

## Chapter - 3

### CLASSIFICATION OF EDGAR ALLAN POE'S SHORT STORIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The short story is the most recent of all literary forms. It is the only mode in which American writers were privileged to participate from the very beginning. The American writer Edgar Allan Poe was the first to use the term 'short story' to describe his collection of prose narratives which was usually known as a 'tale.' Poe's definition of a tale was succinct. He said that a tale should be a satire to achieve 'a creation unique of single effect,' and that every word and every action should contribute to the working out of this 'one pre-established design.'<sup>1</sup> Poe also says a short story is a prose narrative "requiring from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal."<sup>2</sup> We may say that short story is a story that can be easily read at a single sitting. If we use the term 'short story' or 'tale' loosely we may find stories in the Bible, in the 'Gesta Romanorum' of the middle ages, in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In England, there was hardly any encouragement to a writer of short fiction at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Book publishers wanted novels preferably lengthy, because these were in great demand. Moreover they wanted novels suitable for the sensibilities of novel-reading public whose appetite was voracious. The periodicals of the times did not encourage short fiction and the fiction if included was mostly serialized. The miscellanies took their fiction either from the 18<sup>th</sup> century repositories or from the amateur contributors.

The history of the short story as a literary form is as follows. It was a form developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so that the American writer could participate in its development from the beginning. Historically the earliest

forms of stories, such as ‘gesta’ were tales of action, and adventure. The word is from the same root as are the English words, ‘Jest’ and ‘Gesture.’ The Italian and German terms are ‘novella’ and ‘nouvelle,’ which like ‘gesta’ are used in the plural to suggest a collection. The English word ‘tale’ suggests a telling something or recounting. The modern word ‘story’ has its roots in both the old French, ‘estorire’ and the Latin ‘historia.’ Thus we accommodate ourselves to the relatively modern view of prose narrative as essentially a retelling of something which actually happened.

A short story is a work of fiction that is usually written in prose, often in narrative format. This format tends to be more pointed than longer works of fiction, such as novels. Short story definitions based on length differs somewhat even among professional writers, in part because of the fragmentation of the medium into genres. A classic definition of a short story is that one should be able to read it in one sitting, a point most notably made in Poe’s essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846).

The early American writer Washington Irving saw his own early tales as pictorial representations of places and events and called them ‘sketches.’ Both the sketch and tale have been absorbed into our modern concept of the short story. Generally viewed by scholars as an invention of the nineteenth century, the modern short story has been described as a compact prose narrative designed to elicit a singular and unified emotional response. As such, critics have made formal distinctions between the short story and its generic predecessor, the tale, a short narrative sometimes of oral origin. Likewise, commentators have contrasted the short story with the lengthier novella and novel, both of which typically feature a greater complexity of themes, multiple characters and intersecting lines of plot. European and

American writers first articulated the formal qualities of the modern short story in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, which coincided with the rapid proliferation of periodical publication in the industrializing nations of the western world at this time, and thus it is thought to have been broadly influenced by economic as well as literary stimuli. Early innovations in the genre appeared in the short fictional prose of such writers as Prosper Mérimée, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walter Scott and Nikolai Gogol, to name only a few. Following differing but parallel lines of development in France, the United States, Britain, Russia and elsewhere, the short story is traditionally thought to have reached a peak of maturity in continental Europe during the late nineteenth century with the Naturalistic pieces of Guy de Maupassant and Anton Chekhov, and a generation later in English with the publication of outstanding Modernist works in the Anglo-American tradition.

Washington Irving is considered a seminal writer of short fiction in the United States, with his collection of tales called the *Sketch Book* (1820) often described as a foundational text. Including the outstanding pieces “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” the *Sketch Book* foreshadowed the future development of the short story in America with its blend of incisive wit, satire and narrative virtuosity. After Irving, scholars generally focus on Edgar Allan Poe as a crucial figure in the development of the short story. In his 1842 essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) Poe outlined the principal features of the genre, claiming that it should be readable in one sitting and that its effect, similar to that of lyric poetry, should be singular and total, designed to evoke a primary emotional reaction in the reader. Additionally, Poe’s writings, such as his seminal

stories of psychological horror and detective fiction collected in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) and later volumes, exemplified his evolving theories. Meanwhile, Hawthorne's short stories in *Twice-Told Tales* and *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846) offered an innovative blend of allegorical symbolism and internalized character study that, while not immediately successful with American audiences, proved immensely influential. In addition to the psychological works of Hawthorne and Poe, the pieces collected in Herman Melville's *Piazza Tales* (1856), including the stories "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and "Benito Cereno," illustrated a continued transition toward increased realism, internalized delineation of character, and narrative distance in American prose fiction. Following the Civil War, the short story market in the United States became increasingly dominated by the regional tales of local colorists. Beginning with Bret Harte and his gritty sketches of mining camp life in California, the local color movement developed from the literary efforts of such writers as Harte, George Washington Cable, Thomas Nelson Page, Kate Chopin and many others to depict the daily existence of ordinary Americans in prose fiction. Portraying the varied regional settings of provincial America with near-journalistic verisimilitude, the local color authors were broadly successful, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s, although the movement had largely run its course by the turn of the century. About this time, William Dean Howells expressed a feeling, shared by many at the time, that American writers on the whole had taken the short story form nearest to perfection. While this assertion remains open to debate, scholars have since agreed that the new genre was eminently suited to the tastes of the reading public in the United States during the nineteenth century.

The development of short narrative prose in nineteenth-century England was hindered by the popularity of the sprawling Victorian novel. In many cases the proponents of the British short story were themselves dedicated novelists, figures like Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, who favored this lengthier and more expansive form. The creation of condensed narratives designed to produce an immediate emotional response, however, was not uncommon. Sir Walter Scott, another writer more generally remembered for his novels, offered a significant precursor of the modern short story in Britain with “The Two Drovers”. Cited for rising above the level of mere anecdote to produce a simple yet totalizing thematic effect, the story sought to elicit what critics would later view as the defining quality of the modern short story. By the 1830s, compact tales of Gothic horror by writers like Edward Bulwer-Lytton and the Anglo-Irish Sheridan Le Fanu began to appear in British literary magazines and increasingly captured the attention of reading audiences. Scholars have noted, however, that the nineteenth-century highpoint of British short fiction would not arrive until the last quarter of the century and the publication of realistic sketches set in exotic locales by Robert Louis Stevenson and later by Rudyard Kipling.

The development of the short story in the nineteenth-century France and Russia can generally be aligned with the gradual predominance of the Naturalist mode in prose fiction. In France, the compact and detached narratives of Prosper Mérimée redefined the French short story, or *conte*, in the late 1820s. Mérimée's “Mateo Falcone” (1829), which recounts a violent and tragic clash of honor between father and son with lucid simplicity and economy, is usually considered a pivotal piece. Other significant short

stories were composed by Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, whose short fiction reflects in miniature the artistic achievements usually associated with their more well-known contributions to the realistic novel. Additional French short-story writers of note include Alfred du Musset, Alphonse Daudet and Théophile Gautier. While acknowledging the accomplishments of these and other writers, many critics have reserved their highest esteem for the famed realistic stories of Guy de Maupassant, who in the 1880s and early 1890s concentrated his talents in the genre, effectively liberating it from the last vestiges of Romanticism to produce startling, lyrical stories admired for their clarity, unity, and compression. In two of his most famous pieces, “Boule de suif” (1880; “Ball of Fat”) and “La Parure” (1884; “The Necklace”), Maupassant produced penetrating studies of character, and with them is thought to have perfected the realistic short story in the late nineteenth century. The development of Russian short fiction followed a similar pattern. Mid-century innovators such as Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev and Aleksandr Pushkin published works of increasing realism and stylistic precision, and in so doing formed a tradition that was to culminate in the detailed, observant, and often ironic sketches of daily life found in the prose masterpieces of Anton Chekhov. Elsewhere in Europe and in other parts of the globe, the short story genre followed comparable trends, in large part reflected in stylistic developments associated with the shift from Romanticism to Realism and Naturalism which was united with the contributions of a regionalist impulse inspired by the local color writers.

Certainly the three American writers -- Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville -- whose accomplishments in the writing of short prose narrative were of most importance to us, drew from all sources without concern for the type or

genre. Hawthorne, Poe and Melville called their productions as ‘tale’ as did Irving in his *Tales of a Traveler*. Hawthorn’s first published collection of stories was called *Twice-Told-Tales*. Poe called his book *The Tales of Grottesque and Arabesque*. Melville called his early collection *The Piazza Tales*.

One of the earliest uses of the term ‘story’ in the title of a work in English was by Henry James in *Daisy Miller: A Study and Other Stories* published in 1883. The word ‘story’ was used exclusively since the beginning of the mid-century.

If the critical revaluations of our own day have tended to exalt Melville and Hawthorne and to reduce the stature of Poe, it is nevertheless to these three men that we must look for the beginning of the short story in America. It does not mean that the American story was an isolated and independent phenomenon. Much could be written about the influence direct or indirect of European literature.

The development of periodicals and magazines helped the growth of short stories in America. There was a body of native materials, which combined with more or less of typical 19<sup>th</sup> century American attitudes, determined the method or technique by which such materials could be shaped into story form. Yet the history of the American short story during its brief existence is the tracing of the creative talent even occasionally the genius of American authors in their struggle to subdue the intractable materials of life through the media of art and genius.

Preceding the year 1765 the American colonist had created a body of writing which the modern literary historian finds by no means negligible.

There was no conscious demand for a national literature. The first writers to be colonized as American classics were Irving, Cooper and Bryant. Literary fashions were changing and with the drift to Romanticism even the writings of Benjamin Franklin began to seem old fashioned. What Americans wanted was a literature that would match the magnitude of the continent and exalt the destiny of a great nation. So a desire for national literature was born.

The difficulty was that while the new land supplied the writer with rich and untouched materials, it gave him no technique for handling them. The author had to learn it from European writers. Eventually, of course, America would produce original writers like Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, James, Twain, Hemingway and Faulkner who would be valued by European writers and critics for their contributions to aesthetics.

The United States had no literary capital, like London or Paris, where one might hear, the problems of art and literature and where the youthful writer or artist could find encouragement and advice. It is not surprising that few of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writers except Poe and James, had any clear and consistent conception of the literary art. James naturally enough gravitated to Paris and London where he could talk with Flaubert, Turgenev and others. If Poe and Whitman could have lived among their peers in London or Paris, they would have discovered that their ideals were somewhat narrow.

The Americans, however, had no literary tradition except that of England and this seemed unsuited to the needs of the New World. So the question arose about dominant theme or central motif of the great American literature yet to be written. There was as yet no American way of writing, no

conception of an American literary language as distinguished from that of England.

As we understand America developed its literary interest from Europe. The extraordinary popularity of Scott's novels set American young writers to explore the belief in American past. The search for the great American writer continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 1820's American writers of a younger generation were eager to make places for themselves. They were Irving, Cooper and Bryant. United States had a number of 'expert story tellers' like Irving, Dana, Hawthorne, Brown, Cooper and Poe. As Poe thinks Drake and Halleck were overrated. The major writers of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century were Poe, Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau and Longfellow. As the American settler was pushed to West, his tales accompanied him and were enlarged and altered to meet the new circumstances of the American continent. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century these folklore tales had become so much a part of the popular press.

The writers selected permanent elements of society, set his characters into motion against them, and drew conclusions from the resulting action. Such a method has its limits in science as well as fiction, so that when the microscope and the X-ray reveal to scientist a universe of being beyond the limits of man's ordinary perceptions, writing shifted its method and its aim, discovering a means of focusing its attention upon those inward motives. The beginning of the modern short story paralleled this rise in interest in the psychological motives for action or in the psychological results of past events. Although the beginning of the short tale had represented little more than an objective recording of picaresque adventure, some authors by utilizing the atmosphere of Gothic setting had hinted mysteries that might be

explored perhaps even unconsciously suggesting that the supernatural world of medieval romance might represent a clue to the working of the mind.

The principal philosophical interest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was nature. The most literary subject was the relation of man to nature. In America both interests were particularly pertinent. Poe showed little interest in contemporary society, but the landscapes that he borrowed from his Gothic forebears were inhabited, not by vigor and energy, but by decay. He applied natural science in his fiction, not to give examples of a trend toward Utopia, but as a means of fathoming mystery.

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century with the completed writings of Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, James, Twain and Harte, the first great period of the American short story had come to an end. Hawthorne had examined the effects of sin and innocence on the American character particularly as they were to be found in his Puritan forebears. Melville had looked into past as well as the present contrasting evil and innocence, discovery, monotony and sterility in modern life, injustice and wanton cruelty in much of the past. James raised questions concerning the nature of reality and his stories revealed the true and false as they were expressed particularly in social manners and in art. Twain and Harte had utilized their experiences in the American West to illustrate the advantages of innocence and common sense over social pretensions and romantic ideals. But Poe had created situations of horror and mystery where his macabre effects tested the stability of human mind or he posed mental problems that suggested the mind's infinite possibilities.

There are many reasons why Poe was attracted towards short fiction. No doubt, his great ability lay in this direction. Short stories were in great demand in America of his days. The reverse was the case in England which lacked good short stories. Poe as a journalist knew the pulse of America which was in too much of hunger to stay with three volume novels. Through the magazine under his charge Poe gave to the public what it demanded. He wrote sixty eight tales in 17 years.

Poe's tales can be conveniently classified according to the 'effect' Poe sought to create. Such a classification will help us to bring to surface the undercurrent of meaning. In a letter to T.W. White Poe defines four categories of his short stories:

.....the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Wilber, one of the most sympathetic and understanding critics of Poe, groups the tales as soliloquy, the dramatic monologue, and the posthumous tales, the dialogue in heaven and the dream journey. This distinction is not based on the distinctions, which Poe himself spoke. Poe here made a distinction between the "Grotesque" and the "Burlesque," both belonging to the comic art. Hence from the above quoted letter, we can derive three types of narratives:

1. The Gothic or horror tales, representing the fearful coloured into the horrible.

2. The comic tales, including the ludicrous heightened into the Grotesque and the witty exaggerated into the Burlesque, and
3. The mystical pieces, detective fictions, wherein the 'singular' is wrought out into the strange and mystical.

A.H. Quinn classifies the tales of Poe in four categories: the Arabesque, the Grotesque, the Rationative and the Descriptive. Quinn keeps up the distinctions which Poe himself made. W. H. Auden divides Poe's tales as major and minor. In the major group he makes two divisions. The tales describing the state of willful being: the aggressive ego. The minor tales of Poe are divided into two groups, the tales of the humorous, satiric pieces. Auden's classification is unsatisfying because it stands in no realistic relationship with Poe's artistic intentions. Darrel Abel classifies Poe's tales as analytic and synthetic. He calls the analytic tales as the "stories of realistic terror" and divides these into two groups: the tales that analyze sensations and the rationative tales that analyse a complex problem. The synthetic tales are of romantic terror. His putting together of the Arabesque and Grotesque tales seems unconvincing. The epithets of 'Grotesque' and 'Arabesque' will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales. This statement clearly shows that the contemporaries understood the terms very well and recognized Poe's tales. W. L. Howarth categorizes Poe's works into three parts: the 'Grotesque,' the 'Arabesque' and the 'Ratiocinative,' corresponding roughly to the early, middle and later periods of Poe's literary career. He does not take into consideration what A.H. Quinn calls the descriptive pieces.

Poe was not clear in his definition of the story. He attempted, for instance, to divide the story into two types. Those which he called tales of ratiocination and those he called tales of atmospheric effect. The first type is characterized by the ingeniously plotted story as 'The Gold-Bug' or 'The Purloined Letter' where the effect is made primarily as the result of an interest aroused by a close following of the details of complicated action and a final comprehension of its infallible logic. The second depended less upon action than it did upon the multiplication of atmospheric details, as in 'The Fall of the House of Usher.' Now here is nothing essentially wrong with an attempt to define an art.

Poe's concept of the ratiocinative tale developed into more or less empty form of the detective story. At its best, it produced an O. Henry and at its second best a Jack London. The atmospheric tale, in the sense that it came to be known as such, produced little more than Poe's own tales of horror, most of which seem to us now to be forced and sentimental and perhaps the same applies to the so called "local color" stories of a writer like Bret Harte who seems to have falsely exploited atmospheric effects at the expense of psychological and moral truth.

The real fact now would seem to be that Poe was more concerned with the preconceived structure than he was with grounding his art in the life around him. His was a dilettante's interest, focused more on the mechanics of form than on form as an expression. Poe is seen now as having the principal concerns of his time centrally located in his work. We have come to see that this remoteness was not one of subject matter but of technique. He might write a story about a love affair between the exotic daughter of an Italian sorcerer and her student lover, set in a remote place and time and

embracing events which our common sense tells us are clearly impossible; yet the underlying theme is so embodied in the tale and is so much a part of our own human experience.

Poe and Harte had given the 'short tale' eminence in America. In tracing the advance of belief that the short story has its own aesthetics, it is once again America that provides a starting point. As far back as 1842 Poe had formulated basic principles for the composition of short prose narratives, relating the writer's aim directly to the brevity of the form. By a brilliant stroke, Poe applied to prose writing what he had found to be an invariable rule of poetic production. In poetry, he maintained, that the 'unity of effect' was only attainable in works which could be read at one sitting.

The words 'unique,' 'single' and 'wrought' remain key terms in the discussions of short story. So too does Poe's insistence that only when the desired effect is clear in the writer's mind should he go on to invent incidents and arrange them in the order best calculated to establish this effect. Whatever the subject the aim is to pull the reader along towards a single moment. Poe's account of the deliberate artistry by which the writer must seize and maintain control gives the short story the status of an exacting and powerful form.

In Poe's view the short story is compared favorably with poetry as well as with novel, because of the vast variety of modes and inflections of thought and expression available to the writer. It is precisely the same appealing range and diversity which excited James in the 1890s. James said, "By doing short things I can do so many he declared, touch so many subjects, break out in so many places, handle so many of the threads of

life.”<sup>4</sup> Like Poe, James observed that the length of a story was relative to its central motive. James’s great achievement came with his experiments in the form of the novel, but his interest in short fiction was in no way diminished by that. He observed that the short story and its organic unity had been anticipated by Poe. He gave entirely new force to a theory which had been dormant for fifty years, by incorporating it into his characteristically modern view of the artist.

Short stories of one sort or another had been part of literature from its earlier expression; writers were just beginning to theorize about the possibilities of the short story at the start of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Poe makes character subsidiary to action. Like Aristotle he sees each element of the story as subsidiary to the action. The ‘Literary Artist,’ Poe says conceives a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out and then invents such incidents and combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect...’<sup>5</sup>

However, Poe wrote five kinds of stories: Mystery or Detective; Science fiction; Gothic Humor; Gothic Romance; Gothic horror stories that emphasize atmosphere and the supernatural. He contributed sophisticated analyses of the psychological process into insight.

### **Detective Fiction:**

The detective stories are masterpieces in a minor vein. Poe portrayed the prototype for Sherlock Holmes. These stories are called “tales of ratiocination,” because of Poe’s meticulous attention to the rational process by which mysteries are unveiled. His science-fiction stories are developed with the same careful regard for rational credibility. Poe was unconsciously

rebellious against the 19<sup>th</sup> century excessive faith in the private sensibility and inspiration of the artist and the accidental nature of art. Poe's first detective story 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue' pioneered the sub-genre of the 'locked room' mystery by presenting a seemingly impossible crime. The second story 'The Mystery Of Marie Roget' is interesting both historically and structurally. Because the story is based upon the real New York murder case of Mary Rogers; structurally because the narrative's use of newspaper reports and textual sources anticipates the kind of fragmentary structure that would be used by Wilkie Collins in 'The Woman in White.' 'The Purloined Letter' has become significant in terms of psychoanalytic theory following Jacques Lacan's analyses of the story and Jacques Derrida's reading of Lacan. But in a wider sense the stories are significant for introducing us the figure of the detective in Dupin. Dupin would be a template for many of the detectives to appear in the late nineteenth century. This earliest work of detective fiction as understood today was that detective Dupin became the model for those who solved crimes by deduction from a series of clues.

### **Gothic Horror Stories:**

There is a psychological intensity that is characteristic of Poe's writings, especially the tales of horror that comprise his best-known works. These stories which include 'The Black Cat,' 'The Cask of Amontillado' and 'The Tell-Tale Heart' are often told by a first person narrator, and through this voice Poe probes the workings of a character's psyche. This technique foreshadows the psychological realism. In his Gothic tales, Poe employed an essentially symbolic, almost allegorical method which gives such works as 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' 'The Mask of the Red Death' and 'Ligeia,' an enigmatic quality that accounts for their enduring

interest and also links them with the symbolical works of Hawthorne and Melville. The influence of Poe's tales may be seen in the work of later writers, including Ambrose Bierce and H. P. Lovecraft, who belong to a distinct tradition of horror literature. Just as Poe influenced many succeeding authors and is regarded as an ancestor of such major literary movements as Symbolism and Surrealism, he was also influenced by earlier literary figures and movements. In his use of the demonic and the grotesque, Poe evidenced the impact of the stories by E.T.A. Hoffman and the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliff, while the despair and melancholy in much of his writing reflects an affinity with the Romantic movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was Poe's particular genius that in his work he gave consummate artistic form both to his personal obsessions and those of previous literary generations, at the same time creating new forms which provided a means of expression for future artists.

A tale of sickness, madness, incest and the danger of unrestrained creativity, "The Fall of the House of Usher" is among Poe's most popular and critically examined horror stories. The ancient decaying House of Usher filled with tattered furniture and tapestries and set in a gloomy, desolate locale is a rich symbolic representation of its sickly twin inhabitants, Roderick and Madeline Usher. Besides its use of classical Gothic imagery and gruesome events including escape from live burial the story has a psychological element and ambiguous symbolism that have given rise to many critical readings. Poe used the term "arabesque" to describe the ornate, descriptive prose in this and other stories. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is considered representative of Poe's idea of "art for art sake," whereby the mood of the narrative, created through skillful use of language, overpowers any social, political or moral teaching.

The story is also one of several of Poe's which utilizes as a central character the decadent aristocrat. This mad often artistic noble heir took the place of the traditional Gothic villain in tales portraying the sublime hostility of existence itself rather than the evil embodied by individuals. In addition to "The Fall of the House of Usher," such characters appear in his stories "**Metzengerstein**" (1840), 'Berenice,' 'Legeia,' 'The Oval Portrait' and 'Masque of the Red Death.' Central to the setting in many of these stories is a large, ominous castle, likened by critic Maurice Levy to the medieval fortress that appear in the writing of Radcliff, Maturin and Walpole. Interior architectural elements, such as the moving tapestry in "Metzengerstein," serve almost as character in these tales.

A second group of Poe's tales has obsessive detail on the horror and misery wrought by a guilty conscience. These include 'The Black Cat,' 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' and the doppelganger story 'William Wilson.' 'The Black Cat' is narrated by a once kind man who has fallen for alcoholism. One day, in a rage, he hangs his cat and is forever haunted by the image. Upon attempting to kill the cat's replacement, he kills his wife. It appears his deeds will go unpunished until he is given away by the screaming narrator. While not widely acclaimed during his lifetime, it has become one of Poe's most famous stories. While stories like 'Hop Frog,' 'The Pit and the Pendulum' and 'The Cask of Amontillado' do not take a guilty conscience as their starting point, they share the same paranoid intensity.

Poe first gained widespread acclaim for his poem 'The Raven,' which exhibits elements of the tales in both groups identified above. Set at the stroke of midnight in an otherwise empty chamber, the narrator hears a tapping at his door. The narrator, tormented by the ominous raven revealed to be the source of the noise, is not wracked with guilt, however. Rather, he

mourns the loss of his love, Lenore, while the Raven serves as a despicable and terrifying reminder of her death. Poe completed only one novel, 'The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym' in Gothic tradition. The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym of Nantucket is his only complete novel. It is at once a mock non-fictional exploration narrative adventure, hoax, largely plagiarized travelogue and spiritual allegory. The journey is about establishing a national American identity as well as discovering a personal identity. The plot both soars to new heights of fictional ingenuity and descends to silliness and absurdity. In order to present the tale as an authentic exploration, Poe used a number of the travel journals that proliferated at the time he was writing. Poe's most significant source was the explorer Jeremiah N. Reynolds whose work addresses on the subject of a surveying and exploring expedition to the Pacific Ocean and the South Seas. This was reviewed favorably by Poe in January 1837. It is one of the most elusive major texts of American literature.

### **Gothic Romance:**

Edgar Allan Poe is considered part of the American Romantic movement. He wrote Romantic works. Romanticism in America consists of several common themes. It questioned the earlier ideas of literature, art and philosophy. An example of Poe's Gothic romance is 'Legeia.' Poe explains through the narrator how more exacted and meaningful Legeia's beauty is specifically, because she exhibits more natural features. Poe clearly rejects classical beauty by killing off Rowena and having Legeia, the heroine and the personification of romantic beauty live on through Rowena's body. Poe cannot explain what he sees. Poe wrote "Legeia" to promote his belief in Romantic theories and ideas. His originality specifically the use of the

supernatural is a consistent example of the innovation projected throughout romantic literature.

### **Gothic Humor:**

Critics have differed widely concerning Poe's humor. Generally his laughter is dismissed as hysterical, his tales invoking not the comic muse but the macabre. Arthur Ransom says that "his attempts to be funny are like hangman's jokes."<sup>3</sup> In the opinion of Constance Rourke "Poe's laughter was of a singular order. It was inhuman, and mixed with hysteria."<sup>4</sup> Rourke relates Poe to the more callous aspects of the south western comic mode. Brom Weber however thinks that Poe is "one of our major humorists."<sup>5</sup>

In the eyes of the common man Poe was a writer of Gothic and ratiocinative tales. In the life time of Poe his humor was ignored. John Pendleton Kennedy as early as February 1836 said, "Some of your bizeereries have been mistaken for satire and admired too in that character. They deserve it, but you did not intend them so. I like your grotesque –it is of the very best stamp; and-I mean the serio-tragic-comic."<sup>6</sup> In Poe's life time these humorous tales were given many epithets: bizeereries, satire, grotesque, serio-tragi-comic, banter, extravagancies, joke, humor, quiz, and grin. From this it is evident that all of his comic writing should not be taken as 'grotesque.' Poe obviously intends some gradation in his humorous writing. Then in his letter to Thomas W. White, he refers to "the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque" and "the witty exaggerated into burlesque." However, it will be more appropriate to classify the comic tales under the sub divisions Grotesque, Burlesque and Parody, hoax and social comedy. He wrote so many Grotesque tales like 'King Pest,' 'The Thousand and Second

Tale of Scheherazade,' 'The Angel of Odd,' 'Bon Bon,' 'The Balloon hoax' and many more.

Poe wrote tales of satires. The year 'Ligeia' was published, Poe published only two other prose pieces: 'Siope-A Fable' and 'The Psyche Zenobia,' both Gothic styled satires. Supporting evidence for this theory included the implication that Ligeia is from Germany. The narrator describes their expression, which he admits is a word of no meaning. The story also suggested that 'Ligeia' is a transcendentalist a group of people Poe often criticized.

### **Science Fiction:**

Poe profoundly influenced the development of early science fiction author Jules Verne. The stories, which are set in the future or in which contemporary setting is disrupted by an imaginary device such as a new invention or the introduction of an alien being. They were first labeled as "science fiction" in American magazines of the 1920s; a term previously used in Britain was scientific romance and many contemporary writers and critics prefer the term 'speculative fiction.' They respect the limits of scientific possibility and that the innovations are plausible extrapolations from modern theory and technology though relatively few examples are genuinely conscientious. Although elements of science fiction appears in may stories of imaginary voyages it was until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the advancement of science began to inspire a good deal of work. The science fictional themes play a significant part in Poe's stories.

Renowned science fiction author Ray Bradbury has professed an admiration for Poe. He draws upon Poe in his stories and mentions Poe by

name. His anti-sensorship story “Usher II” set in a dystopian future in which the works of Poe have been censored, features an eccentric who constructs a house based on Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

Poe is celebrated as science fiction pioneer for being the first to base his stories firmly on a rational kind of extrapolation avoiding the supernatural extrapolation. He is also called the father of science fiction. Poe was significant in that he was one of the first writers to make use of the burgeoning possibilities of science and to give these possibilities literary expression in the form of fiction. His life coincided with a plethora of scientific and technical developments in which he displayed a keen interest: the balloon, automata, the electric telegraph, the Daguerre type, the steamship, and so on. Many of these developments he eulogized in his satirical story ‘The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade.’

For the calculus of probabilities had been long familiar to Poe from the work of Condorcet and Laplace and Quetelet. This is to have a sufficient number of observation and a mathematics that is complex enough. From a mathematical theory of probability he turned to a social mathematics or calculus of history to tame the future.

Poe has nothing but scorn for human perfectibility. But his C. Auguste Dupin is a heir to the great French tradition. He is Poe’s spokesman in praise of the theory of probabilities that theory to which the most glorious objects of human research are indebted for the most glorious of illusion. In ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ he expounds and refines on its technique.

Poe’s sonnet ‘To Science’ written while he was only 20 begins:

Science! True daughter of old time thou act  
Who at least all things with thy peering eyes.  
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,  
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?<sup>6</sup>

Poe adhered to science. In 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una,' Monos denounces the harsh mathematical reason of the schools, sweeping aside the rectangular obscenities with which technology has our globe. Poe used speculative theory from the start to frustrate technological methods and aims. Industrialization led only to regimentation to that ultimate disease of the 'poetic intellect' the expropriation of the imagination. And one critical fight he was intent on waging was: "The mistake... of the old dogma that the calculating faculty was with the ideal; while in fact, it may be demonstrated that the two divisions of mental power are never to be found in perfection apart. The highest order of the imaginative intellect is always pre-eminently mathematical and the converse."<sup>7</sup> Poe's fascination with lunar investigation's sound and colour, the cosmology of Newton, Von Humboldt and Laplace was a cult of homage to pure science. It is said, "Poe was opening up a way," wrote Paul Valery, 'teaching a very strict and deeply allowing doctrine in which a mathematics and kind of mysticism became one...the beauty of number was that point that configuration where mathematics and mysticism met."<sup>8</sup>

Something of this ambivalence ever since has haunted science fiction. The new genre was to evoke a horror both of the future and of the science which could bring that future about by identifying with the collapse

of technology. Yet its only appeal was to science. It had now here to turn but to science for its salvation. The fiction then was that somehow science must learn to control its own disastrous career. Poe too quite self consciously of course was working in this gothic vein.

There is far more of literary burlesque of outright parody in all this than Sam Moskowitz, for example or H. Bruce Franklin, appeared to realize. Yet many zestful surfaces are deceitful. The reckless playfulness invades even the august vision of Eureka. For his science ultimately is admitted to be a kind of hoax; his fiction openly and ironically conceived as a lie. Like Lucian in his *True History* he might have declared:

The motive and purpose of my journey lay in my intellectual restless and passion for adventure and in my wish to find out what the end of the ocean was and who the people were that lived on the other side.<sup>9</sup>

But what Poe contrived was the inversion of romantic fiction from the antiquarian hoax into a futuristic hoax. It proved a brilliant reveal of time scale made possible by the widespread willingness of an ever proliferating journal reading stack investing news addicted male and female public to be duped. His purpose in the hoaxes, Constance Rourke remarked, “was to make his readers absurd to reduce them to an involuntary imbecility. His objective was triumph or in Poe’s own caustic words:

Twenty years ago credulity was the characteristic trait of the mob, incredulity the distinctive feature of the philosophic; now the case is exactly conversed.<sup>10</sup>

Hans Pfaall stands in a direct line of descent from the pseudo scientific ‘Memorirs of Martinus Scriblerus,’ the literary hoax from the start that was bound up with literary burlesque. Compared to Queen Anne’s England, Jacksonian America presented even more fertile ground. As the tall tale came into its great prime in the early 1830’s sudden contagion was created. A series of newspaper hoaxes sprang into life in the east. The scale was Western, the tone that of calm scientific exposition of wanderers such as often belonged to western comic legend. Baudelaire commented in a note to ‘Hans Pfaall’ adding that fooling people was Poe’s main ‘dada’ or ‘hobbyhorse.’ The American hoax or tall story was indeed a kind of pioneer ‘dada,’ a violent endlessly protracted game with the absurd. What Poe the southerner initiated Mark Twain from the southwest was loving to perfect and William Faulkner with reckless rhetoric to explore for a 20<sup>th</sup> century topology of the south.

But by detaching himself from the prosaic present in imaginatively identifying with the future, Poe himself was duped. Compiling, extrapolating closely paraphrasing he seems to have deceived himself at last into claming his very plagiarism as his own victim. There are moments at the climax of ‘The Colloquy of Monos and Una,’ ‘Narrative of Aurthur Gordon Pym’ or ‘Eureka’ when the hoax is no longer openly and ironically confessed as a ‘lie’ but tolerated as the ‘truth’ of the imagination, whose natural home is located en route geographic horizons.

‘The Conversation of Eiron And Charmion’ is an apocalyptic science fiction. The story follows two people who have been renamed Eiros and Charmion after death, discuss the manner in which the world ended. Eiros who died in the apocalypse explains the circumstances to Charmion who

died ten years previously. A new comet is detected in the solar system and as it approaches the earth, people experience in turn exhilaration, then pain and delirium. The cause is discovered to be the loss of nitrogen from the atmosphere leaving pure oxygen which finally bursts into flame when the comet nucleus hits. In this story we find the two characters taking in the disembodied shades of 'Aidenn.' Here Charmion informs Eiros that the allotted days of stupor are over and Charmion will induct her in the full joys and wonders. Then the story of the disappearance of the earth ensues, how a comet, coming in close proximity of earth and passing over it, extracts the nitrogen out of the earth's atmosphere. The result is "a combustion irresistible, all devouring, omni prevalent, immediate; the entire fulfillment, in all their minute and terrible details, of the fiery and horror inspiring denunciations of the prophecies of the holy book."<sup>11</sup> 'The Power of Words' is a fable in which the angelic imagination is pushed beyond the limits of the angelic intelligence to the point at which man considers the possibility of creative power through verbal magic. The physical power of words brings into being a star. The story is told in inter-stellar space after the world has come to an end. And this is the final knowledge Poe has gained.

'The Facts in the Case of Valdemar' is a scientific report. It is the best example of a tale of suspense and horror. Poe uses particularly descriptions. In this story the narrator tells us what should be the object of a mesmeric trance. As a subject for his experimentation he chooses M. Valdemar whom his physicians had declared to be in a confirmed phthisis. M. Valdemar agrees to subject of the narrator and promises that he would send for Mr. P., as he calls him, twenty-four hours before the period announced by his physician as that of his decease. When the hour of M. Valdemar's death

approaches Mr. P. arrives on the scene and hypnotizes him. Under the influence of the hypnotic trance M. Valdemar forgets his pain. M. Valdemar dies, yet lives. “Yes; no; - I have been sleeping - and now – now I am dead, says M. Valdemar.”<sup>12</sup> Mr. Valdemar remains under this trance for a period nearly seven months. But the result of awakening him from this trance is horrifying. The last words of Valdemar are: “For God’s sake! - quick!- quick! - put me to sleep- or Quick! - waken me! - quick! - *I say to you that I am dead!*”<sup>13</sup> A closer examination of the tale reveals that Poe uses mesmerism to achieve his effect by means of verisimilitude or to use his own coinage ‘life likeliness.’ His coinages of the synonyms show the importance to him of the concept and the artistic method. In his letter to P.P. Cooke, Poe refers to Miss Elizabeth Barrett’s opinion regarding the tale:

Then there is a tale of his.... About mesmerism (The Valdemar Case) throwing us all into most admired disorder or dreadful doubts as to whether it can be true as the children say of ghost stories. The certain thing in the tale in question is the power of the writer and the faculty he has of making horrible improbabilities seem near and familiar.”<sup>14</sup>

In his letter to Evert Duyckinck Poe makes clear his own conception of verisimilitude. Referring to “Valdemar Case” he says:

In my “Valdamar case” (which was credited by many) I had not the slightest idea that any person should credit it as anything more than a “Magazine Paper” but the whole strength is laid out in verisimilitude.<sup>15</sup>

The incident of the arrest of death by the extraordinary power of mesmerism is in itself highly incredible but Poe's art lies in rendering it serious and credible by a skilful marshalling of plausible details. Arthur H. Quinn says:

The frame of the story is realistic, the actions of the characters with the exception of Valdemar, are possible. The result is impossible. But the critical faculties have been dulled by the influence of plausible details, and the story was taken seriously.<sup>16</sup>

Poe's central object is no doubt to create a sense of horror, and in doing this he has carefully established the circumstances and prepared our minds by means of several significant methods. The narrative is given a historical authenticity. In the opening paragraph the case would have taken for a miracle; but the narrator in effect gives a convincing account of it and makes an impossible thing seem entirely plausible under the circumstances of the case. This tale is different from tales like 'The Balloon Hoax' in that it contains the semblance of emotional excitement. There is an attempt at gradual intensification of horror through the indistinct replies of Valdemar and the description of his changing aspect: "... so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed."<sup>17</sup>

'The Duc de l'Omelette' is a short story written by Poe, where the young man Duc has died from eating an ortolan. An ortolan is a small European bird that is approximately the size of a finch. Despite the fact that it is only a mouthful it is rumored to be very good. The bird's legs are wrapped in paper, to prevent soiling the hands while indulging and it is then fried,

cooking in its own fat. After dying he finds himself in Satan's apartment. The Duc is unwilling to accept the fact that he is dead at first. He is even more unwilling to strip as the devil has instructed him, so he can be cooked in the fires of hell. There is a direct correlation between the ways the ortolan is cooked and how the Duc is to be cooked. The Duc views his surroundings, after "having become satisfied of his identity." Satan's apartment was exquisitely decorated with every beautiful thing. In an attempt he suffers two fold in Hell, if he wins he saves his soul. Satan is always unable to refuse a card game. Miraculously the Duc beats the Devil.

Another story 'The Island of the Fay' reflects his background and interests as one of the world's foremost semioticians. He pursues theoretical and practical problems of signs and signification through the labyrinths of nature and society, and through verbal mazes of his own making. The overarching theme of the novel might be expressed as follows: how perception and experience alter each other in a never ceasing dance. Perception is conditioned by experience, but also rhetorical training. Roberto de la Grive and his contemporaries view the world through their complex, antithetical wordplay. Roberto becomes so enmeshed in the letters he writes and the fictions he imagined that ultimately he can no longer separate external reality from the reality inherent in his words. Dreadfully short, bleak and seemingly disorganized, 'Shadow A Parable' is another of Poe's masterfully created stories.

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