



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Poe's Life After Death

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Harpa Björk Birgisdóttir

Maí 2010

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Enska

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Leiðbeinandi: Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir

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Abstract

The subject of this essay is Edgar Allan Poe and how his life, works and death have contributed to the fact that he is such a renowned name today, even though it has been 160 years from his death.

Firstly, after the introduction, Poe's life will be accounted for. Poe's life was a tragedy and his death is a mystery. His biggest impact in literature has been on the Gothic genre which is the genre of tragedy and mystery. The third chapter will therefore focus on the Gothic. Poe's works have been thought to mirror his life and Poe has therefore become the focal point in interpretations of his works, which gives rise to the question whether authors have generally been centralized in their works. The fourth chapter is a theoretical account of the status of "the author" through the course of literary history. Going back to Poe's death, the fifth chapter focuses on two authors who have written books in which they try, each in their own way, to find a solution to the mystery of Poe's death. Another interesting aspect of Poe's death regards his funeral. According to sources no more than ten people attended Poe's first funeral, which inspired the population of Baltimore to throw Poe a large and glamorous memorial in 2009, 160 years after his original burial. This event is the subject of chapter six.

Poe's life has interested many biographers and Poe's works, especially his Gothic tales, have made Poe very famous. However it is the mystery left behind when Poe died, along with the tragically small funeral, which has turned Poe's death into an enormous cultural phenomenon. Poe's death therefore hugely contributes to the fact that the memory of Poe and his works are still alive today.

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1. Introducing Poe

Many writers have made a great impact on the world of literature by living unique lives and writing outstanding works, but few have managed to influence the world by dying an interesting death. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was a writer who left a huge mark on the field of literature, especially on the genre of the Gothic. Poe led a very interesting life and left behind a considerable amount of works despite his short life of forty years. Unfortunately, his life was filled with tragedy and darkness which inspired him, perhaps fortunately, to write the dark and tragic stories which made him such a popular writer. The most interesting aspect of Poe is possibly his death. The exact circumstances and causes of Poe's death are unknown and this mystery has been an inspiration to many writers. Poe is therefore a very well known name today, not only because of his life and works, but also because of his death.

In order to get to know Poe and understand the extent of his influence, it is best to start by taking a look at his life, his works and, most importantly, his death. As formerly mentioned, Poe had a huge impact on the Gothic genre. Following an introduction to the world of the Gothic and its literary history, Poe's innovations and contributions to the genre will be accounted for. The doom and darkness which characterize Poe's works is generally thought to mirror the darkness in Poe's own life. Poe as an author therefore becomes the focal point in interpretations of his works. Through the history of literary criticism, the role of the author has however not always been so centralized. Therefore the next chapter will depict a quick scan through the main critical movements and the main pioneers of the last century which will roughly show the journey that the author has gone through thus far. Poe has also

been the focus in the works of others. The mystery of Poe's death has been an inspiration for many and perhaps an obsession for some. Two authors, at least, spent many years working on their books in which they tackle this mystery in equally ambitious but very different ways. These two authors are far from the only people who uphold the memory of Poe. It has become common knowledge that Poe's funeral was attended by very few people and that he was buried in an unmarked grave. In the year 2009, a window opened for a great opportunity. That year, it was decided not only to celebrate Poe's 200th anniversary, but also to give him a proper funeral, 160 years after the first one. News of the event travelled wide and reports and comments about the event appeared all over the World Wide Web. Poe's death therefore has not only been an inspiration for writers, it has also become a huge cultural phenomenon.

2. Poe

2.1 Poe's Life

Edgar Allan Poe went through great hardship in his life. He was born in Boston on January 19th, 1809. His parents, Elizabeth Arnold (1787-1811) and David Poe Jr. (1784-1811?), were both actors and they were very poor. Because of their financial difficulties, they put their first child, William Henry Leonard Poe (1807-1831), into the care of David's father, "General" David Poe (1742-1816) (Allen 4). There are no known records for what happened to David, Poe's father. He either left his family or he died. For some reason at least, Elizabeth ended up alone with her child in Richmond in 1810, performing on stage night after night, pregnant with her third child and suffering from tuberculosis. Poe's sister, Rosalie (1810-1874) was born in December, and one year later, their mother passed away. Poe and Rosalie were both taken care of, but by separate families (Allen 10-19). Approaching his third birthday, Poe had already lost his parents and been separated from both his siblings.

One of the women who visited Elizabeth during her illness was Mrs. Frances Keeling Allan (1784-1829), wife of merchant John Allan (1780-1834). They had been married for eight years when Elizabeth passed away, but they were without children.¹ Mrs. Allan had taken a real liking to the charming little boy Edgar and the day after his mother died, Mrs. Allan took him to her home (Allen 16-19). Mr. Allan had mixed emotions about his wife's decision: "He was willing and kindly enough to indulge his lovely wife in a temporary charitable impulse [...] but to make the object of it his legal son and heir, with all that would be involved, was a horse of a different color". Mr. Allan never legally adopted little Edgar, but he gave him his name (Allen 31-39) and raised him as his godson (Mabbott 2).

John Allan did learn to love the little boy and take pride in him (Allen 54). However, their relationship turned out to be a rocky one. In 1826 Poe went to the University of Virginia

¹ Although school-records show that Mr. Allan was supporting at least two illegitimate children (Allen 35).

and even though he did well with his studies he only stayed one term. The reason was a monetary dispute between Mr. Allan and Poe (Mabbott 2). Mr. Allen had become a wealthy man and was hoping, now more than ever, for a natural heir (Allen 115), and at this point does not seem to have wanted to spend another dime on Poe. Poe tried to raise funds by gambling but raised only debts instead and was, in the end, forced to leave the school (Allen 134-5). Poe returned to Richmond but did not stay long. After a couple of months of tension between John Allen and Poe, an enormous argument took place in March of 1827, which ended with Poe storming out (Allen 154-7).

Poe decided to enlist in the army in May, 1827 (Allen 167). He served two years and did very well (Allen 185). During that time, Mrs. Frances Allen, Poe's mother figure for seventeen years, passed away. When Mr. Allan remarried in 1830, Poe realised that he could not rely on financial aid from Mr. Allan any longer. Shortly after that, Mr. Allan was offended by a remark he saw in a letter written by Poe, which was all that was needed to end this fragile relationship. John Allan disowned his godson (Mabbott 2-3) and for the second time in his life, Poe had lost his family.

On his own for the first time, Poe tried writing for a living. In 1833 Poe gained some national recognition when one of his short stories won a small monetary reward (Allen 282). He then went on to becoming a very successful editor. Poe's dream was however to start up his own magazine. The closest he came to achieving this goal was when he became the sole proprietor of a weekly paper called the *Broadway Journal* in 1845 (Mabbott 5-7). However, in order to become owner of the paper, Poe had borrowed money all over town. Poe tried to increase his income with more advertisers, but that resulted in decreased numbers in subscribers. In the beginning of 1846, the *Journal* collapsed (Allen 521, Mabbott 7).

2.2 Poe's Women

Although various sources state that Poe had many short love affairs, there were not many “significant others” in his life.

Poe's first love was Sarah Elmira Royster (1810-1888) (Allen 110) and they secretly got engaged before Poe started his studies at the University of Virginia. However, when Elmira's family found out about the relationship, they cut off communication between the two and arranged for Elmira to marry someone more suitable (Mabbott 2). These former lovers were reunited many years later when Poe and Elmira had both lost their spouses and they were in fact engaged at the time when Poe died (Mabbott 8-9).

Poe married once in his life. Poe's aunt, Mrs. Maria Poe Clemm (1790-1871), arranged the marriage in 1835 between him and her thirteen year old daughter Virginia (1822-1847) (Mabbott 4). The ceremony was performed secretly in St. Paul's Episcopal Church with Mrs. Clemm as the sole witness. The marriage was to be kept secret, at least to begin with. Poe did gain a new family and a new home, but whether he gained “a wife in the full sense of the word has been doubted” (Allen 309). Poe pursued other women during his marriage, but he cared about Virginia and they stayed together until she died from tuberculosis (Mabbott 6-7).

Poe had a very good relationship with his mother-in-law and aunt, Mrs. Clemm. She helped Poe as much as she could through the difficult times. When money was tight, she helped him for example by delivering his work when he was sick (Allen 456) and when alcohol had taken over his senses, she tracked him down and brought him home (Allen 428). Mrs. Clemm stayed loyal to Poe to the end and was, when the time came, buried next to him and her daughter (Mabbott 9).

2.3 Poe's Death

Poe was not in very good health throughout his life. The distress he went through from a young age no doubt had dire effects on his mental health (Allen 474-5). Another problem concerning his health was alcohol. Poe was not a heavy drinker, but the effects that small amounts of alcohol could cause in Poe's case, were staggering (Mabbott 2). "One glass was literally too much; two or three were disastrous; and a continued round of potations reduced him to a quivering caricature of himself" (Allen 139). Drinking could cause Poe to go on bad sprees for days at a time. At one point, Mrs. Clemm found her son-in-law in the woods outside of Jersey City, where he had been wandering about without food for days. The recovery from the deliria required several days of bed rest (Allen 428).

Poe had become very ill when Virginia died, and her death also took a large mental toll on Poe. His heart had also become very weak (Allen 582-9) and according to one of his physicians, Dr. Valentine Mott, Poe had suffered a brain lesion as a child which could shorten his life expectancy. "The lesion is thought to have produced manic and depressive periods, which might account for some of Poe's wild freaks" (Mabbott 8). Poe did eventually recover from the trauma of Virginia's death and for a small period of time, things seemed to brighten up. In January, 1849, Poe writes "I am so busy, now, and feel so full of energy. Engagements to write are pouring in upon me every day" (Allen 637). In September, though still poor, he was receiving great praise for his work and, the icing on the cake, he got back together with his first love, Elmire Royster, and they planned on getting married on October 17th. Poe even made an effort to stop drinking by joining the Sons of Temperance club in Richmond (Allen 660-6). Unfortunately, this was only the calm before the storm.

On September 26, 1849, Poe attended a gathering in Richmond. Poe was in good humour and when he left for Baltimore at four o'clock in the morning he was, according to witnesses, "quite sober" (Allen 669). Poe's whereabouts for the next week are unknown.

According to the evidence collected by biographer Hervey Allen (1889-1949), Poe seems to have been at the point of another break down:

Elmira noticed that he had a feverish pulse. It was probably the heart again.

He had been quite active for some time, and was labouring under considerable excitement over the move South, and his approaching marriage. Under the circumstances, an attack was due. (670)

It was a few days before elections in Baltimore and it is a fact that during that time, votes were bought with alcohol or drugs. This is, according to Allen, the most likely explanation of what happened to Poe, although, in his short biography, Thomas Ollive Mabbott (1898-1968) claims that this story is nothing but a hoax. One thing is certain. On October 3rd, 1849, Poe was found “in great distress” and taken to the Washington Hospital. Poe spent his last days in delirium, unable to explain what had happened to him, and on Sunday, October 7th, he passed away. Poe’s final words were “Lord help my poor soul” (Allen 672-5, Mabbott 9).

2.4 Poe’s Works

Poe was a great American literary mind who wrote poetry, short stories, a novel, essays, criticism and reviews, articles and editorials. Among Poe’s most famous works are “The Raven”, a poem which gained instant popularity when published in 1845 (Allen 506), “The Gold-Bug”, a short story based on Poe’s time in the army (Mabbott 3), “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, one of the world’s first detective stories, and gothic tales such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”. One of his most known prose works is the essay “The Philosophy of Composition” which was described by Poe himself as “his best specimen of analysis” (Baym 1597).

Poe was very innovative with his writing. According to John Walsh, Poe invented the detective story² and created along with it the intuitive detective; Monsiour C. Auguste Dupin. This character appeared in Poe's three detective stories; "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). Dupin is not a detective by profession but a philosopher who becomes a private investigator simply because of his extreme curiosity and his talent of drawing conclusions from clues that no one else seems to notice, a talent which Poe named ratiocination. However, Dupin sometimes finds evidence without the reader's knowledge, coming to conclusions that the reader could never have assumed (Parent), making Dupin perhaps, a little bit too clever.

In addition, Poe investigated all possible angles of the criminal story. In "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", Poe tackled an actual crime, in "The Purloined Letter" the crime of the story was given no attention at all, and in "Thou Art the Man" appears the first criminal who is presented, to begin with, as a respectable character (Mabbott 5).

Poe's influence on the literary world has been enormous. For example, without the methods used in his detective stories, the world might never have seen the likes of Sherlock Holmes. Undoubtedly though, Poe's greatest impact, which is still noticeable today, is his influence on the genre of the Gothic.

3. The Gothic

3.1 Literary History

The word *Gothic* is not a term easily explained since it is used in so many art forms such as architecture, fashion and music. In this case, the focus will remain on the literary Gothic.

The Gothic in its widest term can be described as "the art of haunting, the art of possession" (Edmundson xi). However, Gothic in its highest aesthetical abilities, "fills its

² Very few examples existed before Poe's detective tales (Walsh 138).

audience with fear, with an uncanny sense of impending harm, that abides even after the film is over, the book finished and back on the shelf” (Edmundson xii). Gothic fiction generally has a lot of common features. The story is usually located in an ancient, dark and dreary place, such as a castle, a graveyard, an old theatre or a large prison. The protagonists of the story are then plagued by secrets related to these locations. Uncanny beings, such as ghosts or monsters arise from these dreary places, haunting their victims, either physically or mentally, trying to reveal their secrets in order to resolve crimes of the past. Gothic fiction then varies in whether these creatures and uncanny events originate from the realm of the supernatural, or can be explained in a logical manner (Hogle 2-3). Crimes of the past can of course be connected with the murders and mysteries of the detective story.

The first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, was published in 1764. It was written by the English historian, playwright and novelist, Horace Walpole (1717-1797). The novelty of this story was, as Walpole himself explained, that he attempted to “blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern” (Haggerty 1-2). Already in this first Gothic novel, the standard Gothic elements were in place: “hero-villain, heroine on the run, a terrible place, uncut fear” (Edmundson xi).

Gothic literature did not catch on quickly among English writers after the example set by Walpole. In fact, it was not until the tremendous turmoil of the French Revolution in 1789 that the English found their Gothic literary inspiration. The age of reason, which had suppressed all passionate expression, had come to an end, and middle-class English writers welcomed this freedom with their Gothic tales which poured forth in the 1790s (Edmundson xi).

The origin of American Gothic is traced back to Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) and his novel *Wieland; or the Transformation* (1798). It is considered to be “the first major novel to adapt the conventions of British Gothic to American circumstances” (Savoy

172). American Gothic contains popular British Gothic motifs, such as gloomy atmosphere, imminent violence, creepy settings and plot elements like the vengeful ghost. The American Gothic elements then developed on and became much darker than in British Gothic. American Gothic is characterized by fear of the past; fear of past wrongdoings, fear that the American dream will turn into a nightmare (Savoy 167-8). This fear is realised by bringing inanimate objects, ghostly voices and the dead, back into threatening existence. “It thus achieves the ultimate effects of the haunted, the uncanny, and the return of the repressed while placing these thoroughly in the depths of American life and the American psyche” (Savoy 168).

3.2 Gothic Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is said to have been “the first American to write truly sophisticated Gothic fiction” (Haggerty 81). Poe at least brought new elements into American Gothic. For instance, unlike most of his contemporaries, Poe’s tales usually do not take place within the United States, but rather in an unspecific location which could be imagined anywhere (Savoy 181). Gothic literary scholar David Punter claims that this imagined world is “an artificial version of a European environment” and that evil forces in Poe’s works can always be, in some way, connected to Europe (184; Vol. 1). Poe took the elements of British Gothic and developed them further, turning them inwards into a nightmare without escape (Edmundson 71), often using tools of imprisonment like coffins and tombs (Savoy 181). The world that Poe’s main characters have to deal with is obsessive and repetitive (Edmundson 152) and the atmosphere of his tales indicate that “humans are mostly damned and doomed from the start” (Edmundson 45). However, as Eric Savoy points out in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2008), in combination with this darkness; this utter despair and impending doom that appear in his works, Poe is at the same time obsessed with beauty and looking for “precise aesthetic

effects” (180). With this unique combination of Gothic elements, Poe captures his readers, both through fascination and terror (Savoy 181).

3.2.1. The Great “Fall”

One of the stories, where Poe manages masterfully to capture his reader’s attention, is “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839). This story features all of the basic Gothic elements along with Poe’s masterfully crafted additional Gothic tools.

From the very first sentence of “The House of Usher” the reader is bombarded with words of Gothic nature, setting the mood for the dark and dreary surroundings of the story. On this “dull, dark and soundless day [...] the clouds hung oppressively low” (Poe 1534), the walls of the house were bleak, the windows were vacant and “eye-like” (1534), and a black, lurid small lake mirrored the image of the ghastly house. However, the bleak surroundings pale in comparison to the description of the crushing emotions that overcome the unnamed narrator; “insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit” (1534), “an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart” (1535). This strange place is one of Poe’s imaginary settings, which could be located anywhere, but it certainly has a European feel to it. An addition element which Poe adds to the story is the unknown. The narrator is the only gateway that the reader has into the story, and the narrator cannot explain why the surroundings seem so dilapidated or why he is suddenly filled with such soul-destroying feelings. The readers enter the story with full uncertainty of the terrors that might await them.

The uncertainty continues on through the entire story. The narrator has come to visit his old friend, Roderick Usher, who is suffering from a disease only vaguely described as “acute bodily illness” and “a pitiable mental idiosyncrasy” (1535). Roderick had asked his friend to come in order to try and take his mind of the illness. The Usher family has, for some unknown reason, never been able to sustain a large family tree. Roderick, along with his sister

who has also taken ill, are the last remaining Ushers. Roderick's twin sister, lady Madeline, is suffering from a disease of a cataleptical nature, and this disease "had long baffled the skill of her physicians" (1539). This endless misfortune of the Ushers represents an atmosphere typical in Poe's stories which is, as mentioned above by Edmundson, that "humans are mostly damned and doomed from the start" (45). There also lingers in the air the sense that some unknown force connected to the house, perhaps a family secret, causes the Ushers' constant struggle, as well as the present illness of the Usher twins.

Poe's search for beauty along side with the Gothic is very clearly depicted in the section where the narrator describes Roderick's face. A hauntingly beautiful face appears when reading a description of a "cadaverousness of complexion" (1537), a large, luminous eye, and thin lips mixed with a delicate nose, "a finely moulded chin" (1537), beautifully curved lips, and hair softer than a web.

The narrator stays with his friend for several days, during which time lady Madeline dies. The narrator helps his friend to place her body "in one of the numerous vaults" (1542) in the house. The body would be kept there for two weeks, safe from "resurrection men".³ The narrator notices that lady Madeline's bosom and face are still faintly blushed and a "lingering smile" (1543) remains visible on her lips.

During the next few days, the mental health of both Roderick and the narrator deteriorate, of course for unexplainable reasons. Something uncanny lingers in the air. The story's climax is reached when a tremendous storm rages the house. Both Roderick and his friend hear strange sounds coming from the house until Roderick's built-up nervousness explodes: "*We have put her living in the tomb!*" (1546). For days Roderick has been hearing strange sounds and all the time he suspects that the sounds are coming from his sister, "oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not – *I dared* not speak!" (1546). This terrible

³ Men who dug up fresh bodies and sold them for medical studies (1543).

secret of having buried his sister alive has now come back to haunt him. “*I tell you that she now stands without the door!*” (1547). As lady Madeline appears outside the door and lets her exhausted body collapse onto her brother, the narrator flees away from the mansion. As he turns around he sees the entire house crumble into the lake. Whether the collapse is a result of natural dilapidation or supernatural events, is left open.

Poe uses the Gothic elements in a way that keeps readers at the edge of their seats through the horror of the House of Usher, and they are left puzzled while the mansion disappears into the lake.

3.3 Poe Discovered

Poe’s genius did not become apparent to his fellow Americans at first. The fame Poe received during his lifetime was based on his critical and editorial work, not his stories and poems (Foye viii; Preface 1).⁴ Poe was not shy about expressing his opinion. He ruffled a lot of feathers and, at the time of his death, his American colleges had developed a malignant attitude towards Poe because of his critiques (Foye ix; Preface 1). Fortunately, Poe’s brilliance was discovered by the French literati. Mostly, Poe was discovered by one man; Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who had ruffled a few feathers of his own in the French literary community. Baudelaire found his counterpart in Poe, and two years prior to Poe’s death, Baudelaire had started introducing Poe’s works to the French nation (Foye 75; Preface 2). By translating some of his works, Baudelaire opened up the world of Poe to French writers, inspiring them to write supernatural fiction. From France, Poe’s inspiration was carried on to Britain and America (Punter 28; Vol. 2).

There is no doubt that Poe’s influence on the Gothic world has been enormous. Poe introduced new concepts to the genre such as the split personality, the detective thriller and the premature burial (Punter 176; Vol. 1) and shrouded his tales with darkness formerly

⁴ The instant success of “The Raven” was an exception

unknown to his contemporaries. Poe's writings influenced the next generation of Gothic authors, such as American writer Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?). As with Poe, Bierce's fiction also had a very dark tone and a sense of hopelessness and futility (Punter 27-8; Vol. 2). In the generation following Bierce it was H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) who played a huge part in carrying on the torch of American Gothic literature. Although he was not favoured by literary critics, his popularity among the general public was enormous (Punter 42; Vol. 2). Therefore Lovecraft played a huge part in keeping the American Gothic tradition alive and spreading it on to coming generations.

Poe's influence throughout the 20th century can clearly be seen by taking account of the movie industry. In Hollywood in the 1960s, many of Poe's Gothic stories were rewritten into movie scripts, including *The House of Usher* (1960), *The Raven* (1963) and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964). All of these movies were directed by Roger Corman (1926-) and therefore this group of films is sometimes referred to as "the Corman-Poe cycle". (Kavka 224). The movies represent a mixture of Poe's Gothic elements such as murder, madness and being buried alive, combined with traditional American Gothic elements for example the dead returning from their graves and the haunting of the past. Almost all the movies of the Corman-Poe cycle reappear in altered form later in the century. *The Mask of the Red Death* and *The House of Usher* were both remade in 1989 and an adaption of *The Raven* was remade as a short drama film in 2008. In 2011 another movie is scheduled to appear with the title *The Raven*. The plot of this movie is a fictional account of Poe's final days which he spends chasing after a serial killer who copies methods used in Poe's stories. At the moment, Ewan McGregor is listed for the main role (*imdb.com*).

Poe's overall influence on the Gothic world is difficult to measure, but one thing is certain: few people who read Poe's Gothic works are left untouched. Perhaps Poe's impression on the literary world was best described by T. S. Eliot, who stated that "one cannot

be sure that one's own writing has *not* been influenced by Poe" (Foy vii; Preface 1). Poe's life was filled with Gothic elements such as tragedy, disappointment, illness, death and darkness. Biographer Hervey Allen locates the core of Poe's Gothic life when describing Poe's first entrance into his foster-home: "he must dimly have experienced for the first time, in an emotion without words, the extreme sense of fear and utter loneliness which was to follow him to the grave" (20). The result of this Gothic life was the composition of some of the world's best Gothic fiction. Furthermore, even when he finally seemed to be approaching happiness with his first love, Poe himself died from a strange illness. Poe therefore not only wrote Gothic literature; he lived a Gothic life and died a Gothic death.

4. Criticism and the Author

For those who have some knowledge about Poe's life, it might be difficult to regard his works without taking his life and his character into consideration. The spirit of his stories seems to be mirrored by Poe's life and experience, making it very easy to give Poe himself a very centralized position when interpreting his works. The story is then interpreted in relation to the author, instead of from the qualities of the story itself. This gives rise to a question which has been central to critical literary debate; is it necessary to take the author into consideration when studying a literary work? Considering the fact that Poe as an author has been so centralized in his literary works, it is interesting to regard the genre of literary criticism and see what position "the author" has held through the course of literary history.

4.1. The Beginning

Literary criticism dates all the way back to Aristotle (384 B.C.–322 B.C.) and his work *Poetics* which examines "the nature of literature itself" (Barry 21). Aristotle focuses on literary genres as a whole. He studies the basic elements of the tragedy and the comedy and

tries to analyse the most efficient way to compose works of these genres. The author was not taken into consideration except when literary critiques constructed rules which the author should follow in order to write good literature. This method of criticism did not change until the 18th century with the groundbreaking work *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-1781) by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). This work established a new method in criticism. From this point on, criticism focused on isolated works by single authors. In this work, Johnson discusses a number of English poets, starting with an introduction of the poet's life and character before moving on to the poet's works, thus generating a context between the author and its works. Johnson's intention was not however to explain the meaning of the works with the author's life. He merely established this new method of biographical criticism, bringing closer attention to the author in the field of literary criticism (Dutton 47-8).

4.2. Romantic Criticism

During the period of Romantic criticism, the author not only became the centre of the critic's attention, he was also idolized as a "great and specially gifted man, the greatness of whose works is almost indistinguishable from the special qualities of his vision and talent" (Dutton 50). One of the most important works published in the beginning of the Romantic era of criticism was William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).

According to Wordsworth, the poet possesses qualities such as sensibility, insight, passion and imagination and these qualities allow the poet to write 'authentic poetry' spontaneously and without effort. Poetry is merely formed through the poet's "overflow of powerful feeling" (Dutton 52). The only restrictions Wordsworth believes the poet must abide to, is adapting himself to speaking the language of men; i.e. the language of the average person, not the jargon of lawyers, doctors or philosophers (Dutton 52). During the Romantic period, the creative process was freed from the rules and restrictions of the older literary movements

(Dutton 59). Romantic critics were therefore able to enjoy poetry based on its own aesthetical quality instead of measuring it against the standards set by society. The focus however remained on the poet, because without the innate and powerful imagination of the poet, the poem would not exist (Dutton 52-5). Romantic criticism was the high-point in the centralization of the author. In the following critical movements, the author quickly became less and less important to the critical process.

4.3. New Criticism

The movement of New Criticism, in around the 1930s and 1940s, moved the critical focus away from the author and aimed it purely at the text. Not only was the text viewed without consideration to social standards, as in Romantic criticism, but New Critics also isolated the text from all other outside influences, including the author and the reader. The meaning was to be derived solely from the form of the text (Bertens 22). The reasoning for this method is that if literary texts are worth looking at, worth studying and teaching, their worth will originate from the text itself, not from historical context, not from the author's life, or any other external influences (Dutton 71). New criticism therefore practices 'close reading' of the text itself (Bertens 23).

At this point in the history of literary criticism, the author has practically been surgically removed from the work, but during the structuralism and post-structuralism of the 1970s, something even more drastic happened.

4.4. Structuralism and Post-structuralism

In contrast to Romanticism and New Criticism, meaning in structuralism comes from the outside, that is, "meanings are attributed to the things by the human mind, not contained within them" (Barry 39). Single elements cannot be studied in isolation. They must be studied

in coherence with the larger structures that these elements belong to. Structuralism takes its readers further from the text, searching for outer structures which the individual text belongs to (Barry 40).

Post-structuralism still focuses on structures of the text but in an almost exact opposition to the structures of structuralism. Instead of linking texts to a larger structure, post-structuralism looks at the meaning hidden behind the text. Words do not have a clear-cut, singular meaning and their interpretation is always tainted by their opposites (Barry 63-4). Establishing a final meaning and finding closure is therefore very difficult in post-structuralism.

4.5. Barthes vs. Foucault

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) is one of the originators of structuralism but during his transitional period over to post-structuralism he published an essay called “The Death of the Author” (1967). Barthes states that the author has held a much too powerful position up to this point. The author has been considered as the owner of language and it is time for that to end; it is time for language to speak for itself. Since the author has nothing to do with the text, there is no reason to decipher it anymore. Without an author, there can be no hidden meaning. Barthes transfers all the power over to the reader. The importance of the reader lies in the fact that the only place, where texts in all their diversity come together, is with the reader; “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 4). The reader attributes meaning to the words through the language itself. This transition of emphasis comes with a price: “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (Barthes 4).

The cultural historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984) belongs to the critical movement of post-structuralism. Foucault was very critical about the death of the author, and in his essay, “What is an Author?” (1969), Foucault explains how removing the author altogether

poses a series of problems. One of these problems lies in how to define a work. In order for a critic to do his job, he must first know “What is a work?” (103). However, when the author has been completely removed from the equation, this definition becomes quite difficult. When something has been written by an individual, that text must constitute a work. The person who wrote the work must therefore be the author of said work. Another problem pointed out by Foucault is concerned with the process of writing, a term which is also very difficult to consider if the author is no longer present. If there is no author, there is no process of writing, without which there can be no production of a work. Importantly, Foucault does not deny that the author has been declared dead. He simply points out that no one has yet investigated the consequences of the declaration of the death of the author or the problems that follow.

Foucault then goes on to analyze a notion which he calls the “author function” (108). This notion seems to encompass the way that works are viewed from the outside: in what way discourses concerning certain types of work are practiced, how those discourses change in time and in different civilisations, how anonymous works can be contributed to a single author by examining certain aspects of the work, and how a work can contain several identities of selves, none of which is the actual author. Foucault concludes by announcing his belief that the “author function” will eventually disappear from all discourse and be replaced with the functionality of the work itself.

Judging from these two essays by Barthes and Foucault, it seems that they are in agreement about the author’s disappearance. They do however seem to disagree to what extent the author has disappeared. Barthes declares that the author has completely vanished and appears to be relieved over the fact that the reader has managed to overthrow the author from his dominance over the language. Foucault, on the other hand, claims that even though the author has been exiled, he is still present in discourse about the function of literary works, at least for the time being.

Already in the years 1969-1974, Roland Barthes issued statements about the author's return. As an example, in his work *Sade/Fourier/Loyola* (1971), Barthes introduces the author back to the scene, though with some conditions. He does not go so far as to admit that the author has acquired her original status of power. The author is merely reintroduced as a guest, not as a creator of a text but rather as the text's offspring (Burke 30-32). Edgar Allan Poe is a good example of an author who has literally become the offspring of his text, in the works of others. Several books have been written, both fiction and non-fiction works, inspired by Poe's work and using Poe himself as a character.

4.6. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

The main critical movements of the 1980s were two branches of the same tree: new historicism in U.S.A. and cultural materialism in Britain. The novelty of these approaches was that all texts are relevant. Literary texts are not put on a pedestal but regarded in the same way as any other texts, whether historical, political or religious texts (Bertens 177). These movements do however focus on the text, which means that the author does not have much power in their books. The text is a product of a shared experience between the author and his society, giving the author a "role that is to a large extent determined by historical circumstances" (Bertens 176). At this point, the author has become somewhat more than solely a visitor or a by-product of the text; he has gained the position of contributing to the production of the text. In a similar way, Poe's work is regarded both from his experience and from the society in which he lived. Also, when writing about Poe, it is necessary to examine him in the historical context of his society.

4.7. The Modern Day Author

The status of the author in the present is difficult to define, since this concept is still under construction. None the less, it is safe to say that the largest community of the modern day writer is the electronic community. Blogs, websites, news-sites, my-space, facebook, the World Wide Web is crawling with sites where the modern day “author” expresses himself. Such writers control how much personal information about themselves they publish on their own pages. The internet can, however, also be a medium which grants readers easy access to information about authors of texts. This open access to the author’s life makes it easy for the reader to connect the author to his work, as was done in the Romantic era. On the other hand it is also very simple to post writings anonymously on the web, making the internet the world of unnamed writers as well. The electronic community of the modern day therefore depicts authors in two very different ways: as the unknown author and as the idolised author of the Romantics.

5. Poe’s Inspiring Death

Obviously, the author has not always been as central to literary works as Poe has been in his. However, Poe has not only been the centre of his own works, he has also become the centre of the works of others.

Poe’s genius was just starting to be discovered when he died and his works inspired others to write fiction of their own. However, Poe’s life and works are not the only things that influenced other writers; Poe’s death was also a matter of great inspiration. The exact causes of Poe’s death are a mystery. The fact that a renowned writer, known to a great extent for his Gothic writing, left behind a real life mystery, has sparked the imagination of many people. Among these people are authors John Evangelist Walsh and Matthew Pearl.

5.1. Midnight Dreary

John Evangelist Walsh (1927-), inspired by Poe's detective stories, sets out to investigate Poe's death in his book *Midnight Dreary; The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe* (1998). Walsh takes on the challenging task of digging up original files and papers, relevant to the case, in order to try and shed some new light on the matter. This complicated task took years of extensive investigative work which evidently paid off. Walsh, at least, is convinced that he was able to crack the case.

Walsh starts off his book by recalling the time when Poe gets back together with his first love, Elmira. Poe plans to take care of some business in Philadelphia and New York before their wedding and bring his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, back with him on his return. The journey is scheduled to take about two weeks and Poe leaves his home on September 26th, 1849. This is where the gap begins in Poe's life, right before his death, and this is the period that Walsh focuses most of his attention on. Walsh's biggest effort goes into tracing Poe's steps; find out where he went and by what means of transportation. His conclusion is that even though Poe was found in Baltimore on October 3rd, he had not stayed there through the entire five-day gap. Rather, Poe travelled to Baltimore by boat and then carried on with his journey by train to Philadelphia. He arrived there at his friend's house, publisher John Sartain, in a very agitated state claiming that he was being followed by men who wanted to kill him for "revenge" because of some "woman trouble" (82, 114). Before leaving his friend's house one or two days later, Poe disguised himself by cutting off his beard and dressing up in a strange assembly of borrowed clothes. He then took a train back to Baltimore, but his pursuers are still on his track.

Another point that Walsh directs his focus on is Elmira's family. The reason that Elmira and Poe did not get married when they were young was because Elmira's family objected to the union. They did not approve of Poe as a teenager. Why would they approve of

him now? The rumours of Poe's behaviour regarding women and alcohol are not flattering and Elmira's family is sure to have heard many of these stories. Walsh's theory is that the Royster family was determined to stop the marriage a second time and that Poe's pursuers were Elmira's three brothers, George, James and Alexander Royster. Walsh pictures the brothers catching up to Poe at his hotel room in Philadelphia, threatening him to leave their sister alone, ordering him to continue on with his journey to New York as planned, and never again return to Richmond. Poe's reason then to disguise himself and return to Baltimore, is that he wanted to get back to Elmira as soon as possible to resolve the issue. He never made it back. The brothers caught up with Poe again in Baltimore and this time they took action. They knew that one more debauchery would be enough to drive Elmira away from Poe for good, especially since Poe had recently joined a Richmond temperance society. The brothers forced Poe's mouth open and poured large amounts of whiskey down his throat. Poe probably resisted and received some blows to the head during the struggle. When Poe had become weak from the alcohol, Elmira's brothers dumped him on the street near a polling place. The next morning Poe was found as reported and brought to the hospital where he died.

5.1.1. Detective Walsh

Walsh is very confident about the quality of his book and even though 150 years had passed, he is convinced that no one had done a better job of investigating the circumstances of Poe's death than he has. At the front flap of the book's cover, it is stated that "no one has seriously probed the mystery of that missing week [towards the end of Poe's life]... until now".

Actually, Walsh is very experienced when it comes to the field of investigative works, as he has previously written several historical and biographical works, as well as tackling other

mysteries.⁵ This experience might be part of the reason for Walsh's confidence in his conclusion of the Poe case.

Walsh does not focus on Poe the author in this work and he barely mentions Poe's works. In order to get to the bottom of the case, Walsh studies the character of Poe, as well as all the circumstances in his life which could possibly contribute to the solution of Poe's disappearance. Through the process of his studies, Walsh seems to feel that he gets to know Poe fairly well, not as an author but as a person. At least, Walsh describes how Poe would never have taken the pledge at the Temperance society if not for Elmira, because that would have been "totally out of character for him" (146). Clearly, at least in this case, Walsh forms a very personal relationship with his subjects of investigation.

Perhaps it is because Walsh takes such a personal stance in his investigation, that he allows himself to blend his personal feelings into his results. There are many instances in the book where Walsh concludes facts by guessing and assuming (e.g. 11, 160, 168, 175) and often, especially in the chapter where he describes his version of the five-day gap, he allows himself to describe events in details that could not possibly be known, such as when Elmira's brothers catch up with Poe for the second time:

Wildly [Poe] charged his tormenters, fists flailing, as he tried to fight his way out of the room. It was in the resulting melee, *probably*, that he did receive some hard blows, *perhaps even* to the head [italics mine] [...] Sputtering and choking, resisting fiercely, he gradually weakened and was soon swallowing surge after surge of the fiery liquid. (119-20)

This does not seem to be mere assessment of the facts even though, in the beginning of the book, Walsh states that "[i]n these pages nothing has been merely imagined, no smallest item"

⁵ See the back flap of the cover of *Midnight Dreary*.

(xvi). Even though his research supports the statements that he makes, it does not change the fact that he does fill up some of the gaps with his own assumptions.

5.2. The Poe Shadow

Matthew Pearl (1976-) takes a more adventurous route with his novel *The Poe Shadow* (2006). The book is clearly from the start a fictional story, but at the same time it is based on actual facts. It is clear that Pearl is well-informed about Poe's life, works and death and, considering the facts of the matter, this story is therefore something that could have occurred following the years of Poe's passing. Pearl shows at least as much ambition in acquiring sources about the Poe case as Walsh does, and he even prides himself in discovering new evidence never before noticed by anyone. From his research, Pearl then finds his own conclusion of the Poe mystery.

Pearl's inspiration from Poe's death takes him back to the mid 19th century, where he imagines a lawyer by the name of Quentin Clark. Clark is a sincere fan of Poe's work and has exchanged letters with him, where he for instance offers Poe legal advice. When rumours start flying that Poe's death was caused by extreme debauchery, Clark feels obligated to clear his name. From then on Clark completely neglects his own life; his career and his future wife, and focuses all his powers on solving the mystery in order to redeem Poe's character. Clark brings in reinforcements from Paris, Auguste Dupont, a man who Clark believes was Poe's inspiration for his detective C. Auguste Dupin. In an odd twist, another man, Claude Dupin, who likes to be called "The Baron", claims to be the real model for Poe's fictional detective. The Baron also travels to Baltimore to prove his worth over Dupont and the chase begins. Who will be the first one to solve the mysterious case of the death of Edgar Allan Poe?

The road is long, dangerous and filled with obstacles, but eventually, Dupont manages to come to a conclusion. Dupont's theory is to a large extent based on "[t]he fact

that Poe's entire nature could be reversed by a single glass of wine" (480). Dupont supposes that Poe meets an acquaintance on the train to Philadelphia. They have a drink together and then part ways. Poe would have shown irrational behaviour from the alcohol and would therefore have been sent on the next train back to Baltimore. Roaming around the city in the rain, Poe would have traded his clothes in for dry ones and then ended up near a polling place where he intended to seek shelter. When Poe is found he is aided by three men, his friend Dr. Snodgrass, Henry Herrings, Poe's uncle and George Herring, Henry's uncle. Dr. Snodgrass was the leader of the local temperance club, Henry Herrings had ill feelings towards Poe because of unwelcome advances Poe had made with Henry's daughter, and George Herring was the president of the political party which was holding elections at the polling place where Poe was found. The three men decide to put Poe on a carriage to the hospital to get rid of him quietly and avoid a scene. They do not ride with Poe to the hospital or even pay the carriage fare. Dupont blames the three men for Poe's death. Because the staff at the hospital was not informed of Poe's intolerance to alcohol, which these men were aware of, or the exposure he had suffered the previous night, Poe died from improper care.

5.2.1. Original Pearl

Pearl leaves a "Historical Note" at the end of his book. From that chapter it becomes clear that Pearl feels he has accomplished something more than any other Poe-investigator has ever achieved, as he states that his book contains "the details about Poe's death determined to be the most authentic". After mentioning that he made some "original discoveries", he goes on to describing the trouble he went through during his investigation: "Original research through numerous resources, including archives and depositories in six different states, has aimed to endow the novel with a definitive examination of the subject" (510).

Pearl is obviously very pleased with the research aspect of his work, but that is not necessarily what leaves the biggest impression on the reader. Poe himself becomes a minor plot in the story, compared to everything else that is going on; there is family drama, love trouble, and trilling action – all of this overshadows the fact that Poe is the red line through the plot of the story. Duponte's final solution to the riddle also seems a bit insignificant in comparison to the amount of work, effort and time that Clark and Duponte put into the investigation. This conclusion to Poe's real life mystery sounds like an educated guess by someone who has acquired basic knowledge of the subject, and these "original discoveries" made by Pearl, do not, in the end, seem to contribute much to the case.

5.3. Two Dupins

Since Poe is merely an "extra" in *The Poe Shadow*, Pearl does not appear to be obsessed with Poe in the way that Quentin Clark is. Pearl spent some time doing research for the historical accuracy of his book and finding a possible outcome for Duponte's conclusion, while Clark spent years searching for the answer, meanwhile risking his career and his love in the process. And what about Walsh? Was his work the result of an obsession with Poe? Based on the fact that Walsh has written books on various other people and mysteries, his obsession does not lie with Poe, even though he might harbour an obsession for mysteries. Despite Walsh's desire to investigate the unknown, he does not depict Gothic elements in his book; it is merely a compilation of facts put together and interpreted by Walsh. Pearl on the other hand uses many Gothic elements in his novel. The mystery of Poe fuels the protagonist of the book and his obsession results in a plot of crimes and secrets.

Both Walsh and Pearl do, however, show one common tendency; they both seem to put themselves in the shoes of Poe's detective Dupin. The way they assemble the evidence to form a cohesive story of what happened to Poe is identical to the method of Poe's intuitive

detective. Dupin assembles evidence unnoticed by others, as both writers claim to have done, and he pieces the evidence together, forming a story where the slightest details of the event is accounted for, even though it is impossible that Dupin could know these details from the evidence at hand. Both Walsh and Pearl show this tendency in their works. Pearl's Quentin Clark also eventually finds out that there actually is no real life model for Poe's Dupin. The famous detective was purely a fictional character. Despite that fact, Clark's friend Duponte does find the solution to the mystery of Poe which must mean that anyone can be his own Dupin, even Pearl himself.

Edgar Allan Poe has come full circle. Poe "the author" has been centralized in critical assessments of his works, Poe as a character has become the centre in the works of others, and now his fictional character has become a creative force through the minds of other writers.

Whether Walsh's and Pearl's theories are correct or not, is not relevant here. What is amazing is that these authors spent years of their time and energy, studying a death which occurred 150-160 years before these books were published. This ambition and effort is admirable and clearly demonstrates how it is possible to get caught in Poe's world of mystery.

6. Poe Remembered

Poe may be dead and buried but he is far from forgotten. His name continues to be heard for various reasons; for his works, for his influence on other writers, because of movies based on Poe's stories or works based on Poe's life – or death. On October 7th, 2009, Poe's name was once again on everyone's lips. That day was the 200th anniversary of Poe's birth.

The society of Baltimore decided that something had to be done to honour Poe's memory. Since his original funeral had been small, to say the least, it was time for Poe to receive a proper send-off. Therefore, 160 years after Poe's death, an enormous memorial was held in Westminster Hall, a former church located near Poe's burial site in Baltimore.

Everyone was invited and the event was so popular that it was decided that the ceremony would be held twice in the same evening (“Edgar Allan Poe to get...”). Around 350 people attended each ceremony. The memorial featured several exiting events. A mock up of Poe’s body was put on display, actors dressed up as writers from Poe’s time read eulogies, and impersonators of famous people influenced by Poe also made an appearance; for example Sir Alfred Hitchcock – the legendary filmmaker, and Arthur Conan Doyle – creator of detective Sherlock Holmes (“Edgar Allen Poe Gets...”).

These events were not only in themselves very remarkable. News of the events spread over the world, appearing for instance on various websites. What makes these reports so remarkable is that all over the world, people were not only talking about the memorial, they were talking about Poe.

As is the tradition with Poe, facts that are stated about him are often based on unreliable sources or they are the results of misconceptions and therefore often conflict with other statements. The truth of the matter is that some facts in relation to Poe have never been fully established, such as regarding the death of his father and the number of mourners at Poe’s original burial (Walsh 153). It is interesting to compare reports that mention how many people attended Poe’s first funeral. The numbers stated by various websites include a handful of people (Morris; “Edgar Allan Poe to get...”), ten people (Porkelsson), seven people (Guðmundsson; Kilgore), fewer than ten people (“Edgar Allen Poe Gets...”) and hardly anyone (“Edgar Allan Poe fær...”). Regarding Poe’s parents, one report claims that they died when Poe was three years old (“Edgar Allan Poe to get...”), while another website claims that his father left when Poe was one years old and that his mother died when he was two (Porkelsson). A great misunderstanding caused one blogger to become outraged over the fact that Poe’s body was being exhumed for the mere sake of entertainment (Kilgore). The same misconception prompted people to call Jeff Jerome, the curator of the Poe House and

Museum, and complain over the fact that Poe was to be exhumed for the ceremony (“Edgar Allen Poe Gets...”). Poe’s body was not exhumed for this memorial, although the body had once been removed before: in 1875 it was decided to move Poe’s remains from his unmarked grave to a better place in the corner of the cemetery. His grave was marked with a grand monument and the remains of his aunt, Mrs. Clemm, and his wife, Virginia, were also exhumed and reburied next to Poe (Holderman).

This hugely elaborate event, along with the press coverage, discussions and commotion that resulted from it, is a perfect example of the cultural phenomenon that Poe’s death has become.

7. Poe's World of Mystery

The world of Poe is a fascinating place and there is no wonder why so many people have been swept away by its charm. Poe's life has been accounted for many times, both by biographers and fictional writers, and he has become so well liked that everyone who knows him is prepared to defend his honour by those who call him a drunkard and a failure, just like Quintin Clark did in *The Poe Shadow*. Poe has captured and terrified his readers with his Gothic tales and through the movie industry new generations are constantly being re-introduced to Poe. The fascinating world of Poe is constantly growing.

The Gothic elements surrounding Poe have come together in the most surreal way. Perhaps there is a natural link between the Gothic elements in Poe's life and the Gothic tales that Poe wrote. Poe's life could easily have been a Gothic tale written by someone else; interesting and captivating, just like Poe's Gothic stories. The fact that Poe manages to give his life such an epic ending completes this marvellous trinity of the Gothic in Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe could easily have been forgotten. When he died he was poor, had alienated a number of people with his critiques, and had only had success with one of his literary work. Thankfully, Poe's brilliance was discovered before it was too late. Now, with the influence that Poe has had on the world of arts, the events of a memorial in celebration of his life, and the obsession left behind with Poe's mysterious death, the legend of Poe will not easily be forgotten. This cultural phenomenon that Poe's death has become, will keep Poe's memory alive for a very long time.

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