Shadows of the Soul:
Exploring the Gothic Poetry
of Edgar Allan Poe

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Summary

This master's thesis entitled Shadows of the Soul: Exploring the Gothic Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe aims to illuminate how Edgar Allan Poe's poetry embraces the Gothic elements, particularly melancholy and morbidity, to reveal how these elements are not only haunting, but also profoundly captivating, inviting readers to find beauty within darkness. Focusing on five selected poems such as "The Raven" (1845), "Annabel Lee" (1849), "Alone" (1829), "A Dream" (1827), and "The City in the Sea" (1845).

The theoretical framework of this thesis includes two subchapters: The Purpose of Reading and Darkness and Decay: Understanding the Gothic. The former mainly examines the work of Rita Felski's *Uses of Literature* (2008), complemented by insights from additional scholars, to establish a foundation for understanding why we read. The latter draws primarily upon the work of Fred Botting's *Gothic* (2014), while integrating perspectives from other theorists, to build a groundwork for understanding the Gothic tradition.

Furthermore, the analysis is structured after three core themes, which capture the depth of human experience: The Dead Beloved: Love and Loss Beyond the Grave, Lonely Island of Solitude, and The Majesty of Death, where a close reading and in-depth analysis are employed, while incorporating the theoretical framework to support and contextualise interpretation. By analysing the Gothic elements of Poe's poetry, this thesis reveals the various ways beauty and darkness coexist. The aforementioned themes are interpreted as instances of experiences, where suffering is a response to those. The common denominator.

Embedded with Gothic traits of the negative aesthetics and psychological complexities, the sublime, transgression, and the uncanny, Poe orchestrates poetry with vivid imagery of melancholy and morbidity, emotionally loaded words, and repetitions. On account of this, Poe successfully captivates and disturbs the soul of readers, yet further presents his poetry as a means of connection, through recognition and reflection, immersing readers into his universe

of haunting beauty. Poe does not refrain from heavy negative emotions, instead, he absorbs them in a compelling way that evokes a bewitching distress. This means that through perpetual suffering, Poe excels at composing poetry that illuminates the beauty within darkness, thus creating an emotional resonance with readers, who are drawn to the elements of morbidity and melancholy.

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Introduction

To search for beauty in the dark is a journey towards embracing the full spectrum of human experience, where sorrow and decay are not hidden away, yet acknowledged as emotionally resonant and hauntingly beautiful. The human experience is created from the complexities of human emotions. These aspects can be found within the Gothic genre, where authors such as Edgar Allan Poe invite readers into his universe of morbidity and melancholy.

The human tendency of being drawn to the tragic dates back to Aristotle and his concept of catharsis, which refers to the emotional release after encountering intense emotions, such as pity and fear, that are key elements in a tragedy ("Catharsis"), thus, it remains a compelling phenomenon. When encountering a work of art that evokes deep emotions such as sadness, loneliness, and grief, spectators might feel a heightened sense of personal connection, as the emotions reflected in the work can mirror their own experiences. Furthermore, works of art that evoke these deep emotions tend to linger in the spectator's mind. Often, because of the way these emotions are conveyed, wrapped in poetic beauty that allows them to appear sorrowful yet mesmerising. On account of this, this thesis explores how Poe processes universal emotions, such as losing a loved one, loneliness, and the perception of death in a way that resonates with readers. More specifically, the focus is on identifying the precise elements within Poe's poetry that evoke such an emotional response, as his writing carries an emotional depth, which manifests through Gothic elements.

The method of this thesis involves a literary-analytical approach combined with theories related to *The Purpose of Reading*, and *Darkness and Decay: Understanding the Gothic.* The approach is based on a close reading and in-depth analysis of five selected poems by Poe, such as "The Raven" (1845), "Annabel Lee" (1849), "Alone" (1829), "A Dream" (1827), and "The City in the Sea" (1845). These poems are selected because of their ability to

illuminate how Poe's poetry embraces the Gothic genre, while offering meaning and emotional resonance to readers who seek beauty in darkness. Regarding close reading, Tom Furniss and Michael Bath (1996) state that "Romantic readings of literary texts tend to focus on questions about sincerity of feeling, emotional response, and profundity of insight. More recent ways of reading poetry, however, beginning with New Criticism, place more emphasis on the close reading of the actual language of the poetic text itself." (10). Nonetheless, this thesis employs a close reading of language and occasionally the form to uncover the emotional resonance embedded in the texts, while in-depth analysis integrates the theoretical framework to support and contextualise interpretation.

Furthermore, I argue that the elements presented in Poe's poems are an exquisite blend of melancholy and morbidity, captivating readers and immersing them into a beautifully haunting universe. Consequently, this thesis aims to illuminate how Edgar Allan Poe's poetry embraces the Gothic elements, particularly melancholy and morbidity, to reveal how these elements are not only haunting but also profoundly captivating, inviting readers to find beauty within darkness.

Understanding Poe as Poet: Life, Psyche, and the Reader's Role

This thesis acknowledges the relevance of the author's position without engaging in a theoretical exploration of authorship. Nonetheless, before diving into the theoretical framework of this thesis, the following section explores key aspects of Poe's life, drawing from literary scholars to frame the discussion in relation to the thesis statement. To understand the universe of Poe, we must understand Poe as an individual, while taking his life and experiences into consideration. We must dig into the depths of his persona, uncover the cracks in the surface, and stare into his soul in order to become one with his mind. Only then can we gain the pleasure

of pain: the shadows of the soul. This resonates with poet-critic Daniel Hoffman (1998), as he states that:

> Edgar Poe was both insane and sane, but sane mostly, especially sane when writing his poems, his criticism, and his tales. For these are composed not, as he would have dearly hoped, out of the disinterested stirrings of the primary imagination alone; they are composed out of the sufferings and wounds of his bruised and beaten yet resilient ego, his ego that had the extraordinary power of dipping, slipping, ripping down into his unconscious and, while not surrendering its willed control of the shape and form of what he wrote, yet depending for its content - always for its latent content, sometimes even for its manifest content - upon the id. The work of Idgar I Am Poet. (46)

Hoffman argues that Poe refrains from using his imagination in his writings, instead, he utilises the raw version of his reality, referred to as his ego. Nonetheless, his writings are affected by his inner feelings, the id. Furthermore, Hoffman plays with the words and the meaning of *Idgar I Am Poet,* he substitutes E with I to symbolise that Edgar is fuelled by the id, thus *Idgar* is a creative way to state that Poe's writings stem from instincts and unconscious feelings. This implies that Poe utilised his sanity to voice his insanity, creating his own literary nightmares. Moreover, *I Am Poet* illuminates the root of Poe's personality, in the sense that Poe is expressing his authentic self through his writing.

This thesis explores the poetry of Poe, where the themes in the analysis are selected by virtue of looking at the poems. Nevertheless, they also resonate with Poe's existence, which reinforces the authenticity of the experience, thus, it is significant to establish a brief overview to elucidate how his personal life has influenced his writing. Kenneth Silverman (1993) remarks that Poe's first universal experience is inflicted by his father, David Poe, Jr., who

deserts Poe and his mother, Eliza Poe, kick-starting Poe's abandonment issues at the age of two. A year following his father's departure, Poe's mother, Eliza Poe, passed away. The death of his mother is Poe's first encounter with the fatal theme of existence, setting the stage for a lifetime of grief, thus, death is the embodiment of ultimate fear that manifests repeatedly throughout his life (1).

Moreover, Poe's experiences with loss, either in terms of abandonment or death, lead to a sense of isolation. Beginning with his father deserting the family, followed by the death of his mother. Subsequently, his adoptive mother, Frances Allan, passed away, which results in his adoptive father, John Allan, remarrying and wishing no further communication (2). After having experienced such tragedy over the course of only twenty years, Poe senses a deep solitude that highlights his way of writing. The previously mentioned experiences of Poe's existence reflect the feeling of suffering.

Additionally, Hoffman summarises how Poe's tragic existence is embedded in his writing, as he notes, "Poe really was a haunted man, and as a poet, in verse or prose, he had the power to haunt his reader" (33). For that reason, Poe's only talent is not for suffering, but for how he utilises his haunted mind to create works of fiction. Instead of rejecting these heavy feelings, Poe embraces them in a way that turns these negative emotions into a powerful force that resonates with readers. Either those who undergo similar experiences, or those who recognise a segment of their existence in his universe. Thereby, Poe paves the way for those who seek beauty in the dark, because in the dark, where everything seems overwhelming, Poe offers a glimpse of comfort in his words when observed carefully.

Furthermore, David R. Saliba, who has written *A Psychology of Fear: The Nightmare Formula of Edgar Allan Poe* (1980) explores how Poe's imaginative universe emerges from the dark side of the mind, and how the relationship between the author and the reader is deemed significant in order to engage thoroughly with the experience. Saliba states:

> A study of the development of Poe's art is a study in Poe's developing understanding of the human psyche. For example, part of what his criticism reveals is that meaning in art is relative and depends as much on the reader as on the author (...) Poe's gothic tales is synonymous with experience; that is, for the reader to comprehend one of his tales he had to experience it, to feel its effects. This means that his gothic art is emotive, like the dark side of the mind. (5-6)

Fundamentally, Saliba accentuates the importance of the dynamic between the reader and the author, meaning that interpretation is not fixed, but rather shaped by each reader's subjectivity. Therefore, the individual interpretation is highly valued, since individuals comprehend the exact artworks differently based on our own experiences. In other words, when engaging with an artwork, we are putting ourselves in someone else's point of view, where we slowly begin to unmask whether or not we have experienced anything similar. We begin to question whether we can perceive ourselves in what is being expressed, or if, by any chance, we fail to resonate with the piece of work. It all boils down to the individual person: their emotions, their perceptions, and their experiences.

Furthermore, Saliba elucidates that Poe's gothic art is captivating, because it touches the dark side of our mind which possesses emotive strength. The dark side of our mind further implies nightmares, meaning that nightmares seem to affect the mind beyond dreams, as they are loaded with negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and distress. Anything that sparks these emotions within the mind often lingers, resulting in an intense emotional response, thus impacting our awakening state.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the relevant theoretical framework of this thesis. It is structured into two subchapters, beginning with *The Purpose of Reading*, which primarily draws on the work of Rita Felski (2008), while also incorporating insight from other theorists to articulate why we, as humans, read, thus emphasising the various ways literature resonates with and impacts us, providing a foundation for analysing how Poe's poems resonate with and affect readers. The second subchapter *Darkness and Decay: Understanding the Gothic* mainly engages with the work of Fred Botting, complemented by additional scholarly perspectives to examine the Gothic tradition in a manner that aligns with this thesis, especially as it pertains to the poems of Poe.

The Purpose of Reading

Rita Felski is a literary theorist, whose work *Uses of Literature* (2008) discusses why we read. Felski's exploration is crucial for understanding the personal and emotional connections that readers form with literature, hence offering a nuanced framework for analysing how literary works resonate with audiences on a deep, often subconscious level.

Felski attempts to deconstruct the rhetoric that is built up around literature, since we as individuals ought to be more receptive to the possibilities of literature. She provides four fundamental perspectives to understand the broad functions of literature: recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock. Nevertheless, this subchapter focuses exclusively on recognition and shock, as these perspectives are considered essential to exploring this thesis.

Literature as Recognition

Regarding recognition, Felski explores how literature grants readers the ability to recognise aspects of their own lives, identities and experiences within a narrative. One of Felski's key arguments is that the concept of language is a tool used to express complex emotions and create connections, as she states that "While we never own language, we are able to borrow it and bend it to our purposes, even as aspects of what we say will continue to elude us. We are embodied and embedded beings who use and are used by words" (31). This speaks to the paradox: I cannot exist without You, which alludes to how our sense of self is shaped through interactions, dialogues, and actions with others, as nothing is entirely unique. This means that humans are social creatures, and we are not meant to exist in solitude. Everything we know, we learn through others. For instance, through our upbringing, where our caregivers, such as parents, influence how we perceive the world.

To put it differently, the paradox coheres with the phrase: I am because you were. To explain this, we might use a particular phrase, favour cats over dogs, or sit in a certain way, perhaps with one leg crossing the other, simply because of someone else. Everything of our being is somehow based on others, not essentially a singular person, quite often a blend, which is developed through these interactions, dialogues, and actions. Therefore, we are always carrying the presence of others, often in minor gestures, often going unnoticed, yet they are present, shaping the essence of who we are, and what we become. We truly become a mosaic of everything we encounter.

Returning to Felski's argument, it emphasises the dynamic and adaptive nature of language, as it is not a static entity, yet it is shaped by individuals and authors to express particular experiences. Moreover, Felski's argument suggests that language is influenced by others, which is comprehended in the ways in which individuals adapt language to convey unique emotions, thoughts, and identities. When an author utilises language as a means of

communication, they invite us to engage with their universe and reflect on our own. In this way, language becomes both a shared resource and a personal instrument. While we borrow words and phrases from others, we are constantly shaping them in ways that allow us to communicate our individual experience. This is reflected in literature, where the author borrows language to express their world, yet, in turn, they invite readers to shape their way of communication into their own understanding and reflection. Hence, the act of engaging with literature becomes a mutual exchange, where language operates as a tool for both the author and the reader to connect, comprehend, and create their identities and experiences.

There exists a great extent of similarities between individuals, because eventually we somehow correlate with each other, especially through language. Language, metaphors, and expressions are reflections of shared human experience. In this sense, the way we understand the world and ourselves is influenced by what is familiar to us, often reflecting collective or cultural patterns. Felski echoes this idea, noting that "when we recognize something, we literally 'know it again'; we make sense of what is unfamiliar by fitting it into an existing scheme, linking it to what we already know" (25). To some extent recognition becomes a sense of reflection. Similar as our identity is shaped by the experiences that we encounter in the world around us, literature grants us the opportunity to reflect on and recognise parts of ourselves. By engaging with familiar experiences in literature, we can perceive ourselves through the lens of shared narratives, which draws connections between what we already know and what we encounter in the text. For instance, Poe's portrayal of grief stems from his individual context, but if readers relate to that expression, it becomes a shared experience, a shared narrative. In other words, literature becomes a mirror that aids us in recognising our own existence and identity.

Felski explores the instance of recognition as a situation where we, as individuals, can step into others' shoes and reach a parallel outcome, as she notes, "In one possible scenario,

recognition is triggered by a perception of direct similarity or likeness, as we encounter something that slots into a clearly identifiable scheme of things" (38). This is connected to how a book, or a poem can evoke memories or past experiences that were once long forgotten. To put it differently, when engaging with any type of literature, we can be triggered by certain phrases, word choices or merely descriptive language that causes a recognition of the past, hence affecting our perception of the work. Therefore, these works of fiction encourages us to revisit them, as they initially sparked a recognition of past memories, meaning when we are on the edge of forgetting, and in need of a reawakening, we can grab the book or the poem and delve into the pool of past experiences, thus re-experiencing the emotions and memories that literature evokes. This idea resonates with Hoffman's views on the lasting impact of literature, as he notes that "one has had an experience he does not forget" (22). Essentially, Hoffman refers to how the experience of reading certain pieces of fiction are unforgettable, meaning that the emotional and intellectual impact it has on readers is profound, hence literature functions as a catalyst for recognition and memory, as it evokes emotions and past experience. The conceptual link between Felski and Hoffman in this context lies in the idea that we are unable to forget certain written works, because they rekindled something in us in such a powerful way, meaning that the experience lingers with us. We recognise something of ourselves in someone else's point of view, and suddenly, as readers, we feel seen.

It is important to note that recognition is not always positive, sometimes it is unsettling or even painful. When immersing oneself in literature, we are often confronted with a mirror reflecting unflattering aspects of human nature: the dark and suppressed parts of us. We recognise elements in written works that forces us to acknowledge aspects we try to supress, which is why we often are intrigued by these works. This correlates with Felski's notion on how recognition captures the darker aspects of human nature, as she states:

> Mirrors do not always flatter; they can take us off our guard, pull us up short, reflect our image in unexpected ways and from unfamiliar angles. Many of the works we call tragic, for example, relentlessly pound home the refractoriness of human subjectivity, the often disastrous gap between intentions and outcomes, the ways in which persons commonly misjudge themselves and others. We can value literary works precisely because they force us - in often unforgiving ways - to confront our failings and blind spots rather than shoring up our self-esteem. (48)

Evidently, this passage demonstrates the multifaceted quality of literature, meaning that instead of simply making us feel good about ourselves, it forces us to face the flaws we recognise in the characters depicted. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald serves as a great example of a literary work that achieve this effect. The novel functions as a mirror to human desire, illusion, and failure, as it explores Jay Gatsby's obsession to rekindle his relationship with his great love Daisy Buchanan. Additionally, the novel uncovers the way people latch on to illusion while suppressing the painful truth, as Gatsby believes that by recreating the past, he is able to win back Daisy. His way of recreating the past is by continuously throwing these extravagant parties, holding onto the hope that one night she will make an appearance, where their love will rebloom, wishing that this time she will stay.

This aligns with how recognition can be unsettling or even painful, in the sense that we as readers might recognise elements of ourselves in the novel. Perhaps we can see ourselves as Gatsby, lingering on a past relationship, where we have idealised our own version of Daisy, building up this resilient illusion of them as our perfect partner, yet in reality, we are frightened to face the uglier truth, because it is unbearable. Therefore, Gatsby's relentless pursuit forces readers to reflect on their own idealisations and regrets, thus the novel subtly confronts us with complex questions, such as what are we willing to ignore for the sake of our dreams? How

much of our identity is built on illusion? And do we truly know ourselves, or are we merely acting out roles shaped by denial and desire?

When engaging with literature, we as readers often see parts of ourselves in the characters, in this case either in Gatsby's longing, or in Daisy's indecision. This is where recognition becomes uncomfortable, even if beautifully written. We are drawn into a beautiful yet hollow world.

Literature as Disturbance

Felski explores another perspective on the broad functions of literature, which is the device of shock and how it is utilised to evoke emotions of distress. She argues "shock thus marks the antithesis of the blissful enfolding and voluptuous pleasure that we associate with enchantment. Instead of being rocked and cradled, we find ourselves ambushed and under assault; shock invades consciousness and broaches the reader's or viewer's defenses" (113). Shock affects both body and mind. When it strikes us, we may experience an increased heart rate followed by shallow breathing and be left with a sense of confusion, as it disrupts the spectator's expectations. Although a shocking occurrence might be passing quickly, we cannot forget about the aftershock, referring to the delayed emotional reaction or lingering impact, meaning that the spectator may feel numb during the event, but the real emotional processing hits afterwards.

This helps explain why we are compelled by literature that shocks us, in the sense it stays with us emotionally, hence increasing the likelihood of revisiting that specific piece of art, or hunt for works of a similar nature, often from the same author, as we are actively searching for something that elicits that reaction within us. Much as the pursuit of a drug-induced high, we return to literature that shocks us, because we are seeking the same emotional rush. The intense reaction it provokes in us, either in form of surprise, revelation, or even

discomfort, triggers a burst of dopamine, hence we are not only reading for knowledge or mere entertainment, but we are also, in fact, chasing a visceral experience, a spark that makes us feel alive.

This concept echoes Franz Kafka's belief that literature should act as a catalyst for emotional reactions, thus pushing us to confront the depths of our own psyche, as he declares that:

> I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? So that it will make us happy, as you write? Good Lord, we would be happy precisely if we had no books, and the kind of books that make us happy are the kind we could write ourselves if we had to. But we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe from the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief. (Popova 2014)

Similar to Poe, Kafka had a troubled mind that is illustrated in his writings and his general attitude towards literature ("*Franz Kafka"*). Kafka's passionate belief about literature emphasises how we should aim for pieces of fiction that shatter us, in the sense they are supposed to bring up the buried truths and emotions hidden deep within our minds. Therefore, literature should challenge our assumptions and awaken us not just intellectually, but more importantly, emotionally. The essence of the power of literature is when it holds the ability to transform us as individuals.

Additionally, Kafka's words correlate with Felski's notion about shock, as both acknowledge the magic of literature lies in its potential to activate substance within the spectator, hence engaging with written work is not merely meant for knowledge or

entertainment. These dopaminergic triggers are attainable through the act of shock, as Felski argues. Nonetheless, Kafka refrains from using that particular term, yet the passage elicits the implication with the use of expressions associated with shock, such as “wound and stab us” that amplify a visceral reaction. The expression “a blow on the head” suggests an awakening by the magic that plays out on the page, which is associated with undergoing a startling incident. Ultimately, the expression “the death of someone” elucidates the fatality of human nature, which in its essence is habitually distressing. Fundamentally, both Felski and Kafka argue that the peak of literature happens when it is delivered in a raw, unfiltered, and devastating manner, affecting the spectator significantly on an emotional level.

The aforementioned is connected to Hoffman’s remark that “Poe really was a haunted man, and as a poet, in verse or prose, he had the power to haunt his reader” (33). Nevertheless, Hoffman formulates it in a way that suggests that one must be haunted in order to haunt someone else, speaking to the authenticity of literature, meaning that if the writer lacks experience within the field, the writer fails to properly affect the reader. To put it differently, if a writer wishes to create a piece of fiction about for instance a devastating heartbreak, the death of a loved one, or the struggles of mental illness, authenticity becomes a key factor to evoke a profound emotional response.

To explain the connection between Hoffman’s remark and Felski’s notion, they correlate, in the manner that when literature shocks us, it is not meant in any superficial way, it happens because it touches upon something sincere and quite often painful, hence a haunted writer haunts their reader. This further aligns with Kafka’s belief about how literature should disturb and not comfort us, which is only achievable, if the writer themself compose words from agony and not from a happy place. The notion of eliciting pain within the reader coheres with another of Hoffman’s statement, where he notes that “I cannot read the poems of Edgarpoe without feeling a sensation - of pain” (20). Hoffman’s statement highlights how Poe’s work

evokes a visceral emotional response, suggesting that his writings not only depict pain, but also transmit it.

The idea of disturbing the reader in an authentic way further relates to the concept the negative knowledge associated with the philosopher, Theodor Adorno, and discussed by Felski as a form of awareness that emerges from confronting the bleak and powerless truths embedded in art:

> This viewpoint assumes a somber and even melancholic cast in the work of Adorno, where the negative knowledge afforded by the work of Kafka and Beckett is hailed as the only authentic, albeit bruised and impotent, option in a capitalist system that eviscerates language of all substantive content by commodifying and reifying every last word. (81)

Elaborating on this, Adorno suggests a more philosophical perspective on the role of authenticity in literature, where the negative knowledge leans into Kafka's belief, meaning that it excludes hope or solutions, yet rather illuminates the emptiness and contradictions that permeate human experience. Authors such as Kafka and Beckett are often interpreted as embodying this type of literature, offering a glimpse into a reality shaped by capitalism's dehumanising impact, as seen through the lens of critical theory.

While Kafka and Hoffman emphasise that the emotional sincerity of the author is a significant factor to haunt or disturb the reader, Adorno builds on this, arguing that the negative knowledge is not only emotionally powerful yet also the only authentic response to a world where capitalism dismantles language and meaning. In terms of Adorno's view, literature that disturbs the reader is regarded as deeply personal, and equally necessary through a political and philosophical lense, as it serves to debunk the commodified language, proposing a bruised, yet honest form of resistance. Similarly, Poe's dark and haunting writings display a universe where the negative knowledge reigns, since Poe explores the disintegration of rational thought,

the fragility of the human mind, and the fear of facing a world without meaning or order. Echoing Kafka's nightmarish vision, Poe's writings suggest that the true nature of reality is fragmented and often beyond our grasp, revealing a truth that is unsettling and ultimately powerless to offer comfort. Therefore, the negative knowledge in Poe's universe refrains from enlightenment, and leads to an awareness of the oppressive and chaotic forces that shape human experience.

Literature as Connection

Literature is a means of connection. It is a two-sided connection that happens between the author and the reader, emphasising Saliba's notion on the importance of the author-reader dynamic. When encountering a sense of disempowerment, certain individuals favour to illustrate their thoughts and feelings with words. Whereas others prefer sinking into the substance of another's written work to search for a matter of reflection, a thought that reverberates in our hearts, or words that articulate any emotion that we are unable to process or even express ourselves. This relates to Felski's reference to the philosopher, Charles Taylor, which she draws upon to discuss self-reflection and reflection, where she states that "we live in what Charles Taylor calls webs of interlocution; struggling to define ourselves with and against others, we acquire the capacity for reflection and self-reflection" (32). This highlights interaction as a key determiner for self-reflection, thus self-definition. There is a continuous exchange between the self and the world around us, where the self represents the internal dialogues and reflection of our entirety as human beings, and the world around us reflects the external aspect of humanity, for instance engaging in a conversation or with literature.

In the context of escapism, this notion further suggests that both writing and reading present individuals with the opportunity to escape from their immediate realities, where writing operates as a way of expression, allowing the writer to escape into their own thoughts, hence

creating a personal space for processing and understanding, much as journaling utilised as a means of self-help ("*Power of Journaling"*). On the other hand, reading offers individuals to interact with the thoughts and feelings of others, where we can escape into other universes and perceptions. Hoffman argues that "of course we read into the poems we read the needs we need those poems to serve" (47). Evidently, reading is essentially beneficial if we are searching for a sense of purpose or solace in the works of others, especially when we struggle to voice our emotions in a way that feels justifiable. Either approach functions as a break from the chaos of life, hence granting the possibility of self-discovery, emotional release, and reflection in its entirety. Therefore, in these webs of interlocution, we are offered a way to navigate not only our own thoughts, but also the thoughts of others and escape into written words that guide us to understand ourselves and the world around us better.

Literature as a means of connection further relates to its timelessness. This means that literature, as an artform, continues to speak, be reinterpreted, and resonate with individuals across different cultures and eras. Felski draws upon this notion, as she notes "the idea of 'afterwardness' speaks to this delayed or belated transmission, highlighting the transtemporal movements of texts and their unpredictable dynamics of address" (120). Evidently, we are able to return to certain time periods to either explore or re-explore literature through a new perspective. Additionally, the second time engaging with a written work always diverges from the initial experience, meaning that we are inclined to notice something, perhaps a motif, a rhyme, or a character, which stands out the second time revisiting a piece of literature that we might have missed the first time around. This notion is illuminated by Hoffman, as he reflects on returning to a tale, in the hope of rediscovering, whatever it is that persistently echoes in his thoughts:

> For years my waking hours were troubled by the search, as were my sleeping hours by the memory, as I combed the pages of the tales of Poe I

> owned. How many times have I re-read 'The Pit and the Pendulum' in the fascinated hope that I had somewhere overlooked a page, a paragraph - perhaps only a phrase - which was the source of that terrible dream! (8)

Hoffman's remark encapsulates the affective relationship readers share with literature, often accompanied with the author. The way Hoffman consistently returned to Poe highlights both a desire for further interpretation in addition to the unresolved emotional resonance literature impose over time, resonating with Felski's concept of 'afterwardness'. Hoffman's experience demonstrates the way literature serves as a portal of both memory and discovery, where each time he revisits the tale indicates the possibility of uncovering a detail previously hidden or even misunderstood from his original encounter with the piece. Hoffman further notes "My chronicle of Poe's life and work and reputation and influence and how Edgarpoe wormed his way into my guts and gizzard and haunted my brain and laid a spell upon my soul which this long harangue is an attempt to exorcise" (25). In this manner, literature frequently resists resolution, embodying Felski's notion about 'transtemporal movement'. Arguably, it is not only the story that captures the reader, yet also the lingering effect it imprints that perpetually reverberates long after the initial encounter.

Furthermore, Marie-Elisabeth Lei Pihl (2022) draws upon Felski's notion of 'literary recognition' and the ways in which literature challenges the reader's thoughts:

> When readers encounter literary renditions of certain places, situations, emotions, longings, or losses that profoundly *resonate* with their own experiences, beliefs, or convictions. Otherwise put, when it feels as if the text is speaking directly to the reading mind. Literary recognition, in this sense, covers a relatively large territory of readers being able to relate to not only specific protagonists and narratives but also conventions of genre and style, or political ambitions ingrained into a given work: it stretches

> from recognizing elements from one's own life to encountering well-known stylistic conventions or the text's affiliation with a certain cultural or sociolinguistic formation or aspiration (15).

This passage reveals the broad spectrum that literature encompasses in the practice of connecting with readers, hence when speaking to us, it goes beyond the manner of writing and embraces the underlying purpose as well. Either in an implicit or explicit way, does literature address how and why it is written. Essentially, Lei Pihl argues literature can share the author's thoughts about what is right or wrong, or how the world should be. These are the aspects that readers might recognise and feel connected to.

Up to this point, the subchapter has explored the purpose of reading literature as a means of recognition, highlighting both the positive and negative facets, which recognition offer. Literature as disturbance emphasises how the shocking qualities of a written work resonate with readers. Finally, literature as a means of connection underscores how readers reflect upon, and connect with written works, often leading to a sense of self-discovery. Based on the aforementioned, this subchapter has established a foundation for further analysis.

Darkness and Decay: Understanding the Gothic

As stated in the introduction, Poe invites the reader into his universe of morbidity and melancholy, where the majority of his work is rooted within the Gothic tradition (Fisher 79). Considering the analysis of this thesis is structured around key themes within the tradition, namely loss, isolation, and death, it is significant to explore the defining characteristic of the genre. Therefore, the aim of this subchapter is to provide a deeper insight of the Gothic to better grasp how Poe embraces elements within the tradition to portray the darker facets of human existence in a way that makes them beautifully haunting. In light of this, Hoffman states that

Poe "led the most luckless life of any writer. His only talent was for suffering" (xiii). Nevertheless, many people would say that Poe also had a talent for writing, in which he utilised his suffering as a leading force in his creative expressions. This becomes particularly crucial, as it offers a lens through which we can understand how Poe's own experiences influenced his poetic exploration of these themes, raising the authenticity of his work.

The Negative Aesthetics and Psychological Complexities

The Gothic is emphasised by the macabre, the psychological, and the supernatural to evoke a sense of uneasiness within the reader. The genre traces back to Gothic architecture "from mid-12th century to the 16th century, particularly a style of masonry building characterized by cavernous spaces with the expanse of walls broken up by overlaid tracery" ("Gothic Architecture"). Nevertheless, Gothic fiction originates from literature, specifically from Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), setting the stage for the genre. The novel is rich with supernatural elements that add to its mysterious atmosphere, leaving readers on edge throughout the narrative. Additionally, it introduces the haunted house as a symbol of cultural decay and transgression, which serves as core components of the negative aesthetics within the tradition. Literary scholar Fred Botting focuses on the various styles and forms of the Gothic in his book *Gothic* (2014), in which he asserts that "a negative aesthetics informs gothic texts" (1). Essentially, the negative aesthetics oppose the traditional notions of positivity, thus incorporates aspects such as morbidity, darkness, gloominess and decay, which are utilised to evoke emotions of fear and distress within the reader, making it a vital feature of the Gothic. Ultimately, the negative aesthetics are what contribute to the genre's atmosphere, tone, and imagery.

The irrationality of Gothic works rises to the surface upon examination, as they often illustrate intense emotional outbursts, obsessive behaviours, supernatural beliefs, and violent

passions. Botting conceptualises this as “disturbances of sanity and security” (2). In a similar manner, Steven Bruhm (2002) draws upon what Freud acknowledges as critical to the human experience, which is the exploration of the individual’s psyche, stating that it is the most fundamental subject of the Gothic (261). Both critics recognise that irrationality and psychological disturbances are key factors in the Gothic, nonetheless, they approach it from different angles. Botting highlights that the disturbance of mental and emotional stability is a central aspect of the Gothic tradition, emphasising the unravelling of sanity and security. On the other hand, Bruhm’s key point is centred on the individual’s psyche, which is intended to be understood as the complex inner workings of the mind. This includes the internal struggles, desires, and fears. To put it differently, Botting explores the external forces that unsettle the mind, whereas Bruhm examines the mind’s internal complexities.

Moreover, Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) serves as a great example of a canonical Gothic work that incorporates Botting’s and Bruhm’s perspectives. From Botting’s perspective, the character Eleanor experiences intense psychological disturbance, which is reflected in her increasing paranoia. This disturbance of sanity and security is triggered by the external supernatural forces within the house, resulting in blurred lines between reality and delusion, unsettling Eleanor’s mind from the outside.

In contrast, if approaching the novel through Bruhm’s point of view, the house itself is interpreted as a symbol of Eleanor’s unconscious mind, as her repressed emotions, such as desires and fears emerge. Therefore, the haunting shifts from being an external force to also manifest internally of Eleanor’s psyche. Hence the supernatural turn of events in the Hill House is interpreted as manifestations of the characters’ hidden fears and distress.

Nevertheless, Botting’s and Bruhm’s views align in the sense that both critics recognise that Gothic fiction explores the fragility of the human psyche, hence the psychological states that are disordered or destabilised are the pivotal aspects of the Gothic tradition. This is further

supported by Marshall Brown (2005), as he denotes that "the sensibility of the gothic arises from its exceptionally undirected and unregulated emotions" (202). This implies that Gothic fiction is fuelled by intense emotional chaos, emphasising the mental and emotional instability that defines many of its characters and themes. For instance, in Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) that focuses on Esther Greenwood's mental breakdown, leading to a suicide attempt. This novel reflects the theme of mental illness, specifically depression.

Regarding the Freudian framework, Brown describes a psychological moment of a strong emotional reaction that he positions within Freud's map of the psyche, which is highly relevant regarding Gothic literature:

> The prolonged moment of speechless and agitated astonishment occurs at the boundary between the unconscious and the preconscious. Regarded topically, in the Freudian map of the psyche, the unconscious is the realm of pictures, the preconscious the realm of words, and consciousness the realm of stories. Dynamically, primitive drives are subject to what Freud calls an originary repression (*Urverdrängung).* (175)

Fundamentally, Brown underscores that the experience of astonishment lies at the boundary between the unconscious and the preconscious. It is intended to be understood as the moment where buried thoughts and emotions are on the verge of becoming consciously recognised, yet remain challenging to articulate. Subsequently, the mental processes are divided into three realms: The unconscious is the realm of pictures that refers to raw and unprocessed thoughts and emotions. The preconscious is the realm of words, which describes the state where these thoughts and emotions begin to take form in words. Lastly, the consciousness is the realm of stories that relates to thoughts and emotions being fully integrated into awareness. Furthermore, the 'originary repression' refers to Freud's idea that some primal desires and traumas are

repressed from the very beginning of psychological development, which forms the foundation of later unconscious conflicts.

To contextualise it within the Gothic, the tension between the unconscious and preconscious mirrors the Gothic's exploration of the irrational, the uncanny, and the repressed. To exemplify this notion, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) portrays the protagonist's gradual descent into madness, where her repressed emotions are expressed irrationally through her fixation on the wallpaper. The wallpaper itself is a symbol of the uncanny which reflects the Gothic tradition of turning the ordinary into something unfamiliar that evokes a sense of terror. Nonetheless, the uncanny is further elaborated in later sections. The moment of astonishment occurs when the protagonist begins to see the figure of a woman trapped behind the wallpaper. This moment reflects a surreal and emotional reaction, which the protagonist cannot fully comprehend nor explain, capturing the essence of speechless astonishment.

Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) is another example of how a Gothic work incorporates a moment of astonishment. The protagonist, Victor Frankenstein attains forbidden knowledge, resulting in psychological horror. Upon bringing his creature to life, Frankenstein is overwhelmed by emotions he cannot fully process nor explain. Instead of triumph, he is struck by the speechless astonishment filled with horror and disgust. This notion is further supported by Brown, as he notes that "What is gothic about *Frankenstein* is the fact that it is – not just that it is about – a monster" (195). Brown suggests that the novel itself functions as a monster, unfolding through disturbing descriptions and intense emotions, leading the reader into moments of astonishment.

Reverting to the negative aesthetics, the Gothic tradition immerses the reader into a world of psychological and emotional complexity. Botting touches upon this notion, as he states:

> Knowledge and understanding do not constitute the primary aim of gothic texts: what counts is the production of affects and emotions, often extreme and negative: fear, anxiety, terror, horror, disgust and revulsion are staple emotional responses. Less intense, but still negative, affects instilled by bleak landscapes include feelings of melancholic gloom, loneliness and loss. (6)

This passage evidently reveals that Gothic works are designed to evoke intense emotional responses within the reader, as Botting stresses that 'the production of affects and emotions' is considered significant. By shifting the focus from conveying knowledge to evoking emotions, the Gothic genre introduces an alternative approach of engaging with fiction by disrupting and challenging the secure and rational world with the use of negative emotions. Hence the Gothic experience is intended to be visceral and affective. This is why people often are drawn to the of morbidity and melancholy, because these negative emotions, occasionally draped in beautifully haunting expressions remain buried in us.

Hoffman supports this notion, as he remarks that "Poe's poem will address itself to the highest manifestation of poetry's supreme province, Beauty, rendered in a Melancholy Tone, and it will accomplish the excitation of the reader's sensitive soul in the space of a single sitting, i.e., within a hundred lines" (86). Although Hoffman credits Poe's talent to achieve this, we can trace it back to the underlying qualities of the Gothic genre. Gothic works possess the ability to almost hypnotise the reader, through eerie settings and mysterious atmospheres. Hence, immersing them into a haunting universe, where beauty and darkness exist in symbiosis, leaving the reader in agony.

The Sublime

As stated previously, beauty and darkness coexist in the Gothic tradition. Nevertheless, Immanuel Kant distinguished beauty and the sublime. David Bindman et al. (2012) draw upon this notion:

> If the beautiful is a representation of a quality then the sublime is experienced through quantity; if the beautiful invokes a positive pleasure that is compatible with charm and the play of imagination, the sublime evokes agitated emotion and gives negative rather than positive pleasure. If beauty is adapted to calm judgement, then the sublime is associated with chaos and disorder. If we must seek ground external to ourselves for the beauties of nature, we seek the sublime only in ourselves. (47)

Essentially, Kant describes beauty as an aesthetic experience that is defined by pleasure and harmony, whereas the sublime is an aesthetic experience characterised by the ways in which it evokes a sense of vastness, awe, and even fear. However, Brown remarks that "Throughout the gothic, the sublime is often not even a step away from the ridiculous (211). Even though the sublime is utilised as an aesthetic technique to evoke an experience that transcends ordinary understanding that often elicit both attraction and fear, Brown implies that occasionally, the sublime is often heavily employed, even exaggerated, which bears negative consequences as it might be perceived as absurd and laughable. Brown's statement is not entirely regarded as typical within the Gothic tradition, yet the aspect of absurdity is a repeated trait in the Gothic. This is supported by Botting's definition of the sublime, as he states it results "from a disrupted sense of order and a discombobulation of reason, imagination and feeling: intensities, magnitudes and violent contrasts overwhelmed mental faculties – evoking terror, awe, wonder – and threatened the eclipse of any subjective unity" (7). In essence, the sublime challenges the rational perception that causes feelings of confusion or awe.

Additionally, Botting's notion reinforces Kant's description of the sublime, in the sense it is affiliated with chaos and disorder ingrained in the inner experience rather than in the external reality. This coheres with Brown's statement that "The gothic is perhaps the most sublime of all our literary modes, transcending the merely human sublime of the psyche" (11). Essentially, the sublime speaks to the feelings the spectator experiences when engaging with literature. However not on a superficial level, where the spectator observes the words on the page, but when the spectator actively interprets the essence of it, which produces a sense of ecstasy. This creates attachment, as the spectator becomes hooked by the feeling. For instance, when we are drawn to the morbid and melancholy aspects of a work, we are by some means attracted to the sublime.

Transgression

As mentioned earlier, transgression is regarded as a crucial aspect within the negative aesthetics of the Gothic tradition. What is meant by transgression is any violation of law, whether it is moral, societal or natural. Botting offers a broader explanation of transgression:

> Transgression, too, brings out the importance of limits in the act of exceeding them: one becomes more keenly aware of boundaries and taboos, both of their existence and the consequences of breaking them. Crossing boundaries, however, demonstrates the protection they offer. The excesses of gothic fictions, involving the breaking of codes of law or knowledge, disobeying paternal injunctions, indulging immoral desires and appetites, displays transgression and brings norms and limits more sharply into focus. (9)

In Gothic works transgression operates as a source of horror, yet also as a means of exposing societal boundaries. In the mundane world, in a conventional sense, an established order of

right and wrong exists, where society adheres to what is recognised as correct behaviour. Additionally, we live in a world of natural order with no intermediary between the heavens and the earth. On account of this, the Gothic vocalises transgression by dramatising anything that contradicts normality and reality, such as forbidden desires and anxieties, yet also otherworldly beings and elements that defies the laws of nature.

To provide a better understanding of transgression, Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* serves as a classic example of how a Gothic work can depict a character who defies moral, social, or natural laws. In this case Frankenstein, a mad scientist, is portrayed as obsessed with achieving scientific success, thus his character defies moral boundaries, because of his selfishness to proceed with the experiment, despite knowing his actions are wrong considering moral codes of conduct. Furthermore, Frankenstein utilises human remains in his experiment to create life, where this illegal use of dead bodies is perceived as an example of a way the novel violates societal laws, since the employment of human corpses for scientific purposes without permission is regarded as a criminal offense. Additionally, the novel violates the natural law that is identified, when Frankenstein plays the role of a creator and assembles his creature from stolen body parts to create a new life artificially. Thereby, he defies the natural order where death is supposed to be final, which challenges the fundamental principles of biology and nature.

The Uncanny

After having accounted for transgression within the Gothic tradition, it is further imperative to examine the uncanny, since Hoffman suggests that Poe's writings evoke the uncanny, as he states "His diction is that of the Gothic spook story or ghost poem, his vision that of a man struggling to say what he has seen in a world so unlike ours that he has difficulty using the language of ours to describe it" (59). Hoffman argues that Poe utilises Gothic language to

describe strange experiences, because the conventional world with its mundane language cannot justify it. This passage accentuates the familiar as our world with our language and highlights the unfamiliar as the world Poe attempts to paint. As earlier explained, the uncanny occurs when turning the ordinary into something strange to evoke unease. Consequently, Poe grabs our world with our language and manipulates it into something unfamiliar, thus creating a strange world with strange language, because only then, it is deemed justifiable to portray those experiences.

Sigmund Freud theorises the concept in a psychological context in his essay *The Uncanny (Das Unheimliche)* (1919), where he presents the uncanny as follows:

> There is no doubt that this belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread. It is equally beyond doubt that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general. Yet one may presume that there exists a specific affective nucleus, which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One would like to know the nature of this common nucleus, which allows us to distinguish the 'uncanny' within the field of the frightening. (123)

Fundamentally, Freud characterises the uncanny as a subset of fear. The concept itself bears ambiguity which reflects its complex nature. However, Freud posits that the uncanny has a unique affective quality, as it is utilised to evoke emotional and psychological responses. In specifically the field of art, the uncanny is used as a tool to provoke a reaction from the spectator by making the familiar strange and unsettling.

One way to interpret the emotional quality of a work of art is through a superabundance of coincidence, where Brown remarks that "Freud takes the superabundance of coincidence to be the one of the defining characteristics of the uncanny" (195). Coincidence in this context

refers to occurrences or happenings that may seem random, however as they begin to occur repeatedly, they appear eerily intentional, resulting in this uncanny feeling. For instance, noticing the same word or number appear repeatedly. In other words, noticing a meaningful pattern. To provide an example of this, the film *The Shining* (1980) by Kubrick Stanley demonstrates a scene, where the main protagonist, Danny Torrance, frequently says *Redrum* and writes it on the door with red lipstick. That alone creates an eerie feeling, nonetheless the uncanny is further strengthened, when the spectator discovers that *Redrum* is, in fact, *Murder* spelled backwards.

While the superabundance of coincidence generates an uncanny effect, simply by turning random occurrences or happenings into something that feels intentional, Sigmund Freud (1919) further emphasises another significant aspect, which is the unsettling power of repetition itself. He notes:

> The factor of the repetition of the same thing will perhaps not be acknowledged by everyone as a source of the sense of the uncanny. According to my own observations it undoubtedly evokes such a feeling under particular conditions, and in combinations with particular circumstances - a feeling, moreover, that recalls the helplessness we experience in certain dream-states. (143-144)

This paragraph suggests that repetition causes psychological discomfort. As stated above, the superabundance of coincidence centres about meaningful patterns, nonetheless, the repetition itself emphasises that the act of encountering something frequently evokes an unreal sensation, which Freud describes as the disorienting loops we experience in our dreams. To put it differently, when reality is behaving in a way that is beyond our control, we experience similar feelings, as we encounter in our dream-state.

Thus far, the subchapter has examined the Gothic genre through the negative aesthetics and psychological complexities, highlighting the gloomy atmosphere, and the disturbance of sanity and security, as well as the exploration of the inner mind. Additionally, the sublime explains how readers are drawn to the elements of morbidity and melancholy, as it evokes feelings of awe, vastness, and fear. Moreover, transgression outlines any violation of moral, societal, and natural codes. Lastly the uncanny emphasises the eeriness created by turning the familiar into something unfamiliar. Based on the aforementioned, this completes the theoretical framework for further analysis.

Analysis

This chapter analyses five of Poe's poems to illuminate how his work embraces the Gothic elements, particularly melancholy and morbidity to reveal how these elements are not only haunting, but also profoundly captivating, inviting readers to find beauty within darkness. This is achieved by examining the linguistic and stylistic elements, where words and phrases are closely inspected to interpret the meaning and emotional depth of the poems. Moreover, the analysis is organised into three themes, beginning with *The Dead Beloved: Love and Loss Beyond the Grave, Lonely Island of Solitude,* and *The Majesty of Death.* These themes capture the depth of human experiences, which are selected by the virtue of analysing the poems. The analysis concentrates solely on Poe's poetry, hence excluding everything with his prose to keep a narrow focus for deeper exploration of poetic elements that emphasises how Poe combines feelings of pleasure and pain. The analysis engages with relevant theory as necessary to support the interpretations. Additionally, four of the five poems employ the lyrical I as the speaker, nevertheless, the gender of this lyrical persona is not explicitly indicated within the poems. For the purposes of this analysis, I alternate between referring to the speaker as the lyrical I, and masculine pronouns for ease of discussion.

The Dead Beloved: Love and Loss Beyond the Grave

The Dead Beloved is the first theme that explores how two different poems depict the variety of ways in which loss, in the shape of love, is represented. According to Margaret Stroebe et al. (2015) "The term 'bereavement' comes from the Latin word *rumpere* (to break, to carry, or tear away). It refers to the objective situation of a person who has recently suffered the loss of a significant person through death" (531). While the term implies a single, identifiable event, the emotional repercussions are often much more sustained and diffuse. Stroebe et al. further

outline a wide range of responses to bereavement, from yearning, guilt, and despair to intrusive thoughts, shock, and even physical exhaustion. (531-532). These reactions suggest that bereavement encompasses not only the loss of someone, but also of yourself, and everything in between. Any encounter with loss either by abandonment or death is often accompanied by grief. Grief is anything but linear. It reveals itself in many facets and will often remain a part of you. It can manifest as a sensation that inhabits your chest or seeks refuge in your gut, an unpredictable heartache. Not caring where you are, or where you are going. The pain of loss is beyond words, especially for those who have yet to experience it.

Since the following section focuses on losing a loved one from the perspective of a bereaved lover, it highlights aspects of morbidity and melancholy in the poems. Regarding Poe's perception about how melancholy is the ultimate embodiment of poetic beauty, Vincent Buranelli (1977) incorporates a statement from Poe, which he characterises as reflective of Poe's literary philosophy:

> Poe's notion of the function of melancholy in poetry leads him to ask himself what is the most melancholy of subjects. "Death - was the obvious reply." He next asks when death is most poetical. "When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world - and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover." (94)

This explains why Poe emphasises the tragic beauty in much of his writings, since the death of a beautiful woman is, in his belief, the most emotional subject of all. And the one best suited to narrate the story is the bereaved lover, someone who deeply loved the woman, and is now mourning her. Albeit Poe's various written works that utilises this subject, this section solely

focuses on “The Raven” (1845) and “Annabel Lee” (1849) to demonstrate how the morbid and melancholy elements are perceived as both captivating and profoundly beautiful.

“The Raven”

“The Raven” was originally published in 1845 and explores the speaker’s loss of a loved one, Lenore. The poem is recognised and critically assessed by various scholars, thus canonised as Poe’s greatest poem, which is supported by Tony Magistrale (2001) statement that “Without qualification, this is Poe’s most famous” (39). Furthermore, Buranelli draws upon Poe’s reflections on composing *“*The Raven”. He mentions that “His objective is to elevate the souls of his readers by suggesting to them intimations of the perfect beauty that lies beyond this world. He here adds that the tone of the highest beauty in poetry is sadness and that melancholy, therefore, is “the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.” (93) This contributes to the poem’s sorrowful and haunting atmosphere executed beautifully, as Poe deliberately chooses melancholy as the dominant emotion to achieve what he recognises as the ultimate embodiment of poetic beauty.

Despite its diverse representations, sorrow illustrated in poetry is a powerful emotion, to which Poe argues that it connects us to that deep, soulful longing for something eternal or lost, such as a lost love, emphasising the connection between the author and the reader. Therefore, by exposing his readers to poetry wrapped in a soul crushing drape, Poe aims to showcase a perfect beauty that stirs their emotions. Buranelli further offers his own interpretation of the poem, in which he highlights the importance of the Raven as its central symbol:

> There is a second meaning that has to be interpreted through symbols of the poem, through suggestive signs standing for ideas hidden below the surface. The raven is the principal symbol. By the common consent of

> mankind, the raven, with its jet black feathers and harsh croak, represents fate: It is, as Poe says, a "bird of ill omen," Therefore he found it pertinent to his poem. He then added a symbolical interpretation of his own. He tells us that *his* raven is "emblematical of *Mournful and Neverending Remebrance,*" which means that the bereaved lover, who is trying "to borrow/From my books surcease of sorrow-sorrow for the lost Lenore," will now have his sorrow brought home to him in the most acute way by this creature that precisely stands for memory. (102)

This represents one critic's point of view, explaining how the Raven functions as a symbol with a deeper meaning, drawing on the traditional symbolism of the bird, a messenger of misfortune, which Poe appears to affirm yet adds a personal twist to it. In the sense that the Raven must act as the "*Mournful and Neverending Remebrance*", reminding the lyrical I of never escaping the pain of remembering his lost love, Lenore. This answers why Poe foregrounds "The Raven" as the initial determiner, instead of Lenore, to emphasise the psychological impact the Raven has on the lyrical I. Nevertheless, the following analysis further engages with the poem to explore how love and loss beyond the grave is illustrated in a way that resonates with readers fascinated by beauty within the darkness.

The loss of Lenore is initially referenced in stanza 2, where Poe presents it as a source of deep sorrow and longing that anchors the speaker's emotional state:

> Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
> And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
> Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow
> From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore -
> For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore -
> Nameless *here* for evermore. (Poe 68, lines 7-12)

Poe utilises symbolisms of “bleak December” and “dying ember” to reinforce the speaker’s grief. These symbolisms indicate a gloomy mood of finality, since December is the last month of the year, where warmth and life ends. This highlights the absence of joy in the speaker’s life, suggesting the perpetual state of his sorrow, meaning without Lenore, the world remains forever cold. Poe portrays Lenore in a manner that aligns her as a symbol of purity and grace; “the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name”. Her passing has placed her among the angels, where her divine beauty remains unattainable, and only appreciated in memory, which is emphasised by the following verse line “Nameless here for evermore”. This indicates her earthly presence, like December, marks an ending, leaving the lyrical I with an aching grief that, in contrast to Lenore, stretches into eternity.

This further establishes a Gothic paradox, where beauty in the shape of innocence is intertwined with loss in the most fatal state, death. Elaborating on this notion, Lenore is depicted as a young beauty, but she was claimed by death despite her innocence, making the reading of this beautifully haunting. Additionally, the repetition of “Lenore” emphasises the speaker’s obsessive grief. By repeating her name at the end of verse lines ten and eleven, Poe creates a musical echo making the lines more memorable for the reader yet in a haunting manner. Similar to the lyrical I, the reader becomes haunted by Lenore, as we are forced to notice her significance, emphasised by the repetition of her name. Therefore, Poe effectively establishes Lenore as unforgettable and central to the speaker’s thoughts.

Furthermore, this resonates with Felski’s notion about how recognition is not always positive, as “We can value literary works precisely because they force us - in often unforgiving ways - to confront our failings and blind spots rather than shoring up our self-esteem” (48). On account of this, if we, as readers, have encountered such a devastating loss, reading this may awaken feelings of sorrow that we thought had been buried. Therefore, it resonates deeply with those who have faced their own profound loss, either in the form of a loving partner, a child,

or a parent, where we are reminded of the enduring pain that such experiences can bring. Additionally, it provokes a shocking reaction, as the reader is forced to confront the reality of loss, realising that death is inevitable, and the aftermath is shattering, confining your soul to a lifetime of grief. Its raw exploration of human suffering and helplessness enhances its effectiveness.

Poe deploys a great extent of repetition in "The Raven", more prominently than any of the other poems I examine. The most significant repetition is of the Raven uttering the word "Nevermore" (Poe 68-71). This particular instance echoes an unsettling manner, thus speaking to the poem's supernatural elements, a talking Raven with an agenda, emphasising its Gothic traits. In stanza 14, the lyrical I expresses hope for relief, only to be reminded by the Raven that his grief will not subside, yet instead intensify from sorrow to torment, emphasising the impact of loss:

> Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
> Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
> "Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he hath sent thee
> Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;
> Quaff, of quaff this kind nepenthe and forget his lost Lenore!"
> Quoth the Raven "Nevermore." (Poe 70-71, lines 79-84)

This stanza alludes to an ethereal presence, suggesting that the memory of Lenore, even after her passing, still lingers in a celestial form, speaking to the Gothic traits of the supernatural. This is interpreted from the mentioning of "Seraphim" that ties Lenore's death to a divine realm, creating a juxtaposition of the earth and the afterlife, where life is represented as constant suffering, and death is represented as peaceful. This contradiction reinforces the poem's melancholy tone, while it gestures toward a worldview in which death is viewed as a form of spiritual release, a release from the torment of earthly existence. Additionally, this stanza

exhibits the moment the lyrical I hoped for relief, which is interpreted from “respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore”. In this verse line, “nepenthe” symbolises a soothing remedy consumed in hope for oblivion, which highlights the speaker's wish for forgetting. Nevertheless, this is soon subverted by the Raven’s remark of “Nevermore”, transforming the divine into a message of despair. Hence it breaks the stereotypical notion that beings sent from above are meant to offer solace to a troubled soul. This moment reflects Brown’s remark on the Freudian framework of astonishment, as the lyrical I realises he may never escape his grief, hence becoming forever trapped “between the unconscious and the preconscious.” (175).

In stanza 15 Poe creates a comparison between the Raven and a prophet, as it appears to be sent from above to the lyrical I, whose soul suffers after the loss of Lenore:

> “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” (Poe 71, lines 85-90)

The Raven brings an inevitable message to the lyrical I. Nonetheless, instead of offering solace to the narrator, the Raven delivers a prophecy of despair, forcing the lyrical I to confront the harsh reality of his loss. Therefore, the Raven defies the prophetic principles, as the eleven repeated utterances of “Nevermore” serve as a cruel reminder bestowed upon the lyrical I, revealing that his grief may never be alleviated. With each repetition Poe delivers a renewed emotional blow to the reader. This notion further highlights the Gothic traits presented in the poem, specifically the supernatural beliefs that Botting conceptualises, which further showcases a “disturbance of sanity and security” (2), in the sense the Raven disturbs the lyrical

I, and instead of providing a sense of security to his already unstable mind, the Raven, in fact, reinforces these negative emotions, thus heightens the feelings of despair.

Additionally, the loss of Lenore represents a great tragedy for the lyrical I, leading to an accumulation of mental distress to such an extent, he begins to experience hallucinations. This suggests that the visitation from the Raven symbolises the disintegration of his mind, which correlates with Buranelli's claim that "Poe writes, nevertheless, from the standpoint of psychology rather than ethics" (73). The poem effectively reveals the inner workings of the mind, since the loss of Lenore drives the lyrical I to the edge of psychological collapse, which further reflects Bruhm's belief that the most remarkable element of the Gothic is the exploration of the individual's psyche (261). To elaborate on this, the speaker's grief becomes so consuming that he shifts between a desperate desire to cling to the memory of her, even if it means enduring eternal pain, and a yearning for emotional numbness, allowing him to entirely forget her. This juxtaposition portrays the complexity of human nature, where both options illustrate negative consequences, suggesting that life offers no victory, forcing you to pick your struggle.

Poe vocalises loss in a more sinister tone in "The Raven", inviting the reader to sink deeper into the void of despair. The tone and mood of the poem point more to an atmosphere of misery combined with melancholy, which might resonate with readers, who have experienced any instance of loss. These further highlights Felski's notion about disturbance, as "shock invades consciousness and broaches the reader's or viewer's defenses" (113). To put it differently, we as readers become shocked about the brutality of losing a beloved, hence it triggers a sense of discomfort within us. Nevertheless, it also makes us feel alive. Discomfort is heightened, as the whole fatality of human nature is indeed embedded within this poem, where the Raven in the form of a prophet symbolises the Grim Reaper, the personification of death. This means the poem suggests that the Raven's appearance at the speaker's chamber

door symbolises a summons to the underworld, indicating he will never reunite with Lenore, and is condemned to live in perpetual torment over her loss.

Lenore is often interpreted as being inspired by the tragic death of Poe's beloved wife, Virginia (Magola par. 4). By taking this into consideration, the poem acts as a great example of a written work that successfully elicits pain, given that it is composed from agony. This speaks to the authenticity of the poem, relating to "the negative knowledge" that Adorno discusses, as Poe sheds light on the emptiness and contradictions that penetrate human experience, rather than sweeping it under the rug. To contextualise it further, the lyrical I, much as Poe himself, enters a stage in life after encountering such a significant loss that the human is deemed fragile, unable to grasp the process of recovering, thus trapped in the vicious cycle of suffering. This results in a devastating, and simultaneously honest representation of human experience, which others might refrain from.

The lyrical I moves from being denied a reunion with Lenore, to a denial of even the possibility of forgetting her, meaning that the Raven proclaims that he will never escape this grief, reinforcing the speaker's gradual descent into madness. The pain, hence, serves as the only reminder of what has gone was real, suggesting that the lyrical I implicitly prolongs the suffering, since pain acts as the last link uniting them. It is a beautiful articulation of human suffering that essentially is what captivates readers. This further aligns with Kafka's belief about reading literature that wounds us, as the speaker's torment is vividly depicted causing a visceral reaction within readers, like the Raven, the poem disturbs us rather than providing a sense of comfort (Popova 2014). The lyrical I reveals a haunted mind, thoroughly rooted in psychological turmoil, thus aligning with what Bruhm describes as the Gothic's most principal subject (261). The lyrical I transfers his haunted self to readers, which establishes a mutual exchange, where readers are swept into a world saturated with beautifully haunting emotions.

“Annabel Lee”

Parallel to “The Raven”, the second poem in this section “Annabel Lee” published in 1849 also exhibits the loss of the speaker’s beloved, named Annabel lee, and his enduring sorrow after her death. Jacky W. Dumas’s (2019) interpretation of the poem reflects Poe’s real-life heartbreak over Sarah Elmira Royster. Dumas establishes the connection by highlighting certain words in the poem that suggest the youthfulness of both Annabel Lee and the narrator, which he then places in the context of an allusion to Poe and Royster, creating a parallel to their beginning of their relationship. He further indicates that the illustration of Annabel Lee’s passing is a reference to Royster’s father, who was against their love, emphasising the notion of innocent love being unfairly destroyed (318-319). Conversely, Buranelli suggests that the death of Poe’s young wife Virginia may have been the inspiration behind “Annabel Lee” (37-38). This represents two different critic’s point of view, nevertheless, the following analysis refrains from determining whether the poem was inspired by either Royster or Virginia. Yet keeps this possibility in mind to highlight the authenticity of its portrayal of loss, and the ways it appeals to readers who are captivated by the beauty of melancholy.

The haunting theme of the dead beloved is central to Poe’s poetry, where love persists even after death. The love illustrated in “The Raven” captures the torment of loss and the longing for a reunion beyond the grave, but in a more macabre tone, where love and death are eerily intertwined. Whereas “Annabel Lee” paints a picture of a bittersweet and nostalgic love that brings the lyrical I sorrow expressed through devotion instead of despair. The poem carries a softer, more romantic tone. Haunting like moonlight on the sea, which is already established in the first stanza:

> It was many and many a year ago,
>
> In a kingdom by the sea,
>
> That a maiden there lived whom you may know

By the name of Annabel Lee;

And this maiden she lived with no other thought

Than to love and be loved by me. (Poe 89, lines 1-6)

The verse line: “In a kingdom by the sea” reveals a timeless and whimsical setting, creating a dreamy and emotional tone from the beginning. It further suggests a sense of isolation, in the sense it implies that the setting is far from reality. This introduces the negative aesthetics of the poem, initiating the less intense affects of melancholy. Despite its ethereal associations, the verse line hints at eternal love and haunting loss, since the use of the sea contributes to the poems’ mystery and melancholy tone, as the sea symbolises vastness, loss, and death. It foreshadows the heartbreaking event that later unfolds, preparing readers to witness the tragedy of youthful love.

The poem illustrates the innocence of love as the most powerful statement, which is interpreted from the last two verse lines: “And this maiden she lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me.” These emotionally loaded words awaken something entirely human within us, as it captures the aspect of unconditional love that we as humans yearn for. A quality truly natural from the moment God created Eve as a lifelong companion for Adam. Thereby, the verse lines serve as an allusion to the Biblical creation of Eve for Adam, highlighting the pure and exclusive nature of Annabel Lee’s love for the lyrical I. Additionally, it reinforces the notion of innocent and eternal love immersed in devotion.

Annabel Lee’s devotion is reciprocated by the lyrical I to such an extent that even after her death, love is the eternal force, functioning as the emotional bridge that connects the world of the living to the world beyond, which is interpreted from stanza 5:

But our love it was stronger by far than the love

Of those who were older than we-

Of many far wiser than-

And neither the angels in Heaven above

Nor the demons down under the sea

Can ever dissever my soul from the soul

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee; (Poe 90, lines 27-33)

Poe utilises the classic juxtaposition of angels and demons to express the enduring bond between Annabel Lee and the lyrical I, which means that no spiritual beings whether divine as the angels symbolise, nor damned as the demons symbolise, can separate their souls.

Poe reinforces the mystery and melancholy aspects of the sea, by utilising it as the home of the demons. This transforms the sea into a gateway to the underworld, further emphasising that the once romantic setting, established in the first stanza, now carries a haunting undercurrent. This depiction not only exemplifies Poe's fascination with death, but also invites readers to experience the heartfelt beauty found in sorrow and memory, adhering to the hallmarks of the Gothic genre.

Moreover, the detachment from society established from the setting enhances the psychological turmoil of the lyrical I, aligning with Bruhm's belief that the exploration of the individual's psyche is significant in the Gothic tradition (261). This is particularly accentuated in the final stanza:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side

Of my darling - my darling - my life and my bride,

In her sepulchre there by the sea-

In her tomb by the sounding sea. (Poe 90, lines 34-41)

The image of death and burial elucidated by the verse lines “In her sepulchre there by the sea / In her tomb by the sounding sea” reveals a pure and undying love that transcends death, supported by the romantic undertone of the poem. This demonstrates a transgression of natural boundaries, a key element of the Gothic discussed by Botting, as the living and the dead are meant to be apart and not intermingled. Words such as “tomb” illustrate a Gothic space, indicating isolation and melancholy, associated with death and often charged with emotional intensity. This effectively both evokes the sublime and the grotesque, as the lyrical I lies beside her “in her sepulchre” that creates a motif of physical decay and morbidity, suggesting that the act of sleeping beside her corpse arises from the realisation that mourning and remembrance through memory no longer suffice. This reflects Brown’s remark of absurdity as a common trait in the Gothic tradition (211), which creates an unsettling manner within readers, but similarly a bittersweet. We recognise their love as a solid foundation, still standing even after death, indicating that death is, in fact, not finality, yet a haunting continuation, as the lyrical I is haunted by the devotion and memory to Annabel Lee.

This speaks to Felski’s concept of an unflattering mirror, as it creates an emotional mirror from an unfamiliar angle for readers, who have lingered too long in their own losses, thus revealing their haunted attachments (48). This can further be linked to the Freudian framework of astonishment that Brown draws upon, stating that “The prolonged moment of speechless and agitated astonishment occurs at the boundary between the unconscious and the preconscious” (175). In terms of the lyrical I, he experiences this overwhelming love for Annabel Lee, which means that his grief is equally overwhelming, implying that he cannot fully process it nor explain it. This is where the astonishment occurs, almost freezing him emotionally, which is highlighted by the way he lies besides her corpse, reinforcing the state of irrationality

Poe blends aspects of both emotional familiarity and chilling depth to build a psychological and affective connection with his readers, creating a sense of mirrored identification and visceral disturbance, aligning with Felski's notions about recognition and shock. To elaborate on the role of recognition, there are two crucial repetitions in the poem, the verse line: "In a kingdom by the sea" recurs four times, once in the first four stanzas, and the name of "Annabel Lee" appears once in each sixth stanzas, mirroring mantric qualities. This creates a looping pattern of grief, indicating a psychological truth that many may recognise intimately, if they have encountered any aspect of loss. Hence reinforcing the belief of grief functions as anything but linear.

This relates to the citation discussed in the section *Literature as Recognition,* where Felski notes that "when we recognize something, we literally 'know it again; we make sense of what is unfamiliar by fitting it into an existing scheme, linking it to what we already know" (25). Poe utilises common tropes of youthful romance and tragic death that develops personal sorrow into a shared narrative across cultures and time periods, affirming literature as a means of connection and the timelessness of it. The poem is more likely to resonate with those who have lost someone they loved sincerely, establishing a haunting familiarity, where the poem serves as a two-sided mirror reflecting both the speaker's emotions, and readers' lived or imagined experiences of love that is abrupted by death. On account of this, readers practically borrow Poe's language for their own reflection to articulate and process grief, reflecting Felski's notion on how we borrow and bend language.

In order to elaborate on the role of shock, we have to return to the taboo intimacy between the lyrical I and the corpse of Annabel Lee. This disturbs the conventional boundaries between the living and the dead, causing readers to feel a sense of contempt in the shape of shock. By crossing this boundary, Poe highlights the power of love surpassing death. Even though the speaker's action carries a beautifully haunting note, the shocking action replaces

comfort with disturbance, thus agreeing with Kafka's belief that literature ought to torment us (Popova 2014). The lyrical I is not healed by remembering Annabel Lee, instead he is haunted by her, hence becoming a figure of the negative knowledge developed by Adorno, as Poe portrays the consequences a soul suffers after losing a loved one, instead of deliberately covering it up. Since this paper already has accounted for the great deal of loss manifested in Poe's life, the authenticity of his grief becomes present in the poem, hence eliciting pain in readers, cohering with Hoffman's remark.

The duality of the poem causes two different reactions within readers. The speaker's never-ending love for Annabel Lee is enchanting, yet simultaneously his inability to find peace with her death is startling. On account of this, the poem serves as an artefact of both recognition and shock. Readers might relate to the love portrayed, thus discover aspects of themselves within the 41 lines. Nevertheless, at the same time, they might be disturbed by what they uncover, for instance, if they can relate to the speaker's inability to overcome the death of Annabel Lee.

To summarise this theme, these two poems explored in the context of how loss in the shape of love is illustrated, demonstrates the allure of melancholy. As stated in the beginning, Poe's idea of the most poetic topic is the death of a beautiful woman voiced by the mourning lover. In "The Raven", beauty is found in the way the lyrical I describes Lenore as a heavenly figure, where the Gothic elements of the poem are perceived captivating, as readers might recognise themselves in the sombre world portrayed. Additionally, the repetition of the name of Lenore happens eight times over the course of 108 verse lines, repeated twice consecutively within the stanza, occurring in only four stanzas overall. This reflects how, just as readers, similar to the lyrical I, stands on the verge of almost forgetting her, we are suddenly drawn back, re-haunted by her lingering presence. Not in a frightening manner, but jarring, as the sudden agony of a heart breaking. Conversely, in "Annabel Lee" beauty is found in the

speaker's devotion to Annabel Lee, where not even death can do them part. The name of Annabel Lee is repeated six times over the course of 41 verse lines, and never more than once in each of the six stanzas. Nonetheless, Poe alters between a single possessive determiner “my”, a definite article “the”, and an epithet “beautiful” to emphasise the sincerity of the speaker. The repetition of Annabel Lee creates a natural flow, thus establishing an illusion of this ethereal romance woven with a melancholic undertone.

Essentially, these two poems transform Poe’s haunting from a solitary position to a participatory one, where the Dead Beloved becomes a symbol of not only personal grief, but a universal aspect of humanity. In the sense, we all, eventually will lose a loved one, or perhaps have already encountered loss. When reading the poems, we are not only encountering the speaker's mourning, but we also participate in it, reinforcing the connecting qualities of literature. However, there is a difference between them. In “The Raven”, readers are captured in the speaker's psychological collapse expressed in a claustrophobic and dim setting, where we feel the desperate and obsessive grief. Although emphasised in a melancholy tone, the poem is amplified with a dread-filled and anxious tone, resulting in readers almost co-suffering in madness with the lyrical I. Essentially, the lyrical I longs to escape the torment by forgetting Lenore.

Whereas, in “Annabel Lee”, readers are drawn by the speaker's devotion expressed in a romantic ethereal setting, where we experience an eternal and reciprocated love shared through an idealised and melancholy tone. Evidently, the lyrical I clings to the memory of Annabel Lee, unwilling to let it fade away. Furthermore, the poems transform the pain into a poetic allure. This creates an emotional interaction, where readers’ individual experiences of love and loss connect with the speaker's sorrow. Based on this, the poems evoke an emotional response within readers, rather than just provoking thoughts. Additionally, they reveal how literature operates not only as a representation but also an experience, allowing readers to

reflect upon the most fundamental aspects of human nature, particularly the need to love and be loved, to grieve, and to remember.

Lonely Island of Solitude:

Lonely Island of Solitude is the second theme that examines how two poems illustrate the variety of ways in which loneliness and isolation are depicted. To understand how solitude can manifest emotionally and psychologically in literature, it is crucial to consider how its meaning shifts over time in reality. According to K. H. Rubin (2001):

> Typically all forms of solitude decrease from early through middle and late childhood. As noted above, causes of shy behavior change from early wariness to the anxiety associated with being socially evaluated. While reticent behavior tends to decrease with age, it is also the case that the 'meanings' of different forms of solitude change as well. For example, as children come to cope with their social anxieties among unfamiliar peers, they become increasingly likely to display that form of solitude that had been viewed earlier as normal and adaptive - *solitary-exploration* and *construction*. Thus, with increasing age, such constructive solitude becomes increasingly associated with measures of social wariness, and psychological markers of anxiety and emotional dysregulation. (14056)

This changing meaning of solitude, from adaptive to anxious, underlines how, in later stages, being alone may no longer serve a constructive purpose. This shift in the psychological function of solitude underscores how, for some individuals, involuntary isolation can elicit a sense of paralysis. Togetherness turns into loneliness, and as the burden of loneliness grows heavier, you become unable to move. Trapped somewhere between body and mind, you are taken hostage by numbness, starving for connection. You yearn for a place to call home, yet you are

only met by a silent embrace. It is like knocking on someone's door, but they are nowhere to be found. Every fibre in you is screaming, but no one hears your cry. After a while in solitude, you begin to feel alienated, as if you are the odd man out.

Furthermore, this shift reflects how loneliness can develop from mere physical aloneness into an emotional burden. Hence, it becomes central to understand Poe's description of how the different aspects of loneliness and isolation are portrayed, since the following section focuses on "Alone" (1829) and "A Dream" (1827), and the way they evoke an emotional response within readers captivated by the morbid and melancholy aspects.

"Alone"

"Alone" was originally written in 1829, but firstly published 26 years after Poe's death in 1875. The poem highlights the speaker's emotional and personal isolation. J.R. Hammond (1981) contextualises the poem that captures the essence of alienation, through Poe's personal life and struggles:

> It is not difficult to detect in these verses Poe's early awareness of his own distinctive strengths and weaknesses, those psychic qualities which together constituted his 'demon'. He was, as we have seen, a deeply divided character: his entire life could be described as a case study in contrasts. Born in the poverty of wandering actor parents (...) his whole life was spent in a struggle against poverty and critical indifference. Viewed against this background his poems assume a special and deeper significance. From first to last, from 'Tamerlane' to 'Ulalume', they are the product of a tortured personality, a man divided against himself, a man who, finding life intolerable, sought refuge in a series of womb-like images: the whirlpool, the pit, the vault, the premature grave. (154)

Hammond's observation captures the autobiographical resonance of the poem, emphasising the authenticity behind it. He positions it as an early expression of Poe's inner turmoil, suggesting his emotional life is inherently contradictory. A creative soul struggling with the hard battles that life mercilessly throws at him, leaving him craving for meaningful connections, but instead receiving social isolation. Haunted by the absence of belonging, "Alone" voices a life-long sense of alienation and suffering. This represents one critic's point of view, stating the importance of taking Poe's existence into consideration when reading the poem. Nevertheless, the following analysis further engages with the poem to explore how loneliness and isolation are demonstrated in a way that speaks to readers searching for beauty in the dark.

The initial determiner functions as a foreshadowing, allowing readers to anticipate the solitary tone of the poem. Given that, Poe rapidly affirms the initial prediction, as he articulates the sense of alienation through the speaker's point of view from the beginning:

> From childhood's hour I have not been
>
> As others were - I have not seen
>
> As others saw - I could not bring
>
> My passions from a common spring-
>
> From the same source I have not taken
>
> My sorrow - I could not awaken
>
> My heart to joy at the same tone -
>
> And all I lov'd - *I* lov'd alone - (Poe 45, lines 1-8)

This effectively frames the speaker's emotional estrangement as inherent and persistent, stemming from childhood. Poe's repeated use of enjambment, especially exemplified by dashes mirrors a stream of consciousness effect. It establishes a sense of unfiltered thought flow, which can be interpreted as the speaker's attempt to tie the emotional loose ends together in real time. Evidently, the dash functions as a visual and rhythmic extension of the speaker's inner unease.

This indicates that the speaker's feelings of alienation are continuous and unresolved, thus not confined to a single situation, which is further emphasised by the absence of full stops, as it reinforces that his sense of loneliness is perpetual. Elaborating on the visual aspect, the italicisation of the second "I" in the verse line "And all I lov'd - *I* lov'd alone" establishes intense emphasis, hence catching readers' attention. This typographic choice results in separating the lyrical I both grammatically and visually, and draws attention to the speaker's emotions, hence highlights that Poe does not simply describe alienation, instead he formally embodies it in both structure and emphasis.

At first glance, it is rather challenging to discern the Gothic elements within these eight verse lines. Nonetheless, certain word choices help uncover traits of the tradition, when fully engaged with. Word choices such as "sorrow" and "I could not awaken / My heart to joy" elicit an emotional stillness in the lyrical I, suggesting that joy is an emotion that flows effortlessly, yet for the lyrical I, it remains far out of reach. These emotionally loaded words paint a portrait of a child whose inner world is conflicted compared to those nearby. The lyrical I is painfully aware of the difference. This establishes a scenario where readers imagine this child isolated, craving to love and be loved, yet unable to feel connected as the others seem to, which reinforces a sense of innocence touched by the tragic, as the lyrical I from the first breath of childhood stands as an outsider. Therefore, the morbidity of the poem is interwoven with the melancholy aspects.

Speaking of childhood, it is a significant stage in life, often idealised as a time of carefree happiness, security, and nature. A period where love is a given, not granted through effort. Poe reverses these expectations associated with the innocence of childhood, where instead of curiosity and comfort, the lyrical I reflects upon the emotional alienation stemming from the most formative stage of life, where identity and attachment are gradually forming. Encountering this deviation in the context of the emotional norm during such a critical

developmental period suggests a deep psychological wound. This increases the probability of the psychological distress intensifying upon entering adolescence, persisting into adulthood, until it becomes nearly impossible to heal. This is consistent with Rubin's assessment that "(...) with increasing age, such constructive solitude becomes increasingly associated with measures of social wariness, and psychological markers of anxiety and emotional dysregulation" (14056). This means that when a child spends a certain amount of time alone it is deemed as constructive solitude. Nevertheless, when these periods become more frequent, a child that has spent the majority of their time alone, is more likely to struggle to form healthy attachments, and act in society as their peers. These are the children our heart aches for.

Therefore, by utilising this perspective, Poe ensures a reaction from readers. If we keep Hammond's interpretation of how the poem is based on Poe's existence in mind, this portrayal of a child in distress resonates with Hoffman's statement that "Poe really was a haunted man, and as a poet, in verse or prose, he had the power to haunt his reader" (33). This outlines the disturbing qualities of the poem, while heightening the authenticity, creating a stronger reason for connection. In other words, if readers imagine the poem written from Poe's perspective, he transmits his pain to them. This reflects Felski's belief that "(...) we find ourselves ambushed and under assault (...) (113). The innocence of childhood is an effective means of achieving this emotional transmission, since it triggers basic human instinct of protecting and caring for children, especially of those who are neglected. This creates a strong sense of empathy, heightening the emotional resonance of the poem.

As discussed in the section *The Negative Aesthetics and Psychological Complexities,* Gothic works often appear irrational due to their expression of intense emotional outburst and a disruption of mental and emotional stability. In these eight verse lines, this irrationality is demonstrated as a deep and continuous internal conflict rather than in a chaotic and violent manner. This correlates with Bruhm's notion of Gothic literature engaging with the inner

workings of the mind, as the lyrical I exhibits a self-divided against itself (261). A self that struggles with loneliness, a factor following the feeling of ongoing otherness. Additionally, Brown's statement that "the sensibility of the gothic arises from its exceptionally undirected and unregulated emotions" (202) relates with Poe's portrayal of the lyrical I regarding unresolved sorrow and alienation. The psychological complexity of the lyrical I is central, specifically in the eight verses lines, in which emotional regulation malfunctions. When a child's basic needs are unmet, serious consequences follow. For instance, the absence of love and security from their primary caregivers can affect the child's fundamental perception of emotional connection, thus interfering with their way of establishing healthy relations to not only others', but also to themselves. Emotional neglect can result in a child feeling repeatedly rejected, leaving them isolated and lonely.

This is supported by Xiaokang Jin et al. (2023), as they state, "Childhood emotional neglect (CEN), a subtype of childhood maltreatment (including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and physical or emotional neglect), refers to a failure to meet the basic emotional needs, insensitivity to the child's distress, and ignoring the child's social and emotional development" (1). Even though Poe refrains from explicitly stating emotional neglect, Poe's use of juxtapositions to portray the lyrical I as the other underlines the feeling of alienation. This distinct separation from others, specifically from a young age, implies a lack of emotional nurturing. When a child becomes aware of their difference, in the manner that they fail to share the same joys or experiences as others, it can increase a sense of solitude. Such early recognition of being different from others often points to a deeper emotional void, one that is possibly rooted in unmet emotional needs during formative years.

Moreover, this portrayal relates to the citation discussed in the section *Literature as Disturbance,* where Hoffman's remark "I cannot read the poems of Edgarpoe without feeling a sensation - of pain" (20). To engage with this kind of written work evokes a heartfelt

emotional response, particularly, as we are forced to imagine the lyrical I as a child burdened with these unsettling feelings. Poe's portrayal of such innocence intertwined with pain effectively leaves a haunting impression, which stimulates a profound sense of empathy. Additionally, the form emphasises the distress expressed, which demonstrates Poe's poetic choices, resulting in the form and content of the poem supporting each other. This reinforces a haunting atmosphere of isolation and existential difference.

This emotional foundation reaches its peak in the poem's final verse lines, shifting from internal reflection to an external worldview loaded with figurative language of nature:

> *Then* - in my childhood - in the dawn
> Of a most stormy life - was drawn
> From ev'ry depth of good and ill
> The mystery which binds me still
> From the torrent, or the fountain-
> From the red cliff of the mountain-
> From the sun that 'round me roll'd
> In its autumn tint of gold-
> From the lightning in the sky
> As it pass'd me flying by
> From the thunder, and the storm-
> And the cloud that took the form
> (When the rest of Heaven was blue)
> Of a demon in my view- (Poe 46, lines 9-22)

Poe's poetic choice of italicising "*Then"* operates as a visual marker signalling this shift from internal reflection to an external worldview. Peter Simonsen (2007) remarks that "Visual is meant both in the sense of being more about the visible, external world of matter as opposed

to the hidden, internal world of self (...) and in the sense of calling attention to itself as a visual form on the page" (864). On account of this, Poe pairs the continuous form with the italicised word, rather than breaking the stanza, to bring attention to the ongoing and unbroken nature of the speaker's inner distress. It is a subtle cue to guide readers through the transition, while further intensifying the emotional impact. This suggests that the expansion from inner turmoil to the external environment heightens the speaker's distress instead of diminishing it. Additionally, this poetic choice enhances the seamless yet escalating nature of the speaker's psychological and emotional experience. It is a formal device that helps support the content.

Furthermore, we cannot discuss the form without mentioning the rhyme. The lyrical poem consists of a single stanza that employs continuous end rhymes throughout its 22 verse lines, therefore the rhyme scheme can be identified as follows: AA BB CC. To exemplify, "dawn" and "drawn" rhyme, as do "ill" and "still", and "fountain" and "mountain". The effect of using such a rhyme scheme is that it guides readers through the poem's flow, all while creating musicality that makes the poem more memorable. Moreover, the rhyme scheme mirrors the persistence of the speaker's feelings and thought, thus echoes the poem's meaning. Instead of attracting attention, the rhymes are more subtle and cohesive, suiting the reflective tone of the poem. The rhymes enhance the lyrical quality without any disturbance of the natural flow thought and add to the melancholy atmosphere of the poem.

These final verse lines exhibit natural elements to symbolise the intense emotional forces shaping the speaker's experience of solitude. By utilising imagery of "From the lightning in the sky" and "From the thunder, and the storm", Poe illustrates how the speaker's isolation is an active state rather than a passive one. These are further examples of how morbidity can be expressed in an implicit way, as these natural elements are associated with chaotic presences, where Poe utilises them in a way that arguably demonstrates the speaker's perception of the world. There is an internal paralysis, a numbness that yearns for recognition, nevertheless, no

matter where the lyrical I searches, even in these chaotic presences, he only finds silence. This evokes an unsettling emotion within readers, as the natural elements are examples of the mundane language, however the way Poe integrates them to reflect the speaker's view on the world, mirrors the uncanny, as he turns the ordinary into something strange.

On account of the aforementioned, these final verse lines effectively demonstrate the transformation from the internal reflection to an external worldview. By confronting such raw emotion, Poe invites readers to share this experience, perhaps to even reach a parallel outcome. By internalising a sense of otherness, Poe ensures that no one feels as alone as the lyrical I, since loneliness is the loss of togetherness. This resonates with Felski's notion about how "In one possible scenario, recognition is triggered by a perception of direct similarity or likeness, as we encounter something that slots into a clearly identifiable scheme of things" (38). Poe's portrayal of solitude and alienation evoke an emotional response, not only because of its authentic and honest intensity, but also because it mirrors the unspoken loneliness that readers might carry in their chest. Based on this, the poem further affirms the connective function of literature, as Poe allows readers to engage in a reflective dialogue, inviting them to navigate their own isolation through recognition of shared human suffering.

"A Dream"

Through a motif of lost dreams and fading illusions, the second poem in this section "A Dream" originally published in 1827 conveys how the collapse of idealism deepens the speaker's sense of loneliness and isolation, thus highlighting certain similarities to "Alone". The poem reflects a sorrow of the loss of happiness, composed in an ethereal and melancholy tone. Once again Hammond contextualises the poem through Poe's existence:

> It would be easy to dismiss Poe's early poetry as adolescent posturings, as the heavily imitative outpourings of a young man striving to express a

> series of inchoate ideas. Certainly the early work is open to criticism on these grounds. Yet on a deeper level it can be seen to be the rudimentary statement of a philosophical attitude of profound relevance to the twentieth century: that of the utter loneliness of man. Poe was in fact an existentialist long before the term was invented: he was one of the first writers to show an awareness of the terrifying implications of man's consciousness and to discuss themes and ideas which have become almost commonplace in our own time - annihilation, withdrawal from the self, mental disorder, and premonition of death. (155)

Hammond does not disregard any criticism of Poe's early work as overreaching for depth, however, he posits that by inspecting it beyond the obvious, a concept or feeling seems to recur in his work that is loneliness. This concept of discussing heavy emotions such as loneliness is first recognised in the twentieth century, meaning that Poe was ahead of his time, composing work with an existentialist attitude before the term even was originated.

To some extent this discloses Poe as an honest man with real authenticity, not afraid of choosing difficult topics to express in his own way. It is not a surprise, if individuals around Poe's time would feel slightly ashamed to admit their struggles with these existential themes, which can be viewed as one of the reasons why Poe still is one the most influential writers. By exemplifying this with words from "A Dream", Hammond encourages others to view Poe as a man who expresses a core existential concern rather than a youthful imitation, hence representing one critic's point of view. Nevertheless, the following analysis further engages with the poem to uncover how loneliness and isolation are exhibited in a way that resonates with readers.

At the first glance, the initial determiner reflects a universal experience. The use of the indefinite article "A" implies that the dream in the poem is merely one among many that

foreshadows a sense of impermanence. The first quatrain establishes the mood of the poem through emotionally loaded words:

> In visions of the dark night
>
> I have dreamed of joy departed -
>
> But a waking dream of life and light
>
> Hath left me broken-hearted. (Poe 20, lines 1-4)

Even though the word "visions" typically alludes to dreams or illusions, it takes on an ominous tone when Poe pairs it with "the dark night", suggesting a state closer to nightmares. Poe's fusion of dream and darkness creates an ambience of melancholy and mystery. In addition, it establishes the emotional tone of the poem. This hints at the fragility of the speaker's inner mind, when describing that joy fades away during nighttime. The night usually symbolises the passing of time, meaning that when nighttime approaches, the day is over. Nonetheless, Poe experiments with readers' expectations of the dream world, where the verse line "But a waking dream of life and light" blurs the boundary between reality and illusion, suggesting that the lyrical I is not fully aware of which state grants him complete consciousness.

This is reinforced by the following verse line, where Poe plays around with the predictability of night, where the verse line "Hath left me broken-hearted" speaks to the notion of when the day is over, the lyrical I falls apart. This is interpreted as his mind is left vulnerable during the transition from day to night, wandering the hollowed streets of his subconscious, exposing the fragility of the speaker's emotional state. This further supports Bruhm's notion about how psychological disturbances are fundamental to the Gothic tradition.

The second verse line introduces the lyrical I as the speaker of the poem, thus illuminating the loss of contentment. The first two verse lines suggest that the lyrical I is haunted by memories of past happiness. Whereas now the joy only exists as echoes in the speaker's mind. In this context "joy" is personified, which is interpreted by the past participle

of the verb depart, here Poe utilises it as an adjective to modify “joy”. This emphasises the end of “joy”, hence the removal of something once meaningful, which highlights the theme of loneliness and isolation.

Additionally, it radiates a sense of longing, as the lyrical I aches for what has passed that is further emphasised by the last two verse lines in the first stanza. “A waking dream” alludes to a sense of disconnection from reality. As stated earlier, the juxtaposition between waking and dream blurs the boundary between reality and illusion. The word “waking” symbolises a state of reality, whereas the word “dream” symbolises illusion. By combining these two words in the same sentence, a sense of ambiguity is created, as each word seems to contradict and cancel the other. Nonetheless, this juxtaposition evokes a dream-like state of being that is neither fully real nor entirely imagined. This state is further enriched by the words “life” and “light”, where “life” symbolises energy, vitality and spirit, and “light” symbolises purity, clarity and hope. Therefore, a waking dream of life and light suggests an almost ethereal and transcendent experience that exists on the threshold between reality and illusion deepening the melancholy mood.

Furthermore, by reading these words in relation with the following verse line, it hints to the speaker’s wish for what was lost to return, which is illuminated by the words “Hath left me broken-hearted”. The word “broken-hearted” is itself a metaphor for the emotional distress a person experiences after a great loss, thus by utilising this word as the final of the first stanza it unveils the lingering pain caused by loss, reinforcing the isolated state of the lyrical I. This first stanza evokes that emotional high and crash that is often associated with limerence, as there is an emotional intensity portrayed in an idealised manner of a moment or a loved one, who now has passed, leaving the lyrical I caught between hope and despair, while reflecting upon the emotional aftermath of once having loved or hoped deeply.

Moreover, the first quatrain contributes to literature as disturbances, as it resonates with Kafka's belief that "(...) we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide" (Popova 2014). From the very beginning, Poe effectively succeeds with composing a written work that causes readers to reach this state of recognition. It is a lyric version of in medias res, as readers are immersed immediately in the speaker's inner mind, disturbing our comfort by challenging our perception of reality and illusion.

In the second quatrain, Poe intensifies the theme of loneliness and isolation, as it transitions from the intimate voice of the lyrical I to a third-person perspective, hence shifting away from the self-related towards a more reflective tone:

> Ah! what is not a dream by day
>
> To him whose eyes are cast
>
> On things around him with a ray
>
> Turned back upon the past? (Poe 20, lines 5-8)

The second quatrain demonstrates how loss of dreams can disconnect a person from reality, which is reinforced by Poe's poetic choice of distancing the speaker from the self, allowing a more reflective turn that heightens the sense of solitude. This dream-like state is persistent throughout the unfolding of the poem, implying a feeling of confinement in a waking dream - physically present, yet mentally drifting through memories of what once was. In addition, the verse line "Ah! what is not a dream by day" suggests that the speaker ponders upon if there truly is anything in life that does not feel as a dream, as if needing someone or something to awaken you, to anchor you, for you to regain a sense of awareness, a sense of purpose. Moreover, the punctuation marks in the second quatrain are attention-grabbing, specifically the exclamation mark in the first verse line "Ah!". This is further known as an interjection that

indicates an expression of reflection and realisation in a manner full of awe, which effectively coheres with the representation of the stanza.

The second verse line introduces the unspecified person “him” reflecting a sorrowful gaze, emphasising the melancholy mood of the poem that supports the theme of loneliness and isolation. The person is gazing at the present world yet through the lens of the past, suggesting that their perception is altered by memory, hence controlled by loss of dreams and fading illusions. They are incapable of perceiving the present for what it truly is, as they are restrained by nostalgia, longing, and grief. Even though their gaze appears vacant and empty, it is in fact emotionally fixated on the past, revealing how their mind is trapped in memories despite an absent expression. This is another instance of how morbidity is illustrated implicitly. This idea of emotional fixation mirrors Botting’s definition of the sublime, stating it stems “from a disrupted sense of order and a discombobulation of reason, imagination and feeling: intensities, magnitudes and violent contrasts overwhelmed mental faculties - evoking terror, awe, wonder - and threatened the eclipse of any subjective unity” (7). Essentially, the exploration of emotional fixation is so intense, it nearly causes the person to lose their inner sense of self. It is sublime because it disrupts order and reason, but not without encouraging reflection. Poe’s depiction of inner chaos is what makes readers feel, even through sorrow.

Nevertheless, the use of the question mark as a technique to end the second quatrain indicates an uncertainty embedded in doubt or reflection, hence revisiting the past is not considered a settled action, instead it is saturated with ambiguity, emphasising feelings of regret, confusion, and longing. Furthermore, the use of the question mark invites readers to engage with the words on a deeper level, as it encourages the spectator to reflect on the past, thus pondering upon what consequences the act may bring forth.

This coheres with literature as connection, as the quatrain’s meaning and the emotions that Poe tries to evoke reflect Hoffman’s idea that “one has had an experience he does not

forget" (22). This emotional fixation and the resulting loneliness in the poem exemplify Hoffman's belief of an unforgettable experience, as it shows how memory shapes the inner life. To elaborate, the second quatrain asks readers to revisit their past, to uncover whether their loss of dreams and fading illusions illustrate how the collapse of their idealism deepens their sense of loneliness and isolation, to draw similarities between readers and to he who is emotionally fixated on the past. Thereby Poe further utilises literature as a means of connection, offering an exchange between the self and the world around us. This adheres with Felski's reference "we live in what Charles Taylor calls webs of interlocution; struggling to define ourselves with and against others, we acquire the capacity for reflection and self-reflection" (32). In this context, being part of webs of interlocution, refers to how we are continuously engaging with others, whether implicitly or explicitly, for instance by how Poe encourages readers to use their thoughts to reflect upon the past, similar to "him". In other words, Poe invites readers directly through this quatrain which prompts their individual reflection of past memories.

The third quatrain redirects the focus back to the self-related to highlight the speaker's personal experience, which intensifies the emotional weight of solitude:

> That holy dream - that holy dream,
> While all the world were chiding,
> Hath cheered me as a lovely beam
> A lonely spirit guiding. (Poe 20, lines 9-12)

By returning to the speaker's direct experience, Poe exhibits loneliness as a personal lived reality, instead of a philosophical condition. At first glance the repetition of "that holy dream" catches readers' attention, which emphasises the impact of the phrase. In contrast to "The Raven" the repetition used here evokes an ache embedded in nostalgia within readers, rather than an unsettling manner. In addition, Poe's use of the demonstrative pronoun "that" instead

of the definite article “the”, demonstrates the particularity of the dream, as it is not simply any dream, but a significant one and singular one. This further heightens the emotional weight of the dream, establishing an almost sacred tone, which emphasises its personal value.

The sacred tone is amplified by the word “holy”, which frames the dream as a moment beyond reach, as if it exists in a space that can no longer be reclaimed. This phrase resonates with the theme of loneliness, as it symbolises a long-lost ideal that once carried rays of comfort and hope, only to be forever imprisoned by the past, leaving the speaker in solitude. The sacred emotional ideal is beyond grasp, leaving the speaker to reflect upon it with admiration fused with mourning. In this way, Poe echoes the notion that there exists beauty in the dark. When searching for something that can soothe the numbness that manifests deep within us, we tend to revisit ideals, illusions, or even dreams that ignites even the slightest sense of misfortune. Although they may trigger discomfort, it is better to feel something than nothing at all. This emotional attraction to discomfort reflects what Kant characterises as the sublime, as it “(...) evokes agitated emotion and gives negative rather than positive pleasure. If beauty is adapted to calm judgment, then the sublime is associated with chaos and disorder. If we must seek ground external to ourselves for the beauties of nature, we seek the sublime only in ourselves” (47). On account of this, Poe evokes an overwhelming beauty veiled in melancholy, to express an intense longing as a consequence of loneliness, it becomes sublime.

Furthermore, the second verse line demonstrates a contrast between the external world and the speaker’s internal experience, where the word “chiding” signifies the criticism that the speaker is confronted with. Yet the following verse line implies that despite the criticism, the speaker discovers comfort in “that holy dream”, which is interpreted from the phrase “a lovely beam”. The juxtaposition between these two phrases elicits the image of a lightning beam guiding the speaker towards a place of comfort. Building upon the last verse line of the third quatrain, this imagery represents that, even in the darkest moments, “that holy dream” offers a

slight relief to “a lonely spirit”. Additionally, “a lonely spirit” illustrates the emotional emptiness and isolation, which the speaker encounters in the aftermath of loss. This stresses the feelings of detachment from the external world, only to find a sense of solace, when immersed into “that holy dream”. This image further alludes to a biblical notion of divine light, where “a lovely beam” symbolises a light from above, which implies that the speaker undergoes a moment of spiritual comfort in the midst of emotional darkness. This naturally leads up the last quatrain of the poem.

The fourth and final quatrain of the poem emphasises the emotional significance of holding onto light in the face of darkness, while simultaneously underlining the speaker’s sense of solitude:

> What though that light, thro’ storm and night,
>
> So trembled from afar-
>
> What could there be more purely bright
>
> In Truth’s day-star? (Poe 20, lines 13-16)

In the context of loneliness, this stanza differs from the earlier ones. Poe articulates a sense of emotional transcendence. Nevertheless, not through longing and sorrow, yet through the enduring presence of a distant and guiding light. The word “light” alludes to a memory, dream, or hope that once was close but now remains “afar”, intensifying the relinquishment of it. Yet this light evokes a profound significance that is interpreted from the phrase “Truth’s day-star?”. The speaker asks a rhetorical question, in which light appears purer than truth itself. This stanza portrays a tribute to what was lost, as the speaker holds gratitude for the past connection, resulting in feelings of appreciation, even though the experience of reminiscing provokes sorrow, it is a mourning that has found beauty in the memory. In this way, the light becomes the quiet companion, soothing the speaker’s solitude. Hence, the pain of loss has not vanished,

but it has softened into melancholy, offering presence where there is absence, and feeling where there was once numbness.

To summarise this theme, these two poems explored in the context of how loneliness and isolation is illustrated, are other instances of how the allure of melancholy, interwoven with implicit notions of morbidity are effectively demonstrated. “A Dream” articulates loneliness and isolation in the form of dreams, illusion, and idealism, which resonates with Kafka’s belief that we ought to read literature that wounds us (Popova 2014). The poem serves as a great opportunity for self-reflection, thus self-discovery, guiding us to shed light on if we ourselves ever have forsaken a dream. The repeated use of the word “dream” speaks to the superabundance of coincidence in the Gothic tradition. It generates an uncanny effect, yet rather than creating an unsettling feeling in the traditional form, readers are left with a sense of ache. Therefore, it connects more profoundly with the psychological discomfort that Freud describes that is similar to what we experience in our dream-state, which effectively connects with the essence of the poem, emphasised by its initial determiner. Furthermore, the way “A Dream” is interpreted as a poem within the Gothic tradition is because of the psychological twist it plays on readers, creating a sense of unease in the shape of relating to the speaker’s longing.

Regarding “Alone” there is a contrast between societal expectations of childhood and the speaker’s emotional experience, which deepens the poignancy of the poem. While most children might wonder what game to play after dinner or look forward to being tucked in at night by nurturing parents, the lyrical I is already grappling with existential loneliness. In this sense, “Alone” does not simply depict difference, but confronts the emotional cost of being different in a world where belonging is crucial. The poem explores how loneliness evolves from physical solitude into an emotionally distressing state. An internal paralysis, a numbness that years for recognition but only finds silence. The speaker’s solitude stems from childhood,

aligning with Rubin's statement that "Typically all forms of solitude decrease from early through middle and late childhood" (14056). This is why the poem can evoke a visceral reaction, adhering to Felski's concept of literature as disturbances. The thought of a child struggling upsets most people, even the thought of an adult struggling with loneliness is unsettling in itself. Since the beginning of time, when God created Eve for Adam. Humans have needed humans, as we are social beings, meant to thrive in companionship, much like Adam and Eve. We are not meant to be isolated and on our own. This is further the case with "A Dream", even if the speaker experiences loneliness, he is comforted by the light above, which is another biblical allusion that is further emphasised by words such as "holy", and "truth's day-star".

At first glance, both "A Dream" and "Alone" might not exhibit any explicit instances of Gothic transgression of either moral, social or natural law boundaries, such as crimes or taboo behaviours. Nevertheless, its Gothic quality emerges through the intense internal psychological struggle and emotional isolation that the lyrical I experiences. This coheres with the key aspects of the Gothic discussed earlier. To elaborate on this, in "Alone" The speaker's internal exile represents a deviation from normative emotional experience, a rejection or failure to connect with others and share the joys of life. This internalised otherness embodies a form of Gothic estrangement, which unsettles the notion of childhood as a time of innocence, careless happiness, and belonging. Instead, it reveals a psyche that is fractured by alienation from the earliest years. Thereby, creating a sense of the uncanny, as it distorts the ideal perception of childhood. Additionally, the poem's Gothic nature lies in its exploration of psychological turmoil and emotional alienating, showcasing how the Gothic tradition can manifest through an individual's confrontation with their own divided self and enduring loneliness.

The Majesty of Death:

The Majesty of Death is the third and final theme that explores how one significant poem exhibits the ways in which death is represented. According to Mary A. Varga (2015), "Death and dying are inevitable experiences in life. They are also complex processes. How a person perceives these phenomena is directly impacted by their stage of life and level of development - and development is significantly impacted by dying as well" (862). While Varga implies that how we understand death changes, and our encounter with death affects how we grow emotionally and intellectually, the only guarantee in life is death. It is the utmost natural part of the cycle of life. There is no assurance of entering existence, yet departing from existence is a certainty no living organism can escape. The day we are born is the very day we begin to die. Even if expected, death will always be shocking, either in the moment, or in the aftermath of it all. This perception of death as an inevitable and complex process is crucial, since the following section solely focuses on "The City in the Sea" (1845) to demonstrate how death and decay are illustrated to elicit an emotional response for readers seeking beauty in the darkness.

"The City in the Sea"

"The City in the Sea" was published in 1845 and symbolises the inevitability of death and decay, especially through the imagery of a city swallowed by the sea. Magistrale offers his interpretation of the poem:

> "The City in the Sea" is a good illustration of Poe's employing fantastic imagery and convoluted sounds in his poetry to create a vision of the macabre. Like a dream hallucination or the landscape of a dystopian science-fiction film (e.g., *Mad Max's Beyond Thunderdome*), Poe imagines an entire city where decrepit buildings hold themselves together, where there is no physical movement, human presence, or even an

> awareness of time. The whole place appears to "float pendulous in air," as if suspended in a vacuum. If the reader has ever walked the streets of a city late at night during a serious snowstorm, perhaps this sense of urban abandonment is close to what Poe sought to invoke through the language and imagery of this poem. (38-39)

In contrast to Hammond, who contextualises Poe's poems with his existence, hence, focuses more on how Poe's personal life influenced his writing, Magistrale engages with the poem. He draws attention to the symbols and themes to shed light on how Poe constructs the poem, like surreal vision, or a scene from a film to create a haunting awe within readers. In addition, he includes a comparison to walking through a snowstorm that helps readers to comprehend the vision of the poem despite its complex diction.

Magistrale's thorough interpretation is particularly insightful in the context of this thesis, as it highlights readers' attraction to the morbid and melancholy elements of the poem:

> There is certainly a sense of strangeness in this work, but perhaps Poe's truest intention here was to represent the ultimate void of death. In crossing from one world to another, a landscape that was once comprehensible and rational is transformed into something vaguely mystifying and mysterious. And, as is often the case in Poe, the reader is at least as attracted to this monstrous manifestation of a craving for the shadow of death as he is repulsed by its very desolation. (39)

Magistrale's insight is compelling, especially in how it captures the tension between fear and fascination that defines Poe's portrayal of death, which is highly relevant to the purpose of this thesis, in the sense it aims to highlight that there is beauty in the dark. This correlation between pain and pleasure, is manifested by the way the poem appeals to readers, yet simultaneously disturbs them. This represents one critic's point of view, where Magistrale's interpretation

deepens the understanding of why Poe's macabre imagery remains powerful. Nevertheless, the following analysis further engages with the poem to explore how death is demonstrated in a way that resonates with readers seeking for beauty in darkness.

The first impression of the poem is the initial determiner "The City in the Sea", where the use of the definite article "The" implies a specific set location, foreshadowing its legendary quality. This is enhanced by the subtle allusion to Atlantis that foreshadows the mythic and haunting ambience of the poem. Additionally, the ambience is further reinforced by the opening stanza, where Poe presents death as a majestic force that rules over a city, which creates a beautifully haunting atmosphere from the very beginning:

> Lo! Death has reared himself a throne
> In a strange city lying alone
> Far down within the dim West,
> Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best
> Have gone to their eternal rest.
> There shrines and palaces and towers
> (Time-eaten towers and tremble not!)
> Resemble nothing that is ours.
> Around, by lifting winds forgot,
> Resignedly beneath the sky
> The melancholy waters lie. (Poe 53, lines 1-11)

Poe personifies Death by making him a king ruling over an abandoned city; "Death has reared himself a throne / In a strange city lying alone". By doing this, Poe bestows Death with not only an inevitable power, but also an elevated, almost sacred authority. He is attributing agency to Death, allowing him to exert power. Nevertheless, in contrast to most kings or rulers in general, Death is not striving to gain obedience. Death takes rather than asks. In this sense, the

verse lines serve as a metaphor of a merciless king reinforcing Death's dominance. This is similar to famous monarchs of the past, who utilised their sovereign authority to determine who lives and who dies without permission or any kind of remorse. Furthermore, the imagery of the verse lines establishes the Gothic atmosphere of the poem, which is only reinforced as we continue through the stanzas.

This stanza represents an afterlife, "Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best / Have gone to their eternal rest.". Despite character, eternal rest is a certainty. This means that Death does not differentiate, which adds to his agency. In other words, by personifying Death, Poe turns him into a being with intention, one who can choose to punish whomever he wishes. Additionally, "eternal rest" embodies a stillness quality, suggesting that every being is released from their suffering. This creates a juxtaposition between Death as the ruler and the concept of eternal rest, which appears more as a peaceful release than a punishment.

Poe builds a majestic landscape out of "shines and palaces and towers", where "(Time-eaten towers and tremble not!) / Resemble nothing that is ours.", which echoes elements of Gothic architecture. Here the word "time-eaten" suggest decay, much like the natural deterioration that happens as a human ages, or the decay of buildings. Although decaying, the buildings still stand strong, as if charged by mystical energy, emphasising this eerie stillness occupying the city. This is highlighted by how "The melancholy waters lie.", indicating the absence of movement, setting a calm but sombre time, almost as if time is frozen. This creates a distance from the known world, and enhances the otherworldly, sublime quality, asserting the City in the Sea as something beautiful, but in a broken way. This draws parallels to watching footage of an old shipwreck in a diving documentary, such as the Titanic, where spectators are taken on a tour through a sunken ruin. They are given the opportunity to witness the striking remnants of what was once a magnificent ship, which now remains forever suspended in stillness. This evokes a similar beauty; broken, haunting, and enduring.

This moment further relates to what Felski defines as an instance of recognition, although refraining from the literal context of the stanza, yet in the imaginative response it evokes. For instance, the way the initial determiner subtlety alludes to Atlantis, while descriptions of time-eaten towers and melancholy waters might recall the haunting imagery of shipwrecks, such as those depicting Titanic. These associations arise as we engage with the poem, thus reflecting how we often "encounter something that slots into a clearly identifiable scheme of things". (38). Much like Magistrale who utilises an example of a science fiction film, or the comparison of walking in a snowstorm (38-39). These can be defined as his instances of recognition, hence the associations he gains from engaging with the poem.

Moreover, this vision of the City in the Sea in the opening stanza exhibits an eerie stillness and majestic decay, which evokes the sublime, an overwhelming combination of awe, beauty, and terror that effectively challenges rational perception. This supports Brown's remark that "The gothic is perhaps the most sublime of all our literary modes, transcending the merely human sublime of the psyche." (11). Poe's use of Gothic imagery and his personification of Death enhances this effect, thus transports readers into a realm beyond ordinary understanding, where beauty and devastation collide in a haunting manner.

Recounting "A Dream", Poe's depiction of light as "a lovely beam" that symbolises light from above differs significantly in this poem. The second stanza implies a constant darkness, where Poe's use of light illuminates from beneath, creating depth and mystery in a surreal manner:

> No rays from the holy Heaven come down
> On the long night-time of that town;
> But light from out the lurid sea
> Streams up the turrets silently-
> Gleams up the pinnacles far and free-

Up domes - up spires - up kingly halls -

Up fanes - up Babylon-like walls-

Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers

Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers-

Up many and many a marvellous shrine

Whose wreathed friezes intertwine

The viol, the violet, and the vine. (Poe 53, lines 12-23)

This constant darkness is emphasised by "No rays from the holy Heaven come down", where only "light from out the lurid sea" sheds light on the building, creating this surreal ambience that results in a strange almost dream-like glow. The buildings appear enchanted, yet not in a warm way as a beam of sunlight on a greenfield in summertime. More like a dark silent bloom of blue emerging from beneath the waters, a colour scheme one might encounter in a nightmare. This creates a negative aesthetic of morbidity, emphasising the tone of the poem.

Furthermore, this stanza represents Poe's unique perception of beauty, one that is inherently tied to decay, melancholy, and death in general. Just like when Buranelli included a remark from Poe stating that "The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (94). Nevertheless, this stanza demonstrates a shift onto a grander scale, as it is not a woman that dies, but a city. The city is majestic, decorated with "sculptured ivy and stone flowers" that indicates beauty frozen in time, emphasising a mournful sense of stillness. The ivy and flowers are not living plants, but artistic carvings in stone that speak to an immortalisation of the natural world, yet in a lifeless and eternal form.

This highlights that the city belongs entirely to the realm of the dead. Beauty, in Poe's belief, is not lively, it is fading, fragile, and frozen in time, echoing aspects of morbidity. On account of this, Poe composes a haunting portrayal where beauty and decay are inseparable, and majesty exists not in the world of the living, but in the gloomy kingdom of Death. This

further resonates with Botting's notion on how the negative aesthetics of Gothic works evoke emotions, especially the "Less intense, but still negative, affects instilled by bleak landscapes include feelings of melancholic gloom, loneliness and loss." (6). Where the imagery establishes this slow and eerie mood of melancholy.

A major shift unfolds in the final stanza, where Poe introduces movement, breaking the eerie stillness that has haunted the City of the Sea:

> But lo, a stir is in the air!
> The wave - there is a movement there!
> As if the towers had thrust aside,
> In slightly sinking, the dull tide-
> As if their tops had feebly given
> A void within the filmy Heaven.
> The waves here now a redder glow-
> The hours are breathing faint and low-
> And when, amid no earthly moans,
> Down, down that town shall settle hence,
> Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,
> Shall do it reverence. (Poe 54, lines 42-53)

There is a subtle, yet powerful shit indicated by the verse lines "The wave - there is a movement there! / As if the towers had thrust aside,", which evoke the image of a riptide, suggesting that something begins to descend, while foreshadowing the rise of something darker, a hellish atmosphere, which is further supported by the verse line "The waves here now a redder glow-". Poe uses the colour red to evoke an association with fire or blood that symbolises death, violence, and the underworld. This establishes an ominous visual echo of a ring of fire or gates of hell, which suggests that the city is on the brink of a final and irreversible transformation.

Nevertheless, this is not a chaotic, but rather a carefully orchestrated fall, almost majestic in its descent that is reinforced by the verse line “Down, down that town shall settle hence,”. Here, the word “settle” speaks to a slow collapse, meaning that the city is not destroyed in an explosion of ruin, but swallowed by the sea. Poe’s imagery retains a sense of tragic grandeur, where the city falls with the dignity of a ritual. Hence, it is not merely a city dying, yet a vision of beauty dissolving into the abyss. The dying of the city under the rule of Death reveals a paradox, by attributing mortal qualities to the city, Poe emphasises that nothing can escape the inevitable power of Death. Inanimate or not, dying is ultimately the only certainty.

What makes this moment distinctly Gothic, thus correlating with Botting’s statement that “a negative aesthetics informs gothic texts” (1), is the fusion of majesty and melancholy, where the decay is portrayed as poetic rather than grotesque. The red glowed waves, the thrusting of the towers, and the city’s slow submersion evoke a haunting beauty that lingers. Even Hell, typically imagined as chaotic and defiant, “Shall do it reverence.”, which elevates the City in the Sea beyond ordinary ruin. On account of this, it becomes sacred in its sorrow, a relic of faded grandeur that commands respect, even from damnation itself. In essence, the City in the Sea becomes a metaphor of a body in the grave, embodying Poe’s Gothic ideal that beauty is not found in spite of decay, but through it.

To summarise the analysis chapter, Poe’s poems resonate across time, which is emphasised by his inclusion in the literary canon, as stated by Magistrale that defines “The Raven” as Poe’s most famous work. Evidently, Poe’s writings stem from the 19th century, yet still operate as subjects for discussions and interpretations in the contemporary world. This correlates with Felski’s statement that “the idea of ‘afterwardness’ speaks to this delayed or belated transmission, highlighting the transtemporal movements of texts and their unpredictable dynamics of address” (120). This continuing process of revisiting works and gaining new discoveries highlights the timelessness and lasting power of Poe’s work. This is

further supported by Hoffman acknowledging re-visiting “The Pit and the Pendulum” (8), meaning that Poe’s writings function as a way of forming a connection to others, as they spark both a sense of memory and discovery.

As analysed, the poems explore deep emotions such as grief, loneliness and the inevitability of death. These are experiences that many readers can relate to, which creates a strong sense of literary recognition, as Lei Pihl describes as: “When readers encounter literary renditions of certain places, situations, emotions, longings, or losses that profoundly *resonate* with their own experiences, beliefs, or convictions.” (15). This means that readers might feel as if Poe’s words speak directly to their own feelings and struggles. For instance, in his poem “Alone”, the exploration of loneliness stemming from childhood’s hour might resonate with readers, who have experienced emotional neglect, or felt the weight of difference heavy on their shoulders.

Furthermore, Poe’s use of Gothic style, rhythm, and haunting imagery can also connect with readers familiar with those literary conventions. This adheres with Felski’s notion that “While we never own language, we are able to borrow it and bend it to our purposes, even as aspects of what we say will continue to elude us. We are embodied and embedded beings who use and are used by words” (31). This means Poe's Gothic writings about deep emotions are his way of adapting language to convey his inner thoughts. Poe borrow and bend language to reflect themes such as the loss of a loved one, as in for instance “The Raven” and “Annabel Lee”, and the human condition, such as solitude emphasised in “Alone” and “A Dream”, and the majesty of death in “The City in the Sea”. Through these poems, Poe touches upon ideas of what he believes is right or wrong, and how the mysteries of life might be understood, which aligns with Lei Pihl’s view that literature connects with readers, not only through style and narrative, but also through shared values and questions about the world. On account of this, Poe’s poetry embodies the wide-reaching power of literary recognition, offering readers,

especially those, who seek beauty in the dark, emotional resonance and intellectual engagement.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to illuminate how Edgar Allan Poe's poetry embraces the Gothic elements, particularly melancholy and morbidity, to reveal how these elements are not only haunting, but also profoundly captivating, inviting readers to find beauty within darkness. Poe demonstrates the various ways beauty and darkness exist in symbiosis through five different poems, across three core themes: *The Dead Beloved*, *Lonely Island of Solitude*, and *The Majesty of Death*. The interpretations are supported by several scholars, whose work is examined in the subchapters: *The Purpose of Reading*, and *Darkness and Decay: Understanding the Gothic.*

Beginning with the first theme, "The Raven" illustrates how Poe implements the Gothic elements by exploring the psychological complexities of loss and grief embedded in an interplay of melancholy and morbidity. The haunting imagery of the Raven, and the speaker's perpetual anguish lures readers into the depth of emotional resonance, where darkness acts as a source to elucidate the virtue of human experience. The poem sheds light on sorrow through the lens of madness, evoking Gothic traits of the disintegration of the inner mind, which further elevates the written work into a poignant representation of human suffering that simultaneously captivates and disturbs the soul of readers. Essentially, the poem is a hauntingly beautiful expression of the eternal struggle between love and loss.

In a similar manner, "Annabel Lee" further showcases Poe's exploration of loss, nevertheless in the shape of eternal and innocent love, exhibiting how devotion prevails beyond the grave. The romantic and melancholy tone of the poem reveals the connecting abilities of literature, as it encourages readers to bond emotionally with the speaker's unceasing misery, hence it becomes a personal and universal experience. The poem blends Gothic traits,

especially transgression, with the highest form of affection, challenging the traditional notion of how death do us part. In essence, the poem affirms Poe's vision on the death of a beautiful woman as the quintessential theme, since it encapsulates the bittersweet magnetism of melancholy accomplished through nostalgia and the human yearning to love and be loved beyond the grave.

Proceeding to the second theme, Poe composes a poetic expression of solitude in "Alone", which carries a poignant voice to the isolating experience of alienation, as it encompasses an enduring sense of otherness ingrained in childhood. Poe disturbs readers by framing alienation as a psychological complex of distress, which is emphasised by implicit morbidity intertwined with melancholy, especially through natural imagery and poetic choices of form. The poem resonates with readers who recognise the quiet ache of being different, or whose heart aches for those who do. This reinforces the poem as a means of connection, as it becomes a shared space, where loneliness can be seen, named, and momentarily understood.

Reminiscent, "A Dream" represents how the collapse of idealism heightens the speaker's loneliness and emotional isolation, a motif that closely mirrors "Alone". Crafted through imagery of a dream, Poe fades the boundary between illusion and reality to emphasise the emotional landscape of the lyrical I. It is a landscape marked by detachment and longing, as he yearns for lost joy. The speaker embodies an emotional attraction to discomfort, thus deepening the sublime characteristic of the poem. The poem unveils the reflective qualities of literature, by altering the dreamscape into a realm of emotional truth, which exposes the human tendency to search for meaning in loss and memory. This confirms that Poe's strength not only resides in his macabre universe, yet also in his exploration of the subtle terrors of the mind, which resonates with readers searching for beauty in the dark.

Finally, in the last theme, "The City in the Sea" exhibits Poe's depiction of darkness and decay in a beautifully haunting harmony. This is especially highlighted through his

personification of Death as a majestic ruler, and the portrayal of the city under dark silent bloom of blue water. Poe converts death into a sublime and sacred spectacle, particularly as the city's ultimate descent into the sea is accomplished through a slow and dignified collapse, admired by Hell. The poetic representation of death as majestic rather than frightening supports that Poe's Gothic style invites readers to discover aesthetic and emotional meaning in the morbid. The poem advocates for embracing beauty within darkness, serving as a compelling example for readers drawn to elements of melancholy and morbidity, as it offers recognition, resonance, and emotional depth through its haunting vision of the inevitable: The Majesty of Death.

All the aforementioned points pave the way for suffering. While *The Dead Beloved*, *Lonely Island of Solitude*, and *The Majesty of Death* are experiences, suffering is a response to those. It encompasses both emotional and physical pain, an intensified sensation running through your whole body. It takes the shape of a battlefield deep in your core. Your throat clenches as a fist prepared to fight. All while your heart is winning the race, signalling a potential risk ahead. You are left suffocating, wishing to banish the pain. Then at times, the end feels almost near, but almost is never enough. Through poetry, Poe states that we must suffer to survive. Poe does not just have a PhD in suffering, he orchestrates it, casting it as a light that illuminates the beauty within darkness.

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