS. O'LEARY / MOURNER
LADY IN PURPLE / HANNAH / MLLE L'ESPANAYE /
MOURNER
MIGUEL / PALLBEARER

THE FACTS ARE THESE

Edgar Allan Poe did disappear for five days prior to his death, his whereabouts and activities are completely unknown. It is believed he boarded a ship for New York but even that is not absolutely certain.

We do know that he was found delirious, wandering the streets of Baltimore. Recognized by an acquaintance, he was taken to a nearby tavern and a doctor friend of Poe's sent for. The doctor and Poe's relatives arranged for Poe's transfer to nearby Washington Hospital.

Throughout the night that followed, Poe remained delirious and delusional. Long into the night he called out, over and over again, for someone named "Reynolds," but no one there knew who that was. Finally, Poe was calmed down. Three days later, after fading in and out of consciousness, but without regaining coherence, he died.

His enemies and literary rivals were quick to blame Poe's drinking on his demise. There is no doubt, Poe had a problem with alcohol but many scholars believe that, in his last years, Poe was also battling with severe mental illness. After the death of his wife Virginia to tuberculosis, most agree, Poe was severely depressed and never the same again.

He did make an effort to stop drinking, even joining the Richmond Sons of Temperance, but soon he was drinking again. Many believe this led to Poe's madness although he himself said the drink didn't make him mad—the madness made him drink. Some scholars have suggested that Poe showed the symptoms of hypoglycemia, which would explain his low tolerance for alcohol and his delusional behavior at times. Whatever the diagnosis, Poe's mental condition was certainly severely impaired at the time of his death.

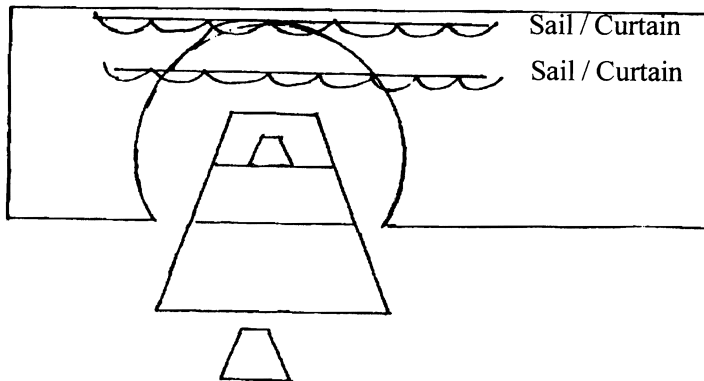
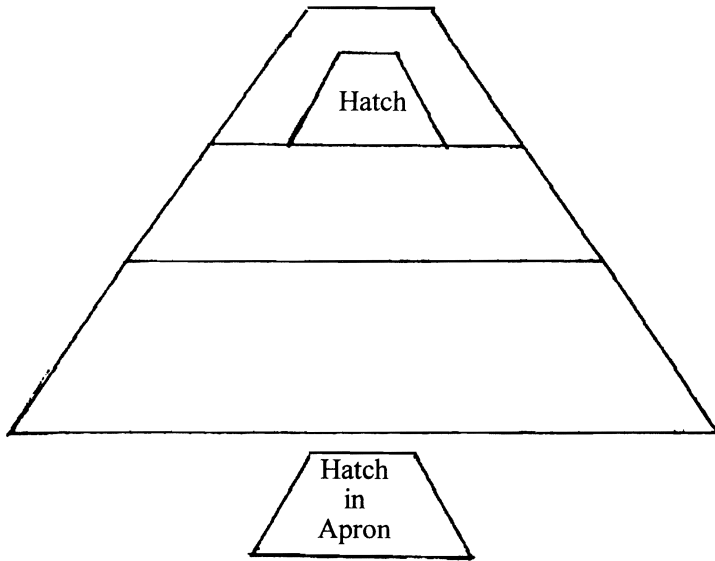
Who was the mysterious “Reynolds” to whom Poe called out? Many believe he was Jeremiah Reynolds, a minor Antarctic explorer of the 19th century. Reynolds, like many during this last age of exploration, believed that somewhere in the Antarctic region there was an entrance to the center of the earth, perhaps to a land of paradise. Poe used this theory and the journals Reynolds had written about his Antarctic expeditions in two of his stories. Both his short novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Manuscript Found in the Bottle* tell tales of ghostly, ghastly and ultimately ill-fated voyages to the Antarctic.

While the inspiration for Poe’s fascination with the Antarctic can be traced to Jeremiah Reynolds, there is little solid information as to the identity of Annabel Lee. Poe’s poem, *Annabel Lee*, was one of the last, perhaps *the* last poem Poe penned before his death. No one knows the identity of his beloved Annabel Lee, however. Perhaps she is someone biographers have failed to discover. Most likely she was a creature only of Poe’s vivid imagination. Charleston author and publisher, Mrs. Elizabeth Verner Hamilton, in the Tradd Street Press’s Sullivans Island Edition of *The Gold Bug*, speculates that perhaps Annabel Lee was a young Charleston belle who became Poe’s first love. Poe was, after all, stationed at Sullivans Island when he was only seventeen, young, impressionable and adventurous. He had run away from home, joined the army under the alias Edgar A. Perry and found himself stationed at Ft. Moultrie on Sullivans Island. If, indeed, Annabel Lee was a Charleston girl, this would, of course, make Charleston the fabled “kingdom by the sea.” This is all mere speculation, however. But wonderful speculation, so wonderful that I borrowed this premise for *Nevermore!*.

One final note. Since the 1950s, on the anniversary of Poe’s death, a mysterious lady appears at the cemetery where Poe is buried. Each year, she appears at midnight and leaves a bottle of cognac and a single white rose on his grave. No one knows the identity of this ghostly visitor.

Nevermore !

Set plan



NOTES ON STAGING

I am sure there are many scenic solutions which can be devised for the demands of *NEVERMORE!* and they need not be extremely complex. What is critical is that the changes from scene to scene happen with blinding swiftness or the magical, dream-within-a- dream sequences will fall flat. Here's how we solved the problems in the original production.

Because we wanted to give the sense that Poe was always on board a ship, the basic set was an abstract triangular wooden deck of a sailing vessel. It was wide near the apron of the stage and slanted upward to a narrow point upstage. There were two hatches, one far DC which was a trapdoor which descended into the orchestra pit and the other, UC which led to an area beneath the deck. The UC hatch, about 2 x 6 feet, could be closed for certain scenes. Late in the play, when open, it also served as Poe's grave.

The ship seemed to be sailing into a giant circle upstage which was sometimes filled with fog, at other times, swirling lights, or a projection of moon and stars, etc. For the Antarctic scenes a giant iceberg appeared there.

Hanging above the deck were two sets of curtains which were made to look, when raised, like the folded sails of the ship. One set of these sail curtains were downstage and the other set above 12 feet upstage. By raising and lowering them, scenes could be played in front of them while other scenes were being set up behind them. The sails were made of thin muslin and in many scenes the shadows of actors were projected onto them from upstage.

Most sets, therefore, consisted of simple furniture elements in front of the lowered sail curtains onto which projections or silhouettes were projected. The sails and projections added a mysterious and ephemeral element to the set.

THE MAGIC TRICKS

The Oblong Box

This is a standard false bottom magician's box. For a complete description see *Mark Wilson's Complete Book of Magic*.

Poe's Escape from Death

This is very simple actually. Poe's deathbed was specially made so that his head appeared on the pillow but a trapdoor allowed for his body to be underneath the bed. The feet and body that the audience saw under the covers were actually those of another actor, whose identity was hidden by the covers. When Poe died, the sheet was pulled up over him and he slipped his head underneath the bed. The pillow covered the hole. It was the body of the second actor who was actually lifted off the bed, onto the stretcher and into the coffin. While this was happening a curtain fell hiding the bed. Poe then made his escape and took his place upstage as the Gravedigger. To speed up this change he was already wearing the Gravedigger's costume. Since the curtain rose only moments later, allowing just enough time for the bed to be taken off and Poe to get in place, the audience had no idea a switch had been made. We got great audience response from this trick.

ABOUT THE POEMS

Poe was known to rewrite his poems, often changing their titles as well. The pieces used here in *NEVERMORE!* were taken from a volume in which the poems were reprinted from standard older editions, usually presenting the final versions, which are thought to be distinct improvements.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: The First Mystery Was His Name

On the Beach at Sullivans Island, South Carolina

(A mysterious mist enshrouds the stage. A VISION IN WHITE materializes from the darkness and crosses D.)

ANNABEL LEE.

Mystery...

In the end there was only mystery.

We know he boarded a ship bound for New York

But where he journeyed on that final fateful voyage no
one knows...

...the true destination, a mystery.

That was Eddie,

He lived a life of mystery.

I think that's what drew me to him

The mystery...the imagination...

You have to make your own truth he once told me...

And he did...

(Once ANNABEL crosses D, the U curtain falls U of it and dancers gather.)

When I first met him, he had even fabricated a new name for himself...Edgar A. Perry, he called himself...Sergeant Major Edgar A. Perry...He had run away from home, changed his name and joined the army...He was stationed at Ft. Moultrie, on Sullivans Island. He was already over-

whelmed by his imagination...He said he was twenty-two but he was actually, only eighteen. Oh, the imaginary worlds he conjured up! Said he'd taken a mysterious trip to Russia and Greece which was, of course, all fancy... One could scarcely believe anything he said. But that night...at the Regimental Ball, when he asked me to dance...I believed every word he uttered...(A *dance ensues. The silhouettes of couples waltzing about the floor are projected on the U curtain.*)

SCENE 2: I'll Love You Forever

Ballroom at the Lee House on Sullivans Island

(*YOUNG EDGAR A. PERRY, Poe at about seventeen, appears in front of the U curtain. He sweeps YOUNG ANNABEL LEE, also seventeen, off her feet and whirls around the dance floor...after a few turns he pulls her off to one side.*)

EDGAR A. PERRY. I'll love you forever...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Mr. Perry, we've only just met...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Destiny has brought us together...we will never part...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE (*teasing him*). Never part?

EDGAR A. PERRY. Not till the end of time...Not even then.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Who are you?

EDGAR A. PERRY (*grandly, outrageously*). I am Sergeant Major Edgar A. Perry, Defender of Sullivans Island.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Are you always this incorrigible?

EDGAR A. PERRY. Always. Besides, we poets are always incorrigible.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Oh, you're a poet as well...

EDGAR A. PERRY (*nods "yes"*). All men are poets at heart.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. I'd like to read one of your poems...

EDGAR A. PERRY. And you shall, as soon as I write one...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Tell me, Mr. Perry, do you ever speak the truth?

EDGAR A. PERRY. Only in desperation...Why rely on ordinary truth when we can create our own reality?

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. An interesting point of view...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Oh, it serves you well, you should try it...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. For instance?

EDGAR A. PERRY. For instance, if you are spoken for... (*YOUNG ANNABEL LEE goes to answer but PERRY puts his finger to her lips.*) pretend you are not...that you are still free.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Well—

(*Her FATHER enters.*)

FATHER. She *is* spoken for, sir...

EDGAR A. PERRY (*challenging the intruder*). And who are you...

FATHER. I am her father...Come, my dear...(*Her FATHER parts them, gives PERRY a look, then leads YOUNG ANNABEL away.*)

EDGAR A. PERRY. But I don't know your name...

FATHER (*turns back to PERRY with a glare*). And you don't need to. Come along, Annabel. (*They start off.*)

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE (*calling after him*). Annabel...

Annabel Lee. (*PERRY takes a step toward them but FATHER turns, stops and blocks him.*)

EDGAR A. PERRY. What a lovely name!

FATHER. Sir, kindly retire, my daughter has nothing more to say to you.

EDGAR A. PERRY. Sir, I would like to ask for her hand...

FATHER. Are you mad, boy?

EDGAR A. PERRY. There are those that think so, sir...

FATHER. Come along, Annabel...(*YOUNG ANNABEL, led by her FATHER, exits.*)

(*The VISION IN WHITE reappears.*)

ANNABEL. Eddie appeared on our doorstep everyday but Father forbade me from admitting him...and I always obeyed my father...of course, Father said nothing about chance meetings on the beach...(As ANNABEL crosses D the sound of the ocean is heard.)

SCENE 3: "I Was a Child, She Was a Child"

On the Beach at Sullivans Island

(*Moonlit night. Projections of leaves appear on the U curtain. Behind it Annabel's bedroom is being set up. EDGAR A. PERRY appears from the shadows.*)

EDGAR A. PERRY. Annabel...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. I shouldn't have come...

EDGAR A. PERRY (*teasingly*). But...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. You're wicked, Sergeant Perry...
do you know that?

EDGAR A. PERRY. What can I say? I'm a poet...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. So you claim, sir...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Well, I will make good my claim
with... (*He writes in the sand. As he writes, YOUNG
ANNABEL reads.*)

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. I was a child and she was a child,
You think I'm a child?...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Children of Eros we are...

I was a child and she was a child,

In this kingdom by the sea: (*He writes in the sand again.*)

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE (*reads again*). But we loved with
a love that was more than love—

EDGAR A. PERRY (*reading as he writes*). I and my—

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE (*reading as he finishes writing the
line*). Annabel Lee...(*Touched, turning to him.*) Eddie...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Close your eyes...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Why?

EDGAR A. PERRY. I have a present for you...now close
them...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. All right...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Now, hold out your hand...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Pray, what kind of present have
you for me...gold, diamonds...

EDGAR A. PERRY (*holds his hand high over hers and pours
a thin stream of sand from his hand to hers*). Eternity.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE (*opens her eyes and looks at the
sand and then deeply into his eyes. He smiles*). Eternity...

FATHER (*from offstage*). Annabel...Annabel...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Father, I gave him the slip...I
must go...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Give him the slip again...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. I can't...

FATHER (*offstage*). Annabel...(YOUNG ANNABEL gives PERRY a kiss and then exits into the darkness. As lights fade on PERRY, YOUNG ANNABEL reappears in a spot on the other side of the stage.)

ANNABEL. I disappeared into the shadows, shadows from which I would never return. That summer, a dark cloud swept over our mystical kingdom by the sea...a cloud—malarial fever...fever, fever so fierce that the city was in a panic. Guards were posted at the doorways of houses, houses which were afire with the pestilence. One of the houses was mine. No one was allowed to come in and out...but this didn't stop Eddie. He climbed a live oak near the back piazza and made his way to my room. Father was not pleased.

(U curtain rises to reveal Annabel's bedroom.)

SCENE 4: Is There Any Hope?

Annabel Lee's Death Bed

(YOUNG ANNABEL lies near death in a bed UL. Her FATHER and a matronly AUNT are DL conferring. Through the window U, PERRY appears. He tiptoes to YOUNG ANNABEL's side.)

EDGAR A PERRY. Annabel...

FATHER (*discovering him*). Sir, you have no place here.

EDGAR A PERRY. I love her, sir, I will not be dissuaded...

FATHER. I must ask you to withdraw. She's very near death.

She is delirious. She doesn't know any of us anymore...

EDGAR A PERRY. Dear God, is there no hope?

FATHER. None...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Eddie...Eddie, is that you?

EDGAR A PERRY (*crosses and kneels by her side*). Anna-
bel...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. I knew you would come...

EDGAR A PERRY. You must hold on...You're going to get
well. We're going to be together...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Oh, Eddie, if that only that could
be true.

EDGAR A. PERRY. We must make out own truth, remem-
ber?

ANNABEL. I remember...

EDGAR A. PERRY. Promise me you'll never leave me.

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Not till the end of time.

EDGAR A. PERRY. Not even then...

YOUNG ANNABEL LEE. Not even then...I have something
for you, take this...(*She thrusts a handful of paper into his
hands.*) It's my turn to give you a present...

EDGAR A. PERRY. They're blank...(*She nods "yes."
Smiles.*) What must I do with them?

ANNABEL. Fill them with wonder...(*She drifts off again.*)

FATHER. Perhaps we should let her rest now...(*PERRY
nods. FATHER and AUNT exit. PERRY lags behind to give
YOUNG ANNABEL a final kiss. He then crosses D. As he
does, the U curtain falls behind him and as he crosses far-
ther D, the D curtain falls behind him. As he recites, the
Poetry Lecture is set up behind the D curtain and the
ship's gang plank is set up behind the U curtain.*)

EDGAR A. PERRY.

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow

.

Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less *gone*?

(He continues DR and speaks to the audience.)

SCENE 5: The Poetry Lecture

EDGAR A. PERRY.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea:
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my ANNABEL LEE;
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
So that her high-born kinsman came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her in a sepulcher
In this kingdom by the sea.

(Lights crossfade from PERRY to EDGAR ALLAN POE, DL, now 40. He picks up the lines at this point.)

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In the sepulcher there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea...

(The D curtain rises behind him to reveal that the scene has been transformed to a poetry lecture.)

So you see, the most precious things in this life are the things we have lost...Poetry is a quest to recover those lost moments, for the poet gives us a brief and indeterminate glimpse of what lies beyond our reach, beyond the grasp, beyond our comprehension

...a glimpse of immortality...glimpses, all too brief...

When we find ourselves melted into tears from a poem it is not because of its beautiful words, it is from the sorrow we feel...sorrow at our inability to grasp here on earth, the rapturous joys of the divine...so we hunger, we thirst for another glimpse. And like the moth dancing about a candle flame, if we are not careful, we will be consumed by our desire.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Thank you, Mr. Poe...This concludes Mr. Poe's lecture, and although he has a steamer for New York to catch tonight, he has agreed to accept a few questions...

LADY IN GREEN. Mr. Poe, this new poem seems to contradict *The Raven*, in that the bereaved lover in *The Raven* is told he will never see his true love again, here in *Annabel Lee*, you profess that true love lives on, beyond the grave...

POE. Yes...

LADY IN GREEN. But isn't that a contradiction?

POE. Yes...

LADY IN GREEN. Well, would you like to clear up the contradiction?

POE. No...*(He takes a flask from his pocket and drinks. The audience of LADIES is shocked.)*

LADY IN CRIMSON. Mr. Poe, don't you believe in temperance...

POE. Of course, my dear, after all I'm a member of the Sons of Temperance...and I drink to them every chance I get...*(He drinks again, LADIES gasp.)*

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Yes, well, I think we best get Mr. Poe off to his waiting boat...*(POE is pulled from the stage.)*

LADY IN GREEN. Shocking...

LADY IN CRIMSON. A troubled genius...

LADY IN PURPLE. I heard last year he attempted suicide... over a woman...

LADY IN GREEN. Which one?...I hear he's proposed to five women just in the past few weeks...*(POE and the MASTER OF CEREMONIES pass by and as they do, POE drinks again.)*

LADY IN PURPLE. Cad...

LADY IN GREEN *(as she and the LADIES cross D)*. Drunkard...

LADY IN CRIMSON. Blue-eyed mad is what I hear... *(LADIES exit. POE and the MASTER OF CEREMONIES cross*

D and the D curtain falls behind them. While the scene continues, the poetry lecture set is struck.)

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Yes, well, we do appreciate your taking the time to lecture to us, Mr. Poe, and as promised, here is a token of our appreciation. (*He gives POE an envelope of bills.*) I must tell you, however, that we would have appreciated your lecture more if you had not been in such an inebriated condition...

POE. Well, I charge double for sober lectures...

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Indeed...

POE. Did you enjoy my lecture, Reynolds? Mr. Ives, have you met my friend, Captain Jeremiah Reynolds? He's down from New York...

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Jeremiah Reynolds, the Antarctic explorer?

REYNOLDS. The same...

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. An honor, sir. Perhaps you could lecture for us sometime...

POE. Do you think you could make the same kind of impression as I made tonight, Reynolds?

REYNOLDS. It would not be easy, to outdo you, Edgar.

POE. Can I buy you two gentleman a drink? I noticed a tavern across the street.

REYNOLDS. Edgar, we have a boat to catch.

POE. Oh, yes, Captain Reynolds here is taking me to New York tonight. He promised me that if I journey to that great metropolis on the Hudson that he would tell me of his most recent South Polar adventures.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES. I am honored to meet you both but I don't want you to miss your boat, so I'll say good night.

REYNOLDS. Good night, sir.

POE. Here's to you. (*Drinks from his pocket flask.*) What time does our ship sail?

REYNOLDS. Midnight. (*Ship's whistle sounds. D and U curtains rises on the next scene.*)