

**An exploration of Dark Romanticism in Poe's Gothic Fiction:**

**A journey into the conscious and subconscious mind**

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## Abstract

Through this dissertation I aim to get to the bottom of the perverse and self-destructive nature of the conscious and subconscious mind. This notion finds precedence in the works of Dark Romantics, such as notable American author – Edgar Allan Poe – whose short stories are fraught with themes of the deranged mind and the tortured soul. The tenets of Dark Romanticism have found a permanent placing in the Gothic Fiction sub-genre. Through the incorporation of the ideals of Dark Romanticism, Edgar Allan Poe popularized the sub-genre of Gothic Fiction. This dissertation will begin by an in-depth understanding of the ideals of Dark Romanticism, after which it will follow the manner in which they are depicted in the fascinatingly disturbing short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. With the aid of the primary texts and correlating them to secondary resources, I aim to uncover Poe's preoccupation with the ill at ease nature of the fragile human psyche, and show that through the discovery of the perverse and destructive compulsions he uncovers the sublime.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In the 17th century, there began a shift in the artistic realm from the imposing rationalism of the Enlightenment age. It began in Germany first, and the movement was known as *Sturm und Drang* or Storm and Stress. The movement placed great emphasis on extreme emotions and subjectivity. In novels and poems of this genre, the protagonist is characteristically driven to act by the compelling forces of revenge and greed. The literary works which emerged sought to elevate things that were natural and extremely real, especially experiences which were distressing and painful and terrifying. The emphasis that the *Sturm und Drang* movement placed on an individual's emotional experiences helped pave the way for early Romanticism and later fostered an offshoot - Dark Romanticism, a branch propelled to great heights by the dark and foreboding tales of one notable American author – Edgar Allan Poe.

Romanticism centered its idea on Nature. Nature being the elements around us, while also drawing attention to the elements within us – the human nature. “The movement placed great value on nature, making man's association with nature an important aspect. Idealism also distinguished it, along with a desire to explain “the why rather than the how of reality” (Eigner 3). The Romantics incorporated the duality of Nature in their works, by which it means the ordinary perceivable beauty was celebrated, while leaving the space to explore the awe-inspiring intangible malice of Nature. This juxtaposition of the duality of nature, allowed writers like Poe to hinge tales on the premise of psychological devolvement while blurring the lines with supernatural occurrences.

The Romantic Movement is characterized by a celebration of the sublime, and a belief in individualism. The sublime is an emotional experience an individual goes through when

confronted by a situation which seeks to inspire awe-inspiring terror within them, and becomes a way to also find beauty in something which may be regarded as otherwise frightening or unsavory. It placed an emphasis on emotions, and postulated that intense emotions were a credible source for aesthetic experience. Imagination of the artist took precedence over rationality and it was credited as a justifiable source of creative inspiration. While Romanticism glorifies the inherent sublimity of human intentions, Dark Romanticism is characterized by a preoccupation with emotions like apprehension, fear, and the grotesque aspect of imagination. Dark Romanticism gave rise to the popularized sub-genre Gothic Literature in which it presents “the darker side of awareness... guilt, fear and madness... the uncomfortable sense of being in a fantasy world which is about to reveal secrets of the human personality” (Howard 3). H.P. Lovecraft chronicles the development of the treatment of supernatural elements in literary works in his essay titled *Supernatural Elements in Literature*. A prolific American horror author himself, Lovecraft pays homage to Edgar Allan Poe, dedicating a full chapter to try and explain Poe’s contribution to the genre of the Gothic Fiction, and credits Poe for laying the foundation on which later authors found the confidence to venture forth into the world of horror fiction.

Lovecraft begins by discussing the nature of man’s instinct and emotions and stipulates that they were formed from his response to the surroundings he found himself a part of. Defining emotions rooted in pain and pleasure emerged from the phenomena whose cause and effects man understood, and also around those that were incomprehensible to him. “The universe teemed with them in the early days -- were naturally woven such personifications, marvelous interpretations, and sensations of awe and fear as would be hit upon by a race having few and simple ideas and limited experience”. (2) Lovecraft is referring to human experiences that go beyond the rational and shines light on the extreme emotions an individual experiences when

confronted with a situation which defies logic and explanation. He credits this space as being awe-inspiring as well as fearful.

The unknown which is fraught with unpredictability became a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities which impressed upon mankind the idea of cryptic and “wholly extra-terrestrial reasons”. Lovecraft is alluding to the world of unseen supernatural phenomena where logic and rationality remains defied. He also brings in the idea of dreaming which helped foster notions of an unknown and ethereal realms, intangible to reality where “life so strongly conduced toward a feeling of the supernatural, that we need not wonder at the thoroughness with which man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition”. Lovcraft goes on to claim how the imposition of these unseen elements is a scientific fact when factors like the subconscious and inner instincts are concerned – “for though the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos” (Lovecraft, 3).

Dark Romanticism addresses the mind's preoccupation with the grotesque and morbid. It highlights the debased patterns of human emotions and also delves into the supernatural aspects of nature. Dark romanticism is characterized by depictions of such themes as supernatural, sin, guilt, evil, madness. Individuals are prone to giving into destructive behavior and sin and is shown to lack wisdom. Dark Romanticism holds the view that nature is a spiritual force encompassing the sinister and morbid. According to Dark Romantics, nature has the tendency to reveal pessimistic truths of mankind .These themes helped propel the status of the Gothic Fiction into a prominent genre. The imagination was the gateway into the unknown – a region that thrives on the fantastic, the demonic and the insane.

Gothic Literature, as a sub-genre stemming from the incorporation of elements of Dark Romanticism is tentatively comprising of these striking elements. Usually a tale of Dark Romanticism needed such elements as a Catholic – feudal society set in a dark foreboding landscape reeking of wild oppressive ruin. It also includes the nerve-wracking and sensitive sensibilities of the heroin juxtaposed with the rash impulsiveness of her lover. The inherent threat of being destroyed by an old man with a piercing gaze made for an unsettling narrative. Lovecraft even brings in the uncertain nature of narrators, and their ability to create worlds where rationality is overthrown by an encounter with the supernatural realm. Framing devices such as unreliable narrators and subplots have been found in manuscripts and historical texts, which gives these tales their sense of spine-tingling eeriness. The device of the unreliable narrator is frequently employed by Poe to create a keen sense of uneasiness in his stories.

The subversion of holiness like a morally corrupt priest and monastic institutions were key features of these tales. The portrayal of deathlike states or a state of perpetual sleepiness bring about the sensation of sickening dread. The fear of underground spaces which is a reference to the phobia of being buried alive generates a sense of anxious paranoia. Lovecraft even eludes to the existence of doubles, a device which has been constantly used to narrate an individual's struggle with themselves, which often needs to self-annihilation or liberation when finally confronted. The resolution with either a reunion with oneself or the eventual death of the self. Lovecraft also states:

the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art; possibilities of incest; unnatural echoes or silences, unintelligible writings, and the unspeakable; garrulous retainers; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past; Faust- and

Wandering Jew-like figures; civil insurrections and fires, the charnel house and the madhouse. (*Exploring Gothic Fiction: A Corpus-Based Analysis*, 7).

Since this dissertation will follow the incorporation of gothic elements in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, certain elements mentioned in *Exploring Gothic Fiction: A Corpus-Based Analysis* are pertinent when dealing with the American author's writing. Elements such as the poisonous effects of guilt and shame; nocturnal landscapes and dreams; apparitions from the past feature heavily in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories.

The Gothic Tradition was firmly established in Europe before American writers had made names for themselves. By the 19th century, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and to a lesser extent Washington Irving and Herman Melville were using the Gothic elements in their writing. Edgar Allan Poe was the master of the Gothic form in the United States. The Gothic dimension of Poe's fictional world offered him a way to explore the human mind in extreme situations and so arrive at an essential truth. Poe's work generated strong responses. Critics either loved his work, or they hated it. Today, Poe is recognized as a master of poetry, a superb writer of short stories, and a profound explorer of the torments of the human soul. Howard Phillips Lovecraft doles out high praise to Poe, giving him the credit of being the first to recognize the potential for storytelling when dealing with psychological aspects. Lovecraft notes that Poe was the first to systematically design a structure for the incorporations of such elements to imbue readers with an intense feeling of terror. Perhaps the best thing Lovecraft says is how Poe adopts an impersonal artistic stance when composing his stories – and that Poe's ability to incite feelings of apprehension in his readers is a credit to his genius rather a commentary on his own being.

## 1.1: Investigating the origins of Dark Romanticism

Before we can understand the principles which shaped Dark Romanticism, it is imperative to take a closer look at Romanticism. Romanticism sprung up during the late eighteenth century in Germany and carried on well into the nineteenth century, by which time it spread its sphere of dominance to America. As an artistic and intellectual movement it “focuses on the individual, the subjective, and the spontaneous.” Romanticism valued emotions and belief over rationality and logic. The individual is brought to the forefront, and nature is seen as a sublime source of aesthetic experience, emphasizing on such emotions as horror and awe.

The Romantic period coincides with what is known as the “age of revolution” beginning from the American Revolution in 1776, to the fateful French Revolution in 1789. The Romantic period itself was propelled by a revolutionary spirit. Choosing to break free from the excessive emphasis on rationalism of the Age of Reason, Romantics legitimized the individual imagination as a critical authority.

Romantics were optimists who believed that individuals embody a natural goodness. They stressed on knowledge gained through intuition, and keenly supported experiencing the sublime through a connection with nature. Romanticism is highly dependent on feelings, emotions and observations garnered from the natural senses. Romanticists reveled in the world around them. They emphasized on nature as a symbolic source of enlightenment and inspiration. The writing of the movement explored the natural world with great detail at the same time shifting into supernatural themes, reflecting the concept of nature as symbolic. The natural world was good, while humans were corruptible. The closer human beings could get to their natural state the more pure they would be. The writing style of the Romantic period put a focus on the effect of events, while creating an imaginary world. They viewed God as an external force. Some

views from Romanticism found a footing for a new movement once it migrated to America – it was called Transcendentalism. Mathew Hagaman shifts the focus to Romanticism in America in his paper, *Comparing the Literature of Romantics, Transcendentalists, and Dark Romantics* commenting on how the Romanticism movement in America was fostered by intuition and imagination, instead of the early themes of “Rationalism and divinity”. Hagaman recounts the period before American Renaissance as a period which saw the rise of three new literary genres – Romantics, transcendentalists and Dark Romantics. The culmination of these three genres into one form is known as Romanticism (Hagaman 1)

Transcendentalism gained momentum as a social movement and also as an ideological philosophy in America. It also functioned as a religious protest. Like the Romantics, they believed in intuition and removed themselves from rationality. Transcendentalists believe that an ideal spiritual state can be achieved through intuition. They firmly adhered to the notion that divinity resides within us. Transcendentalists believed in the inner goodness of all human beings. The more an individual could tap into their inner light, the closer to God they would become. Figun Dincer summarizes the state in which America was when Transcendentalism began to take precedence, in his paper *Light and Dark Romantic Features in Irving, Hawthorne and Poe* stating that America went through the throes of industrial revolution, and this led to development in many sectors. The newly liberated nation entered into a period of vast commercial expansion post-Civil War. The overall economic boom allowed new factories to be built which in turn assisted in the growth of cities and the fortunes amassed by the people. All facets of the demography reaped the benefits with the result of more opportunities and the added liberty. This well-to-do situation helped foster a sense of patriotism, “which made them sure, that the U.S. was the greatest nation on earth.” However the industrial and economic boom had its downside,

and the dissatisfaction was becoming palpable. These developments prompted an artistic, literary and intellectual movement which steadily gained momentum and was called Romanticism with subgenres comprising of three trends - light and dark romanticism, and the transcendentalism (Dincer, 1)

Rooted in the aspect of individualism, Dark Romanticism is said to have developed as a reaction to the Transcendentalist doctrine of divinity existing inherently in man. Dark Romanticism acknowledged the multiplicity of human impulses. Dark Romantics also values intuition over logic. It explores the will's susceptibility to bend towards the deliberately sinful. The innate desire to surrender to self-sabotaging delusions perpetrated by the unhealthy musings of an unsure mind, constantly shouldering the burden of a guilty conscience. The Dark Romantics differed from the Romantics and the Transcendentalists in regards that they viewed the world as dark, foreboding and mysterious. While the Romantics and Transcendentalists believed that nature revealed truths in life, the Dark Romantics saw the truths to be only evil and hellish. Unsure of the individual's ability to follow through with reform. FigerDincer surmises eloquently in his paper, *The Light and Dark Romantic Features in Irving, Hawthorne and Poe*:

Fallen man's inability fully to comprehend haunting reminders of another, supernatural realm that yet seemed not to exist, the constant perplexity of inexplicable and vastly metaphysical phenomena, a propensity for seemingly perverse or evil moral choices that had no firm or fixed measure or rule, and a sense of nameless guilt combined with a suspicion the external world was a delusive projection of the mind--these were major elements in the vision of man the Dark Romantics opposed to the mainstream of Romantic thought. (25)

American author, Edgar Allan Poe spearheaded the reactionary literary movement - Dark Romanticism, as he vehemently was in opposition of the transcendental beliefs of divinity and inherent goodness. Most of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories and poems, not just fall in the canon of Dark Romanticism, but has also shaped the canon. Poe's exploration of the unreliable quality of the conscious and subconscious mind remains unparalleled. Edgar Allan Poe found the macabre mesmerizing and spun tales where he wove worlds of psychological and emotional depravity. With such short stories as "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The Black Cat", "Cask of Amontilado" and "Ligeia", the notable author deftly presents an in-depth analysis of the human will succumbing to the inexplicable urge to maim and cause grievous harm – an urge we are taught to deny – Poe singularly acknowledged it and gave it a confronting form in his stories. His characteristic interest in exploring the psychology of man, including the perverse and self-destructive nature of the conscious and subconscious mind, finds precedence in the darkest of all sub-genres to emerge from the Dark Romantic movement – called the Gothic Fiction.

## **1.2 Gothic Novel and the Sublime; a legacy of Dark Romanticism**

When writing about the short story genre in *Philosophy of Composition* Poe maintains that the effect of the piece is key, and also alludes to the necessity of maintaining the attention of readers. Poe stipulates that in order to maintain an effect throughout the story and to sustain the experience for the reader, the author must consider the nature of reaction he intends to provoke in the reader through his words. In his essay, Poe first postulates a question: "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" (*Philosophy of Composition*, 1).

Poe's line of ponderings is in par with the philosophy behind the Romantic Sublime. The term "gothic" has been linked with an appreciation of the joys of extreme emotion, the thrill of

fearfulness and awe inherent in the sublime, and a quest for atmosphere. Both the gothic fiction genre and the narrative behind the sublime is open to much debate, and has been maintained definitions that always have room for exploration. David B. Morris surmises in his paper *Gothic Sublimity* stressing first on accepting the uncomfortable fact that, the sublime, similar to the Gothic novel has an array of historical practices and theoretical accounts. Therefore the need to pick out a single defining feature of the sublime is futile. (300)

Morris tracks the evolution of the definition of sublime through the writers of the eighteenth century - from Longinus to Edmund Burke. It is in Burke's definition Morris finds a precarious clarity to the meaning of sublime, stating:

It was Burke's accomplishment, in entering the confusing and contradictory dialogue on the sublime, to consolidate the vastly materials of previous account within a single, uneasily unified system. Splitting the sublime from the beautiful in an irreconcilable division, he then explained all aspects of sublimity as governed by one comprehensive power. As he summarized his theory unconditionally: "Terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime"(Morris, 300)

The common definition of "gothic" has been connected to the dark and horrific. Some important features of gothic fiction include terror – both psychological as well as physical – it is laden with mystery, the supernatural, ghosts, haunted houses and Gothic architecture, castles, darkness, death, decay, doubles, madness , secrets, hereditary curses, and persecuted maidens. In *The Gothic: Function and Definition*, Snorri Sigurdsson singles out what he calls the "sublime effect". The Gothic and is a unique genre for its focus on particular emotional stimuli, and the process of creating this stimulation. The genre specializes in creating terror, fear and desire in its audience – and it achieves this by presenting characters and settings to the audience which hints

at the audiences' unacknowledged or repressed desires. This allows for a conflicting moment to transpire in which the sublime effect is achieved and media through which this process is carried out is called abjection. "We begin by dealing with the concept of the sublime as it pertains to the Gothic, as that is the intended effect." (Sigurdsson, 10)

In *The Gothic: Function and Definition*, Sigurdsson notes the effect of sublimity was to detach oneself from reality by inciting strong emotional responses and intense stimuli. The sublime effect has a transporting quality. Alluding to Edmund Burke, Sigurdsson iterates the necessity for imaginative transport as desirable. This imaginative transport is important for both mental and physical faculties. Edmund Burke first lays out the problem of indifference which is a state of mental lethargy stemming from the steady grind of the familiar. While positive pleasure, which according to Burke is a 'novelty' – is associated with beauty, and this is only one way of relieving the problem since it's a "mild and temporary cure". The alternative is more effective since it's a combination of a "peculiar pain" mixed in with delight. Burke defines the sublime as being apprehensive of the danger in nature or art without the fear of immediate annihilation. It is a "state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" and "the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other." (Sigurdsson, 11)

Even though both Sigurdsson and Morris refer to Edmund Burke when looking for a definition for the sublime, this definition proves somewhat lacking in fully grasping the profundity of emotions that terror can induce. Burke's reference of terror is associated to the adrenaline rush one experiences during a flight or fright moment when in danger of bodily harm or harm to one's person. Morris notes in *Gothic Sublimity* that Burke's definition of the sublime proves deficient when it comes to understanding the Gothic novel since Burke posits his theory of terror on "a narrow, mechanical account of bodily processes". Terror is derived directly and

simply from a situation or notion which holds the capability to evoke in us “an apprehension of pain or death. He means that we fear whatever threatens to injure us or kill us...his claim that “pain and fear consist in an unnatural tension of the nerves” while he seems to deliberately steer away from the psychological aspect of terror as well its cultural dimensions (Morris, 301)

Sigurdsson turns the conversation to the need for abjection in gothic fiction, and also illustrates its functions. Describing it as process similar to projection, it is that they deviate from what is socially accepted. Abjection is created in the workings of a gothic novel by a keen attention to detail in the presentation of the monsters and audacious atrocities of the genre. Abjection is also the horror one experiences when confronted by a truth about oneself which is difficult to confront. Morris explains this by writing, “As in such perverse unities of the exaggerated and the impossible, hyperbole passes from language to action, where it provides a mysterious logic underlying almost every instance of Gothic plot”. (303)

Gothic elements prevalent in the plots of the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe show his predilection for the subjective, macabre and fantastic. For Poe it was crucial that his creations leave behind intense emotional and psychological impressions on the minds of his readers, and he meticulously wove tales with the purpose of delving into the disturbingly fantastic to unearth the awe-inspiringly frightful abjections of the human consciousness.

### **1.3 A Brief Account of Poe’s Life**

The purpose of this thesis is to see the perverse and self-destructive nature of the conscious and subconscious mind. Last chapter discussed the notion of sublime and its treatment in the literary genre Gothic Fiction. The sublime unravels in the works of gothic fiction through the manifestation of the grotesque – which can be the psychological as well a visceral

understanding of the unseen malice lurking all around. American author Edgar Allan Poe was born into a life fraught with loss and marked with an intense understanding of human suffering and the debilitating effects of narcotics – used to dull an eternal inexplicable ache. The troubled author's life offers readers an explanation of the harrowing and horrifying occurrences one has to encounter while reading one of Poe's dark and disturbing short stories.

Credited for improving the short story genre, Edgar Allan Poe is a long renowned American author and critic. Singlehandedly ushering in the detective genre into the literary realm, Edgar Allan Poe till today remains shrouded in a plume of mystique given the conflicting accounts of his life recorded thus far. Lorine Pruett writes in *A Psychoanalytical Study of Edgar Allan Poe*:

The life of Edgar Allan Poe might be considered happy record of that "disaster" which "followed fast followed faster" this man of brilliant capacities till it drove him into opposition with most of the world, deprived the love he so inordinately craved, paralyzed his creative abilities, seduced him to seek a vague nepenthe in the drugs and stimulants, and, its relentless purpose achieved, cast him aside, a helpless wreck, to die from the darkened tragedy of a Baltimore saloon. Without further following such an anthropomorphic conception of fate, we must be impressed that both environmental circumstances and natural inheritance seem to conspire to cast the young poet in a role that is both somber and wild, with a beauty that chills more than it saddens." (Sova, 1)

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809 in Baltimore. Poe's parents, Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins and David Poe, Jr were in a local touring theatre at the time. The famed author is preceded by an elder brother William Henry Leonard Poe and a sister after him named Rosalie

Poe. The Poe family were of meager means, despite a lineage of distinguished ancestor owing to Poe paternal grandfather David Poe Sr, who was a veteran of the American Revolution. This claim to a distinguished ancestor made Poe keenly aware of his social standing and “he consistently asserted his pride in being descended from a woman at once so beautiful and so noble as his mother, who both honored and was honored by her profession. Such assertions as these suggest that he spoke quite as much to assure himself as to convince others. While the reality allowed him full right to take pride in his descent, yet circumstances so contrived to cloud over that reality as to make his proud and sensitive spirit constantly alert against the possibility of an indignity.” (Pruette, 2)

Poe’s father – a former lawyer - was disowned because of his career choice where he unfortunately did not amount to much nor amass any notoriety due to harsh critical reviews which led to a lack of popularity. David Poe Jr was a raging alcoholic, who eventually deserted the family leaving Elizabeth to fend for the children and maintain the household. Elizabeth already stricken with tuberculosis passed away after only a couple of months. Left to the mercy of strangers, the children were separated and adopted by different families causing them to grow up without any filial affiliations or family ties.

Pruette accounts for William and Rosalie noting that William was accredited with both taste and genius – and even composed fugitive verses which showcased a poetical prowess of a high order, though they are all but lost now. William was privy to the ‘flowing bowl’, and after being turned down as a lover decided to venture off to sea where through his careless he became entangled in a sailor scrape which resulted in his death at the young age of twenty-six. Rosalie on the other hand did not exhibit any of her brothers’ propensities, instead she was thought to be dull to the point of being incapable. She did not excel in a subject at school, and she was seen as

unfit to take care of herself. Even the family who had taken her in left her to her own devices – a time which Rosalie was subjected to a precarious existence. Later in life Rosalie was admitted to the care of a charitable institution in Washington where she was diagnosed with a multitude of eccentricities, and succumbed to death at the age of sixty-four.

Edgar Allan Poe was disposed to the care of the Allans. With the Allans Poe found maternal nurturing in Frances Allen. She gave Poe the motherly tenderness that was lacking in his life. The Allans gave Poe a private school education when they traveled to England in 1815, and his education continued in private schools when they returned to the United States in 1820. In 1826, Poe entered the newly established University of Virginia, but John Allan made him leave one year later after Edgar racked up huge debts by drinking and gambling instead of attending classes.

Pruette credits Poe's waywardness to a hereditary disposition stating in her paper that "a tubercular father and cousin, an eccentric uncle, a drunkard brother as well as many relatives known for a "too free use of the bottle," and an imbecile sister, coupled with the peculiar genius of the poet himself, his sensitiveness to the effects of stimulants and temporary fits of insanity toward the last of his life, form fairly conclusive evidence that there was in the Poe family a decided organic inferiority" (4)

Despite growing up with the Allans who offered him a semblance of normality, Poe was afflicted with a perpetual sense of loneliness which made him sensitive to affection in such a way as to borderline on morbid. Poe did not feel the need to acclimate with his surroundings feeling he was intellectually superior and often given to fits of boredom and intense flights of imagination. Poe is known to assert himself in scenarios where he felt inferior. At the slightest

inclination of being ridiculed, Poe's "rebellious pride" felt an intense desire to prove his superiority.

Edgar Allan Poe grew up in a reality where he did not feel anchored. Shaped by the experiences in his life, Poe understood the frailty of human emotions given his own sensitive disposition. Battling for fame, and struggling with sobriety Poe penned tales exploring the intensely disturbingly psyche of human beings. He seemed to have an inherent understanding of the mental faculty and the nature of fancy prone to taking flight into the darkest of realms. The legacy left behind by Poe gives us an insight into the author's mind, and his essays shed light on his creative genius. Even though during his time, Poe met an end best suited for lepers, over the years his work has contributed to genres and created them whilst taking readers into a journey of the sublime – an ethereal space best understood by the man himself.

#### **1.4 The significance of Sigmund Freud when reading Poe**

In almost seamless connection, Sigmund Freud's postulations of the uncanny being manifested by the mind is explored by Poe in his short stories. A psychoanalytical reading of a writer's body of work adopts Freud's theories to examine a text. It suggests that literary works are an expression of the writer's own unconscious desires, and that a literary creation is a manifestation of the writer's own neurosis. This critical approach is taken to show evidence of psychological traumas, conflicts and unresolved emotions of the author through his/her texts. Psychoanalytical criticism tries to trace the author's own fixations and trauma within the behavior of the textual characters, however psychological aspects will materialize indirectly in the form of symbols and metaphors. It seeks to understand the repressed matter of the author, to unearth the unintended unconscious material which has buried within the rationality of the conscious mind.

In *The Uncanny* Freud begins by , etymologically dissecting the meaning of German words *Heimlich*, which is assigned two meanings – the first meaning equates to the sense of homely familiarity and is associated with security, the second meaning alludes to secrecy, or concealment, something unseen and deceitful. The most important of the definitions being a sense of concealment from the self. Moving on to the idea of the *unheimlich* , which is in part the opposite of *Heimlich*, as in it eludes to the feeling of unhomeliness, or encountering something unfamiliar and eerie. It is the name given to everything that should have been kept a secret or hidden but has emerged into the light." *Unheimlich* thus becomes a kind of unwilling, mistaken self-exposure. In psychoanalytic terms, it provides a surprising and unexpected self-revelation.

Freud attempts to give us a definition of the uncanny through an analysis of “*The Sandman*” by E.T.A Hoffman. Freud brilliantly intertwines psychoanalysis with the discipline of literary criticism. He assumes the role of a literary critic and lays out the framework of the effect created by certain kind of literature. He points out the necessity to realize whether the situation and facts being presented to readers in an uncanny fiction are real or imaginary – this is his reference to Jentsch’s “intellectual uncertainty”, Using E.T.A. Hoffman’s “*The Sandman*”, Freud touches on the anxiety of castration through the motif of eyes. It is the castration complex of our infantile sexuality that is evoked by the removal of the eyes. Therefore the uncanny is also a returning to a previous state of psychosexual anxiety of our infanthood, which has been forgotten and overcome. So the uncanny is the manifestation of a return to a repressed infantile state.

Another notion that Freud speaks in-depth about is the idea of the *doppelganger*. The primary source of this is the narcissism experienced during childhood. It is a process by which a child projects multiple versions of themselves to ensure his/her immortality. However, later in life, the function of doubling morphs into something uncanny, once the childhood narcissism has

been overcome. Another aspect of the doppelgänger that Freud shines light on is the double's function as the development of the super-ego. The super-ego becomes an agent of self-checking—on one hand it works to project what it represses on the primitive image, and on the second hand the double encompasses all that is viewed as negative to the ego and has been repressed. Or it is the embodiment of all the hopes, dreams and wishes that remains suppressed once an individual comes in contact with the society or the environment around him/her. “But, after having thus considered the manifest motivation of the figure of a “double,” we have to admit that none of it helps us to understand the extraordinarily strong feeling of something uncanny that pervades the conception; and our knowledge of pathological mental processes enables us to add that nothing in the content arrived at could account for that impulse towards self-protection which has caused the ego to project such a content outward as something foreign to itself. The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the “double” being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect. The “double” has become a vision of terror” (The Uncanny, 10). This postulation of Freud’s theory will later come in use when trying to understand the tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

The idea of the return to a repressed state is not enough to describe the effect of the uncanny, hence Freud returns to the world of fiction to better understand the occurrence of the uncanny in the literary realm. Freud states that the uncanny in real life and in literary fiction are different, since readers disassociate from reality while immersing themselves into the world created by a story. Readers take it for granted that the facts presented in the fiction are separated from their sense of reality, thus diminishing the feeling of uncanniness. Fiction is able to create

the sensation of uncanniness when the author puts the reader in a fiction which seems rooted in reality, but then systematically unravels the fabric holding the narrative together.

When doing a psychoanalytical reading of Poe, it is also imperative to understand Freud's Personality Theory. Personality Theory deals with the structure of the human personality which Freud divides into three parts – the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. The conscious mind is concerned with the present, which includes present perceptions, memories, feelings, thoughts and fantasies. The preconscious mind deals with thoughts, memories and dreams that can be easily recalled and brought to the forefront. The unconscious mind is the significantly larger aspect, and is the source from which we draw motivation, be they the desire for food or sex, also neurotic compulsions. The unconscious is also credited for motivating artists and scientists.

To better understand Freud's structure of the personality we have to take a closer look at Freud's distinctions for the human personality. Freud stipulates that the human personality is comprised of three major components – the id, the ego and the superego. The id aspect of our personality is the most primitive part which responds to the pleasure principle, and serves to fulfill primal desires without concerning itself too much with morality and logic. Ego, on the other hand is rooted in reality, and is the second to develop. It is responsible for our decision making. The ego functions under the reality principle which means it has to satisfy the demands of the id and superego without compromising the moral standards of the superego. The superego is the last to develop, and functions under the morality principle – it makes decisions based on right and wrong. It is the idealistic aspect of the human personality and branches into two subsections – the conscience which is the internalization of punishments, and the ego ideal, which responds to rewards. Both the ego and superego function in all three levels of

unconsciousness. Edgar Allan Poe is renowned for leading his readers through the maelstrom which is the mind, and creates a fantastic sense of uncanniness which when thoroughly understood leaves readers with a sense of having encountered something sublime.

## **Chapter Two: The uncanny unravels in “William Wilson” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “Leigia”**

Edgar Allan Poe occupies a unique position in American Literature. He delves headfirst into the nature of the subconscious in his short stories, and leads readers by the hand into the heart of the human psyche and unfurls it to them. Poe deals with paranoia in his supernatural fiction – a paranoia deeply founded in human psychology. Feverish dreams and the unseen are his sources of horrific inspiration.

The early notions of Gothic are synonymous with “explained supernatural” which means that there was strict adherence to form and the conscious application of horror or supernatural elements to a novel. Gothic refers to varied range of overlapping senses: horrid, barbarous, and superstitious. Abhik Maiti writes in *Writing, as a Mysterious Cat: a Critical Evaluation of Poe’s the fall of the House of Usher* states, “Gothic tales initially, had a predominant disposition to infuse their readers with an element of terror which however changed with the gradual onset of modernity and Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis as the once gloomy castles with its meandering labyrinth of corridors of the Gothic novels gradually came to signify the darker region of the human psyche.”(3)

Let’s consider Freud’s take on the Gothic novel – or more importantly his massive contribution in understanding the complex nature of the human psyche, a theme rampantly prevalent in the works of Gothic fiction. Freud postulates that “horror is (not) connected to what he calls ‘intellectual uncertainty’. Instead he introduces the notion that the whole structure and mood of horror fiction is a projection, in heavily codified form, of deeply instinctual drives in the unconscious mind. He accounts for the recurrent motifs of this kind of fiction by seeing them,

not as a literary devices, but as a projection of what he calls ‘repetitions and compulsions’ – the primary activity of the pleasure principle which drives us compulsively to repeat experiences which we find pleasurable” (Maiti, 3). This co-existence of conflicting drives and juxtaposing elements is known as ‘The Notion of Double’.

‘The Notion of Double’ is rooted in the philosophical, literary as well scientific theories of German Romanticism. According to the historical background, ‘The Notion of Double’ shows the romantic poets struggle to go beyond his own existence and reach the infinite – an intangible realm. In Romantic literature, the double functioned as a bridge of sorts attempting to mend the gap between ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ or it seeks to express the sublime – a longing for spiritual and mystical unity.

The motif of the double also lent itself to the interests of supernatural or unexplained phenomena and the exploration of the subconscious. Given this, The Romantic poet, therefore, employed the motif of the double as the chance to investigate the passions and illnesses of the human mind and to examine the presence of a supernatural world. Before Romanticism, ‘the notion of double’ was employed for comedic purposes in plots dealing with cases of mistaken identity. It is with the onset of Romanticism, that the ‘notion of the double’ was implemented for a deeper understanding of the psychology by endowing it with the meaning of the admonishing angel, the tenacious devil or the good repressed ego.

As stated above, the double or the doppelganger emerged in German Romanticism and was devised for comedic purpose. It is in American Romanticism, especially in the tantalizingly horrific tales of Edgar Allan Poe that the double took on a sinister air and was used to explore the depths of depravation in human psyche with a strong correlation to the manifestation of

supernatural forces. A prominent feature of Edgar Allan Poe's gothic fiction is the portrayal of a foe in the form of a doppelganger.

In Poe's fiction, the doppelganger appears as an apparitional counterpart to a living person. We see this in "The Tell-Tale Heart", where the protagonist of the story resonates deeply with the antagonist. Writing, as a Mysterious Cat: a Critical Evaluation of Poe's the fall of the House of Usher states, "The idea of the protagonist fighting a counterpart occurs so often in Poe's works that critics often suggest that it indicates Poe's attempts to work out, through his writings, his own inner conflicts and psychological struggles." (Maiti, 13)

"The Tell-Tale Heart" follows an unnamed narrator who at the very beginning comments on his/her mental state of being saying, "True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" which immediately brings into question the sanity of the narrator. Poe sets up the narrator in a manner where readers are confronted with the unreliability of his/her over assurance regarding their mental wellbeing. The story has a recurring motif – the narrator's constant identification with the old man. Throughout the story, there are countless times the narrator mentions that he is aware of how the old man feels. The eerily aware narrator claims to know the nature of the groans emanating from the old man, going so far as to confirm that he too has experienced these groans – not of pain or sadness – but of mortal terror. The narrator says, "It was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt" ("Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe", 3)

The unreliable narrator keenly resonates with the old man's emotions showing how equal of a footing the two share – almost as if they are the same person. The protagonist never presents a rational comprehensible reason to his motivation for wanting to murder the old man. Instead he narrows it down to the old man's pale blue eyes. The narrator muses "I think it was his eye! Yes. It was this!" as if trying to convince himself of his true intention. His repetition suggests uncertainty and also eludes to the need to transfer his misguided impulses on to an object. Abhik Maiti interprets "the "eye" not as an organ of vision but as the homonym of "I." Thus, what the narrator ultimately wants to destroy is the self, and he succumbs to this urge when he could no longer contain his overwhelming sense of guilt." (13)

Another of Poe's tale that is emblematic of the doppelganger is the story of "William Wilson". In "William Wilson", Poe dramatizes the power of the dark unconsciousness. This tale serves as an allegory for the doppelganger. Shu-ting Kao explores the doppelganger phenomena in her paper A Dark Unconscious in Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" using "Freud's theory of going beyond the pleasure principle. Further, to illustrate the tension between the ego and alter-ego, and thus the conflict between them, I focus on Gothic space as a metaphor for the dark unconscious of our minds." (1)

In the tradition of Dark Romanticism, features of the dark unconscious include madness, horror, an inexplicable sense of guilt and the eventual triumph of evil – seen commonly in Poe's tales. In "William Wilson" the double is also named William Wilson. The two cross paths during childhood while in school. Every time Wilson noticed a similarity or resemblance with his doppelganger, it served as fuel to his fire. He realized they "were of the same age; but I saw that we were of the same height, and I perceived that we were even singularly alike in general contour of person and outline of feature." (Poe 358) Wilson was convinced that his double was

imitating him on purpose. The double donned the same clothes. He was similar even in the manner of walking and speaking. However, a distinct difference between the two – the double could not speak above a whisper.

Kao explains that “William Wilson” is a dramatic representation of the dark unconsciousness of the self. The haunting of the second William Wilson is a reference to the condemned, predetermined genealogy and also the protagonist’s quiet desire for reunion with his phantom self – or death. The tale “William Wilson” shines light on the disturbances experienced in the psyche due to an unresolved conflict between the ego and the alter-ego. It also showcases “the Self’s plunge into the abyss due to the unconscious desire for death.” (A Dark Unconscious in Edgar Allan Poe’s “William Wilson”, 3)

It is frequently suggested that Poe is attempting to reconcile a conflicted sense of self through his stories. “William Wilson” is highly suggestive of this, given that he “is a descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable; and in my earliest infancy. I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character. As I advanced in years, it was more strongly developed; becoming for many reasons, a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself.” (Poe, 352)

William Wilson’s perverse tendency is related to the universal narrative of the soul’s tendency towards destruction. Wilson’s uncanny feeling about his alter ego entangles him with emotional disturbance. Wilson’s primary encounter with his alter ego happens in Dr. Bransby’s school. The second William Wilson leaves an impression of “sarcastic imitation” on William Wilson when he appears in the school as his classmate (Poe 357). Not only do they share a resemblance in their appearance, but they also have the same “congeniality in their tempers.” They are “the most inseparable of companions.” Nevertheless, William Wilson’s feelings

towards “the twin” are “petulant animosity” and uneasy “fear” due to the alter ego’s immoral superiority over him (Poe 359). Because of the complicated nature of his feelings towards this alter ego, William Wilson consciously avoids any occasion where the two might have to share the same space. The narrator confesses that there exists a substantial sense of intimacy between him and the second William Wilson. Like the unreliable narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart”, William Wilson expresses a sense of familiarity with his doppelganger.

The doppelganger in William Wilson rears its head when Wilson is mercilessly succumbing to his vices. Kao gives an explanation positing that the antagonism between the doubles reaches its climax when William Wilson is in attendance at a masquerade in Rome, where he intends on seducing the young wife of a Duke - the host of the masquerade. The first William Wilson is intensely irritated upon discovering the intrusion of his doppelganger, the second William Wilson and lays charges on him of being a “scoundrel”, “impostor” and “accursed villain”. Irked beyond reason, the first William Wilson proceeds to drag his doppelganger into an adjoining room, and plunges a sword into his chest. “In the last scene before the death of the second William Wilson (Poe 418), William Wilson glimpses the final image of the alter ego in the mirror in which the feeble and dying William Wilson astonishes him, since he discovers that he is killing himself” (5).

Kao offers for explanation:

The second William Wilson, the specter in the tale, is the personification of conscience, who steers the passions of William Wilson to approach death. The Self, haunted by his conscience, tries to escape supervision, domination, and accusation. As he kills the conscience “I,” he kills himself at the same time since the second William Wilson is his double, inseparable from him. The conscience

dies; there is no hope for him to have spiritual rest in Heaven. The last scene is thus the triumph of evil as the Self dies in the reunion of the double. (6)

Poe's use of the doppelganger in his tales more often than not highlight two aspects; (i) The protagonist is a victim of the double which is the case of a stolen identity being carried out by a supernatural presence or the working of a hallucinating mind, (ii) the split personality of the protagonist. In "The Tell-Tale Heart" we can see the usage of the doppelganger as the workings of a hallucinating mind and in "William Wilson", we are treated to the monstrous, repressed and perverse alter-ego of a protagonist already prone to emotional excitements and harboring a "genealogical" tendency to be uncouth and destructive.

### **2.1 Unreliable narrator and setting as devices of uncanniness**

In his story *Ligeia* Poe brings about female pairs of doubles, where the ghost of dark and mysterious *Ligeia* possesses the sweet and unassuming body of the blonde and innocent *Lady Rowena*. The tale of *Ligeia* is also a striking implement of "intellectual uncertainty" brought about by the unreliable narrator. *Lady Ligeia* is defined her by her indomitable will as suggested by the epigraph by *Joseph Glanvill*. *Miriam Fernández-Santiago* posits a psychoanalytical reading of which leads to the typical psychomachia between the doubling vicious id and its hosting virtuous ego (*Edgar Allan Poe's Narrative Use of Literary Doubling*, 5). Poe begins the tale of *Ligiea* with an unnamed narrator who opens the story trying to recall where he first encountered the fiery, strong-willed and passionate *Lady Ligeia*. The narrator is consumed by his need to describe the essence of his beloved, saying how "she came and departed like a shadow", and the countenances of her beauty was like the "radiance of an opium-dream". The unreliability of our narrator starts becoming clear as he tries his hardest to conjure up the perfect analogy to

describe his lover's eyes. The narrator says, "we often find ourselves upon the verge of remembrance, without being able in the end, to remember" (Poe, 38)

The attempt the narrator makes in trying to capture the elusive tantalizing mystery of his lover's eyes evokes Burke's idea of the sublime, where the eyes are beyond any comprehensible comparison with anything tangible, rather it incites a feeling of wonderment and is a cause for intense rumination on the narrator's part. He tries to describe the exquisiteness of his lover's eyes, which were larger than ordinary pair of eyes. It was not the color or shape of Ligeia's eyes that arrested the narrator, rather it was their expression. When looking into her eyes, the narrator is reminded of Glanvill's quote. As the story progresses, Ligeia grows ill causing the narrator to become wildly morose when she eventually dies.

After the demise of his beloved, our narrator moves to England where he marries the tame-natured Lady Rowena. The narrator drowns himself in his opium addiction, and gives himself to intense imagination dreaming that Leigia is back from the dead and alive. The setting of the abbey he procures is situated in a remote, unfrequented part of England, further intensifying the horrific air of the story. The narrator is preoccupied with one room in particular – the bridal chamber which Poe describes in minute detail. Expansive and pentagonal in shape, on one side of the room is an immense window and the sun and moon gleaming into the room casts a "ghastly lustre". The eeriest aspect of the room's design is the "gigantic sarcophagus" which lends to the ominous essence of the tale. Another element which adds to the spooky nature of the tale is the strong gusts of wind blowing in through the windows causing the tapestries to move, completing the nightmarish and frightening experience.

Lady Rowena is seen as being afraid of her husband, who is severely ill-tempered and remains in an opium-induced haze. Our unreliable narrator delights in the fact that Lady Rowena

finds him frightening and terrifying. He harbors a hate for her that makes him wish that her existence was obliterated. The nightmarish quality of the tale deepens when Lady Rowena is taken ill by an undescribed sickness, which is only worsened by her perceiving sounds and shapes around the room which are not visible. One night, Lady Rowena is awakened from an uneasy sleep and is unusually frightened and distressed. Our narrator finds himself terrified of her appearance as she seems frail and deathly. He ignores the illness-induced rambling whispers of Lady Rowena noting that the blowing tapestry does give the appearance of shadowy figures pacing in the room.

The unnamed unreliable narrator admits to being in a opium-haze and subjects him experiencing an intangible presence to his current drug addled state. He admits to himself that he does in fact perceive a shadow that could very well be the shadow of something unseen, but he keeps this sliver of information to himself. Giving Rowena a glass of wine to settle her nerves, our narrator gives himself away to intense fantasies of his deceased lover Ligeia. In his addled state, the narrator watches Lady Rowena's deceased body, seeing it become animated as her cheeks become flushed and he hears a low moan, only to see that the body is worse for wear. This occurrence repeats a few times, till the narrator feels sure that Lady Rowena has indeed passed, calling her a "tenant of the tomb". However, as morning dawns, the dead body seems to be full of life inciting terrible fear in the narrator. Believing that he is dreaming, the narrator watches riveted with fear as the once dead body of Rowena is suddenly animated with life, and this causes wild thoughts to rush through his frenzied mind. "Could it indeed be the living Rowena who confronted me? Could it indeed be Rowena at all – the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, why should I doubt it? (Poe, 54) The narrator finds himself captivated by the moving shape of Lady Rowena and when the ceremonies which was

covering her face and head fell off it revealed hair “which was blacker than the raven wings of the midnight!” (Poe, 54), and the narrator notes the eyes which are “the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of (his) lost love – of the Lady – of the Lady Ligeia” (Poe, 54)

The unsettling nature of the story is brought about by the uncertainty of the narrator, who refuses to be in a sober state of mind. He is given to flights of fancies which is heightened by his obsession with Ligeia. Whether Ligeia comes alive or not is a matter of speculation, since readers are made aware from the beginning of the narrator’s preoccupation with opium. Freud refers to the effect of the uncanny arising from “uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton; and to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately, since that, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing.” (Freud, 5). Edgar Allan Poe deftly employs conditions for awakening uncanny sensations, and this is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an in-animate object becomes too much like an animate one as witnessed by the apparent revival of Lady Ligeia.

### Chapter Three: Conclusion

The unfathomable mystery of the mind has always been a cause of intrigue. The mind is fraught with faculties which have its own specified functions, and when these faculties are subjected to introspection it can result in the revelation of ground-breaking and breathtaking truths – be it a revelation about oneself or an inexplicable truth about the world we inhabit. The idea of twins or the existence of doubles, and their implications has piqued the interest of countless minds for centuries. The simultaneous existence of good and evil, of light and dark juxtaposing itself in the realm of the mind has been the source of inspiration for innumerable body of literature. The mind's ability to be both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time has been the cause for much anxiety and also an area that has been feverishly explored.

American author, Edgar Allan Poe is responsible for bringing about multitude changes to the literary landscape. As a poet and writer, Poe is not only responsible for ushering in a new age of detective stories – but is credited for making horror stories a popular and widely acclaimed genre. Poe was also one of the first writer's to focus specifically on the style and its subsequent effect in a literary work. When dealing with works of the gothic mode and horror fiction, it is difficult to not find echoes of Poe. He was the forerunner in bringing the horror genre to the forefront.

Poe approaches the mind with clinical precision, taking it apart layer by layer till all that is familiar has morphed into a miasma of suppositions and curious peculiarities. He understood the machinery of the mind, and knew just where the right buttons are situated and just how much pressure to apply to generate an effect. He is calculative in his writings and takes an immense amount of care before jotting down the plot. His attention to detail is like a fine-comb picking up

the subtle nuances of the mind, which often goes overlooked or is not assigned the significance it deserves. He deals with madness with the rationality of a sane man who remains objective while impressing upon the subjectivity of his readers. The manner in which he leads his readers through the perilous journey into the supernatural is both gentle and assertive, with an air of surety that comes from pragmatism. Poe knew his craft and he had the markings of an unacknowledged genius.

Edgar Allan Poe's genius stirred up controversy and went uncelebrated while he lived. It is right to assume he was a man with a troubled spirit, and to say his mind was prone to being preoccupied by his vivid imagination would not be overstating it. Poe, more than being a prolific author, was someone who could empathize with the marauding meanderings of a mind which had to be shaped by oneself, while always being fearful of its surroundings. From too early on, Poe was left to his devices, and when not attended to, a young impressionable mind starts shaping its own form of reality – which can lead to a multitude of avenues – one being discovering the covert layers of the mind where the dark, twisted roots of our instincts are shaped, and another being the powerfully creative reservoir of unfiltered imagination. I believe Poe had discovered these two aspects of the mind very early on.

Poe knew how to lead the mind down its own trappings and unfurl the unconscious realm to give way to the sensations of awe-inspiring dread – an emotion which is wondrous on its own owing to its ability to cause an individual to become acutely aware of the existence of another reality beyond the constraints of perceivable reality, where the imagination was free to conjure up the brightest of fancies or confront the darkest of dreams. When one has travelled through their own mind to an extensive proportion, the sense of self becomes dwarfed, as the mind reveals truths that is akin to experiencing the state of sublime. That is to say, becoming aware

that one's own existence is not limited to the mental faculties needed for practical reasoning, rather realizing that the mind is home to worlds unexplored.

His ability to write stories with such intricacy, developing the details in order to impress upon readers the sensation of a particular effect shines light on the truly sensitive nature of Poe's poetic soul, and his exploration on the range of human emotions. His life is an homage to morbid excesses, where he indulged in vices and waged wars against those he did not find favorable. It takes a certain amount of self-assuredness to reach such levels of apathy as Poe expressed in his lifetime – more so towards himself than others.

Many speculate that through his tales Poe attempted to reconcile the conflicts that raged within himself. Fiction is derived from reality, but then fiction is also derived from imagination – so to postulate that his stories are sordid biographies of himself would be not assigning credit where it is due, that is Poe's ability to go beyond himself and reality and tap into a world where the imagination is the only crutch to provide a precarious stability.

The sublime is a state in which an individual becomes aware that the reality they exist in is but a mere facsimile of a much bigger and grander reality, and with the dawning of this realization accepts the miniscule role he/she occupies with a sense of awe. Poe exhibits an understanding of the sublime in his stories through his depiction of the uncertain on goings of the mind in such striking clarity. Through the exploration of the pervasive perverse nature of the mind, Poe paves the path for readers to experience a reality beyond what is perceivable thus alleviating the mind to transcend into spheres where one may encounter the sublime.

Even though Poe was not appreciated in America during the time he wrote - he has left a significant mark on the international literary landscape. French poet Charles Baudelaire was

greatly influenced by the American author. The French translations of Poe's work greatly influenced French writers to draw inspiration from his body of work. It subsequently also led to Russian writers like Dostoevsky to pen stories resonating deeply with Poe. Poe is renowned for his tales on the macabre and darkly fascinating, and has singlehandedly propelled the detective genre to the canon it is today, and his contribution to the short story genre has garnered him the title of being the father of the modern short-story – a legacy which remains unparalleled and continues to inspire.

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