

**Desolate Childhoods: The Absence of Parental Figures in the Formation of
Edgar Allan Poe's Young Characters**

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis will explore the theme of the absence of parental figures through the analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles". Through this exploration, the study aims to shed light on how the absence of parental figures influences the psychological development and decision-making abilities of Poe's young characters that creates a desolate childhood experience for them. In "Hop-Frog," the protagonist is a court jester who does not have parental figures, which makes him face constant exploitation and humiliation as a means of entertainment by the cruel king and his seven ministers. This unfortunate condition leads him toward his act of revenge against those who oppress him. Hop-Frog is deprived of the nurture and care a child gets from a family in his upbringing which allowed him to make such a cunning and morally ambiguous decision. Similarly, the protagonist in "The Spectacles", Napoleon Bonaparte who also happens to be known as Simpson which is later revealed in the story, makes impulsive and irrational decisions. One example of such decisions is when he decides to marry a woman he has only seen once without even getting to know her properly or thinking of the consequences that may follow the marriage. This kind of decision by the protagonist is easily driven by his sense of pride and a desire for social status. Such impulsive behavior of the character portrays the catastrophic damage of the absence of parents; and emphasizes how significant the effects of parental guidance are on personal growth, psychological development, and decision-making abilities as they grow up.

The socio-economic perspective of 19th-century America highlights how often these young characters fall prey to exploitation, manipulation, and wrong choices due to the lack of any familial support in the society. The main character in "Hop-Frog" is an example of how the young individuals without the support of parents often face

marginalization and oppression. As for “The Spectacles”, the protagonist of this story is seen desperately and thoughtlessly chasing acceptance and social status through superficial means which might not have been the case if there had been parental guidance in his life. Therefore, the absence of parental figures can also be considered a criticism of the society as it does not provide the necessary support and effort in order to protect the vulnerable young individuals in the society. This criticism then highlights the significance of familial presence and nurturing surroundings as these encourage proper ethical conduct, sound judgment, and positive character development. This study will not explore these themes in light of Poe’s personal experiences; instead, it will focus on the greater literary and social implications of the absence of parental figures that his works convey. To sum up, the analysis of the two short stories will emphasize how intensely the absence of parental figures affects the young characters especially when it comes to their moral and psychological development that is connected to identity building and also their decision-making abilities. To enable the readers to have a better grasp, the analysis will be conducted within the framework of socio-economic challenges.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe's works are mostly known for their dark and gothic themes that often delve into the psychological complexities of his characters. The main focus of this exploration will be on the theme of parental absence which is an important element that heavily influences the moral and psychological development and actions of Poe's characters. This study aims to analyze how the lack of parental guidance shapes the lives and decision-making abilities of the young characters in Poe's narratives, with a specific focus on these two short stories, "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles". Through an in-depth and detailed analysis, this research seeks to bring forth the profound impact that the absence of parental figures and their guidance has on the psychological and moral development of the young protagonists in Poe's stories.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

At the center of this research lies an urge to understand and address the significant influence that the absence of parental figures has on the development and decision-making abilities of the young protagonists of Poe's stories. This study sheds a light on how the absence of parental figures creates a void that often leads to disastrous outcomes in young characters' lives. This concept highlights how important and essential it is to have the nurturing presence of parental or familial figures in order to have sound and healthy psychological and ethical development. The short stories, "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles" provide sympathetic examples of how desolate childhoods create surroundings where poor judgment and ambiguity thrive.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The socio-economic conditions of 19th-century America serves as a background for this research. Edgar Allan Poe's work emerged during a period where significant societal changes were taking place, mostly in terms of traditional family dynamics. Poe in his stories often highlighted the progressing roles within families and constantly changing social expectations which emerged with the 19th century socio-economic landscape. For example, in "Hop-Frog", the protagonist who is a dwarf jester, is the victim of cruel mistreatment by the court which embodies the outcome of the lack of familial support in a society that is undergoing rapid changes even in terms of social hierarchy. The familial absence make him susceptible to constant exploitation which eventually leads him toward ultimately taking revenge as a means of getting back at his oppressors. Similarly, in the other short story "The Spectacles", the protagonist Napoleon Bonaparte Froissart aka Simpson makes impulsive and irrational decisions that are driven by his pride and a desperate desire for social acceptance through superficial means. Napoleon's behavior highlights the craving that lies deep inside for care and parental guidance that is absent in his life.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are divided into deeply analyze and understand the consequences of parental or familial absence impose on the psychological, moral, and ethical development of the young characters of Poe's stories and how the absence effects their lives from a socio-economic perspective. The objectives are of two types: general and specific.

1.3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to grasp the overall impact of familial absence on the personal growth of the young protagonists in Poe's stories.

1.3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of this research are –

- a) To analyze how the absence of parental figures in “The Spectacles” and “Hop-Frog” affects the judgment and decision-making abilities of the young protagonists
- b) To look into the contributions of the parental or familial absence on socio-economic factors
- c) To evaluate the wide-ranging implications of these findings to understand Poe's literary contributions to the theme of moral obscurity and take a peek at how the harrowing impact of the lack of family is relevant in real life even in today's world.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions in this study include –

- a) How does the absence of parental figures and their guidance affect the development and decisions of young characters in Poe's “Hop-Frog” and “The Spectacles”?
- b) How does parental absence contribute to the socio-economic factors in these stories? How do these factors affect the psychological development and moral choices of the young characters?

- c) What broader insights can be accumulated about the significance of familial structures in Poe's works?

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The research proposes that the absence of parental figures significantly disrupts the ability to make sound decisions and shape a strong moral compass in the young characters in Poe's narratives. It also stresses on how the foundation of healthy psychological and moral development of an individual lies in a healthy family environment. A detailed textual analysis is done in the thesis to test the hypothesis.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework for this research is psychoanalytical theories, especially those focusing on child development and the shaping of moral judgment in the absence of parental influences. The key focus of this analysis is the ideas put forward by theorist Sigmund Freud who ventured into the effect of early childhood experiences on psychological development. Furthermore, socio-economic theories have been used to comprehend the broader context in which these stories were written and how familial absence determines the socio-economic state of young individuals.

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

Edgar Allan Poe's observation of desolate childhood and the absence of parental figures has fascinated the readers for decades, especially the themes that add to the psychological and moral development of the young characters in his stories. The goal of this chapter is to provide an elaborate investigation of existing scholarly pieces on Poe's works, focusing on the thematic elements of abandonment, parental absence, and moral development. It will also analyze the socio-economic circumstances of the 19th century

America and their effects are illustrated in literature as these are crucial factors for understanding the broken family dynamic in Poe's stories. By engaging with a wide range of critical stances, this chapter aims to expand and contribute to the existing knowledge base, providing fresh and unique perspectives on how the absence of parental figures influences the growth of young individuals in Poe's stories psychologically and literally.

1.7.1 Parental Absence and Moral Development in Poe's Young Characters

The theme of parental absence in Edgar Allan Poe's stories has been vastly analyzed through many theoretical lenses over the years, especially within the frameworks of psychoanalytic and literary criticism. In order to understand the psychological effects of parental absence in Poe's young characters, scholars and critics have often looked up to psychoanalytical theories. For example, the work of Marie Bonaparte who is one of the earliest psychoanalytic critics of Poe, has provided a fundamental stance on how Poe's narratives often reflect the deep-rooted psychological conflicts that come with the lack of familial or parental presence. Bonaparte, in her book *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytical Interpretation*, argues that the recurring pattern of parental absence in Poe's stories is a display of his unconscious desire and limited childhood experience due to the lack of parental figures in his own life (Bonaparte 12-25). Although her analysis mostly engages with the biographical perspective of Poe's narratives, Marie Bonaparte's analysis provides valuable insights into how the lack of parental figures contributes to the fragmented and disorganised identities and moral conflicts within Poe's young characters.

The analysis of Poe's narratives through a Freudian lens also provides valuable insights into the construction of the superego which is a crucial element of an individual's moral compass and parental figures significantly influence it. According to Freud's theory of child development, the absence of parental figures is likely to steer a person toward a defective and dysfunctional moral infrastructure. Evidently, in Poe's stories, parental absence is usually associated with the young characters' inability to make sound moral decisions. For example, in "The Spectacles", the central character Napoleon Bonaparte's impulsive and irrational actions can be interpreted as the outcome of an incomplete superego with the lack of parental guidance being the underlying cause. His arrogance and lack of prudence lead him to a situation that results in mortification. This situation might have been avoided if the young character had proper parental guidance and nurture in his life (Freud 34-37). Poe's work is usually considered impressions of ruinous aspects of the human psyche where the lack of parental figures causes the moral and psychological constitution to crumple that should guide his young characters. In his stories, the absent parental figures are an embodiment of the lack of a supporting force which leaves the young characters susceptible to their immoral instincts. For this reason, their actions are driven by their desperate emotional needs without thinking of the long-term consequences of those actions.

1.7.2 Socio-Economic Context and Parental Absence

Besides psychoanalytical interpretations, the socio-economic context of the 19th century also plays a significant role in comprehending the theme of parental absence in Poe's narratives. During the time of Poe's literary emergence, America was facing a great social and economic change due to urbanisation and industrialisation. For this, the traditional family dynamics were disrupted and many individuals were left isolated.

Scholars like David Reynolds have studied how the social and economic changes influenced Poe's portrayal of young characters and argued that the characters often were the embodiment of the alienation and isolation that was felt by many throughout this period, especially those people who were on the margins of the society (Reynolds 427). The absence of a stable family and support in Poe's stories can be perceived as a symbol of the widespread collapse of social dynamics in the face of industrialism and capitalism that emerged during the period.

In "Hop-Frog", the protagonist being a slave illuminates socio-economic marginalization and social inequality of that time. The young character's lack of familial support makes him vulnerable to the cruelty of the king and the court where he is treated as a means of entertainment as well as a subject of mockery which ultimately leads Hop-Frog to seek violent revenge. This account underlines the socio-economic aspects of parental absence emphasizing how social positions can intensify the psychological outcomes of such absences (Goddu 80-82)

Similarly, in "The Spectacles," the protagonist's impulsive actions and irrational decisions are driven by the desire to achieve a social status which is an illustration of the social and economic pressures of that period. Due to the lack of parental guidance, Napoleon Bonaparte makes decisions that focus more on outward appearance rather than righteous moral and emotional reflections that lie within. Teresa A. Goddu in her book titled *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* has noted that the socio-economic backdrop of Poe's narratives often leads to an assessment of societal standards, particularly illustrating how these standards are internalized by his young characters in

the absence of parental figures and familial support. The characters' actions reflect the pressure of social mobility and the desperate chase for status which are often misguided due to the lack of parental guidance and lead to their destruction (92-94).

1.7.3 Literary Analysis of Desolate Childhoods

Critics have explored the thematic implications of parental absence in Poe's stories as well. G.R. Thompson in "Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales" argues that the absence of parental figures in Poe's narratives represents the themes of alienation, identity crisis, and moral ambiguity. Moreover, the young characters often reflect the relation between innocence and corruption. The lack of parental guidance enhances the relation, which then leads to their psychological and moral collapse (Thompson 39).

It is evident in "The Spectacles" as the protagonist Napoleon Bonaparte aka Simpson makes an impulsive and irrational decision to marry an old woman due to his desperation for social status. He later finds out that the woman is his grandmother. Although he does not directly refer to the story but drawing on Thompson's analysis, Simpson's lack of judgment and poor decision-making is symbolic of his fragmented identity. The young character lacks a strong moral foundation that would have formed within him if he had the guidance of parental figures. Due to the lack of guidance, the protagonist is left to make irrational decisions driven by his superficial desires, blinding his sense of moral integrity (41-42).

Similarly, in "Hop-Frog", the lack of familial support and guidance leads to the protagonist's moral downfall. Referring to Thompson's analysis on Poe's other gothic works, it can be understood that the absence leads the young character toward his desire

for revenge as he lacks moral guidance. His violent deeds are illustrated as the unavoidable consequences of his detachment from a nurturing environment (68).

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The thesis has used a qualitative approach as the research methodology and closely analyzes the short stories, “The Spectacles” and “Hop-Frog” to provide an in depth understanding of parental absence and the impact it has on young characters. The study involves an analysis of the socioeconomic condition of the period in which the stories were written to better understand the greater implications of the socio-economic factors that play a part in the development of characters. Secondary sources like scholarly articles, theoretical works and books written by critics have been used to support and offer a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic context in relation to the theme of desolate childhood due to the absence of parental figures. The goal of this approach is to offer a thorough and detailed examination of the themes that are being studied.

1.9 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The is limited to the analysis of “Hop-Frog” and “The Spectacles” due to their vivid depiction of young characters influenced by parental absence. Poe’s other stories may have some of these traits and there might be references to a few other stories of his, but due to the limitation of time, the thesis needed to narrow down its focus primarily to these two stories only. This study is also limited by the possibility of subjective interpretation that comes with the literary analysis and its dependence on existing secondary sources for historical context. Despite having such limitations, this research seeks to provide a strong and insightful exploration of how the lack of parental figures affects the young characters in Poe’s narratives.

1.10 CONCLUSION

By examining the stories “Hop-Frog” and “The Spectacles” through a psychoanalytic and socio-economic lens, this thesis aims at providing a deeper understanding of the critical part familial support plays in the development of moral and psychological stability in an individual. Moreover, this study emphasizes Poe’s work in exploring the themes of abandonment and ethical development within the socio-economic framework, highlighting the profound impact of the absence of parental figures on young characters as they navigate the complexities of their surroundings. The study will also review the thematic interpretations of Poe’s stories that will help understand the themes of isolation and destructive nature of the young characters due to familial absence. The exploration of the socio-economic conditions of the 19th-century America will play a crucial role in this thesis to shed light on the broader aspects of rapid changes of the individuals living in the society and its effects. Theoretical implications will further enhance the study in attempts of understanding the individuals’ psychological and emotional conditions. Through this analysis, the thesis aims at highlighting the significance of nurturing family structures in encouraging sound judgment and ethical purity, providing valuable insights into the timeless relevance of Poe’s literary contributions.

The findings of this research will not only highlight the Poe’s literary contributions but also bring to light how his explored topics are issues that persist in the present time as well. The more the world progresses, it seems that such issues increase. And so, the research aims to highlight how such themes and concepts in Poe’s works are relatable to individuals in today’s world.

CHAPTER 2

THE AGONIZING PATH OF HOP-FROG IN A WORLD WITHOUT PARENTAL FIGURES

Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Hop-Frog" explores the moving themes of fragmented identity, familial void, and moral development. The story is set against the backdrop of an unpleasant court of a cruel king. This narrative dives into the psychological and moral conflict of the protagonist, Hop-Frog, a court jester who is subjected to mockery and exploitation. The story serves as an analysis of how the familial absence and the social dynamics play a part in forming the identity and moral decisions of young characters. This chapter reads the short story with reference to these themes connecting to the greater psychological implications and socio-economic contexts. The chapter also discusses how Poe, through his narratives, puts forward the struggles of individuals navigating a harsh and bitter world without any familial support which most often leads the individuals toward tragic endings.

2.1 A Fragmented Identity

The protagonist, Hop-Frog, is a character who suffers from a physical deformity which can be a disadvantage for him at the face of parental absence and support in the unfair and oppressive environment he is in. He faces social alienation and degradation that coincides with his role as a court jester. It is evident throughout the narrative that the young character's identity is strongly tied to the absence of a nurturing familial environment. From the very beginning of the story, Hop-Frog's position acts as a reflection of his isolation and marginalization within the court as well as in society. The lack of parental guidance and familial support increases his sense of isolation as he is

constantly treated as an object of entertainment and mockery instead of as a respected individual in the society and most importantly, as a human being.

The absence of parental figures is extremely profound in Hop-Frog's life. He is compelled to walk through his life in a harsh world on his own without the support and guidance of a family that an individual usually gets. This absence forms the young character's sense of dignity and action which leads him towards plunging into his act of revenge. Marie Bonaparte's analysis of Poe's characters suggest that Hop-Frog's act of violence is rooted in a deep sense of neglect and deception which highlights how the absence of parental guidance can cause an individual to have a distorted moral compass (Bonaparte 25). This impression aligns with the Freudian theory of child development where the lack of parental guidance is connected to the shaping of a fragmented identity and moral ambiguity.

Moreover, the court's mistreatment towards Hop-Frog portrays how the social dynamics influence an individual identity. The young character's position as a jester makes him a subject to slavery where he matters only as long as he has the ability to entertain everyone. This discrimination and unequal power dynamics aggravate his sense of abandonment and neglect as he does not receive the value and respect a person should get for possessing such unique talents as his. The kind and the courts' ill-treatment and social marginalization of Hop-Frog combined, paints a complex psychological picture in which Hop-Frog's identity is connected with his suffering and spark his desire for acceptance and acknowledgment.

2.2 A Distorted Moral Compass

The theme of revenge is the focal point of “Hop-Frog” as it embodies the young protagonist’s emotional disorientation and moral descent. As the story progresses, Hop-Frog’s innocence and obedience turns into a desire for revenge against his oppressors, the cruel king, and his seven ministers. The absence of parental guidance disrupts the formation of his moral compass and also fuels his anger and need for justice. The psychological transformation of the young character highlights the concept that without the guidance of parental figures, individuals may often choose the path of extreme measures to regain control over their lives.

In order to seek revenge, Hop-Frog comes up with an elaborate plan, and he tricks the cruel king and his seven ministers into becoming the subjects of his retaliation. He uses their cruelty and vanity against them and puts on a grim performance that ultimately leads them to their demise. His hatred for his tormentors comes to light when we find him commenting,

“I now see distinctly.” he said, “what manner of people these maskers are. They are a great king and his seven privy-councilors, —a king who does not scruple to strike a defenseless girl and his seven councilors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Frog, the jester — and this is my last jest.”(Poe 1)

Hop-Frog’s act of revenge portrays a deep moral ambiguity with his deeds appearing as both justified and morally wrong. Lacking parental guidance results in him not having a steady moral foundation, making him resort to violence in order to establish his identity.

Critics like G.R. Thompson have studied how Poe’s characters often reflect moral conflicts, illustrating the challenges in human nature in situations of neglect and hardship (Thompson 88). In Hop-Frog’s case, his need to seek revenge acts as a way to cope with

his feelings of helplessness. The psychological impact of his actions emphasizes the conflict between wanting control and the moral implications of using violence to achieve it. This conflicting aspect calls for readers to confront the moral implications of Hop-Frog's conduct, giving rise to questions about the concept of justice and revenge in a world without parental guidance.

2.3 The Impact of Class and Power

The socio-economic conditions portrayed in "Hop-Frog" highlights the broader themes of abandonment and identity. The narrative takes place in a court that is filled with luxury and lavishness which points out the difference between the privileged king and his courtiers with the oppression that Hop-Frog faces. The difference among these social classes demonstrates how structural inequalities can preserve the cycle of unfairness and exploitation. The king's lack of respect for Hop-Frog's humanity highlights the flaws in power dynamics that allow such cruelty to prevail.

Poe reinforces the concept that people frequently value social standing more than personal integrity by portraying the court as a place of extravagance and superficiality. The king and his courtiers prioritize their entertainment over the welfare of others. In the 19th century America, the social trend of lacking empathy was evident as class distinctions and social hierarchies marginalized individuals like Hop-Frog. According to David Reynolds, Poe's characters often represent the concerns of a society undergoing rapid change due to the rise of urbanization and industrialization, resulting in greater feelings of alienation and displacement (Reynold 123).

Hop-Frog's struggle for identity becomes more challenging because of the socio-economic conditions. Being a jester puts him in the role of a servant where his worth is

defined by his entertainment skills rather than his value as a person. The oppressive reign of the king elevates Hop-Frog's sense of abandonment as his control and independence get taken away from him.

2.4 The Impact of Social Alienation on Moral Reasoning

Hop-Frog's lack of moral reasoning can be better understood by examining his severe social alienation. Isolated from any form of community and familial associations, he becomes more and more detached from traditional moral norms. Lack of parental figures and harsh surroundings lead to a distorted perception of justice that values retaliation rather than salvation. This supports G. R. Thompson's claim that Poe's characters often exhibit a fragmented sense of self which is especially prone to falling apart without social and familial bonds (Thompson 5).

Hop-Frog's relationship with Trippetta, another dwarf and fellow entertainer in the royal court, is the closest thing he has to a familial bond. However, this relationship is characterized by a common feeling of being victims rather than offering each other support or guidance. Trippetta was unable to stop Hop-Frog from going forward with his brutal act of revenge, suggesting that their bond might be strong but it is not powerful enough to possess the moral guidance or control of a parental figure. Instead of being a source of moral guidance, Trippetta ends up supporting Hop-Frog in his descent into madness, showing how their mutual suffering in the face of mistreatment and exploitation has led them to compromise their moral judgment.

This contrast of Poe's illustration of family can be seen while comparing to the traditional portrayals of family in literature where the parents are usually depicted as wise and morally upright figures. Without such figures, Hop-Frog's moral rationality is solely

based on his desire for revenge. His final act of revenge is not only a fight against the king but also a reflection of his own inner turmoil— a turmoil that comes from a childhood with no parental guidance and that is filled with ongoing humiliation and mistreatment.

2.5 Thematic Connections to Abandonment and Identity

The themes of abandonment and identity are connected in Hop-Frog, creating a complex narrative that explores the psychological and moral effects of parental absence. Hop-Frog's transformation from obedience to vengeance emphasizes the significant influence of familial dynamics on personal growth. Hop-Frog is left to navigate a world that is filled with cruelty, manipulation and exploitation, without a nurturing familial environment to guide him.

Poe's exploration of these themes represents a greater societal concern regarding the consequences of neglect and alienation. The psychological impact of Hop-Frog's action reflects the challenges many people experience without any familial support in a society that is rapidly changing. The lack of parental guidance in Hop-Frog's life not only distorts his sense of right and wrong but also plays a significant role in shaping his identity, a kind that makes him resort to violence in order to take back control.

According to J. Gerald Kennedy, Poe's characters often struggle with the complexities of human nature when met with abandonment and adversity (Kennedy 212). Hop-Frog's transition mirrors the greater concerns of a society that is struggling with the outcome of industrialization, in which conventional family dynamics are falling apart and people are compelled to find a path through their lives in sheer isolation.

Individual's who grow without parental figures, carry the psychological effects of the isolation into their adulthood where they struggle to embrace human interactions and connections. It often turns them into a dark and complex person who also struggle with their identities and find it difficult to fit into society. Even if such individuals find a way to escape the misery of isolation, the harrowing experience of it still haunts them.

CHAPTER 3

“THE SPECTACLES” AND THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story “The Spectacles”, he explores identity, misperceptions, and self-discovery in a humorous way, deviating from his usual focus on dark and psychological horror in his stories. The protagonist's realization of his true identity is primarily because of a comical misunderstanding about his looks and age which highlights Poe's skill in using irony and satire to explore profound issues like the influence of parental absence and societal expectations on the shaping of personal identity. This chapter explores how “The Spectacles” addresses these themes highlighting the main character's struggle with self-image and self-worth which are closely connected to the absence of familial guidance. The chapter also sheds light on how Poe uses humor and irony as a way of coping with hardships and discusses the socio-cultural factors that influence the young character's experience. In this way, the chapter aims at demonstrating how the narrative deals with the psychological and societal implications of shaping an individual's identity in a world where family and social expectations play a significant role.

3.1 Self-Discovery and Parental Influence

In “The Spectacles”, the lack of parental figures plays a significant role in creating the protagonist’s false view of himself and his wrong sense of self. In the story, Simpson, also known as Napoleon Bonaparte, is portrayed as a man who is struggling with his sense of self which is proven by his false belief in his outward appearance and youth. This misguided perception of himself is driven by the lack of parental guidance and the formation of a fragmented identity. J. Gerald Kennedy has pointed out that Poe’s central character often displays a form of “identity dysmorphia,” in which they see themselves in such a manner that is drastically different from reality because of unresolved psychological issues arising from abandonment or neglect (Kennedy 75).

The protagonist’s distorted view becomes more and more complex due to his obsession with external appearance and social standing which highlights the values that are implanted in him by the society instead of nurturing family figures who will guide him. External factors like glamour easily influence Simpson’s self-image due to the lack of parental guidance which makes him obsessed with superficial ideas. It is only when he puts his spectacles on, his confidence in his perceptive youth and attractiveness crumble and make him face the reality of his growing age and imperfect looks. This realization symbolizes the protagonist’s sudden understanding of his lack of self-awareness which is a result of the absence of familial support.

The narrative also explores the theme of false identity as the main character attempts to pursue Madame Lalande who he mistakenly thinks a youthful and attractive woman only to find out later that she is an elderly woman who also happens to be his relative. This incident highlights Simpson’s lack of knowledge and inexperience in social relationships, a problem that he might not have faced with proper parental guidance. The protagonist’s wrongful pursuit of Madame Lalande brings to light his unfulfilled desire for recognition

and acceptance as he turns to an unsuitable figure in order to fill the void in this life due to the lack of nurturing hands on his head. According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the way we form our identities is heavily influenced by early relationships, especially those with our parents as they create the foundation for a strong sense of self (Erikson 97-105). Without such support, individuals like Simpson can face difficulties in terms of self-worth and identity even as when they are older.

In addition to Erikson's theories, Freudian psychoanalysis provides a perspective for understanding the protagonist's psychological condition. Freud suggests that experiences during early childhood, especially those with parental figures, have a significant impact on forming an individual's identity and behavior patterns in adulthood (Freud, 1-66). The lack of parental figures in Simpson's life has led him to have a distorted self-perception and a strong desire for validation from others. The absence of a strong foundation for his identity causes him to be easily influenced by societal expectations which lead him to make unwise choices like pursuing a woman based on a false image of her youth and beauty. Hence, "The Spectacles" acts as an example about the negative aspects of forming one's identity in isolation without the guidance of parental figures.

3.2 Humor and Irony as a Way of Coping

In "The Spectacles", Poe uses humor and irony in a creative manner to offer a different narrative perspectives on the protagonist's struggle with identity. In contrast to his darker narratives, in this story, Poe uses a playful tone to illustrate the silliness of Simpson aka Napoleon Bonaparte's situation, enabling readers to connect to the messages the story conveys without its psychological meaning being too heavy on them. In this context, humor serves as a way for the audience and the protagonist himself to cope with the

eventual discovery of his true identity, acting as a shield to mitigate the impact of this sudden and unexpected realization.

The ironic situation of the protagonist is obvious throughout the narrative. Simpson's confidence in his looks is crushed by the fact that he is actually much older and less attractive than he thinks. His fascination with Madame Lalande, who he initially sees as a lovely young lady, turns out to be an older family member adds more irony to the story. This unexpected twist highlights not only the main character's obliviousness but also criticizes the superficial societal priorities that value outward looks more than what resides inside a person. The protagonist's dilemma reflects on society's obsession with looks and status, portraying how these outside influences can play a part in shaping one's identity and how they see themselves. Therefore, humor serves as a means to cope with the conflict between our self-perception and how others see us.

Moreover, the protagonist, Simpson's silly mishaps act as a reflection of the human tendency to avoid facing uncomfortable realities about themselves. Poe's technique of making the main character's journey humorous instead of tragic allows readers to connect with the themes of identity and self-exploration in a much easier and lighthearted way. The humor in "The Spectacle" is a way of creating flexibility, implying that laughter can be a powerful tool to deal with the challenges of forming one's identity in the absence of parental support.

3.3 Socio-Cultural Influences of Identity Formation

The socio-cultural condition of the 19th century America heavily influences the protagonist's experiences in "The Spectacles". Class, appearance, and status were the most important factors during this time as these determined where one stood in society,

influencing one's views of themselves. Poe's story mirrors these cultural and social pressures, highlighting how societal norms can distort an individual's view of themselves and lead to an identity crisis. The protagonist's confidence in his own appearance and social status at the beginning comes from these cultural standards. His belief that he needs to present himself as an attractive and elegant young man in order to impress Madame Lalande demonstrates how societal pressures can influence one's actions and sense of self. However, this mask of false appearance is soon taken off when he is forced to face the reality of his appearance through the symbolic gesture of putting on his spectacles. The spectacles allow him to have a clear vision for the first time which symbolizes a moment of clarity that breaks down his misconceptions about himself and the world.

In this context, "The Spectacles" can be considered a critique of the superficial beliefs that were dominant in the 19th-century society. The protagonist's obsession with youth and beauty mirrors the cultural emphasis on appearance as a label of social status. His eventual realization that he is not the young and charming person he imagined highlights the threats of forming one's identity based on temporary characteristics. As mentioned earlier, critics like David Reynolds claim that Poe's works often act as a reflection of the concerns and contradictions of a society undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization (Reynolds 123). In "The Spectacles" Poe uses humor and irony to uncover these contradictions, demonstrating how societal norms can cause individuals to lose touch with the authenticity of their identities. The protagonist's journey also represents the greater cultural changes taking place in America during Poe's lifetime. With the country's shift towards increased industrialization and urbanization, traditional family structures were disrupted causing feelings of disorientation and

isolation for many people. Poe's exploration of identity in "The Spectacles" reflects the uncertainties and concerns brought on by the decay of traditional social and familial bonds.

"The Spectacles" portrays how skillfully Poe combines humor and irony with profound psychological themes, creating a story that is interesting and inspiring. Poe delves into the effects of parental absence, the significance of humor for coping, and the influence of socio-cultural norms on self-perception through the protagonist's humorous journey of self-discovery. Simpson's false identity and the eventual discovery of his true self serves as a lesson about the threats of forming one's identity based on external values and societal norms for they are only temporary and continuously changing.

CHAPTER 4

FAMILIAL ABSENCE IN POE'S BROADER CANON

Poe's exploration of themes of familial absence, alienation, and despair is not unknown to everyone. His protagonists are often seen struggling to cope with the psychological and emotional effects of such conditions. Like, "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles", Poe's other works such as "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Tell-Tale Heart", and "The Cask of Amontillado" contain these themes as well. These stories feature characters who also deal with loneliness, fragmented identities, and moral ambiguity which are rooted in unstable familial bonds. This chapter discusses these recurring themes in Poe's stories and how the lack of familial figures results in mental breakdowns and moral decline. The chapter also discusses how Poe's use of narrative techniques and symbolic illustration conveys the psychological and emotional effects of familial absence.

4.1 Common Themes of Abandonment and Alienation in Poe's Work

Abandonment and alienation are common themes in Poe's work. These themes are frequently shown through the lack of parental guidance, or familial support by portraying characters in these situations who gradually become psychologically unstable and eventually experience moral descent. In "The Fall of the House of Usher", Rodrick Usher is portrayed as a highly isolated individual, deprived of meaningful human interactions and familial support. His twin sister Madeline is his only human association which is also a symbol of his psychological disintegration and emotional turmoil. Rodrick Usher's struggle to maintain a stable identity is reflected in the decaying state of the Usher family mansion, representing the collapse of the Usher family line and the emotional descent because of the absence of familial connections (Hoffman 233).

The theme of familial absence is also evident in "The Tell-Tale Heart". The narrator's increasing paranoia and descent into madness are due to the lack of foundational influence like family or friends. His obsession with the old man's eye can be seen as the manifestation of his deeply rooted fears and unresolved emotions which could have been reduced by the presence of a stable family environment. Critics like G.R. Thompson claim that the narrator's mental condition portrays an "unanchored psyche" by the absence of nurturing bonds (Thompson 217). The narrator's emotional instability leaves him vulnerable to obsessive thoughts, eventually leading him to commit murder.

In "The Cask of Amontillado", the protagonist Montresor's vengeful deeds mirror a deep feeling of isolation and moral impurity. Although Montresor's family is never directly mentioned in the story, his tendency to be alone and his obsession with seeking revenge imply that he strays from the usual moral guidance that is found within familial relationships. Lacking familial support and guidance, Montresor's idea of justice becomes distorted, causing him to seek revenge by committing a horrific act against

Fortunato. The uncanny silence and isolation of the catacombs highlight the chilling nature of his crime, symbolizing Montresor's moral decay and detachment from human connections (Peeples 149).

4.2 Psychological and Emotional Consequences

The lack of parental figures or stable familial connections in Poe's stories often results in characters having intense psychological breakdowns. In "The Fall of the House of Usher", Rodrick's growing paranoia and hypersensitivity stem from his isolation and the overwhelming atmosphere of his family home. Madeline, his twin sister, mirrors Rodrick's declining mental health both literally and symbolically. The symbolic significance of her death and resurrection represents Rodrick's tragic fate as he is unable to break free from the weight of his family history.

In "The Tell-Tale Heart", the narrator's obsession with the old man's eyes can be interpreted as a reflection of his unresolved issues and past traumas, potentially due to the lack of parental figures. His claim of not being insane contrasted with his unpredictable actions and eventual confession of murder underlines the internal struggle and remorse coming from his deeds. His isolation aggravates his preexisting psychological and emotional turmoil as there is no one to help him control his thoughts or guide his actions.

Similarly, in "The Cask of Amontillado", Montresor's preplanned revenge against Fortunato demonstrates a strong desire for control and recognition. His decision to block up Fortunato inside a brick wall within the catacombs shows not just his desire for vengeance but also his lack of emotional connection with others. Montresor's revenge is driven by the lack of familial or moral guidance which makes him feel entitled and immune to consequences, demonstrating the negative effects of familial absence.

4.3 Narrative Techniques and Symbolism

Poe's use of narrative techniques and symbolic visuals improves the portrayal of familial absence and its consequences. The decaying mansion in "The Fall of the House of Usher" reflects Rodrick Usher's declining mental state and the end of his family line, with its cracking foundation and gloomy atmosphere. The gothic setting of the narrative symbolizes the psychological and emotional collapse as a result of prolonged familial isolation .

In "The Tell-Tale Heart", Poe uses a first-person narrative to engulf readers in the disturbed mind of the protagonist. The narrator's unreliable perspective and obsessive focus on the old man's eye create a sense of distress and paranoia, highlighting his unstable psychological condition. The constant emphasis on the eye, representing judgment or conscience indicates an internal struggle with guilt and morality, themes that are heightened by the absence of familial guidance.

The catacombs in "The Cask of Amontillado" serve as a significant symbol in the story. The bones and remains of Montresor's ancestors represent his broken ties with his family. The burial imagery mirrors Montresor's emotional imprisonment and his inability to overcome past resentments. The story's ironic ending highlights Montresor becoming a prisoner of his own vengeful desires, further emphasizing the symbolic imprisonment.

CHAPTER 5

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTAL ABSENCE

The socio-economic landscape of 19th-century America played a crucial role in shaping the identities and experiences of individuals, especially those without the support of familial figures. The country was undergoing rapid changes during this period as a result

of industrialization and urbanization. This also changed the traditional family dynamics and resulted in higher levels of poverty, orphanhood, and limited social mobility. The themes of abandonment and marginalization are central to Poe's works as they reflect the socio-economic instability.

5.1 Impact of 19th century Socio-Economic Conditions

The 19th century witnessed significant social unrest in America. During the transformation from a farming-based society to an industrialized one, many families had to move from rural to urban areas in hopes of employment. This change frequently led to families breaking apart, leaving many children orphaned or abandoned because of financial challenges. The lack of a secure family structure combined with the absence of a proper social support systems, resulted in the emergence of a class of social outcasts. This new social class included individuals who found it difficult to fit into a society that was evolving quickly. The social and economic challenges of the time led to the emergence of a distinct lower class of laborers and servants, who were further marginalized due to limited access to education and economic opportunities. Characters in Poe's stories like "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles" reflect these exact social constitutions. Both characters face isolation and mistreatment due to their position in society and the absence of familial support which illustrates how an individual's fate often lies at the hands of socio-economic factors.

5.2 Representation of Social Outcasts

"Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles" both have protagonists who are in their own ways social outcasts, struggling to establish their identities in oppressive and unfair environments. Hop-Frog being a jester and Simpson's obsession with social status both

illustrate the overall alienation felt by people who do not have the support and stability that familial structures provide. In “Hop-Frog”, the protagonist is susceptible to exploitation without a parental figure while in “The Spectacles”, Simpson's identity crisis due to the absence of family guidance is only put at ease with the help of external factors.

Poe portrays these characters as a reflection of the broader socio-economic concerns of 19th-century America, as rapid industrialization and urbanization disrupted traditional family structures and led to the emergence of a class of individuals who were disconnected from familial roots. The lack of a stable familial environment in these stories symbolizes the economic and social instability of the time. It also emphasizes the mental and emotional strain that individuals may experience under these circumstances.

5.3 Socio-Economic Mobility and Its Effects on One’s Identity

Industrialization in the 19th century led to significant socio-economic mobility, providing new opportunities for wealth and social progression. Nevertheless, this mobility was often accompanied by a feeling of not having a place to call home and disconnection, since people who advanced in society were often separated from their familial and cultural origins. In “The Spectacles”, Simpson tries to reshape his image through symbols of success and attractiveness, showing the fragile nature of identity when it is based solely on socio-economic status.

Hop-Frog’s journey, however, paints a picture of the darker side of socio-economic mobility where individuals are exploited and dehumanized in their pursuit of survival. His final act of revolt against the court symbolizes a refusal of the oppressive societal systems that have shaped his life, but it comes at the cost of his moral integrity

and independence. Without familial support, he lacks a foundation to assert his identity against these forces and ends up trapped in a tragic loop of exploitation and revenge.

The concept of social mobility can be seen in the present time as well. It might not be as profound as the discussed period due to no extreme hierarchy but it still persists. Many people fall prey to the mobility and often suffer in silence and isolation. Hence, it is the responsibility of society to provide protection for such individuals who are vulnerable.

CHAPTER 6

MORAL AMBIGUITY AND ETHICAL DILEMMA IN THE ABSENCE OF FAMILY

6.1 Moral Consequences of Parental Absence

Edgar Allan Poe's stories frequently show how the absence of family members deeply influences his characters' moral growth. The lack of parental direction results in ethical dilemmas that influence their actions and choices, as portrayed in "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles". These narratives show how characters struggle with moral ambiguity, resulting in complicated illustrations of revenge and justice that defy traditional ethical standards.

In "Hop-Frog", the main character represents the outcomes of the lack of parental care and the absence of a nurturing environment. Being a jester, Hop-Frog experiences the king and his court's cruelty, heightening his sense of isolation and mistreatment. The shift from being a victim to seeking revenge is a key part of the story. Critics such as Jonathan Taylor argue that Hop-Frog's lack of parental guidance deprives him of a moral foundation, leading him to seek revenge in the end. This quest is more than just a

personal grudge; it symbolizes a greater observation of the moral decay that can develop in people without positive familial influence (Taylor 45). Hop-Frog's ethical dilemmas illustrate the challenges of directing one's morality without parental guidance. He resorts to extreme measures to confront those who oppress him, raising questions about the true nature of justice and the ethical impact of his actions. Hop-Frog's actions of setting the king and his courtiers on fire can be viewed as a form of revenge that is both justified and ethically questionable. The narrative invites the readers to consider whether his deeds are justified in response to the oppression had been facing or a reflection of the moral decay caused by his abandonment.

On the other hand, "The Spectacles" presents a different aspect of moral ambiguity influenced by the lack of parental presence. The main character struggles with self-doubt and a distorted image of himself while trying to fit into a society where looks determine status. Without a parental figure to provide guidance and moral principles, his decisions are influenced by the distorted ideas of love and self-worth. This character's story portrays the challenges experienced by those without guidance through societal norms and personal identity. As the protagonist struggles with his obsession over his looks and seeks the validation of Madame Lalande, his moral choices become more tangled with ethical dilemmas. The narrative ends with a revelation that compels him to face his true identity, emphasizing on the impact of societal expectations and lack of familial support. This story highlights how characters seek approval in morally ambiguous ways when parental figures are not present to provide a stable foundation.

6.2 Revenge and Justice

The theme of revenge plays a crucial role in both "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles", illustrating how feelings of abandonment and betrayal influence characters' belief about

justice. In “Hop-Frog”, the protagonist seeks revenge as a direct response to the oppression and humiliation he experiences because of the king. Hop-Frog feels deeply hurt after being betrayed by the king that aggravates his sense of moral outrage, driving him to take revenge on his oppressor. His decision to hide the king’s execution plan behind the mask of his playful show as a jester demonstrates a complicated interplay between comedy and terror. The narrative criticizes the societal norms that allow those in power to take advantage of the weak, ultimately questioning the effectiveness of seeking revenge for justice. Many critics believe that Poe’s portrayal of revenge raises ethical concerns regarding the morality of retaliation, suggesting that seeking revenge can lead to a continuous loop of violence instead of uprooting injustice.

In “The Spectacles” the protagonist struggles with the outcomes of his wrong decisions that come from his desire for external approval which offers a unique perspective on revenge. Although he is not really seeking revenge in the story, his choices are driven by a need to demonstrate his worthiness of love and approval. The eventual revelation of his true identity leads to a moment of clarity, encouraging readers to consider the ethical consequences of seeking approval through deceit and manipulation.

Both narratives show that seeking justice without parental guidance can cause an individual to make morally ambiguous decisions. The characters’ experiences with abandonment and betrayal distort their ideas of justice leading them to face ethical dilemmas that question the traditional concept of morality. While they chase after revenge, Poe urges readers to think about how their decisions can affect their moral values and sense of self.

6.3 Ethical Implications of Retribution

The ethical implications of seeking revenge in Poe's works highlight the complications of justice in the case of parental absence. In "Hop-Frog" the protagonist's act of vengeance raises questions about the nature of justice and the moral consequences of his decisions. Even though his behavior can be viewed as fair punishment for the cruel and unjust king, it also showcases the threats of moral decay while seeking revenge. This duality shows the negative sides of choosing revenge over forgiveness, leading readers to reflect on the ethical aspects of justice without familial support. The societal structures that uphold violence and oppression further complicate the moral ambiguity of Hop-Frog's actions. Hop-Frog's revenge can be considered a means to take back control over his life back as well as a vicious cycle of violence and revenge as a way of fighting back against the ones who try to exploit and mistreat him. This recurring pattern of seeking revenge against oppressors raises questions about whether such decisions and actions truly serve justice and help with inner healing. Instead of getting away from oppression, Hop-Frog's revenge could make the oppressive system stronger that he wants to leave behind.

In "The Spectacles" the protagonist's ethical implications become apparent as he struggles with the complexities of identity and self-worth. His tendency to achieve approval through dishonesty and deceitful ways shows how the lack of parental guidance has compromised his morals. The narrative takes a turn when Simpson discovered his true identity which compels him to face the consequences of his actions and the ethical implications of trying to achieve validation through deceit. This unexpected turn evokes a sense of reevaluation of the societal pressures on the making of one's personal identity and the ethical implications of conforming to superficial standards.

Both narratives warn about the threats of moral ambiguity that come with the absence of familial support and guidance. Poe dives into the themes of revenge and justice, presenting the challenges in making ethical choices as the characters of both narratives struggle with their senses of right and wrong while dealing with abandonment and betrayal. By portraying the outcomes of these struggles, Poe invites readers to survey the broader greater effects of familial absence on personal ethics and the search for justice. Moreover, the exploration of the themes of revenge and justice, Poe's narratives also highlight the threats of choosing extreme measures to achieve justice and how it can cause more harm than good. Often times, choosing such means once can create a sense in the individual that justice can be always found through such ways resulting them to be in a never ending loop of violence.

CHAPTER 7

PARENTAL FIGURES AS THE METAPHOR OF AUTHORITY AND CONTROL

“Hop-Frog” and “The Spectacles” by Edgar Allan Poe provide unique perspectives on the representation of parental figures as metaphors for authority and control. Both narratives present protagonists who have to live through complicated power dynamics without the presence of traditional familial support. The parental figures are metaphorically portrayed as authoritative characters, influencing the protagonists' actions and moral decisions. This chapter explores how Poe subverts these figures of authority, illustrating them as oppressive forces that instigate revolt and fight from the protagonists.

7.1 Parental Figures as Symbols of Authority

“Hop-Frog” and “The Spectacles”, both stories represent parental figures not through biological connections but through symbolic and social structures. In “Hop-Frog”, the king and his court are the symbols of parental figures in the sense that they strictly control the protagonists like dominating parental figures. Their absolute dominance over the character is marked by exploitation and harshness, similar to oppressive parental figures who abuse their authoritarian powers over a child. Hop-Frog’s unfortunate experience of ill-treatment and violence from the king can be seen as a form of intense punishment that dominating parents impose on a child, taking away his humanity and control over his life. The position of a jester puts Hop-Frog into a submissive role, similar to a child who tries to please a controlling parent. Hop-Frog’s revolt against the king becomes inevitable due to his lack of compassion and understanding which resembles the oppression of a dominant patriarchal figure. Thompson's observation of Poe’s works suggests that the parental figures in Poe’s stories are most often portrayed as controlling which represents the societal norms and power dynamics that push the protagonists toward self-destructive and morally ambiguous behaviors (Thompson 45). Hop-Frog’s final act of revenge illustrates this connection as he metaphorically overthrows the oppressive parental figure, ultimately rebelling against the authority that imprisoned him.

Similarly, Madame Lalonde in “The Spectacles” is portrayed as a metaphoric parental figure who uses manipulation and deceit to control Simpson, the protagonist. Madame Lalonde’s control over Simpson aka Napoleon Bonaparte, although not in a conventional parental role, is similar to the influence parental figures have in molding a child’s perception of what reality is. She uses her looks and status to trick Simpson into thinking that she is a suitable romantic partner for him despite the moral and ethical conflicts caused by her true identity.

Poe's characters in these stories face challenges due to authoritative metaphoric parental figures who misuse their powers, representing the societal norms of 19th-century America that caused the protagonists to be prone to vulnerability. The protagonists' struggle for independence is more deeply observed as they seek approval from these metaphoric parental figures, adding complexity to the power dynamics.

7.2 The Struggle for Power and Control

Both "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles" contain a common theme which is the protagonists' fight for control and power. At the beginning of "Hop-Frog", the protagonist is seen completely under the control of the king and his court. Because of his peculiar appearance and role as a jester, he becomes an easy object of cruel jokes and entertainment. However, underneath the mask of submission is an intense longing for power and retaliation. The sinister performance he puts up at the end of the narrative represents Hop-Frog's shift from being a helpless prey to a forceful rebel, ending in an unsettling act of revenge towards the king and his seven ministers. Thompson's analysis of Poe's exploration of power dynamics reveals that Hop-Frog's fight for power and control over his own life symbolizes a universal human desire to regain independence in the face of oppressive control (Thompson 47). Hop-Frog uses his cleverness and the king's arrogance to typical the typical child-parent relationship with oppressive and abusive parental figures, with the child being Hop-Frog, taking control over the king the role of the parent. This switching of roles emphasizes the delicacy of authority and the threats of violence when power is misused.

In "The Spectacles", Simpson's battle for control is not that obvious yet just as important. His fascination with Madame Lalande, coming from a misguided view of her age and looks, is an implication of his wish to assert his own identity and independence,

even though he is still under her deceitful influence. At the end when Simpson's realizes that Madame Lalande is an elderly relative and not a potential romantic partner it reminds him of how little control he has over his life and in general. His inability to acknowledge the truth of his circumstances shows a deeper struggle with identity and self-control which are shaped by his need for validation from a figure who holds authority and is influential.

In both stories, Poe illustrates how the fight for control can result in self-destructive outcomes. The protagonists of both stories face moral ambiguity and ethical dilemmas as they try to establish their authority while maintaining their independence within the complexities of their situation.

7.3 Subversion of Parental Authority

The protagonists of Poe's stories are often seen facing situations in which they need to subvert or overthrow the controlling figures that dominate their lives. In "Hop-Frog", the subversion is achieved through violence and deception that are used by the protagonist, as he carefully plans and carries out his revenge on the cruel king. The king's death by fire, is a powerful and symbolic act that represents the complete overthrow of his authority. The morality of Hop-Frog's actions gives rise to questions despite the act seeming justified for his fight against the king's cruelty. As he chooses to murder the king and his court, Hop-Frog transforms into a morally ambiguous character, representing both victim and aggressor. Thompson's analysis of Poe's writings implies that the subversion of authority in these stories is not just about seeking revenge, but also psychological need for the characters to regain their identity (Thompson 49). Without the presence of nurturing parental figures, Poe's characters cannot but face their moral and ethical challenges by themselves, often turning to drastic measures to establish their

independence. Hence, this subversion or overthrowing of authority is illustrated as a necessity on both psychological and moral levels, despite the obvious consequences that may come with it.

As mentioned earlier, the subversion of parental authority in “The Spectacles” is more subtle but just as significant. Simpson's discovery that Madame Lalande has tricked him makes him face the limitations of his judgment and how much he has been influenced by an external figure of authority. His fascination for her at the beginning can be viewed as a way to assert his independence and identity but ultimately leads to a deeper sense of delusion and loss. Madame Lalande's manipulation and eventual revelation act as a metaphoric unmasking of parental authority which uncovers the imperfections and limitations of individuals who have authority over others.

The ethical implications of this subversion are quite complicated as the characters' behavior challenge the conventional ideas of justice and morality. In both narratives, the characters' fighting against authority is shown as a form of freedom with a hint of uncertainty and moral ambiguity. Hop-Frog's brutal revenge, although satisfying in the sense of subversion of oppressive authority, creates doubts about the justification of his deeds. Similarly, Simpson's realization of the truth about Madame Lalande brings a sense of empowerment but also serves as a painful acknowledgment of his own naivety and lack of control.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through the analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, “Hop-Frog” and “The Spectacles”, this thesis has been able to illustrate how the absence of parental

figures that creates a desolate childhood, significantly impacts the psychological and moral development of his young characters. Through the lens of psychoanalytical theories, and the analysis of the socio-economic conditions of 19th century America, the thesis has shed light on how important it is to have familial presence and its constitutions when the concern is about shaping individuals' identities, ethical and moral outlook, and how they respond to hardships. Through the exploration of the themes of abandonment, identity, psychological development, ethical dilemmas, moral ambiguity, socio-economic impacts, and the fight for authority and control, this thesis as a whole suggests that Poe's works often offer a complex yet comprehensive portrait of how the lack of parental figures and their guidance keep the characters away from having a strong and stable moral compass. As a result, it creates unclear views of revenge and justice in the individuals.

A key finding of this thesis is that the young individuals who lack the presence of parental figures in their lives like in "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles", often tend to develop a fragile sense of self. In "Hop-Frog", the protagonist's moral compass has been twisted due his being enslaved and constantly mistreated by the cruel king for the sake of entertainment. Here, the cruel king can be seen as an oppressive authoritative figure. The absence of nurturing parental figures distorts Hop-Frog's idea of justice as well. Thus he resorts to his final act of violence. Although it may seem fair in the context of responding to the cruel oppression of the king and his ministers, it still raises concerns regarding one's ethics. Similarly, in "The Spectacles", the protagonist Simpson's deluded images regarding himself and lack of awareness of his own identity is the result of not having a strong and stable foundation that supportive familial figures provide. His journey to self-discovery is marked by misconception and a false sense of self and pride which

eventually comes to an end when he faces the truth about his own image both physically and psychologically. One other key finding of this thesis is how the socio-economic conditions of 19th-century America have played a significant role in Poe's portrayal of family dynamics. The widespread economic instability, social mobility, and orphanhood during that time caused the conventional family structures to be disrupted. Poe in his narratives portrays these conditions remarkably by featuring characters who are isolated, marginalized, and detached from their families. The socio-economic framework provides a deeper understanding of these conditions by portraying the psychological challenges faced by characters like Hop-Frog who has been brought in from a far away land to the king as a present and then put him into the role of a jester. The role of a jester also makes him a subjected to enslavement. And as for Simpson, his lack of parental guidance presents him as the slave of a society that values looks and social status more than an individual's true identity and character development. Therefore, it can be concluded that the stories not only show the challenges that the individuals who do not have parental figures in their lives face but also criticizes the society for not providing enough support and effort to protect individuals who are the most vulnerable.

Poe further explores the moral consequences of parental absence as his portrays the themes of revenge and justice. In "Hop-Frog", the protagonist responds to years of humiliation and exploitation with a well-planned and well-executed murder of the cruel king and his courtiers. As mentioned earlier that even though the revenge seems justified against the oppressive authoritative figures, it does raise questions about one's moral judgment. His actions also highlight how the experience of mistreatment in the absence of parental figures can bend one's moral compass and make him commit heinous deeds. Although Hop-Frog's act of violence can be considered as a way to break free from the

hands of oppression, it also hints at the loss of one's ethical purity where the line between justice and violence becomes blurred. Similarly, in "The Spectacles", the protagonist's thoughtless and desperate attempts of pursuing Madame Lalande comes from a lack of self-awareness and a strong desire for social acceptance which may have been avoided if only he had proper familial guidance.

Future studies may further explore how familial absence connects with identity and development in Poe's other works. Studying how modern analyses of Poe's works address these themes in present conditions would help keep his narratives relevant in discussions about family, identity, and morality.

In the end, this thesis has attempted to reveal how Poe in his stories uses the theme of parental absence to explore the more complicated topics like identity crises, moral ambiguity, and ethical dilemmas. Through a close analysis of Poe's two stories, "Hop-Frog" and "The Spectacles", the research shows how the absence of familial support and guidance heavily influences and distort one's views of justice and morality. The absence also influences the psychological and ethical conduct of Poe's young characters. The thesis uses the socio-economic context of these narratives in order to better understand Poe's literary contributions while underlining the long-lasting significance of his exploration of family, identity, and moral development.

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