Chapter – 5

CONCLUSION

Edgar Allan Poe was an American poet, short story writer, editor, critic, essayist and one of the leaders of the American Romantic Movement. Best known for his tales of the macabre and mystery, Poe was one of the early American practitioners of the short story and a pioneer of detective fiction. He was also credited with contributing to the emergent science fiction genre. Poe’s literary reputation was greater abroad than in the United States, perhaps as a result of America’s general revulsion towards the macabre. Rufus Griswold’s defamatory reminiscences did little to command Poe to U.S. literary society. However, American authors as diverse as Walt Whitman, H. P. Lovecraft, William Faulkner and Herman Melville were influenced by Poe’s works.

The investigation into “Edgar Allan Poe as a Gothic Writer” leads to the following conclusions:

The gothic fiction germinated in the latter part of the 18th century. Various causes have been ascribed for the Gothic origin and development. Montague Summers ascribes romantic escapism as the origin of gothic fiction. Literary historians usually call Gothic trivial and treat it with indifference. Some Gothic elements can be faded manuscripts tied with yellow ribbon in subterranean labyrinths, old castles, supernatural occurrences, secret panels and stairways and poorly lighted midnight scenes. The presence of one or many of these conventional stereotypes leads critics to brand it as ‘Gothicism.’ The first Gothic fiction in English is Horace
Walpole’s *The Castle of Ontranto* (1764). This novel describes a castle as dark, labyrinthine and the confining dominates the individual characters. There are ghosts. Ghosts and castles had appeared in the earlier fiction too. But their combination in Walpole gave rise to a new literary cult. Walpole used all the symbols and themes of Gothic fiction, and aroused fear to evoke the atmosphere. Ann Radcliff with her *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) set the model. Her work became so popular that not only the plot but the titles of her book were borrowed and used with slight variations in novel like *The Castle of Ontranto*.

William Godwin, Mary Shelley and ‘Monk’ Lewis are the other authors of distinction who have tried their hands at Gothic narrative. The prose narrative Gothic has flourished more in America than in England. The European gothic reached only in poetry and drama, but in America, Gothic reached in poetry, drama and also in fiction. The list of great American Gothic fiction writers is really impressive. It starts with Charles Brokden Brown and Edgar Allan Poe, embracing Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain, Henry James and comes right up to the present to Hemingway and Faulkner. The serious American novel started with Gothic and it flourishes now also.

When Poe appeared on the American literary scene, more than seventy years old tradition in Gothic writing existed. In his more memorable tales Poe capitalizes on the contemporary interest in the Gothic. It should be remembered that there are no Gothic ruins in America.

However, Poe is a very popular author of short stories but his greatest appeal comes from his horror or Gothic tales. Gothic fiction as art form is one of a very recent origin. Yet it cannot be said that the ancients did not
know about it. They also felt themselves exposed to the delinquent passions of gods. They also imagined fiendish supermen who, at any moment, might come to terrorize them.

An attempt has been made to study the Gothic tales of Poe so that an estimate of Poe as a writer of tales can be made. The more usual interpretation that these tales are devoid of any consistent meaning gets changed if we remember that Poe was not averse to an undercurrent of meaning in his tales. This is, of course, true that Poe deplored the didactic in art, and especially the allegorical. His finishing and conscious craftsmanship has led people to believe that he banished morality from art. These readers who take Poe on face value read his tales merely as entertainment. But Poe does not say that there must be no meaning in a work of art. What he insists is that it should be submerged and unobtrusive and should not come in the ways of the study of a work of art as work of art. Poe’s tales have a symbolic meaning.

The achievement of Poe as a creative artist has been qualified in various ways but his work is still distinctive. If his detractors accuse him for sensationalism and fake scholarship, his apologists say that he also wrote poems which have passed so deeply into the literary heritage of America that it is difficult to guess their author. Moreover they try to make a case for Poe’s influence. A person they argue who could influence the French symbolists so thoroughly cannot be bad. Poe apologists claim for him the title of the inventor of the genre of short story. Although this claim is too broad to sustain, his tales are highly distinctive. However, all the tales of Poe are not read with equal attention and care.
In the Gothic tales, Poe uses all the conventional stock-devices so popularized by Mrs. Radcliff, Horace Walpole and the horror tale writers of the *Blackwood’s*. But his use of such devices is different from that of other popular writers of his age. Hawthorne, for example, uses the Gothic stock-devices for the purpose of moralizing; other writers, especially of the *Blackwood’s* used these devices merely for sensational effects. But there is hardly any sensationalism in Poe, and he is not like Hawthorne either. In these tales Poe deals with the evil inherent in the heart of man. The Gothic devices give him an opportunity to look into the human soul and watch its working. The theme of man’s violence and his brutal and utter debasement which runs through all these tales leads him towards ultimate questions which he deals in the artistic and poetic tales.

In his rationalative tales Poe looks beyond the illusion of human violence and tries to arrive at a truth which is easily understandable to us. However in his landscape pieces he deals with the problem of evil in a more concrete way. Since Adam was thrown out of the Garden of Eden because of his sin, artists have been trying to regain the paradise. These tales try to recreate this second Eden at least on the imaginative level. The longer tales make this quest for the paradise.

The fact that Poe was successful in his attempt admits no doubt. Although Poe was not equipped to be a systematic thinker, he absorbed life, drew it in, and transmuted experience into his tales.

We remember Chaucer, Fielding or Dickens today for creating such immortals as the Wife of Bath, Tom Jones and David Copperfield
respectively. Poe created immortal characters like Legeia, Roderick Usher and William Wilson. And it is no mean achievement by any standards.

One third of Poe’s tales according to their tone and subject matter belong to the group we call “Grotesque Tales.” Bulk, however cannot be the sole criteria for us to study these tales. The fact that these are the earlier pieces of a craftsman who wrote masterpiece like ‘Ligeia,’ ‘William Wilson’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ does not mean much. Edward Davidson maintains that “The grotesque tales of Poe are inferior to his Gothic tales. In point of attack they seem to be “undirected and objectless: his tales are what might be called ‘verbal cruelties’ and depend upon rhetorical violence rather than on vivid and forceful presentation of human situation.”¹ These grotesque tales are an integral part of the total work and they contribute to the total meaning of the tales.

A study of Poe’s grotesque tales will rebut any charge that Poe was writing his horror tales to express the horror of his own mind. The image of Poe as psychological neurotic also, almost faded into insignificance.

Poe’s grotesque tales have not been given their deserved place by critics. Poe’s earliest efforts in fiction were in the area of comic and satiric writings - burlesques, parodies, hoaxes, and he continued with such writing throughout his career. Yet Poe critics generally start from the assumption that Poe lacked humor. They dub these tales as ‘verbal cruelties.’ The grotesque effects, however, which Poe evoked in these tales, are part of a general pattern. He looked upon human life and found artificial values being given more attention. America which the Protestant settlers hoped would be a second Eden, was behaving like Europe. Through the burlesque tone of
these tales Poe laughed at the new values which had become dearer to his contemporaries. The exposure of American social, literary and political life that he makes in these tales is most complete.

In all these tales, humor predominates. In these tales Poe was out to demolish all that his contemporaries thought was good and worthwhile. Sometimes his humor becomes grim; at other times, his verbal humor might be poor. The overall situation, however, remains humorous. John Marshall has suggested that Poe’s humor was sadistic and his employment consisted of seeing other people suffer. Poe’s humor might be grim, it is certainly not sadistic.

The ridicule that Poe heaps on transcendentalism, New York Literati, Democracy, social foibles and the literature popularized by the Blackwood’s and other popular magazines reveals that he was a conscious artist who was out to evaluate society around him. Even if we subscribe to the view that Poe did not have any trucking with moral, he had a correct perspective on all these things. Granted that Poe’s interests were varied and his interest in all these problems was far from deep, he like the Pope of Dunciad, utilized humor for serious purpose. Poe is not a mere entertainer. The ruling conventions of his day, he explodes one after the other. His response to the contemporary situation is like that of a critic who feels angry at the type of literature that is being produced. This anger takes many forms like irony, burlesque, banter and grim. But Poe expected that a sensitive reader might be able to explode all this to see the real intention of the artist. Critics have been ready to look into the Gothic and the ratiocinative tales for intentions but they, somehow deny this penetration for Poe’s grotesque tales. But ‘X’ing the Paragrab’ is not distant from ‘The Cask of Amontillado.’
stylistic devices spoofed by Poe in *Blackwood* pieces are employed in ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ and ‘The Black Cat.’ The examples of coordination between the early and the later tales of Poe could be multiplied. The ruling passions in all the tales are the same. In the rationative tales the detective triumphs where others have failed. For Dupin the world bears a window in the heart. He is in the end able to order the chaotic world. In the grotesque tales, Poe tries to look through appearance. Poe always delighted in overcoming others. The divorce between appearance and reality is the theme which Poe repeatedly works in all his tales. The opposition between white and black in *Pym*, between Fortunato and Montresor in ‘The Cask of Amontillado,’ between Dupin and the prefect of police point to Poe’s attempts at solving the problem of appearance.

In the popular imagination the origin of America is strongly lined with the search for an earthly paradise. The discovery of America was linked with the founding of a second Eden. However, the rise of industrialization and the consequent callousness of man made literary imagination look at the past with nostalgia, when the existence of a second Eden seemed a possibility. The America of Poe’s time had lost the possibility of becoming a second Eden, because money, worldly success, and ambition had imposed artificial values. Through his grotesque tales Poe looks at the world around him and tries to correct the perspective of his contemporaries.

The verbal cruelties are certainly not undirected and objectless. Tale after the tale Poe is out to demolish appearance and works towards what he considers the true perspective. His evaluation might be personal but his quest for identity in a chaotic, undirected and objectless world cannot be challenged.
Poe’s comic tales bring to light several interesting devices used by the author to produce humorous effects. One aspect of Poe’s comic art in his grotesque tales is his employment of improbability as a recurring device. ‘Loss of Breath’ depicts the improbable and ludicrous adventures of Mr. Lackobreath from the time he loses breath while haranguing his bride till it is restored by Mr. Windenough. In ‘The Angel of the Odd’ the angel is an incredible figure composed of various containers of alcohol. The story relates the oddest and most improbable series of incidents. However these two tales burlesque the fantastic plots of the popular grotesque fiction of Poe’s time. ‘A Predicament,’ in which Psyche Zenobia attempts to produce the type of fiction taught by Mr. Blackwood, is a tale not of terror but of a series of grotesque situations and improbabilities. Incidents like Psyche Zenobia’s eyes and head rolling down the clock tower into the gutter and the character holding dialogue with her head are unbelievable in the extreme and only create grotesque effects.

In addition to the improbability of action, Poe makes use of unbelievable physical distortions of the characters for producing grotesque effects. Certain parts of the human body are presented in abnormal dimensions, thus giving a queer look to the character. For instance, the courtiers of King Pest have their bodies unusually distended and the effect they produce is something less than terror and more than comedy. A number of badly formed human figures are presented in these tales. The major representatives are Hugh Tarpaulin, Bon-Bon, the inhabitants of Vondervotteimittis and Psyche Zenobia’s Negro servant Pompey. The reader cannot ignore the repulsive aspect of these characters. But this emphasis on a particular distortion only produces humor. Ultimately the violence and
suffering presented in these tales produces amusement because they are patently absurd and unnatural. At the same time, details from the world of actuality remind the reader of a stark reality which is not fully concealed by the absurdity. In addition to violence and suffering, death also is an aspect of Poe’s grotesque humor. The devil stands for a link between humor and death in some tales like ‘Bon-Bon’ and ‘Duc de l’Omellette.’ Thus death in the grotesque tales is a source of laughter. Due del’Omellette’s daring comic escapades are presented against a background of the hell-torments of lost souls. ‘Bon-Bon’ depicts a fine philosophy and devilry. The climax of the ridiculous in the story is reached when the devil classifies Greek and Latin philosophers according to the delectability of their souls. In both the tales the grotesque humor mainly arises out of the dialogue between the human character and the devil, perhaps a parody of the dialogue between Dr. Faustus and Mephistopheles.

‘The Spectacles’ and ‘Three Sundays in a Week’ achieve their effects through lighthearted incidents and dialogues between the characters despite the fact that they lack the power of expression. The spirited quality of Poe’s other comic tales like ‘The Man That was Used Up,’ have considerable interest for the reader in tricking him and playing upon his credulity. This kind of joke at the reader’s expense is attempted in ‘The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether,’ where the mystery is aimed as much at the reader as at the narrator. Whereas in the Gothic and the rationative tales, the mystery intensifies the effect of terror in the comic tales. The device is employed mainly for ludicrous effects.

Both the incident and tone in Poe’s comic tales are exaggerated to the point of absurdity. For instance, in ‘The Angel of the Odd’ and ‘A
Predicament’ the character adopts a mock serious attitude toward the most distressing experience like a serious injury or mutilation. In ‘The Angel of the Odd’ the humor arises out of the odd accidents that the narrator undergoes. The tone of ‘The Man That Was Used Up’ is established by the exaggerated and mechanical repetition of the mention about the ‘Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign’ by persons who are themselves mechanical. This produces a comic effect. The accidents in the tales such as ‘Loss of Breath,’ ‘King Pest’ and ‘A Predicament’ are highly incredible and grotesque. In ‘A Predicament’ the humor also arises out of a juxtaposition of things. Again in some tales the characters are made to speak in a language that they are least acquainted with. ‘Bon-Bon’ is an instance. The comic devices used in the tales are puns, misquotations, and queer. For instance, the repetition of ‘Moissart, Voissart, Croissart, Froissart etc.’ in ‘The Spectacles’ produces laughter. In ‘The Man that Was Used Up’ Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith and Dr. Drummumm are typical. Legs, Tarpaulin, King Pest and Queen Pest in ‘King Pest’ and Lacko’breath and Windenough in ‘Loss Breath’ are some more of the comic characters. In addition to these names, certain serio-comic verbal exchanges such as those between the devil and the philosopher produce laughter.

Walter Blair says, “The framework narrative typical of the American humorous writing discusses the use of the technique in the works of writers like T. B. Thorpe.”2 Poe’s ‘Hans Pfaall’ adopts the same techniques for humorous effect. The tale deals with subjects like gravitation, astronomy, the topography of the moon, the construction of balloons and the effects of atmosphere pressure. This show of learning is superbly fitted into the framework of a letter describing Hans Pfaall’s adventures.
According to Walter Blair, “The humor of exaggeration is typically American. Poe’s tales abound in the use of this device. Poe’s ‘Mellonta Tauta’ is almost a miniature version of Knickerbocker.”³ In this story, Poe’s view of the 19th century America is a part of ancient history. The story is set in 2848 A.D. with a perspective similar to the ‘Lunatics’ fancied by Washington Irving’s Knickerbocker. Poe presents the citizens of America as savages and their democratic institutions as disruptive mob rule.

‘Ligeia’ is rendered with psychological realism; the end of the tale is left rather ambiguous. Before revelation itself the narrator is chilled with terror by aspiration but after the lovely and fantastic image of Ligeia reveals itself for the shroud, is the terror transformed for the narrator into an ecstatic vision. The indication would seem to be that the narrator is delighted and thrilled by the revelation. So the reader is left in uneasy state of indecision whether to react to the conclusion as that of a horror tale or as a final culminating vision of a delightful fantasy. The overall impression of the scene would, no doubt, rule out the later alternative. There is undoubtedly something supernatural and terrifying in the idea of spirit of the dead tenanting the person of the living. The fact that Ligeia’s will asserts itself after death and possesses the person of Lady Rowena would naturally suggest the evil act of vampire. Thus D. H. Lawrence seems to be correct when he says, “It is the spirit of Ligeia., leagued with the spirit of the husband that…the destruction of Rowena.”⁴ Poe’s letter to P.P. Cooke, explains the conclusion of ‘Ligeia’: “The gradual perception of the fact that Ligeia lives again in the person of Rowena is a far loftier and more thrilling idea than the one I have embodied.”⁵ He further admits that, in
view of a more gradual ending in ‘Morella’ here he had to be content with a sudden half-consciousness on the part of the narrator.

The forgoing analyses of Poe’s Gothic tales shed light on different aspects of his narrative technique such as the telling methods, openings and endings, incident and tone, suspense and suggestion, symbolic and pictorial devices and the dramatic quality. Poe does not employ all these technical elements in any single tale but uses them in varying combinations in different tales. He himself has outlined some of the ways in which elements like tone in incident may be manipulated singly or in combination. He differentiates between tales in which the effect is wrought through incident and those in which it is wrought through tone and yet others in which both incident and tone combine to produce the desired effect. Poe outlines the following ways:

1. Poe’s most Gothic tales are narrated by the central character himself, who actually goes through the incidents of the story and relates them to the reader. It is clear that Poe deliberately chooses the protagonist as narrator to create the maximum intensity because the narrator himself is at the heart of the conflict and presents a point of view that is vital to the emotional content of the narrative. Poe’s handling of the protagonist narrator device in tales like ‘The Cask of Amontillado,’ ‘The Tell Tale Heart,’ ‘Legeia’ and ‘The Black Cat’ secures for the narrative a high degree of dramatic immediacy. Poe’s story is narrated with great emotional excitement and the reader’s involvement is complete. Critics of the psychoanalytical school are fond of maintaining that Poe’s protagonist-narrators are little more than maddened versions of Poe himself. In spite of the objective method of Poe’s narration his presence in the tales at times becomes rather palpable. For instance the
apostrophe to the Baron’s mother in ‘Metzengerstein’ is structurally unrelated to the main incident of the tale. The prolonged theorizing of ‘The Imp of the Perverse’ destroys the balance between the narrative interest and the interest of the idea that the tale exemplifies. In his more successful tales like ‘Berenice’ Poe, of course, manages to subordinate the theorizing to the main business of the tale and to make it contribute directly toward the central effect.

2. The method that Poe employs in telling his story is having the peripheral narrator speaking in the first person. In tales like ‘The Assignation’ and ‘The Fall of House of Usher’ this keeps the narrator at a considerable distance from the inner torments of the central character, and contributes to the sense of mystery that is so vital a part of the effect of those tales. In ‘The Fall of House of Usher,’ however, he shows a greater degree of participation and is more deeply involved in the predicament of the central character but since he is largely a confused spectator, his point of view is unreliable. Allan Tate says “that the point of view in this tale is that of Usher himself in spite of the fact that the story has been narrated by a secondary character.” It is true that Usher looks at the events and the physical surroundings as indicative of an impending catastrophe for himself. His words to the narrator are significant: “In this unnerved- in this pitiable-condition, I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when most abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantom, FEAR.” Nevertheless we should notice the importance of the narrator’s point of view which serves to heighten the effect of terror through suggestion and suspense. Till almost the middle of the story the point of view is essentially that of the narrator himself. Right from the opening
paragraph, the manipulation of the reader’s mood is achieved through the effect that the entire surroundings and character produce upon the narrator’s mind. Broadly speaking we can say that the tale has two points of view—one is that of the narrator and the other, Usher’s own. However despite the presence of a dual point of view, the final effect of the story is unified and single.

A fourth position is that of the mere recorder- an unidentified individual whose presence is not felt by the reader. The narrator in ‘Hop-Frog’ is strictly a raconteur and renders an eyewitness account of the incidents. He is neither the central character nor a dramatized secondary character. However he seems to have been connected with the court. Even though in the earlier part of the tale his presence is felt more distinctly the latter part does not reveal him much. It sounds like the voice of the omniscient author. A more interesting narrative method, used in “A Descent into the Maelstrom” is the double narrator: a raconteur and the central character narrator.

Poe’s narrative methods do not exhibit the same complexity of interest as those of Henry James. As James’s aim in his tales, as well as in his novels, is the enfoldment of the consciousness of his characters. He makes subtle shifts of point of view of sometimes providing a multiple centre of interest. But in Poe there is only a single point of view that produces a single and unified impression. Whatever narrative medium he employs he does it with rare ingenuity. John Michael thinks: “In Poe’s work narration is itself often problematic. The reflection and narrative form are ineluctably joined double movement, an ‘enchanted circle’ of reflection that carries narrator
and reader together toward the limit of cognition. In their very narration, Poe’s tales enact the search for the grounds of thinking and the self.”

Poe adopts various kinds of story-opening. They can be broadly classified into four categories: reflective, dramatic, atmospheric, and matter of fact. In reflective category the tale opens with a philosophical reflection on some theory like metempsychosis, misery, evil etc. which receives exemplification through the later events until finally the conclusion reinforces the idea. For example, ‘The Imp of the Perverse’ and ‘The Premature Burial’ becomes a little overdrawn and tedious unlike the brief opening paragraphs of the Gothic tales. The conclusion of ‘The Sphinx’ again does not carry out the expectation aroused by the opening. The tale has a Gothic opening but ends in a disappointing ratiocination.

In dramatic category, method of opening a tale is in media res. The story begins abruptly with an apostrophe. ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ and ‘The Tell Tale Heart’ are the best examples of this category.

The atmospheric is found in ‘The Fall of House of the Usher’ and ‘The Masque of the Red Death.’ These stories open with a description of the physical surroundings and of the narrator’s reactions to them. Here the author builds up the tone of the narrative. Wayne C. Booth calls the device ‘the mood building’ method.

In Poe’s story, sometimes in the openings, Poe skillfully plays upon the reader’s nervous sensibility, inducing the desired mood by means of suggestive detail. The descriptions in the course of the narrative serve as interpretative accompaniment to achieve subtle intensification of the sensation. For example in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ the peripheral
narrator’s reactions to the appearance of the mansion and its surroundings help build up the mood, but in the ‘The Masque of the Red Death’ the omniscient author gives a vivid description of the physical horrors arising out of the pestilence.

The last classification i.e., matter-of-fact is opening with no dramatic abruptness. ‘The Oblong Box’ opens with an account of a voyage from Charleston to New York. In ‘MS Found in a Bottle’ the narrator gives the details of his birth and personal life. ‘The Black Cat,’ which turns about at the end to be a tale of horror, opens with a homely account of a succession of natural causes and effects. The tone of voice of the narrator is matter of fact and contrasts sharply with the excited openings of tales like ‘Berenice.’ ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’ too develops into a fully Gothic narrative, but it opens in a matter of fact way with the narrator trying to present before us the facts of the case with the ostensible detachment of a newspaper reporter. In both the cases the particular attitude of the narrator, the claim of homely origins in the case of ‘The Black Cat’ and the claim of a veracious account of a case of mesmerism in ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,’ is evidently a strategy to secure the effect of a surprise ending. The openings of these tales are in sharp contrast to those of ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ and ‘The Masque of Red Death’ where even the initial sentence foreshadows the ending.

Poe says a tale should fully bear out its beginning. In his own practice he achieves remarkable success with his story endings. Such tales like ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’ ‘Berenice’ and ‘Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’ have climaxes that are arresting in their effect. But the conclusion of ‘Morella,’ like that of ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ is more gradual. The
entire plot of ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ is one prolonged climax, but even within its own movement the story records a peak point that is marked by the chiming of Fortunato and the ultimate horrifying act of his entombment. The conclusion of ‘The Black Cat’ is clear in its effect, but that of ‘Legeia’ though fully justified in terms of tale, produces a confused response on the part of the reader. ‘Hop-Frog’ is marred by a detective conclusion that is not promised by the beginning. The conclusion of ‘The Man of the Crowd’ is rather disappointing, for it does not fulfill the reader’s expectations. The effect of ‘Shadow’ is blurred at the end by a too obvious allegorizing. However, in spite of these occasional shortcomings, most of Poe’s tales end well. Poe insists on a strict casual relation of the tale and follows out this principle. In fact, his observance makes for great theatrical effect. The unity of plot in his tales arises out of (1) A strict casual relationship of incident and (2) Harmony of character and incident. ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ and ‘Ligeia’ have mutually dependent incidents that make the story move with rapidity and intensity. ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ is a little drama in itself; in fact it has only one prolonged chain of episodes, Montresor leading his unsuspecting victim to his doom. The tale achieves dramatic effect through the harmonious relationship of character and incident and the skillful management of dialogue. ‘Morella’ is successful within its own limited form, the two incidents of the heroine’s death and the scene of the daughter’s baptism emerging directly from the character. ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ achieves dramatic quality through the device of a prose monologue, although the device is not fully exploited. The climatic incidents show the author’s masterly rendering of the incidents of the tale. ‘The Black Cat’ is remarkable for the strictly casual ordering of its incidents.
In his more successful gothic tales like ‘The Pit and the Pendulum,’ ‘The Masque of Red Death,’ ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ and ‘Legeia,’ Poe makes the setting contribute directly to the effect. But in ‘William Wilson’ the setting on the Bransby school does not quite harmonize with character and incident. The external setting of Wilson’s school is not in harmony with his inner life; however this dichotomy of the real and the fantastic establishes the peculiar nature of the tale. ‘Morella’ depends mainly on character and incident. Through setting as much as through the peculiar mental state of his characters, Poe achieves atmospheric effects in his gothic tales.

Poe in order to build up the rising emotion of his tales employed suggestion and suspense. It means the reader is kept in a state of poised expectancy as to what is going to happen. The information deliberately withheld from the reader keeps him in a state of anticipation and uncertainty as to the outcome. This is a sure way of creating the maximum emotional tension in the tale; Poe uses the device of suspense in achieving this end in the Gothic tales as much as in the rationative tales. He portrays remarkable skill in keeping the reader in a state of high excitement in his tales ‘Ligeia’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher.’ In ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’ he gives us no inkling as to what will happen at the end and achieves unqualified success in keeping the reader in suspense. In his method Poe seems to have been influenced by Mrs. Radcliff to whom he makes a direct reference in ‘The Oval Portraits.’ Suggestion, like suspense, keeps the reader in a state of expectation. While dropping a few hints, the author leaves the rest of the details to the reader’s imagination. In many of his tales Poe fully exploits the Gothic power of suggestion, casting a
hypnotic spell over his reader, especially significant in this respect are tales like ‘The Masque of the Red Death,’ ‘Berenice’ and ‘Ligeia.’ Even the earliest tale, ‘Metzengerstein’ abounds in suggestive details that create a sense of horror.

In addition to suggestion, association plays an important role in the creation of the mood and the ultimate effect. We find many eminent modern writers using this technique, perhaps derived from Poe’s early model. And also Poe’s use of symbolism adds to the most important role for the associative images. Symbolism making the tales vague, contributes to dramatic effect. Poe’s tales abound in color symbolism producing both visual and emotional effects on the reader.

Poe’s presentation of character and situation is highly impressionistic. His description of the fast moving crowds in ‘The Man of the Crowd’ or the gigantic rotating black funnel in ‘A Descent into the Maelstrom’ leaves an indelible mark on the reader’s mind. In ‘William Wilson,’ the protagonist is pictured as moving from place to place with great momentum. The motion of the background, whether it is Bransby’s Eton or Oxford or the various other European cities, gives an impression similar to the rapid shifting of scenic views in motion pictures. While the reader keeps on looking at the picture of the character, the background changes swiftly. We know vaguely where the action is taking place, but we have no distinct idea of the specific locale.

The ultimate effect of Poe’s tales of terror on the reader is the characteristic spiritual glow, illuminating the darkest recesses of the minds of these tormented and suffering men and women. Poe’s heros like Roderick
Usher and the narrator of ‘Legeia’ are tormented and suffering individuals. Reading about them is indeed an adventure into the horrible underground passages of the human soul. These protagonists are scholars, desperately struggling to find the meaning of life. Their beloveds too are intellectual women, in a similar state of inexplicable suffering. An absence of psychological adjustment of these characters constitutes the essential drama of Poe’s Gothic tales. The characters in Poe’s tales are often alienated personalities, their physical appearance symbolizing the states of their minds. Events tend to be unusual being perverse, violent or shocking. The character’s disposition is toward fear, terror, horror, insecurity and the failure of love. Therefore, problems are seen within the individual’s soul rather than in external terms.

Thus the analyses reveals that, Poe’s life is reflected in his works, because Poe had a number of distinctive characteristic beliefs about the world that reappear in characters and themes in his works. The loss of love is the first theme. Alcoholism and perversion is also a theme we find in his short stories. The abuse is another theme by the rich he has helped to achieve their high heights. The first theme loss of love: Poe had many lost loves in his life. He lost his mother at the age of two. He lost his foster-mother while he was in his teen age, and his friend’s mother, whom he loved with a puppy love also died young. Virginia, his cousin and wife and Mrs. Whitman all are explicit. He equated many of his feelings about the circumstances and the methods of their demises in his stories. ‘A Dream Within a Dream’ tells about holding onto grains of life. The harder he grasps the grains, the faster they slip away, just as the lover in Poe’s life slip away when things are working out for him. In ‘The Oval-Portrait’ the painter who represented Poe,
was painting a picture of his wife. Poe was so attached to his art that he would not sacrifice it for his true wife. In ‘The Black Cat’ Poe kills his wife when she was trying to interfere with his attempted murder of the cat that he hates. In the poem ‘The Raven’ the narrator reflects on the death of his wife Lenore, whom Poe equates to the inevitable death of his wife. He asks the Raven whether he will ever see his wife again, and the answer is ‘nevermore,’ as he knows his wife will in time pass, and he will be without yet another of his lover. In the short story ‘Hop-Frog’ the lead female character, Trippetta, represents his lost love. The dominant king in the story stole Trippetta away from her home for his court, and escapes in a plan with hop frog, the Poe type character. This is like Poe’s love for Sarah, broken away by the oppressive parents, but there was victory in the end. In another part of the story, the king splashes wine in Trippetta’s face symbolic of society’s throwing wine in Virginia’s face by depriving Poe of the compensation he deserves and therefore not being able to provide Virginia with the conditions she would need to avoid TB. In ‘Annabel Lee’ also Poe’s life reflects on the loss of his lover. The love that Poe experienced was so great that even angels in heaven coveted that love, and they endeavored to deprive him of it. And thus he wrote that Sarah’s highborn kinsmen bore her away from him, and that they chilled and killed Virginia in the way that she died of disease.

However, these incidents prove that Poe’s life is reflected in his works. He thoroughly incorporates psychology into many of his stories, which he knew a great deal. He uses personal fears in his stories, along with characteristics of his surroundings. Even though there are many correlations the connections provided here suggest that Poe’s writings were an outlet for
his life, an extension into the Poe that he really was not but perceived he was.

So in portraying complex or distorted emotion, the submerged psychic states, Poe has affinity with Hawthorne whom he calls “A man of rare genius.”9 Moreover in thus revealing phases of buried thought or feeling, Constance Rourke says, both are close to the “rude fantasy making of the pioneer.”10

However, Edgar Allan Poe is the most complex personality in the entire gallery of American writers. No one else fuses, as he does such discordant psychological attributes or offers to the world an appearance so various. No one else stands at the centre of a mystery so profound. Hawthorne, Melville and Faulkner are by comparison with Poe, easy enough to classify, while Edwards, James Cooper and Hemingway emerge with crystal clarity. Poe resists easy interpretation and broad generalization. Any plausible analysis of his work, like any authentic story of his life, must begin with this primary and essential truth.
References:


9. Hawthorne, qt by D. Ramakrishna, *The Crafts of Poe’s Tales*, p.158.

10. Constance Rourke, qt by D. Ramakrishna, *The Crafts of Poe’s Tales*: p.158.
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