Elegies of the Mind: A Phenomenological and Psychological Analysis of Death Narratives in Edgar Allan Poe's Short Fiction

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Abstract

This dissertation delves into the depths of Edgar Allan Poe's macabre and enigmatic short fiction, embarking on a profound exploration of death narratives that permeate his works. Utilizing a dual approach grounded in Freudian psychology and Heideggerian phenomenology, this study scrutinizes the psychological and phenomenological dimensions of death as portrayed in Poe's iconic tales: The Fall of the House of Usher, The Pit and the Pendulum, The Masque of the Red Death, The Cask of Amontillado, and The Tell-Tale Heart.

Examining the Freudian concept of the 'death drive', this dissertation unravels the subconscious desires and anxieties related to death that drive Poe's characters to the brink of self-destruction. It dissects how the characters' thoughts, actions, and narratives are influenced by the specter of death, unraveling the complexities of the human psyche. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of 'Being-toward-Death', this study delves into how characters confront their own mortality and the existential anxiety that accompanies such awareness. It emphasizes the significance of authenticity, temporality, and the freedom to define one's existence in the face of death.The synthesis of these psychological and phenomenological perspectives reveals the multifaceted narratives in Poe's works, where characters' journeys become mirrors of the human condition. Thereby proposing that it is the intricate interplay of the psyche and phenomenon, that leads Edgar Allan Poe to craft narratives of death in his short fiction.

Keywords

Death narrative, Psychology, Phenomenology, Death- drive, Existence, Freedom

Contents

Introduction

Death is an inescapable destiny and the only certainty in life for every individual, and for this reason it has always permeated the thoughts at all levels, from the immediate sense of devastation that personal bereavement gives a person to the ways in which one manages the fact of death by pushing it onto the surface, as familiarly and comfortably spooky as the deaths in horror films. Death has always been the central concern of the law, and the reason it bothers every individual is because it is an irreversible process. Fiction is one way to imagine and gain knowledge of death. Death is a recurrent theme in literature, as it creates plot twists, suspense, mysteries, and emotional effects in narrations. But more importantly, stories about death seem to have an existential importance to our lives.In the realm of literature, few writers have managed to delve as deeply into the intricacies of the human psyche and the enigma of mortality as Edgar Allan Poe. Through his haunting and often macabre short stories, Poe crafts narratives that explore the complex interplay between life and death, consciousness and sub-consciousness. This dissertation explores these themes, seeking to uncover the nuanced connections between phenomenological experiences and psychological dimensions in Poe's death narratives. It aims to unravel the intricate tapestry of human existence that Poe weaves through his tales of demise.

Edgar Allan Poe, an American novelist, poet, editor, and literary critic, is most known for his poetry and short stories, notably his macabre and mystery novels. He is widely

considered as a key character in American literature, American Romanticism, and American Gothic fiction. Poe is credited with creating the detective fiction subgenre and with having a major influence on the development of the science fiction subgenre. Poe, expressed interest in the influence of emotions and frequently sought to delve into the minds of persons who are guilty, afraid, or otherwise mentally ill. Poe aimed to achieve what he called a unity of impact in each of his tales, in which every element added to the mood of the piece. In his short stories, Poe's literary philosophy inspired him to write relatively brief narratives that included no unnecessary elements that could not sustain the ominous or horrifying moods for which he became so well-known. He proposed two cardinal rules for his short stories which were, firstly, it should be read in one sitting and secondly, every word must contribute to its purpose. Poe never quite achieved a sufficient level of stability in his life, which may have influenced his work. Most of Poe's short stories were produced when he changed editorial positions. He was particularly dependent on opium and alcohol for a large portion of his adult life, which gave him a particularly intimate insight into the minds of some of his insane protagonists.

The allure of Edgar Allan Poe's works lies not merely in their eerie settings and eerie atmospheres but in the depths of the human experience that they plumb. His narratives often serve as mirrors to the human psyche, reflecting the profound contemplation of life's mysteries and the ever-present specter of death. The present study arises from a recognition that these narratives carry layers beyond the surface, connecting phenomena

of the external world with the labyrinthine intricacies of the mind. The scope of this dissertation encompasses a selection of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories that prominently feature death narratives and grotesque elements. These stories, which include but are not limited to, serve as focal points for the investigation into the phenomenological and psychological aspects of mortality. *The Fall of the House of Usher* depicts the narrator who visits his friend Roderick Usher's decaying mansion. Roderick and his twin sister Madeline suffer from mysterious ailments. As the story unfolds, the mansion's atmosphere grows increasingly eerie. Madeline seemingly dies and is buried, but later emerges alive. The tale ends with the collapse of the house, symbolising the Usher family's psychological and physical downfall.

The Pit and the Pendulum, which is set during the Spanish Inquisition, follows the story of an unnamed narrator who is sentenced to death. He wakes up in a pitch-black cell and must navigate various torturous situations, including a swinging pendulum that threatens to kill him. Eventually, he's saved from his predicament, but not without a sense of impending doom. In *The Masque of the Red Death*, Prince Prospero tries to evade a deadly plague known as the ‘Red Death’ by locking himself and his courtiers in an abbey, where they engage in lavish parties. Despite their efforts, the Red Death infiltrates the abbey, symbolising the inescapability of mortality. The story highlights the futility of attempting to escape death's grasp.In *The Cask of Amontillado,* Montresor seeks revenge against Fortunato by luring him into the catacombs with the promise of tasting a rare wine, Amontillado. Once there, Montresor chains Fortunato to a wall and

walls him in, leaving him to die. The story explores themes of betrayal, vengeance, and the darkness that lies within human nature and *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the narrator insists on their sanity despite their obsession with an old man's vulture-like eye. Believing the eye to be evil, the narrator kills the old man while he is asleep. Afterward, tormented by guilt, they start hearing a relentless, imaginary heartbeat. As their paranoia escalates, they confess to the murder to escape the haunting sound.The primary objective of this dissertation is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how phenomenological and psychological elements intersect in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories centered on death narratives. By dissecting these narratives, the study seeks to uncover the layers of meaning, the intricate characterisations, and the underlying philosophical inquiries that these tales embody. By unraveling the intricacies of his narratives, a deeper insight into the human psyche and its unending quest to comprehend the enigma of mortality is understood.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Approaches: The Psychological and Phenomenological Aspect in Death Narratology

Death is an inevitable aspect of human existence and has been a central theme in literature for centuries. It serves as a powerful narrative device that allows authors to explore profound philosophical, emotional, and psychological dimensions of human life. The portrayal of death in literature is multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of

emotions, perspectives, and cultural interpretations. Death in literature is often used to explore complex themes that resonate with readers on both personal and universal levels. Themes such as mortality, the afterlife, the fear of the unknown, the meaning of life, and the nature of existence are commonly intertwined with narratives of death. These themes serve as reflective mirrors that encourage readers to ponder their own mortality and the meaning of their lives.

Literature allows authors to delve deep into the complex emotional landscape that surrounds death. Grief, loss, regret, acceptance, and even relief are among the myriad emotions that characters and readers grapple with. Through these emotional explorations, authors create relatable narratives that resonate with readers who have experienced loss or contemplated their own mortality. The narrative of death has stood the test of time, remaining a constant presence in literature throughout history. Whether in ancient myths, Shakespearean tragedies, modern novels, or contemporary poetry, the exploration of death continues to captivate authors and readers alike. This enduring significance speaks to the universal nature of the human experience and the fundamental questions that one grapples with.

The psychological ideas behind the notion of death are explained by Sigmund Freud in his work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist, founded the distinctive theory of mind and human agency derived from psychoanalysis which was a clinical method for assessing and treating pathologies believed to be caused by conflicts in the psyche. The ‘death-drive’ was a concept that first appeared in Freud’s

work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he equates it with a tendency inherent not only to the psyche but to all forms of the living, to life itself. He describes humans as struggling between two opposing drives: 'Eros' which produces creativity, harmony, sexual connection, reproduction, and self-preservation; and the 'death drive' which brings destruction, repetition, aggression, compulsion, and self-destruction.

Freud introduced the idea of the death drive as a way to explain certain behaviors and phenomena that couldn't be adequately accounted for by the pleasure principle alone. He proposed that the death drive operates alongside life instincts and can manifest in various forms, such as aggression, self-destructive behavior, and a fascination with danger and risk. The death drive concept is deeply intertwined with Freud's understanding of the unconscious mind and its role in shaping human behavior. It helps explain seemingly paradoxical behaviors, like the repetitive nature of certain destructive actions or the allure of dangerous activities that defy the preservation of life."There exists in the mind a strong tendency towards the pleasure principle, but that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure" (Freud 7). Freud conceptualises the death-drive as unconscious and self-destructive, maybe seen at work as aggression, risky behavior, or a living past trauma. The death drive does not work in favour of the pleasure principle, for instance, being aggressive in the name of revenge would be an attempt to gain pleasure. While the death drive would be aggression for the sake of aggression.

The death drive pushes the subject to self-annihilation to return to the inanimate non-life they once were.

> If we is to take it as a truth that knows no exception, that everything living dies for internal reasons-becomes inorganic once again-then we shall be compelled to say that the aim of all life is death and, looking backwards, that inanimate things existed before living ones. The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception.... The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been inanimate substance endeavored to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state. (Death Drive 02:03-02:40)

This drive to Freud is the first drive, the one driving life itself. If this is to be the case the primary aim of life would be death for life to return to non-life. Freud later expands this to say that the life drives seen in the pleasure principle are subservient to the death drive and only there to aid the organism to its death.

Seen in this light, the theoretical importance of the instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion, and of mastery greatly diminishes. They are component instincts whose function is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself. (Freud 14)

In the concept of the death-instinct, Freud declares that “the aim of all life is death and looking backward, that inanimate things existed before living ones” (38). Freud interprets an organism’s drive to avoid danger only as a way of avoiding a short-circuit to death: the organisms seek to die in its own way. “It is certainly not a primordial belief: the idea of a natural death is alien to primitive races; they ascribe every death occurring among themselves to the influence of an enemy or an evil spirit” (Freud 46).

Freud brings in a biological aspect to his finding and says that the psychological death-wish is a manifestation of an underlying physical compulsion present in every cell. Death is rather a purposive contrivance, a phenomenon of adaptation to the external conditions of life, because after the differentiation of the corporeal cells into soma and germ-plasm the indefinite prolongation of the life of the individual would have become a quite inexpedient luxury. He also says that death - instincts are traceable to the beginning of life on earth. Freud's point was that, to the same extent one wants to live and love, they also want to die and destroy. That is, life and death, not only as substances but as tendencies or drives, relate to each other in a complex and even paradoxical manner. The death drive, writes Freud, does not work alone and always goes hand in hand with Eros. It is silent but not lonely. This is an undeniable truth as writers like Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson have expressed this instinct to die and destroy in their works. Their poems glorified death with varied imageries and brought in a different perspective on death.

Martin Heidegger's concept of 'Being-toward-Death' is a central idea in his existentialist philosophy, particularly in his seminal work *Being and Time*. This concept explores the nature of human existence, one's relationship with their own mortality, and how this awareness shapes their being in the world. *Being and Time*, a classic work in phenomenology and existentialism was first published in 1927 and had a significant influence on later philosophy. It shaped the philosophical outlooks of Herbert Marcuse, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Heidegger attempts to reconsider the philosophical tradition's position on the subject of 'Being', or the underlying framework of all existence. He achieves this by appealing to the reader's direct and everyday feelings rather than using a cold, rational argument.

Heidegger's central concern throughout *Being and Time* is the question of the meaning of being. The history of philosophy has been occupied with questions about beings, says Heidegger - they ask does a book exist does the colour red exist does the number one exist yet each time they ask they presuppose an understanding of what it is to exist or to be. This is what Heidegger's interested; in not in beings but in what being is. Seeking an answer to the question of the meaning of being Heidegger takes on a phenomenological approach that is based on experience rather than theory and inspects 'Dasein' which is rendered as 'being-there' or 'existence' when translated. If anything will shed light on the meaning of being it'll be the one asking the question.

Dasein is not the biological human nor the person as an individual static thing, but the distinctive kind of entity that human beings as such are. As Dasein things are meaningful there are concern for ourselves, others, the world, and being itself. Thus Dasein's state of being is care, while the conventional meaning is implied Heidegger gives a more technical or jargon meaning - to care. Heidegger defines care and Dasein's state of being as ahead of itself being already in the world as being alongside entities encountered within the world.

> The formally existential totality of Dasein's ontological structural whole must therefore be grasped in the following structure: the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in- (the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term 'care'. (Heidegger 237)

Divided into three temporal descriptions these characteristics define that kind of entity that one is. First Dasein is being in the world none choose whether born who they're born to when they were born nor a number of defining attributes. Instead, they are thrown into this world and their experience where they find themselves, who they find themselves with, and when they find themselves is subsequently conditioned and limited. Second Dasein is being alongside entities and others. One lives in constant use of tools and things around them. They live alongside others or with others as the structures through which they attribute meaning are commonly those one adopt from others. Wherever one finds oneself there are certain habitual and intellectual norms

determined by that-they and invoked at times whenever it is said that's just what one does or that isn't what one does. In so far as Dasein gives into these expectations, Dasein has fallen and adopts an unauthentic ‘they-self’. Third and finally Dasein is ahead of itself and is constantly projecting at all times a number of possibilities that lay before. Only some of these possibilities will become actualities. But in so far as it is some of those possibilities will become actualities.

Thus Dasein always has a number of possibilities and although not an infinite number they each shape what Dasein gives meaning and does. These three components make up the state of being of Dasein, yet as presented they are all distinct. This is the challenge Heidegger faces at the beginning of Division Two. Division Two starts off by posing the question of how one may overcome inauthenticity and find their authentic self. Heidegger contends that a healthy connection with death will enable this. Unlike other parts of one’s presence in the world, death cannot be substituted by another. As a result, it is very individualized.

Dasein as the questioner of the meaning of being must be revealed if one is to have any luck in answering the question of the meaning of being. But as it is Dasein has only been unconcealed in parts. So now Heidegger would like to bring it all together and reveal the whole of Dasein. “One thing has become unmistakable: our existential analysis of Dasein up till now cannot lay claim to primordiality” (Heidegger 276). Heidegger’s existential analysis of Dasein up till now cannot lay claim to primordiality. To lay claim to primordiality first requires Dasein to be revealed as it is, as Dasein in its wholeness.

But where is the whole of Dasein to be found? So long as Dasein has possibilities it is not yet whole. Hence wholeness cannot be found in Dasein so long as it is. Conversely no longer being there in which Dasein has no more possibilities is whole only in the end is wholeness found but once in the end Dasein is no longer.

This poses a serious problem as to how to discover Dasein wholeness through Heideggerian phenomenology. Where can one find this wholeness if it cannot be found in one's own end? One answer that Heidegger entertains only to reject is in the experiencing of the death of others. "The dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most, we are always just there alongside" (Heidegger 282). The end of others appears at first to be objectively accessible as a shift of modes from being there to no longer being there. Heidegger contends that human existence is fundamentally characterized by our awareness of our own mortality. Unlike other beings, humans are conscious of the fact that they will eventually die. This awareness sets us apart and influences the way we navigate the world.All the things done is only one that must be done. Any possible action they take then in time is one step closer to death, no matter what that action is. The awareness of this actually changes the shape of all experiences. Death is not just a thing in the future rather it's with oneself even in the moment and awareness of one's action brings it closer. This gives the actions value because to choose which one is most worth doing, considering that any action done brings death one step closer. This is called 'being toward death'. "Death is the possibility

of the impossibility of any existence at all… it is the possibility of impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything" (Being unto Death 08:35-08:45).

What makes Heidegger's reflection on the human condition distinctive for Pattison is "the persistent rigor with which [it] thinks through the human condition in the perspective of its thrownness towards death" (Pattison 4). Heidegger emphasizes that individuals are not merely passive observers of death but actively engage with it through anticipation. Death is not just an abstract concept; it lets an individual anticipate one's own death, and this anticipation shapes one's actions, choices, and priorities. Heidegger distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence. In an authentic existence, individuals confront their own mortality honestly and fully. This confrontation with death prompts individuals to live authentically, make meaningful choices, and take responsibility for their lives. Inauthentic existence, on the other hand, involves evading or denying the reality of death, leading to a shallow and unfulfilling life. The anticipation of death makes human beings aware of the finitude of their time on Earth. This awareness, according to Heidegger, allows one to engage with life more authentically by recognizing the importance of the present moment and the limited time available. By confronting one's mortality and living authentically, it helps find meaning, purpose, and freedom in the face of inevitable death.By combining these psychological and phenomenological approaches, this dissertation can provide a holistic examination of death narratology, considering both the individual psychological processes involved in confronting death and the broader existential and interpretive dimensions of death

narratives in literature and culture. This interdisciplinary perspective can yield rich insights into the complex ways Edgar Allan Poe's short stories engage with the theme of death.

Chapter 3

Unveiling Elegies of Mind

The Fall of the House of Usher is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe that revolves around the mysterious and eerie atmosphere of the Usher mansion and the decline of the Usher family. The story is narrated by an unnamed protagonist who visits his childhood friend Roderick Usher at his decaying ancestral home. The story begins with the protagonist receiving a letter from Roderick, urging him to come to the Usher mansion due to Roderick's ill health and an impending sense of doom. Upon arriving, the protagonist is immediately struck by the gloomy and oppressive atmosphere of the house and its surroundings. The description of the mansion's appearance sets the eerie tone of the story:

> During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passingal one, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. (Poe 110)

The protagonist finds Roderick in a state of intense mental and emotional distress. Roderick is plagued by a heightened sensitivity to his senses and a morbid fear of the outside world. He explains that his family has a long history of illness and mental instability, and he believes the house itself is influencing his mental state.

> There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. (Poe 110)

Roderick's odd behavior is so pronounced that even someone not very familiar with him can see it. Roderick's twin sister, Madeline, is also gravely ill and confined to her room. The presence of death and decay looms over the story, as Madeline's illness worsens and Roderick becomes increasingly unhinged. Eventually, Madeline seemingly dies, and Roderick becomes consumed by grief.

> To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave. “I shall perish,” said he, “I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence

> of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, Fear". (Poe 115)

As the story progresses, the protagonist reads to Roderick in an attempt to distract him from his distress. They read a Gothic romance tale called *The Mad Trist*, which parallels the events of the main story and adds to the sense of foreboding. The protagonist begins to suspect that Roderick's mental state is deteriorating rapidly, and his own unease grows as he witnesses strange phenomena in the house. In a climactic and nightmarish finale, Madeline reappears, seemingly risen from the dead, and confronts Roderick. The siblings die together, and the house collapses into a tarn (a small lake), symbolising the fall of the Usher family and the crumbling of their legacy.

The story ends with the protagonist fleeing the mansion just in time to witness its destruction. Throughout the story, Poe employs vivid and poetic language to create an unsettling atmosphere. He masterfully uses descriptions to convey the decay and deterioration of both the mansion and its inhabitants. The symbolism of the crumbling house reflects the disintegration of the Usher family's bloodline and the underlying themes of decay and madness. *The Fall of the House of Usher* delves into themes of psychological terror, hereditary illness, and the power of the environment on human psychology. Poe explores the thin line between reality and madness and how one's surroundings can exacerbate mental fragility. The story's focus on the macabre and the

eerie, combined with its exploration of the human psyche, makes it a quintessential example of Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic and psychological horror style.

The Pit and the Pendulum by Edgar Allan Poe is a chilling short story set during the Spanish Inquisition. The tale follows an unnamed narrator who is subjected to various forms of torture and psychological torment as he navigates a nightmarish dungeon. The story begins with the narrator describing his dire circumstances: “I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me” (Poe 128). The narrator has been imprisoned and has lost track of time and location. He is uncertain of the reasons for his captivity.

The narrator awakens to find himself in a pitch-black cell, and he measures its dimensions with outstretched arms, describing it as “for what could be of less importance, under the terrible circumstances which environed me, than the mere dimensions of my dungeon!” (Poe 134). He discovers that the cell has a deep pit in the center, a foreboding sight that represents the unknown dangers that await him. As the narrator explores the cell, he trips and nearly falls into the pit which increases the suspense as the pit becomes a palpable threat.

> It was this: my chin rested upon the floor of the prison, but my lips, and the upper portion of my head, although seemingly at a less elevation than the chin, touched nothing. At the same time, my forehead seemed bathed in a clammy vapor, and

> the peculiar smell of decayed fungus arose to my nostrils. I put forward my arm, and shuddered to find that I had fallen at the very brink of a circular pit, whose extent, of course, I had no means of ascertaining at the moment. (Poe 133)

Soon, the narrator experiences the horrifying presence of a pendulum with a razor-sharp blade, suspended from the ceiling. The pendulum descends gradually, conveying the narrator's panic:

> Down steadily down it crept. I took a frenzied pleasure in contrasting its downward with its lateral velocity. To the right to the left—far and—with the shriek of a damned spirit to my heart, with the stealthy pace of the tiger! I alternately laughed and howled, as the one or the other idea grew predominant. Down – certainly, relentlessly down! It vibrated within three inches of my bosom! I struggled violently – furiously to free my left arm. (Poe 138)

In a twist of fate, rats save the narrator by gnawing through his bonds. He uses the meat from his meals to lure the rats, facilitating his escape from the restraints: “They pressed —they swarmed upon me in ever accumulating heaps. They writhed upon my throat; their cold lips sought my my own: I was half stifled by their thronging pressure: disgust, for which the world has no name, swelled my bosom, and chilled, with a heavy clamminess, my heart” (Poe 140).

As the pendulum continues its descent, the narrator manages to escape its deadly path by rolling himself out of the way. This sequence showcases the story's theme of desperate survival against terrifying odds: “Free! —I had but escaped death in one form of agony, to be delivered unto worse than death in some other” (Poe 140). The narrator is eventually rescued from his dire predicament as French soldiers liberate the dungeon, ending the tale on a note of unexpected salvation. *The Pit and the Pendulum* delves into themes of fear, torture, and the human instinct to survive in the face of extreme adversity. Poe masterfully crafts an atmosphere of suspense and terror through his descriptions of the sinister dungeon and the narrator's ordeal. The story's exploration of the physical and psychological torment endured by the protagonist makes it a quintessential example of Poe's macabre and psychological horror style.

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Masque of the Red Death* the narrative unfolds within a gloomy and plague-ridden European kingdom, where a deadly disease known as the ‘Red Death’ is wreaking havoc. Against this backdrop of suffering and despair, the story centers around the enigmatic Prince Prospero's attempt to escape the grasp of the plague through an elaborate masquerade ball held within the confines of his opulent abbey. “The ‘Red Death’ had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avator and its seal — the redness and the horror of blood” (Poe 157).

The story introduces the reader to the kingdom ravaged by the Red Death, a disease characterized by sharp pains, dizziness, and profuse bleeding. The narrator paints a vivid picture of the devastation, describing “the scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim” (Poe 157). Amid this chaos, Prince Prospero takes refuge in his abbey, sealing himself off along with a thousand of his wealthy and privileged friends. They believe that by isolating themselves, they can shield themselves from the horrors of the outside world.

The abbey itself is a grotesque yet decadent setting. It consists of seven rooms, each adorned in a different color, starting from the easternmost blue room and ending with the westernmost black room. This sequence symbolizes the stages of life and the passage of time, while the colors represent different aspects of the human experience. The rooms are a testament to Prospero's extravagance and desire to escape death's realities. Amidst this peculiar backdrop, Prospero decides to host a masquerade ball, a lavish event aimed at diverting attention from the horrors of the plague outside. The revelers adorn themselves in costumes and masks, with each room illuminated in a vibrant hue. The music, decorations, and overall opulence create an atmosphere of surrealism and excess that starkly contrasts the grim reality of the kingdom.

> A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts… The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there

> was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the Red Death. (Poe 157)

As the clock strikes midnight, a mysterious figure arrives at the masquerade. This uninvited guest is shrouded in garments resembling those affected by the Red Death: their face concealed by a mask resembling a corpse, and their garments soaked in blood. The ghastly appearance of this guest chills the attendees, instilling a sense of dread among them. The climax of the story takes place in the final, seventh room, which is cloaked in black and shrouded in darkness. The ebony ambience symbolises death itself, highlighting the inescapable reality that even the most affluent and powerful individuals cannot evade their ultimate fate. As Prospero confronts the uninvited guest, he is paralysed by fear, and he collapses and dies in the midst of the revelry. The irony is stark: despite Prospero's attempts to isolate himself from death, he falls victim to its grasp.

As the uninvited guest moves through the rooms, attendees recognize the true nature of the visitor—it is the Red Death incarnate. Panic ensues as the guests attempt to flee, but one by one, they succumb to the disease's grip, falling to the floor in a grotesque tableau of death. The narrative closes with the striking of the clock, symbolizing the relentless passage of time and the inevitable end that awaits all.

> And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all. (Poe 162)

In *The Masque of the Red Death*, Edgar Allan Poe weaves a haunting allegory that explores the human pursuit of escapism in the face of mortality. Through vivid imagery and symbolism, the story delves into the futility of attempting to evade death, no matter one's social status or wealth. The abbey's seven rooms represent life's progression, while the uninvited guest personifies death itself, serving as a haunting reminder that death is an inescapable reality that transcends human attempts to isolate or distract from it.

The Cask of Amontillado is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe that centers around the theme of revenge and the dark depths of human psychology. It is narrated by Montresor, a character driven by a desire to avenge perceived insults from his acquaintance, Fortunato. The story is set during Carnival season in an unnamed Italian city. Montresor opens the story by explaining that he has been wronged by Fortunato and has vowed revenge. He sets the tone of his sinister plan, saying, “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge” (Poe 163).

Montresor manipulates Fortunato's weakness for wine and his pride as a connoisseur to lure him into the catacombs under Montresor's palazzo – “He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine” (Poe 163). He tells Fortunato that he has acquired a cask of rare and valuable Amontillado, a type of wine, and wants Fortunato's expertise to verify its authenticity. Fortunato's curiosity and vanity drive him to accompany Montresor into the depths of the catacombs.

As they venture deeper into the catacombs, Montresor continues to manipulate Fortunato's trust and anticipation of the Amontillado. Fortunato's drunkenness increases as they progress, and he starts to cough due to the dampness of the environment. Montresor plays on Fortunato's concerns, saying, ““Come”, I said, with decision, “we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible”” (Poe 165).

Montresor eventually leads Fortunato to a small chamber deep within the catacombs. There, he chains Fortunato to the wall and proceeds to wall him up alive. Throughout the process, Montresor speaks to Fortunato, both taunting him and revealing his own twisted motives. Fortunato's realization of his impending doom is met with terror, and he pleads, “For the love of God, Montresor!” (Poe 169). The story concludes with Montresor completing the wall, sealing Fortunato's fate. Montresor reflects on his satisfaction at having executed his revenge with impunity, stating, “For the half of a

century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!" (Poe 169). This quote is the last line of the story, and it translates to 'May he rest in peace.' It highlights the sinister nature of the protagonist, Montresor, as he wishes peace upon the victim he has just murdered, further emphasising the eerie and macabre tone of the tale.

The Cask of Amontillado delves into themes of revenge, manipulation, and the depths of human cruelty. The story explores how the desire for revenge can drive individuals to commit heinous acts and how the human mind can rationalise such deeds. Poe's use of the catacombs as a setting creates a claustrophobic and eerie atmosphere, symbolizing the entrapment of both Fortunato and Montresor in their obsessions. The story's first-person narration provides insight into Montresor's twisted psyche and his rationalisation of his actions. It leaves readers questioning the reliability of the narrator and contemplating the moral ambiguity of revenge. *The Cask of Amontillado* is a chilling exploration of the darker aspects of human nature, showcasing Edgar Allan Poe's mastery of psychological horror and his ability to delve into the complexities of the human mind.

In *The Tell-Tale Heart* an unnamed narrator, insisting on their sanity, admits to a crime they committed, proclaiming that their heightened senses and acute hearing should not be mistaken for madness – "True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them" (Poe 359). They argue that they meticulously planned and executed the murder with utmost care and rationality. The narrator describes their

profound dislike for an elderly man with a ‘vulture-like’ pale blue eye that haunts them. Despite claiming to love the old man, the narrator's obsession with the eye grows, and they become convinced that the eye is evil, vowing to rid themselves of it. “I think it was his eye! yes, it was this. One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees— very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever” (Poe 359).

For seven nights, the narrator secretly observes the old man while they stand at the door of his room. During this period, the old man's fear and restlessness increases, yet he remains oblivious to the narrator's presence. On the eighth night, as the old man senses a presence, he wakes up and shrieks in terror. The narrator remains motionless, basking in the old man's fear. They listen to the old man's heartbeat, which grows louder in their ears. As the heartbeat becomes unbearable, the narrator lunges at the old man, smothering him under the bed and killing him-

> In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gayly, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more. (Poe 362)

The narrator immediately dismembers the body, carefully removing the head, arms, and legs. They ensure that not a single drop of blood stains the floor. The remains are hidden beneath the floorboards. Having completed their gruesome task, the narrator hears a knock on the door. The police have been summoned by a neighbor who heard the old man's shriek. The narrator invites the police inside, behaving calmly and confidently. They chatter about various topics and even take a seat in the old man's room. As time passes, the narrator becomes increasingly agitated by a low, rhythmic sound. They initially believe the sound is the old man's heart, but soon realize that it is their own heart pounding in their ears. Unable to bear the sound any longer, the narrator begins to confess to the murder. They insist that the police should tear up the floorboards to reveal the heart that they believe exposes their guilt. The police, initially puzzled, don't understand the narrator's hysteria.

The story ends with the narrator's manic repetitions of their confession, convinced that the sound of the beating heart is consuming them. *The Tell-Tale Heart* explores the narrator's descent into madness and paranoia. The story vividly portrays the narrator's obsession with the old man's eye, their meticulous planning of the murder, and their eventual unraveling due to the guilt they feel. The story delves into the thin line between sanity and madness, highlighting how a distorted perspective can lead to a catastrophic chain of events.

Chapter 4

Between Psyche and Phenomenon: A Critical Reading

Edgar Allan Poe's writing greatly benefits from Romanticism's interest in the occult and the satanic. He adapted a remarkable talent for creating realistic garments out of impalpable materials to his own frenzied fantasies, which are also largely responsible for this. His creations have an aura of objectivity and spontaneity and heavily rely on his own creative abilities as well as a complex approach. His life was filled with tragedies that started when he was ten months old and until he died at age forty. These tragedies might be the answer to why Poe wrote in a way that confuses most of his readers.

Although a lot of Edgar Allan Poe's finest writing deals with tragedy and dread, Poe was a lovely company in everyday life. The dualism is much more apparent when Poe's thought is taken into account. He was a dreamer and an idealist on the one hand. He yearned for the ideal with both his heart and his mind. He was sensitive to the delicacy and beauty of women, which led to some of his most heartfelt songs and full-toned prose hymns. The last part of his life was notably characterized by this Pythian mindset.

In his short stories, he frequently used unsettling urges, ideas, or anxieties to escape the world of everyday experience. He derived the stunning impact of his stories of death, wickedness and crime, survival after dissolution, and fate from these sources. He causes the nerves to tremble by inflicting the agony of impending death and his horrifying

creation deals with corpses and decomposition in a strange play with death's aftereffects. Many scholars call him the architect of the modern short story. While the macabre and the grotesque often dominate discussions of Poe's tales, a deeper analysis reveals that his portrayal of death is intricately woven with psychological complexities.

In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Poe introduces readers to the enigmatic character, Roderick Usher, whose psychological descent could be viewed as profoundly influenced by Freud's concept of the death drive. Roderick's acute sensitivity and his obsession with the decaying Usher mansion reflect a morbid fascination with decay and deterioration. Freud's ideas about the unconscious desires and fears related to death are mirrored in Roderick's psychological struggles.

The House of Usher's physical features serve as a metaphor for death throughout the story's events. The house has fatal features, even in Poe's depiction of it. Poe describes the house as "Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the caves… a barely perceptible fissure, which extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (Poe 113). This 'fissure' is shown to the reader early in the novel to symbolize how Roderick's love for his twin sister, Madeline, was eroding as a result of her battling a strange illness that confounded even her physicians. Roderick became mentally and physically sad as a result of this, and at this time, he was referred to as a madman.

Throughout the narrative, the narrator shares in all of Roderick's feelings and issues. He observes Roderick's sympathy for his sick sister. After Madeline passes away, the narrator helps Roderick lay her remains in a coffin made of steel in a vault beneath the home. Madeline's dread of her physicians was the cause of this extreme guarding of her body. Roderick was worried that they might abduct her body for pathological purposes since they were so intrigued by the peculiarity of her illness. Poe uses this whole scenario to show that Roderick really cares for his sister. It was as though they were one being, relying on each other for life; Madline's death could have made his loss a part of him. His link to the realm of humans was Madeline. He was aware that his love for her would ultimately kill her, and it did.

In the end, the narrator who is the guest of Roderick, admits that Roderick is indeed insane. The reason for this is that Madeline was still alive while he closed her in the casket. Usher was aware that he had carried out his action days before. "Long —long—long—many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it - yet I dared not - oh pity me, miserable wretch that I am!—I dared not - I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb!" (Poe 126). After Usher finally speaks about what he knew, a figure of Madeline appears to them, "but then without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher" (Poe 127). She returned in order to reclaim Roderick's soul, which shows that their love for one another had ceased, thus, breaking apart this 'one being'.

Roderick's relationship with his twin sister, Madeline, adds another layer of complexity. It is observed that although narrator is Roderick's closest childhood buddy, yet the he seems to know nothing about him, such as the obvious fact that Roderick has a twin sister. So here arises the question of Roderick's decision to contact the narrator and his response. The story begins without a detailed description of the complete motive of the narrator's arrival and this ambiguity sets the tone of the tale. In this tale, Poe evokes a sense of claustrophobia. The narrator is suddenly entrapped by Roderick's appeal, and he is unable to flee until Usher's home entirely crumbles. The house's construction prevents characters from moving around and acting naturally, so it takes on a monster persona of its own—the Gothic genius that decides what happens to its residents.

The claustrophobic effect that Poe creates affects the relationship of the siblings. The siblings' entwined lives and eventual tragic fates underscore Freud's theories of repression and unconscious desires. Madeline is laid to rest before she's dead because of how much she resembles Roderick, who acts as a coffin for her identity. Madeline stifles Roderick by preventing him from seeing himself as essentially different from her. She completes this attack when she kills him at the end of the story. Roderick's inability to confront the death of his sister and the house's collapse can be interpreted as a manifestation of the death drive, a force that compels him toward self-destruction and the dissolution of his familial ties.

In *The Cask of Amontillado*, Poe presents Montresor, a character whose motives and actions align with Freud's psychoanalytic concepts. The story opens with Montresor's

declaration that he intends to seek revenge against Fortunato, although the exact nature of the offense remains undisclosed. Montresor's meticulous planning of Fortunato's demise highlights the depths of his vindictiveness. However, the true psychological motives that fuel Montresor's vengeance are shrouded in the unconscious mind.

Montresor's relentless pursuit of revenge against Fortunato can be seen as an externalization of his unconscious desires related to death. Freud's ideas on repression and the return of the repressed come to the forefront as Montresor's quest for vengeance escalates. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides valuable insights into Montresor's unconscious motivations. According to Freud, individuals often repress traumatic or disturbing experiences, pushing them into the unconscious. These repressed desires and memories can resurface in various ways, often in disguised or symbolic forms.

Montresor's cryptic motto, "*Nemo me impune lacessit*" (Poe 166) which translates to 'No one provokes me with impunity', may hold the key to his unconscious desires. While the exact provocation remains undisclosed, it is plausible that Montresor harbors deep-seated resentments and grievances against Fortunato that have been repressed. His desire for revenge represents the return of the repressed, an unconscious urge to redress perceived wrongs. Then the titular cask of Amontillado serves as another powerful symbol within the story, representing the unconscious desires and motives that drive Montresor's vengeance.

Amontillado, a rare and exquisite wine, embodies not only Fortunato's expertise but also his refined taste and social status. In obtaining Amontillado, Montresor seeks to appropriate a symbol of Fortunato's perceived superiority, fulfilling an unconscious desire for social and psychological dominance. Then the story's setting, which is within the catacombs of Montresor's family estate, serves as another representation of the subconscious mind, where suppressed desires and anxieties lurk.

Montresor's act of walling Fortunato in is not only a literal act of entombment but also a psychological manifestation of his inner conflict and the death drive's influence on his actions. Freudian psychoanalysis suggests that individuals may unconsciously seek to inflict upon others the same pain or trauma they have experienced. At this point, the question really arises whether the embarrassment Fortunato experienced really prompted his actions or is there another reason for it. Though Poe doesn’t give a complete answer, it could be read in this light, that Montresor's choice of punishment was an inherent instinct in him towards destruction as Freud explains in his idea of the death drive that people typically channel this death drive outward, which manifests as aggression toward others. “Most of the pain we experience is of a perceptual order, perception either of the urge of unsatisfied instincts or of something in the external world which may be painful in itself or may arouse painful anticipations in the psychic apparatus and is recognized by it as danger” (Freud 7).

Also an insight into Fortunato brings an observation that he was innocent throughout. He was unaware of the danger befalling on him. He was carried by his pride and greed

that blinded him the danger that followed. Fortunato is the unhappy person who will die. Fortunato will soon become a part of all the other remains that are there after being lured by Montresor into the eerie and gloomy tunnels. Since Fortunato now knows his fate, he acts in a way that both demonstrates his anxiety and instills terror in his new adversary. Even Fortunato hopes that this is a joke as he starts to chuckle. But here too the only sound heard is the last hopeful words uttered by Montresor to Fortunato. Like Madeline in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, here too Fortunato is buried alike which draws the notion of the death drive proposed by Freud. Man inherently proposes a destructive inclination that could be triggered by aggression or any risky behavior.

Another short story where the very idea is seen manifested is *The Tell-Tale Heart.* It provides a compelling case study in Freudian analysis within the context of Poe's death narratives. The narrator's obsession with the old man's vulture-like eye, coupled with his meticulous planning and execution of the murder, exemplifies Freud's concept of the death drive as a force driving individuals toward self-destruction. Poe depicts what actually transpires when a person undergoes fear and panic that, when coupled with the difficulties inside his mind, causes that person to become mentally sick. The challenges mentioned in *The Tell-Tale Heart* lead the narrator to an ironic conclusion. These obstacles progressively progress to a terrifying conclusion for the narrator. The narrator is reminded that the elderly guy is still following him in the end by the heartbeat that won't stop beating.

The story begins where an unnamed, ungendered narrator who lives with and cares for an old man who has a clouded, vulture-like eye. The narrator begins to focus more on that eye that they get to a point that makes them so obsessed with the old man's eye. Their only aim becomes to separate the old man from his 'evil eye'. The old man's eye is essentially the 'I' of the old man at this moment, a part of him that cannot be separated as the narrator believes. It is obvious that the narrator does not realise this. The narrator is motivated by this obsession and hatred for such a little target to mercilessly murder this elderly guy.

The story's relentless repetition, both in the narrator's recounting of events and in the rhythmic beating of the heart beneath the floorboards, emphasizes the inescapable return of the repressed. "The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of remembering it as something in the past" (Freud 13). The beating of heart heard in the entire time is Poe's style of keeping the reader in place. The fear created through it can be read as the conscious guilt that the narrator carries his entire time. It is this sound that made him confess the crime he did.

> But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! – and now – again! - hark! louder! louder! louder! louder

> "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! —here, here it is the beating of his hideous heart!". (Poe 364)

So as Freud points out The Eros or the life instinct is what denies one from destruction and the inherent drive towards death could be awakened anytime in our psyche. Freud's theory of repetition compulsion finds resonance in the narrator's inability to repress the guilt and anxiety triggered by the murder. His denial of the crime, despite overwhelming evidence, highlights the psychological mechanisms that individuals employ to cope with the fear of death and the death drive's influence on their psyche.

The Pit and the Pendulum offers a stark portrayal of existential dread, where the protagonist confronts his impending death in a nightmarish setting. This short story is thought to be one of Poe's most successful suspense stories, and the structure of the story is carefully crafted to build that suspense. The first-person narrator describes his experience while imprisoned in great detail, not just what he can detect with his senses, which are often quite restricted, but also what he thinks and feels. His narration is done in a tone that is filled with fear and worry. Poe thus creates a mood of terror by causing the reader to be as completely focused on the eerily threatening setting as the narrator is.The titular pit, an abyss into which the protagonist is about to be cast, serves as a powerful symbol of mortality and the unknown that lies beyond death. As the narrator helplessly observes, "Down—certainly, relentlessly down! It vibrated within ten inches of my bosom!" (Poe 138). The pit represents the inescapable reality of death, the ultimate journey into the abyss from which no one can return. The protagonist's descent

mirrors the human condition, where individuals are inexorably drawn towards their own mortality. The pendulum that swings menacingly above the protagonist becomes a symbol not only of impending doom but also of the inexorable passage of time. The pendulum embodies the responsibility that man is supposed to take up in this world, marking each second that passes as the protagonist grapples with the impending inevitability of death. The protagonist's desperate attempts to escape the pendulum's descent represent the human struggle against the temporal nature of existence. The understanding that existential philosophy posits that man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself, echoes the protagonist's determination to define his existence in the face of temporal constraints.

The protagonist's isolation in the dark and dank dungeon magnifies his sense of existential dread. He is alone, cut off from human contact, and left to grapple with his impending death in solitude. He is deprived of his senses which leaves him completely to imagine a version of the dungeon. This isolation reflects the existentialist idea that individuals are fundamentally alone in the universe, confronting their mortality without external guidance or meaning. The protagonist's torment becomes a microcosm of the human condition, where individuals must navigate the abyss of existence alone.

Heidegger's concept of ‘Being-toward-Death’ becomes palpable as the protagonist grapples with the awareness of his mortality. The pit, symbolising impending death, and the pendulum, symbolising the relentless passage of time, serve as existential threats that drive the protagonist's experience. The experience he gains from the finite time he

lives in is totally individualized. Though towards the end the protagonist's senses and his freedom of movement are fully restored, his fear only increases. “Free! —I had but escaped death in one form of agony, to be delivered unto worse than death in some other” (Poe 140).

In his struggle to survive and resist the pendulum's descent, the protagonist embodies the existentialist concept of authenticity. Existentialism argues that individuals must confront the absurdity of existence and make meaningful choices in the face of despair. The protagonist's determination to survive, to “force [himself] upright as the stones of the wall” (Poe 138), represents an existential act of defiance against the abyss. Heidegger's notion of ‘temporality’ comes to the forefront as the protagonist faces the impending doom of the pendulum. Time takes on a heightened significance, and the protagonist's existence becomes a struggle to define himself authentically in the face of death. He must confront the abyss of his own mortality, a process that aligns with Heidegger's emphasis on the temporality of existence and the need to embrace the present moment.

In *The Masque of the Red Death*, Poe presents a world in which a wealthy aristocracy attempts to escape a deadly plague by isolating themselves within a fortress-like abbey. This tale delves into the human psyche's intricate layers, exploring the tension between the denial of mortality and the inevitability of death. Heidegger's concept of ‘Being-toward-Death’ takes on a different dimension here, as the characters engage in a

collective denial of their mortality. The revelers immerse themselves in a never-ending masquerade, attempting to evade the reality of death.

The masquerade, held within the confines of Prospero's fortress, symbolizes the characters' collective denial of the Red Death's presence and their evasion of the grim reality of mortality. The masks worn by the revelers serve as both literal and figurative shields against the plague, allowing them to hide their true identities and momentarily escape the terror outside. This masquerade, however, is emblematic of humanity's tendency to construct elaborate facades to shield themselves from confronting the specter of death.

Prospero's fortress is described as ‘impermeable’ and ‘impregnable’, providing a false sense of security against the Red Death. This fortress symbolizes humanity's delusion of control over mortality. Prospero believes he can outwit death through isolation, yet the inexorable advance of the Red Death into the very heart of the fortress underscores the futility of such endeavors. The fortress represents the human tendency to construct defenses against mortality, despite the inevitable intrusion of death into every aspect of life.

The arrival of the Red Death within the fortress serves as a poignant reminder of mortality's indiscriminate nature. Despite Prospero's attempts to insulate himself and his revelers from death, the Red Death infiltrates the masquerade, revealing the inescapable presence of mortality. Poe's depiction of the Red Death as a ‘masked figure’ shrouded

in blood-red garments underscores the idea that death is an ever-present, relentless force, regardless of the masks worn.

> The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revelers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood— and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror. (Poe 161)

Throughout the masquerade, the revelers engage in hedonistic and superficial revelry, further emphasizing their denial of death. They exhibit inauthenticity in their pursuit of pleasure and their collective detachment from the realities of the world outside. According to Heidegger, it is only in being-towards-death that one can become the person who one truly is. Concealed in the idea of death as the possibility of impossibility is the acceptance of one's mortal limitation as the basis for an affirmation of one's life. In contrast, the revelers epitomize existential inauthenticity, seeking to escape the absurdity of existence through hedonism and denial. Heidegger's philosophy can be applied to analyze the revelers' inauthentic existence, marked by a refusal to confront the existential anxiety brought about by the Red Death. Their denial is a stark example of how individuals can succumb to inauthenticity, evading the reality of death rather

than embracing it. The masquerade serves as a symbolic representation of their attempts to escape the temporality of existence.

In the final analysis, it becomes evident that Heidegger's phenomenological approach to death enriches our understanding of Poe's narrative method. In both *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Masque of the Red Death*, the characters' experiences and choices are profoundly shaped by their awareness of death. Existential dread and the anticipation of mortality are central themes that echo Heidegger's philosophical concepts. The synthesis of phenomenology and death narratives in Poe's works illustrates the intricate interplay between the psychological and existential aspects of mortality. Heidegger's emphasis on authenticity, temporality, and the freedom to define one's existence in the face of death deepens our appreciation of how Poe's characters confront the abyss of their own mortality.

Conclusion

In the dark and enigmatic realm of Edgar Allan Poe's short fiction, death narratives take on a profound significance, delving into the very essence of human existence. This dissertation, entitled “Elegies of the Mind: A Phenomenological and Psychological Analysis of Death Narratives in Edgar Allan Poe's Short Fiction”, is a journey into the haunting narratives of Poe's tales, specifically *The Fall of the House of Usher, The Pit and the Pendulum, The Masque of the Red Death, The Cask of Amontillado*, and *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Through the dual lenses of Freudian psychology and Heideggerian phenomenology, an intricate interplay of psychological aspects and existential confrontations that permeate Poe's narratives is uncovered.

The journey begins firstly by plunging into the depths of Freudian psychoanalysis to explore how the unconscious mind shapes the characters in Poe's narratives. Freud's

concept of the death drive revealed the presence of unconscious desires and anxieties related to death that drive Poe's characters to the brink of self-destruction. Characters like Roderick Usher, Montresor, and the unnamed narrator in *The Tell-Tale Heart* provided compelling case studies in the exploration of the human psyche, where repression, defence mechanisms, and the symbolic representation of death intersect with the conscious mind. It explores how the unconscious, like a shadowy specter, influences their thoughts, actions, and narratives, ultimately contributing to the richness and complexity of Poe's exploration of death.

Secondly, the attention is turned to Martin Heidegger's phenomenological approach, focusing on his concept of 'Being-toward-Death'. Through tales like *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Masque of the Red Death*, characters confront their own mortality and the existential anxiety that accompanies such an awareness. Heidegger's philosophy emphasized the significance of authenticity, temporality, and the freedom to define one's existence in the face of death. The characters' journeys became mirrors of the human condition, where the anticipation of death shapes their experiences and choices, prompting them to question their authenticity and the meaning of their existence.

The final chapter brought together these dual perspectives, revealing the synthesis of the psychological and phenomenological aspects of death narratives in Poe's works. Characters like Montresor exemplified this intricate interplay, where psychological complexity and existential confrontation converged. An observation into how their narratives were shaped by the subconscious desires is uncovered by Freudian analysis

and the existential challenges posed by Heidegger's notion of 'Being-toward-Death.' This synthesis, it became clear, contributed profoundly to the dark, enigmatic, and haunting narratives that define Poe's fiction.

In conclusion, it could be observed that the tragic events that Poe faced in his lifetime might have influenced him in his works and the recurrent theme of death also could be its influence. A closer look at his life shows that he faced losses in his life from his childhood onwards and this idea of loss is evident in his short stories. Each tale he has written has a grotesque element and is done in first person narrative. His narrator being unnamed and the ambiguous surroundings he creates for his stories could be seen as the certainty of his mortality.

Poe states that there are two radical rules for short story writing which he says, firstly it should be read in one sitting and secondly, every word must contribute to its purpose. So if his works are considered as a structure of life, it is clear that once projected to the world, death is defined. The only uncertainty it carries is how, when, and where it happens. This uncertainty is what leads a man to find purpose and meaning in life. All his short stories through grotesque imagery put forward this uncertainty that life carries and the certainty of death.

Thus it is reminded that the marriage of psychological complexity and existential depth in Poe's narratives is a testament to the enduring power of literature to illuminate the human condition. These pages leave a deeper understanding of how death narratives,

like mirrors, reflect anxieties, yearnings, and capacity for introspection. In the end, it is the convergence of the psychological and the phenomenological, the psyche and phenomenon, that leads one to the heart of Poe's enigmatic narrative method—a method that continues to intrigue, challenge, and haunt any reader as they navigate the unfathomable terrain of human existence.

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