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EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "HIDEOUS DRAMA OF REVIVIFICATION": RESURRECTING HIS MOTHER IN FEMALE VAMPIRES

Edgar Allan Poe'da "Yeniden Canlandırmanın Korkunç Dramı": Dişi Vampirlerde Anneyi Canlandırma

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to analyze Edgar Allan Poe's fiction and poems from a psychoanalytic perspective. The Romantic writer's short tragic life was governed by his Oedipus complex and a strong death drive as the result of his traumatic experiences at an early age. He witnessed his mother's battle with tuberculosis, which was followed by her death. Throughout his entire life, he has searched for a mother figure. In his works, Poe revives his mother in his portrayals of female characters in the forms of vampires. These characters and all their experiences in his writings appear as uncanny reflections from his unconscious, which he had a strong grasp on long before Sigmund Freud researched and theorized these terms. Resulting from a strong death wish, Poe's narrators, who are mere reflections of himself, create dark, tomb-like settings where they isolate themselves from reality or consciousness, focusing on the female vampire figures who they admire. However, these figures also horrify Poe as they are the embodiments of death itself. In creating these undead women, Poe expresses his strong desire to reunite with his dead mother and endeavors to uncover the link between life and death, a secret that the female holds. This research focuses on Poe's short stories "Berenice", "Ligeia", "Morella" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" in addition to various of his poems.

Keywords: American Literature, Romanticism, Edgar Allan Poe, Psychoanalysis, Vampires

ÖZ: Bu çalışmada Edgar Allan Poe'nun kısa öyküleri ve şiirleri psikanalitik edebiyat kuramı vasıtasıyla incelenmiştir. Romantik yazarın kısa ve trajik hayatına Sigmund Freud'un tanımladığı Oedipus Kompleksi ve güçlü ölüm istenci hâkim olmuştur. Bunun en büyük sebebi yazarın yaşadığı travmalar olmuştur. Bu travmalardan yazarda en derin iz bırakanı, annesinin verem ile uzun mücadelesine tanık olduktan sonra onu küçük yaşta kaybetmesi olmuştur. Poe ömrü boyunca bir anne figürü aramış ve eserlerinde, ölü annesini dişi vampir figürleri aracılığıyla canlandırmıştır. Bütün bu figürler ve bu figürlerin tasvir edildiği

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anlatımlar, bilinçdışının "tekinsiz" ("uncanny") yansımaları olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu da Freud'un çalışmalarından uzun bir zaman önce, Poe'nun eserlerinde bilinçdışının derinliklerindeki karanlık yerleri kavradığını göstermektedir. Yazarın kendisinin yansımaları olan anlatıcıları, kendileri için tabuta benzer karanlık alanlar yaratır. Söz konusu imgeler Poe'nun güçlü ölüm arzusundan kaynaklanmaktadır. Poe'nun erkek karakterleri, kendilerini reel yaşamdan, başka bir deyişle bilinçten, izole edip dişi vampirlere odaklanmaktadırlar. Erkek karakterlerin, dişi vampir figürlerine karşı büyük bir hayranlık beslemeleri, yazarın kavuşmak istediği annesini simgelemektedir. Aynı zamanda bu figürler ölümü temsil eder ve bundan dolayı, varlıkları Poe'yu dehşete düşürür. Dolayısıyla, yazarın yarattığı ölümsüz kadınlar, aslında Poe'nun ölü annesi ile bir araya gelme arzusunu dışa vurmaktadır. Yazarın nihai amacı ise, ölüm ile yaşam arasındaki bağı keşfetmektir ve anlamaktır. Bu çalışma, Poe'daki bu teknikleri göstermek için yazarın şiirlerine ve ayrıca, "Berenice", "Ligeia", "Morella" ve "Usher Evi'nin Düşüşü" gibi kısa öykülerine odaklanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amerikan Edebiyatı, Romantizm, Edgar Allan Poe, Psikanalitik kuram, Vampirler

Introduction

"How poignant, then, must have been the grief"
"as a child groping benighted" (Poe 1966c: 389)

George Bernard Shaw's character John Tanner in *Man and Superman* (1903) claims that among all the battles for humans, "there is none so treacherous and remorseless" as the one "between the artist man and the mother woman. Which shall use up the other?" (Shaw 1975: 558). Poe's relation with his mother did use him up, while it also inspired him to create his unforgettable and uniquely haunting female characters. Poe's continuing search for a maternal figure compelled him to revive her in many of his stories and poems. This, ironically, both empowered him to construct his masterpieces and created a strong death wish that threw him into a severe depression. Despite the morbid and tragic aspects of his life, one can only admire him as an innovative artist. Poe led the way to new literary genres, such as the detective fiction; however, more awe-inspiring is his insight into the human unconscious long before psychoanalysis was established as a valid science. Poe's preoccupation with the hidden darker segments of the mind stems from the most prominent attribute in his works: his obsession with the dying beautiful woman – a topic numerous studies have treated and researched. Yet this subject never loses its poignancy as it retains its allure and mystery, and it is always worthy of re-examination. Compared to various other writers who showed a wild fascination for death and the nature of the dying body, Poe holds a unique place. This study will take a closer look at the Romantic writer's female vampire figures in "Berenice" "Morella", "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" along with

various of his poems, that illustrate Poe's recognition that the female, life, and death are intertwined.

Poe's discernments in his works can be strongly connected to his personal traumas. He led a very troubled short life, in which he endeavored to untangle the mystery of death, and the exact nature of the decomposing body. Samantha Stobert details the apprehension of death in the Victorian Era, where "sentimentalized grieving ultimately suppressed and romanticized the physical process of death" (Stobert 2001: 284). However, Poe emphasized the horrific aspect of this inevitable process. Unable to comprehend the suffering and disappearance of his mother at a very young age, Poe in later life continued to deny her demise. Thus, she became, in a sense, the "archetype" of all the ensuing women in his works – the undead figures who both horrified and attracted him. James Twitchell claims that, among many other interpretations, the vampire figure may be "used to personify the forces of maternal attraction/ repulsion" as well as incest (Twitchell 1986: 5). As many studies on Poe's fiction have shown, the melancholy Gothic writer's most poetical subject, "the death of the beautiful woman", (Poe 1966f, 179) originates from his own experiences and trauma surrounding death. In her book on Poe's life and work, Dawn Sova relates how Edgar Poe and his siblings "were found huddling close" (Sova 2001: 3) to the dead body of their mother Elizabeth Arnold Poe, who had succumbed to tuberculosis at age twenty-four. Afterwards, Poe lost his foster mother Frances Allan, with whom he had a close relationship. I claim that throughout his life, Edgar Poe continuously searched for a mother-figure and constantly felt the strong urge to reunite with her. Later, his wife Virginia's emaciated condition for several years brought up the memories of his own mother's transformation, which compelled Poe to recreate them in his works. When Virginia died, he broke down, though he felt relieved in a way from "horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair" as he wrote in one of his letters (Kennedy 1996: 543). Poe suffered from a more severe depression which continued until his own death in 1949.

As an avant-garde writer in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Poe unleashed riveting insight into the unconscious workings of the psyche, decades before Sigmund Freud's research. T.E. Apter points out that psychoanalysis, "in regard to its emphasis on beliefs and desires inadmissible to consciousness … can be viewed as an outgrowth of the Romantic glorification of emotion and impulse" (Apter 1982: 5). One of the most apparent descriptions of Poe reaching into the depths of his psyche can

be found in his short story "Berenice" (1835). Poe's narrator claims that, "the realities of the world affected me as visions… only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became … that existence utterly and solely in itself" (Poe 1966b: 46). Freud, in *Interpretation of Dreams*, writes: "In the best interpreted dreams we often have to leave one passage in obscurity because we observe during the interpretation that we have here a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled" and that is "the point at which it ascends into the unknown" (Freud 1997: 265). It is exactly that "unravelled" tangle Poe endeavors desperately and relentlessly to untangle.

Poe's writings emanate from his unconscious which stores everything that is repressed, according to Freud. The Romantic writer is uniquely talented in creating dream-like, or rather, "nightmarish" atmospheres, which are essentially dreams he struggled to decipher, and the readers need to solve. For instance, water is regarded as a symbol for the unconscious and several of his poems use imagery of lakes and seas. Aside from his most popular dead beloved Annabel Lee (1849) who is entombed in a "kingdom by the sea," (Poe 1966a: 43), another poem is called "Dreamland" (1844), imagining the bottomless pit of the unconscious and its dark mysteries, "obscure and lonely," a dreamland where "Night/ On a black throne reigns upright" (Poe 1966i: 234). In this world, there is no sense of "SPACE" or "TIME" and it is composed of "boundless floods, / And chasms, and caves" and Poe claims "no man can discover" this place because "Never its mysteries are exposed / To the weak human eye unclosed." Its visual imagery creates a watery region, "For the tears that drip all over; / Into seas without a shore / Where dwell the Ghouls,- / … In each nook most melancholy- / There the traveller meets … / Sheeted Memories of the Past" (Poe 1966i: 234). Furthermore, in his poem called "To the Lake" (1827), the persona describes a wild lake he visited when he was very young, and he faced the "terror" of that watery setting. He claims that this feeling of terror "was … / But a tremulous delight" (Poe 1966h: 698). The dreadful, for Poe, is pleasure as well, as his vampires represent both the irresistible mother and appalling death, which he calls a "poisonous wave" as his soul is able to change a dim lake into "Eden" (Poe 1966h: 698). As it is evident in this latter poem, the intertwined existence of love and death run throughout all of Poe's works.

His obsession with dying further suggests that Poe himself harbored a strong "death wish" mostly apparent in his melancholy state. Poe's isolated narrators suffer from mental disorders, whether it be monomania,

schizophrenia, psychosis, or depression. These gloomy and restless male characters reflect the melancholy writer himself. Charles Baudelaire, whom Mario Praz calls Poe's "brother-in-art" (Praz 1946: 144), claims that Poe's personal life and his fiction bore the "indefinable stamp of melancholy" (Baudelaire 1837: 13). This emotion is overtly present in narrators and male characters who show, what Freud termed, a strong "death drive" or death wish (*Todestrieb*) in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud described this desire as "the instinct to return to the inanimate state" (Freud 1920: 32) in which the organism is free of tension, fear, or anxiety. In Poe, the death drive was stronger than the pleasure principle, or the life instinct, which led him to repeat self-destructive habits, such as alcoholism and his urge for conflicts with fellow-writers and critics. As a result, fueled by his fascination with death, he reflects this side of himself in his works. As Baudelaire writes it so poetically: "[Poe] could not resist the desire of finding again those visions, marvelous or awful … they were old acquaintances which imperatively attracted him" (Baudelaire 1837: 19). The French writer also claims that Poe's works were "the cause of this death" (Baudelaire 1837: 19). Poe's self-destructive strain resurfaces frequently in his works, specifically in his grasp on the intertwined concepts of love and death. As he admits in his poem "Romance": "I could not love except where Death / Was mingling his with Beauty's breath" (Poe 1969: 157). According to biographer Silverman, Poe's artistry "may be understood as a sort of prolonged mourning" (Silverman 1991: 78). In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe sympathetically describes this emotion as "the human thirst for self-torture" (Poe 1966f: 182). It may be argued that Poe's unresolved mourning led to his self-destructive addictions. "Poe had the alcoholic's tendency to deny reality," Jeffrey Meyers asserts in *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy* (Meyers 2000: 145). Meyers further claims that Poe's addictions resulted from his need to punish himself, leading out of "some deep-rooted guilt," as he believed to be accountable for the demise of his beloved women (Meyers 2000: 91).

Poe's strong death drive is obvious in the following quotation from a letter he wrote in 1835, when, Kennedy claims, "he slid into suicidal despair in Richmond in 1835 … Apologizing for his 'incoherency,' he wrote …: 'I am suffering under a depression of spirits such as I never felt before. I have struggled in vain against the influence of this melancholy ... I am wretched, and know not why'" (Kennedy 1996: 547). In this "wretched" state of mind and his wish to perish, Poe envisions himself entombed alive in his various eerie and gloomy settings. Camille Paglia claims that Poe's characters are

interred alive "because he sees nature as a hostile womb from which humanity can never be fully born … His stories are Late Romantic tholoi fusing the trauma of birth and death" (Paglia 1990: 577-578). In his works, Poe buries himself in the unconscious realm, which resembles the "artificial night" (I.1.149) that Montague refers to as Romeo's death wish in William Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare 2003 :74). Houses, abbeys, or chambers – every environment is damp, decaying, and dark. For instance, Montresor in "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) walks down through the caverns and tunnels underground his palazzo, into his unconscious, where he builds a wall around his double Fortunado, who is buried alive. These tomb-like settings, like the "dark and intricate passages" in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Poe 1966e: 645), represent the deep caverns of the mind. In this story, where both Roderick Usher and the narrator are Poe's personas, Roderick foreshadows his death, while disclosing his life-long desire to comprehend the unknown. Roderick expresses a strong belief that he will "perish in this deplorable folly" and claims he "must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR!" (Poe 1966e: 646).

This fear results from the unknown, which he ardently aspires to understand. In *The Uncanny*, Freud claims that this feeling "belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (Freud 2003: 159). From the German word "Unheimlich," the closest translation in English would be "uncanny" and "eerie" and etymologically "unhomely" (Apter 1982: 41). Poe's intoxicated narrators create a "dream state" and delve into the unconscious which, according to Freud, reveals what one either dreads or desires. Regarding psychoanalytic studies on Poe's works, Clive Bloom asserts that "Poe conceives of a world which is a mirror image of Freud's own … in which the conditions which allowed Freud to find a discourse of 'fact' allowed Poe to form … a certain type of fiction" (Bloom 1988: 8). Freud further theorizes that the uncanny originates from frightening phenomena that reside in the familiar (Freud 2003: 160). As Baudelaire noted, the fantastic element in Poe's tales is grounded in "exceptions in human life and in nature . . . hallucinations . . . hysteria usurping the place of the will, contradiction set up between the nerves and the mind" (Baudelaire 1837: 20). Poe's imaginary world is inspired by his unconscious in which his uncanny women reside.

Poe's female vampire figures are "indescribable" whether resulting from his opium addiction, mental disorders, or failing memory. Something

inhibits him in his depictions because he has discovered the uncanny. Freud posits that the strongest example of the uncanny is "represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts" (Freud 2003: 183). Poe's vampires arise with the slightest memory of his deceased beloved. Freud describes this as thus: "the primitive fear of the dead is still so potent in us and ready to manifest itself if given any encouragement" (Freud 2003: 184). Poe's female undead figures are inspired by, "an uncanny effect" that "often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred" (Freud 2003: 185). Commenting on the importance of fiction on his own work, Freud also remarks that "The uncanny that we find in fiction … is … much richer" and that "it embraces something that is wanting in real life" (Freud 2003: 190). Both frightening and attractive phenomena at the root of his necrophilia comprise Poe's ardent desire to understand death. As Paglia posit: "woman is literally the occult, which means 'the hidden'. These uncanny meanings cannot be changed, only suppressed, until they break into cultural consciousness again" (Paglia 1990: 23). His wish to be buried alive, as it were, springs from his compulsive wish for his mother, who represents both death and life. In his mind, his undead female figures hold the secret to this connection.

Vampires in literature are depictions of the femme fatale who appears in various shapes – animalistic, grotesque figures, both alluring and revolting. In his groundbreaking work *Evil Sisters* (1996), Bram Dijkstra points out the emergence of female vampires in the cultural view of women as either conservative angels or deadly sexual beings as sirens, whores, or sphinx. The destructive evil woman – the "malefactors of the female sex" (Bade 1979: 6), harboring the powers to destroy her male victims, were profusely present in art, literature, and operas. Nina Auerbach's study on Victorian womanhood outlines the myths surrounding women's images as sirens. "Intellectual and volatile as well as dangerously beautiful, these divine-demonic women possess absolute power" (36) as they symbolize the eternal cyclical nature. Furthermore, in nineteenth-century art, eroticism and sexuality have always been connected to agony and death. Bade posits that artists portrayed "a masochistic conception of sex roles in which the woman was dominant" (Bade 1979: 6). According to Paglia, however, "the femme fatale was produced by the mystique of the connection between mother and child … Family romance operates at all times" (Paglia 1990: 14). Furthermore, Baudelaire contends that Poe's fiction lacks love, which refers to eroticism, which Poe's vampires do not exude as they represent Poe's yearning for a mother's unconditional love.

His obsession for his mother created a fixation with the decaying body - specifically linked to consumption. The dying female body takes on the physical features of all of Poe's fictional women; they are emaciated, pale, with prominent eyes, withered lips exposing the teeth, a low soft voice, and shadow-like movements mustered with the remaining energy they possess. Poe shaped the figure of the female vampire in his own unique manner, as he delved into the depths and caverns of his own unconscious, following the Late Romantic strain which was later embraced by the French Symbolists. However, Poe's lethal women expose Poe's Oedipus complex, which is at the root of his works. Incest is a highly Romantic motif, as Paglia emphasizes: "Incest, erotic solipsism, is everywhere in Romantic poetry" (Paglia 1990: 41). Leslie Fiedler points out that in Poe's works, the incest motif derives from "the private world of his own tortured psyche" (Fiedler 1960: 398). The "succubus-brides", according to Fiedler, are "dark projection[s] of his psyche" (Fiedler 1960: 398). This complex results in his fixation on incestuous relationships, which later leads to Poe marrying his young cousin, thirteen-year-old Virginia Eliza Clemm (1822-1847). Sova quotes from Poe's letters and points out how he addresses Virginia as "My love, my own sweet Sissy, my darling little wifey" (Sova 2001: 7), disclosing his continuing search for an incestuous connection. After their marriage, he lived in familial bliss with his aunt/ mother-in-law, his "Muddy", the final mother-figure who supported his career. Four months before he died, Poe published his poem "To My Mother" (1849), which merges the wife and mother figures: "by that dear name I long have called you — / You who are more than mother unto me,/ And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you / In setting my Virginia's spirit free. / …you / Are mother to the one I loved so dearly, / And thus are dearer than the mother I knew" (Poe 1966g: 1024).

Poe's lifelong search for his mother, in addition to his preoccupation with death, led him to the uncanny realization that the unknown *is* woman. Both his mother and Virginia, inevitably transformed into emaciated women, became the inspiration for his fictive vampires. They embody death and decay, with their dark hair, black eyes and their mystically terrifying presence and expressions. By "resurrecting" her, Poe keeps reliving the trauma of watching his mother pine away due to a mysterious reason. In this pursuit, Poe's narrators focus on their objects with an intrinsic analytic mind, which shows itself in their detached and cold tone. D.H. Lawrence, who claimed love relationships prove that there is a thin line between love and death, notes that Poe's narrators appear like scientific personas who observe

and analyze these female figures as they undergo severe physical transformation. Lawrence claims that Ligeia, "is the passive body who is explored and analysed into death" (Lawrence 2003: 71-72).

One such analytic depiction of one these spectacular female vampires occurs in his short story "Berenice" (1835). The eeriness of the narration results from the fact that we, as readers, are witnessing Poe's apprehensions from his unconscious, thus the events should not be regarded as reality. Freud brings light to this phenomenon:

> "Where the uncanny stems from childhood complexes, the question of material reality does not arise, its place being taken by psychical reality. Here we are dealing with the actual repression of a particular content and the return of what has been repressed, not with the suspension of *belief in its reality*" (Freud 2003: 190).

In his realm of dreams, Egaeus relates how he suffers from monomania, as nearly all his narrators are agonized by mental disorders. The complete story takes places in the library, his death chamber, in which he was born and, he adds, his mother died (Poe 1966b: 45). The setting is symbolically the source of both life and death. After mentioning his mother, he continues to recount his experiences with his cousin.

Concerning the vampire figure of Berenice, the narrator, Poe's alter ego, admits that "during the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her … my passions always were of the mind" and describes Berenice as "a thing … to analyze" (Poe 1966b: 47). In his endeavor to grasp the meaning behind her appearance, Poe takes on a more analytic stance toward her during her physical transformation. He recounts how, as Berenice falls victim to a mysterious illness that emaciates her and makes her very pale, he feels terror induced by her "lifeless" eyes. Next, he focuses on the thin and pale lips that uncover her teeth (Poe 1966b: 47). As he obsesses over her teeth, he feels horror as Berenice's shadow-like presence creeps up to him in the tomb-like chamber. She utterly terrifies him, and more specifically, he becomes rigid with fright when he beholds "the white and ghastly spectrum of the teeth" (Poe 1966b: 48). In his obsession, he finds himself coveting them. Furthermore, Berenice's illness causes her to fall into "trances" and the last epileptic paralysis is the reason for her burial, after which the narrator opens her grave and pulls out her teeth. However, he has allegedly no memory of this as he feels like he had just woken up from a "confused and excited dream" and appears to describe the uncanny feeling that still lingers: "of that dreary period … I had no …

definite comprehension. Yet its memory was replete with horror" and intensified because of its vagueness and ambiguity, which is rooted in the repressed sections of his unconscious (Poe 1966b: 49).

This image of the sharp teeth behind the pale lips stands for the vampire's menacing weapon and the "vagina dentata" at the root of the castration fear in the male. Paglia asserts that "Mothers can be fatal to their sons … She is Medusa, in whom Freud sees the castrating and castrated female pubes" (Paglia 1990: 14). The paralyzing fear in Poe, appears to originate from female sexuality; however, he claims that the fires burning his soul "were not of Eros" as he states in "Morella" (Poe 1966d: 469). The image of the vagina also stands for the entrance of the uterus, where life is conceived. Striving to unravel the connection between life and death, he believes he can achieve it only by gaining possession of those mysterious teeth. However, in the last line of the story, as he tries to grab the box that holds the teeth, he cannot open it, try as he may. Finally, it falls to the ground and breaks into pieces, as "thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances" are scattered on the floor (Poe 1966b: 50). Ultimately, this scene symbolizes his inability to grasp the mystery he desperately wants to understand.

Yet another one of Poe's stories that originates from his unconscious is "Ligeia" (1838), narrated again by a persona who struggles with his memory. The female vampire's name is inspired by one of the mythical sirens, whose melodious voices put men under a spell. The short story begins, in Dorothea Von Mücke's words, "with the narrator's narcissistic enjoyment of his lament" (Mücke 2006: 151). Describing his struggles to remember, the narrator says: "in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves upon the very verge of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember" (Poe 1966c: 387). The gaps in his story make him one of Poe's "unreliable" narrators, as he does not remember where or when he met Ligeia. This may suggest the mother-child relationship after birth, when infants cling to their mother in the first years of their lives as they form one individual. Naturally, the child does not have any recollection of meeting the mother figure. In this incestuous relationship, Poe portrays himself as a child under the "infinite supremacy" (Poe 1966c: 388) of Ligeia. Furthermore, he states that after her demise, he was "but as a child groping benighted" (Poe 1966c: 389). Ligeia is the perfect idea of the erudite, superior mother figure, as Poe speaks of her "immense" learning. Like Berenice, she has marble skin, a low voice, and "came and departed like a shadow" (Poe 1966c: 386).

Despite the gaps in his memory, he distinctly remembers "the person of Ligeia" (Poe 1966c: 386). This comprises the "strangeness" of her beauty, and specifically her large eyes, "far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race" (Poe 1966c: 387). More than anything, it is specifically the appearance of those Medusa eyes," which he struggles to understand as he "was possessed with a passion to discover" (Poe 1966c: 387). After her death, Poe ventures to describe the uncanniness of her eyes: "a sentiment … aroused within" him by her "large and luminous orbs" (Poe 1966c: 388). He exclaims that he cannot define nor analyze that feeling. The uncanny, as Freud points out, originates from what we fear, which in this case, is something Poe also desires to know – the mystery of life and death. As Ligeia battles with death, the narrator is in awe of her passion for life, as "she wrestled with the Shadow" (Poe 1966c: 389). In her fierce wish for life, the dying Ligeia foreshadows her return to life at the end of the story; like the ancient figure of the Ouroboros, she represents the eternal life cycle. Ligeia "wills" herself back to life, as her eternal soul reminds us of H. Rider Haggard's enchanting queen Ayesha, She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, who claims "that naught dies. There is no such thing as Death, though there be a thing called Change" (Haggard 1951: 91). Just as the sorceress Ayesha endeavors to revive her lost lover through de Vincey's body, we see that Ligeia "wills" herself back into the mortal world.

Ligeia returns from the dead through the medium of the narrator's second wife, the Lady Rowena, whose presence is only required to this end. After their marriage, the couple resides in a ghastly decorated setting: a wedding chamber which also represents a death chamber. Grotesquely decorated, the room includes tombs and tapestry which all create "a hideous and uneasy animation" (Poe 1966c: 392). Allegedly, the narrator's memory fails him because of opium, as he does not hear or see all those suspicious visions and sounds that Rowena claims are present. He does however admit he notices the red droplets appear out of thin air and fall into Rowena's wine, after which she dies. The enshrouded body of Rowena alternately revives and falls back into a rigid posture, "this hideous drama of revivification was repeated … each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death" (Poe 1966c: 395). This continues until the body stands up and the narrator is "paralyzed … chilled … into stone" (Poe 1966c: 395). Finally, he realizes that he sees "the wild eyes … of the LADY LIGEIA" (Poe 1966c: 395). Poe's life-long wish is materialized in this phantasmagoria of his revived mother.

Similar to Ligeia, his beloved in "Morella" (1835) is erudite and talented; "her powers of mind were gigantic" (Poe 1966d: 469). They embody the connection of mother and child: "She … shunned society, and, attaching herself to me alone rendered me happy … it is a happiness to dream" (Poe 1966d: 469). He specifically explains that the fires that transpired between them are not those of Eros. Paglia contends that: "There is no sex instinct per se in Poe. His eroticism is in the paroxysms of suffering, the ecstatic, self-inflaming surrender to tyrant mothers" (Paglia 1990: 573). According to Mario Praz, Poe "was sexually inhibited" (Praz 1960: 377). In "Morella", Poe envisions "Oedipal family romance," as Paglia calls it (Paglia 1990: 41) – a world where they are isolated from everything – as is the perception of a child clinging to the mother. He presents a vampire in Morella, with her cold hands, the siren-like "music of her voice" (Poe 1966d: 469). However, it is pure serene pleasure that suddenly turns into horror: "there fell a shadow upon my soul, and I grew pale, and shuddered inwardly at those too unearthly tones … joy suddenly faded into horror, and the most beautiful became the most hideous" (Poe 1966d: 469). One witnesses the strongest motif in Romanticism, the converging of beauty and death in a performative scene. Morella's eyes show him "a dreary and unfathomable abyss" (Poe 1966d: 470) that sickens his soul. Life and death are intertwined as she, like Ligeia, has no intention to disappear in death as she claims: "I am dying, yet shall I live" (Poe 1966d: 470). Interestingly, the narrator and Morella herself keep repeating her name, which has the root "mor" of the Latin word for "death". With her last breath, Morella gives life to a daughter who grows to be identical to the mother. His daughter "remained nameless" until she must be named during her baptism, when an inexplicable urge forces him to name her Morella, too. The questions which ensue reveal his lack of grasp on his unconscious: "What demon urged me … What fiend spoke from the recesses of my soul … What more than fiend convulsed the features of my child" (Poe 1966d: 472). The moment she is named "Morella," his daughter dies, and the narrator claims he hears Morella exclaiming: "I am here!" At the end, when he carries the child to Morella's tomb, he "laughed with a long and bitter laugh" (Poe 1966d: 472) when he realizes the body of the mother is gone. The bitterness arises from the recognition that she is the undying spirit – superior and relentless.

The same relentless vampire is once again present in his short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Roderick Usher's physical appearance reminds the reader of Poe's vampire victims: he looks like a ghastly cadaver, with thin pale lips, "his eyes were tortured by even a faint light" (Poe 1966e:

646). His condition is described as an "acute bodily illness" in addition to an oppressive mental disease (Poe 1966e: 644). Moreover, he lives in fear as he believes he will perish soon. Enter the vampire figure: his twin sister Madeline, whose emaciating disease her doctors cannot explain. She suffers from a "settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent … affections of a partially cataleptical character" (Poe 1966e: 651). Poe portrays her as a shadowy figure that engenders dread in him. On the day that the narrator arrives, Madeline "succumbed … to the prostrating power of the destroyer" (Poe 1966e: 647). Oddly enough, Roderick wishes to keep her in the coffin in a vault "for a fortnight" before the burial (Poe 1966e: 651). As they place Madeline in her coffin, the narrator notices a slight color on her face, and "that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death" (Poe 1966e: 651). Days after her entombing, Roderick's condition worsens into hysteria, and his physical changes deteriorate, while the narrator also becomes gradually more and more restless. Finally, Roderick exclaims: "And you have not seen it?" (Poe 1966e: 652), as he refers to Madeline not as a person, but a terrifying phenomenon.

She has become the living dead, proving Roderick had valid reasons to feel intense fear. He admits she was alive when they entombed her: "We have put her living in the tomb! … I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin … many, many days ago – yet … I dared not speak!" (Poe 1966e: 655) Madeline appears in the room, with her blood-stained white dress, the vampire-bride, who finally has come to "usher" Roderick toward eternity with her. Madeline, "with a low moaning cry, 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 1966e: 655). Poe, as Roderick, feels both horror and desire in this incestuous relationship. As much as he fears these female vampires as they are Death, he also wishes to be with them, as they hold the key to the unknown. He covets the vampire bite to become undead. Poe struggles between his conscious and unconscious mind, which is symbolized in the breaking down of the Usher house: "the fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (Poe 1966e: 645).

Death pervades the hideous Usher house, which appears to be alive, while it also represents Poe's topography of death. The sight of the decaying, gothic building sickens his heart as he asks at the beginning of the story:

"what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?" (Poe 1966e: 643) Again, at the end, he strives to understand this uncanny feeling that overcomes him as he gazes, under the blood moon, at the decaying house of death that collapses into the waters of the tarn. It becomes a tomb where the brother and sister – Poe and his mother – finally reunite. Ultimately, Poe portrays the performative scene of what Paglia refers to as unavoidable in the individuation process of men: "[the mother's] centrality is a great obstacle to man, whose quest for identity she blocks … Reunion with the mother is a siren call haunting our imagination" (Paglia 1990: 9-10). Poe's sole purpose of reuniting with his dead mother pervades his personal life and works. He divulged that wish in "The Raven" (1845), in which the persona is tortured by the bereavement of his Lenore, incidentally also the title of one of the earliest vampire ballads in German literature by Gottfried August Bürger ("Lenore" 1773). In his much-acclaimed poem, he begs of the ominous bird to "Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn, / It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore" (Poe 1966i: 939). He intentionally chooses the verb "clasp", as a young infant clasps to the mother instinctually, for survival. Another one of his popular poems in which Poe expresses his ardent desire to be with a beautiful dead woman is "Annabel Lee" (1849), which he wrote a short period before his own demise. Lamenting her death, he confesses he lies with her in her "tomb by the sounding sea" (Poe 1966a: 44). Once more, the symbol of water, which may signify eternal life, as well as death, illustrates he has delved into the dark caverns of his unconscious.

Conclusion

After Virginia's demise, in December 1847, Poe published "Ulalume", a poem which, according to Sova, "Poe made clear was a memorial to his late wife" (Sova 2001: 314). He describes he "roamed with Psyche, my Soul" and as they "stopped … / By the door of a legended tomb; / And I said: 'What is written, sweet sister' / She replied … 'the vault of thy lost Ulalume!'" (Poe 1966k: 1029). In the final stanza of the poem, prophesying the exact month of his own death, the persona exclaims: "Then my heart it grew ashen and sober … And I cried: "It was surely October / … Ah, what demon has tempted me here? / Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber – / … This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir" (Poe 1966k: 1029). This uncanny place in the depths of his psyche, the "dank tarn" of his unconscious, is swarming with his female ghouls he is inexplicably drawn to.

In his lifelong pursuit to understand the reasons that compelled him toward the macabre and the morbid, Poe established himself as the ultimate Romantic writer. In his works replete with incest, sadomasochism, and necrophilia, the recurrence of female vampires demonstrates Poe's compulsive need to reunite with his beloved women. Unbearable losses inevitably led him into his own "descent into the Maelström" where he delved every so often. His suicidal disposition and enduring bereavement drove him to self-entombment and unconscious denial of the deaths in his life. His ardent desire to revive his mother figures and beloved wife eventually led to the "return" of "repressed" urges in his unconscious. These yearnings manifest themselves in the undead figures of Annabel Lee, Ligeia, Morella, Madeline Usher, or Berenice, among many others. His reluctance to let go of the dead impels Poe to examine the nature of death in its connection with life and woman. Poe's relentless obsession and fascination with the undead beautiful woman forced him, inexplicably, to explore the unknown link between death and love in the figures of his female vampires.

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