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# Introduction

In the wake of The Age of Enlightenment many new philosophies, sciences, and discourses emerged, some of these were concerned with complex questions such as what defines mankind, what differentiates man from animal, and how the human mind works. Many of these thoughts are today looked on with a certain amount of scepticism, and are regarded as too simplistic or even erroneous, however, common to all the theories are that they were the first steps towards understanding life from a rational point of view rather than a religious or superstitious one. As a reaction against this celebration of logic and reason, authors began depicting the supernatural and inexplicable through what is now referred to as Gothic narratives. In the introduction to *Empire and the Gothic: the Politics of Genre* (2003)Andrew Smith and William Hughes write that ‘the Gothic gives a particular added emphasis to this through its seeming celebration of the irrational, the outlawed and the socially and culturally dispossessed. It is this challenge to Enlightenment notions of rationality which has also drawn the attention of postcolonial critics’ (Hughes, 2003; 1). This view on the Gothic genre as a reaction against the Enlightenment is also shared by Rosemary Jackson author of *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (1981) who writes, that ‘unreason silenced throughout the Enlightenment period, erupts in the fantastic act of Sade, Goya and horror fiction’ (Jackson, 1981; 95). The beginning of the Gothic genre is generally dated to the publication of the English writer Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story* (1764), however, it is the American author Edgar Allan Poe, another great contributor to the Gothic tradition, whose works will be discusses in this thesis. Poe’s works are considered to be the epitome of the Gothic tradition and the reaction against the Enlightenment’s rational world view. Some of the themes which Poe’s works often deal with are murder, madness and seeming supernatural events, which have caused him to become one of the front figures in the American Gothic tradition.

The Gothic genre, however, was not the only genre which Poe attributed to. His short story “The Murders in Rue Morgue” (1841) in which we follow C. Auguste Dupin solving crimes and mysteries in Paris, is widely regarded as the first detective story ever published. In this story Poe demonstrates the power of analysis and science as he solves a mystery through the use of analysis and deduction. Poe’s detective fiction seems to be a contrast to the Gothic genre, as it celebrates reason in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Tony Magistrale, author of *Student Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* (2001) writes that a ‘contradictory propensity is evident in the very genres where Poe chose to work’ (Magistrale, 2001; 20) due to the irrationality of the Gothic genre, and the celebration of logic and reason in his detective fiction. However, this general consensus that Gothic literature is a reaction against the Enlightenment is disputed by James P. Carson who in his essay “Enlightenment, Popular Culture, and Gothic Fiction” (1996) questions ‘the claim that there is a sharp break between the Enlightenment and Romanticism’ (Carson, 1996; 256-257).

Based on Carson’s claim that Gothic literature should not be discarded as a celebration of the irrational but rather seen as a widening of the Enlightenment’s rational world view (Carson, 1996; 257), I will aim to uncover whether Poe’s works should be reinterpreted as a widening of the Enlightenment, rather than a reaction against it. My thesis is that Poe uses his short stories and poems as a means for uncovering and understanding the complexities of the mind, rather than celebrating the seemingly inexplicable obscurities of it. To support my claim that Poe uses his works as tools for illustrating and analysing the hitherto unexplained dark emotions, I will first explore his disciplined approach to analysis and poetic composition. For this purpose I will briefly go through the key points made by Poe in his essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846) in which he discusses the importance of taking an analytic and structured approach to the construction of poetry. Furthermore, I will take my point of departure in “The Murders in Rue Morgue” (1841), as this will enable me to establish whether or not there is a link between Poe’s Gothic writing and the Enlightenment’s favouring of science and reason. “Rue Morgue” embodies the Enlightenment’s tradition due to it celebration of the analytical mind, and includes references to James Burnett, Lord Monboddo’s *The Origin and Progress of Language vol. 1-6* (1773-92)in which the origin of language and its influence on the development man is discussed, based on studies of orang-utans and its similarities to man. I will give an account of Monboddo’s thoughts on language, mankind and orang-utans which will serve as a basis for my later interpretation of Poe’s use of the orang-utan as means for understanding the darker sides of the mind.

Despite the detective genre’s strong ties to the rational Enlightenment, there has been a tradition of interpreting “Rue Morgue” from a Freudian perspective. An approach which traditionally is strongly connected with the Gothic genre, because Freud used E.T.A Hoffmann’s Gothic short story “The Sandman” (1816) as a basis for his essay “The Uncanny” (1919) in which he theorises what mechanics are at work, when the human mind experiences feelings of terror and fear. This connection between the logical Enlightenment and the Freudian interpretations which traditionally are linked with the inexplicable aspects of the Gothic genre, makes the detective fiction an appropriate starting point for my later analysis of Poe’s Gothic stories as it can give an insight into the relationship between the Enlightenment and Poe’s Gothic stories. I will therefore do a Freudian reading of “Rue Morgue” in order to gain an understanding of the similarities between Poe’s rational detective story and his apparent irrational gothic genre. This will give me a basis for uncovering whether Poe uses his Gothic narratives to uncover mysteries in the same way as he does through his detective fiction.

In order to back up my argument, that Poe’s Gothic writing is a widening of and not a reaction against the Enlightenment, I will do a Freudian reading of his short stories “The Fall of The House of Usher” (1839), “The Black Cat” (1843), and “William Wilson” (1839) which will enable me to uncover what elements of the mind are at play in the stories, and whether Poe might have been aware of these. The Freudian tradition dictates that literature should be read as an expression of the author’s subconscious mind, which is seen in Freud’s colleague Marie Bonaparte’s psycho-biographical reading of Poe’s works in *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* (1933) in which she attempts to explain the psychological elements as Poe’s reactions to experiences and childhood traumas. This psycho-biographic approach to literature has caused the Freudian analysis to be disregarded by many critics, who believes it to be irrelevant and over-thought. However, I believe that despite the tradition of reading phallic symbols and childhood traumas into every aspect of a text, Freud’s psychoanalysis still has a legitimacy, because it offers an insight into the psychological references and images found in texts, which is indispensable to the understanding of Poe’s works, which often deal with madness and terror – two subjects which Freud’s theories thoroughly cover. I do not agree with Bonaparte’s psycho-biographical reading of Poe, however, I still believe that Freud’s psychoanalysis and Bonaparte’s interpretations have their raison d’être, as they offer an insight into some of the mechanics at work in Gothic literature. I will therefore revisit the Freudian readings in order to gain an understanding of what the Gothic narratives represent and if there is a conscious method behind the use of references to the mind, which might have been prompted by observations Poe made of his contemporary society, rather than personal traumas. I will also use Freud’s theories on the uncanny, as these provides a tool for understanding the seeming supernatural elements in Poe’s works as representations of the mind. This will give me an insight into how Poe employs supernatural imagery in order to play out tales of madness and terror.

In order to support my Freudian interpretations of Poe’s works and the supernatural elements as images of the mind, I will use Tzvetan Todorov’s theories on the Fantastic, as these will enable me to uncover whether Poe’s supernatural tales should be classified as uncanny or marvellous. For this purpose I will give an account of the differences between Todorov’s fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous in order to be able to distinguish between supernatural elements and elements which only appear supernatural. By analysing Poe’s works through Todorov’s theories I aim to uncover if the supernatural elements in his works can be understood through explanations of this world e.g. madness, or if they defy the natural order and therefore are purely supernatural. Furthermore, I wish to add some of Michel Foucault’s thoughts on madness in the late 18th century, as this will give me an insight into how madness was viewed during the period in which Poe wrote his stories. By clarifying the view on madness during the late 18th century and early 19th century, I hope to gain an understanding of how Poe’s narratives either break with these views or if they are written in keeping with them.

Finally I wish to uncover whether Poe uses his Gothic writing to directly comment on elements found in his contemporary society. For the purpose of this, I will analyse “The Imp of the Perverse” (1845) and the self-destructive emotions which are depicted in the story. Because “The Imp of the Perverse” is a combination of an essay and a short story it gives an insight into how Poe might have intended his works to be read. I will therefore analyse what defines the mental state which is referred to as ‘the imp of the perverse’ by Poe, and how he attempts to understand and explain it throughout the text. Furthermore I will give an account of the 19th century science ‘phrenology’ which is mentioned several times through the text, and how Poe attempts to use this science as a means for uncovering the mechanics behind a unbalanced psyche.

To sum up, my aim with this thesis is to uncover whether Poe’s writing should be dismissed as irrational narratives, written as a contrast to the Enlightenment’s rational world view, or if it is a commentary on and a discussion of the his contemporary society’s view on madness and other dark sides of the mind. Furthermore, I wish to establish if Poe adopts an analytical approach to the madness portrayed in his Gothic writing, thus echoing the Enlightenment’s traditions. My thesis is that Poe was aware of the psychological elements which can now be explained through a Freudian analysis, and that his writing therefore should be regarded as a cry for more thorough studies, or even as an unscientific analysis, of the human mind, thereby making his works a part of the rational Enlightenment’s search for explanations through science, rather than a reaction against it.

# The Analytic Poe(t)

My argument that Edgar Allan Poe used his fictional works to discuss the various discourses, both scientific and philosophical, which emerged during the 18th and 19thcentury originate in the fact that several critics have touched upon the subject of *analysis* when dealing with Poe and specifically his detective fiction, however, only a few have regarded his fiction as analysis and interpretations in itself. There seems to be a general consensus that the element of analysis plays an important role in Poe’s fiction, whether it is his detective Dupin’s methodical approach to a mystery, or critics who wish to understand the different layers found in Poe’s Gothic works. John T. Irwin writes in his article “Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story; Also Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson” (1986), that while later detective stories are build around an adventurous detective who ventures out on quests to solve a mysteries, Poe’s character Dupin is as one dimensional as can be, and his adventures are hardly adventurous because they merely evolve around reading news paper articles or scrutinizing the information the police or others have gained. Irwin refers to Poe’s detective stories as ‘the analytic detective story’(Irwin, 1986; 1168), which he defines as a story with nearly no interest in the characters, instead it is purely plot driven, with a focus on the analytic solution to the riddle (Irwin, 1986; 1169). The importance of the analytic elements in Poe’s short stories is also emphasised in *The American face of Edgar Allan Poe* (1995). HereStephen Rachman dedicates a major section to what he refers to as “Generic Logic”(Rachman, 1995; 91-178) in which various essays concerning the analytic and logic aspects of Poe’s writing are found. One of the essays found in this section is Shawn Rosenheim’s “Detective Fiction, Psychoanalysis and the Analytic Sublime” which primarily deals with Poe’s detective story “The Murders in Rue Morgue” (1841) in which an unnamed narrator follows his friend C. Auguste Dupin, as he tries to uncover the truth behind the murder of two women; Mme. L’Espanaye and her daughter. Dupin solves the mystery through a thorough analysis of statements given by witnesses, and comes to the conclusion that the murders have been committed by an orang-utan which had escaped its owner*.* Rosenheim’s article can roughly be divided into two sections: in part one he maps out how Poe was inspired by his contemporaries and the currents in society, and part two is dedicated to the psychoanalytical tradition which surrounds the detective genre, and lists some of the psychoanalytical elements found in the text. However, the two sections are never combined, and even though Rosenheim touches upon the subject of whether or not Poe in fact was aware of some of the sexual undertones, he never truly states, that Poe not only discussed discourses found in his age, but also observations he made regarding the mind.

Rosenheim, Irwin and many others before gather information given by other critics, then adding their own interpretations in order to reveal the truth behind Poe’s words, just like Dupin, who reads newspaper articles, listens to statements and then does his own investigation which leads to the answer.

“The Police have laid bare the floors, the ceiling, and the masonry of the walls, in every direction. No *secret* issues could have escaped their vigilance. But, not trusting to *their* eyes, I examined with my own. (…) My own examination was somewhat more particular, and was so for the reason I have just given – because here it was, I knew, that all apparent impossibilities must be proved to be not such in reality. (Rue Morgue, 1841; 16)

Like Dupin I wish to revisit other critics discoveries in order to uncover whether Poe is as oblivious to the psychoanalytic elements of his own text, as the Parisian police are when uncovering the mystery of the macabre murders of the two women, or if there is a method or perhaps even an investigation more to be found in the composition of the elements which corresponds with Freud’s later theories. However, before I proceed to my analysis of “Rue Morgue”, I shall first give an account of Poe’s view on analysis in relation to his own texts based on his essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846).

## The Composition of a Text

The importance of analysis in relation to Poe and his writing is not only recognised by his critics, but also by Poe himself. This is made clear in the essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), in which he explains how he believes a good text is written, and uses his own poem “The Raven” (1845) as an example of how the composition of good writing should be constructed. In the following chapter, I will elaborate on Poe’s attitude towards analysis in relation to his writing. This will be done in order to uncover if there is a basis for my claim, that Poe was so aware of his own writing that the elements which can be explained through a Freudian interpretation, were in fact Poe’s own way of discussing and understanding the human mind.

Edgar Allan Poe’s essay “The Philosophy of Composition” has caused some debate among critics because of its strictly logical approach to writing. According to Kenneth Silverman, author of *Edgar Allan Poe – Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* (1992) some critics have suggested, that Poe’s essay was a hoax that should not be taken seriously (Silverman, 1992; 296). Silverman claims that the scepticism is caused by the manner in which Poe has written the essay and uses Poe’s internal discussion of what is the most melancholic topic to write about, as an example:

‘(…) I asked myself –“Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?” Death – was the obvious reply. “And when,” I said, “is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?” (…) the answer, here also, is obvious – “When it is most closely allies itself to Beauty: The death, then of a beautiful woman, is unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.” (Philosophy, 1846; 4)

According to Kenneth Silverman, this paragraph mirror’s one of Poe’s poetic devises which he uses in many of his tales of madness:

‘The voice that speaks here and throughout “The Philosophy of Composition” recalls that of the crazed narrators in some of Poe’s tales, whose tone of eerie calm is intended to demonstrate their lucidity and self-control, but arouses only the reader’s fear and pity.’

Because of the similarities between Poe’s characters and his own way of recounting his theories, critics have come to suggest, that the essay was meant as a satire, and not as a truthful insight into Poe’s approach to his own writing (Silverman, 1992; 296). However, Silverman also emphasises, that there have been many critics who believe Poe’s essay to be genuine, as ‘it has long been recognised as a preliminary manifesto of literary modernism and postmodernism’ (Silverman, 1992; 295) due to its analytic approach to the creation of poetry. For the purpose of this assignment, I have chosen to regard the essay as a factual account of Poe’s view on writing methods, even though it seems that Poe may have carried his points to excess. I base my claim, that the essay is factual on the fact, that Poe also exhibits an awareness of the process behind the creation of a text, when he reveals the method behind the detective genre and its mysteries:

“Where is the ingenuity of unravelling a web which you yourself have woven for the express purpose of unravelling? (…) I do not mean to say that they are not ingenuous – but people think they are more ingenious than they are – on account of the method and *air* of method.” (Poe, as quoted in: Rosenheim, 1995; 154)

Here Poe demonstrates that he is aware of the process behind his detective fiction, and uses a specific technique and approach when he constructs his stories, which is to know the answer to the mystery before the mystery unfolds. This statement that the solving of the mystery in detective fiction is not as impressive as Poe’s audience seemed to believe corresponds well with Poe’s attempt of demystify the creative process behind a text in “The Philosophy of Composition”:

‘Most writers – poets in especial – prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy – an ecstatic intuition – and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes (…)(Composition, 1846; 1).

In order to expose the writer’s methodical rather than intuitive approach to the creation of a text, Poe reveals his own methods, which he haughtily claims to be the recipe for a successful text. One of the criteria is, according to Poe, the length of the text. Poe claims that the perfect text is a short story that can be read in one sitting, because otherwise the reader’s concentration will be broken and the effect of the text lost (Composition, 1846; 2). This claim corresponds well with Poe’s own body of work, which primarily consists of short stories, essays and poems[[1]](#footnote-1), and therefore adds to my argument that the essay is factual examination of Poe’s own method of writing. Another precondition for writing a good text is, according to Poe, that the author must know the ending of the story, before putting pen to paper:

‘Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *denouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, of causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention’ (Composition, 1846; 1)

This is in keeping with Poe’s disclosure of the dynamics behind the solution to the mysteries in a detective story. Again we see, how the statements in “The Philosophy of Composition” correspond with Poe’s own remarks on his work method and his own works.

A third and important element in the creation of a text is what Poe refers to as the ‘unity of effect’ (Composition, 1846; 2). This effect refers to the mood of the text and what effect the text should have on the reader, which also should be established before writing. As we have seen in a quotation earlier, Poe believed melancholy and the death of a beautiful woman to be the most poetic topics to write about. This combination of death and beauty as a poetic device echoes the 18th century philosopher Edmund Burke’s thoughts on the sublime which he discussed in depth in the book *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Burke distinguished between the sublime and the beautiful by claiming, that the sublime is ‘associated with grand feelings stimulated by obscurity and highly dramatic encounters with the world in which a sense of awe was paradoxically inspired by a feeling of incomprehension’ (Smith, 2007; 11). Beauty on the other hand is ‘linked to notions of decorum and feelings for society’ (Smith, 2007; 11). Burke’s sublime is often paired with death, as he believed that the fear of death was the strongest source of the sublime, because a person is faced with the unknown, thus experiencing anxieties and terror, which are two prominent emotions in the fabrication of the sublime. Poe’s idea that ‘the most poetic topic in the world’ is ‘the death of a beautiful woman’ combines Burke’s the sublime and the beautiful, because the transitoriness of beauty and life is showcased. Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* and the sublime seem in contrast Poe’s wish to be analytical in his approach to poetry, because the sublime is defined as something which is incomprehensible and therefore evokes feelings of terror and awe (Smith, 2007; 11). However, Andrew Smith points out, that Burke attempts to uncover the mechanics behind strong and negative feelings like terror through *Philosophical Enquiry* and that he hypothesises ‘that the subject is not defined by noble or lofty feelings, but by anxious feelings relating to self-preservation’ (Smith, 2007; 12). Burke anticipates the Freudian idea that the individual is shaped by traumas and the ability to combat them. Another important Freudian text which Burke’s sublime is a forerunner of is the essay “The Uncanny” in which Freud also attempts to theorise the mechanics behind fear. However, despite the connection between Burke’s sublime and Freud’s Uncanny I will not use Burke’s theories on the sublime, due to the fact that these rely on religion rather than science, which is my main focus in this thesis. Furthermore, the fact that the sublime by definition is inexplicable makes it unsuited for my later analysis in which I search for a explanation for the inexplicable. It is, however, still important to recognise Burke’s influence on Poe’s works, as the sublime seemingly inspired Poe in his choice of poetic devices, hence the claim that the most poetic topic is the death of a beautiful woman.

By structuring the creation of his literary works, Poe seems to go against the Freudian idea, that literature is a dreamlike expression of the author’s subconscious mind, and that the symbolism is a result of traumas which find expression through writing. The contrast to the Freudian idea of literature as expressions of the subconscious mind emphasises my claim that one should pay attention, not only to the critics’ interpretations and analyses of Poe’s works, but also to Poe’s own analysis which he conducts through his works. Because Poe is so focused on the construction of the plot and the various poetic devises, or the ‘unity of effect’, one must assume that the similarities between his texts and the human mind (I shall return to these later in my thesis) are not something which have been conjured up at random, but are as deliberate as the everything else in Poe’s works.

# The Enlightened Orang-utan

In order to prove my claim that Poe found inspiration in his contemporary society, and discussed the tendencies which he observed through his literature, I will now establish how some of the elements found in “Rue Morgue”are based on publications and ideas which emerged during the late period of the Enlightenment. In this first section I will primarily focus on the reverberations of the Enlightenment, and the new discourses concerning the development of mankind and the relationship with nature. After having established how concrete literary works have influenced Poe, I will move on to do a Freudian reading of the psychoanalytic tendencies found in “Rue Morgue”. This will enable me to understand the structure of Poe’s the detective fiction and shed light on whether or not Poe was in fact aware of these tendencies which Freud later theorised, or if it is something which critics only have read into it.

The Age of Enlightenment is a term used about ‘an intellectual movement and cultural ambiance’ (Abrams, 2005; 80) which emerged during the seventeenth century. People started breaking with the old traditions of superstition, suppression and the universal truth of authorities e.g. the church, and instead started celebrating reason and science. The Enlightenment influenced art, philosophy, and politics, and the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) is a result of this new way of thinking. In order to support my claim, that Poe’s texts was written as a widening of the Enlightenment’s search for understanding and reason, I need to establish whether or not Poe was influenced by his contemporaries and how this is expressed through his writing.

Poe’s detective stories straddle the transition between the Age of Enlightenment’s celebration of reason and facts, and the gothic fiction’s fascination with nature, the supernatural, and the irrational. In *Uncertain Chances: Science, Scepticism, and Belief in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2011)*,* Maurice S. Lee discusses the scientific and philosophical aspects of Poe’s literature.

‘D.H. Lawrence once called Poe “almost more a scientist than an artist.” He did not mean it as a compliment, and (as “almost” suggests) most readers of Poe do not consider him a legitimate student of science, especially those following the lead of Eliot, who complained of Poe’s “lack of qualification in philosophy, theology, or natural science.”’ (Lee, 2011; 18)

Here Lee sums up the confused relationship between science and fiction, which seems to have merged in Poe’s short stories, especially his detective stories. However, despite the tendency to disregard Poe as a philosopher and scientist, there seems to be the general consensus that Poe flirted with science and philosophy in his works. It is this unlikely relationship between author and scientist, romanticism and enlightenment, which I wish to uncover in the following section, by mapping out the philosophical and scientific discourses which Poe seems to have been inspired by when writing “The Murders in Rue Morgue”.

Some of the thoughts which marked the 17th and 18th century concerned what defined mankind and what separated man from animal. One of the proto-evolutionary texts, which Poe quite possibly have known and read, is James Burnet, Lord Monboddo’s *The Origin and Progress of Language* *vol. 1-6* (Burnett, 1773-92), in which he discusses the development of language, culture, mankind, and the relationship between man and orang-utans. According to Shawn Rosenheim, author of “Detective Fiction, Psychoanalysis and the Analytic Sublime”*,* Poe found inspiration in these types of studies and the discourse is echoed in “Rue Morgue” where Monboddo’s orang-utan is represented. Monboddo’s thoughts on language and culture in relation to orang-utans influenced the Enlightenment movement due to it insight into how language plays an important role in the definition of what makes humanity. Monboddo based his philosophies on various pre-existing texts, including French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, whose findings regarding orang-utans[[2]](#footnote-2) is discussed and explored in the first volume of Monboddo’s *Of the Origin and Progress of Language.* Oscar Sherwin, author of “A Man with a Tail – Lord Monboddo” writes that ‘*Of the Origin and Progress of Language (6 vols., 1773-92)* is primarily an eloquent plea for a more enthusiastic study of classical languages and literature’ (Sherwin, 1958; 435), which explains why Monboddo’s proto-evolutionary commentary on the relationship between man and ape is not as highly regarded as Darwin’s later theories, seeing as he formed more questions than he answered. Furthermore, ‘he earned more fame by his eccentricities than by his acuteness and learning’ (Sherwin, 1958; 437) because he went against the Enlightenment’s tendencies to celebrate everything modern when he stressed the importance of understanding and learning from the ancient Greeks who he glorified.

Despite being deemed an eccentric by his contemporaries, Monboddo still offers an interesting insight into the early thoughts on humanity and evolution, which is emphasised by the fact, that Poe takes inspiration from Monboddo’s theory that orang-utan’s are a subspecies of humans:

‘As I have so often mentioned this race of animals, I think it proper to give here a more particular account of them than I have hitherto done; being, according to my hypothesis, a barbarous nation, which has not yet learned the use of speech.’ (Burnett, 1774; 270)

Monboddo’s theory that orang-utans are a ‘barbarous nation’ and a subspecies of humans who has ‘not yet learned the use of speech’ is in contrast to Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon’s claim that humans and apes are two unrelated species. To back up his claim, Monboddo uses Buffon’s own findings against him, when he lists the facts concerning orang-utans which Buffon had collected.

‘Buffon pronounces, that, as to his body, he is altogether man, both outside and inside, excepting small variations (…). And more particularly, he has, says Mr Buffon, the tongue, and the other organs of pronunciation, the same those of man; and the brain is altogether of the same form and the same size. He and man are the only animals that have the viscera, such as the heart, the lungs, the liver, the stomach and intestines, exactly of the same structure; and they alone have buttocks and calfs of the leg, which make the more proper for walking upright, than any other animal.’ (Burnett, 1774; 271)

These physical similarities between man and ape, leads Monboddo to conclude that orang-utans and humans are of the same species, and he supports this argument, by claiming that orang-utans can express human emotions such as guilt and modesty (Burnett, 1774; 272). Monboddo focuses on the physical similarities, because he believes that what ‘chiefly distinguished human nature from that of the brute was not the actual possession of higher faculties, but the greater capacity of acquiring them’ (Sherwin, 1958; 443). This distinction causes him to ridicule Buffon for his idea that ‘the state of pure nature, in which man had not the use of speech, is a state altogether ideal and imaginary’ (Burnett, 1774; 293), because Monboddo sees language as a sign of evolution. This is also emphasised by his homage to the ancient Greeks, who he saw as ‘our superiors in philosophy, science, art, physical characteristics of strength and stature and longevity’ (Sherwin, 1958; 438), and their language is therefore one of the only ones which had removed itself completely from the original barbarity in mankind, which the orang-utan represents. This theory, however, is deemed illogical by Oscar Sherwin, because Monboddo both claims to see regression and evolution in mankind through his examination of orang-utans as well as Greek history.

His [Monboddo’s] assertion that the [human]race had degenerated mentally, morally, and physically was curiously illogical when taken in connection with his admission of the animal ancestry of man’ (Sherwin, 1958; 440)

Sherwin, however, seems to forget his own claim, that Monboddo’s *Of the Origin of Origin and Progress of Language* was not a definitive argument on evolution, but a cry for more research in this area. Monboddo’s text should therefore not be regarded as definitive evidence of anything, but as a steppingstone towards understanding humanity, language and art. The fact that Monboddo’s text forms a basis for a discussion is emphasised by Poe, who uses “Rue Morgue” to elaborate on the thoughts concerning language and its role in evolution. When Poe explores the differences as well as similarities between man and animal through the various statements given by witnesses concerning the origin of the madman, it can be argued, that he answers Monboddo’s wish, by further exploring the relationship between language and humanity. Poe illustrates how language, or want for the same, can help determine the origin and identity of the ‘madman’, thus proving the importance of language and the understanding of it. When Poe uses language to identify the murderer he therefore follows in Monboddo’s footsteps, because he too sees language as a tool for identifying not only humans, but also status and intelligence. Poe deducts from the descriptions of the culprits language, that they are dealing with an orang-utan, because he too seems to understand language from a hierarchical perspective; the lesser a human, e.g. a madman, the lesser developed a language.

‘(…) we have gone so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification. What result, then, has ensued? What impression have I made upon your fancy?’ (…) the voice of a madman, even in their wildest paroxysms, are never found too tally with that peculiar voice heard upon the stairs. Madmen are of some nation, and their language, however incoherent in its words, has always the coherence of syllabification.’ (Rue Morgue, 1841; 20)

Because the descriptions of the sounds heard in the L’Espanaye mansion all point in different directions, Dupin concludes that even though the murderer has some features which can be interpreted as human, it still differs in one of the most crucial aspects when defining humanity; language.

The difference between the man and ape, and the power of language is also emphasised through the narrative surrounding the orang-utan and its escape. Here it is revealed to the reader, that the orang-utan desires to be like its master when it attempts to mimic his shaving routine. Shaving becomes a symbol of humanity and civilisation, because it, like language, separates the wild and untamed from the civilised. Another clue to the fact that the ape is envious of man’s ability to use language is the manner in which it kills the two women. When the L’Espanaye’s are found they are both terribly maltreated and the ape has cut open their throats with the sailor’s razorblade. Again we see how the orang-utan is envious of the women’s ability to speak, and therefore targets their throat area, which is connected to language skills and is what separates the uncultivated animals from humans. I shall return to this relationship between the orang-utan and the cultivated world in the chapter “The Human Ape”, however, it is important to note, that the orang-utan’s attack of the women’s ability to speak creates a proto-Darwinian commentary on the relationship between apes and humans. When the orang-utan destroys the very essence of being a cultivated human, Poe emphasises the difference between man and ape, and at the same time introduces the fear of regression, due to the orang-utan’s success in overpowering man, hence the murders of the L’Espanayes. Here we see how the hierarchy of nature can be broken because the ape uses a razorblade, something which represents the cultivated world, to destroy another essential part of mankind, the ability to communicate through languages. Shawn Rosenheim very aptly describes Poe’s investigation into the relationship between language, culture, humankind and nature when he concludes that ‘Poe simultaneously dramatizes both the power of human analysis and his fear of that life without language might be like’ (Rosenheim, 1995; 160).

Rosenheim also explains Monboddo’s interest in orang-utans when he writes that ‘the orang-utan offered Enlightenment thinkers a liminal figure of the human at a time when language was crucially involved in the definition of humanity’ (Rosenheim, 1995; 158). As we have seen through my analysis, Monboddo uses the orang-utan as a point of reference when he attempts to gain an insight, not only into the relationship between animal and man, but also into human nature and culture, by understanding and defining the similarities and differences between two so similar and yet so different beings. Monboddo concludes that ‘no species of thing is formed at once but by steps and progression from one stage to another. Thus naturalists observe several different appearances betwixt the *feed* and the *vegetable,* the embryo and the animal. (…) There is the same progress, according to my hypothesis, in the formation of *man* (…)*’* (Monboddo, 17; 175-76). This proto-Darwinian conclusion on the evolution of humanity is, as we have seen, scrutinized in “Rue Morgue”, and by combining sensational fiction with Monboddo’s theories, Poe establishes the bridge between fiction and science, thus supporting my claim, that Poe’s works should be seen as a widening of the Enlightenment and not a break with it.

## Monboddo’s Orang-utan and Freud’s Id

When dealing with Poe’s detective stories it is almost impossible not to include Freud’s psychoanalysis, because “Freudian readers have long been attracted to detective fiction just because the genre’s structure and themes so often echo central psychoanalytical scenarios” (Rosenheim, 1995; 168). However, almost all Freudian interpretations of Poe’s short stories assume that because Freud’s psychoanalysis was not published until almost a century after Poe wrote his short stories, the psychoanalytical elements must be a coincidence, or an expression of Poe’s subconscious mind. This view, on pre-Freudian literature, however, leaves the author as someone who has no control of his art, and who is merely at the mercy of his subconscious mind. As previously mentioned, I wish to challenge this view, by showcasing that Poe was just as conscious of the elements, which now are referred to as Freudian, as he was of his use of Monboddo’s orang-utan as the murderer. This claim can also be supported by Poe’s use of Monboddo’s and Buffon’s thoughts on humanity, because some of these are not only reminiscent of Darwin’s evolutionary theories, but also of Freud’s later psychoanalysis. This similarity between Monboddo’s theories and Freud’s psychoanalysis will be discussed in the following section, and will give an insight into the possible study of the mind, which I believe Poe executes in “Rue Morgue”.

As mentioned, Monboddo’s inquiry into the relationship between man, animal and language does not only focus on the biological differences and similarities, but also the cultural disparities. This connection between nature and culture opens up to the thought, that because man has these animalistic roots, how much of these are left in the cultivated human being, and what is done in order to move away from the orang-utan-like stage, and instead move towards the kind of perfection, which, according to Monboddo, the ancient Greeks had achieved? These thoughts have a Freudian ring to them, because they touch upon what Freud defined as *the id;* an animalistic, uncultivated part of the human mind, which must be controlled (Church, 1995 ;212). This first hesitant beginning of understanding the dynamics of the human mind, seems to be explored further by Poe in “Rue Morgue”, where, as mentioned, many Freudian readers have found several psychoanalytical elements. Poe’s fascination with Lord Monboddo’s orang-utan and language studies opens a gateway for him to understand, or at least discuss, some psychological tendencies which he might have observed in society. The orang-utan therefore serves as a basis for Poe’s journey into the human mind, which I will attempt to prove in the following section, by interpreting the orang-utan from a Freudian perspective.

As we have seen so far, Poe was fascinated with the contrast between nature and culture, and the power of language as a means of identifying and differentiating man from animal. This duality between the cultivated and uncultivated is further explored through the contrast between the detective Dupin, the orang-utan and its owner, the Sailor. Dupin represents an almost supernatural calm and composure and an extreme ability to raise himself above the masses and gain an overview of the situation, thus enabling him to demystify and identify the person (or animal) responsible for the reckless murders of the L’Espanayes. The orang-utan on the other hand, represents violence, madness and the uncontrollable, almost animalistic tendencies found in mankind. In Freudian terms, the orang-utan, and its beastly behaviour mirrors the id-driven emotions found in the human psyche, which should be kept hidden and controlled by the superego. The ape has escaped its master, and its dangerous and violent emotions have manifested themselves through the murders of Mme L’Espanaye and her daughter. The link between the id and the animal is magnified when the narrator voices that the murders have been committed by a madman, because id-driven emotions and actions are connected with everything wrong, sinful and dangerous.

Freud’s idea of animalistic tendencies in man is not further explored in “Rue Morgue”, however, the connection between man and animal is still present in the story.

‘Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet. Terrified at the sight of so dangerous a weapon in the possession of an animal so ferocious, and so well able to use it, the man, for some moments, was at a loss what to do. He had been accustomed, however, to quiet the creature, even in its fiercest moods, by the use of a whip, and to this he now resorted. Upon the sight of it, the Ourang-Outang sprang at once through the door of the chamber, down the stairs, and thence through a window, unfortunately open into the street.’ (Rue Morgue, 1841; 24)

The clash between nature and culture is depicted in this section, where the ape desperately tries to mirror his master, through the art of shaving. Rosenheim writes that ‘shaving codes the body as a part of culture, not nature (…)’ (Rosenheim, 1995; 170), which, like the narrators assumption that the murderer was a madman, links the cultivated human with the wild nature represented by the orang-utan. When putting Rosenheim’s claim that shaving and culture are connected into a Freudian context, the orang-utan’s attempt to mimic his master becomes an image of the superego, which is formed by culture. However, the id, which the orang-utan is a manifestation of due to its strong connection to nature, overpowers the superego and turns into a violent, emotion driven beast. Shawn Rosenheim explores the connection between the orang-utan and its master the Sailor, and draws upon the similarities between Poe’s text and Freud’s claim that ‘the analyst [should] enter into an alliance with the ego of the patient to subdue certain uncontrolled parts of the id (…) The ego learns to adopt a defensive attitude towards its own id and to treat the instinctual demands of the latter like external dangers (…)’ (Freud, 1963; 253, as cited in Rosenheim; 1995; 169). When Dupin confronts the sailor with the orang-utan’s crime, he demands the sailor to recount the entire story of the orang-utan’s escape and the murders of the two women. By imploring the sailor to confess, Rosenheim claims that Dupin enters into an alliance with the sailor who represents the ego, while the orang-utan represents his id (Rosenheim, 1995; 169), and it can therefore also be argued that Dupin adopts the role of the analyst which corresponds well with my previous observation, that Dupin possesses an almost supernatural overview of the situation. The idea that the orang-utan represents the sailor’s id can also be applied to the fact that the sailor keeps the orang-utan captive in a closet.

‘Returning home from some sailors' frolic the night, or rather in the morning of the murder, he found the beast occupying his own bed-room, into which it had broken from a closet adjoining, where it had been, as was thought, securely confined.’ (Rue Morgue, 1841; 24)

By locking the orang-utan in a closet, the sailor attempts to control the animal through force, however, as Dupin demonstrates, it is not enough to simply suppress the id, the sailor has to face it and recognise its presence. Poe writes that ‘(…) he [the sailor] at length succeeded in lodging it [the orang-utan] safely at his own residence in Paris, where, not to attract toward himself the unpleasant curiosity of his neighbours, he kept it carefully secluded (…)’ (Rue Morgue, 1841; 24) which emphasise the fact that the id cannot be hidden, but must be exposed and understood in order to gain control of it.

This physical manifestation of the id, which the orang-utan is, and the fact that it is locked up in the closet bears a strong resemblance to Oscar Wilde’s late Victorian Gothic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) in which the main character, Dorian Gray, hides a painting which exposes his true colours in the attic. Here the theme of a hidden and uncontrollable id which in the end is revealed is also explored. Like Poe, Wilde also finds the darker and more animalistic tendencies in man fascinating, and common to both texts, the authors examines what happens when the id is released into the cultivated world.

### The Human Ape

As we have seen, the orang-utan’s fascination with the cultivated human finds expression in its attempt to shave like its master. However, this is not the only aspect of the story, which explores the differences and similarities between the orang-utan and man. The manner in which the murders of the two women are committed bears a crucial role in the understanding the differences between animal and humanity.

‘Upon the face [of Mademoiselle L’Espanaye] were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails, as if the deceased had been throttled to death. (…) After a thorough investigation of every portion of the house, without farther discovery, the party made its way into a small paved yard in the rear of the building, where lay the corpse of the old lady, with her throat so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off. The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated – the former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity.’ (Rue Morgue, 1941; 8)

Like the razorblade and the ape’s attempt to shave creates a connection between the wild animal and the cultivated man, the fact that the animal has attacked and manhandled the two women’s throats also links the two because it echoes some of Monboddo’s thoughts on the similarities between the orang-utan and man. As previously discussed, Monboddo believed that the orang-utan is a subspecies of humans because of its many physical similarities to man, such as ‘the tongue, and other organs of pronunciation’ (Burnett, 1774; 217). The similarities between the orang-utan’s ‘organs of pronunciation’ and man’s led Monboddo to conclude that the orang-utan was a subspecies of man, because he defined humanity based on the ability to acquire a language. When Poe chooses to focus on the destruction of the throat areas, he depicts a frustrated and envious orang-utan, which destroys the very essence of culture. This is done with a razorblade which, as mentioned, is a symbol of the cultivated world, however, here the orang-utan uses it against humanity, thus creating another Freudian image of the id, due to its attack on culture or in Freudian terms, the super-ego. Poe shows how culture not just depends on the physical ability to obtain langue, but also on the psychological ability to control animalistic urges. The orang-utan is unable to conform to society through shaving, and therefore turns against the cultivated world which is expressed through the murders of the two women.

As I have previously touched upon, Poe’s quest to understand the human mind through the orang-utan also takes him through Monboddo’s idea of the possibility of regression in humanity. If the orang-utan is a type of human it opens the possibility that mankind might have the potential to revert into an uncultivated being like the orang-utan. Poe experiments with a world without language through the orang-utan in “Rue Morgue”,because he fears the consequences of not having this key ability which separates man from animal. Furthermore, he travels into the obscure world of the human mind, where he investigates the connection between the animalistic tendencies displayed by man, hence the sailor’s attempt to deny telling the truth, and the importance of maintaining a civilised world, hence the fact that the sailor tells the truth in the end, and thus is forgiven his lack of control over the ape (or his id). Shawn Rosenheim writes that ‘the sailor’s mistake has been to assume that once he had succeeded in lodging the ape at his own residence, the danger that it posed was over. The sailor has yet to learn to “treat the instinctual demands of the [id] like external dangers”, which finds expression the captive ape’s escape from the sailor, and therefore forces him to face the violent consequences of its acting-out. The process of admitting his possession of the ape is a precondition for its taming, which requires that the sailor objectify and confront as an external danger (…) the fact of the bodily unconscious’ (Rosenheim, 1995; 171). Poe has simply constructed a scenario where he tests how the animalistic tendencies in man can be expressed, and more importantly, how they can be tamed through understanding and acknowledgment.

This Enlightenment-like approach to the id-driven mind and more bodily emotions is also briefly touched upon through the near-beheading of the L’Espanaye women. The ape’s frustration with not having what the human head and mind represent, causes it to nearly tear the head of the body, leaving the L’Espanaye’s like itself: without the civilised mind, only with the urge driven body. It is tempting to simply say, that Poe’s intention with the novel was to show how the mind is our strongest and most important organ, and that the body and what it represents is something which we merely have to control and otherwise ignore. However, one of Dupin’s final remarks in the text reveals that Poe recognises the importance of understanding and exposing the darker sides of the human mind:

‘Nevertheless, that he failed in the solution of this mystery, is by no means that matter for wonder which he supposes it; for, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound. In his wisdom is no *stamen.* It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laverna, - or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature after all. I like him especially for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained his reputation for ingenuity. I mean the way he has *‘de nier ce qui est, et d’expliquer ce qui n’est pas’”* (“To deny what exists, and to explain what doesn’t”) (Rue Morgue, 1841; 26)

The combination of proto-Darwinian elements and the Freudian symbolism creates a view into the future, where gothic writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson, who in his famous novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) explores the fin-de-siècle fears of regression, through an archetypical Freudian narrative, where the main character literally is split in two; the ferocious id, and the controlled ego. This division of the mind explored through external images will also be discussed in the chapter “Uncanny Projections”, as it is a popular subject in Poe’s works.

Poe’s use of scientific studies in his detective story paves the way for my claim, that much of his fiction is written as a way of understanding and categorising various aspects of life. One of his major concerns in “Rue Morgue”, as we have seen, is the proto-Darwinian thoughts on humans in relation to nature, and how mankind’s place and role in nature needs to be defined and understood in order to avoid regression. However, as we have seen there are also strong ties to Freud’s psychoanalysis and the various aspects of the human mind which he later mapped out. In order to gain a thorough understanding of these references to the mind, I will in the following chapter go through the Freudian tradition of analysing detective fiction as a metaphor of the mind. This will enable me to uncover more of the psychoanalytic elements in “Rue Morgue” while establishing how Freud’s psychoanalysis previously has been applied to Poe’s works.

# Poe and the Psychoanalysis

When dealing with Freud and detective fiction, one cannot avoid gazing towards Marie Bonaparte’s *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* (1933) in which she makes a psychoanalytic interpretation of Poe’s works based on his life. This psycho-biographical interpretation is based on Freud’s idea that literature as a dream-like expression of the author’s own emotions generated by experiences in his life, and as a result, the readings are highly sexualised, because they take their starting point in childhood traumas such as having witnessed ‘the coitus of the parents’ (Bonaparte, 1933; 445) or experienced Oedipal desires (Bonaparte, 1933; 445). Bonaparte’s interpretations were applauded by Freud, who wrote the foreword to her book, however, many other critics since, have distanced themselves from this overtly sexualised and biographical interpretation, deeming it crude and over thought. This psycho-biographical interpretation of literature is not a method I agree with, based on the fact, that it reduces literature to ‘a bundle of symptoms’ (Massé, 2007; 234). The texts become mere retellings of the author’s subconscious mind, thereby removing the author’s influence on the symbolism and structure of text. When dealing with Poe’s detective fiction, it seems an insult to assume that the connection to the human consciousness in “Rue Morgue” is a mere coincidence shaped by his unconscious mind and not another aspect to the investigation into the powers of analysis. However, even though I do not agree with the biographical aspect of Bonaparte’s analysis, her readings of Poe’s works offers an insight into how some of the psychoanalytic elements in “Rue Morgue” form a commentary on the human mind and its various facets.

Even though many critics, including Shawn Rosenheim and Andrew Smith, author of *Gothic Literature* (2007), distance themselves from Bonaparte’s readings, they still acknowledge the *“central place that Poe has in psychoanalytical discussions of literature (…)”* (Smith, 2007; 63). However, neither of them seems to take a stand on whether or not Bonaparte was right in interpreting Poe’s fiction as autobiographical, or if Poe was aware of the connection between the human mind and his plots. This question is left unanswered, however, they both seem to be drawn to Bonaparte’s Freudian interpretation, because it at some points seems justified.

One of the many Freudian elements which Rosenheim points out in his article is the setting of the story, and the sexual undertones of it which Bonaparte had interpreted. The L’Espanayes’ house is surrounded by the mystery of the violent act and the fact that the two women lived a very isolated life from the rest of society. The description of the mansion as ‘time-eaten and grotesque […], long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall” (Rue Morgue, 1841;) echoes the gothic tradition which Poe is an important part of, and the reader is led into another world in the middle of Paris, which, even before the murders, was surrounded by an air of mystery and secrets, and now has been exposed as a place of terror and violence. The uncanny feeling which this estranged house in the streets of Paris evokes is, in Freudian terms, magnified through the use of anatomical and sexual symbols found in the L’Espanayes’ house, which will be discussed below. Bonaparte believes that the murders of the L’Espanayes are an image of a ‘primal scene’ (Bonaparte, 1933; 446) in other words, a sexual act, which an infant can witness when sleeping in the same room as its parents.

‘The reader will now see the solution: the murder of Mme. L’Espanaye by the ferocious ape represents, to the sex-charged unconscious, the sex act. Not by chance did most of the witnesses testify that the voices heard quarrelling behind the partition, as they ascended the stairs, were those of a man and a woman; namely, of the human pair. Further, the mother’s severed head symbolises castration, that female castration which is so cardinal a phantasy of small boys.’ (Bonaparte, 1933; 447)

Even though I do not agree with this sexualised interpretation of the murders as an image of (Poe’s) childhood traumas and fantasies, it is still useful in terms of understanding the dynamics which are at play between the two women and the ferocious orang-utan. Bonaparte mentions the unconscious, which I have touched upon earlier, however, while she primarily combines the unconscious with sexual feelings, I believe that the unconscious should be interpreted in more general terms. This means, that instead of viewing the unconscious as something driven by sexual desires and frustrations, it should be viewed as an emotion driven side to the human mind, which includes feelings of lust, envy, aggression, and frustration etc. The murder of the two women can therefore be interpreted as more than sexual frustrations or castration anxieties, but, as we have seen, as envy at what the two women represents, namely the opposite of the id; culture, language and control.

Rosenheim too discards Marie Bonaparte’s claim that the murders are prompted by Oedipal desires and frustrations, an interpretation which he sees as “out of fashion” (Rosenheim, 1995; 167). However, even though this overtly sexual interpretation is dismissed, Rosenheim still recognises the appeal of Bonaparte’s unveiling of sexual and anatomical symbols in the text.

(…) but her monomaniacal inventory of sexual symbols (of, for instance, the L’Espanayes’ chamber as a gigantic projection of the interior of female anatomy) is difficult to dismiss. From the rending of the double doors of the L’Espanaye home (“a double or folding gate … bolted neither at the bottom nor top” forced “open, at length with a bayonet”), to the ape’s futile ransacking of Mme L’Espanaye’s private drawers (…), to the identification of the broken and whole nail, the story overcodes it anatomical symbols. (Rosenheim, 1995; 167)

The sexual symbols found in the L’Espanaye household emphasises the feeling of the uncanny, which in traditional Freudian terms, finds expression in the revelation of the home or mind as a place of sexual desires. Even though Bonaparte’s oedipal interpretation of the sexual references in “Rue Morgue” has been dismissed, one cannot avoid noticing how Bonaparte’s sexualised elements help form the feelings of fear in the text as well as the reader. It seems that Poe flirted with the idea, that fear can be evoked, when a home is exposed as a place where physical emotions (not necessarily sexual) can run wild[[3]](#footnote-3). Again we see how Bonaparte’s sexualised interpretation can be transferred onto a more general view of the unconscious as a place of irrational and violent emotions, rather than just a place to harbour sexual frustrations and deviations.

Rosenheim goes as far as to nearly approving of Bonaparte’s sexual symbols, as well as the Oedipal castration of the matriarch (Mme. L’Espanaye is nearly beheaded) based on the fact that the word “head” and “bed” is found twenty and seventeen times, respectively, in the text. Rosenheim claims that this “invites the reader to link them through metaphor” (Rosenheim, 1995; 168). The text is therefore constructed in a manner which invites the reader to see the sexual symbolism in the killing of the L’Espanayes. This awareness of the connection between the two words seems again to point towards the idea that Poe realised the detective stories’ ability to mirror the human psyche, and Rosenheim echoes this theory when he writes: “What looks like Poe’s eerie anticipation of psychoanalytic motifs may say as much about generic as about psychic structure (Rosenheim, 1995; 168). It seems that Poe did not only use the detective stories to demonstrate the power of analysis and deduction, but also to present and somehow theorise the darker and more obscure sides to the human psyche. The early 20th century critics overtly sexual interpretations, like Marie Bonaparte’s psychoanalytic reading of Poe or Ernst Jones’ reading of oedipal desires in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*[[4]](#footnote-4), should not be discarded as vulgar and irrelevant to the modern reader, instead, I believe, the interpretations of psychoanalytical elements need to be refined and generalised in terms of reinterpreting the sexual symbolism as a discussion of all negative, id-driven emotions.

Another psychoanalyst with his roots in the Freudian psychoanalysis is the structualist Jacques Lacan who also used Poe’s detective fiction as a basis for his own interpretation of Freud’s psychoanalysis. I will refrain from going into details with Lacan’s theories, due to the fact that they do not provide me with the necessary insight into Poe’s investigation of the mind and the psychoanalytic sciences of his time. Lacan adopted a semiotic approach in his interpretation of Freud’s theories, and his analysis of “The Purloined Letter” (another detective story in which an unnamed narrator follows Dupin’s attempt to solve a mystery) therefore primarily focuses on the language and the symbolic meaning of it. Peter Barry, author of *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (2002) writes that contrary to Bonaparte, Lacan ‘does not talk about the psychology of the individual author, but sees the text as a metaphor which throws light upon aspects of the unconscious, on the nature of psychoanalysis, and on aspects of language’ (Barry, 2002; 117). Despite this break with Bonaparte’s psycho-biographical readings Lacan discards the author as completely irrelevant to the text, and his theories will therefore not provide me with a useful insight into Poe’s inspirations for his texts. However, there is one interesting aspect, in relation to Lacan’s theories, and that is his use of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” which Lacan uses as an example of how his own theories should be applied. For the same reasons that I will not use Lacan’s theories I will not go into detail with his reading of “The Purloined Letter”, but the fact that he chooses one of Poe’s detective stories as an example of the structure of the human mind, emphasises my claim that the structure of Poe’s detective stories offers a firm basis for exploring the human mind. I will not make a detailed reading of “The Purloined Letter, however, one aspect of it deserves to be accentuated, as it supports my claim, that Poe was interested in psychology and the power of understanding the human mind. In the story, Dupin once again must help the Parisian police, who are unable to locate and retrieve a stolen letter, even though they do a thorough and structured investigation of the Minister’s (the man who stole the letter from the Queen) home. Dupin must therefore take charge and use his analytical skills in order to find the letter. In the quotation below, Dupin explains how he has come to the conclusion, that the Minister must have hidden the letter in plain sight:

‘I know him [the Minister], however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold intriguant. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. (…) I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. (…)I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so very self-evident.”’ (Purloined, 1844; 131)

In this paragraph we see how Poe emphasise not only the power of Dupin’s analytical mind, due to the fact, that he analyses how the Minister, as both a mathematician and a poet, would think, but also the power of knowing and understanding the mechanics of the mind in general. This observation is in keeping with my analysis of “Rue Morgue”, as it shows how Poe uses his detective fiction, not only to depict the power of analysis, but also to comment on the importance of it, hence the fact that Dupin solved another seemingly impossible mystery through his analytical approach to the mind.

When looking at Poe’s detective stories from a psycho-biographical, one thing stands out, and that is the similarities between Poe’s narratives and the structure of the human mind. I believe, that the psychoanalytic view on literature as an expression of the author’s unconscious mind should be discarded, as this reduces the author to a mere puppet for his own subconscious mind. However, interpretations such as Bonaparte’s should still be taken into consideration when trying to establish the link between Poe’s narratives and the mind. The psycho-biographical interpretations should therefore not be completely discarded, but looked upon in more general terms, as the texts could also be written as a means for the author to understand currents observed in his contemporary society, such as Monboddo’s orang-utan and the importance of language, which I have discussed earlier.

# Gothic Enlightenment

As we have seen so far, Poe’s detective fiction echoes the Enlightenment’s tradition of focusing on science and reason, by discussing various discourses surrounding the definition of humanity, however, it also seems that he uses “Rue Morgue” as a stepping stone for understanding the obscurities of the human mind. Because Poe’s detective stories are so concerned with analysis, and combined with the fact that he uses Monboddo’s orang-utan as a means for understanding the concept *humanity,* the idea that Poe also used “Rue Morgue” as a gateway for exploring the human psyche, does not seem farfetched, and the Enlightenment tradition of reason and logic is thus widened through the detective genre. In the following chapter I will give a brief account of how the Gothic tradition has developed and how Poe’s works embodies some of the major tendencies which are connected to the Gothic genre.

Horace Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) is widely regarded as the first Gothic novel, and embodies the Gothic tradition with its medieval setting, old castles, and ruins. The novel’s subtitle emphasises how one of the key elements in the gothic genre is the use of a medieval or Gothic setting and references, such as monasteries, castles, dungeons, etc (Abrams, 2005; 117). The setting creates a contrast to the Enlightenment’s rational worldview, because it represents an era of irrationality where superstitions thrived. This was combined with supernatural and sensational elements, and the Gothic novel is therefore regarded as an embodiment of everything which the Enlightenment wished to move away from. Poe’s Gothic writing is a part of the American Gothic tradition, which differ from the European tradition due to the fact that America is a relatively young country and therefore lacks the medieval buildings which much European literature revolves around. However, the medieval elements are not imperative for a novel to be regarded as Gothic, and ‘a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror, (…) events that are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent, and (…) aberrant psychological states’ (Abrams, 2005; 118) also constitutes what is now referred to as a Gothic tale. Poe excels within this latter form of Gothic fiction, which is seen in his short stories “The Tell-Tale-Heart” (1843) and “The Black Cat” (1843) in which the reader follows the decline of the narrators, both socially and psychologically. As we shall see in my later analysis, these two short stories operate in the land between reality and fantasy, which emphasise their place in the Gothic genre, because they include elements of the supernatural as well as depicting ‘aberrant psychological states’.

Vincent Buranelli, author of *Edgar Allan Poe* (1977) notes that Poe ‘stepped into the swirling current of the romantic movement’ (Buranelli, 1977; 22) and the fact that many of his works operates within the Gothic genre, should therefore not be thought of as random, but as a conscious decision made by Poe, to use this genre and its poetic devices in order to support his narratives (Buranelli, 1977; 22-34). This argument is backed up by Margaret Alterton in her book *Origins of Poe’s Critical Theory* (1925) in which she writes, that Poe studied British periodicals such as *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in which articles discussing the Gothic genre and Gothic short stories were printed (Alterton, 1925; 7). *Blackwood* gave Poe an insight into the genre through the publication of European horror stories, such as E.T.A Hoffmann’s “The Devil’s Elexir” (1815), and whose short story “The Sandman” (1817) will be discussed in the chapter “The Uncanny”, and the articles in *Blackwood* also provided Poe with inspiration and material for his own works (Buranelli, 1977; 25). Burnanelli writes that because Poe was heavily inspired by the stories and articles in *Blackwood* he was often accused of plagiarism, however, Poe dismissed this accusation by claiming that he added ‘something fundamental to his borrowings by giving old themes an urgency they could not have had on merely literary grounds – an urgency derived, as we shall see, from his personal history’ (Buranelli, 1977; 25). Buranelli advocates for Bonaparte’s psycho-biographical interpretation of Poe’s works, however, again I believe, that it would be more appropriate to regard Poe’s additions to ‘his borrowings’ as observations he made of society rather than interpreting them as ‘personal history’. We have seen how Poe does this in “Rue Morgue” where he discusses Monboddo’s orang-utan, and later we shall see how he found inspiration in other scientific discourses as well.

Poe’s use of Gothic settings and elements should therefore not be viewed as mere entertainment, but as deliberate poetic devices used to explore and emphasise his observations and attitudes towards society. Because Gothic literature often is played out on the frontier between reality and fantasy, it is easy to discard the genre as pure entertainment, written without any real message or deeper meaning in mind. This attitude is presented by Allan Lloyd-Smith, author of *American Gothic Fiction: an Introduction* (2004)*,* who avidly stresses the importance of regarding gothic fiction as entertainment.

‘Writers of Gothic aim to entertain – themselves and their audience – rather than covertly instruct. The shadows that we see: of class anxieties, racial conflicts and genocidal guilts, domestic oppressions, the persistence of the past in the present; these are not the reason for the writing, they are “what happens” in the process of writing, the more or less conscious conditions of its being, and sometimes even, perhaps, the effect of the unconsciousness of the writer. There is then, a risk of over-coherent interpretation, as though the Gothic writer set out to express a specific concern and then thoughtfully chose the Gothic form to present it best.’ (Smith, 2004; 35)

This view on Gothic writing as pure entertainment, may indeed, apply to some Gothic writers and works, however, as we have seen in my interpretation of Poe’s “Rue Morgue”, Poe used his short story to examine Monboddo’s evolutionary thoughts, and to shed light on the importance of language. It is therefore not farfetched to believe that he used his Gothic writing in the same manner to discuss various aspects of society and mankind. My view on Gothic literature as a possible widening of the Enlightenment is shared by James P. Carson, who ‘question[s] the claim that there is a sharp break between the Enlightenment and Romanticism’ (Carson, 1996; 256-57) in his article “Enlightenment, Popular Culture and Gothic Fiction” (1996). Carson writes that ‘Gothic novelists frequently claim to have undertaken a quasi-scientific investigation into natural human responses when characters are confronted with situations of apparently supernatural stress’ (Carson, 1996; 257). I will refer to the outcome of this confrontation ‘with apparently supernatural stress’ as *Gothic Enlightenment,* in order to emphasise the connection between the Enlightenment elements, or the ‘quasi-scientific investigation’, and the Gothic genre.

# The Uncanny

In the chapter “The Composition of a Text” I mentioned Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) and his attempt to categorise powerful emotions such as fear and awe as a forerunner to Freud’s the uncanny. In this chapter I will give an account of Freud’s theories on the uncanny and how they can be used in order to uncover more references to the human mind in Poe’s works.

When dealing with Gothic writing and Freud, it is impossible not to include one of Freud’s most critically acclaimed essays “The Uncanny” (1919), in which he attempts to theorise terror through an analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Gothic short story “The Sandman” (1816). The fact that the uncanny is connected with the Gothic genre from its birth makes it an appropriate tool for understanding the elements of terror and horror in a Gothic narrative. By uncovering the uncanny elements in Poe’s Gothic works, I aim to gain an understanding of whether or not these elements form a type of Gothic Enlightenment, or if they are in fact just an unconscious expression of the author’s mind, as previously assumed. However, before exploring the uncanny elements in Poe’s works, I will briefly give an account of what the uncanny is, and how it should be read.

The uncanny is a translation of the German word *Unheimlich* which is the antonym of *heimlich*. *Heimlich* translates into homely or secret, while *unheimlich* becomes un-homely, meaning something un-familiar or something which is no longer secret. These words are the essence of Freud’s the uncanny, as it deals with something familiar yet strange, which has come to light and therefore no longer is Heimlich but unheimlich or uncanny. Freud writes that ‘in general we are reminded that the word *‘heimlich’* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight (…) everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light’ (Freud, 1919; 5). This ambiguous view on the home, or everything ‘homely’, stems from the fact, that the uncanny is a widening of Freud’s previous studies of the Oedipus complex. Freud noticed how the supposedly safe home changed during a child’s oedipal phase into a place filled with sexual tension, which according to Freud is experienced within the family during the Oedipus conflict (Smith, 2007; 13). Because of this phase the home should not only be seen as a place of safety and security, but also as ‘place which generates repression and becomes uncanny because it involves incestuous sexual feelings that evoke fear, dread and horror’ (Smith, 2007; 13). This view on the home is afterwards applied to the mind, meaning that everything which reminds us of the traumas which takes place in the home becomes uncanny, because they evoke feelings of ‘fear dread and horror’ in the mind.

As mentioned Freud used Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” as a basis for his studies of the uncanny. “The Sandman” is a story about a young man, Nathanial, and his childhood traumas which evolve around a story about the Sandman and how he throws sand in children’s eyes to make them sleep. The Sandman, however, takes on a nightmarish character when Nathaniel is told, that he comes in the night and takes children’s eyes. Nathaniel’s father’s associate, the lawyer Coppelius, is linked to the Sandman by Nathanial’s young mind, because the lawyer always visits after nightfall, thus causing Nathaniel to believe that he is the Sandman. After the death of his father, Nathaniel is engaged to his best friend’s sister, Clara, and travels to university. However, here falls in love with another girl, who turns out to be a doll with eyes made by Coppola, a merchant who sells lenses and glasses, and who Nathaniel believes to be Coppelius (and who later is revealed as the very same man). Nathaniel, maddened by fear of Coppelius and the threat of losing his eyes, throws himself from a tower and dies, after finally having found happiness with his fiancée Clara and his good friend and her brother Lothario. Freud’s main focus lies on Nathaniel’s childhood trauma of losing his father and seeing this man, who he believes to be the Sandman coming for his eyes. According to Freud, the fear of losing one’s eyes is connected with the fear of castration. He founded this on the Greek myth about Oedipus who blinded himself after having murdered his father and unknowingly married his mother – a punishment which according to Freud ‘was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration’ (Freud, 1919; 9). Freud also connects Nathaniel’s fears of the Sandman with castration anxiety, because the Sandman ‘always appear as a disturber of love’ (Freud, 1919; 10), which is seen when he destroys the doll Olympia, which Nathaniel falls in love with not knowing it is a doll, and later when he is reunited with his fiancée, the Sandman, or Coppelius/Coppola drives him into suicide. The Sandman poses a threat to Nathaniel living out a normal love life, thus creating the fear of castration which leads to the feeling of the uncanny. The loss of an eye evokes the feeling of the uncanny, because it is reminder of the hidden and suppressed emotions from the id, which causes the fear Nathaniel and subsequently the reader experiences.

Another element, which Freud discards as irrelevant to the understanding of the uncanny, is the doll Olympia. However, Freud’s predecessor Ernest Jentsch, whose essay “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” (1906) Freud builds many of his theories on, believes that the doll is the epitome of the uncanny. Because Freud purely bases his view on the uncanny on childhood traumas, Freud discards the peculiar liveliness of the doll, because children like dolls and often pretend that they are alive. A seemingly living doll can therefore not produce the feeling of the uncanny, because it is not connected with childhood traumas (Freud, 1919; 10-11). Jentsch, whose theories Freud bases his essay on, claims that the doll is uncanny, because it creates an uncertainty in the reader due to the fact that it is not certain whether or not the doll is alive. The feeling of the uncanny can therefore also arise when ‘when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one’ (Freud, 1919; 11) or when there is an uncertainty connected to an object or person (Freud, 1919; 11). Freud acknowledges the feeling of uncertainty as a basis for the uncanny, when he claims that the Sandman, who is of cause connected with childhood traumas, creates an uncertainty in the reader due to his potential to stir up hidden id-driven emotions (Freud, 1919). In my later analysis, I will use Jentsch’s interpretation of the uncanny on equal terms with Freud’s as this gives a more nuanced image of the uncanny, which is principal in my later analysis.

Freud’s uncanny hinges on the idea that there *must* be a childhood trauma connected to the element which causes the feeling of the uncanny to arise, however, for the purpose of this assignment, I will not use Freud’s uncanny as a means for uncovering potential traumas in Poe’s characters or in Poe himself, as is the case in Marie Bonaparte’s interpretations. Instead I wish to take a more general approach to the uncanny, by analysing and interpreting what suppressed id-driven desires might cause the feeling of the uncanny, as opposed to analysing *why* these emotions from the id has been suppressed. I will therefore focus on the uncanny as something which has been hidden but has come into light, whether it is emotions, desires or more literal projections of the undesired feelings and emotions (which we shall see in my later analysis of “The Black Cat” (1843)).

According to Alan Lloyd-Smith, the uncanny is one of the major themes in American Gothic, because the European tradition of Gothic castles which hides terrifying secrets has been replaced by houses, or homes, and many Gothic writers, including Poe, used “domestic terror” in their writing (Lloyd-Smith, 2004; 75). Lloyd-Smith emphasises Poe’s short story “The Black Cat” (1843), as a good example of this, because the Gothic narrative is played out in a domestic setting, where the narrator is driven mad by his own hatred of his cat Pluto, and in the end kills his own wife in an attempt to kill the cat, and buries her body behind the wall in their basement. This macabre turn of events and the feeling of the uncanny which arises when the narrator starts viewing his cat as a kind of supernatural threat to him, is foretold by Poe, when he in the very first sentence of the text writes: ‘For the most wild yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief’ (Black Cat, 1843; 61). In a literal sense this sentence contains a near perfect description of the uncanny, hence the fact, that the narrative is described as homely, wild, and unbelievable. However, it is not just the uncanny which the opening line of the text foretells, it also touches upon the veracity of the narrator, as it is already here is reviled that the narrative might seem unbelievable to the reader. This questioning of the narrator’s credibility will be explored further in the chapter “Todorov and the Uncanny”.

As we have seen in my reading of “Rue Morgue” Poe invests a lot of time in exploring the human mind, and the powers of it in relation to analysis. However, in his Gothic texts, the power of the human mind is no longer Poe’s main focus, instead the darker sides are explored through tales of madness and horror. In the following chapter I will examine how Poe uses his characters as projections of the mind, in order to gain an insight into the mechanics at work, when destructive feelings emerge.

## Uncanny Projections

One of the key uncanny elements in “The Black Cat” is the walling up of the wife, and the subsequent exposure of her body, which literally is something ‘that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light’ (Freud, 1919; 5). The theme of walled up women is also seen in Poe’s story “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) in which a narrator encounters the two Usher siblings, and discovers that the brother, Roderick, has entombed his sister, Madeleine, prematurely, which is then followed by a series of what seems to be supernatural events. I shall return to these supernatural elements, in my section on “Todorov and the Uncanny”, however, first I will discuss the role of the female characters in these two texts with a main focus on the wife in “The Black Cat”.

Common to both texts is the fact, that the female characters have been buried, or hidden, by male characters, and when they are exposed it triggers the downfall of the men. In “The Black Cat” the narrator is exposed as a murderer to the police, and in “The House of Usher” Roderick Usher dies when his sister returns from her grave, and their house subsequently crumbles with the death of the two siblings. The question arises as to why it is crucial for the survival, both socially and physically, of the males, that the female characters remain hidden? As previously mentioned, the Freudian reader Marie Bonaparte did a biographical reading of Poe’s works, in which she interpreted the fiction as an expression of traumas Poe had experienced. Bonaparte believes that the fact that female characters often represent a threat to the male characters in Poe’s narratives is an expression of Poe’s troubled relationship with several women in his life[[5]](#footnote-5). Again, I will refrain from going into details with Bonaparte’s psycho-biographical reading of Poe, however, her interpretation does give an indication of how the reading should be approached, as she suggests that the female characters represent a threat to the men’s masculinity, and in order to repress their feminine side, they dispose of the females who represent this side (Bonaparte, 1949; 458-490). By using this claim as a point of reference, Poe’s use of female characters can be read as a study of the duality in the human mind and sexuality, specifically in the male, and in the following, I will therefore do a Freudian reading of the female characters and their significance in relation to the construction of the male characters.

In “The Philosophy of Composition”, Poe, as mentioned, concludes that the death of a beautiful woman is ‘the most poetical topic in the world’ (Composition, 1846; 4), however, Karen Weekes author of “Poe’s Feminine Ideal” (2002) notes, that Poe’s ‘poetic and fictional females lack individual development’ and that he ‘never truly wrote about women at all, writing instead about a female object and ignoring dimensions of character that add depth or believability to these repeated stereotypes of the beautiful damsel’ (Weekes, 2002; 150). Because the female characters are mere objects in the story and not fully developed characters, it supports my claim, that the women in “The Black Cat” and “The House of Usher” should be interpreted as a projection of the male characters’ psyche, and not as individual characters. However, despite the fact, that the female characters are not the pivotal figure in Poe’s stories, it is important to note, that they often share some traits with other characters in the stories, thus making them more complex. In “The House of Usher” Poe depicts an odd trinity consisting of Roderick Usher, his sister and the house who all suffers the same fate. I shall return to this trinity in the chapter “The Mysterious Usher House”, as it requires a thorough examination of the role of the house, in order to understand the symbolism of the text. However, the connection between different characters is also seen in “The Black Cat” in which the narrator’s wife is put on the same footing as the cat, Pluto, from the very beginning of the text. The narrator explains that his wife quickly observes his fondness of domestic pets, and complies with this by buying him various pets, one of them being the cat. In the same way as the wife follows the narrator in his love of pets, Pluto is describes as an obedient pet, which follows his owner everywhere. This connection is amplified through the text, as the narrator becomes increasingly violent, first towards his wife, then Pluto, and in the end, when the wife’s corpse is uncovered, the wife and cat seem to have become one:

‘The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast [Pluto] whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled up the monster within the tomb.’ (Black Cat, 1843;)

Because the cat and the wife are linked through the narrative, it becomes crucial to understand the cat’s role in the story, as it is a widening of the wife’s and therefore emphasises what she represents in relation to the narrator. One of the prominent features of the cat, both the original one, and the mysterious second cat, which appears after the narrator has hanged the first in the backyard, is its missing eye, which the narrator cuts out with a penknife. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the loss of an eye can be interpreted as an image of castration. It can therefore be argued that the narrator’s seemingly unjustified hatred towards the cat and his wife is founded in a fear of the loss of his manhood. The narrator confesses in the beginning of the text, that he since childhood had differed from the norm:

‘From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure.’ (Black Cat, 1843; 62)

The narrator’s description of his parents enabling him to continue to differ from the norm, by complying with his wish for pets, is very similar to the description of the wife and cat as two who reinforces this somewhat feminine side in the narrator. The women in the early nineteenth century had ‘few political or economic rights; and assumed to exercise such rights only indirectly through her husband’ (Lloyd-Smith, 2004; 158). Furthermore, the women were supposed to adopt the role of the caring mother who looks after the home (Lloyd-Smith, 2004; 158). This passive and submissive role which women had during this period echoes the narrator’s own tendencies in relation to his love of pets and his ‘tenderness of heart’. When the narrator turns against his wife and cat, it can therefore be argued, that he attempts to suppress and break with this feminine side of himself, which has caused him to become ‘the jest of my companions’. When combining the cat’s missing eye and the narrator’s wish to kill the cat, it becomes clear, that when turning against the wife and the cat, the narrator attempts to regain his manhood and reject his feminine side, which had found expression in his love for animals. The narrator’s fears of his feminine side can be interpreted as the fear of losing control, hence the submissive role of the women in nineteenth century America. However, ironically when the narrator feels that he has gained control of his life after having walled up the wife, his arrogance causes him to lose control of the situation, and his recently acquired manhood is removed from him by the very thing which embodied his feminine side and everything he tried to escape from; the cat.

The question now arises as to whether or not Poe was aware of this duality of the narrator’s mind, which is depicted through the narrative, or if it is just a coincidence, perhaps formed by the author’s subconscious mind? I have previously discussed Lloyd-Smith’s assertion that all Gothic writing is mere entertainment, and that it does not offer any deeper meaning, however, on the subject of Poe, Lloyd-Smith contradicts himself, as he comments on the images of the double and uncanny in “The Black Cat”:

‘The howling of the immured cat, likened to the howling of the damned and their tormenters, suggests as clearly as does the doubled *Will*iam *Wil*son [short story by Poe] that Poe is finding external correlatives for internal divisions of the mind.’ (Lloyd-Smith, 2004; 77)

Here Lloyd-Smith acknowledges the thought, that Poe uses his narratives to explore the obscurities of the human mind and uses Poe’s short story, “William Wilson” (1839) as proof for that Poe was aware of these projections of the mind, because Poe uses the doppelgänger motif as a tool for depicting some of the darker and seeming obscure emotions of man. In the following chapter, I will therefore do a thorough analysis of Poe’s “William Wilson”, because this, as Lloyd-Smith mentions, is the epitome of how Poe uses projections of the mind in order to play out various mental curiosities, and it can therefore offer me an insight into how Poe uses his narratives as images of the mind.

### The Double

In “William Wilson” the narrator tells the story of how he at university met a man who shared his name (William Wilson), his birthday and even looked like him. The only aspect which William Wilson and the narrator differed in was their voices. While the narrator is able to use his voice as everyone else, Wilson is incapable of producing more than a whispering sound. The narrator quickly becomes annoyed with William Wilson and the fact that people believe that they are friends or even related due to their identical names. The narrator ends up leaving the university and attends another in order to escape the torments of being near Wilson whose face, according to the narrator, had become identical to his own. The narrator becomes a demoralised swindler who cheats at gambling in order to earn money. One night when attempting to trick a friend, the narrator hears the whisper of Wilson and he is exposed as a cheater and a thief. Wilson starts to appear regularly every time the narrator attempts to con someone, however, finally the narrator catches Wilson and kills him, which subsequently causes the narrator’s own death. In Freudian terms, Poe uses the doppelgänger motif in “William Wilson” as a means for playing out the struggle between the demoralised id and the superego’s strict moral code. The narrator is forced to submit to Wilson, ‘who thwarted my ambition at Rome, my revenge in Paris, my passionate love at Naples, or what he falsely termed my avarice in Egypt (…)(Wilson, 1839; 163), and therefore attempts keep clear of trouble or ‘mischief’ as the narrator refers to it. This indicates that William Wilson is a projection of the narrator’s conscience, or superego in Freudian terms, whereas the narrator is an image of id-driven desires and emotions which is seen through the fact that he is revealed cheating, seeking revenge and being greedy. When the narrator keeps his path clear and lives by the moral rules set by society, he represents a well balanced ego, which listens to the superego and suppresses the id, however, the internal struggle is too much for the narrator, and this becomes his downfall. According to Freud, the image of the double was originally an insurance against death, hence the thought of an immortal soul and a perishable body, however, the double has now become ’the uncanny harbinger of death’ (Freud, 1919; 12) because it is a constant reminder of the human mortality. When the narrator kills Wilson, the uncanny figure which in the eyes of the narrator was a threat to his life, he unknowingly destroys himself, as he kills his insurance against death. In the final lines of the story it is revealed that the narrator cannot live without Wilson when the two have become one through a mirror:

‘It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said:”*You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward are thou also dead – dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou has murdered thyself”’* (Wilson, 1839; 165)

Here we see how Poe comes to the conclusion that the id and the superego, or the unconscious and conscious, are dependent on each other, because without Wilson, the narrator can live neither on earth nor in Heaven. Without the double nature of the human mind there is nothing. The narrator is able to live a balanced life for a while, because he comes to fear Wilson and his exposure of the id-driven actions of the narrator. This corresponds well with Freud’s claim that childhood traumas are crucial in the development of a person, as it is as a result of these, that the superego is formed out of fear that the id might take over and make one unable to conform to the norms of society.

Another element which emphasises the doppelgänger motif is the mysterious appearance of the mirror and how the narrator and Wilson merge into one through it.

‘The brief moment in which I averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce, apparently, a material change in the arrangements at the upper or farther end of the room. A large mirror, - so at first it seemed to me in my confusion – now stood where none had been perceptible before; and as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait. Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist – it was Wilson who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution.’ (Wilson, 1839; 164).

This confusing merger of the narrator, Wilson and the sudden appearance of the mirror emphasises the complexity of the narrator’s and Wilson’s relationship, because the reflection of Wilson and the blood on the narrator reveals to the reader, that they have become (or perhaps always were) one and the same.

Otto Rank, whose studies *The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study* (1914) Freud refers to several times in “The Uncanny”, claims mirrors and reflections are symbols of the soul in a literary context (Rank, 1989; 15-16). The fact that the narrator and Wilson always have been one and the same is therefore emphasised through the imagery of the text. By using a mirror as the basis for the merger of the two characters, Poe shows that they represent two sides of one person; the body and the mind, or body and soul.

By projecting the narrator’s psychological issues onto another person or object, it seems that Poe, like in “Rue Morgue” attempts to map out the seemingly inexplicable sides to the human mind. Common to “Rue Morgue”, “The Black Cat” and “William Wilson” is that Poe explores the duality of the mind by using an object, e.g. the orang-utan and the cat, to portray the obscure aspects of the mind. This enables him to lay bare the mechanics of the mind, thus using both the detective stories, as well as the Gothic narratives as gateways to understanding the strange within the familiar; the strange William Wilson who appears out of nowhere turns out to be the narrator’s conscience and the sounds of tormented souls turn out to be sounds from the cat. Freud’s the uncanny provides a tool for comprehending the mechanics at work, when the narrator in “The Black Cat” turns his anger and frustrations against two seemingly unthreatening things, and why the narrator in “William Wilson” is only left alone by his tormenter, when he complies with the rules of society, due to the fact that the uncanny reveals the id-evoked fears of the characters.

### The Usher Mystery

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Poe projects his main characters’ emotions and urges onto other characters in order to explore how the human mind works and what happens when a person struggles with his own mind and urges. As mentioned, Allan Lloyd-Smith acknowledges the idea, that Poe uses external images in order to gain an understanding of internal struggles. This supports my claim, that Poe’s fiction should be seen as a widening of the Enlightenment, because his seeming supernatural or surreal narratives are founded in mental issues and dark emotions, which Poe attempts to understand through his fiction. One of the stories which is placed on the frontier of sanity and madness, or the realistic and the supernatural is “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), in which Poe also uses external characters as projections of the psyche, which thereby evoke the feeling of the uncanny. While we so far have seen how Poe has used living objects and other characters as images of the mind, in the following I will show, how Poe also uses an immaterial object as a projection of the Roderick Usher’s decaying mental status.

In the “The Black Cat” Poe uses a lot of energy on emphasising that it is a “domestic tale”. As we have seen in the chapter on Freud’s uncanny, the feeling of terror is caused when we are reminded of our id-driven urges, and the things which remind us of these become the uncanny object. When Poe exposes the home in “The Black Cat” as a place filled with terrors, violence and seemingly supernatural events, he, in a very literal sense, shows how the *homely* (*Heimlich*) can become *unhomely* (*unheimlich)*. Like Freud’s claim that the Oedipal conflict exposes the home as a place of sexual tension and id-driven emotions, Poe’s home in “The Black Cat” is also exposed as a place of id-driven emotions, thus creating a feeling of the uncanny because the supposedly safe home becomes a place of terror. Because of the strong ties between the uncanny and the home, it can be argued that the home in “The Black Cat” represents the human mind and the dark and dangerous emotions within.

In “The House of Usher” Poe also uses a domestic setting as the foundation for his tale of madness and terror, however, while the home in “The Black Cat” only plays a secondary role in the narrative, the Usher House is portrayed as an equally important element in the story and relationship between the Usher siblings. The importance of the house and its role in the short story is emphasised by the fact that Poe devotes the entire opening of the story to the description of the decaying house and the gloomy feeling which the narrator experiences when he approaches it.

‘I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul, which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil.’ (Usher, 1839; 171)

This personified description of the mansion combined with the fact that the title of the story can be interpreted both as “the fall of the literal house” and “the fall of the Usher family” emphasises the importance of the house as an important third element in the complex Usher family. This connection is further emphasised when the house crumbles the moment the last two members of the Usher family die in the arms of each other. Because the role of the house seems to be crucial in the understanding of the Usher family and their demise, my interpretation of the story will primarily focus on the house, because it seems that this immaterial element forms a frame around the narrative and the family, due to the emphasis it is given when Poe devotes the entire opening and ending of the story to it. This suggests that the house itself is an important element in the narrative, as it is given the same level of importance in the demise of the Usher family as the two siblings are.

This emphasis on the home and the family unit again evokes Freud’s description of the uncanny, as something strange within the familiar (or family), because the Usher home is exposed as an unsafe place where Roderick and Madeleine Usher slowly waste away because of mysterious and undiagnosed diseases. The safety of the institution “home” again becomes an object for debate, as it can be a place of traumas and terrors. This is seen in the premature burial of Madeleine Usher, which again emphasises the feeling of the uncanny, because of the uncertainty which arises when Madeleine returns. Like the uncanny doll Olympia in “The Sandman”, which appeared to be alive though it was not, Madeleine’s return creates the feeling of the uncanny, because it is uncertain whether she is alive or dead. The questions arises whether she was alive only to throw herself into a mortal embrace with her brother, or if she had come back as a form of ghost, dragging her brother, the last member of the Usher family, as well as the house itself into the grave? Many critics have attempted to explain this uncanny trinity of the supposedly dead Madeleine, the melancholic Roderick and the decaying house, including H.P. Lovecraft who argues that the story ‘displays an abnormally linked trinity of entities at the end of a long and isolated family history – a brother, his twin sister, and their incredibly ancient house all sharing a single soul and meeting one common dissolution’ (Lovecraft, 2008; 62). Lovecraft’s interpretation of the link between the Usher siblings and the house emphasise the Freudian claim, that the home not only represents security and comfort, but also is connected to traumas and terrors which are pivotal in the shaping of the mind. In my opinion, the house is therefore an equally important element in the understanding of “The House of Usher” and the mysterious relationship between the twins and the home. Alan Lloyd-Smith writes resignedly that:

‘(…)in non of these episodes of failed epistemological utopias do we find anything beyond the horrific *materiality* of death itself. Nor do most attempts to find psychological explanations – as in identification of Roderick Usher with the super-ego and his sister Madeleine with the id, or Roderick with the mind and Madeleine with the body – seem wholly convincing’ (Lloyd-Smith, 2004; 47)

When Lloyd-Smith is inclined to dismiss Poe’s story as inexplicable from a Freudian point of view, he bases his assumption on the idea that only the two siblings are images of the mind. This assumption seems justified as the twins are the only living people left of the Usher family, however, he neglects to see, that Poe emphasises and personifies the house through his description of it. As previously mentioned, Poe personifies the house through his description of its eye-like windows, and even Roderick Usher claims that the house has had a will of its own and thereby a direct influence upon his family’s lives:

‘Its evidence – the evidence of the sentience – was to be seen, he said, (and I here started as he spoke,) in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent, yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him – what he was.’ (Usher, 1839; 179)

The idea that the house has shaped him emphasises my Freudian interpretation of the house as an image of the traumas which according to Freud shape a person’s mind. Furthermore, the idea of the house as a conscious thing which influences its inhabitants supports the earlier personification of the house through the description of eye-like windows etc. It can therefore be argued that the house should not be viewed as a concrete house, but as an image of the fragile mind or soul of Roderick Usher and his sister. Like the cat in “The Black Cat”, the house is therefore another non-human projection of the mind which Poe uses to explore the complexities of mental decay. Because Poe seems unable to separate the mind from the body, he uses the house as an indicator of the mental status of the Usher twins. When the last two members of the Usher family meet each other in a mortal embrace, the House crumbles and thereby embodies the demise of Roderick and Madeleine’s bodies and minds. In the chapter “Poe and Phrenology” I will analyse how Poe also uses the physical description of Roderick Usher, as an expression of his mental state, which will support my argument, that Poe is unable to think the mind free of the body and other physical images.

# Todorov’s the Uncanny

I have so far used Freud’s theories on the uncanny and the human mind, as a means for uncovering whether or not Poe used his Gothic fiction as a basis for experimenting with ideas he had concerning the human psyche. Because of my claim, that Poe’s Gothic stories operate in an area between the scientific approaches of the Enlightenment and the emotion-driven and often supernatural Romanticism it becomes interesting to uncover how Poe approaches this barrier between realism and the surreal. For this purpose, I will use Tzvetan Todorov’s theories on what defines the fantastic, and how it operates on the border between the supernatural, or marvellous as he refers to it, and the uncanny. Todorov’s theories will enable me to explore if Poe’s supernatural elements should be interpreted as supernatural, or if they should be explained through logic and reason in the spirit of the Enlightenment.

Todorov’s definition of the fantastic hinges upon the understanding of *uncertainty* (Todorov, 1975; 25)*.* In *The Fantastic, a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) Todorov writes that:

‘In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. (…) The Fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. (…) The concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary’ (Todorov, 1975; 25).

This definition of the fantastic as something which exists on the frontier between reality and the supernatural is very similar to the setting of many of Poe’s Gothic works, including “The Black Cat” in which the question arises as to whether or not the cat is a manifestation of the devil or simply just a cat. The decision between believing the event to be of a supernatural character or not, can be made by both the characters in the book and the author, but also by the reader. The definition of the fantastic in a book can therefore vary depending on the reader as much as the character and author (Todorov, 1975; 41). It is therefore important to note, that when interpreting a story like “The Black Cat” I as the reader, decides as much as Poe, because he never gives a definitive answer as to whether or not the narrator encounters the devil, or just projects his own fears onto the cat. When the uncertainty as to whether the cat is the devil or a projection of the narrator’s mind, is broken, the story can no longer be defined as purely fantastic, but becomes either marvellous or uncanny. Todorov writes on the difference between the marvellous and the uncanny that ‘if he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous’ (Todorov, 1975; 41). This means that if one chooses to see the cat as a manifestation of the devil, the story immediately falls into the category of the marvellous, which is defined as a genre in which the supernatural is accepted (Todorov, 1975; 42). However, if one on the other hand decides to view the cat, as simply a cat, the fantastic is transformed into the uncanny, and it is within this category I aim to interpret Poe’s works. Todorov uses Poe’s “The House of Usher” as an example of how a story can be uncanny while still bordering closely to the fantastic and even the marvellous.

‘Here the uncanny has two sources. The first is constituted by two coincidences (there are many of these in a work of the *supernatural explained*). Although the resurrection of Usher’s sister and the fall of the house after the death of its inhabitants may appear supernatural, Poe has not failed to supply quite rational explanations for both events. The house, he writes: “Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building to the front, made it way down the wall in a zig-zag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.” And of Lady Madeline: “Frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character were the unusual diagnosis.” Thus the supernatural explanation is merely suggested, and one need not accept it.’ (Todorov, 1975; 48)

This reservation in terms of letting his fiction become completely supernatural, which Todorov here points out, is also seen in stories like “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”, in which the narrators clearly states that they are not mad, but that the seeming surreal things which they describe in fact did happen to them.

‘Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not – and very surely do I not dream’. (Black Cat, 1843; 61)

‘True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then am I mad?’ (Tell-Tale, 1843; 117)

Both narrators in the stories strongly object to the idea that they should be mad, however, the fact that it is mentioned in the very first lines of each text, shows that the idea of madness is omnipresent in the texts and the reader should therefore be aware of this when reading the two short stories. I shall return to the idea of the insane narrator in the next chapter, however, before I move on, it is important to understand, that by placing the seed of disbelief in the readers mind, Poe actively directs the reader towards reading the story as an image of a mental issues, rather than an encounter with the supernatural. Again, we see how the reader has to make a conscious choice as whether or not to believe the narrator when he tells that he is not mad, or to believe one’s own senses, and read the stories as ramblings made by a madman. By creating this doubt, Poe both creates and deflates the uncertainty which is needed in order to categorise the stories as fantastic. He creates it by leaving the door open for an explanation which defies the rules of this world, thus making the story marvellous, and he deflates it, because the seed of doubt is planted in the reader’s mind, when the word “mad” is brought up in the very first sentence.

Another element, which adds to my argument that Poe did not intend for his stories to be read as marvellous, is his use of references to evil and the supernatural. In “The Black Cat” the narrator hears a ‘long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhumane – a howl – a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation’ (Black Cat, 1843; 68). This description of the sounds coming from the wife’s grave connects the cat with the devil or some other kind of evil. However, it is not just due to this description, that the reader is inclined to believe that the cat is a messenger from the devil. From the very beginning Poe constructs this connection between the cat and evil through seemingly insignificant remarks:

‘In speaking of his [the cat] intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusions to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point – and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered’ (Black Cat, 18; 64)

Furthermore the cat’s name – Pluto – is a reference to the Roman equivalent to the devil, which again prepares the reader to interpret the shrieks made by the cat, as those of the damned. However, common to each element is that the connection is constructed. The name of the cat was chosen by the narrator, the link between witches and cats is mentioned by the narrator, and the final comparison of the cat’s shriek and the damned is also made by the narrator. All this adds to my argument that the evil in this story is constructed by the narrator and his own choices and comments, thus removing the story completely from the marvellous, due to the fact, that every connection between the cat and the supernatural has been created by the narrator and nothing else. This constructed supernatural presence of the devil is also seen in Poe’s poem “The Raven” (1845) in which a narrator is mourning his lost lover Lenore, when a raven comes to his window and the narrator begins a conversation with the mysterious bird, whose only answer is “Nevermore”. Like we have seen in “The Black Cat”, Poe makes many direct references to the devil and evil in his texts, however, there is no actual presence of evil in his texts, instead it is the narrator’s own mind which conjures up the threatening evil. This is seen through Poe’s use of references to Pluto again, when the narrator calls the raven a ‘thing of evil’ and commands it to ‘Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore’ (Raven, 1845). Furthermore, the raven is a classic image of bad omens, death and despair (BO: Raven), which adds to the feeling of the supernatural. However, even the mystery of this talking raven, which repeats the word ‘nevermore’ is deflated due to the repetition of the word. The reader quickly becomes aware of the fact that this is the only word, which the raven knows, and the narrator’s questions therefore get an air of self-destructiveness, as he too must understand that the answers he will get are the same. The ravens role as an omniscient oracle is also constructed by Poe, when he writes that the bird “perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door” (Raven, 1845). The reference to Pallas Athena, the Greek Goddess of wisdom, combined with the fact that the Raven lands upon it, creates a connection between the raven and knowledge, however, again this connection is constructed, because there is no definitive proof that the raven posses the same kind of wisdom as the bust of Pallas represents.

Again we see how Poe has used references which steer the reader towards believing the narratives to be marvellous. However, when looking closer at Poe’s narrators it becomes clear, that it is they who construct the elements with a supernatural air, thus making the stories and poem uncanny, because everything can be explained in terms of this world. When choosing to view Poe’s works as uncanny, a discussion of sanity and insanity becomes apparent, because many of the seemingly inexplicable elements can be attributed to the human mind and its more obscure and darker sides. This adds to my claim, that Poe used his fiction to try out ideas concerning the psyche, because just like in “Rue Morgue” where the unsolvable murders can be explained via logic, so can the apparent supernatural elements in Poe’s Gothic works. When reading Poe’s Gothic works as uncanny, the reverberations of the Enlightenment’s rational world are therefore unveiled, because it becomes clear, that the seemingly inexplicable events all are connected with the human mind.

### Madness and the Supernatural

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Poe constructs the elements of the supernatural through the minds of his narrators. These elements subsequently cause the narrators to become absorbed by their own fears, thus leaving the narrators in a state which can be interpreted as madness. In the following chapter, I wish to briefly give an account of how madness was precieved in Poe’s contemporary society and how the Enlightenment related to it. This will be done in order to determine whether Poe’s Gothic fiction is written in keeping with the Enlightenment’s attitude towards madness, or if it is written as a critique of it.

In the essay “Gothic and the Madness of Interpretation” Scott Brewster argues that during the eighteenth century madness transformed from ‘a public spectacle to a subject of institutional confinement, clinical depression, and classification’ (Brewster, 2003; 282). This observation corresponds well with Michel Foucault’s account of the history of madness in *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in an Age of Reason* (1961). Here Foucault explores the development of society’s view on madness over three ages: the Renaissance, the Classical Age, which covers the late seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth century, and finally the Modern. Brewster’s claim that the view on madness transformed during the eighteenth century corresponds well with Foucault’s claim, that up until the mid seventeenth century the world was ‘strangely hospitable, in all senses, to madness’ (Foucault, 2001; 33). However, this ‘hospitality’ in the world soon changed during what Foucault refers to as ‘the Great Confinement’. The term ‘The Great Confinement’ is a reference to the many confinement institutions in which many alleged madmen were confined during the late seventeenth century and onwards (Foucault, 2001; 41). According to Foucault, the Great Confinement caused people to start exploring madness and trying to diagnose it based on the medical science of the time. This categorisation of madness, however, did not satisfy the Enlightenment’s hunt for reason, as it revealed that there are some aspects of the mind which are beyond control and reason, and madness was thereby ‘excluded from the realm of reason’ (Brewster, 2003; 282) due to the clash between the seeming irrationality of madness and the celebration of reason during the eighteenth century.

According to Brewster, this categorisation of madness as a fault in the human mind influenced literature, and the supernatural in Gothic writing therefore changed from being otherworldly threats to being internalised, and the supernatural elements thereby became effects of mental aberrations and deliriums(Brewster, 2003; 281). This change in the perception of madness and its influence on Gothic writing, corresponds well with my previous analysis of Todorov’s fantastic and the fact that Poe’s short stories can be read as uncanny, hence the strong connection between the narrators’ madness and the supernatural elements which appear. However, this explanation of why the supernatural elements in Gothic writing often can be interpreted as images of the psyche, does not fully prove my thesis that Poe’s writing should be viewed as a widening of the Enlightenment, due to the fact, that the madness portrayed in Gothic writing was considered an attack on reason and logic seeing as it emphasised the sides in man beyond the control of reason (Brewster). In order to prove my claim, we must look further into Poe’s attitude towards mental disorders and the sciences which he applied as a means for understanding it. In the next chapters I will therefore discuss how Poe viewed madness and his position on the contemporary science’s approach to it.

# Poe and the Perverse

As we have seen in the previous chapter madness was a thorn in the side of the Age of Reason’s hunger for logic and control, as it was a reminder of the aspects of the mind which could not be controlled. However, the Enlightenment’s hunt for categorisations and an understanding of the mechanics at work behind the seemingly inexplicable aspects of life, is mirrored by Poe in several of his short stories, as he tries to uncover the logic behind what he refers to as ‘the perverse’. In the following chapter, I will therefore attempt to uncover how Poe uses his narratives to explore the perverse nature of his narrators by analysing his short story “The Imp of the Perverse”.

The theme of madness, as I have already established, is often present in Poe’s short stories. This is emphasised by Poe’s narrators in “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat”, who are both concerned with convincing the readers that they are not mad even though their stories seem to tell a different tale. However, common to the narrators is that they both struggle with keeping their impulses at bay. In “The Black Cat” the narrator fantasises about torturing and killing his cat, in “The Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator is obsessed with his companion’s, an old man who he lives with, “vulture-like” eye and therefore wants to murder the old man in order to get rid of the eye and find peace. The narrator in “The Raven” also seems to suffer from these urges to destroy, however, in this poem, the object of his destruction is himself, when he is torn between forgetting and remembering his lost lover Lenore. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the narrator is the one who decides whether or not the raven’s answer “nevermore” should have a positive or a negative ring to it. This is made evident when he first asks the raven:

‘Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered –  
Till I scarcely more than muttered `Other friends have flown before -  
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.'  
Then the bird said, `Nevermore.' (Raven, 1845)

Here the birds answer still has a positive ring to it, however, as the narrator’s questions changes character, so does the tone of “nevermore”:

`Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! -  
Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted -  
On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore -  
Is there - *is* there balm in Gilead? - tell me - tell me, I implore!'  
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.' (Raven, 1845)

Common to all three of Poe’s narratives is that there seems to be no explanation as to why the narrators torment themselves, like in “The Raven”, or others e.g. the cat and wife. In order to find an explanation to this behaviour we need to look towards Poe’s short story “The Imp of the Perverse” (1845), in which the key to unlocking the truth behind the madness seems to be. “The Imp of the Perverse” differs from other of Poe’s short stories, because it begins as an essay, before moving on to the well-known style of a written confession. Frederick S. Frank author of *The Poe Encyclopaedia* (1997) writes on the subject that ‘the tale combines elements of confessional narrative and discursive essay, moving from an objective commentary on the human tendency to commit acts of perversity to a subjective outburst by the murderer-narrator (…)’ (Frank, 1997; 174). “The Imp of the Perverse”, “The Black Cat”, and “The Tell-Tale Heart” all share the same motif of uncontrollable, perverse impulses which the narrators act upon, and subsequently betray themselves by confessing to their crimes. In “The Imp of the Perverse” the narrator becomes torment by the thought of being exposed as the murderer of an unnamed man (who he killed by placing a candle which emitted a poisonous vapour in his room), and in the end is forced by his own fears of exposure to admit to the murder. Even though the narrative is so similar to the other two short stories, “The Imp of the Perverse” seems to offer the key to unlocking the question as to whether or not the narrators are haunted by some kind of devil, or if their madness can be explained in terms of this world, e.g. through psychology. Poe explains the destructive as well as self-destructive impulses which are experienced by all three narrators as a mental stage, which he refers to as ‘the Imp of the Perverse’, meaning the impulse to do something wrong:

‘Had I not been thus prolix, you might either have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble, have fancied me mad. As it is, you will easily perceive that I am one of the many uncounted victims of the Imp of the Perverse.’ (The Imp, 1845; 264)

By attributing the narrator’s madness to the Imp of the Perverse, Poe breaks with the tradition of connecting madness, murder and other macabre incidents to the devil or simply uncontrollable and inexplicable urges, hence Foucault’s claim that madness was shunned by the Enlightenment, and instead opens the door to the possibility of rationalising the dark sides of humanity and not simply discarding them as being the devils work. This idea of removing the responsibility from a Deity is emphasised when the coroner comes to determine how the narrator’s victim had died:

‘I need not describe the easy artifices by which I substituted, in his bed-room candle-stand, a wax light of my own making for the one which I there found. The next morning he was discovered dead in his bed, and the coroner’s verdict was – “Death by the visitation of God”.’ (The Imp, 1845; 264)

Here Poe nearly mocks the idea that a deity, either good or bad, should be responsible for the death of the unnamed man. Instead he clearly shows that the murder was committed by a man with no connection to the devil, or any other higher power, but simply his own disturbed mind influenced by the Imp of the Perverse. When Poe describes this perversity as something which takes over the mind and leads the individual to harm itself or others, whether it is done by words or violence, the description is quite similar to Freud’s theories concerning the id. Poe writes that ‘nor will this overwhelming tendency to do wrong for the wrong’s sake, admit of analysis, or resolution into ulterior elements. It is a radical, primitive impulse – elementary’ (The Imp, 1845; 262). This idea if a ‘radical, primitive impulse’ is in keeping with Freud’s later theories claiming that the id is an omnipresent, emotion-driven part of the human, which can only be controlled by a strong super-ego formed by society. In contrast to Freud, but in keeping with the beliefs of the Enlightenment, Poe here writes, that these perverse impulses cannot be analysed, however, as we shall see in the following chapter, Poe still attempted to do so by means of phrenology.

## Poe and Phrenology

As we have seen in my previous analysis, Poe seems unable to separate mind from body, when discussing the mechanics of the human psyche. This finds expression in the fact, that he uses other characters as projections of mental disorders in order to paint a picture of the dynamics which causes man to behave irrationally, e.g. the narrator in “The Black Cat” and his relationship with the cat and wife. This inability, or refusal, to see mind and body as two separate things, is taken up by Erik Grayson in his essay “Weird Science, Weirder Unity: Phrenology and Physiognomy in Edgar Allan Poe” (2005), who discusses Poe’s use of the physical as a means for understanding the psychological aspects of the mind. In “The Imp of the Perverse” Poe several times refers to ‘phrenology’ which, stereotypically is thought of as a quasi-scientific approach to determining an individual’s personality based on the bumps on the person’s head. Grayson, however, emphasises the importance of understanding that phrenology is more than this, because it was not until the Austrian physician Franz Joseph Gall published his theories on phrenology and the link between the skull and human character, that people started to link the brain with the mind (Grayson, 2005). Until then only a few scientists believed the brain to be the centre of thoughts and emotions. According to Grayson Gall’s theories on phrenology should not be discarded as pseudo-scientific, because they formed the foundation for modern psychology (Grayson, 2005).

Franz Joseph Gall hypothesised that the brain consisted of 27 separate organs, which he named according to their function. These organs could, according to Gall, be felt as bumps on the skull. This meant that if an area was particularly pronounced on the skull of an individual, he believed that this was caused by an increased activity in some of the organs, and the bumps and dents in an individual’s skull could therefore be used to determine the character and temperament of a person (Wyhe; web). John van Wyhe, author of *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism* (2004) and the man behind the website *The History of Phrenology on the Web* writes that the essence of Gall’s theories can be divided into six points:

‘1.The brain is the organ of the mind.   
2. The mind is composed of multiple, distinct, innate faculties.   
3. Because they are distinct, each faculty must have a separate seat or "organ" in the brain.   
4. The size of an organ, other things being equal, is a measure of its power.   
5. The shape of the brain is determined by the development of the various organs.   
6. As the skull takes its shape from the brain, the surface of the skull can be read as an accurate index of psychological aptitudes and tendencies.’ (Wyhe, web)

Gall’s theories concerning the skull as an image of a person’s mental status was widened by his apprentice, Johan Gaspar Spurzheim, who in 1815 published his own studies called *The Physiognomical System.* Here Spurzheim expands Gall’s theories by increasing the number of cerebral organs to 32, and changing the name of several of Gall’s 27 organs (Wyhe, web). Furthermore, Spurzheim added facial features to the theory, thus arguing that the width of a nose, the brow line or cheekbones also were indications of a person’s character (Grayson, 2005). Spurzheim’s physiognomic theories never gained the same popularity as Gall’s phrenology, however, according to Grayson, Poe borrowed inspiration from both theories (Grayson, 2005).

A third and highly influential debater of phrenology and physiognomy was George Combe, who in his lectures *Lectures on Phrenology* (1839), which were based on his book *System of Phrenology* (1825)[[6]](#footnote-6) ‘identifie[d] four temperaments and describes their physiognomic manifestations’ (Grayson, 2005). These four temperaments consisted of: the lymphatic, the sanguine, the bilious, and the nervous (Combe, 1839; 113). Grayson emphasises the importance of understanding Combe’s studies of the nervous temperament and it physiognomic manifestations, as it was here Poe found inspiration for Roderick Usher and his appearance and behaviour (Grayson, 2005). The physiognomic characteristics of ‘the nervous’ are according to Combe indicated by ‘fine thin hair, small muscles, thin skin, paleness of countenance, and brightness of eyes’ (Combe, 1839; 113). Poe characterisation of Roderick Usher echoes Combe’s description of a person suffering from a nervous temperament. This is seen when the narrator describes Usher as having a ‘cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; (…) hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity’ (Usher, 1839; 174). This description, combined with the fact that the narrator refers to Roderick Usher’s behaviour as of ‘an excessive nervous agitation’ (Usher, 1839; 174), shows that Poe uses Combe’s theories as a basis for his construction of a man who is struggling with a ‘mental disorder which oppressed him’ (Usher, 1839; 172). Like we have seen in my previous analysis, Poe uses the house as an image of Roderick’s mental health, in the same way as we here see how he uses the physiognomic description of Roderick’s body, as an indicator of his mental status.

Another story in which Poe uses references to phrenology is the detective story “Rue Morgue”. In the opening of the story, in which Poe discusses the importance of analysis, there is also found a reference to phrenology and the importance of analysing analysis:

‘The constructive or combining power, by which ingenuity is usually manifested, and to which the phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a separate organ, supposing it a primitive faculty, has been so frequently seen in those whose intellect bordered otherwise upon idiocy, as to have attracted general observation among writers on morals’ (Rue Morgue, 1841; 4)

According to Edward Hungerford who explores Poe’s attitude towards phrenology in the essay “Poe and Phrenology” (1930), this quotation is not a dismissal of phrenology, but Poe’s way of emphasising that it is not a science without faults and that the science itself must be analysed before it can be used as a satisfying tool for analysis (Hungerford, 2000; 16). Poe’s vocabulary in “Rue Morgue” is also marked by the terms which are used by phrenologists. This is seen in his use of the word ‘constructive’ as this refers to ‘constructiveness’. According to Combe’s theories ‘constructiveness’ is the organ which represents originality and ingenuity (Wyhe, web). However, Poe points out, that possessing the capability to invent a method of analysis does not qualify one to apply this into practice.

‘The analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis’ (Rue Morgue, 1841; 4)

It seems that Poe calls for a more nuanced and thorough interpretation of the mind through phrenology, due to the fact that he claims to have noticed some faults in the logic behind it. In “The Imp of the Perverse” Poe calls attention to the lack of explanation to the psychological phenomenon which he refers to as ‘the perverse’, and here he showcases how it is falsely assumed that an individual with a highly developed ‘constructiveness’ also posses analytical abilities.

However, despite openly disagreeing with some of Combe’s categorisations of the brain’s structure, Poe still confesses to being a follower of phrenology. In a letter to a friend, Poe writes that he has seen several phrenologists: ‘Speaking of heads – my own *has been* examined by several phrenologists – all of whom spoke of me in a species of extravaganza which I should be ashamed to repeat’ (Zimmerman, 2005; 195). Poe’s fascination with phrenology as a means for understanding the human psyche, both his own as we see here, and as a tool for constructing characters supports my claim that Poe uses his writing as a means for analysing and discussing scientific discourses of his time. This is also emphasised by his direct commentary on the faults of phrenology which we see in “The Imp of the Perverse” and “Rue Morgue” when he directly challenges Combe’s theories and categorisations of the brain through his narratives.

Poe’s fascination with phrenology and physiognomy and the fact that he seems to use Combe’s theories in the same way, as I have uncovered that he used Monboddo’s orang-utan as inspiration for “Rue Morgue”, emphasises my claim, that Poe used studies available at his time, as grounds for his own exploration of the human psyche. According to Grayson, Poe viewed phrenology as a gateway to understanding some of the complexities of the mind:

‘Poe's interest in phrenology blossomed after he reviewed Mrs. L. Miles's “Phrenology and the Moral Influence of Phrenology" for the Southern Literary Messenger in March 1836. In the review, Poe boldly declares, "Phrenology is no longer to be laughed at. It is no longer laughed at by men of common understanding. It has assumed the majesty of a science; and as a science, ranks among the most important"(Essays and Reviews 329). (…) Clearly, Poe's interest in phrenology extends beyond the superficial, so it is not surprising to find instances of phrenology's presence in Poe's fiction.’

As we have seen in my analysis of Poe’s use of Monboddo’s thoughts on humanity and language, Poe does not simply comply with Monboddo’s ideas, instead he tests them through his own narrative and discusses how the ideas can be taken further. In “The Imp of the Perverse” Grayson emphasises the opening passage in which the narrator speaks of phrenology: ‘In the consideration of the faculties and impulses – of the *prima mobilia* of the human soul, the phrenologists have failed to make room for a propensity which, although obviously existing as a radical, primitive, irreducible sentiment, has been equally overlooked by all the moralists who have proceeded them.’ (The Imp, 1845; 261) Grayson notes, that ‘although some may initially interpret the narrator's statement as a criticism of phrenology, the passage merely points out that the science has neglected to catalogue the perverse. In fact, the narrator exhibits much more than a casual interest in the subject’ (Grayson, 2005). This critique of scientists’ tendency to overlook the darker sides of the mind corresponds well with my previous claim, that Poe uses his Gothic narratives to explore and understand these sides of humanity. The fact that Poe uses his narrative to discuss phrenology becomes evident when the narrator in “The Imp of the Perverse” discusses whether or not the perverse is already accounted for under the subject of ‘combativeness’[[7]](#footnote-7):

‘It will be said, I am aware, that when we persist in acts because we feel we should *not* persist in them, our conduct is but a modification of that which ordinarily springs from the *combativeness* of phrenology. But a glance will show the fallacy of this idea. The phrenological combativeness has for its essence the necessity of self-defence. It is our safeguard against injury. Its principle regards our well-being; and thus the desire to be well is excited simultaneously with its development. It follows, that the desire to be well must be excited simultaneously with any principle which shall be merely a modification of combativeness, but in the case of that something which I turn *perverseness,* the desire to be well is not only not aroused, but a strongly antagonistical sentiment exists.’ (The Imp, 1845; 262-3)

By openly discussing scientific discourses of his time through Gothic narratives, Poe creates the Gothic Enlightenment which I have previously discussed. Instead of merely celebrating the inexplicable, Poe attempts to rationalise the destructive and self-destructive urges which he claims that ‘there lives no man who at some period has not been tormented, for example, by an earnest desire to tantalize a listener by circumlocution’ (The Imp, 1845; 263), through a Gothic setting. In the quotation above, we see how Poe is not contempt with the lack of understanding in terms of the darker emotions of the mind, and he therefore sheds light on what tendencies in society and man he wants to have explored and explained.

Poe’s wish for a more thorough examination of phrenologic and physiognomic traits in man was met by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso who founded The Italian School of Criminology in the end of the nineteenth century. Like Poe, Lombroso used physiognomy to identify people who differed from the norm, more specifically criminals. While Lombroso’s thoughts are discarded today, his impact on late nineteenth century Gothic fiction is undeniable. This is seen in the late Victorian Gothic novel *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker, in which Poe’s use of phrenology and physiognomy as a means for describing characters is echoed by Stoker. Stoker used Lombroso’s criminological theories as the basis for describing Count Dracula, which enabled the late Victorian reader to identify Dracula as the culprit, in the same way as Poe relied on his readers to recognise Combe’s description of combativeness, or his description of the Roderick Usher’s nervous temperament. Poe’s use of scientific discourses as a means for supporting his narratives and add creditability to his characters, supports my claim, that Poe essay “The Philosophy of Composition” was a factual account of his own methods, because the use of scientific elements as poetic devices points in the direction, that Poe was so self-aware of his texts, that the references to the human mind in both his Gothic narratives as well as detective stories must have been taken into careful consideration, when he wrote his short stories.

# Conclusion

Through my analysis I have uncovered that Poe’s connection to the Gothic genre is undisputable, due to his many seeming supernatural elements, the dark and ominous mood of his texts, his focus on violent and obscure emotions, and his use of domestic settings as a place of terror and horror. However, despite these typical Gothic elements, which traditionally are thought of as going against the Age of Enlightenment’s search for reason and logic, Poe’s Gothic narratives should not be regarded as a reaction against the Enlightenment, but rather as a call for a thorough examination of the hitherto unexplained darker sides of the human mind.

Tony Magistrale’s claim in his *Student Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* (2001) that Edgar Allan Poe’s detective fiction and his Gothic works represent two contradicting and incompatible currents in the early 19th century, has been disproven through my analysis. Poe’s detective fiction is firmly connected with the Enlightenment’s need for analysis through science, logic, and reason, which is seen through his references to Monboddo’s orang-utan, and his avid praise of the power of analysis and deduction. However, Poe’s detective genre also bears a strong resemblance to the Gothic genre, due to the violent and seeming inexplicable emotions which the orang-utan embodies. According to Michel Foucault and Scott Brewster, the Enlightenment shunned madness and destructive emotions because they represented a constant reminder of the fact, that there were elements of the human mind which were beyond control. As we have seen through my analysis, Poe’s Gothic works are primarily tales of madness told from the perspective of the madman, while his detective stories depict madness seen through the eyes of a rational analyst. I believe, that it is this difference in the approach to madness, which causes Magistrale to claim, that the two genres are contradictory, however, as I have uncovered through my analysis, Poe, like Dupin, also performs an investigation of the obscurities of madness through his Gothic narratives.

By using Freud’s theories on the human mind and the uncanny to analyse “The Black Cat”, “William Wilson” and “The House of Usher”, I have uncovered how Poe uses projections of his characters’ minds in order to play out the mechanics at work, when madness takes over. While “William Wilson” is a classic image of the double where an individual is divided into the uncontrollable id and the balanced ego, or conscience, as seen in “William Wilson”, “The Black Cat”and “The House of Usher” offer some more complex emotions which require an analysis of the cat and house, respectively. In “The Black Cat” the cat and wife proved to be projections of the narrator’s mind, and his hate towards them could be interpreted as self-loathing, because they represented a side of him, which he wanted to escape from. This use of external projections is also found in “The House of Usher” where Poe used the house and its slow decay as an image of Roderick Usher’s mental decline. Both “The Black Cat” and “The House of Usher” are played out on the border between sanity and insanity, which is emphasised by the uncertainty as the whether or not the narrators are either mad, haunted by the devil or, like in “The House of Usher” a witness to the demise of a seeming supernatural trinity.

In order to back up my Freudian interpretation of the similarities between the supernatural elements and the human mind, I have used Tzvetan Todorov’s theories on the Fantastic, the marvellous and the uncanny. Through my analysis I have uncovered that the supernatural elements often, and without problems, can be explained through rules of this world, which in Torodov’s terms, makes the stories uncanny. The fact that the supernatural elements are images of madness, is supported by my interpretation of the supernatural references as fabrications of the narrators’ minds. This is seen in “The Black Cat” and “The Raven” where Poe links the cat and raven to images of evil by using references to witches, devils, and the roman God Pluto. The cat’s and the raven’s apparent supernatural abilities are therefore attributed to them by the narrators, thus emphasising their madness. This constructed evil supports my Freudian interpretations of the texts as images of tormented and mentally unstable characters, who project their own faults and fears onto external images.

However, having uncovered that both Poe’s rational detective fiction and irrational Gothic stories can be interpreted as images of mind, does not entirely prove my thesis that Poe’s Gothic stories should be regarded as a widening of the Enlightenment. This claim, however, is proven through my analysis of Poe’s use of philosophic and scientific publications found in his contemporary society. In “Rue Morgue”, Poe uses references to James Burnett, Lord Monboddo’s orang-utan and his studies of language and its importance in the development of mankind. As we have seen in my analysis, Poe tests Monboddo’s claim that language is crucial in defining humanity, and examines the differences and similarities between man and orang-utan through the story. My Freudian interpretation of the orang-utan has proven that Poe uses it as an external image of the id’s uncontrollable and violent emotions. When Poe uses a text which is concerned with the origin of language in relation to understanding and defining man, he seems to grasp at texts which touch upon the origin of the ferocity that can be seen in man, and which is depicted in many of his Gothic narratives.

This need for understanding the darker sides of humanity through means of analysis is also seen in Poe’s use of Gall’s phrenology and Combe’s physiognomy. My interpretation of the uncanny elements in Poe’s Gothic narratives revealed, as mentioned, that Poe uses projections of his characters’ minds in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics at play when the mind is taken over by madness. This inability to separate mind from body is confirmed by Poe’s use of phrenology and physiognomy as means for understanding the many facets of the mind. Poe chooses sciences which claim that a person’s character and temperament is manifested through the bumps and dents in the skull and facial features. This emphasises Poe’s inability to think the mind free of the body, however, it also proves, that he was interested in more than just the ferocity of the mind. Poe wanted to understand and analyse what caused the darker emotions and destructive urges his characters represent, and seemed to believe that phrenology and physiognomy had the potential to uncover this mystery.

My analysis has revealed that Poe does not give a definitive answer to the mechanics behind madness and other obscure emotions. However, like Oscar Sherwin’s claim, that Monboddo’s *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* should not be seen as a definitive study of language and the development of man, but rather a cry for a more thorough examination of the areas, Poe’s stories and his discussion of language, physiognomy and phrenology through them, should also be viewed as a call for science to undertake an investigation of all aspects of the mind, even the aspects which had been deemed illogical and beyond reason by the Enlightenment. By using texts from his contemporary society, Poe shows how his detective stories and Gothic narratives are two sides of the same coin; the detective stories are narratives in keeping with the Enlightenment’s traditions of analysis and control, however, they also contain a layer which portrays the darker sides of man. Poe’s Gothic stories on the other hand, portray madness and seeming supernatural elements, while still containing an analytic approach in keeping with the Enlightenment’s tradition. When Poe chooses to write about madness he goes against the Enlightenment’s wish to forget and ignore these uncontrollable sides of the mind, however, he adopts an approach to these aspects of the mind, which is in keeping with the Enlightenment’s traditions of explaining the world through science, reason and logic. It can therefore be concluded, that Poe’s Gothic works are not definitively a part of the Enlightenment’s traditions as he chooses a topic which was shunned by the Age of Reason, however, his method and his demand for a more thorough study, indicates that he attempted to widen the Enlightenment’s views on the mind. My claim, that Poe’s works should be referred to as Gothic Enlightenment therefore seems appropriate, because they both embody the Gothic tradition of depicting irrational aspects of the mind, while adopting the Enlightenment’s tradition of understanding the world through science and reason.

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# Dansk Resumé

Målet med dette speciale er at afdække, hvorvidt Edgar Allan Poes gotiske værker skal tolkes som en reaktion imod Oplysningstidens rationelle verdenssyn eller om hans værker kan ses som en udvidelse af dette. Til dette formål gør jeg brug af den Freudianske tradition, som er forbundet med Poes værker i kraft af Marie Bonapartes psyko-biografiske fortolkning af Poes tekster og den efterfølgende interesse for at afdække den psykoanalytiske symbolisme, som Poes tekster er blevet tillagt. Denne tradition er dog gennem de seneste årtier blevet skrinlagt, da mange kritikere ser denne type fortolkning som vulgær og irrelevant grundet de mange seksuelle referencer og barndomstraumer, som bliver læst ind i teksterne. Udgangspunkt for min analyse af Poes værker er, at jeg mener, at Freuds teorier har en berettigelse, da de, grundet deres baggrund i den gotiske genre, kan afdække nogle af de psykologiske elementer som er til stede i teksterne. Igennem min fortolkning af Poes tekster, afdækker jeg, om Poe udfører en struktureret undersøgelse og diskussioner af det menneskelige sind gennem sine narrativer.

Opgaven tager udgangspunkt i Poes detektivnovelle ”The Murders in Rue Morgue”, som anses for at være skrevet i tråd med Oplysningstidens jagt på en rationel forklaring på livets mange mysterier. I min analyse af ”Rue Morgue” afdækker jeg, hvordan Poe lod sig inspirere af tekster i sin samtid, hvilket kommer til udtryk i hans brug af en orangutang som morder i novellen. Denne orangutang er baseret på James Burnett, Lord Monboddos teorier omhandlende sprogets oprindelse og dets indflydelse på menneskets udvikling. Teksten indeholder både proto-darwinistiske tanker og en begyndende forståelse for menneskets psyke i forhold til dets kulturelle udvikling. For at få et overblik over hvordan Poe benytter sig af Monboddos tekst, laver jeg en freudiansk fortolkning af orangutangens rolle, for at afdække hvordan Poe bruger denne som en projicering af sindet. Fortolkningen viser, at orangutangens rolle i teksten primært består i at optræde som en projicering af det freudianske id, og understreger dermed forholdet mellem naturens vilde og uforståelige kræfter og det menneskelige sinds mørke sider.

Efter at have afdækket hvordan Poe bruger den overvejende analytiske tekst som et redskab til at forstå aspekter af den menneskelige psyke, udvider jeg min fortolkning med flere af hans gotiske værker. Disse fortolkninger viser, at tekster som ”William Wilson”, ”The Black Cat”, ”The Tell-Tale Heart” og ”The Fall of the House of Usher” alle indeholder elementer, som kan forstås gennem Freuds psykoanalyse og hans teorier omkring det uhyggelige (Uncanny). Min analyse viser, at Poe overvejende benytter sig af projiceringer af sindet for at udspille de mekanismer, som ligger bag sindssyge, ondskab og andre følelser forbundet med id’et. For at styrke min fortolkning af Poes værker som billeder på den menneskelige psyke, tilføjer jeg Tzvetan Todorovs teorier omhandlende den Fantastiske Litteratur. Todorovs teorier giver mig et indblik i, hvordan de umiddelbart overnaturlige elementer i Poes værker ikke skal fortolkes som uforklarlige ud fra denne verdens regler og love, men at de derimod alle har rødder i den menneskelige psyke. Todorovs teorier afslører også, at de overnaturlige aspekter af Poes tekster er konstruerede af karaktererne, hvilket understøtter min påstand, at de overnaturlige elementer er projiceringer af sindet.

Poes brug af projiceringer af sindet indikerer, at han betragter kroppen som et billede på sindet, og derfor bruger håndgribelige symboler for at udpensle hvilke psykiske faktorer der ligger bag bl.a. destruktive følelser. Denne påstand bliver bakket op af Poes brug af teorier omhandlende frenologi og fysiognomi, som giver ham et redskab der konkretiserer sindet, ved at teoretisere, at en persons mentale tilstand kan aflæses gennem buler i hovedbunden og ansigtstræk. Min analyse viser, at Poe ser disse pseudovidenskaber som en mulig nøgle til at løse mysterierne bag det menneskelige sind, men igennem sine værker påviser han også, at denne videnskab stadig mangler indsigt på nogle kritiske punkter, og derfor skal gennemgå en grundig analyse og revidering før dens fulde potentiale er nået.

Gennem min analyse af Poes gotiske noveller og hans detektiv historie, afdækker jeg, at Poe går imod Oplysningstidens holdning til mentale afvigelser, idet han fremhæver disse gennem sine tekster. Jeg argumenterer dog fortsat for, at Poes noveller skal ses som en udvidelse af Oplysningstiden, da hans analytiske tilgang til gåderne bag sindet er i tråd med Oplysningstidens forkærlighed for analyse, videnskab og fornuft. Poes noveller skal ikke læses som en lovprisning af det uforklarlige, men i stedet som et opråb om mere viden på dette område.

1. Poe published only one novel throughout his career; *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The word ’orang-utan’ did not only apply to the species which we today refer to as orang-utan, but to several apes, including the chimpanzee and baboon (OED, Orang-utan). It is therefore uncertain what type of ape Monboddo and Poe refers to, and I shall therefore use ‘orang-utan’ as a general term for apes. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In the chapter “The Uncanny” I will give an account of how Poe uses elements referring to the Freudian id in order to create feelings of fear in his characters. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ernest Jones’ essay “The Oedipus-Complex as An Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: A Study in Motive” (1910) later revised and published as the book *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949) is a Freudian interpretation of Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, in which he explains the character Hamlet in terms of the Oedipus complex. (BO: Ernest Jones, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Poe lost a considerable amount of important women in his life: ‘his mother, Eliza Poe; his foster mother, Fanny Allan; the mother of one of his friends, Jane Stanard; and his own wife, Virginia Clemm.’ (Weekes, 2002; 149) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The book was first published under the title *Essays on Phrenology* in 1819, than reprinted as “*System of Phrenology” in 1825* (Wyhe, web) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Combativeness is defined by Combe as: ‘an instinctive tendency to oppose. In its lowest degree of activity it leads to simple resistance ; in a higher degree to active aggression, either physical or moral, for the purpose of removing obstacles.’ (Combe, 1845) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)