

## Notable Literary Styles and Elements in Poe's Works

Edgar Allan Poe is a prominent figure in gothic literature due to his immense knowledge of the genre and calculated approaches to leading his audience into a dreary, gloomy, horrific, creepy, and dark environment. A majority of his short stories including Tell-Tale Heart, The Pit and the Pendulum, Masque of the Red Death, and The Black Cat share gothic attributes that serve to instill fear into the readers (Szabo et al 2). For example, a gothic poem by the author that most people are familiar with is The Raven. In its sense, a raven is a gothic creature used in horror movies and horror stories to foretell danger and send shivers down individuals' spines. Moreover, the poem describes the narrator's feelings of fear from the beginning, which plays a crucial role in creating a mood that is sustained throughout the poem (Szabo et al 4). However, Poe adopts unique strategies to inform his audience of the poems setting and explain the horrific nature of the narrator's environment.

One of the most common techniques that Poe used to catch the attention of his readers and engage them in the plot is a vivid description. Poe thoroughly describes the gothic settings in his short stories and poems without leaving out the finer details. For example, in The Raven, Poe introduces his audience to the narrator who is sitting alone around a fire in a library filled with books and gothic Pallas (Purbo et al. 6). Another gothic poem where the author adopts this approach is Alone, featuring a narrator who feels alone according to his perceptions. Even though the narrator is in contact with other people, he feels different because his likings and interests do not resonate with others' preferences. Nevertheless, the poem has several gothic elements that are observable in most of his works including lightning, storms, thunder, and demons that haunt their victims (Szabo et al 5). Moreover, his poem's gothic attributes include intense emotions, feelings of detachment from reality and other people, and strong interpersonal bonds associated with love, melancholy, madness, terror, and death.

Poe's works also share a similar and definite structure. It is essential to note that Edgar Poe did not become a prominent artist because of his expressions and inner description of real-life characters in their immediate surroundings. Instead, the structure of his work significantly grabs its audience's attention. According to the author, literary works should not be too long regardless of whether it is a novel or a poem (Purbo et al. 7). Although an ideal length is not specified, the author suggests that creators should adhere to one rule, i.e., the presentation should be readable in one sitting. As a result, most of his works quickly rush into action by first introducing the readers to the situation and the dilemma in place. From the beginning, the author sustains a tempo that ultimately builds to the climax and the resolution (Purbo et al. 7). Seemingly, his technique was effective in inducing tension

and enabling the audience to engage with his plot throughout. This technique allowed him to rise to notable ranks as he became a well-known author, magazine critic, and editor.

The unnamed speaker or the first person point of view is also a notable feature of most of Poe's works as there are a few poems and stories where he names the narrator. During Poe's time, it was unusual to see a story that began with a narrator's confession. Nevertheless, Poe uses the narrator as the focal point of most of his stories and poems as they play a major role in building the plot (Shehabat et al. 357). For example, The Black Cat and Manuscript Found in a Bottle are works that begin with a description of the narrator's mindset. In other stories, this approach is followed by a short introduction of the narrator's environment and the circumstances that led to his often challenging position (Shehabat et al. 359). In A Tell-Tale Heart, the narrator proclaims his sanity after confessing to having killed a man. This approach is critical to the story's development because it allows the audience to share his perceptions and understand

the implications of the characters' actions on their sanity. Thus, his technique shaped the nature and feel of his stories as it enhances reader engagement.

Another notable attribute of Poe's fiction is how he uses individuals' hatred to propel their actions and provide a motive for crimes. Hatred is a feature that can be identified in *A Tell-Tale Heart*, *William Wilson*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, and *The Black Cat* all feature aspects of hate, including hatred sown towards a doppelganger who turned out to be the narrator. According to Winters, Poe was trying to show how this immense feeling can be destructive, especially when they consume an individual who is insane (p 7). Hate is the force that drives the narrator of *The Cask of Amontillado* to commit murder and hide dead bodies in strange places. However, Poe has several other stories where deep emotions drive characters to commit gruesome acts and conceal corpses to avoid getting caught. For example, the narrator hides a dead old man under a floorboard. On the other hand, the narrator in *The Black Cat* hid his wife behind plaster walls in a cellar. Moreover, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* feature a gang that shaves the body of a young lady up a chimney (Winters 14). As a result, the author is successful in elaborating the heinous acts that human beings can engage in due to emotions that are beyond their control and judgment.

Edgar Poe is also known for his heavy adoption of similes and symbolism to depict the nature of his stories' settings, individuals' feelings, and various other aspects. Symbolism is a literary element that describes instances when an author uses an object to refer to something different (Purbo 4). In *The Tell-Tale Heart* Poe uses the beating heart and the old man's eye as symbols. The narrator is obsessed with the eye and he thinks that it resembles that of a vulture. The plot suggests that whenever the narrator takes a look at it, he shivers, and becomes fearful, and cold. The eye had a significant impact on the narrator's well-being that he killed the old man. As a result, the eye is depicted as an object of evil.

The beating heart is also used as a symbol to represent the narrator's conscience (Shehabat et al. 358). After killing the old man, the narrator can still hear his heart beating loudly and the loud noise exasperates his guilt. Ultimately, the old man's beating heart pushes him to reveal his dead body and confess.

On the other hand, a simile uses comparisons and links items with the words 'as' or 'like'. Poe incorporates several similes into his stories, which play a crucial role as they enhance a reader's understanding and perception of the plot's scene. For example, in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the narrator goes into the old man's room and describes it as "black as pitch" (Shehabat et al. 360). Thus, this encourages him to light up his lantern so that he can see his movements and where he is going. As soon as he gets his lantern, Poe notes that a dim ray, like a spider's thread, shoots out from the crevice and falls upon the man's eye, which looks like a vulture's. Therefore, similes allow him to enhance his imagery and provide the audience with deeper insight into the emotions and actions of his characters. Similes also enrich the story's texture as it allows the audience to resonate with the situation and get a clear picture of the proceedings. Therefore, they are a critical element in his thriller and horror stories.

Irony is also a critical component of Poe's short stories and poems as most of his stories end in the exact opposite of individuals' anticipation. Irony in Poe's works varies and may be displayed through ironic situations or individuals' actions. A notable example of irony can be found in *The Cask of Amontillado* when one of the characters, Montressor, shows increased concern over the well-being and health of Fortunato when his real plans are to kill him (Hecker 12). It is also ironic that the enemy of Montressor was named Fortunato, which means fortunate in Spanish because of the story's ending. Rather than escaping the ordeal that was about to meet him, he was unlucky and was buried alive behind a wall. However, Hecker notes that apart from irony, Poe's literary works are also based on scientific concepts as the author is convinced that science is destructive to the world of myths, tales, and fables (p 16). As a result, he applies various scientific concepts and techniques, especially in solving heinous crimes.

In addition, one of Poe's most significant traits was his ability to come up with twisted characters and questionable narrators. Poe preferred incorporating mental disease and human conditions into several of his short stories. As one of the first individuals to adopt this methodology, Poe influenced many aspects of modern-day horror movies (Yousef 255). Most modern horror films feature horrific tales of individuals detached from reality and suffering from emotional, physical, and social distress. These films strive to show that there is a horrific force in human beings that is difficult to control. Sad to note, these images resemble the nature of modern-day America and the mental issues that individuals go through (Yousef 257). However, the intense emotions and often gruesome reparations forecast the potential implications of neglecting the needs of these individuals. Mental

disorders are highly prevalent in Poe's works that one may find it hard to trust the sanity of other characters. Nevertheless, his approaches allowed him to create thrilling stories that included several themes including love, sacrifice, human conflicts, and good vs. evil.

Finally, a vital element of Poe's work that one can only acknowledge after hearing words from the poem is his melodic tendencies. Poe could play with words and sounds, thus allowing him to fill his work with musical attributes. In most of his poems, he adopts alliteration, rhyme schemes, and repetition to enhance the rhythm. According to Kennedy, Poe was convinced that sound and melodic lines play a critical role in the whole poem (p 18). In his essay titled *The Poetic Principle*, Poe suggests that musical features like rhythm, modes of meter, and rhyme, should never be rejected in poetry. Poe proposes that these factors are essential to poetry composition, suggesting that it would be silly to decline their assistance (Kennedy 19). Thus, he advocated for the use of these musical elements in poetry, allowing them to become standard writing and composition components.