

Psychology in Edgar Allan Poe

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Introduction

GERARDO DEL GUERCIO

This volume presents recent critical work on Edgar Allan Poe and psychology. It began in 2012 after careful consideration of what was lacking in Poe scholarship. Upon months of combing through archives at McGill University, Concordia University, as well as JSTOR I discovered that nothing on Edgar Allan Poe and psychology had come around in many years. After more consideration I posted a Call for Papers and received at least thirty responses from scholars from all areas of the world. Finally, in August 2018 I made a selection of the six manuscripts which reflect the current attitudes toward Poe's work and psychology.

In the first chapter, Karen J. Renner examines how Edgar Allan Poe's fictional confessions of murderers and his detective stories provided models for both the serial killer and the profiler respectively. Many of the primary characteristics of serial killers can be traced back to Poe, including their ability to blend in with "normal" society, the ways that the details of their seemingly motiveless murders contain clues to their psyches, and their so-called God complexes. In addition, Poe himself and his detective Dupin have served as prototypes for the criminal profiler, the serial killer's imagined rival. Poe's work may have even influenced actual serial killers by giving them a framework through which to understand—and perhaps even to model—their murderous desires.

The book then moves to Rachel McCoppin's "Shadow Selves: Unwanted Impulses and Obsession in Poe." McCoppin advocates that Edgar Allan Poe's works are defined by obsessed narrators.

Their obsessions are often baffling to readers: an “evil eye,” a merciless cat, or an identical twin, but what makes Poe’s narratives truly horrific is the sense that the narrators’ obsessions come from within. Poe’s narrators have lost touch of reality; they focus conflict within their own unconscious outward which creates irrational obsessions. Carl Jung declares that the unconscious can force the individual to come face-to-face with one’s true self through obsessive means, and Poe’s narrators do just this. The narrators of “The Imp and the Perverse,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Black Cat,” “Berenice,” “Morella,” and “William Wilson” all reveal their unconscious obsession to unmask themselves, revealing a self that does not adhere to societal expectations.

Sean J. Kelly intelligently examines, through a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, the aesthetic effects of Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Raven” (1845), specifically those effects produced by the poem’s sublime architectonics of present-absence. While critics have examined the role of the sublime and uncanny in the poem, most of these studies have focused on providing an historical context for Poe’s aesthetics or establishing cultural sources for the poem’s symbolic imagery. By contrast, Kelly aims to demonstrate that both the form and content of “The Raven” anticipate the psychoanalytic, specifically Freudian-Lacanian, concept of *das Ding*—the mythical “Thing”—which Jacques Lacan, in *Seminar VII*, argues is the lost object “attached to whatever is open, lacking, or gaping at the center of our desire.” Because, according to Lacan’s theory, this concept names the void around which human subjectivity forms and all subsequent desire turns, art functions, in essence, to “creat[e] the void and thereby introduc[e] the possibility of filling it.” In this essay, Kelly examines both how the void is staged through aesthetic means in “The Raven” and “filled” by the enigmatic raven, which takes on the function of a sublime object in the speaker’s melancholic fantasy. This article is used by permission of The Pennsylvania State University Press.” I should like to acknowledge *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* for granting copyright permission to reuse “Staging Nothing: The Figure of Das

Ding in Poe's 'The Raven,'" which appeared in *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2016, pages 116-141.

Tatiana Prorokova's chapter "The Doppelgänger, Psychology, and Poe" demonstrates how already in the mid-nineteenth century, one of the most famous "Dark Romantics" Edgar Allan Poe meticulously examined the problem of human mind in his short stories. Investigating the connections between one's behavior and the psyche, Poe undoubtedly became one of the pioneers of psychology. While literally each story written by Poe deals with the problem of human psyche, this chapter focuses on four of his works, namely "The Black Cat," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "William Wilson," to analyze the issue of the doppelgänger as represented in Poe's oeuvre. Apparently, the existence of the dichotomy of the "good" self vs. "bad" self, which inevitably results in the split of one's personality, was one of the issues from human psychology that interested Poe. Criticizing the notion of human perfection and exploring the questions of sin and self-destruction as an inherent part of the human nature, Poe's stories question human morality, overtly hinting at the depravity of individuals and society in general as well as undermining the sanity of human mind. Thus, the chapter explores the characters' doppelgängers that Poe's stories introduce to their readers to understand the problem of one's psychological mutilation and its various manifestations.

In "A Hideous Veil," Phillip Grayson argues that Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" is a story about how the mind recognizes the reality of other people, and ultimately of the world. Grayson finds in the story a striking demonstration of the cognitive processes that connect us to others and to the world around us. The darkness of the solipsism of a world known only superficially, sensorily, cut off from the reality of the minds of others. Central to these processes is a concept called *extramission*. Extramission is the idea that vision is accomplished by emitting some force or substance from the eyes. While scientifically inaccurate, this idea has been perennially and universally popular, seen in fig-

ures from Medusa to Superman, and undergirding folklore and ancient anatomical systems alike. The key to extramission's persistent appeal is that it reveals a key aspect of the consciousnesses of others, allowing us to track their attention and recognize their existence outside of ourselves. Nowhere is this more evident than in "The Tell-Tale Heart." Here, the inhuman eye of the narrator's benefactor eventually drives the narrator to murder. This penultimate chapter argues that the failure of the old man's eye to reveal his inner consciousness, its failure to emit some energy or material to confirm the inner life of the old man, lies at the heart of the narrator's murder, and allows the story to explore ways in which we experience reality and the importance of these experiences.

Written by the volume editor, "Mapping German Poetics onto the American Psyche: Masculinity and Metaphysics from E.T.A. Hoffmann to Edgar Allan Poe" argues that the German influence on Edgar Allan Poe was indeed essential in his formation of the short story form that arguably best maps out the motions and poetics of the mind freed from the divisions between language, sensation, and elevated perception and not merely a *doppelgänger* per se. It is Poe's attempt to venture into borderlands of the creative process that is designed to bridge the gap between hyper-rational poetics and metaphysical speculations. Mesmerized by the malleability of the material world to imaginative faculties, Poe adapts Hoffmann's dualist stories dealing with the "feminine in men (that) inevitably results in destruction or a life half lived" even further to create a space where unifying forces replace the new psychological language of a woman's creative energies as well as traditional notions of the *doppelgänger* motif.

The intention of the particular layout of this book is not to suggest that the chapters be read in any particular order. Chapters should be consumed in the order that helps most readers understand the association between Poe and psychology. Taken together, even though we are one hundred and seventy years after Poe's death, his writings and world are still very much alive. The various interpretations of Poe and Psychology presented in these essays highlight

the richness, complexity, and pertinence of this classic author. A special gratitude to my contributors for donating their abstract to the present Introduction.