



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

**« EDGAR ALLAN POE: LITERATURE AND MENTAL PATHOLOGIES IN
THE 19TH CENTURY »**

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Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe was an American writer, poet, critic and journalist. He is a central figure in literature as he influenced deeply many writers around the world. This is the case of his horror stories, in which he clearly demonstrates his mastery of the Dark Romantic Poetics. This project tries to offer an innovative view about this poetics by using the sciences of the mind which were constructing a differentiated discourse and which help to have a broader knowledge about the issues beyond the different narratives. Since the sciences of the mind were starting to be developed in that moment, it is interesting to better comprehend the relation they had with his literature.

Keywords

Edgar Allan Poe, sciences, mind, psychology, disease.

Resumen

Edgar Allan Poe es un escritor, poeta, crítico y periodista estadounidense. Habiendo influenciado a numerosos escritores de la literatura mundial, es considerado una figura central en el mundo de las letras. Sobre todo por sus cuentos de terror, en los que demuestra su dominio del Romanticismo Oscuro. Esta investigación pretende ofrecer una innovadora perspectiva de esta parte de su obra, buscando la relación que tiene con las ciencias de la mente, que empezaban a construir su discurso. Esto nos permitirá adquirir un conocimiento más amplio sobre temas no exclusivamente narrativos. Puesto que las ciencias de la mente estaban surgiendo en ese momento, es interesante comprender mejor la relación que tienen con la literatura de Poe.

Palabras clave

Edgar Allan Poe, ciencias, mente, psicología, enfermedad.

I. INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe is considered to be one of the greatest American writers OF the 19th century although, during his lifetime, he was not at all recognized as such. This project tries to prove the link between science and some of Poe's short stories. In particular, the scientific domain that attracts our attention will be the part devoted to psychology and the sciences of the mind. These conceptions were new in Poe's time so there was not much information about them in his period. For this reason, Edgar Allan Poe deserves to be acknowledged as a writer who excels in a context which is not of his expertise.

The theme of this project was chosen because of my personal interest in his life and work since it is has not been an object of study during my years in University of Cadiz. I wished to further my knowledge in the field of his literature. From a historical point of view, this project will explore the nascent science of psychology and other practices that are nowadays considered to be pseudosciences. By researching medical texts written in the 19th century, we can grasp the same concepts that Poe's society and himself read at the time. From the literary perspective, we will expand the interpretations for Poe's short stories by studying which ideas Poe picked up from the scientists and physiologists to enhance his writings. As a whole, the project provides a different side to Edgar Allan Poe's persona; we can regard him as a man interested in the scientific events and developments that raised his curiosity. His imagination is also an important aspect to take into account since we must not forget the literary condition of the stories, Poe will merge scientific facts with his own beliefs. The author's understanding of the diseases of the mind has had some impact in our day's science and modern psychology. He was able to foresee some concepts and notions used in the 20th century as well as illustrating by literature how he believed the mind worked in relation to the body.

The object of my study will be certain short stories by Poe, selected on account of their themes. We will be dealing with: "The Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar", "Mesmeric Revelation", "William Wilson", "The Cask of Amontillado", "The Premature Burial", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Tell Tale Heart", "The Black Cat", "Berenice", "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher". Each of them is related to different illnesses or mental problems.

Our methodology is based on the comparative study method between the literary texts and scientific texts from the 19th century especially devoted to the illnesses tackled in the stories. We will also support our project with historical background information and various literary sources which dwell on the Romantic Movement and Poe's fiction.

My purpose is to demonstrate the skills I have gained in the course of my studies AT the University of Cadiz as well as to improve the ability of creating a research paper. Learning how to choose from the different information some definitive sources for their use in the process of writing is equally important to conceive a coherent and rich project. By means of this work, I would also like to broaden my knowledge on a topic which we have not pondered much over during my studies and that has always drawn my attention.

Finally, the scheme we are going to follow will be divided into chapters based on the stories previously chosen compared with different diseases related to the sciences of the mind which were treated in some medical encyclopedias contemporary of Poe's publications. When distributing these diseases together with the tales in which they are present, it has been interesting to observe that they were also connected with a gendered view of pathology. This gendered vision is also evident in the stories that conform the corpus of this analysis. This is why the second and the third chapters of this work take the division between masculinity and femininity as the axis within which insert the analysis of the tales. Before this, the first chapter deals with a context to introduce the historical situation and the relevance of Edgar Allan Poe in the creation of the Psychological Gothic in American letters. The final part of this research, as conventionally regulated, is devoted to the main conclusions reached throughout the research work.

II. CONTEXT

The well-known American writer, object of this research, was born in the first half of the 19th century in Boston, Massachusetts. This historic time and this geographical situation convey a specific context for his writings which is quite relevant for the understanding of his approach. Besides the particularities in his life, his lack of emotional ties, his problematic relationships with his companions and colleagues and his supposed alcoholism, his production has constantly been a target for the critics who want to see his stories as part of a psychopathologic case.

What is clear is that the time of Edgar Allan Poe was the period of the emergence of the pseudosciences which were paving the way for what is nowadays known as psychology. The interest in the processes of the mind was a consequence of the main assumptions of the Romantic Movement, which reacted against the ideology of rationalism for which the mind was identified with human reason. The romantics stressed the idea that the mind functioned in several levels by connecting emotions, feelings and such mental processes as rationality. For them, the sciences, mathematics, physics, etc. were considered not to be sufficiently convenient when studying the human being since the importance now shifted to consciousness, the mind and feelings.

Seeing Poe's stories within this cultural framework, it is possible to track down their contents, their characterization, their symbolism in terms of exploration of these anxieties which made possible the connection between literature and science. The psychological approach to human nature in terms of medicine started being studied by philosophy along the 1830s "At the 1833 meeting of the British Association, William Whewell proposed the term 'scientist' for investigators who until then had been known as natural philosophers." (Otis 2002) so it is easy to imagine all the conjectures and doubts that began to arise when the problems of the mind were taken as a scientific problem. Since then people started being curious about the brain and mental illnesses and the particular symptoms provoked by insanity. In the preceding years this had not been an object of study because insanity and other mental problems were considered to be of a divine origin thus, they were not questionable.¹ There were however, several

¹ This relevant shift seems to be one of the main elements of the era of Modernity, when the divine was not governing human societies and human laws. Edgar Allan Poe is, moreover, a citizen in the new nation (the United States of America) which was considered at the time the main 'experiment' of a modern nation.

factors that encouraged the development of mental science: an increasing respect for knowledge gained through experimentation, a conviction that physical sciences could be applied to other fields, the idea that the mind had evolved in the same way as the body had and that it could be scanned for traces of ancestral forms.

In relation to Edgar Allan Poe, it is easy to see the correlation between his environment and the topics and illnesses he wrote about. As advanced above, the 19th century is a convulsive period characterized by some of the most important phenomena leading to western progress, caused by the Industrial Revolution and the technological improvement provided by science and the particular thirst for knowledge. In this period, science was getting more recognition and it was argued that the traditional curriculum of education at the time (Greek and Latin literature) was insufficient according to the new needs of modern society. This provoked that science made its way into spaces that were just until then, reserved to literature and literary studies. It is agreeable that both literature and science have similarities and differences, but in this time in which science was just beginning to find its way in more specified and detailed domains, the lines that separated both of them were not as clear as nowadays. As a matter of fact, scientists were also considered to be great writers because of their articulate way of communication.

Curiously enough, the scientists and physiologists who were investigating about the brain or any other symptoms related to psychology or medicine, made a use out of literature since it helped them spread their theories among society. To prove the relation that tied together science and literature at the time, we find that “the scientists, in order to gain a more authoritative voice, quoted poets whose insights into the mind were culturally respected” (Otis 2002). In fact, journals such as the *Westminster Review* in 1851 started adding essays covering many topics like theology, history, travel, philosophy, science found among serialised novels. There existed an important mingling of literature and science because both scientists and novelists were “eager to respond to the challenging questions arising from seeming supernatural experiences and to subject phenomena such as clairvoyance and mesmerism to scientific scrutiny” (Wood 2005). It became then, a common habit for the 19th century society to relate science to literature and entertainment due to the idea that literature was not an unreachable and undecipherable piece of work, but a reflection of human behaviour.

In this sense the use of literature was practical for the scientists since the literary works were easier in reading than scientific treatises. Therefore, the scientists used the narrative voice of some authors to transmit their knowledge and experience on some practices from pseudosciences and filled the readers in with their own sensations and comments in order to appear cultured therefore increasing the interest of the public in their work:

To win the confidence of educated readers, nineteenth-century scientists made frequent references to the fiction and poetry of the day and to that of earlier generations. By doing so, they declared an affinity, sometimes of thought but more often of culture, with respected authors and, indirectly, with their readers. When nineteenth-century scientists quoted Greek and Roman authors, they defined their knowledge as 'cultured' and therefore non-threatening. (Otis 2002)

Although we may agree that Poe did not use his stories to transmit his knowledge on the subject as the scientists did, we could say that he took advantage of the curiosity of the people in his time which he shared. As it was, scientists also made other hypothesis which they were not too sure about. Some writers, like Poe, included these speculations into their writings and expressed their beliefs on the scientific matters.

At the time, scientific treatises and literary stories were released side by side in the same publication, for instance, in the same journal or magazine. The fact that readers might have confused both of them is plausible since the line separating them was blurry enough to create the misunderstanding. Accordingly, if Poe took the subjects that were in vogue at the time, his writings cannot be considered scientific just because of that matter. They can, nonetheless, be read under a special light, keeping in mind the period in which they were written and the scientific topics related to his stories that were published and read at his same time. He cannot be thought of as a scientist himself but in his texts it is possible to recover a scientific background mostly based on profound reading and interest in the nascent questions on psychology. We are prone to think that he would have been one of the readers of these scientific journals or stories in which scientists included their conjectures about this new field in medicine. IN A SENSE Poe created an image for himself as an innovator of the Gothic, and in this sense he was able to link his intervention in the narrative genre by characterizing hem as explorations of the human beings' inner side. In the preface for his *Tales of Grotesque*

and Arabesque (1840) he responds to some part of his contemporaries' criticism who considered his stories as imitations from the German horror story:

If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul, - that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results. (Poe quot. in Hayes 2004)

Although the pseudosciences are now considered to lack a scientific basis, they have been the starting point for the birth of real sciences in our days. This is the case of chemistry which derived from alchemy after many years and moreover, psychology which sets its base on the pseudosciences of the brain which emerged in the early 19th century. In terms of sciences of the mind, the field that occupies our analysis of Poe's short stories, not much was known either but both public and scientists were eager to discover more about this mysterious realm of the human being.

The interest in defining the human being as composed by body and mind, besides the problem of finding the connection between these two sides of the person is one thematic axis in Edgar Allan Poe's stories. In an era in which the religious approach was in some sense forgotten, the focus on the mind replaced the belief in the soul, and with this abandonment of God as the holder of truth came the possibility of finding the workings of the mental processes. The main objective actually was to understand insanity and madness, which were topics celebrated by the romantics. Edgar Allan Poe took all these interests and transforms the gothic conventions into a psychological fiction centred on the exploration of all these phenomena.

The physicians and scientists started to guess what the causes and consequences could be for the brain to be independent of the body or vice versa. This is relatable to the experiments with mesmerism and magnetism which in our days has led to a controversial science such as hypnotism. The dreams and the unconscious were new lands to be explored in terms of science in the 19th century, it became a great source of information and curiosity since it had never been considered scientifically before.

His writings show that Poe was "well aware of the mental science in his era" (Dee Laverty 1951) and in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, medicine was just beginning to be scientific. Because of this, medicine not being fully settled, pseudosciences as it has been mentioned before were quite popular and believed in Poe's time.

Mesmerism has been a recurrent topic in his writings, he understood much of what was happening and took great interest in representing it in combination with the supernatural and terror that characterizes him. This practice was, eventually, in a large number of journals in America so the American society grew more familiar with it. Poe did not only mention mesmerism in his stories, in fact, he started writing about it in his reviews and occasionally praised books of other authors that explained this practice in depth. Although, according to our study, Mesmerism does not fit into the denomination of mental pathology, it certainly has to do with the mental state of the human being. The individual that would be experiencing the mesmerizing process would be in a sort of trance, what has now become hypnosis. The main objective was to communicate with the sick person, in the case of “Mesmeric Revelation” (1844) through the brain, not through the normal senses like the ears or the eyes. They would then use this situation to discuss about any profound topic, as if the one mesmerized had entered a new stage of knowledge, unreachable for those who are not under its effects.

Not only the sciences of the mind were fashionable, but we must acknowledge that it was the part that was hardest to decipher and the one that raised most questions both from society and the scientists. Other new sciences were being discovered and studied which is the case of phrenology; it became a fashion in the 19th century to believe that the physical traits of a person could somehow dictate their personality. This science was based in general on the heads of the individuals who were analysed, depending on the size and shape of their forehead would predict the tendency towards criminality, mental illnesses or exceptional intelligence. Moreover, this pseudoscience argued, also, that the mind was:

made up of marry different individual faculties each located in a certain part of the brain [...] Such qualities as skill in language, ideality, veneration, and emotiveness are typical of those the phrenologists identified with a specific area of the skull. (Dee Laverty 1951)

As phrenology served as a means to analyse one’s personality traits, Poe uses it in his stories to express some probable characteristics about the protagonists in a discreet and implicit manner. Thus we must be familiar with this pseudoscience in order to pick up the details that might be latent in the tales.

Apart from science, there were also other topics related to common society and habits from the 19th century that Poe’s stories would naturally reflect. With the scientific

advances, people were more and more anxious about life after death. As it follows, some speculations spread quicker than others and burials in this time were very different from nowadays. Since science and medicine was just beginning to explore new fields, scientists were starting to contradict the reassuring plans of afterlife advocated by the church. There were many illnesses that could be mistaken for death and as a consequence, some people were unfortunately buried while they were still alive causing terror in society who dreaded this possibility. These events could initiate the common belief about haunting, people coming back from the dead for some reason which was a topic that also comes up frequently when reading Poe's narrative. Taking into account all the deaths of women mostly that he had to surpass, it is no surprise that this found its way into his work.

Bearing all of this in mind, Poe perfectly knew how to combine the topics in vogue at his time and his passion for literature and writing. He renovated the terror tale as he introduced the scientific language so it would not simply entertain but also prove his knowledge in the psychological and scientific fields. Naturally, Poe, being acquainted with the new sciences of his time, wanted to produce something that would sell easily. Thus, he changed his way from his initial poetry and started writing the horror and detective stories for which he is best known nowadays. As he reflected his some facts on pseudoscience in his stories, the public would find it always modern and he would demonstrate his intelligence which seems that he enjoyed doing, proving his knowledge in mathematics and code-cracking. His detective stories would also work for that purpose, he created a mystery to which only he had the key and making it look impossible for the reader to solve, reaffirming his intelligence.

Finally, as Edgar Allan Poe took interest in insanity, medicine, pseudosciences, illnesses, etc. he applied these topics to his narrative not only a couple of times but often in a recurrent way. We may take into account the difficult moments in his life. He practically saw all the women he loved die because of some disease which would not be a disturbing or uncommon reason as to why he incorporates these gothic matters in his narrative. Other explanations are also valid yet not necessarily correct or excluding. It may be because of the Gothic tradition of the books he had read, the journals of the time that started incorporating medicine speculations and more serious studies in their pages. The fact that psychology was recently studied should also be taken as another prompt

for him to write in this manner because the novelty provoked curiosity among the public, which would translate into more sold copies of his collections of stories.

III. SCIENCE AND POE'S SHORT STORIES

The analysis proposed in this section uses the method proposed by comparative literature, and considers Poe's tales and the scientific literature of the time as the corpus to study. The approach conveys also an important line of argumentation based on the different discourses related to masculinity and femininity as regards the stories and the scientific discourses.

A. Masculinity

1. Mesmerism: Body and Soul duplicities

The theme about doubles is recurrent in Poe's narrative and there exist many different types of characters and duplicities that fit into this category. We will refer mainly to the duplicity between body and soul in this first part of the chapter. As it has been mentioned, this was very much argued at the time and Poe himself took time to read and study what the pseudosciences revealed about it. The most extended belief in his time was that both body and soul formed a unity. He never really expressed his own opinion on the matter, if the body and the soul were independent or if they were indeed somehow connected to each other. However, his comments do show that he agrees with that theory stating that "the Body and Soul walk hand in hand." He considers them to be "like the two aspects of matter — attraction and repulsion. The spirit is made of a material as much more rare than the ether, as this ether is more rare than the metal." (Dee Laverty 1951). Not only did he agree with it but he also introduced mesmerism in his stories in a similar way as the scientists did. Poe uses a character that will undergo the mesmerism process and describe his sensations and discoveries as he watches it being practiced.

In his tale "The Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar"², published in 1845, he opens the narrative with an introductory paragraph in which he pretends the story to be real. He imagines how much furor and curiosity among the public this case would have

² The introduction of the term "case" in the title of the story is clearly pointing to a conventional report about a patient, written by a physician or a doctor.

created if it had been a real experience. The narrator goes on, explaining the method he is going to follow, as if he were an experimented scientist or doctor. Poe, embodied in the narrator's persona, seems to take the leading voice of a scientist and intervenes in the scientific discourse of mesmerism.³ Since he feels there is a lack in the past experiments, he creates a new method practiced to someone *in articulo mortis* (at the moment of death). As suggested by (Dee Lavery 1951), the narrator of the story, who was conscious about this pseudoscience and studied it for three years, might fit into his real life. In fact, the stories Poe wrote mainly about mesmerism were all published between 1844 and 1845. Even if the topic was subtly mentioned afterwards, it was in that period that mesmerism was central in his writings. It is important to mention that the vocabulary used by Poe in this story as well as in other ones that incorporate such scientific names is quite detailed and proves his mastery on the topic: emaciation, expectoration, palliative, tubercles, cartilaginous, ossified, phthisis, aneurism, etc. These notions would not come easily to a literary writer if he had not the previous knowledge or had done a lot of research on the topic. Thus, choosing this lexis, Poe proves his readers that he is very much acquainted with the reviews and studies of mesmerism in his time.

The experiment would consist, as mesmerism did at that time, in “the assisted retrieval of knowledge from beyond the grave [...] casting the doctor in a parallel role to that of the medium.” (Wood 2005). Eventually, the narrator would think of his friend Mr. Valdemar who was suffering from phthisis, a sort of pulmonary tuberculosis that could cause his death. The first “glance” the reader gets of the sick man is described in the following way: “The pulse was barely perceptible. He retained, nevertheless, in a very remarkable manner, both his mental power and a certain degree of physical strength” (Poe 2002). Poe manages to reinforce the main source of mystery in this tale which is the power of the brain stating that his mental power still remained. It was this part of Mr. Valdemar that interested the narrator the most regarding his experiment.

In a similar way as he does with the technical medicine vocabulary, Poe figures out the detailed symptoms that a patient of this sort might have and enumerates them carefully so as to depict a clear image of the person, in this case Mr. Valdemar, who will

³ The German physician Friedrich Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) developed a scientific method of delving into the human psyche that provided the medium with access to the patient's inner world and secrets that lay beyond human existence. (Labriola 2002)

be mesmerized. To render the fictional experiment more realistic for the readers, there is a figure of a doctor who will act like a scribe, writing down the conversation and taking notes on everything that happens during the experiment. The narrator then, states that everything that he has been explaining and will keep on doing is based on the written notes of Mr. Theodore L____l. This is a merging between science and literature: Poe uses this technique as an author of short stories to make it more plausible and trick the reader into believing that it could have really happened. They would be thinking that the story is the actual script or notes taken by Mr. L____l. At the same time, it is again proving his knowledge on the way scientists work, someone experimenting and another qualified doctor or scientists writing down how the experiment develops.

While the narrator details the steps taken to force the sick man to sleep, Mr. Valdemar's health keeps getting worse. He continually refers to signs of other mesmerisms as if he had done it before and had a great knowledge on the subject. The organization of the writing is cleverly set into steps imitating the manner of a scientific experiment, thus obtaining the effect of realism that we have commented on just before. We cannot be completely sure but it is easy to imagine that both the steps followed and the symptoms suffered by the agonizing man were present in the common journals and reviews of the 19th century that dedicated their pages to mesmerism. For the readers of that time, it would have been even more realistic because Poe's text bears much similitude with those of the scientists. Probably, for the society in which Poe lived, it would have been a bit more complicated to distinguish the story from a real scientific text that explains this experiment commenting on the steps, symptoms and sensations of the person in charge of the mesmerizing.

The most important part of the story is the dialogue between the mesmerized man and the magnetizer (the narrator). Here, Poe makes use of his previous knowledge once more and starts with a question that was always made in this pseudoscience (it will be retaken in the following part of the chapter, "Mesmeric Revelation"): "The opening question "Are you asleep?" is a typical one, it being common mesmeric practice to wit just such a query to the mesmerized one." (Dee Laverty 1951). One of the greatest achievements of the author in this story is placing the reader inside the room where the experiment takes place. Thus, the transcription of the real conversation and hurried notes brings the text closer to the reader and most importantly, provokes the feeling of quick reading. The repetition made by Mr. Valdemar saying that he is dying functions

as a clock counting backwards to the end of the story, the narrator and the reader will feel anxious for the experiment to be completed before the man passes away and the results become inconclusive.

For quite a long period of time, almost seven months as the narrator expresses, they leave Mr. Valdemar in his actual state between life and death, although for the descriptions we are prone to think that he is more dead than alive. As curious scientists and doctors, the characters accompanying him need to keep up with the experiment and debate about waking him up or not – waking him up would mean replacing the soul back into the body. Through the mesmerizing, the soul has been separated from the body so even if the body is sickening and agonizing, the soul remains untouched by death when in this sort of trance. Therefore, once the nurses and the narrator decide to awaken Mr. Valdemar and replace the soul where it belonged, he dies instantly because they had been prolonging the life of his soul while detached from the body. It is a simple way for Poe to explain through the story the main purpose of mesmeric experiments he had been reading, supposedly as well as his public might have done.

The crudity with which Poe describes Mr. Valdemar's decay and death filled the readers with horror and Philip Pendleton Cook⁴ praised his style and his effectiveness in making the story so realistic. In August 4, 1846, he wrote Poe a letter:

The "Valdemar Case" I... pronounce it without hesitation the most damnable, vraisemblable, horrible, hair-lifting, shocking ingenious chapter of fiction that any brain ever conceived, or hands traced. That gelatinous, viscous sound of man's voice! there never was such an idea before. That story scared me in broad day, armed with a double-barrel Tryon Turkey gun. (Dee Laverty 1951)

It is hard to deny the fact that "The Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar" was published at a very prosperous time, the reading public was concerned about stories dealing with these issues. Something similar happened to others tales by Poe based on mesmerism, "Mesmeric Revelation". Unlike the former, it dealt with this pseudoscience in a more mystical way than the previous short story.

Published in 1844, "Mesmeric Revelation" extends the topic of mesmerism in the 19th century by taking it to a different level than the previous tale analyzed. In this case, the narrator explains in the opening paragraphs the main tenets of mesmerism:

⁴ Philip Pendleton Cook (1816–1850), romantic poet acquainted with Edgar Allan Poe.

[...] cast him into an abnormal condition, in which the phenomena resemble very closely those of death [...] yet perceives, with keenly refined perception, and through channels supposed unknown, matters beyond the scope of the physical organs; that, moreover, his intellectual faculties are wonderfully exalted and invigorated [...] (Poe 2002)

He goes on to explain the informative intention of the tale, he wants to detail everything that happens in the process of mesmerizing to satisfy the hunger for information that we have already commented on, he would be giving the readers what they were longing for. In “Mesmeric Revelation”, instead of tuberculosis, the sick protagonist suffers from asthma which is also affecting his heart. It is evident that he is described to be in great pain and lacking energy but as this particular pseudoscience required, his mental strength was almost unaltered.

As follows, the narrator explains that the mesmerizing has been successful, he has managed to induce him to “sleep”. In this trance, the narrator goes on with the steps, supposedly roughly known to the readers, and utters the question with which the other tale also started: “Are you asleep?” To enhance the veracity of the tale, the mesmerized man does not say “yes” straight away. A few more passes are needed for him to be fully mesmerized, thus, asleep.

A subjacent theme prevails in this story, quite more profound than in the other tale about mesmerism. The narrator and the “sleeping” man engage in a conversation about the beginning of life and the universe which would probably have also stirred the reader’s curiosity at the time. As the dialogue develops they change subjects and pass onto other scientific or metaphysical topics, which seem to be more reliable as they are been told by a man in this state of trance. It was thought that, being mesmerized, the sleeper could reach certain pieces of information which escaped the common knowledge in the 19th century. Thus, all the doubts about religion, death, afterlife, etc. were considered when dealing with mesmerism:

P. What then is God, [...] P. The metaphysicians maintain that all action is reducible to motion and thinking, and that the latter is the origin of the former.[...] What we call "death," is but the painful metamorphosis. Our present incarnation is progressive, preparatory, temporary [...] The pain of the primitive life of Earth, is the sole basis of the bliss of the ultimate life in Heaven. (Poe 2002)

2. Psyche Embodiments and Madness

Secondly, there is another type of duality in Poe's tales that contemplates the physical doubles. This is not as much of a pseudoscience as it was a sign of madness. Usually the protagonist will start focusing his attention on a certain person who resembles him in some way or another, provoking disturbing feelings of similarity. This excessive concentration on a particular aspect of another person will echo in some other stories that will be analyzed further on in this project, not necessarily in the area of physical duality.

"William Wilson" is one of Poe's most notorious tales that deal with the double, also called *Doppelgänger*.⁵ The figure of the double was considered to be a threat since it often symbolized the death of whoever saw their doppelganger figure. Moreover, it could also be a cause for concern considering that, in this sort of horror fiction, the main character would end up killing "himself" when killing the double. Another explanation for the theme of the double, explicitly meant by Poe⁶, is to symbolize the main character's consciousness. The double, this "other" is a reflection of himself, he warns his friends about possible dangers in the future, he speaks in a voice that is almost a whisper and behaves in a way much more positively than the protagonist. He judges the actions of the protagonist who feels compelled to do something about it, he feels oppressed by this other being that constantly ruins his plans.

In psychological terms, the human being's consciousness was starting to be explored in the 19th century. According to the doctors and scientists, the psyche of the mind was something immaterial and this story provided consciousness with a physical form so that the author could explain easily how he thought it worked together with the tangible body. To this issue, the author adds certain moral values but not clearly making a distinction between good and evil, he rather chooses to depict the contrast between evil and self-judgment. It is then safe to say that with this tale, Poe could have foreseen the basic concepts of *id*, *ego* and *superego* that would be studied by Sigmund Freud in the beginning of the 20th century. "William Wilson" can be thus studied from a psychological approach, taking the doubled figure as the superego, that is, the good and noble part of the psyche. The narrator abandons himself to a life of crime and drinking

⁵ German word meaning "look-alike" or "double walker", originally meant a ghost or shadow of a person

⁶ Epigram from the beginning of the story: "What say of it? what say CONSCIENCE grim, / That spectre in my path? – Chamberlain's *Pharronida*" (Poe 2002)

while he tries to escape from his superego, ultimately killing him as he does not manage to flee from him. The story ends with both of them dead as a metaphor for the intricate state of the body and the mind. The narrator is externalizing his consciousness granting it a body which is the object of the narrator's hatred. This act of personifying the superego, or consciousness, symbolizes the psychological collapse that can result after neglecting to obey to the superego impulses. Before this portraying of consciousness in another being, the narrator lived free, he did not feel any remorse for the evil acts he committed:

I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. [...] at an age when few children have abandoned their leading-strings, I was left to the guidance of my own will, and became, in all but name, the master of my own actions. (Poe 2002)

Madness cannot be left out of this analysis, on the one hand, because it is one of the most popular themes in Poe's narrative, and on the other, because it is deeply related with "William Wilson". The personification of his consciousness is caused by madness on the psychological realm, thus producing a hallucination in which the narrator physically sees his superego (Faurholt 2009): "a scenario which of course easily translates into Freudian terms as the pull of unconscious desires vs. superego guidance." (Labriola 2002)

Similarly to "William Wilson", another story by Poe titled "The Cask of Amontillado" can also be subject to the interpretation of the duplicity of the main character. Published in 1846, "The Cask of Amontillado" portrays yet another protagonist who is, in a certain way, reflected as a double upon another person. Montresor tricks Fortunato into his catacombs as only a master of psychology would know how to. He did so in a way which made Fortunato think it was his idea to descend there, Montresor had thus succeeded at deceiving his "friend" by making him jealous of a third person who had, apparently, a higher knowledge in wines than him - Luchesi.

There is no hint of repentance and guilt in the story since from the beginning, the narrator is telling an unknown addressee about his deeds. The killing of his friend, in which he takes pride, may symbolize the killing of his own self, a doppelganger. In this case, it differs from the previous short story "William Wilson" in that the narrators are reversed, Fortunato resembles the narrator in "William Wilson" because he succumbs to

the vices of the earthly world, more particularly wine. Montresor would then be the judgmental part of the psyche, the superego while Fortunato can be considered the id.

Apart from the psychological approach, insanity also comes to mind when focusing on “The Cask of Amontillado”. It cannot escape the reader that Montresor is rather compulsive-obsessive and Poe succeeds with ease depicting the traits considered to characterize insane individuals. Ruthlessly calculating the murder of Fortunato: “I must not only punish but punish with impunity” (Poe 2002), he proves to be despicable and with no sense of guilt: “It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.” (Poe 2002).

It must be emphasized that the readers do not know on what basis Montresor plans to take revenge, the narrator does not detail the wrongs, “insults” and “injury” that he has suffered. For all we know, he could be taking his punishment too far proving that he is mentally insane. He also demonstrates a certain expertise in psychology when playing with Fortunato’s mind, tricking him constantly into thinking he was worried about his health forcing Fortunato to insist into descending into the catacombs so as to not show weakness: “Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado.” (Poe 2002) Montresor’s cunning was evident in his several responses to Fortunato in which he carefully leaked some hints of his approaching demise:

"Enough," he said; "the cough's a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."
"True --true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily --but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damp." (Poe 2002)

The idea of the doppelganger seems to arise again at the end of the tale when Montresor echoes ironically everything that Fortunato says, turning the story into a play of mirrors in which the wall serves as a barrier separating the living and the (almost) dead.

When focusing on the last paragraph of “The Cask of Amontillado”, the main character appears ever so calm even though he has just confessed a murder he committed more than fifty years ago. This may serve the reader to become aware of his

madness, he has no judgment over himself, his superego has disappeared. As he utters “My heart grew sick – on account of the dampness of the catacombs”, it is easy to assume that there is a hint of guilt but when the speaker finishes the sentence, it becomes evident that he does not show the minimal proof of humanity. Along these lines, Montresor gathers the most telling signs of insanity in his character.

Once again, Poe surmounts the burden of conveying the hidden parts of the mind which were not yet fully discovered nor explained in his time. Without almost any medical records or treatises on insanity, the author manages to display very accurately how someone suffering from madness might behave.

3. Death: Fear of being buried alive

In this chapter we will not deal with an illness as such but with a situation that was common in the 19th century: burying people who are actually alive. Death is a motif that is almost permanently present when dealing with horror stories or any other sort of terror. It is always a source of mystery and doubt which make great premises for a sinister feeling such as the fear of death. Not only that, the additional problem of it being a burial of someone alive makes it even worse. The claustrophobia and the fact of knowing that death is close was something quite common in the 19th century America due to the fact that many burials were officiated under this circumstance. Due to the lack of medical investigation and resources, many people were thought to be dead when they presented some symptoms that gave the appearance of death so, without the necessary tests, assumptions were made and decisions of burying the individual followed. The chapter is thus focused on the paranoia that follows from the fear of being buried alive as it was an unfortunately common incident in the period of these short stories.

Similarly to the previous analyzed short story, where one of the protagonists is walled up and left to die in a trap, the characters of the following narratives also endure an experience very close to death sharing the enclosed atmosphere and the feeling of claustrophobia which intensifies the already unnerving narrative.

The first short story on this account is “Premature Burial”, published in 1844. The main character, a man whom the reader does not know much about, suffers from catalepsy. However this illness is not the one structuring the plot but rather the

obsession that follows after he passes out during his catalepsy. This makes him wonder and stress about what could happen if during one of his attacks, others think he is dead and decide to bury him. He is, in fact, buried alive but unlike most of Poe's stories, this one has another type of ending. In the final pages, the man manages to escape due to an artifact that he had built in case a situation of this kind might happen to him.

Poe takes interest in the people that were being buried alive in the same way that he did with mesmerism and other topics. Likewise, the author always finds a way to maintain and even magnify the story's plausibility by supporting it with other documents or relating it to real life events. In fact, the story opens with the narrator accounting on some of these erratic burials taking place, blurring the fiction and reality atmospheres since most readers would be familiar with the mentioned accidents.

The narrator mentions that he suffers from catalepsy which was considered at the time a disease related to sleep and the dreams. It was closely related to insanity since it altered the state of the mind:

[...] the mind frequently contains whole systems of knowledge, which, though in our normal state they have faded into absolute oblivion, may in certain abnormal states, as madness, febrile delirium, somnambulism, catalepsy, &c., flash out into luminous consciousness, and even throw into the shade of unconsciousness these other systems by which they had, for a long period, been eclipsed and even extinguished (Hamilton quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003).

Under the effects of catalepsy, the intellectual powers became stronger yet they did not function in the same way as when the individual is in the "waking state". This would explain the hallucinations that the protagonist experienced, thinking that he was going to be buried alive, fear which was made explicit in the beginning of the story: "It may be asserted, without hesitation, that no event is so terribly well adapted to inspire the supremeness of bodily and of mental distress, as is burial before death" (Poe 2002).

Even though it is a first person narrator, thus, an unreliable narrator, he depicts very clearly the symptoms of his disease and, as in most of Poe's stories; he even seems a reasonable and sensible person. He is able to realize that his brain does not function the way it should when he was in trance: "I was lost in reveries of death, and the idea of premature burial held continual possession of my brain" (Poe 2002). As an expert might have recommended, the narrator mentions that he did not feel safe anymore when he

was away from those who knew he suffered from catalepsy since maybe a stranger might have wrongfully taken him for dead. What is more, he was fully aware that his trances could and in fact would escalate and last longer each time so, he starts to worry about his friends not being able to tell if he has fainted due to the illness or if he is dead.

Another similarity with the 19th century would be that the coffins had been changed in order to make them safer and more suitable if some time the individual was erratically thought to be dead. A mechanism would help him communicate with anyone who might be outside nearby the buried coffin. But still, overcoming a premature burial would not be an easy task; there must be someone there to listen and to recognize the call for help. This is just another example of how Poe merged the social and historic context into his stories so that the public would become more credulous and understand the diseases and experiences he narrated. The author adds these thoughts, which are starting to become obsessive, since it would be what someone who is profoundly worried about death and being buried alive might think: every possible way that it could go wrong.

Poe's portrayal of the deepest thoughts from this doomed man works as a reflection on his deep commitment with the main worries and anxieties of his time. He also dealt with these in a way that did not differ too much from what scientists and doctors described in the late 19th century:

We must admit, however, that the mistake has been made, particularly in instances of catalepsy or trance, and during epidemics of malignant fevers or plagues, in which there is an absolute necessity of hasty burial for the prevention of contagion. In a few instances on the battle-field sudden syncope, or apparent death, has possibly led to premature interment; but in the present day this is surely a very rare occurrence. There is also a danger of mistake from cases of asphyxiation, drowning, and similar sudden suspensions of the vital functions. (Gould, George M. and Pyle, Walter L. 1987)

The motif of waking up after being mistakenly buried is a recurrent theme in Poe's stories such as "Berenice", "Ligeia", and "The Fall of the House of Usher" among others. The following story to be analyzed is "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842) in which there is, however, a different approach to the fact of being buried alive. This tale deals not with an effective burial but with the growing tension of that possibility happening to the protagonist. Set in the 15th century, during the Spanish Inquisition, the

main character faces a death sentence at the very beginning of the story. Hence, the dark and anxious atmosphere is explicit from the start:

I was sick – sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence – the dread sentence of death – was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. (Poe 2002)

The author plunges into the story with no introduction whatsoever, probably to emulate the confusion that the protagonist, as a prisoner, was experiencing. Apart from not knowing where he is, it is equally important that he suffers from a strange sleep disorder that causes automatic “slumbers”. These may be thought of as trances during which he has some dreams or rather hallucinations. These sudden “intervals of utter insensibility” (Poe 2002) present similar characteristics and symptoms than the ones found in the previous story. However, in “The Pit and the Pendulum” there is no reference to any mental illness like catalepsy, although the descriptions could lead the readers to believe a disease has something to do with it.

This story about the torturous imprisonment is in line with the other horror stories even if it does not hold relation with any specific disease. The symptoms account for it and also, the feelings that the protagonist has to go through: “fear of the dark, fear of torture and pain, fear of starvation, fear of the unknown, fear of death” (Fisher quot. in Hayes 2004). These fears are more like subtle hints of horror, they do not physically harm the character but they cause some mental derangement. After going through the torturous “experiments” he has trouble settling down, since he suffers from hallucinations which are related to modern day psychology. These experiments consist in a restriction of the sensorial activities causing delusion in the person of the narrator.

Some critics argue that the pit symbolizes the journey into his psyche and that, no matter what tortures he is confined to, he will feel more despair due to his confusion and fear rather than the physical pain. In fact, there is no actual harm to the protagonist in the tale. It is rather his madness that plays a trick on his mind. As mentioned previously, Poe defended himself by saying that his gothic stories were “not of Germany, but of the soul” (Hayes 2004). He changed the style of the German Gothic in that he sometimes used the setting as a metaphor for the interior of the human head, thus, the mind. To explore this part of the human being, he used it in his stories and projected his own visions and thoughts about how it might work – specially deranged

minds, perfect for his horror stories. Moreover, he could appeal to the readers' fears since they were quite common and not too supernatural, as pointed out in the beginning of this paragraph. Although, it is true that the author combines, in this tale, the natural fears with some extraordinary elements such as the visions he has during the trances.

Poe combines the basic theories about madness with historic aspects like the Spanish Inquisition and common terrors. The fear which is in play here, makes the tales more plausible. The story proves that the author is capable of merging such discordant features to create a story which takes into account the psychology of the time, and creating a plausible tale appealing to the readers' personal psyche. The visions that the prisoner has are corroborated in numerous texts from physiologists from the 19th century treating catalepsy, so the readers were also familiar with the symptoms:

a state in which consciousness and sense of identity are scarcely maintained; where memory and reason are equally disturbed; and yet, with all this, where the fancy works variously and boldly, creating images and impressions which are carried forwards into waking life, and blend themselves deeply and strongly with every part of our mental existence (Holland quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003)

4. Confessions: Workings of the Mind on Good and Evil

In relation to the previous stories, the following two also deal with masculine figures as characters with mental obsessions or illnesses. They are both confessions in the lines of "The Cask of Amontillado" in which the narrator seems to have escaped with impunity since his crime had not been discovered for half a century. In these cases we will examine the duplicities of this opposition between Good and Evil that forces the narrator to explain his griefs so as to appear innocent in front of a sort of jury, police or even the reader. It may just simply be a way of expelling all the tension that they have been holding onto or actually an attempt of redemption.

These two stories are also based on a scientific basis since they explore the psyche and consciousness of the narrators since both of them commit terrible acts and are found to be meditating about their deeds. Furthermore, they are considered to be linked to a certain mental derangement such as monomania or obsessions provoking insanity. Nonetheless, the duality of Good and Evil or wrong and right is a feature that is present throughout both narratives.

To begin with, the first short story was published in 1843, under the title of “The Tell-Tale Heart”. It introduces the character who, addressing the readers directly, tries to convince them about his sanity. He has murdered an old man because of his eye, which bothered him to an unbearable degree. An explanation is given as to why he committed the crime followed by how he did it. As it happens with other stories, there are so many details that it is difficult to believe that an insane person could justify himself in such a coherent way. In the end, the police find out about his crime because the man’s remorse tricks him into hearing the beating of the heart from where he buried it.

As the narrator speaks, he tries to legitimize his actions and his behavior. He intends to be recognized as a hero or an incredibly clever person instead of as a madman. According to this, he even feels proud for how he committed the crime and wishes the audience to whom he speaks to recognize it too.

According to the medical texts and modern psychology, the symptoms that the narrator has in this tale coincide with hyperesthesia, which is, as Poe clearly states in the story, an “over acuteness of the senses”. It would match the manifestation of paranoid schizophrenia, which consists of a persisting disturbance like the one the narrator experiences with the old man’s eye. This type of insanity is probably what drives the protagonist to insanity and to commit the crime. In relation to scientific texts analyzing the causes and types of insanity, it is read that:

It has generally been supposed that the chief, if not the sole disorder of persons labouring under insanity consists in some particular false conviction, or in some erroneous notion indelibly impressed upon the belief. [...] Mr. Locke made a remark which has often been cited, that ‘madmen do not appear to have lost the faculty for reasoning; but have joined together some ideas very wrongly, they mistake them for truths, and they err, as men do that argue right from wrong principles. (Coules Prichard quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003)

This explains quite accurately how the protagonist’s mind works in the story. He continually justifies his crime by trying to prove how sane he is. In fact, this has the complete opposite effect on the reader because someone who tries to over explain himself would not be very reliable. The reader would realize that no matter how much he tries to convince them, the reason for the murder is not a legitimate one and does not

account at all for being a plausible motif for killing someone. So, through the narration and his attempt of depicting himself as innocent, he actually proves to be insane.

Poe works with many types of insanities in his tales and without a doubt knew how to portray them. In this story there is a perfect representation of what a medical textbook on insanity analyzed in 1835. It is difficult to establish if Poe was or not familiar with the textbook at the time, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*. If he was not, he would have probably learnt these ideas from the social context which always held curiosity about the new facts and theories about the mind and, most of all, about insanities. In “The Tell-Tale Heart” the analogy with this reasoning is evident:

Persons labouring under this disorder are capable of reasoning or supporting an argument upon any subject with their sphere of knowledge that may be presented to them; and they often display great ingenuity in giving reasons for the eccentricities of their conduct, and in accounting for and justifying the state of moral feeling under which they appear to exist. (Coules Prichard quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003)

There is a considerable similarity between the story and the scientific textbook. Thus it is possible to say that the symptoms derived from insanity in its various forms were familiar to Poe, even if the source cannot be distinguished with certainty. To support this theory of schizophrenia, the narrator changes his feelings many times, he feels proud, then full of anger, then calm, nervous... as David Schlachter explains, there is a lack of motive in his actions which proves to be a common symptom of schizophrenia. Furthermore, the reason that pushes him to confess is his “over acuteness” of the sense of hearing, as he says, which is actually his mind, a hallucination provoked by his disease. The police were not hearing it and the narrator still insists in that “the noise was *not* within [his] ears”.

The mental illness that Poe depicts in this story is, as always, subject to many theories and criticism but it is safe to say that according to the medical texts of the time, it remains a plausible interpretation. Similarly to this short story, Poe wrote another story in the same year in which the narrator explains his deeds in a similar way as the narrator from “The Tell Tale Heart”. So written in 1843 as well, “The Black Cat” accounts for the crime committed by a man who also insists in his sanity. Quite often in

the narrative, he states that “mad am I not” yet he acts otherwise and not fully understanding why he does so.

From the beginning of the story, the narrator is giving an explanation as to why he is telling the public what happened, and, according to him, it is merely to “unburden his soul”. The topic of Good and Evil, in other words, consciousness appears again as it did in the previous tale and functions as a link. However, this linking element also works as a contraposition since in this case, the man “neither expect[s] nor solicit[s] belief”, he would rather simply let go of the crime which is haunting him so he can be free, even if this condemns him to death.

Due to the similarities it holds with “The Tell Tale Heart”, we are prone to think that the narrator may be subject to the same disease, he is also confessing his crime – even though not following the same purpose. Moreover, he has been carried away by violence caused by an apparently innocent creature which he continuously describes as loving, only that he considers it to have something against him. In this way, the black cat resembles very closely the old man in the previous story, who “had never wronged him”. The obsession with the eye is reflected again upon the animal whose eye would be cut out of its socket. The remorse seems to be the element which triggers his confession. It causes him to hear things which the police are not aware of, supposedly because they are in the narrators head. They are about to leave without accusing him of anything when he starts to uncover his secret.

According to insanity and criminal responsibility, these stories account for the confessions that these two men are, by themselves, forced to pronounce even though it appears that they would have escaped as innocents. A text from 1854 shows the distinction between right and wrong when approached to from the perspective of mentally ill people. There was definitely some controversy on this subject so it seems that this text tries to elucidate the main procedure for calculating when someone is or is not responsible for his crimes:

But if insanity does not remove these innate principles, does it on that account leave persons under their influence wholly responsible for their actions? Certainly not: *Responsibility depends upon power, not upon knowledge, still less upon feeling. A man is responsible to do that which he can do, not that which he feels or knows it right to do.* If a man is reduced under thralldom to passion by disease of the brain, he loses moral freedom and responsibility, although his

knowledge of right and wrong may remain intact. (Bucknill quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003)

The previous excerpt concludes in saying that an insane man cannot be held responsible for his crimes, and therefore, would avoid the death sentence. Many critics argue that in these two short stories, the main characters are actually quite sane but they choose to fake a mental illness to avoid their punishment. This will result in them narrating the facts in a non-logic order, just as stated by the narrator from “The Black Cat”. Also, they both appeal to the fact that their victims, the old man and the wife, had never confronted them whatsoever, proving that they had no previous motive for killing them. If they had mentioned any negative aspect from their relationship with the victims, their defense would have been neglected since charges could be easily settled against them. However, the narrators choose to focus on minor things, little obsessions which, to a sane person, would not at all be a motive for murder. Hence, the eye of the old man and the cat would supply the narrators with an “insanity defense” because they are not reasonable motives:

As early as 1581, a legal treatise distinguished between those who understood the difference between good and evil and those who did not:

If a madman or a natural fool, or a lunatic in the time of his lunacy do [kill a man], this is no felonious act for they cannot be said to have any understanding will.

By the 18th century, the British courts had elaborated on this distinction and developed what became known as the "wild beast" test: If a defendant was so bereft of sanity that he understood the ramifications of his behavior "no more than in an infant, a brute, or a wild beast," he would not be held responsible for his crimes. (From Daniel M'Naughten to John Hinckley: A Brief History of the Insanity Defense n.d.)

The narration of the facts, inconclusive and often contradictory, is used by the author to provide this sort of defense for the characters; they appear to be insane and not to know whether their acts are wrong or right. However, there is another fact to be taken into account, especially in “The Black Cat” when the protagonist explains the “perverseness” of his spirit.

Bearing this in mind, in this tale, there are mainly two “diseases” presented to the reader: alcoholism and the perverseness of the spirit. The narrative uses alcohol as a means to act violently with the excuse of not being completely aware of the

protagonist's acts; it supplies the man with free will to do as he wishes to. On the other hand, it is clear that it does not figure among the main problem or interest of the story.

The perverseness of spirit is a term which started to be used in the 19th century on account of the "insanity defense" afore-mentioned. This concept was used to explain why some people committed evil acts:

One of the major criticisms of the M'Naughten rule is that, in its focus on the cognitive ability to know right from wrong, it fails to take into consideration the issue of control. Psychiatrists agree that it is possible to understand that one's behavior is wrong, but still be unable to stop oneself. To address this, some states have modified the M'Naughten test with an "irresistible impulse" provision, which absolves a defendant who can distinguish right and wrong but is nonetheless unable to stop himself from committing an act he knows to be wrong. (This test is also known as the "policeman at the elbow" test: Would the defendant have committed the crime even if there were a policeman standing at his elbow?) (From Daniel M'Naughten to John Hinckley: A Brief History of the Insanity Defense n.d.)

Poe, who was aware of the scientific and social developments in his time, nurtured his work by the use of these topics over which he pondered but also relied on official texts and journals. As might be expected because of his preceding texts, "The Black Cat" delves into the human mind, illustrating humans' deepest thoughts and revealing the justification for such behavior. Through his detailed writing, Poe manages to accurately describe such problematic thoughts like the "spirit of perverseness", a topic which is still, nowadays, popular.

In short, "The Tell Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" are a reflection of the interior of the mind of the characters. The narrators lead the readers through their own reasoning and explanations so they can figure out why they did what they are being judged for. We may not forget that in the time these stories were released, the mind was starting to be analyzed from a scientific point of view, Poe's narrative helps the understanding of certain human behavior. Nonetheless, we cannot be completely certain that in these stories the men depicted are insane or if it is just a trick they play to get away with their crimes. However this may be, they illustrate clearly what an insane man would do and the element that would trigger their patience and cause a fatal incident as the murders Poe portrays in the tales. The investigation of how the human mind worked is used by Poe as a means for morality. Furthermore, the confessions made by the

narrators are useful for the readers to understand the consequences of succumbing to their deepest desires:

[This] compulsion of some of Poe's murder-narrators to confess indicates that some of Poe's protagonists do consider themselves ethically accountable for their deeds. But regardless of what the narrators themselves think, Poe expects the reader to distance himself from the narrator. The ethical accountability of the characters is exactly what Poe encourages the reader to think about. (Dee Laverty 1951)

B. Femininity

Poe's short stories are characterized by being haunting tales mostly about mentally deranged characters. On the contrary, when dealing with women he has a very particular way to render them; they are often the ones who drive the main male character to madness or the ones with supernatural characteristics, surpassing death, thus being threatening for the male. There are some key biographical elements which would have probably influenced this depiction of women as vulnerable and fragile always tending to death. He witnessed the deaths of all the women he knew or at least all the women he cared for. Naturally, these events would transfer onto his work, both in his short stories and in his poems.

Even though this chapter focuses on Poe's stories about women, it can be argued that they are actually about men. Poe did not use female characters as narrators but rather as objects upon which the male narrators reflect their terrors, desires or emotional excesses. The purpose of the women is "[their] role as emotional catalyst for her partner" (Weekes quot. in Hayes 2004) and they barely have anything to say in the story and lack any form of individual development, unless we consider the changes they succumb during the illnesses.

It is hard to determine which repeated treatment of women is more demeaning: to see them as creatures in their own right, but ones who must die in order to serve a larger, androcentric purpose, or to utilize them as lifeless pasteboard props for the purposes of the narrator's emotional excesses. (Weekes quot. in Hayes 2004)

This idea deserves some merit, nevertheless, the stories which portray women are equally valid for analysis of the mental illnesses that derive from them or that the women cause to the male narrators.

1. Monomania

The first story tackled, that has a woman as a central character even if it is not the protagonist, is “Berenice”, published in 1835. The pathology described in the story is suffered by the narrator, Egaeus, who explains that, caused by the disease, he often finds himself focusing on unimportant aspects of his environment. His cousin, Berenice, is also sick because of an illness that attacks her body and her mind. Egaeus’ disease will make him feel a “nervous *intensity of interest*” towards the teeth of his cousin which he will pull out as a consequence of his disease.

This story is interesting because of the illness it deals with: monomania. According to *The Encyclopedia of Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders* (2007), monomania can be defined as follows:

[...] a type of mental disorder in which a person would have fixed, and often grandiose, ideas that did not correspond to reality. Although the person maintained these delusions, no other sign of mental deterioration was present. Save for these pockets of delusions in their thought pattern, the persons affected were otherwise considered rational. (Encyclopedia 2007)

Poe’s choice of writing a story about monomania is very significant and meaningful for the comprehension of his style. It is essential to know that this disease was just recently diagnosed for the first time in France in 1814. As noted before, Poe used the science and cultural knowledge he had in his works. By understanding the disease, he managed to work with a great deal of details and supply the readers with the thoughts of his mentally deranged character. In short, the topic of monomania is interesting due to the fact of its novelty and the lack of detailed scientific information available. Poe succeeded in depicting the mind, coinciding also with scientific books and treatises which explain this schizophrenic disorder in the 20th century.

As mentioned before, the main character is not Berenice but Egaeus. He is a first person, thus, unreliable narrator, as practically all narrators in Poe’s works. He egocentrically speaks about his own his disease, downgrading, thus, the seriousness of his cousin’s condition. In the first part of the short story, he focuses solely on himself and gives the readers an idea about his way of thinking. The chamber in which he spends most of his time, or in other words, most of his life, is the library. The author depicts him as an intellectual; the man is always in the library, delimiting it as his

territory, unexplored by the female which gives the name to the story. In fact, the only time she is in the library, he shudders and feels a great terror.

It is argued by many critics that Poe feared women when the sexual context came into play. Reflecting this onto his character, Egeus starts to feel overcome with terror because of his imminent marriage that could lead to sexual relations with Berenice. The consequence of this fear might have been exactly that monomania which makes him focus on his cousin's teeth as a way of blaming her and excusing himself for not wanting to take that step forward in the relationship. In fact, according to Karen Weekes, the teeth could be a sign of sexual interest causing even more terror in the narrator: "showing one's teeth in a smile can indicate sexual interest, and if the "peculiar meaning" of Berenice's grin is of carnal desire, the cerebral narrator would be doubly overcome" (Hayes 2004). It could be easy to agree with this concept since the narrator himself mentions, when introducing his cousin, that despite her unnatural beauty and her love for him, he never loved her so. Egeus' "passions *always* were of the mind" which stresses once more the idea of the man as an intellectual character and not as a sentimental human being, like Berenice.

In terms of health, there is a clear opposition between him and his cousin who he describes as being always healthy while he was sick and lived a different life, much more solitary and closed in on himself in comparison to her:

Yet differently we grew – I, ill of health, and buried in gloom – she, agile, graceful and overflowing with energy; her's the ramble on the hill-side – mine, the studies of the cloister; I, living within my own heart, and addicted, body and soul, to the most intense and painful meditation – she, roaming carelessly through life, with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours. (Poe 2002)

This description in the form of a contraposition of aspects from both characters presents the contrast between them. He was sick and she, full of life. This idea can be recalled in other stories in which the "sane" or "innocent" person is the one who suffers the evil deeds in the end, such as "The Black Cat" or "The Tell-Tale Heart". It is a way of blaming indirectly the mad man instead of the woman even though the narrator is blaming her. This first description of her, however, gives the reader a wider view of her behavior and characteristics towards Egeus, similar to the old man in "The Tell Tale Heart" who "had never wronged" the narrator.

Later, the narrator will explain that Berenice is also sick, though before he had solely mentioned his own deranged state of mind. It is significant that he does this towards the central part of the story because in doing so, the reader has already had a chance of creating an innocent and healthy image of Berenice which will, from now on, start a slow decay. Maybe as a means of providing some sort of alibi for himself, the narrator also pictures and describes Berenice as being already dead when her disease attacks her body: “Alas! the destroyer came and went! – and the victim – where is she? I knew her not – or knew her no longer as Berenice!” (Poe 2002) Obviously, Berenice had not died, but for him, she was already dead. It could be due to her emaciating aspect or to his fear of losing her; he could have been preparing himself mentally for when she passed away since her disease was eventually going to kill her.

Poe’s great ability of portraying the psychological aspects of his characters does not stop there, he transgresses that limit and quite often, he explains the way the mind works from another point of view. He foresaw what the readers might think, their possible reactions to Egaeus’ explanations and accounted for them beforehand:

And although, to a careless thinker, it might appear a matter beyond doubt, that the alteration produced by her unhappy malady, in the *moral* condition of Berenice, would afford me many objects for the exercise of that intense and abnormal meditation whose nature I have been at some trouble in explaining, yet such was not in any degree the case. In the lucid intervals of my infirmity, her calamity, indeed, gave me pain, and, taking deeply to heart that total wreck of her fair and gentle life, I did not fail to ponder, frequently and bitterly, upon the wonder-working means by which so strange a revolution had been so suddenly brought to pass. But these reflections partook not of the idiosyncrasy of my disease, and were such as would have occurred, under similar circumstances, to the ordinary mass of mankind. (Poe 2002)

This proves Poe’s intelligent way of narrating and giving explanations about such new topics as was monomania at the time. It had been diagnosed for the first time a couple of decades before this story was penned, so, it is understandable that, in the 19th century, advancements in medicine or science did not grow as fast as they do nowadays. In an attempt to satisfy the readers from his period, Poe takes one step forward and explains the possible controversy in advance. People could tend to think that the disease was somewhat incongruous if it were not for these digressions in which he provides plausibility to the mysterious events.

2. Opiates

Published in 1838, “Ligeia” is one of Poe’s most distinguishable short stories yet also one of the least read. Regarding the feminine characterization in the story, it contains some differences in the topics and points of view from other stories in which the women have no or little voice as opposed with the man in the tale. Ligeia is a strong woman, powerful, and, what is more impressive compared to other stories, is that she is more intelligent and sage than the man, the narrator, her husband. These features serve to highlight the interest taken on this story by Poe. From a psychological or scientific point of view, and taking into account the sciences of the mind, this tale also bends towards the masculine side; it is the male character who suffers from the mental disease or alteration rather than the female.

In the 19th century, opium was legal in America and its use and abuse provoked many alterations in the mind, brain and even physical appearance of consumers. The many side effects from drug abuse were not completely known then but there were some ideas related to the smoking of opium linked to brain damage or at least, some sort of temporal confusion. Drug abuse is one of the main themes in this narrative but it goes together with at least two more ideas connected to the mind: hallucinations probably provoked by opium and the imagery of the dead coming back to life. This last notion is repeated many times in Poe’s work and is often related with a fear on behalf of the narrator that the female would come back to life and take him with her.

The differential aspect in this story as regards others by Poe is, as mentioned above, that the female is more powerful than she tends to be in his work. She is one of the few women who do not die – at least so it seems – or who conquer death. There is another female character, Rowena, who impersonates the complete opposite of the narrator’s first wife, starting from the color of her hair to her attitude and behavior towards him. She is much more fragile and does not prove her intelligence in the same way as Ligeia did. The narrator marries Rowena in a desperate attempt to forget about his late wife which he does not achieve. In depicting Rowena, the speaker shows that he is not at all in love with her but in fact, he hates her. It is no surprise then, for the reader that he does nothing in her favor when he realizes how miserable she is. The obsession he feels towards Ligeia and his hallucinations on its behalf can be seen as the structuring principle in this story in a similar way as monomania was in “Berenice”.

In short, “Ligeia” is a horror tale in which the narrator marries Ligeia, an incredibly beautiful, intelligent and superior female in every imaginable way. She has so many positive attributes according to the narrator that the reader may hesitate if some of this is true or not. To support this idea, we encounter that the narrator is one who smokes opium as he mentions it a couple of times in the telling of his story:

I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. [...] in the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug), [...] But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium, [...] Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted, shadow-like, before me. (Poe 2002)

Apart from causing the mental derangement that occupies this study, the mentioning of the opium abuse also produces some suspicions in the reader about the narrator’s unreliability. This happens in other tales by Poe in which the speaker suffers from a mental illness, thus, confusing the reader who will not know whether to believe him or not. Hallucinations are one of the effects of opium and they affect the speaker, or so critics believe, when he speaks about Ligeia coming back to life. His previous obsession with his beautiful and intelligent wife will be enforced and worsened because of the drugs, culminating with the ultimate illusion: seeing his late first wife within the body and in the eyes of his second. He also proves different attitudes towards them, his caring and admiring Ligeia clashes with his hating and ignoring of Rowena.

As mentioned before, Poe’s relationships with women, whether romantic or familiar, have always been dramatically broken because of their premature deaths caused by diseases, mostly tuberculosis. For this reason, it is quite probable that he always portrays women in decay, sick and almost dying. It is argued that the characteristics that define Ligeia are the ones that Poe longed for himself: “she was no more than a feminine portrait of [Poe] as he wished to be. Her personal beauty, analytic mind, immense learning, powerful will, and supreme love were qualities which he himself possessed in varying degrees.” (Stovall quot. in Hayes 2004).

Besides the sexual authority she might impose onto the narrator, Ligeia also had authority over him from a mental point of view since she was much more cultured and read than him. This, however, does not seem to impose a threat to him because he always stated that he loved her deeply and she loved him back in such a way that he compares it to idolatry rather than love. Furthermore, when she is sick in her deathbed,

he laments her eminent death but always emphasizing his own suffering instead of hers: “How had I deserved to be so blessed by such confessions? – how had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of my making them?” (Poe 2002).

The unreliable narrator is not as insistent in his mental problem as those from the previous stories, in fact, he belittles his drug consumption as if it were nothing to worry about and as if it would not change the issue he is explaining: “I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labor and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. But these absurdities I must not pause to detail.” Since it is concerned with himself, he will not go any further on that topic, he considers it to be less important than the others and irrelevant to the telling of the story. This changes completely the atmosphere of the story, if he is not in full possession of his mental faculties, we cannot be sure that this happened or if it is just a product of his hallucinations. From the very beginning we are introduced to some of the consequences of opium, he has many blanks in his mind which are especially intriguing since they deal with how he met Ligeia. His idyllic love contrasts with his lack of information of his lover. He only appears to remember her physical appearance; this could be related to his hallucinations and the tendency to increase her beauty.

The state of memory loss and insanity provoked by opiates can be analogous to the reverie resulting from dreaming and its relation with insanity. In 1852, some chapters on mental physiology and insanity related to dreaming pondered upon the subject explaining that:

If it were an object to obtain a description of insanity, which might apply to the greatest number of cases of such disorder, I believe this would be found in the conditions which most associate it with dreaming; viz., the loss, partial or complete, of power to distinguish between unreal images created within the sensorium and the actual perceptions drawn from the external senses. (Holland quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003)

It relates to the narrator from “Ligeia” who has hallucinations and seems to hear his late wife while Rowena is dying. Moreover, the protagonist always describes his Ligeia as a shadow whose presence he never notices until the moment she speaks. Her low voice seems to be an evidence for that, because it is nearly musical as it resounded in his mind. His description also focuses much more on her eyes which are like those of a gazelle suggest a supernatural or at least non-human person. When Ligeia dies after

listening to the narrator repeat her poem about the inevitability of death, she started to shriek and grow anxious about the idea:

“O God!” half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made an end of these lines – “Oh God! Oh Divine Father! – shall these things be undeviatingly so? – shall this conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who – who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigor? Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.” (Poe 2002)

It is easy to infer that this passage is what the narrator clings onto so he has the hallucinations provoked by his own mind in which Rowena turns into Ligeia. It is just caused by his obsession with his first wife which was extremely powerful over him. Seeing his late wife in the person of Rowena can account also for being a type of monomania, probably increased by the use of drugs, which causes him to have these hallucinations. Again on a treatise on monomania from 1835, we find that:

Mental dejection or melancholy, which extinguishes hope and hives the mind up to fear and the anticipation of evils, lays the foundation for many kinds of varieties of monomania. (Cowles Prichard quot. in Bourne Taylor, Jenny and Shuttleworth 2003)

The narrator explicitly argues that his love for Ligeia left him like “a child groping benighted”. It is as if he had been deprived of his mother figure, similar to Poe’s relationship with the women in his life. There are many references in his story that support the idea that the resurrection of Ligeia is but a product of his hallucinations. As a premise, we are shown that even before she dies, the narrator does not want to believe what is about to happen: “My brain reeled as I hearkened, entranced to a melody more than mortal – to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known.”. When Rowena dies, he believes it to be caused by some drops of a mysterious liquid, probably poisonous, that fall in her goblet but only he sees. He does not warn her about this but lets her drink it. Before this, he feels a ghostly presence in the room which passes through him but which is invisible. The narrator will now start to be confused:

“I say, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby coloured fluid. If this I saw – not so Rowena.” (Poe 2002)

Most unequivocally, this is product of his hallucinations as an opium consumer, who, driven by his obsession over his first wife, imagines what he wishes to happen. He secretly wants to get rid of Rowena so that Ligeia can come back to him. Evidently, this all happens in his mind and he starts to suggest it is not as real as he might have thought in the first place:

An hour elapsed, when (could it be possible?) I was a second time aware of some vague sound issuing from the region of the bed. [...] I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of Death. [...] There was a mad disorder in my thoughts – a tumult unappeasable [...] What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? (Poe 2002)

The way Poe links opium with the mind's power is very significant. First of all because of the time in which he wrote this, when opium was legal and was not considered to be dangerous. Secondly, because it confirms our theory that he knew well about the workings of the mind, the possible responses to drugs and above all under the influence of an obsessive love. The connections between these elements are so close that are barely noticeable for the reader. The author has, thus, explained through the words of an unreliable narrator, how his mind works when affected by these factors.

3. Catalepsy

This short story is one of the most famous and one of the most complex ones written by Poe. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is charged with scientific references to insanity and other diseases like catalepsy or hypochondria. As usual, the narrator is male but this time he does not suffer from any disease. It is his friend, Roderick Usher who is said to have an unnamed mental disorder. Further on, there are three references to hypochondria suggesting that it is the illness that Roderick Usher has. However, it is crucial to differentiate it from the hypochondria that we know nowadays as an illness that makes the individual think he is prone to catch every disease. In this case, we learn from the very beginning that Roderick Usher actually shows some physical signs of the illness. As for his twin sister, Madeline Usher, she has an illness that the doctors are struggling to understand but among its symptoms or side effects, she has catalepsy. This disease has been found in other short stories by Poe like "The Premature Burial", analyzed above. Madeline's disease serves to emphasize Roderick's fear; he is scared of her because he may foresee that his death is linked to hers.

Besides all the diseases, the house plays an essential role in the story since it provides the title. There is no doubt that there is something gloomy and dark about it because all throughout the tale, the narrator describes it so and the feelings he gets are mainly provided by the house. The house and the twins seem to stand as a whole and there are many analogies that support this in the tale. For this reason, the house breaks down when the Ushers die, this is already stated somehow in the beginning when the narrator explains:

[...] the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the “House of Usher” – an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. (Poe 2002)

“The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) is a story the physical and mental decay which Roderick and Madeline Usher go through. Their house reflects their diseases and mental instability cracking down in the same way as they do when they die. As quoted above, people used to refer to the house and the family using the same expression. This clue points to the evident relation between the Ushers and their estate. For this reason, Poe uses many doublings and personifications to create a sense of duplicity between the building and the siblings. As it happens quite often in Poe’s stories, the reader finds out that the female’s illness once the male character has already explained in great detail his own suffering. Madeline Usher is going through an illness that causes catalepsy inducing her brother into thinking she is dead and burying her while she is only in a trance. Roderick grows more and more anxious and succumbs to his fear of death when his sister comes out of the tomb and both of them die together. The narrator will then run away and witness the collapse of the building symbolizing the death of the Ushers.

Featuring catalepsy, hypochondriasis and insanity, this tale is rich in symptomatic descriptions. We could even consider depression or melancholy as another mental illness or rather as a side effect worsening Roderick’s health. However, the diseases are vaguely defined, thus, collaborating with the blending atmosphere of the story which fluctuates between the gloomy aspect of the house and of the people who live in it. Poe suggests that hypochondriasis in the character of Roderick Usher is:

“a physical and mental affliction, but also a form of heightened sensibility, a kind of allergy to the physical world, and a disease of the imagination that has grotesque and fatal consequences.

[...] a malaise that makes him inordinately sensitive to all manner of real and imagined torments.” (Dillon 2009)

From Poe’s words we can read that “he suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses” (Poe 2002). Similarly to the narrator in “The Tell Tale Heart” this acuteness of the senses ended up in insanity making the narrator imagine things which were only product of his imagination. We cannot tell for sure if this is the case in “The Fall of the House of Usher” but it might be expected that this apparent hyperesthesia played an important role after entombing his sister. Towards the end of the tale, he seems to confess that he knew that she was alive all along:

“Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it [...] yet I *dared* not speak! [...] Said I not that my senses were acute? I *now* tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin.” (Poe 2002)

Hypochondriasis was thought to be among the consequences of the lack of sexual relations. In the tale, it is mentioned that Roderick and Madeline are the only ones left from their family and that “the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain.” (Poe 2002) The narrator speculates that this might, in fact, be the origin of their bodily and mental deficiencies. As a result, it may be stated that the male character feared the sexual encounter with his sister since this was a recurrent theme in Poe’s stories. The male fears the female, especially in the sexual context. Keeping in mind this sexual abstinence, it is plausible that the diseases could have appeared as a consequence.

The woman, although she is the most important character in the story, she does not appear too much nor does she say a word. This is not unlike the previous stories about women included in this project. Her illness is unknown to the physicians and it has shocking effects on her body making her look cadaverous. She also behaved accordingly to her looks since she is described as passing by as a ghost, almost unnoticed and creating an eerie feeling on whoever looked upon her. The physicians did observe that one of the consequences was catalepsy, a disease that is not uncommon in Poe’s tales and can be found in the previously analyzed “The Premature Burial”. When studying the figure of the female in his stories, it is easy to find that they are not active figures. Actually, they serve the male character as a support onto which they project their sorrow and melancholy. This is, even if the sick person is the woman, it will be the

male figure who talks incessantly about himself and how lonely he will be once the woman dies. In this short story, we can see Roderick Usher behaving in such a way, as many other male characters from Poe's tales do, in this excerpt of "The Fall of the House of Usher": "Her decease," he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, "would leave him (him, the hopeless and the frail) the last and the ancient race of the Ushers." (Poe 2002)

When studied under the light of a more scientific approach, "The Fall of the House of Usher" justifies the theory that Poe was eager to show through his tales how the mind works. In other words, this story is a perfect example to illustrate his thirst for knowledge on this subject and his ambition for writing about it. The house is always represented as bearing a disquieting resemblance to a human head: "the vacant eye-like windows". The author uses the building as a means to show the physical deterioration that can be provoked by a mental illness. He proves once more to be a visionary in terms of science, if not as a physician, at least as a writer being able to explain in a literary way the functions and consequences of mental diseases and their relation to the physical body.

Focusing again on the portrayal of the femininity in the story, we notice that, unlike other women in Poe's work, Madeline Usher takes revenge upon her brother. She may not say too much in the story but similar to Ligeia she has the will to surpass death, or in this case, catalepsy, and conquer over the male figure of the story. Nonetheless, the figure of the narrator would still remain as a superior male since he could escape alive. Madeline Usher embodies death for Roderick, he foretells that he "must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR." We will not extend in her cataleptic condition since it has been already interpreted in "The Premature Burial". However, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" there might exist a certain degree of volition in the act of burying Madeline Usher alive.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" works as a perfect ending for the project since it incorporates several physical and mental diseases not uncommon in Poe's time. This story presents the author's main features and writing style, perfectly merging the symbolism, the scientific and the literary realms.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is clear that literature and science were closely linked together in the 19th century since the latter had just acquired a more systematic study approach and deviated itself from the arts. Being as it was, a new topic, kind of futuristic for the time, society in general were tremendously curious and eager to know more about sciences, specially the sciences of the mind. This stimulated Poe's ambition to write about these topics. As other people did, he read scientific treatises released in the journals and magazines creating a scientific context on which he could base some of his literature.

In spite of the public's engagement with the topic, Poe did not attain the prosperity he wished for. However, nowadays, his incredible mastering of the scientific domain has made his short stories reach a whole new level. Psychology has just started to be recognized and the studies it entails are, little by little, approached from a more scientific point of view and less from a divine or religious source.

He knew very specific details mainly about the illnesses and diseases of the mind and expressed them very clearly in his work. These stories could have served as support for the physicians or scientists who were investigating the maladies. Poe, as many other writers, wrote in his stories about his own interpretations and thoughts based on what the professionals revealed.

Poe's tales have always been thought of as dealing with the gothic genre or the supernatural but the psychological sphere plays a role at least as important as these two. He is able to portray how the human mind works when suffering illnesses such as insanity, catalepsy, hypochondria, monomania, hyperesthesia, etc. and under drug abuse. As he was not a physiologist or scientist, he deserves much merit for having portrayed so clearly and entertainingly the symptoms of these mental states. As a difference with the scientific treatises of the time, they had a communicative purpose to inform the readers while Poe's literature, while based on science, had the purpose of amusing the reading public. Nonetheless, this did not stop him from speculating and imagining how the mind and the body were connected. For this reason, he demonstrates to be an extremely intelligent person since he accurately did so without the corresponding studies on the topics.

As almost all literary work, Poe's short stories can be subject to various interpretations but we find that the scientific point of view is quite an accurate way of approaching them. The psychology which is in play in his work together with the scientific basis is crucial to render the stories plausible. In doing so, he provokes a more profound feeling of fear in the readers, which was one of the most relevant goals of the author in creating a strong effect on the reader.

Besides taking interest in the relation of the mind with the body, Poe also created his own scientific theory about the origin of the Universe. This topic is slightly addressed in the story "Mesmeric Revelation" but he discusses it thoroughly in his book *Eureka* (1840). This is yet another confirmation of his close connection with science. Even though he was not a scientist, he enjoyed developing such theories and releasing them for the reading public. We cannot, therefore, ignore the scientific data in his work but rather analyze it together with the gothic and psychological features of his writing.

In conclusion, the goal of the present project is to demonstrate how intermingled science is in Poe's short stories. By taking into account the medical and scientific texts and connecting them with the selected tales, we can assert that Edgar Allan Poe had extensive knowledge on the subject. His work relies greatly on the scientific facts that he probably read in the journals and magazines of the 19th century. Moreover, he embellishes his writings with his own conjectures and thoughts about the human mind. With this in mind, readers can broaden the context of his short stories, reaching a further dimension.

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