

= Metzengerstein =

" Metzengerstein : A Tale in Imitation of the German " , was the first short story by American writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe to see print . It was first published in the pages of Philadelphia 's Saturday Courier magazine , in 1832 . The story follows the young Frederick , the last of the Metzengerstein family , who carries on a long @-@ standing feud with the Berlifitzing family . Suspected of causing a fire that kills the Berlifitzing family patriarch , Frederick becomes intrigued with a previously unnoticed and untamed horse . Metzengerstein is punished for his cruelty when his own home catches fire and the horse carries him into the flame . Part of a Latin hexameter by Martin Luther serves as the story 's epigraph : Pestis eram vivus ? moriens tua mors ero (" Living I have been your plague , dying I shall be your death ") .

" Metzengerstein " follows many conventions of Gothic fiction and , to some , exaggerates those conventions . Consequently , critics and scholars debate if Poe intended the story to be taken seriously or considered a satire of Gothic stories . Regardless , many elements introduced in " Metzengerstein " would become common in Poe 's future writing , including the gloomy castle and the power of evil . Because the story follows an orphan raised in an aristocratic household , some critics suggest an autobiographical connection with its author .

The story was submitted as Poe 's entry to a writing contest at the Saturday Courier . Though it did not win , the newspaper published it in January 1832 . It was re @-@ published with Poe 's permission only twice during his lifetime ; its subtitle was dropped for its final publication . Poe intended to include it in his collection Tales of the Folio Club or another called Phantasy Pieces , though neither collection was ever produced .

= = Plot summary = =

The story , told from an unnamed third @-@ person narrator , takes place in Hungary at an unspecified date . The opening passages describe a centuries @-@ long rivalry between two wealthy families : the Metzengersteins and the Berlifitzings . The bitter enmity between the two families is so old that no one knows how far back it dates . The narrator states that its origin appears to rely on an " ancient " prophecy : " A lofty name shall have a fearful fall when , as the rider over his horse , the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing . "

Young Frederick , Baron of Metzengerstein , was orphaned at a young age and , thus , inherited the family fortune at age 18 (though the age changes throughout its many re @-@ publications) . Equipped with enormous wealth and power , he begins to exhibit particularly cruel behavior . " The behavior of the heir out @-@ heroded Herod " . Four days after he receives his inheritance , the stables of the rival family Berlifitzing catch fire . The neighborhood " instantaneously " attributed the act of arson to Frederick Metzengerstein (the story , however , does not say expressly if he did it or not) .

That day , Metzengerstein , in his home , sits staring intently at an old tapestry depicting " an enormous , and unnaturally colored horse " that belonged to the Berlifitzing clan . Just behind the horse , Frederick sees its rider who has just been killed by " the dagger of a Metzengerstein " . Soon , Frederick sees the horse move and assume " an energetic and human expression " . Immediately , Frederick opens the door to leave , and the action strikingly causes his shadow to fall exactly on the spot of the murderer in the tapestry .

Outside , he sees his men handling a horse that is " the counterpart " of the horse in the tapestry . The men tell Frederick that this new , remarkable " fiery @-@ colored " horse has been found in his stables with the letters " W.V.B. " branded on its forehead . The equerry says , " I supposed them , of course , to be the initials of William Von Berlifitzing , but all at the castle are positive in denying any knowledge of the horse . " Frederick takes ownership of the horse . In the next moment , a page appears and tells Frederick that " a small portion of the tapestry " is missing (presumably the part containing the image of the horse) . Frederick also hears , some time later , that old Wilhelm Berlifitzing died in the fire as he tried to save one of his horses in the burning stable .

Thenceforth , Frederick and the " ferocious and demonlike " horse , which no one else but Frederick

has dared to touch since its arrival , become seemingly inseparable . Day after day , Metzengerstein rides the animal as if addicted , and he becomes less and less interested in the affairs of his house and of society . He eventually begins to live in seclusion to the extent that others in the neighborhood suspect that he is either mad , sick , or overwhelmingly conceited .

" One tempestuous night " , Frederick awakes and maniacally mounts the horse to ride into the forest . Some hours later , the Metzengerstein castle catches fire . A crowd gathers to watch the peculiarly " ungovernable " flames and , soon , see the horse , now carrying " an unbonneted and disordered rider " who clearly has no control over the animal . The sight makes everyone present utter the word " horrible " . The animal leaps into the flames with its rider and " disappeared amid the whirlwind of chaotic fire " , thereby killing the last of the Metzengerstein clan . Immediately , the fire " died away " . In the calm , the horrified onlookers observe a cloud of smoke settle above the castle in the shape of " the distinct colossal figure of ? a horse " .

= = Publication history = =

Poe originally sent " Metzengerstein " to the Saturday Courier as his entry to a writing competition along with five other prose works , including " The Duke de l'Omelette " and " A Decided Loss " . None of his entries won , though the judges apparently liked " Metzengerstein " enough to print it a few months later in their January 14 , 1832 edition . It was published without Poe 's name attached to it but it is acknowledged as the first tale published by Poe . Poe likely was not paid for its initial publication . The subtitle of " A Tale in Imitation of the German " was added when it was republished in the Southern Literary Messenger in January 1836 , likely to capitalize on the popular interest in German horror . It was removed for its publication as part of the collection Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque in 1840 .

" Metzengerstein " was one of 11 tales Poe would have collected as Tales of the Folio Club , a tale collection Poe announced but never actually printed . The " Folio Club " would have been a fictitious literary society the author called a group of " dunderheads " out to " abolish literature " . At each monthly meeting , a member would present a story . In the case of " Metzengerstein " , the speaker was " Mr. Horrible Dictû , with white eyelashes , who had graduated at Gottingen " according to an early draft . The Baltimore Saturday Visitor ran an advertisement calling for subscribers for the collection at \$ 1 apiece . A week later , however , the newspaper announced that the author had withdrawn the pieces with the expectation they would be printed in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania . Poe also considered publishing " Metzengerstein " in a collection of stories to be called Phantasy Pieces as " The Horse @-@ Shade " , though the edition was never printed .

In its first several publications , " Metzengestein " included a line about the mother 's death by consumption . The young baron says : " It is a path I have prayed to follow . I would wish all I love to perish of that gentle disease . " When Poe was still a child , his own mother , Eliza Poe , died , presumably of consumption . His wife Virginia also had tuberculosis and died in 1847 . After her death , Poe altered his personal view of fictional heroines who were sick and idealized sick women while wishing for their death . This more romantic view of death was not uncommon in writing , as in John Keats 's " Ode to a Nightingale " , which may have inspired Poe .

= = Analysis = =

Though not explicitly stated , it is implied that the horse is really Berlifitzing . The first paragraph of the story references metempsychosis , the belief that the soul of a person is transferred to another living being upon death . Other evidence is the tapestry , the lack of a history or recognition in the horse and , certainly , the prophecy referencing the immortality of the Berlifitzings . The story can be read as an allegory , a warning that a human soul can be overtaken by the evil it has created , though Poe himself doesn 't suggest such a moral . Such evil can be created by a person 's hatred and pride .

Poe imitates many traditional " Germanic " elements in this tale . The most obvious example is the gloomy old castle , typical of Gothic fiction . The story also includes typical Gothic themes , which

scholar Dawn Sova refers to as " hints at secret obsessions and sins , foreboding prophecies , family rivalry " . These Gothic conventions had been a staple of popular fiction in Europe and the United States for several decades by the time Poe utilized them . Considering the subtitle , " A Tale in Imitation of the German " , critics and scholars disagree if Poe may have , in fact , intended the story as a satire or burlesque of the genre , purposely exaggerating the elements of the Gothic to be humorous . Other evidence is that all of the other three stories Poe published in 1832 (" The Duc de l'Omelette " , " A Tale of Jerusalem " , and " Bon @-@ Bon ") are comic tales written , as Poe said , " intended for half banter , half satire " . The story also uses irony as a form of humor : Despite the family 's prophecy that " the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing " , the opposite occurs . The suggestion that " Metzengerstein " is purposefully written as a satire has been disputed , especially because of Poe 's revisions throughout its many republications where he removed some of the more exaggerated material .

The German or , more generally , European overtones give the story a medieval setting , though the time and place of the plot is left indistinct . The atmosphere of the story combines both realistic and supernatural worlds while depicting pathological emotional states , likely influenced by the works of Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffmann . It has been called a precursor to " The Fall of the House of Usher " and other later works . Among the elements Poe first uses in " Metzengerstein " which will become typical in his later works are the decaying and gloomy building with oddly shaped rooms , the remote , secluded property , vivid colors , and underground vaults as well as themes of vengeance and the overwhelming power of evil . Future works will also depict characters of extreme wealth ; besides Metzengerstein , other examples are Roderick Usher , the narrator in " Ligeia " and Legrand 's restored fortune in " The Gold @-@ Bug " . Poe also uses teeth as a symbol for the first time in " Metzengerstein " . The horse 's teeth are described as " sepulchral and disgusting " . Poe would later use teeth as a sign of mortality , as in lips writhing about the teeth of the mesmerized man in " The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar " , the sound of grating teeth in " Hop @-@ Frog " , and the obsession over teeth in " Berenice " . Death by fire would later be reused in Poe 's story " Hop @-@ Frog " as another punishment . Though Poe was emulating popular horror fiction of the time , " Metzengerstein " shows what made Poe 's horror tales stand out : rather than focusing on blood and gore , he explored the minds of the characters to better understand them .

The story has some autobiographical overtones as well , with the castle representing Moldavia , the Richmond home of Poe 's foster @-@ father John Allan . The Count , in this reading , would represent John Allan , and Poe the young Metzengerstein . Both Poe and Metzengerstein are orphaned at a young age . Poe may have found writing the story therapeutic ; in it , he destroys " John Allan " , though he is also destroyed in return . In focusing on the final fire scene , Poe may have been recalling the fatal Richmond Theatre fire of December 1811 which occurred three weeks after his mother , the actress Eliza Poe , had died .

= = Critical response = =

The German nature of " Metzengerstein " and other stories in the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* was mentioned in a review by Joseph C. Neal in the *Pennsylvanian* on December 6 , 1839 : " These grotesque and arabesque delineations are full of variety , now irresistibly quaint and droll , and again marked with all the deep and painful interest of the German school " . Rudyard Kipling was an admirer of Poe and once wrote , " My own personal debt to Poe is a heavy one " . " Metzengerstein " was an inspiration to his story " The Phantom Rickshaw " , where the main character is punished by the horse of someone he has murdered .

= = Adaptations = =

" Metzengerstein " was adapted into one component of Roger Vadim 's *Histoires extraordinaires* in 1968 . The segment starred Jane Fonda and Peter Fonda . Romanian composer Joan Balan wrote a musical score for piano in 1934 based on the story called *Das Feuerpferd* .

Italian singer Lord Vampyr , famous for his work with *Theatres des Vampires* , has a song named "

Metzengerstein " , present in his 2010 album Horror Masterpiece . Its lyrics heavily allude to the tale .