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INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales and the tales written by Edgar Allan Poe share a number of similarities and by these comparisons, it is possible to argue that Poe’s writings were influenced by the fairy tales. Poe does not simply just rewrite the tales using his own words; he has different reasons for writing than did the writers of the fairy tales, as well as a different audience. Poe revises and inverts the traditional goals and methods of the fairy tales in some of his stories through inversion of their themes, restructuring of their images and symbols, and manipulation of their purposes.

Edgar Allan Poe began his writing career in 1827 with a book of poetry. He wrote until a few years before his early death in 1849 at the age of 40 years. Poe was writing during the Romantic Period, which partially explains his use of nature and religion in his works. The majority of his works were written in Gothic style, a form of Romanticism. Gothic style differs from Romanticism because of its darker elements; the two styles of writing share the same core elements, such as emotion, natural sceneries, and the presence of supernatural forces, but Gothicism uses these in a more morbid setting.

The Gothic style of writing was common in literature that was written during the Romantic Period. Religion and sin play a large part in Gothic works. Insanity and mental decline are common elements of the Gothic style as well, as is romance that cannot thrive or end happily. Death and the speculation of what comes after are also common themes, as is the idea of deterioration. People decay both physically and mentally. Past places that stir nostalgia decay; memories of a happier past decay, and love decays. Gothic stories
tell the tales of people that endure these thoughts and feelings (“The Gothic Novel”). Poe wrote of these themes in the Romantic Gothic style. Poe’s life was unquestionably not an easy one, and so it would make sense to claim that the lack of happy endings in his stories, as well as the Gothic style of the majority of his works, is related to the miserable events that occurred during his own life.

It is important to first note some biographical information about Poe’s life in order to show how the events in his life correlate with the sadness that he experienced and how the events relate to the themes in his writings. According to the Cambridge Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe, Poe’s father left the family in 1811. His mother’s life ended due to illness at the age of twenty-four on December 10, 1811 (Quinn 45). Due to disagreements with various publishers, Poe did not spend much time with any one particular publishing firm; he also ruined his chances of gaining a government position in politics by showing up to the interview drunk. He made a few bad decisions pertaining to public intoxication that made him enemies and lowered his reputation. He married his cousin, Virginia Clemm, in 1836, but only six years into their marriage, Virginia showed signs of tuberculosis. The disease killed her in January of 1847 (Fisher 7). Her death caused an increase in his alcohol consumption; his alcoholism is also the reason that Sarah Helen Whitman broke off a relationship with him. “More than any other cause, hardships and worries regarding scanty financial means troubled Poe’s life” (Fisher 4). He published in periodicals that he did not particularly care for, solely because he was in dire need of money (Fisher 10). In his last year of life, he was engaged to Elmira Shelton, but he never made it back to Virginia to marry her. On October 3, he was found “lying
outside of Ryan’s Fourth Ward polls. Semi-conscious” (Quinn 639). He died four days later in the hospital after saying, “the fever called living was conquered at last” (Quinn 641). The cause of his death was uncertain: “Hypotheses run a gamut from stroke, to undiagnosed diabetes or hypoglycemia, to hydrophobia, to gradual poisoning from air pollution…” (Fisher 11). Even after his death, Rufus Griswold, an enemy of Poe during his life, wrote an obituary in which he stated that Poe “had few or no friends” (Quinn 646). Also, “Griswold dwelt, apparently with relish, on Poe’s destitution in 1847” (Quinn 646).

As the evidence from his past indicates, Poe’s life emulated Gothic themes, which are seen in his doomed romances, his family being broken apart by loss, his death at a young age, and his personally destructive behavior including alcoholism. Arthur Hobson Quinn’s Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography states that before Edgar Poe was born, his parents were both actors in plays in which pride, love, and death were the main themes (Quinn 50). Quinn then questions whether or not these themes may “have had any prenatal influence upon Edgar Poe,” but even if they did not, “the anxiety under which his parents were struggling may well have had its effects” (Quinn 28). Poe may have been interested in fairy tales because of the connections between the themes in the tales and the events that took place during his life. It is a widely accepted belief that people write about the things that they know, so one can infer that Poe’s life experiences and his knowledge of fairy tales influenced his works.
One may ask the question, “What exactly is a fairy tale?” This has been asked and generally agreed upon by folklorists, and one answer can be found in the works of D.L. Ashliman. In his book, *Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook*, he goes into detail about the classification system of all of the types of folk narratives that exist. Just as Ashliman states in his book, “The label *magic tale* is preferred by specialists, but *fairy* tale is by now thoroughly established in English, and I will not attempt to dislodge it,” the tales that are compared to Poe’s works in this thesis are not technically fairy tales, but will be called “fairy tales” (Ashliman 32).

The overarching title of all tales studied by folklorists is “Folk Narratives.” There are three subcategories that “folk narrative” encompasses: myths, legends, and folktales. Fairy tales are considered a specific form of folktales. Ashliman clarifies: “But strictly speaking, *fairy tale*, applied to such traditional tales as ‘Hansel and Gretel’ or ‘Little Snow-White,’ is a misnomer. These are tales of magic, but no fairies are involved” (Ashliman 32). According to Ashliman, a tale is only a “fairy tale” if there are fairies.

The phrase “fairy tales” and its use exemplify how language changes and modifies over time. According to Ashliman, “the term *fairy tale* came to England from France through an author whose name and works now are largely forgotten. Commencing in 1697... Madame d’Aulnoy began publishing volumes of fantasy stories under the collective title *Les contes des fees* (Tales of Fairies)” (Ashliman 31). Also according to Ashliman, Charles Perrault published in 1697 *Histoires, ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralitez*, or, *Stories, or Tales of Times Passed, with Morals*. In 1794, an American
edition of this publication was released with the title, *Fairy Tales, or Histories of Past Times, with Morals*. The Grimm brothers’ *Kinder- und Hausmarchen*, meaning children’s and household tales, “did not come to be known as a book of fairy tales until several decades after the work was translated into English” (Ashliman 31). Poe’s works can be compared to the tales of the Grimm brothers and to the other storytellers that wrote these fairy tales that folklorists have categorized.

One strong reason for comparing the works of Poe to storytellers and authors that came before him can be best justified by applying the theory of the American literary critic, Harold Bloom. Bloom believes that the themes found in poetry composed by authors of the Romantic Period were similar to the themes found in poetry of later authors. He believes that the reason for this is that the newer poets studied the works of the Romantic poets, and the themes remained subconsciously, and were revealed in the works of the succeeding writers in ways that they claimed were original. Claiming that the works of Poe express similar themes as fairy tales written years prior can be supported by Bloom’s theory.

Harold Bloom argues that poets are not capable of creating poetry using original ideas because the poetry of the “strong poets” (in Bloom’s opinion, these poets are Shakespeare, Milton, and Emerson) whom they studied is in their minds, influencing the ideas they are capable of creating. This lack of ability to create new and original ideas is the reason, according to Bloom, that the poetry of the early Romantic poets is so similar to the poetry of the poets that came after them. Bloom looks to Freud for support for his
argument: Freud’s theory of family romance is used to explain “the relations between poets” (Bloom 8). Bloom also cites Freud’s defense mechanisms as well as Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* as support for his argument. Freud’s defense mechanisms are what make up the “revisionary ratios,” meaning the ways in which the newer poet subconsciously imitates the works of his predecessor:

The great poets of the English Renaissance are not matched by their Enlightened descendants, and the whole tradition of the post-Enlightenment, which is Romanticism, shows a further decline in its Modernist and post-Modernist heirs. The death of poetry will not be hastened by any reader’s broodings, yet it seems just to assume that poetry in our tradition, when it dies, will be self-slain, murdered by its own past strength. (Bloom 10)

Bloom cites a quotation from Nietzsche’s *Of the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. In this essay, Nietzsche states that “The historical training of our critics prevents their having an influence in the true sense – an influence on life and action” (Bloom 49). This means that the works that future poets create are interpreted as criticisms of the original poet’s works; the works are not viewed as original poetry themselves.

Harold Bloom’s theory is reinforced by the ideas suggested by Jeffrey Meyers, a Poe biographer. Meyers writes, “Though Poe was always quick to accuse others of
plagiarism, his early stories reveal that he too cannibalized his literary ancestors” (67).

This supports Bloom’s theory that newer authors mimic the works of their predecessors by creating works with themes similar to the original works. Meyers continues:

He adopted four major conventions from the influential Scottish monthly, *Blackwood’s Magazine*: ‘the creation of a literary personality, the ‘self-consciously learned pose,’ the exploitation of the hoax, and the burlesque and horror tale as major fictional modes.’ In addition to borrowings from *Blackwood’s*, Tieck, Hoffmann, Coleridge and D’Israeli, Poe –early and late in his career –also appropriated material from Milton, Thomas Moore, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Thomas Hood, Elizabeth Barrett and Alfred Tennyson. As he told his fellow poet James Russell Lowell: “I am profoundly excited by music, and by some poem –those by Tennyson especially –whom, with Keats, Shelley, Coleridge (occasionally) and a few others of like thought and expression, I regard as the *sole* poets” (Meyers 67)

Meyers states that Poe believed there were original poets whose works acted as base models for the poets that came after. He says that “Poe, at once derivative and original, both absorbed and transformed the work of his predecessors. He recognized sympathetic temperaments in past writers and discovered in them forms of expression that could be reaffirmed and recreated” (Meyers 67).
This is relative to the study of the influence that E.T.A. Hoffmann had on Poe because Hoffmann was one of Poe’s predecessors, and Poe’s writings clearly mimic the themes and the style of Hoffmann’s writings. This is not to say that Poe’s works are not as worthy as the stories of the writers that he followed. Instead, the reason for this is because Poe’s works draw off of his personal experiences, not solely from the works of the storytellers that came before him. This additional motive for writing is the reason that his tales are not of lesser quality than the works of those that wrote before him, but serve as revisions to those works.

_The Influence of E.T.A. Hoffmann on the Tales of Edgar Allan Poe_, a study written by Palmer Cobb, states that “Poe's critics have from the very first connected his name and work with German romanticism” (Cobb 4). E.T.A. Hoffmann was one of Poe’s contemporaries who also wrote during the Romantic period, and he is considered a direct influence for Poe’s stories. Cobb claims, “English and foreign criticism has been almost unanimous in deciding that Poe was indebted to Hoffmann and other romanticists for material and for a standard of technique in the tale” (10). Hoffmann was the author of stories such as _The Nutcracker and the Mouse King_ and _The Sandman_.

Even Poe made it clear that his work was influenced by E.T.A. Hoffmann: “Poe acknowledges the kinship of his tales to those of Hoffmann, when he calls them ‘phantasy pieces’” (Cobb 6). Cobb states that his source believes that Poe took this title for his works after seeing a critic use the title in a description of Hoffmann’s _German Romance_. Gustav Gruener, the author of “Notes on the Influence of E.T.A. Hoffmann
upon Edgar Allan Poe,” suggests that the influence that Hoffmann had on Poe is evident in five Poe tales, including “The Fall of the House of Usher.” The setting for this tale closely mimics the setting for Hoffmann’s Das Majorat. The houses in the tale are described in the article as being “in the ancestral castle of a noble family, in a wild and remote estate near the Baltic Sea” (Gruener 16). In both the tale and Poe’s story, the houses are split into two; the owners of each of the houses are both named Roderick; the descriptions of the moon casting light on the house in the stories are also similar. In Das Majorat, the narrator describes the house: “Part of the castle was in ruins; and by its fall made a deep chasm, which extended from the highest turret down to the dungeon of the castle” (Gruener 16). Similarities are clear in Poe’s description of the Usher home: “that once barely-discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zig-zag direction, to the base . . . this fissure rapidly widened . . .” (Poe 277). It is clear Hoffmann is a major influence on Poe, as evidenced by these tale connections.

Gruener also suggests that a review of German Romance, written by Walter Scott, published in the Foreign Quarterly Review in 1827, was Poe’s influence for the title of his second collection of works: Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque. “Scott speaks of the ‘fantastic mode of writing’ and cites Hoffmann as the pioneer in this field: ‘He [Hoffmann] was the inventor, or at least the first distinguished artist, who exhibited the fantastic or supernatural grotesque in his compositions, so nearly on the verge of insanity as to be afraid of the beings his own fancy created. In fact, the Grotesque in his
compositions partly resembles the Arabesque in painting” (Gruener 14). Poe formed the idea for his next title after reading and liking Scott’s article (Cobb 7).

Cobb devotes the entirety of his sixth chapter to the comparison of Poe’s tale, “The Oval Portrait” and of Hoffmann’s tale, Die Jesuiterkirche in G. Cobb claims that both of the stories share a theme and a plot too similar for one not to have been influenced by the other: “The theme of both stories is the selfishness of art, and both authors have used exactly the same incidents to serve their purpose” (Cobb 72). In Poe’s tale, the author comes across a portrait, and the remainder of the story is told through the narrator’s reading of the history of the painting. The artist fell in love with a beautiful maiden, and he wanted nothing more than to paint her portrait. His wife was obedient, and so she sat still in the dark, unlit room while he painted the portrait of her. After so many weeks, the artist became so absorbed in his canvas that, as he looked up from his final painting, he said “This is indeed Life itself!” He also then realized that his wife was dead (Poe 384). In Hoffmann’s tale, an artist is only able to see the thing that he will paint in his dreams, until he “discovers the embodiment of his ideal in the person of a Neapolitan princess” (Cobb 76). After he begins a relationship with this woman and marries her, the artist loses interest in painting his muse and soon finds that he no longer even has the ability to paint. This angers the painter, and he takes his anger out on his wife, who then dies. It is not until after her death that he is capable of painting a lifelike portrait of her. Cobb explains, “In other words, the price of the success of the picture is the life of the model…the theme of both stories is the jealousy of Art as a mistress” (78). This comparison supports the argument that Poe’s tale shares the same themes as
Hoffmann’s, and it reinforces Bloom’s idea that writers revise the works of their predecessors.

The fact that Poe’s stories were written in a Gothic style shows a connection between his works and some original fairy tales passed down by oral tradition, to the tales that were recorded and revised by Charles Perrault and later, by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, and to original tales that were written by authors such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and Hans Christian Andersen. The Gothic themes of these tales are also common themes in Poe’s works, which is evidence that fairy tales influenced his works. The Gothic elements linking Poe’s stories to fairy tales are modified and supplemented with attention to the emotions of jealousy, revenge, love, and loss. Just as Hoffmann’s tales had these themes, Poe’s stories mimicked them, again supporting Bloom’s theory of influence.

Oral storytelling was an important part of the European culture particularly in regard to fairy tales, which originated as stories passed down orally. The importance of the oral storytelling tradition in fairy tales is acknowledged by Poe in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” In this story, the narrator decides to read Roderick Usher a story one evening, in an attempt to calm the man’s nerves. The book he chooses is entitled, “The Mad Trist” by a fictional author named Sir Launcelot Canning. In this story, a character named Ethelred attempts to enter a hermit’s home by breaking down the door with the use of his mace. As these events are taking place in the fictitious tale that the narrator is reading, they appear to also be taking place somewhere in Roderick Usher’s home. For a second time, as the narrator reads aloud: “Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the
head of the dragon, which fell before him . . . with a shriek so horrid and harsh . . . the
like whereof was never before heard,” that “I did actually hear . . . a low and apparently
distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound – the exact
counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon’s unnatural shriek
as described by the romancer” (Poe 275). Although startled, the narrator continues
reading:

And now, the champion…bethinking himself of the
brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment
which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the
way before him, and approached valorously over the silver
pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the
wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell
down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great
and terrible ringing sound. (Poe 276)

As soon as the narrator has read this passage, he states, “I became aware of a distinct,
hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled, reverberation” (Poe 275). Poe’s
purpose for drawing such close connections between the story being told and the actual
events that the narrator believed were taking place is to show the power that oral
storytelling can have over its audience. Voicing the story of Ethelred aloud had a stronger
impact on the audience’s imagination than reading to oneself would have had. Poe does
this in order to show that fairy tales that were passed down through the oral tradition had
the same effect on their audience. This also suggests that, for both Poe and the fairy tales, an oral recital can actually become a real occurrence. This lends to the element of the fantastic in both.

The fairy tales that were originally recorded by the Grimm brothers, as well as those penned by writers such as Marie de France, Charles Perrault, and Hans Christian Andersen, were not intended to be purely entertaining stories for children. Fairy tales have been passed on orally for hundreds of years, beginning with the myths of the ancients and continuing through the ages throughout Europe with different versions told depending on the country in which they originated and on the class of people by whom they were created (Ashliman 13). These tales were not originally meant to be considered as written literature; along with being told orally, sometimes these tales were originally meant to be performed live. Depending on whom the tales were intended for, the settings, morals, and events in the stories were religious, cautionary, or vengeful.

The stories written by de France and Perrault were written specifically for the “leisure class,” the wealthy, upper class of people, who had time to spend reading because hired help performed their necessary tasks. The set of fairy tales that originated in France during the 17th century were stories that were passed down orally by French peasants. They were supposed to be blunt and unambiguous. Charles Perrault modified the fairy tales that he collected for the bourgeois. He understood the need for symbolic language because wit and euphemisms were an important part of the stories written for
the people of that time. Perrault had a clear purpose for writing his tales; his purpose was to provide his readers with a moral. All of Perrault’s tales ended with a clear moral.

The stories that were written by Hans Christian Andersen spread a different, more self-serving message to their audience. One could argue that Hans Christian Andersen took a misogynistic approach to his writing; the reasons for this are implied by events that took place in his personal life. His stories are religious, with an emphasis on punishment for committing a sin, or for accepting paganism. A concept that is presented in Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy*, the contrapasso, or the belief that the punishment should fit the crime, is also presented in Andersen’s tales. Andersen’s works were literary compared to those of the Grimm brothers; they were original tales that were written with the intent to be read, not simply oral stories that were written down and revised.

Just as Poe’s tales share similar elements with Perrault and the Grimm brothers, his tales also share elements similar to those in the tales written by Andersen. Many of Andersen’s works had strong religious themes, and this can also be found in Poe’s stories, such as “Annabel Lee.” This suggests that Poe not only wanted to incorporate the power of oral storytelling in his work, but also to capture the different ways of expressing morality that would have been permitted by written literature.

The Grimm brothers compiled the largest collection of fairy tales of all of the storytellers mentioned here. Despite what some people think when they hear “original fairy tales,” the Grimm brothers were not the source from which fairy tales originated.
Initially, the fairy tales that were recorded by the Grimm brothers were oral stories that they collected from members of the lower, working class. The brothers rewrote the tales that they collected from the common people. Just as the oral storytelling tradition was important to the people that passed the tales down to each other, the written tales were important to the audiences they reached. Poe, like many Western authors, believed in the importance of recording works in order to preserve the stories indefinitely.

The first edition of *Children’s and Household Tales* was published in 1812. Revised editions were published between the years 1812-1857. The first edition of the book was a direct dictation of these originally oral stories. After the book was published and had gained popularity, the Grimm brothers noted the fact that the main audience was the children to whom parents were reading. Therefore, in subsequent editions of the book, the Grimm brothers revised the stories to include morals and lessons of right and wrong, in order to make the readings a bit more educational for the primarily child audience, and to appease the parents of the children that would be reading the book. Parents did not want their children reading the original tales that were crude and blunt, because childhood at the time that the Grimm brothers were writing had changed dramatically from what it was in the past. Children were no longer treated as miniature adults, but were instead coddled and treated more as children are treated today. For this reason, the Grimm brothers changed words and changed context. What they edited out in terms of sex, though, they did add in violence. This was meant to be used as a scare tactic; children would behave out of the fear of what happened to the character in the tale. They were taught that if they did not behave, they would meet the same fate. Christian
elements were maintained from the earlier versions, also for these reasons. Though Poe’s tales did not have an explicit moral, the theme was still clear to the reader. The Gothic elements that the Grimm brothers added into their subsequent editions of their collection of fairy tales are the same elements that Poe revised and expanded on in his own work.

Poe revised the purposes of these other authors by taking a similar approach to conveying his own purposes. Poe believed that tales should not have morals. This correlates to his belief in the “heresy of The Didactic” which he explains in his essay, “The Poetic Principle.” Poe maintains, “the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and mothering more—this poem written solely for the poem’s sake” (38). This statement explains why his revised tales do not explicitly state a moral at the end, unlike tales written by Perrault and the Grimm brothers. But the reason that a message is still able to be taken from some of the tales (such as “Never Bet the Devil Your Head”) is because his revisions of the tales were not purely conscious revisions. According to Bloom’s theory, it was not possible for a writer to create works original from their predecessors, and this shows that while Poe’s beliefs led his works in one direction, his experiences with works by other writers pushed them in another.

Perrault and the Grimm brothers included morals at the end of their tales; Poe did not. His messages were not always in the form of a few lines at the end of the story, but
were instead in the form of a clear message throughout the entire work that is easily understood by the reader. Just as Andersen included religious messages in his tales, Poe implicitly included religious ideas in some of his tales. Based on what we know of his lack of belief in the importance of morals, Poe may have felt that his audience did not need overt examples to understand his message. Also, just as some fairy tales were meant to entertain the luxury class, Poe’s tales were also meant to entertain his readers. Poe actively revised the approaches of his predecessors because he was writing to a different audience in a different time period.

The tales that will be discussed here are organized by theme, and there are three theme sections: love and loss, insanity and the supernatural, and vengeance and punishment. I intend to show that Poe has revised these fairy tales in ways that give his readers a more modern lesson in morality, although without abandoning religion, and also that he has revised them for the entertainment of his audience, which was different than the audience for the fairy tales.
CHAPTER I

LOVE AND LOSS

The first section will deal with the themes of love and loss. These themes are present in both Poe’s tales and also in fairy tales. Poe wrote about these themes because of his personal experiences with love and loss, and the fairy tales that have these themes were written with the purpose of empathizing with readers about the tragedies of life. Poe revises these themes, instead of writing generic stories of tragedy (like a fairy tale), by writing stories of tragedy that came from his personal experiences of love and loss. He uses these themes in a more personal way in his attempt to reach the reader.

One fairy tale that shares a similar motif with a Poe work is “The Little Mermaid,” written by Hans Christian Andersen. It can be compared to Poe’s poem, “Annabel Lee.” Both of these are related to the sea: the little mermaid originally lives in the sea, and Annabel Lee rests “in her tomb by the side of the sea” (Poe 87). Andersen uses the sea as the setting for his tale and uses it to show life emerging from the sea and into an immortal state of being in heaven. Poe uses the sea to show that life is ended by the sea, yet with a similar connection to an immortal state of being in heaven. Both of the tales share the same idea of eternal life, as well as the loss of love, but in accordance with his Gothic style, Poe arrives at that ending by taking a more morbid path.
The little mermaid’s tale begins in her father’s kingdom under the sea. In the fairy tale, mermaids do not have souls, but instead they live for three hundred years as mermaids, and then, they become foam that floats on top of the water: “We’ve no mortal soul; we shall never have another life…but human beings have a soul which lives forever; still lives after the body is turned to dust” (Tatar 224). A Christian marriage to a human male is the only chance that a mermaid has of gaining a soul and gaining access into heaven. The little mermaid is the only one with a lasting interest in becoming a human, marrying a man, and going to heaven. The other mermaids are meant to represent paganism; they accept that they do not have a Christian soul and that they will not go to heaven.

The conflict in the story begins when the prince of the human kingdom wrecks his ship, and the little mermaid rescues him. Although he does not remember her face, he knows that he was rescued by a girl. The mermaid then goes to the sea witch (in order to get legs), and the witch tells her that she must marry the prince, adding that if “you don’t win the Prince’s love . . . then you won’t get an immortal soul” (Tatar 226). After removing the little mermaid’s ability to speak, the sea witch gives her legs. The prince does not fall in love with her, and he marries another girl whom he mistakes for the girl who saved his life when he was in the shipwreck. But, the little mermaid has the opportunity to kill the prince and his new wife. She does not take it, and after that, she “hurled herself from the ship into the sea and felt her body dissolving into foam” (Tatar 231). But this was not to be the end of the little mermaid’s life: she becomes a daughter of the air. While mermaids are not able to determine the fate of their souls, daughters of
the air may. If they do enough good deeds, they can create their own immortal souls and “share in mankind’s eternal happiness” (Tatar 232). Well-behaved children also shorten the length of these daughters’ time in purgatory, and misbehaved children lengthen it.

The little mermaid is, from the beginning, the character who represents Christianity. She “worships” the humans and views them as higher beings, both literally and figuratively. She creates a shrine in her garden that includes a statue of the prince; this compares to the way that Christians worship God. The little mermaid is full of love and devotion, especially for the prince whom she has made her idol, and this is represented by the red flowers that grow in her garden (Tatar 220). Red is a universal symbol of love, and the fact that Andersen felt it necessary to include the detail of the color of the flowers is significant to the story. Andersen’s purpose for including this in the tale was to strengthen the image that the reader has of the mermaid’s love for the prince. The purpose of color symbolism in every instance that it is used is to create stronger imagery, strengthening the image that the reader has of the situation that has been presented. But the love that the little mermaid has for the prince is not romantic love, as she believes it is; it is a divine love. He is the embodiment of her idea of God. He is a false idol, but she does not yet realize this. She is not, at this time, aware that the being she intended to worship is an even higher being than humans. Choosing not to kill the prince and his new bride is the reason that the little mermaid was granted permission to become a daughter of the air with a chance to earn an immortal soul.
The inclusion of the last paragraph of this tale is important because it shows the moral for the children who read this story. It stresses, for children, the importance of behaving for one’s parents. If children do not behave, daughters of the air, including the little mermaid, will never be allowed to enter heaven. If a family was particularly religious, this bit of knowledge would likely have influenced a child’s behavior positively.

Poe’s poem “Annabel Lee,” though it shares the same themes as “The Little Mermaid,” differs from that tale in that it does not end happily for the narrator. Though in “The Little Mermaid” her love for the prince is lost, her love for God is so great that she goes to heaven, but in “Annabel Lee,” the loss of the narrator’s love consumes him for the rest of his life. The unhappy ending of Poe’s tale is how his tale differs from that of Andersen’s. This is a poem that tells the tragic, but spiritual story of the narrator’s lover. “But we loved with a love that was more than love—/ I and my Annabel Lee:/ With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven/ Coveted her and me” (Poe 86). She is ideal, and the love between the two is so perfect that even the angels in heaven are jealous. The narrator claims that the angels are so jealous that they sent a wind that chilled and killed his Annabel Lee. But, he believes that their love was stronger than any other love, and the angels would not be able to “ever dissever my soul from the soul/ Of the beautiful Annabel Lee” (Poe 87).

Annabel Lee can be compared to the daughters of the air in that she has a soul—one that will forever be tied to the narrator’s, similar to the type of soul sought by the
daughters. The hope of redemption is the underlying purpose for both tales. Annabel Lee’s soul is never going to die; it will live forever in the heart of the narrator. He dreams of her love when he sees the moon, sees her eyes in the shining stars, and sleeps nearest to her by the side of her tomb in the sea.

Though the story is a sad story of the death of the narrator’s love, the religious aspect of the story is what gives it its redemptive spiritual ending. The narrator’s assuredness that Annabel Lee’s soul is still alive is reassuring to the adult audience that there is certainly something better that will come after death. It is comforting to know this because, naturally, we fear the unknown. Having someone state that they are sure of what is to come next is better than not having any idea of what is to come. The little mermaid felt this same way—she did not want to die and become nothing but floating foam. She wanted to have eternal life in heaven, the same life that the narrator in Poe’s poem tells himself that Annabel Lee has. Poe’s different take on writing a story with themes similar to those of Andersen’s tale serves the purpose of reaching a different audience, and of focusing on the loss of love, a theme more appropriate to adults and less likely to be the focus in a children’s tale, where the reader is more properly directed to the religious aspect in its own right. Poe’s revision of the didactic moral directed toward children is clear here.

“The Raven,” a poem written by Poe in 1845, also shows Poe’s use of the themes of love, loss, and madness, with the purpose of reaching his adult readers emotionally, and expressing his emotions about his personal experiences. The poem tells the tale of a
narrator who has lost his love, Lenore. A raven enters his chamber and begins to speak to him. Throughout the poem, though, the only word that the narrator knows the raven is capable of saying is “Nevermore.” The narrator asks the unmoving raven questions that become increasingly specific, and because the only response that the bird gives is “Nevermore,” the narrator’s questions are (whether he realizes it or not—this is his insanity showing through) all questions to which the bird’s one-word response is unsatisfactory. The narrator begins by telling the bird, “Other friends have flown before / On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before” (Poe 73). The bird replies, “Nevermore.” Here, the narrator realizes that this is the only word that the raven knows. Once the narrator realizes this, he continues to ask the bird questions. The narrator tells the bird how difficult it is for him to forget his love, Lenore, and suggests that the angels sent the bird as “respite . . . from thy memories of Lenore!” (Poe 74). The bird again states, “Nevermore.” This upsets the narrator, but he then asks the bird if he will ever be reunited with Lenore. Again, and the narrator knows this will be the response, the bird states, “Nevermore.” The narrator is completely upset (and by now has reached full madness), and though he tells the bird to “quit the bust above my door!” the bird remains there, and the narrator feels as though his “soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor/Shall be lifted - nevermore!” (Poe 74).

The way that love is portrayed in this poem can be compared to the spiritual way that the narrator of Annabel Lee views love, and so in turn, connects to the way that the little mermaid is turned into a spiritual creature with a soul. Annabel Lee’s soul was so pure that it will always be tied by love to the soul of the narrator. In “The Raven,” the
narrator asks the raven to “Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn, / It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore” (Poe 74). This statement shows that the narrator believes that Lenore went to heaven, and her soul was saved. His soul will also be bound by love to his lover’s soul. Annabel Lee will always be a part of the narrator’s heart; Lenore will forever be in the narrator’s heart because his memories of her prevent him from ever being able to forget her. The little mermaid will earn a soul if she demonstrates enough love. This suggests that pure souls are created out of love, and the love shown in the two Poe stories supports this claim. Poe revises Andersen’s view of the soul in another way by not suggesting that the soul is something one can lose or gain. Though both female characters end up with a soul and gain admittance into heaven, Annabel Lee had a soul at all times; it was not something to be earned. Again, this moves the emphasis away from the didactic lesson of the fairy tale.

The narrator’s madness is a result of the loss of his love, Lenore. He is unable to cope with his sadness, so he spends his time sitting alone in mourning, trying to take his mind off of his sadness by reading. His attempt to put his sadness out of his mind is not the same as an attempt to manage his feelings of loss; his method is not enough to heal himself, so by allowing the pain to aggravate his thoughts and overpower every other emotion, he becomes susceptible to madness. This concern with madness is another place where Poe revises the original purpose of the fairy tales to fit his adult audience. Fairy tales would not have been concerned with madness because of their primarily child audience.
This state of mind is presented in numerous Poe tales, as it is an element in Gothic style writing. In the next section, comparisons between the insanity of Poe’s characters and the insanity of fairy tale characters will be made, and motives and their similarities will be drawn between the two types of tales.
CHAPTER II

INSANITY AND ISOLATION

In this second section, the elements of insanity and madness are examined in each of the following tales. Both are common elements in Gothic works, and Poe uses them as a means of echoing the events that took place in his life and sharing these events with his adult readers.

Insanity is an element closely linked to feelings of isolation: the main characters in each of the stories are driven to madness, and the cause of their mental decline is caused by their sense of isolation. Those around them do not understand the internal turmoil that these characters experience. This causes the characters to feel distanced from society and to lash out in rebellion at the lack of others’ understanding of their internal issues.

In both versions of the tale of Bluebeard, by Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, Bluebeard is a wealthy man, sometimes presented as a king, who has had many wives. His current wife is much younger than himself, and because of this, she feels she needs to obey him. Bluebeard does not know yet whether he may trust this wife. He decides to test her in order to determine whether or not she is trustworthy. When he leaves to go out one day, he gives her the set of keys and the instructions that she may invite her friends to visit, and they may enter any room they choose, except for one particular room. He tells her that he will return within a few days, and with that, he
leaves. As soon as the young wife hears that she is forbidden from entering that one room, there is nothing she wants more than to enter and discover Bluebeard’s secret. She has the keys, and eventually, the temptation proves too much for her to bear. She unlocks the door, and upon entering the room, she sees the corpses of Bluebeard’s former wives hanging from the walls. She is terrified and runs out of the room. She notices that the key that she used is stained with blood, but when she washes the key, the blood remains. The key has been enchanted. When Bluebeard returns, he asks his wife for the keys, and she tries to refuse him. When he forces her to relinquish them, he sees the blood on the key and knows that his wife disobeyed him and cannot be trusted. The wife meets the same fate as the rest of the young, curious wives before her.

“Bluebeard” is a fairy tale about adult secrets. It focuses on trust and fidelity as well as curiosity and humanity. The question that is raised by this tale is: how do you deal with your partner’s secrets? Bluebeard is not trusting of his wife; otherwise, he would never have tested her with the key. But, it is apparent that he had every right to distrust her because she was untrustworthy. She symbolically committed adultery by breaking her promise to her husband to remain out of the locked room. The wife did so out of curiosity; she simply wanted to know what secret her husband was keeping from her. In this way, the husband and the wife both kept secrets from each other, and as a result, neither one trusted the other. This is not a situation in which individual blame can be solely assigned; if a married couple, two people committed to one another for life, cannot trust one another, whom can they trust?
The Grimms’ version of the tale brings into question the authenticity of the marriage between Bluebeard and his wife. In the Perrault version, the marriage time is explicitly stated: “Immediately upon their return to town the marriage took place” (Zipes 732). The reader in this version is certain that the two were officially man and wife. But in the Grimm brothers’ version, the marriage is not described. All that is stated in the Grimms’ version of the tale is that “the maiden also felt frightened by it and resisted marrying him. But her father kept urging her, and finally she consented,” and “Then she got in the coach, sat down next to Bluebeard, and drove away with him” (Zipes 736). The reader is left wondering whether the marriage was real, or whether it is implied that Bluebeard is polygamous. This adds to the romantic aspect of the tale; there is a marriage, and the couple should be experiencing newly-wedded happiness, but instead, the characters are coping with a negative yet real marital issue.

“Bluebeard” has a clear connection to the ideas of insanity and of isolation in that the wife feels isolated in her marriage (secrets are being kept) and that Bluebeard’s insanity leads him to kill his wives and collect their corpses in a secret room. The purpose of Poe’s “The Raven” is the same as the purpose of the fairy tale; they are both stories meant to share with the reader a tale of how isolation causes insanity and possibly the idea that marriage is not always ideal. Though the purposes of the tales are the same, Poe revises “Bluebeard” by keeping with his Gothic style and changing the format of his tales to end in a different type of unhappiness than that in which “Bluebeard” ends for the wife.
Insanity is presented in “The Raven” in a less direct way, and more as an emotional crescendo that can be felt because of Poe’s diction. The rhyme scheme does not change throughout the poem, but the feeling of frenzy and the use of exclamation points increases with each stanza. This mimics how the seed of madness that was planted in the narrator when Lenore died fully develops into full-blown madness by the end of the poem.

Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” is an essay that was written by Poe in 1846 that explains how he believes worthwhile works of writing are created. In this essay, he uses his poem, “The Raven” as the example of his assumption that “A poem... should suit at once the popular and the critical taste,” which he follows with a set of criteria that are necessary for the creation of a good poem (22).

The first thing that needs to be considered is the length of the work. According to Poe, the limit to the length of any literary work is “the limit of a single sitting” (23). If the work must be read over the course of two or more sittings, then the unity of the work will be broken because “the affairs of the world interfere” (22). He continues by suggesting that “the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect: —this, with one proviso—that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all” (23). Poe chose to use “The Raven” because of his belief that the level of excitement of a poem, keeping in mind both popular and critical tastes, warrants about one hundred lines, and his finished poem is one hundred and eight (23).
The second criterion that needs to be met in order for literary work to be considered worthwhile is “the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed” (23). Poe claims that “Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem” (23). His reason is that “beauty is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul” and although other objects such as truth and passion are also objects that people desire to attain, they are both “more attainable through prose,” leaving beauty to be the best choice for a poem (24).

The third criterion for a good poem is the right tone, and “melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones” (24). After this necessity is recognized, the writer must determine what the refrain for his or her poem will be. Poe states that “the pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity—of repetition” (25). Poe then goes on to describe how he chose the word “nevermore” as the refrain for “The Raven.” He states that his refrain needed to be brief because “its application was to be repeatedly varied,” and so decided that it would be a single word (25). He then decided that his single-word refrain would need to include a long vowel and “the most producible consonant,” (o and r, respectively) in order “to have force” (25). For Poe, in the attempt to choose a word that contained these letters and that conveyed a melancholy tone, “it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word ‘Nevermore’” (25). He chose a macabre talking raven instead of a more comical parrot in order to “keep with the intended tone” (26).
Another aspect that reinforces the melancholy tone is, according to Poe, the death of something beautiful. He writes, “the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (26). In this section of Poe’s description, he explains how the narrator asks questions:

[He asks] half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture—propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which, reason assures him, is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but because he experiences a phrenzied pleasure in so modeling his questions as to receive from the expected ‘Nevermore’ the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow. (27)

A section of this essay explains Poe’s stand on originality of the creation of new poetry. He claims that “it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite – and yet, for centuries, no man, in verse, had ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing. The fact is, that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition” (28). Poe states that in addition to these qualities, “some amount of complexity. . . and some amount of suggestiveness” are needed, but not so much that there is and “excess of the suggested meaning” (31-32). Poe’s firsthand explanation of his opinion of good poetry helps aid in the understanding of the purpose of his own writings and helps to show the reason for his partial revision of ideas and form in the fairy tales.
Loneliness and insanity are also the main themes in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” In this story, Madeline Usher suffers from fits of catalepsy: “The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent, although transient affections of a partially cataleptic character were the unusual diagnosis” (267). Roderick Usher, Madeline’s brother, is also afflicted with mental illness: “The writer spoke of acute bodily illness—of a mental disorder which oppressed him” (263). These themes are used in the same way that they are used in “The Black Cat”—the characters’ insanity drives them to push others away and forces them to feel alone, which in turn makes them more insane, until they have pushed themselves to the very edge of sanity and commit a horrific crime from which they cannot return to normalcy. The crime will either cement them in their insanity, or it will end up being the cause of their demise. In the case of the Usher siblings, Roderick’s insanity is the cause of Madeline’s premature demise.

Insanity and isolation are also common themes in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” To the reader, it is clear that the narrator is insane, but throughout the story, he makes appeals to the reader stating that he cannot be insane because of the precautions he took after deciding to murder the old man with whom he lived. The narrator states, “You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work!” (445). When the narrator “leaped into the room,” the old man let out a scream, which would later provoke a visit from the police (447). He states, “In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired him
here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim” (448). Though the narrator begins his visit with the police very confidently, he soon begins to believe that he can hear the heartbeat of the old man buried under the floorboard, and he thinks that the police are able to hear it too. He believes that the police are mocking him by pretending not to hear the heartbeat. Soon enough, he is unable to control his anxiety any longer, and in a frenzied rage, he confesses his crime to the police by pulling up the floorboards and exposing the pieces of the corpse. It is likely that, as the murderous narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” cannot bear to be the sole person with the burden of the knowledge of his crime, Roderick Usher felt the same way, and in an effort to relieve himself of some of the feelings of isolation, he blurted out his wrongdoing. In addition to the feeling of isolation and its relation to insanity in this tale, there is also a supernatural element to this tale and the others that are similar to it in comparison.

In “The Raven,” the narrator asks the raven questions though he knows the bird only has one response. In “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the narrator’s guilt drives him mad enough to believe that he hears the beat of the dead man’s heart underneath the floorboards. In “The Black Cat,” perhaps in addition to interpreting the gallows-shaped pattern on the cat’s body as an isolated supernatural occurrence, one may argue that the pattern is more closely related to the internal madness that exists in “The Raven” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.” In “The Black Cat,” the narrator knew that the cat’s fur did not create a new pattern. Yet, he felt as though he had seen it change, when in reality it had not. The narrator did indeed feel guilty for his actions, even though he could not admit
this guilt. This was his mind’s way of coping with his remorse. This connection between
the three stories strengthens the claim that Poe’s tales dealt very heavily with the subject
of guilt and madness. Both Poe’s works and the fairy tales show a connection between
guilt and madness. Bluebeard’s insanity causes his actions, just as the insanity of the
characters in each of Poe’s stories caused their respective actions, but Poe’s presentation
of madness revises the way that “Bluebeard” is presented by creating the uncertainty of
whether the character is experiencing madness or supernatural activity. In “Bluebeard,”
there is no uncertainty that Bluebeard is insane; his actions are definite, which
emphasizes the didactic nature of the tale and its warning for a younger audience. Poe’s
addition of uncertainty revises the tale with a focus on the real ambiguity of adult
relationships.

Curses are also common elements in Gothic literature. Ghosts and the
supernatural are elements of Romanticism, which are also prevalent in its Gothic subset.
In “The Black Cat,” the reader can infer that there is a supernatural element to the cat that
followed the narrator home. The white patch on this cat “had been originally very
indefinite; but, by slow degrees – degrees nearly imperceptible . . . it had, at length,
assumed a rigorous distinction of outline . . . it was now, I say, the image of a hideous –
of a ghastly thing – of the GALLOWS!” (Poe 481). This shows that there is something
unnatural about this particular cat. It also foreshadows the cat’s future involvement in a
sinister event, which turns out to be the murder of the wife. The cursed cat is what
incriminates the narrator; the police would not have known otherwise that he was
involved in the wife’s murder, if it had not been for the howling of the cat behind the
wall. In Bluebeard, the key with which the wife unlocked the secret room was cursed by Bluebeard. The blood would not come off of the key after the wife disobeyed Bluebeard and used it. This curse incriminated the wife and there was no way that she could cover up what she did. In “Bluebeard”, this example of the supernatural is explicit. The cursed key is known to be cursed, and the use of magic in a fairy tale is undisputed. In Poe’s tale, the supernatural is questioned because his stories are written with the intent of appearing to take place in reality.

Curses are another common supernatural theme in Poe’s works, including “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and he sometimes uses them as an ambiguous explanation for his characters’ demise. There is a curse on the house of Usher that Poe never explicitly states, but which the reader is led to assume is mental illness. Each of the siblings has mental instability with which they cannot cope and which ultimately leads to their death. Madeline has an illness that makes her appear dead, and it is unclear whether Roderick is aware that she is still alive, but regardless, he decides that it is best to bury her in the family crypt. Near the end of the story, Roderick confesses that he has known for a while that they made the mistake of burying her alive: “[Y]es, I hear it, and have heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, I have heard it – …We have put her living in the tomb!” (276). She is not dead, and she comes back into the house, and at this time, the two siblings die in a very supernatural manner. The supernatural, another common theme in Gothic writing, facilitated in part by a half-dead Madeline, can be blamed for Roderick’s demise: “[T]hen, with a low moaning cry, [she] fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death
agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated” (Poe 276). Again, where Bluebeard’s madness is clear-cut and meant to teach a lesson, Poe’s use of it is more connected to the supernatural and uncertainty.

“The Black Cat,” like “The Fall of the House of Usher,” also shares Gothic elements with the Perrault and Grimm versions of the fairy tale “Bluebeard.” It tells the tale of a mentally unstable man who has a passion for animals. He also has a passion for alcohol. He has a black cat named Pluto whom he adores. When he comes home drunk one evening, he approaches his cat in too rough a manner and the cat bites him. This angers the drunken man greatly, and he retaliates by stabbing the cat in the eye, blinding him. The cat refuses to come near him any time after this night. The man eventually gets fed up with his cat’s loss of affection and begins loathing the cat. The man hangs the cat from a tree, and the cat dies. That same evening, the man’s house mysteriously burns down. On the wall of the house remains an imprint that is the shape of the cat. This is not the last of the unusual events that the man witnesses; a new cat follows him home one night, and it looks exactly like the cat that he killed. This cat is also missing one eye; the only difference is that this cat has a white patch on his chest. The man gives in to his love for animals and decides to take the cat home. Soon after allowing the cat in the house, the man realizes that this cat, too, is not friendly. The man believes that the cat is trying to cause harm to him. When the cat nearly trips the man and his wife down the cellar stairs, the man is overcome by anger and attempts to kill the cat with an axe. The man’s wife tries to prevent this, but she interferes too closely, and the blow from his axe kills her instead. The cat then disappears. The man feels incredibly guilty, but he decides that he is
going to bury her body inside of the walls of the cellar. When the investigators arrive, they cannot find any incriminating evidence against the man. On the final day of the investigation, the man feels as though he is about the get away with his crime. He is feeling so sure of himself that he mentions to the investigators how sturdy the walls of his house are. With that comment, he knocks on the wall, and all of the men hear a howl come from within the walls. The investigators tear down the wall, and behind it, they not only find the wife’s corpse, but sitting on top of her head is the black cat.

The Gothic style in “The Black Cat” invokes in readers a sense of terror at the gruesome events that occur and creates a sense of shock at the careless way in which the narrator copes with these events. Though, like Bluebeard, the story is about marriage and the question of fidelity, it is not meant to be a didactic story about love, even if it shares similarly unhappy consequences. Gothic stories that have in them themes of love and romance do not end well for the lovers, particularly in this case. Poe uses the word “horror” in the beginning paragraph of the story: “In their consequences, these events have terrified – have tortured – have destroyed me . . . To me they have presented little but horror” (476). The description of the narrator having “buried the axe in her brain” is a successful representation of horror, as is the perverse contradiction of the narrator’s love for animals and his apparent desire to murder them (477). The narrator also tells readers, “But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!” (477). His struggle with alcoholism is also a dark issue that plays a large role in his motivation and his seemingly contradictory actions and sympathies, but again, it is an adult theme more suited to his audience. More ambiguity is present in this tale as well. The narrator is not
always a destructive and angry person. He states, “From my infancy I was noted for the
docility and humanity of my disposition” (477). His alcoholism, which he admits is the
main source of his deterioration, is the cause of the change in his disposition, and also in
the change in his treatment of his pets. While he once was “especially fond of animals,
and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets,” he is no longer affectionate
towards them, but he is instead an abusive and negligent owner (477). Distancing
himself and cutting off his affection towards his once-beloved animals is one of the
causes of his seclusion that leads to his insanity. Again, this story is another example of
one of Poe’s tales that tell adult readers of his own life experiences.

The motif of aloneness is also common to both “Bluebeard” and to “The Black
Cat.” The narrator in “The Black Cat” is isolated and imprisoned within his own mind; in
the beginning of the tale, it is implied that he has either been called insane, or the police
that arrested him for the murder of his wife have marked him as insane. The implication
comes from the narrator stating that, “Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where
my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad I am not—and very surely do I not
dream” (476). He feels as though he is alone in the belief that he is sane: everyone else
has marked him as insane for his murderous actions, but he alone knows that that is not
who he is; the alcoholism is what drove him to temporary madness. This feeling of
isolation is also present in “Bluebeard.” The wife is left alone in the castle with nothing
but her thoughts and her curiosity as to what is in the secret, locked room. Her isolation
from her husband, both physically and emotionally, caused her to break his trust and
enter the secret room. Because there are secrets within his marriage, and he is not able to
trust his wife, Bluebeard has no one else to turn to but himself. This lack of fidelity and connection with loneliness could account for his actions just as much as the narrator’s aloneness and the struggle with alcoholism accounted for his actions in “The Black Cat.”

There is also ambiguity pertaining to relationship roles in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” The narrator states, “I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them” (272). Madeline and Roderick Usher are twins that live together in the house that has belonged to their family for many years. The two siblings are the only people left living in that house and have been alone, albeit with one another, for many years. There is no outright statement that their relationship is incestuous, but there are implications that suggest it. She is described as “a tenderly beloved sister his sole companion for long years, his last and only relative on earth” (267). Also, according to Dr. Renata Wasserman, a professor at Wayne State University, “a considerable body of criticism on Poe's ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ has clustered around the theme of incest” (33). The ambiguity of this relationship is related to the uncertain authenticity of Bluebeard’s marriage. The more implicit a tale is, the more room for interpretation there is left by the author. This allows the reader to form a personal opinion of what happens in reality in the tale. Not having every detail of the story adds to the mystery of the tale, and as discussed previously, the unknown is something that is feared by all. Not having all of the information allows for this sense of the unknown to permeate through the story and into the reader as he or she understands the tale.
Another very clear similarity between “The Black Cat” and “Bluebeard” is the death of both wives and the secretive location of their corpses. The wives are both murdered, and rather than being buried, they are hidden away in the recesses of their own homes. Instead of the existence of secrets between the two people in a marital relationship, both of the wives can be considered secrets themselves. They are secrets that their murderous husbands kept from their wives, as in “Bluebeard,” or from the police, as in “The Black Cat.” The secret is revealed to the distress of the husband—Bluebeard’s wife found his previous wives, and she was severely punished for discovering his secret. In “The Black Cat,” when the narrator’s secret was discovered by the police, the punishment fell on him, and he was “consigned to the gallows” (483). Neither of the husbands feels particularly remorseful over his homicidal actions. The narrator of “The Black Cat” states: “My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little” (482). The man felt more relief about the disappearance of the black cat than he felt guilt towards the murder of his wife. What differs in the Poe story, and what shows him revising the fairy tale, is the connection to adult themes. In his story, Poe exemplifies the effect that alcoholism had on his once “docile and humane” character (477), providing an explanation for his actions even if he feels no real remorse. Bluebeard did not feel remorse towards his actions either; he had an entire room filled with the bodies of not just one accidentally murdered wife, but all of his previous wives who disobeyed him and destroyed the chances of achieving his trust. But in the case of Bluebeard, the lack of remorse is never given an explanation.
Destruction is the main Gothic element that unites each of these stories. In “The Black Cat,” the narrator’s cheerful and caring disposition was destroyed by his struggle with alcoholism. Pluto’s eye was destroyed by the narrator’s fit of anger. The narrator’s wife was literally destroyed by his axe. The remainder of his life was destroyed by the discovery of his wife’s corpse made by the police. In “Bluebeard,” his potential trust in his newest wife was destroyed, as well as his trust in all of his previous wives. His entire marriage to his wife was destroyed, and even his secret was destroyed. It may be of importance to note that, in Greek mythology, Pluto was the god of the underworld, and just like the cat in this tale, Pluto the god was thought to be responsible for the fate of man.

There is another relation to hell (besides the Plutonian underworld) that is made at the end of the story: “a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and the demons that exult in the damnation” (483). This focus on the punishment of the damned is a Gothic element that is present in other fairy tales, such as “The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf.” It is also present in other tales of Poe; he wrote a tale entitled “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” whose similarities to “The Girl who Trod on the Loaf” will be compared in the section.
CHAPTER III

VENGEANCE AND PUNISHMENT

“The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf” is a fairy tale written by Hans Christian Andersen. This tale is about a young girl, Inger, who takes for granted the things that she has been lucky enough in her life to receive. She is vain and feels self-entitled, and that is not the proper attitude for a person, let alone a young girl, to have, particularly in a fairy tale that is meant to teach a young audience. She is given a loaf of bread to bring on a visit to her parents whom she has not seen in eighteen months (she was too lazy to have visited before that) and rather than allow her shoes to get muddy, she lays the loaf of bread on the ground and attempts to use it as a stepping stone. Instead of successfully crossing, she is stuck to the loaf and ends up sinking through the ground and eventually into hell. On her way there, she must endure entirely disgusting things, such as the marsh-woman’s brewery: “a cesspit is a gay palatial apartment compared with the marsh-woman’s brewery” (Tatar 236). The devil’s great-grandmother decides to take her into hell as a statue for her great-grandson’s entrance hall. The narrator states, “She had no respect for God’s gifts, but trod them underfoot; the door of mercy will be hard for her to open” (238). Inger does not learn her lesson in hell, but instead, she grows even more bitter towards the people who do not sympathize with her situation and believe she deserves to be punished. It does not change until a young girl pities her, and at the end of her life, asks God to grant mercy on Inger. Inger becomes a bird, and she understands that the gates of mercy will be opened for her once she has done a good deed. By the end of
winter, she has sacrificed enough breadcrumbs for the other birds to eat so “that the weight of them all would have equaled that of the whole loaf that Inger had trodden on” (241). She becomes a white tern, and “they said that it flew straight into the sun” (241). After so long in hell, once Inger accepted responsibility for her mistakes, she was finally granted mercy.

Inger sins in a number of ways in this tale. She breaks the commandment that states “Honor thy mother and thy father;” she is vain, and pride is one of the seven deadly sins; she takes for granted the loaf of bread, which is God’s gift; she victimizes the insects, by which one can believe that she is playing God—controlling the fate of these creatures, and disrupting the way that God intended the insects to live. This portrayal of sin was Andersen’s method of pushing Christian ideas on his young audience, scaring them into behaving according to religious values.

Inger’s punishment in this tale fits her crime, but this is not the first time in literature that a punishment is given to fit the crime. Dante Alighieri uses contrapasso as the form of punishment for the sinners that live in Hell in the Divine Comedy. In The Inferno, the spirits that have gone to hell all suffer a punishment that will torture them for the remainder of their existence because it is related to the sin that they committed on earth and which sent them to hell. In Andersen’s tale, Inger sees that all of the people in hell are being punished with a Dante-style contrapasso: the punishment fits the crime. Inger, who is standing on the loaf of bread that she took for granted, will be perpetually hungry in hell. On earth, Inger was vain and wanted people to notice her. In hell, they are
all staring at her, but the reason is that “her clothes seemed to be smeared over with one great blotch of slime;” and “a snake had got caught in her hair and was dangling down her neck” (Tatar 237). She will also be blinded by flies that cannot fly away because their wings have been pulled off. The reason for this is because as a child she pulled the wings off insects for her own entertainment. Again, the punishment fits the crime: a simple lesson for a young audience to digest.

Poe’s tale, “Never Bet the Devil your Head” is similar to this story in that the character receives a *contrapasso*, and the punishment is also issued by the devil. The ideas of hell, evil, and conceit are prominent in both of these stories, and they are presented in parallel ways. Also, both tales have a moral, which is not always the case for Poe’s works or the fairy tales. It is possible that the reason that Poe’s tale is so similar to Andersen’s tale is because he felt that the religious angle of the tale was effective in conveying the moral of the story and he wanted his story to have the same effect, but there is significant revision in Poe’s work as well. Poe’s tale offers an adult way of stressing the religious angle that a child’s fairy tale would not: his tale ends badly for the character that is being taught a lesson. Inger, the character in Andersen’s tale intended for children, is allowed to redeem herself and her tale ends happily.

In Poe’s tale, the narrator describes an acquaintance, Mr. Dammit, as having a vice. Mr. Dammit “had contracted a propensity for cursing and swearing, and for backing his assertions by bets” (366). “It was usually…’I’ll bet the Devil my head’” (367). One day, while walking with Mr. Dammit, the narrator comes across a covered bridge with a
turnstile inside. The narrator pushes through it, but Mr. Dammit “insisted upon leaping the stile and…he straightaway offered to bet the Devil his head that he could” (369). In the meantime, the narrator notices an old man nearby who continues to clear his throat. The old man approaches Mr. Dammit to shake his hand and says, “I am quite sure you will win it, Dammit, but we are obliged to have a trial, you know, for the sake of mere form” (370). Mr. Dammit does not successfully make it over the turnstile; instead, he collapses to the ground. The old man goes over, picks something up, and then limps away. The narrator notices that it was Mr. Dammit’s head that was taken by the old man, who apparently must have been the devil himself. The handshake between the old man and Mr. Dammit signifies “sealing the deal” with the devil.

This tale is one of Poe’s satirical tales because throughout the tale, he is facetiously commenting on transcendentalism. This is the interpretation that a number of literary critics have of this tale. At the end of the tale, he states that because the transcendentalists never paid him for the burial of Mr. Dammit, he dug his remains up and sold them as dog’s meat. This is a good interpretation based on the not-so-subtle implications Poe makes about the Transcendentalists, but there is a more important aspect of this tale that accounts for the connection that it makes with fairy tales, and that aspect is not discussed by those critics. It is also important to note that, Emerson (a writer much admired by Harold Bloom) was a leader in Transcendentalism. Poe is satirizing Emerson and his ideas, and is doing this by revising the purpose of writing for Transcendentalism; Emerson wrote about his ideas as a way of life, and Poe writes about them as something at which to be laughed.
Poe’s stories are able to have a moral while at the same time be satirical because he had the dual purpose, in this case, of entertaining his audience with adult skepticism, while at the same time ostensibly pushing toward some moral lesson. Not only is he taking the opportunity to satirize Transcendentalism, he is also taking the opportunity to warn readers not to make bets greater than ones on which they are capable of following through. Again, the ambiguity in Poe’s revision is what makes it stand out from the fairy tales.

This tale shows that it is not acceptable to take for granted a thing that you have—even if it is something as crucial to life as your head. Do not bet things that you are not willing to follow through on relinquishing if you do not win the bet. Ultimately, do not be conceited. This is the same lesson that Inger had to learn in “The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf.” The moral of both of these tales is the same. The reason that the fairy tale has a much more uplifting and spiritual ending is likely the result of its audience and purpose, as compared with Poe’s story, which changes those things, but also reflects Poe’s unhappiness in his own life. It is likely too that the reason for this is Poe’s rejection of the legitimacy of Transcendentalism. The majority of his tales do not share happy endings; instead, they usually clearly state the moral of the story with an example of what will happen if one takes the same actions as the character in the story. One can be led to consider that Poe did not believe in happy endings because such a thing did not exist for him. This is another example of the way Poe revised tales written before his time in order to fit his own definition of isolation from the way things were. Though the same moral is presented to the readers of each of these stories, the lack of sharing religious themes is
clear, and this is also signified by the colors that are noted in “The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf.”

The color of the tern that Inger becomes is white. The color white symbolizes purity and piety. The reason that Inger has been transformed into a white bird is because by apologizing and realizing her sins, and by redeeming herself by doing good deeds, she has purified herself and is now worthy of being granted entrance into God’s kingdom of heaven: something that only the pure and pious are granted. This religious theme of redemption is not present in Poe’s tale, but other religious themes are still present in his tale—sin and the possibility of being punished by being sent to hell for committing a sin.

Conceit is a form of pride, and that is one of the capital sins. Ultimately, Poe’s moral to the reader is the same moral of “The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf:” commit the sin of pride, and you will be punished accordingly and sent to hell. The reason that Andersen’s tale has a happier ending than that of Poe’s tale is likely because of Poe’s personal experiences; again, not much ended happily in Poe’s life. This is most likely the reason why his tales end unhappily. Andersen’s strong religious views also attributed to the focus on redemption that is present in his tale. It is not present in Poe’s tale because his own choices in life left him with no chances for redemption, and people write about what they know. Poe’s feelings about Transcendentalism also play a part in the explanation of why he does not take the morals from this story as seriously as Andersen did. Poe’s intent was not solely to write a moral tale. He also wanted to write a piece that
satirized Transcendentalism, and by doing so, this story, as satire, cannot be a vehicle for simply promoting morality.

In other situations, fairy tales add jealousy to the topic of vengeance. A fairy tale titled, “The Juniper Tree,” written by the Grimm brothers, tells a tale of revenge and jealousy that is very similar to the tale of Snow White. (The main difference is the gender of the protagonist in the tales). The themes in this fairy tale closely relate to the jealousy and revenge that are portrayed by Poe in “The Cask of Amontillado,” but again, Poe treats jealousy in revised ways.

“The Juniper Tree” is a tale about the jealousy that a stepmother feels towards her young stepson. She cannot love him as her own, so she lures the boy into the chest where apples are kept, and once he is bent over the chest, she slams the lid down and severs his head. She intentionally leaves the boy’s body for her daughter to find, and when the girl slaps her brother for not sharing his apple, his severed head falls completely off of his shoulders. The girl believes she has killed her brother. Her mother stews the boy and feeds him to her husband. The girl mourns her brother’s death and buries his body. Meanwhile, a bird appears and sings his song in exchange for a gold chain from the goldsmith, a pair of red shoes from the shoemaker, and a millstone from the miller. Back at the house, the family hears the bird’s song and one by one goes outside to listen. The bird drops the gold chain around the father’s neck, the red shoes near the daughter, and the millstone on the stepmother’s head, which kills her. Magically, the bird turns into the little boy, and the father, daughter, and son go back to living a happy life, without the
stepmother’s presence. This story tells its young audience that revenge does not have to be an evil thing; getting revenge can be done in a justified manner. This differs from Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” in that Poe’s idea of vengeance is less noble and justified, and as with other themes Poe addresses, more ambiguous.

“The Cask of Amontillado” takes place during Carnival, in Italy. As a result of the abundance of alcohol at the festival, the character Fortunato is already drunk. The main character, Montresor, believes Fortunato “ventured upon insult,” for which Montresor “vowed revenge” (666). After taking the time to decide how he is going to go about enacting his vengeance (a testament to the insanity of another of Poe’s characters), he decides to lie to Fortunato in order to get him alone in his catacombs where his wine is stored. He does this by stating that if Fortunato will not help him by sharing his expertise on a new cask of wine he has acquired, he will go to Luchesi, whose knowledge of wine is less than Fortunato’s. Fortunato agrees, and follows Montresor into the catacombs. There, Montresor tells Fortunato that the wine is in one of the recesses. Once Fortunato stumbles in, Montresor locks him into the shackles that are suspended from the wall and begins building up a brick wall in front of the recess. As Montresor builds the wall, Fortunato sobers up and realizes what is happening. After briefly panicking, Fortunato tells Montresor that they will all laugh about this joke later. This is his last attempt at getting Montresor to come to his senses. After this, he is silent and refuses to verbally respond to Montresor’s call. After this, he merely rattles the chains by which he is bound to the wall as Montresor calls his name a final time before turning around and leaving the catacombs.
The intensity of Montresor’s anger towards Fortunato blinds him to reason causing him to lose sense of what should be a sane reaction to an insult. Montresor states, “I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed – I aided – I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamorer grew still” (671). He continues, “My heart grew sick – on account of the dampness of the catacombs” (671). Montresor does not feel any remorse for his actual crime. Instead, he clarifies that the sickness of heart he felt, that might be mistaken for remorse, was only caused by the atmosphere of the catacombs. This lack of remorse only further proves the man’s insanity. “I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them” (Poe 671). Montresor states that fifty years have passed, and he has not been charged with the murder, and Fortunato’s body is still buried in the walls of his catacombs.

The stepmother in “The Juniper Tree” is the character that represents jealousy and the bird in this story is the purveyor of revenge. The jealousy that the stepmother feels toward her stepson is the reason that she kills him. Her method of killing him is similar to the narrator’s method of killing Fortunato in “The Cask of Amontillado.” Montresor murders his victim because he feels the need to avenge the “thousand injuries of Fortunato” that he had endured. Both of the murderers lured their victims to the cause of their death by tempting them with their personal desires. The stepson is lured to the chest by the promise of an apple, and Fortunato was lured to the narrator’s catacombs by the promise of the Amontillado stored there. Once lured to these places, they are vengefully murdered. Though a main character exacts revenge in both tales, Poe revises the fairy tale version of justice by allowing evil to get away with revenge. In “The Juniper Tree,”
the boy is good, and good overcomes evil. In “The Cask of Amontillado,” Montresor and Fortunato have wronged each other, yet Montresor’s vengeance outweighs Fortunato’s crime, and Montresor goes free. Montresor is a proud man, and vengeance is usually carried out by those with a strong sense of pride, which is a supporting theme in each of the following stories. These stories will reinforce the idea that Poe does not believe that justice and revenge coincide.

These next three tales (“The Emperor’s New Clothes,” “Hop-Frog,” and “The Masque of the Red Death”) feature the mocking of an upper-class character, due to a disapproval of his or her elitist actions. The theme of pride is clear in each tale; the noble character believes in a different way in each story that he is better than the commoners. In each of these tales, a figure of royalty exhibits disrespect towards those of lower social status, and in the end, each king or prince (depending on the tale) is fooled by those who he has disrespected. The emperor is fooled by two common tailors; the king is fooled by the jesters, and Prince Prospero is fooled by the disease that is running rampant amongst the common people that do not have the ability to hide in an abbey. This suggests that while Poe feels differently about the relationship between justice and vengeance, he follows tradition when it comes to the matter of the interactions between social classes.

In, “The Emperor’s New Clothes” written by Hans Christian Andersen, the king is a vain man who takes great pride in his appearance. Two tailors decide to take advantage of the king’s vanity and tell him that they are capable of producing an outfit that is of such good quality that it appears invisible to “anyone who is too stupid and incompetent
to appreciate its quality” (Andersen). After requesting the material needed to make the outfit, including gold thread, they set off “to work.” When they show the king the finished product, he is unable to see it; therefore he comes to believe that he himself is one of the stupid and incompetent. When the king tries it on, the two tailors tell him that the people of his kingdom have heard of his beautiful outfit and want to see the king in it. He is somewhat reluctant to stand before his people when there are bound to be stupid people in the crowd who would see him naked, yet he agrees to do it. The crowd is disappointed to see that the king is not wearing anything at all, but for fear of appearing stupid and incompetent, “Everyone shouted, loud enough for the others to hear: ‘Look at the Emperor’s new clothes! They’re beautiful!’” (Andersen). The only person that did not pretend to see the outfit was a young boy, who instead states, “The Emperor is naked” (Andersen). As soon as the boy says what everyone else is thinking, the rest of the crowd admits that they do not see an outfit either. The king is embarrassed that the people see him standing naked in front of them, but he continues to pretend that he is clothed, and pretends that the entire crowd is stupid as he sheepishly finishes parading through the crowd.

In this fairy tale, the king is the character used to deliver the moral. Andersen meant to convey to the reader the negative consequences that are associated with pride and to reinforce the need for a sense of humility. The king is initially fooled because of his vanity and his curiosity over the things that feed it. Once he has put himself in this position, he cannot tell others that he does not see the outfit because he does not want to appear as one of the stupid people. This leads to the further embarrassment of revealing
to the entire crowd that he has been fooled into giving the two tailors the gold they
required to create the outfit which leads to him nakedly displaying himself to his public.

Poe revises the outcome and moral of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” in “Hop-
Frog: or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs.” In this tale, the king shows disrespect
towards those who are of lower social status. He makes fun of his jester, whom he calls
“Hop-Frog,” because of the limp with which he walks due to his dwarfism. The king and
his council take advantage of the fact that Hop-Frog and his friend, Trippetta, have to
obey his orders in order to keep their jobs. At a masquerade, the king, knowing that
Hop-Frog has a low tolerance for alcohol, orders him to drink multiple glasses of wine. Hop-
Frog can do nothing but obey, so he drinks the wine. The king then insults Trippetta in
front of the entire group by throwing a glass of wine in her face. This angers Hop-Frog,
so when he is asked to invent the entertainment for the king and his council, he chooses
to avenge Trippetta.

Hop-Frog tells the king and his council that they are going to dress up as
“Ourang-Outangs” by outfitting themselves with tar and flax. He says, “I will equip you
as ourang-outangs . . . The resemblance shall be so striking, that the company of
masqueraders will take you for real beasts—and of course they will be as much terrified
as astonished” (698). Since none of the nobility has seen an orangutan, it is easy for Hop-
Frog to convince them that that is how one looks. He then tells them that they will be
chained: “The chains are for the purpose of increasing the confusion by their jangling”
(698). Once the group is fully dressed in their costumes, Hop-Frog tells them to go into
the ballroom and that the guests will be shocked to see them. The group does, and once there, the masquerade guests question who they were. Hop-Frog volunteers to go up to them and see. In the meantime, a hook from the chandelier has been lowered and has been hooked into the chain that connects the king and his council. They are hoisted into the air and are suspended from the ceiling. Hop-Frog climbs atop them with a torch, pretending to get a closer view of them, and when he comes to the king, he touches the king’s flax with the torch. Hop-Frog gets his revenge by telling the entire party that the victims are “a great king and his seven privy-councillors,—a king who does not scruple to strike a defenceless girl, and his seven councilors who abet him in the outrage” (701). He then states that this is his last jest, and soon, the entire group is being burned alive while Trippetta and Hop-Frog escape from the roof.

One message that Poe meant to convey to his readers through this tale is that pride and arrogance both result in negative consequences. The king’s deliberate display of disrespect towards Trippetta leads to the revenge of Hop-Frog. The king’s ignorance towards the jesters’ feelings only exacerbates Hop-Frog’s anger and is similar to the emperor believing in the stupidity of those he ruled. The singular difference (and thus the way Poe revises) between this tale and the fairy tale is the morbid method of the resulting consequence which the nobleman endures, but the lesson learned is the same. This is another example of Poe revising the fairy tale in order to suit his more adult audience.

“The Masque of the Red Death” is another Poe tale that takes place among a group of nobility. Poe’s narrator states, “The external world would take care of itself. In
the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure” (385). Though he should be concerned for the welfare of the entire population, Prince Prospero and a group of “a thousand hale and light-hearted friends” avoid the Red Death by hiding in his abbey while the rest of the world that does not have the means of staying in hiding suffers the epidemic plague known as the Red Death (384). The disease is called this because “there were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores . . . and the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour” (384). In order to entertain themselves while they are waiting out the plague, they hold a masquerade ball and decorate seven rooms of the abbey lavishly, each a different color. Six of the rooms are done in bright colors, but the seventh room is black and “scarlet—a deep blood color” (384). In this room is a large, black clock that, when it strikes the hour, disconcerts the guests and causes silence to come over the entire abbey. The ball continues in this way until midnight, at which time the music stops and the presence of a figure shrouded in black is noticed for the first time. The narrator describes the figure: “The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse . . . but the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death” (387). Prince Prospero is insulted at this and demands to know who it is so he may be hanged. Yet out of fear, no one stops the figure from continuing to pass through each of the other rooms, stopping in the scarlet room. The Prince follows him in, and as he lifts his dagger, he drops dead. A group of people then attack the figure and tear off the shroud. When the figure is uncovered, the narrator states that they “gasped in unutterable
horror at finding the grave-cerements and corpse-like mask…untenanted by any tangible form” (388). Everyone has now realized that this is the Red Death, and “died each in the despairing posture of his fall” (388).

This tale continues the revision of the tales by emphasizing Gothic conventions, including the supernatural elements that are present in Poe’s works. The fact that the cloaked figure is not revealed until the end as not being a human (instead being the literal Red Death) is a clear example of supernatural instance. Also, the Red Death is not a physical embodiment of a person of a lower social status, but it is a disease that is affecting the commoners that do not have the capacity to protect themselves in the same way that the nobility are able to do. The macabre way in which every one of the guests dies is also indicative of Gothic conventions not present in the fairy tales. Just as the selfish and proud nobility are punished for their actions in the other stories, they are also punished in this one, in a way similar to that of those in “Hop-Frog.” Both of Poe’s tales end with gruesome deaths plotted out for the nobility. In “The Masque of the Red Death,” there is a real costume without a man, while in “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” there is a real man without a costume. This is another example of Poe revising a fairy tale by attending to Gothic conventions while simultaneously altering the moral purpose of the original.
CHAPTER IV

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

One last area in which to compare Poe’s works with the fairy tales that influenced them is the focus in both on the fear of the unknown. If one chooses to look more deeply into the connection to real events that were taking place during the time that “Bluebeard” was written, a historical approach may assist interpretation. The version of this tale that was written by Charles Perrault was written during the time that the Ottoman Empire was in power. An argument could be made for an underlying “Islamic vs. Christian” subtext in “Bluebeard.” The French, as well as most other Europeans, felt strong ties to Christianity during this influx of Islam, and because people fear that which they do not understand, Europeans felt intimidated by the exotic nature of the Islamic customs (Said).

One can argue that Bluebeard is modeled after a Muslim man. At the time, the hair color of Muslims was presented as more strikingly different than that of many Europeans. Their black hair was so dark that it appeared to have a blue tint. This is why Bluebeard has the name he does. Also, in the Perrault version of the tale, the wife’s brothers are musketeers and wear large crosses on their chests, as part of the uniform. They also carry straight swords, compared to the more exotic-looking cutlass that Bluebeard wields. The contrast between them and the killer is clear. In the tale, Bluebeard’s Muslim background is stressed in order to exaggerate the sense of dread and horror of something unknown. This portrayal of horror and fear of the unknown (in this case, fear of the unknown culture) is what lends to the Gothic style of this tale. Like Perrault with “Bluebeard,” Poe
uses fear of the unknown (another prevalent Gothic element) in a way suited for the people of his time that feared the unknown customs of people unlike themselves. He plays off the xenophobia of others in order to establish the nature of his characters. Poe’s “One Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherezade” closely relates to the idea of fearing the unknown that is present in earlier tales. Here, Poe revises *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Unlike Poe’s other tales, it deals not so much with loss, insanity, or vengeance, but instead deals with an important social topic of the time: Orientalism (which is directly tied to fear of the unknown).

*One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* was a collection of tales originally passed down by oral tradition in the Eastern hemisphere. The original purpose of this set of tales was for the entertainment of the readers. The premise of these tales is that there exists a king who, because he believes all women to be unfaithful, marries and then kills each of his wives the day after their wedding (similarities to Bluebeard are clear). None of his previous wives have survived their wedding night. When he marries Scheherazade, he plans to kill her as well, but she is a more intelligent woman than the previous wives. She tells her sister to sleep in the room with herself and the king, and throughout the night, she tells a tale. She does not conclude this story, and stops because she must awaken the king, who has fallen asleep at some point during the night. The king’s curiosity to hear the remainder of her story forces him to keep her alive until she is able to finish the story on the following night. She is able to continue telling the story for one thousand and one nights, thereby putting off her death. At the end of the one thousand and one nights, the king decides that he is no longer going to kill his wives, and revokes his vow to do so.
This is the end of the original version of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, but Poe revises it with the “One Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade.”

Poe’s purpose for writing this tale is different than the original tale’s purpose. He intended to make clear to his readers the ideas that Edward Said would later refer to as Orientalism. The western world was not, in Poe’s time, (and is still not completely today) understanding of different “exotic” cultures that are so different from the West’s, such as Islam and their views of women at the time of the monarchy in power during the Arabian nights. Poe’s version of this tale is ironic because in it, the “exotic” people are in disbelief about the things that the western world claims to be capable of doing and having. This is in opposition to how the West is usually the culture that views the “exotic” cultures in disbelief. In Poe’s story, Scheherazade tells the king a tale involving modern marvels of the nineteenth century that exist in the western world—things that he finds too unbelievable. In the end of the story, she tells the king that, “One of the evil genii . . . has put it into the heads of these accomplished ladies that the thing which we describe as personal beauty consists altogether in the protuberance of the region which lies not very far below the small of the back” (621). Scheherazade is referring to the bustle, a common fashion accessory of the nineteenth century. This is so inconceivable in the king’s mind that he refuses to believe Scheherazade’s story and then sentences her to death. Scheherazade is only disappointed “from the reflection that much of the history remained still untold, and that the petulance of her brute of a husband had reaped for him a most righteous reward, in depriving him of many inconceivable adventures” (621).
This story is a satirical take on the original tales because in it, one can see the existence of western orientalism. In an interview on the ideas behind his book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said stated that he believes the orient to be viewed as placid and eternal. Western people view it as unprogressive, unlike the West, which they see as a place which changes and adapts to every new innovation and advancement. Said states that western people have a “they are all the same” mentality towards people with cultures different from their own. They believe that there is a single way to understand all of them, and they use this in order to dominate them. Said echoes the idea that “representations of the ‘Orient’ in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its ‘others,’ a dichotomy that was central to the creation of European culture as well as to the maintenance and extension of European hegemony over other lands” (Loomba 43). An example that Said uses to support his statement is the great interest America has in Israel. The reason given for this is that Israel is not Islamic, and they view themselves as having “Western” ideals. Many Americans demonize Islam and all that it represents, so this is a strong incentive for them to have a positive view of Israel. We associate Islam with extremism, yet most Muslims live lives similar to the ones with which we are familiar.

By reading the original *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, the western world sees the eastern world as fantastical, yet at the same time, primitive and undeveloped. By reading Poe’s sequel to the tale, their belief that their western world is more progressive is strengthened, and it is also shown that the lesser-developed eastern world cannot possibly fathom that these innovations and technologies are at all possible
due to its inferiority. So in one way, Poe reinforces fear of the unknown, yet he undercuts it satirically by having the cause of her death be something as insignificant as a bustle.

There is a section in “The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade” in which the reader’s attention is brought to the details that focus on color. The colors would not be mentioned by Poe if they were not pertinent to the story, and we can see a connection here between color symbolism and fear of the unknown. Scheherazade survived her wedding night by sharing with her sister a tale of a rat and a black cat which the king wanted to finish hearing the following night. Poe states that the cat is black not once, but two separate times. He mentions “a story (about a rat and a black cat, I think),” and his “hope of hearing that night how it fared in the end with the black cat (a black cat, I think it was) and the rat” (609). As explained in relation to Bluebeard, the color black signifies sin and the devil. Things that are black are often connected with evil and are usually associated with hell, such as the black cat in the tale, “The Black Cat.” Poe mentions further that “The lady Scheherazade not only put the finishing stroke to the black cat and the rat (the rat was blue)” (609). Poe’s decision to make the rat a blue rat relates to the color with which Bluebeard is associated. Because blue is not a color commonly found in nature, it is associated with the exotic—things that are rare, unusual, unique, or in Said’s terms “oriental.” This association of the color blue to the man called Bluebeard suggests the exotic nature of the man: “Unfortunately, however, this man had a blue beard, which made him look so ugly and terrible that there was not a woman or girl who did not run away from him” (Zipes 732). The common understanding of the bluish tint to jet-black things suggests, in Bluebeard’s instance, a dark or an almost satanic image; things that
are unique and dangerous are inherently compelling. This explains the implication that Bluebeard is middle-eastern. The blue rat in Poe’s tale and the known association of the color blue to exotic and foreign things further support the connection to “Bluebeard” while at the same time supporting Poe’s use of Orientalism as a concept. These ideas are implied based on emotional evidence—personal associations that the images presented in the tale evoke from the reader emotionally.

The main purpose of this thesis is to show the connections between Poe’s stories and fairy tales that were written by various authors throughout the years. As a result of a difficult life, a reading background of Hoffmann’s works, and a penchant for Gothic Romanticism, Poe wrote tales that share many elements of fairy tales. The main element that allowed this connection to be made was the Gothic writing style used in the writing of all of the works and, based on Bloom’s theory, this occurred because Poe subconsciously wrote using the Gothic (Romantic) themes that he initially read in fairy tales, including the works of Hoffmann.

To reiterate Bloom’s theory, a writer writes using similar themes but different purposes than their predecessors. Poe’s purposes for writing his stories differ from the purposes of the fairy tales’ authors. While Andersen’s purpose was to promote religious ideas and instill these values in his younger audience, Poe revised the use of religious ideas in his stories to reinforce his warning to the reader. While Perrault’s purpose was to provide the reader with a clear, explicit moral, Poe’s morals were implied. While the Grimm brothers wrote for children, Poe wrote for an adult audience, yet he did not lose
the Gothic elements that can be seen earlier in the Grimms’ collection of tales. Poe also wrote with the purpose of expressing the hardship and misery that he endured during the course of his short life. In addition to writing for these reasons, he also wrote with the purpose of entertaining his adult audience, and he did it without the didacticism associated with entertaining children. Poe also recognized the importance of the original oral storytelling tradition, and intended to preserve this with the use of storytelling in some of his stories. These comparisons help to explain how these fairy tales influenced Poe’s works, and also to explain how Poe revised the fairy tales to serve his own purposes.


