

## 8. Flu

A far less sinister theory suggests that Poe merely succumbed to the flu—which might have turned into deadly pneumonia—on this deathbed. As Semtner explains, in the days leading up to Poe's departure from Richmond, the author visited a physician, complaining of illness. "His last night in town, he was very sick, and his [soon-to-be] wife noted that he had a weak pulse, a fever, and she didn't think he should take the journey to Philadelphia," says Semtner. "He visited a doctor, and the doctor also told him not to travel, that he was too sick." According to newspaper reports from the time, it was raining in Baltimore when Poe was there—which Semtner thinks could explain why Poe was found in clothes not his own. "The cold and the rain exasperated the flu he already had," says Semtner, "and maybe that eventually lead to pneumonia. The high fever might account for his hallucinations and his confusion."

## 9. Murder

In his 2000 book *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe*, author John Evangelist Walsh presents yet another theory about Poe's death: that Poe was murdered by the brothers of his wealthy fiancée, Elmira Shelton. Using evidence from newspapers, letters and memoirs, Walsh argues that Poe actually made it to Philadelphia, where he was ambushed by Shelton's three brothers, who warned Poe against marrying their sister. Frightened by the experience, Poe disguised himself in new clothes (accounting for, in Walsh's mind, his second-hand clothing) and hid in Philadelphia for nearly a week, before heading back to Richmond to marry Shelton. Shelton's brothers intercepted Poe in Baltimore, Walsh postulates, beat him, and forced him to drink whiskey, which they knew would send Poe into a deathly sickness. Walsh's theory has gained little traction among Poe historians—or book reviewers; Edwin J. Barton, in a review for the journal *American Literature*, called Walsh's story "only plausible, not wholly persuasive." "Midnight Dreary is interesting and entertaining," he concluded, "but its value to literary scholars is limited and oblique."

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