

Aspects of Duality in the Selected Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

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**ASPECTS OF DUALITY IN THE SELECTED TALES
OF EDGAR ALLAN POE**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and
Literature and Art History at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor:

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ABSTRACT

The thesis entitled *Aspects of duality in the selected tales of Edgar Allan Poe* attempts at offering a concise overview of Edgar Allan Poe's treatment of duality, specifically in the five selected tales. The thesis' opening lines focus on the importance of Gothic fiction and its impact and reception in North America. Further on I take a close look at Poe's narrative principles which can best be observed in his tales. The main and crucial part of the thesis examines the notion of duality through its general tenets and, most importantly, through concrete examples found in the five selected tales. The ending notes of the thesis are my reflections on the creative importance of Edgar Allan Poe.

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INTRODUCTION

The life and work of Edgar Allan Poe share many characteristics, the most prevalent being the one of mystery. Much remains unsaid and undiscovered about this prolific and yet deeply tormented 19th-century Boston writer. The same could be said about his work. It is comprised of many layers and each sometimes functions as a stand-alone piece. Stylistically and plot-wise he managed to create undoubtedly unique works which remain a great source of inspiration even to this day. He gave us detective and murder stories which then on spanned generations of crime story writers. But most important of all, he presented us the image of a conflicted man, one who defies those formulaic characterizations of either good or bad. Edgar Allan Poe imbued many of his works, especially short stories with protagonists fighting not with an external grotesque monster, but one far more daunting, the mind itself. He somehow managed to seamlessly and effortlessly merge a technically embellished type of writing with non-idealized depictions of our society. His ways of constructing plots relied much on contrasts and inner conflicts whose main task was that of educating the audience and making it more aware of the absurdity of idealism and any notion of perfection. Through his work he managed to 'advertise' a new type of hero, one who goes about this world not knowing what he is supposed to be and one who goes to sleep and wakes up with conflicting thoughts about his surroundings and himself. As somebody who despised the idea of human perfection and was rather more convinced in its inherent fallibility, Edgar Allan Poe was determined to portray only truth in his tales. That meant that personality wise, polished and refined characters were nowhere to be found in his tales. His tales employed true to life characters battling not only the external world but also their internal world consisting of conflicting thoughts. For Edgar Allan Poe the road to a peaceful life was a lifelong struggle without a definite solution. Peace of mind was not something that was easily achieved, it was something that had its good and bad days. Constructing plots that center on our daily struggles with our

own conflicting thoughts is what made Edgar Allan Poe and the work he left behind so timeless and relevant. The characters he produced never ceased to be relatable. Quite the contrary, every generation that has ever been acquainted with them managed to find them and their struggles relevant and educating.

1. The importance of Gothic fiction

The expression Gothic fiction today invokes images of horror and terror, dark gloomy landscapes, ruinous palaces surrounded by dark, seemingly never-ending woods, hauntings, apparitions, graves and all in all brooding atmospheres. So it comes as no surprise that it has captivated the audience's attention ever since it appeared, or better yet affirmed itself. The point of affirmation or rather beginning of further flourishing of the genre is considered to have been marked by Horace Walpole's novel entitled *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. It is considered to be the very first Gothic novel. But the novel did not necessarily employ grotesque images and monsters and generally all those things that go 'bump' in the night. It was rather a psychological study and it revealed a lot about human behavior.

And that is where the importance of Gothic fiction lies. The possible usage of images of horror and terror do not just serve the purpose of frightening and entertaining us. Rather their strong impact on our senses enables them to show us human beings as they truly are; imperfect and examples of walking conflicts.

In the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, the author E.J. Clery speaks about the importance of Gothic fiction in an article entitled "The Genesis of 'Gothic' fiction". The author opens up her article by stating how in fact the sheer attachment of Gothic to literature is indeed a recent development.¹ Clery further begins to state the aim and subsequent importance of Gothic fiction by explaining how its main importance lays in the fact it avoids the concept of ideal. It rather pushes the boundaries of what is conventional and it focuses on protagonists who are walking conflicts. She states that '*Only if a fiction is true to life can it become the vehicle of useful instruction or moral improvement.*'² And what is true to life is in no way ideal, but quite imperfect, misguided and confused. Gothic fiction presents us with an

¹ E.J.Clery (2002: 21)

² E.J.Clery (2002: 22)

interesting combination of real and unreal, the real element being people and the unreal element being circumstances, the places in which our main protagonists abide, then monsters and hauntings they bring. Works of Gothic fiction have quite the smart outline, as the incredibly imaginative unreal elements serve to captivate our attention and pull us in the world they present, but the real elements, the people and their reactions to what is presented in front of them serves the purpose of educating us, bringing awareness of our own imperfections and subsequent futile pursuit of the ideal. And that is the only way that enables identification, if it is close to reality (*'In order to carry out its true function of instructing the young, fictions must exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world.'*³).

2. Edgar Allan Poe in the realm of American Gothic

What came as a logical next step after the affirmation of Gothic literature was its flourishing into different subgenres. One of them was the American Gothic. Edgar Allan Poe is considered to be one of the most famous members of this strain of Gothic fiction literature. But one must bear in mind that Gothic fiction wasn't accepted in American literature that fast. Quite the contrary, for a very long time it was considered to be unworthy of academic attention and synonymous to low culture. And that was the kind of creative environment Poe found himself in.

Jerrold E. Hogle gives a short overview of the slow acceptance of Gothic literature in America that occurred in the 19th century. He states how: *'...in many other studies of American literature- the Gothic along with Poe, is relegated to manifesting a 'mechanical horror' that, if occasionally employed by Hawthorne, is overcome in the 1840s-1850s by the*

³ E.J.Clery (2002: 23)

*'tendency of American idealism to see a spiritual significance in every natural fact...'*⁴- meaning that in the beginning it was considered to only display darkness and the grotesque for entertainment purposes, and only after it started to slowly merge with American Transcendentalism did it start being considered educational. What made American Gothic unique was the fact it merged the Gothic Romance and the American psyche, and as J.E.Hogle concludes it was determined by: *'...its union of opposites as seen in hesitations between tradition and modernity...'*⁵

In time the importance of Gothic fiction started overflowing American literature as it was one way of truly addressing humankind, without any kind of embellishments. It was a:

*'...means for American audiences to articulate the terrors that lie deepest in the human psyche...and that repressed conflict includes the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State the American has opened a way to either insanity and the disintegration of the self or a regression into the maternal womb from whose darkness the ego first emerged, hence the American gothic hero's flight towards ever-new frontiers...'*⁶

In other words it served to better express one's worry about losing touch with traditional values and not achieving its potential in the wake of progress.

2.1. Dark Romanticism as a reaction

Within American Gothic there existed a group of authors who didn't completely create in the spirit of American Gothic, but rather mixed genres. The authors I am talking about were Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and, for this thesis the most important member, Edgar Allan Poe. A reaction to not completely agreeing with the tenets of American Gothic was the

⁴ Jerrold E. Hogle (2014: 4)

⁵ Jerrold E. Hogle (2014: 4)

⁶ Jerrold E. Hogle (2014: 6)

creation of a new genre, or rather subgenre, Dark Romanticism. It was the style in which Edgar Allan Poe created and wrote. Being influenced by German Romanticism, he was inspired to follow the German Romanticists' propensity for the mixing of genres, which narrative feature in a way foreshadowed the acceptance of our dual nature and needs (*'Hence a mishmash of motives, costumes, cults, civilisations-Hellenism and Medievalism, Paganism and Christianity- jumbled together in inextricable medley.'*)⁷.

As argued by Morgan Howard in his article "A New Genre Emerges: The Creation and Impact of Dark Romanticism" this new subgenre: *'... presents the darker side of awareness...guilt, fear and madness...the uncomfortable sense of being in a fantasy world which is about to reveal secrets of the human personality. Plots involved illness, secrecy, and terror. Readers and characters alike discovered horror in everyday occurrences.'*⁸ It is a genre within which Poe flourished as it enabled him to completely focus on the human psyche and its many layers, all of which are unique in their perceptions of the world. As a person who did not believe in the perfection of human beings, it was no wonder that Edgar Allan Poe best ended up bringing this genre to a wide audience appeal. He did after all best understand the issues it tried to present. The Dark Romanticism as the name itself indicates presented not only a subgenre of Gothic fiction, but also of Romanticism. It employed certain characteristics known in Romanticism such as the deep fascination with beauty, unrequited love, intense emotions and certain characteristics of Medievalism mostly through the employment of castles and courtship.

Poe is believed to have been the first to successfully combine Romanticism and the Gothic in an innovative way. As stated by Morgan Howard, he was not that interested in the beauty of nature, as much as in the beauty and uniqueness of the mind. He was fascinated by the link

⁷ P.H.Frye (1914: 114)

⁸ Morgan Howard (2015: 2)

between beauty and death and he frequently employed that connection in his short stories and poems. The easiest way to describe his style would be by understanding how he combined genres, thus using traditional tenets of Romanticism and combining them with the dark nature of Gothic fiction.⁹

When talking about his writing, what is so unique about it is the fact how at first glance it appears highly stylized, but after close inspection and reading one sees how the stylization only serves the purpose of drawing its audience's attention and nothing more. Stylization is employed when describing the surroundings and character's garments, but their personalities and the ways in which characters interact exhibit only truth. Morgan Howard gave a rather concise and genuine description of Poe's writing by saying how:

*'His writing has a dark impulse beyond understanding which wreaks havoc, operating in complete contradiction to the normative assumption of the early United States policy, that individuals will always seek to act in their own best interests. In other words, he rejects the idea that humans are basically good and does not believe people would help their fellow men.'*¹⁰

On a final note, when discussing Dark Romanticism it is important to mention the fact that it was closely tied with Transcendentalism, in a way that it undermined all of its most important ideas and tried to create a type of literature that differed from the American Transcendentalist movement. This can be closely inspected in Poe's work. To start with, the Transcendental movement was known for integrating all of our existence in nature, but for Poe nature was not necessarily a place of peace, it was rather an eerie place which made people only more anxious and alone. Ted Billy argues in his article "Descendentalism and the Dark Romantics: Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and the Subversion of American Transcendentalism":

⁹ Morgan Howard (2015: 3)

¹⁰ Morgan Howard (2015: 4)

*'In opposition to the Transcendentalists' integrated perspective on nature, Poe often dramatizes the organic world as alienating and forlorn... for Poe's landscapes evoke an aura of spiritual sterility and eerie isolation. His Gothic fiction also displays nature as a source of estrangement... Yet perhaps Poe most clearly defines his valuation of nature by way of its absence... Poe shuns the organic world in favor of the internal chambers of the mind. Whereas Transcendentalists tended to view nature subjectively, Poe explores the hyper subjectivity of human nature.'*¹¹

And that is how we can best understand the Dark Romantics rebellion against the Transcendentalist movement. For Poe and the others it meant simply not seeing the world as optimistically as Transcendentalists did. Nature for the Dark Romantics and especially for Poe was not the answer and therefore the focus of his work, as he cared very little for our surroundings, but was rather interested in the human mind and its capability of producing such conflicting and dual ways of thinking. What made Poe stray away from the Transcendentalist movement was its reliance on humans as capable of being perfect. Poe did not believe that. They (Poe, Hawthorne and Melville) *'...were keenly aware of the dark side of human nature, and they scorned the Emersonian lack of recognition of darker matters... Dark Romantics were not entirely antithetical to Transcendentalist ideas and goals, but they realized that nature has its perils, individualism its excesses, and social reform has its limitations.'*¹²

3. Edgar Allan Poe's narrative strain

Although Edgar Allan Poe is deemed to be the inventor of the modern short story, this invention of his would not have been conceived without the many influences which helped shape him as an author. One of the influences that are most apparent in his work is that of

¹¹ Ted Billy (2014: 152)

¹² Ted Billy (2014: 162)

German literature, and especially the German author Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann. But strangely enough despite the obvious influence that German literature had on his work, Edgar Allan Poe was more famous for denying this connection. He even famously declared: *'I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul.'*¹³ That may be true after all. But still the fact remains that he was deeply influenced by German literature whether he was or was not aware of it. He famously negated the influences in his Preface to *The Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, where he described his tales by saying: *'I am led to think it is this prevalence of the 'Arabesque' in my serious tales, which has induced one or two critics to tax me, in all friendliness, with what they have been pleased to term 'Germanism' and gloom.'*¹⁴ Despite him denying these inspirations and connections with German literature, his work in itself still proves otherwise. He was undoubtedly influenced by German Romanticists and it was them who inspired the creation of Dark Romantics. His congruity with the German author E.T.A. Hoffmann further on proves that he was under the German influence. To begin with, this connection and similarity was closely studied in Gustav Gruener's article simply titled "Notes on the Influence of E.T.A Hoffmann upon Edgar Allan Poe" and he begins by stating that they both created under the principle of truth being far stranger than fiction.¹⁵

Gustav Gruener observes their shared rebellion against formalism, commonplace, spirit of the bourgeois, and the usage of grotesque humor. Poe might even be considered a sort of doppelgänger of Hoffmann as they both mastered the fantastic and supernatural grotesque which appeared on the verge of insanity.¹⁶

Poe's tales, at least the ones I am going to deal with in this thesis all focus on different aspects of duality that can be found in our everyday life. But despite my centering on tales that deal

¹³ Gustav Gruener (1904: 1,2)

¹⁴ Gustav Gruener (1904: 1)

¹⁵ Gustav Gruener (1904: 5)

¹⁶ Gustav Gruener (1904:5, 14)

with that issue, it still helps to give a short overview of Poe's tale principles, or better said the way in which he approached his tales. He was known for trying to restrict their definition¹⁷, meaning he wanted them to be more concise and specific. He was keen on building his tales almost as a painting which then went on showing us what its main concern was. That is why his tales always appear quite stylized at first; just like a painting they first allure us, only to then show us through their intricacies that not everything is as it seems, and beauty sometimes hides darkness. His tales serve the purpose of telling us the truth about human beings, their reactions to specific situations and generally their ways of going about this world. One of the truths his tales seek to make us aware of, and which I will be focusing on in this thesis, is our own inherent duality.

Poe's tale principles were elaborated by G.R. Thompson, who in his article lists three combinations Poe uses when constructing his tales, the first one where an ordinary incident is combined with peculiar tone, then peculiar incident combined with ordinary tone and lastly, peculiar incident combined with peculiar tone.¹⁸ He concludes his article by summarizing Poe's tale technique which is basically a: '*...complete dramatization of an interior worldview of a centrally involved character who seems more or less rational or normal but who is revealed to be peculiar, self-deceived, or mad.*'¹⁹ What he is describing here is essentially our inherent duality, we can appear both sane and insane, or good and bad. And this duality is what is going to be the main interest in the next pages to come.

¹⁷ G.R. Thompson (1994: 170)

¹⁸ G.R. Thompson (1994: 181)

¹⁹ G.R. Thompson (1994: 192)

4. Duality and its manifestation in E.A. Poe's tales

Our inherent duality has been the topic of interest of many authors long before Edgar Allan Poe, but this thesis deals with his treatment of the matter. His understanding of duality can best be observed through his tales, which often take for their protagonist imperfect characters who have problems siding with only one part of their personality. They are walking conflicts. Duality in Poe's work takes on a different shape every time, sometimes it is a direct addressing (such as the one in *William Wilson*) or an indirect one (such as in *Ligeia*).

Although there exists an increased interest in the phenomenon of the double in literature, because it enables us to better depict our conflicting thoughts, still this phenomenon is quite hard to pinpoint. Just as Milica Živković argues in her article "The Double as the 'Unseen' of Culture: Toward a Definition of Doppelgänger", the double seems to: '*... resist narrow categorization and definition*'.²⁰ The double is also a construct of its time; each era in a way has its own understanding of it. It is shaped by its own social context. But most importantly the double always signifies: '*... a desire to be reunited with a lost centre of personality, the double shows... a tension between the laws of human society and the resistance of the unconscious mind to these laws*'.²¹

The double can manifest itself differently, as a ghost, soul, shadow, or a literal mirror reflection which is dependent on its original, and it makes the same original feel at the same time as himself and as the other. It essentially presents humankind's effort to try and understand its inherent duality and try and achieve integration despite cultural restrictions which often make that process difficult.²²

²⁰ Milica Živković (2000: 121)

²¹ Milica Živković (2000: 121)

²² Milica Živković (2000: 122)

What comes as an interesting discovery is the fact how our understanding of the double has changed over time, as it went from a guardian angel to a demonic presence. It went on from being considered a part of us that protects us and forces us to make rational decisions to being a demonic part of us making us act against our best interests. But Milica Živković concludes correctly when saying : *‘The double is defined as evil precisely because of its difference and possible disturbance to the familiar and the known.’*²³ Carl Gustav Jung in a way managed to best explain the essence of the double by noting how he is neither good nor bad, he is just rather a manifestation of one’s suppressed feelings.²⁴ What we call demonic is in reality the undiscovered and unrevealed in our society. Edgar Allan Poe actually ends up understanding and treating the subject matter of duality in line with Jung, as he too does not limit his doubles as good or bad parts of us, he rather constructs them as unknown parts of us capable of unthinkable pursuits.

The most literal manifestation of duality is a *doppelgänger*, whose beginnings can be traced to the year 1796, when Jean Paul coined the word itself.²⁵ The *doppelgänger* is a literal mirror picture of us, and can then on act according to the emotions we have kept hidden. He basically embodies the suppressed. But the *doppelgänger* also does not have a so called: *‘...forma finalis, rather form is constantly deformed and reformed. The doppelgänger is always in process of construction...’*²⁶

4.1. William Wilson

Of the five selected tales depicting aspects of duality, the one entitled *William Wilson* addresses it most directly as it employs real, physical mirror doubling. It follows the attempts of William Wilson One (let us call him like that for better understanding) of escaping from his

²³ Milica Živković (2000: 124)

²⁴ Milica Živković (2000: 126)

²⁵ Dimitris Vardoulakis (2010: 9)

²⁶ Dimitris Vardoulakis (2010: 7)

double William Wilson Two, who basically embodies all his suppressed emotions. In this story, the double within us is physically embodied. But in this instance, the double is not his demonic part, but his conscience. The man himself is in this story already corrupted, but his double, his other part is acting as his guardian angel and trying to lead him to the right path (*'I grew selfwilled, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions.'*²⁷). The tale depicts one man's trying to avoid accepting this other part of himself, a decision that leads to complete annihilation of the two. He fears his double (*'...I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority...'*²⁸). As his double was constantly the suppressed part, he also never managed to be any louder than a whisper, thus only further acknowledging the fact how much the protagonist denied him. The protagonist's own self-pity and wondering what could have happened had he listened to his double, emphasizes that much more the need for reunification (*'...that his moral sense...was far keener than my own; and that I might, to-day, have been a better, and thus a happier man...'*²⁹). But by refusing to accept the other part of himself, as manifested in the literal physical embodiment of a mirror twin, he actually killed himself. They were both equal in their death and they both vanished. In essence this tale depicts a Freudian approach to reuniting two sides of our being through self-annihilation.³⁰ The attempt at reuniting the two sides of our psyche ends up being unsuccessful because the protagonist in this instance, although governed by two forces; the material (Body) and the immaterial (Soul)³¹, ends up siding too much with the Body and fails to see the importance of the advice given by his conscience, here embodied literally in a human double.

²⁷ Edgar Allan Poe (1839: 1)

²⁸ Edgar Allan Poe (1839: 4)

²⁹ Edgar Allan Poe (1839: 6)

³⁰ Shu-ting Kao (2016: 2)

³¹ Shu-ting Kao (2016: 4)

4.2. *Ligeia*

With the tale *Ligeia* starts a series of tales which do not necessarily refer to a literal double, but rather indicate other aspects of our dual nature always in constant need for reunification. The tale deals with another aspect of duality, one where the grotesque is intertwined with the romantic. It also further on proves us how this world is made up of the beautiful and the terrifyingly ugly, and it is only by accepting both that we may find balance. It also juxtaposes love and hate, this tale proves that one does not necessarily exclude the other, as you cannot really hate something, without first having experienced love. Hate often emerges from the disappointment of having lost what we have initially loved. In *Ligeia* duality is interpreted through the medium of love. The tale opens up with numerous descriptions of the protagonist's love for Ligeia and her beauty ('...her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence...made their way into my heart...' / 'In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her.'³²). The first part of the tale is filled with poetic descriptions of her beauty and its impact on the protagonist; he is completely consumed ('The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it!'³³). With the death of Ligeia, all the previous light disappears, now darkness follows. The only image our protagonist now has in his mind is that of death ('...the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave, and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the gentle emotion.'³⁴). Another thing contrasted here are two ways of experiencing love, in this case the protagonist ends up loving profoundly his first wife, Ligeia and hating profusely his second, Rowena ('That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper...I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to a demon than to a man.'³⁵). What can be observed here is that he ends up hating his second wife just as much as he loved his first. The two different

³² Edgar Allan Poe (1838: 1)

³³ Edgar Allan Poe (1838: 2)

³⁴ Edgar Allan Poe (1838: 4)

³⁵ Edgar Allan Poe (1838: 7)

ways in which he treats his wives shows us how love in this tale ends up revealing a double in a man, one capable of pure, passionate and genuine love and utter and inexplicable hatred. Just as Dorothea E. Von Mücke argues in her article “Ligeia: Her Large and Luminous Orbs”, this tale consists of hidden dualities, one of the most apparent one being the plot itself, as one part centers on the narrator’s remembrance of his first wife and the mourning of her death, and the second part on his cruel behavior with his second wife, Rowena.³⁶

4.3. *The Tell-Tale Heart*

This tale represents another aspect of duality which Poe employed rather often in his tales. *The Tell-Tale Heart* depicts our struggle with this inexplicable need to do what is indeed bad, although we are at the same time aware of the fact we are acting against our best interest. It is this conflict that makes us then on feel as a ticking bomb, just waiting to explode. Now, this tale does not name this evil force within us, thus only further emphasizing its dangerous nature.

The tale focuses on a confused protagonist dealing and fighting with what is essentially an invisible and unknown enemy. The opening lines see a man desperately trying to convince himself he has not lost his mind and is in fact in control of his actions. Unfortunately, this only proves to be another act of despair in the event of not seeing your enemy (*‘IT’S TRUE! YES, I HAVE BEEN ILL, very ill. But why do you say that I have lost control of my mind, why do you say that I am mad? Can you not see that I have full control of my mind?’*³⁷). Now, what in a way separates this protagonist from the one we have been acquainted in *William Wilson* is the fact that the protagonist / narrator in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is aware of his dual nature and he is indeed trying to give meaning to his actions, he is thirsty for answers (*‘I heard sounds*

³⁶ Dorothea E. Von Mücke (2006: 149)

³⁷ Edgar Allan Poe (1843: 64)

*from heaven; and I heard sounds from hell!*³⁸). The tale itself, plot-wise, follows a man who one night, grown tired of an old man's 'vulture' eye, decides he needs to kill the old man, he does so and ends up not being able to live with that evil doing only to then confess his crime to the police. Throughout the tale, the protagonist is constantly trying to make us aware of the fact that he did not know why he had killed the old man, as he did not hate him. Thus, the tale focuses on the issue of externalizing the problem, rather than facing it, as the man decides to project all his insecurities and conflicting thoughts into that old man's eye, and by killing the eye, he manages, or at least he believes so, to get rid of the problem (*'And so, I finally decided I had to kill the old man and close that eye forever! / 'For it was not the old man I felt I had to kill; it was the eye, his Evil Eye.'*³⁹). His confession of the crime essentially shows us what happens when we suppress emotions. Now, although this tale overdramatizes the issue, it is still not that far from the truth, as suppression leads to uncontrollable violent acts.

4.4. The Imp of the Perverse

Following the previous tale which only presented in front of us this inexplicable dual ability of simultaneously being capable of great good and extreme evil, now the following tale deals with further and more accurately trying to explain this conflicting phenomenon. For one, it actually succeeds in naming this phenomenon, *The Imp of the Perverse*. The tale's opening lines make it resemble to a psychological study, rather than a one man's gallows confession. The narrator / protagonist argues how we have all overlooked the importance of our inherent dual nature, and by doing so we have given birth to this imp of the perverse, a side of us which through the process of suppression has become far more violent (*'In the pure arrogance of the reason, we have all overlooked it. We have suffered its existence to escape*

³⁸ Edgar Allan Poe (1843: 64)

³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe (1843: 65)

our senses... We saw no need of the impulse...⁴⁰). The essence of this imp lies in the fact that it simply makes us act against our best interests, it perpetrates actions that we consciously know we should not do. And the more we deny its existence and growing presence, the more violent it gets, or rather do we get, so much so that we end up fearing ourselves and the growing violence within us (*We tremble with the violence of the conflict within us,- of the definite with the indefinite-of the substance with the shadow.⁴¹*). Daniel Hoffman argues in his article "Grotesques and Arabesques" : *'...this Imp of the Perverse is but a portion of the ego separated out from the rest, which seeks the destruction of that from which it is separated...Life is on a collision course with death; the death-wish betrays, whenever it can, the life instinct.⁴²* This constant denying of our self-division and trying to escape its reunification always proves disastrous and further proves the need for its acceptance.

4.5. The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether

I conclude with the tale *The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether*, which, although it does not exhibit any direct mention of duality, it nonetheless deals with the fine line between sanity and insanity. The tale focuses on the narrator's visit to Monsieur Maillard's insane asylum where he meets all sorts of people, only to find out he has all along been in the company of patients, and not people working there. But, that is not necessarily the point of the story. I found the story quite fascinating and apt as an ending to this thesis, as it does discuss an aspect of duality, the one of dual appearances, one man appearing sane until proven otherwise and vice versa. We go on a journey with the narrator, and every time he has a feeling something is wrong, so do we as readers. Everybody appears well-educated and well-mannered (*I soon found that nearly all the company were well educated; and my host was a*

⁴⁰ Edgar Allan Poe (1845: 1)

⁴¹ Edgar Allan Poe (1845: 3)

⁴² Daniel Hoffman (2009: 14)

world of good-humored anecdote in himself.⁴³), but still there is a constant underlying feeling of strangeness (‘There was an air of oddity, in short, about the dress of the whole party...Upon the whole, I could not help thinking that there was much of the bizarre about everything I saw...’*⁴⁴). The point of this story lies in its depiction of conventionalized understanding of sanity and insanity. The fact that one person can at the same time appear both sane and insane proves how a lot of our understanding of what is to be deemed normal or abnormal comes from arbitrary and conventionalized notions. The truth is, within us exist two contrasting natures, and although to better manage them we have labeled one good and the other one bad, the fact remains we need them both reunified as to probe the essence of who we truly are.*

⁴³ Edgar Allan Poe (1844: 5)

⁴⁴ Edgar Allan Poe (1844: 4,5)

CONCLUSION

What Edgar Allan Poe's work teaches us is that oftentimes the truth is indeed stranger than fiction. But fiction on the other hand serves as that enthralling part of his tales which attracts our attention and further on enables the educating part to have that much more of an impact. Our psyche was what fascinated him the most, the secret ways of our mind. He organized his tales in a way that made them both entertaining through their usage of images of horror and terror, but for anybody who was as equally interested in trying to find out as much as possible about their conflicting nature, his tales served as an excellent starting point. As an innovative writer who despised narrow categorizations, he managed to bring a fresh take on Gothic fiction, making it one of the most widely used and read genres. On the other hand as a man who was deeply preoccupied with his and the general human psyche, he imbued his work with intricate psychological studies of human behavior and interactions, focusing on their dual nature. Firmly believing in human fallibility rather than perfectibility, he set out to only use realistic and conflicted characters on the verge of insanity. The battle with that insanity was for him a matter of daily struggle. The only way of 'escaping' it was through accepting our imperfections. Balance in Poe's opinion was an internal matter, existing only when we make peace with our fallibility and bring about the reunification of our seemingly contrasting natures.

Edgar Allan Poe's importance lies in creating timeless written pieces that will never cease to be relevant because they are so deeply embedded in the human nature and its inherent duality which is constantly only changing its appearances.

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