



A Reading of Freud's Uncanny in Poe's *Haunted Palace* and *The Raven*

Poe'nun *Kuzgun* ve *Perili Saray* Eserlerinin Freud'un Tekinsizlik Teorisiyle Okunması

Tavgah Saeed^{1*}

Sumayah Al-Doori²

* Sorumlu yazar

Corresponding author

¹Doç. Dr., Karabük Üniversitesi, Türkiye
Assoc. Prof. Dr., Karabük University, Turkey
tavgah.saeed@karabuk.edu.tr
ORCID ID 0000-0003-3984-3569

²Öğretim Görevlisi, Bağdat Teknoloji Üniversitesi, Irak
Assist. Lec., Baghdad University of Technology, Iraq
60015@uotechnology.edu.iq
ORCID ID 0000-0003-3656-6690

Makale geliş tarihi / First received : 20.01.2021

Makale kabul tarihi / Accepted : 12.03.2021

Bilgilendirme / Acknowledgement:

Yazarlar aşağıdaki bilgilendirmeleri yapmaktadırlar:

- 1- Araştırmacıların katkı oranı eşittir.
- 2- Makalenin yazarları arasında çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
- 3- Makalemizde etik kurulu izni ve/veya yasal/özel izin alınmasını gerektiren bir durum yoktur. Makale doküman incelemesini içermektedir.
- 4- Bu makalede araştırma ve yayın etiğine uyulmuştur.

This article was checked by *Turnitin*. Similarity Index 15%

Atf bilgisi / Citation:

Saeed, T. & Al-Doori, S. (2021). A Reading of Freud's Uncanny in Poe's *Haunted Palace* and *The Raven*. *IBAD Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, (10), 238-247.

ÖZ

Freud'un tekinsizlik kavramı, edebiyatta uygulanan en gözde psikolojik terimlerden birisidir. Öte yandan Freud, insanların cansız nesnelere veya olağandışı korku olaylarıyla ilgili olarak neyle karşılaştıklarından emin olmadıkları için tekinsizlik duygusunu deneyimlediklerini düşünmektedir. Freud tekinsizlik kavramını, aynı başlığı taşıyan makalesinde belirli edebi öykülere uygulamıştır. Bu makale, Freud'un tekinsizlik kavramının tanımını ve ana özelliklerini açıklamaktadır. Edgar Allan Poe, eserlerinde korku ile son derece ilgilendiği için, çalışmalarını tekinsizlik çalışmaları için ideal hale getirmiştir. Tekinsizlik kavramının nasıl etkili olduğunu gösterdiği için belirli edebi eserlerden, ünlü iki şiir: *Perili Saray* ve *Kuzgun*, bu makalede ele alınmaktadır. Makalenin sonunda, Poe'nun tekinsizliği kullanma şeklinin okuyucunun zihnindeki korku hissini yoğunlaştırmaya ve şiirlerindeki temalarının karanlık atmosferi ortaya çıkarmada yardımcı olduğu gösterilmektedir. Bu bağlamda tekinsizlik, Poe'nun niyetinin tüm etkisini arttırmada hayati bir rol oynadığı için Poe'nun şiirlerinde gerekli bir araç haline gelmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler

Freud, esrarengiz, Poe, Kuzgun, Perili Saray

ABSTRACT

Freud's concept of the uncanny is one of the most popular psychological terms that are applied to literature. Freud himself applied it to certain literary stories in his paper that carries the same title. The term itself is not coined by Freud, but rather by the German Psychiatrist E. Jentsch, who uses the term *unheimlich* to mean unfamiliar and scary. On the other hand, Freud thinks that people experience the feeling of the uncanny because they are not sure of what they face concerning inanimate objects or unusual cases of horror. This paper is an attempt to explore Freud's definition of the concept of the uncanny and its main features. As Edgar Allan Poe, in his works, is highly interested in horror, it makes his work ideal for the study of the uncanny. Poe is well known for his preoccupation with horror and mystery, so it is rather easy to apply Freud's concept of the uncanny to Poe's works. This paper deals with two well-known poems: *The Haunted Palace* and *The Raven*, as they demonstrate the use of the uncanny to show how it works in certain literary works. By the end of the paper, it becomes clear that the way Poe uses the uncanny helps to intensify the feeling of horror in the reader's mind and it helps to bring out the dark atmosphere of the themes of his poems. In this regard, the uncanny becomes a necessary tool in Poe's poems as it plays a vital role in enhancing the whole effect of Poe's intention.

Keywords

Freud, Uncanny, Poe, Raven, Haunted Palace

INTRODUCTION

The psychological approach is one of the popular approaches that helps to decode a literary work. Freud, being one of the leading figures in psychology, helps through his concept of the uncanny to shed light on the nature of human being's attraction to mystery. According to Freud, a person is equally attracted and terrified by any object that he/she cannot identify its nature. Any object that seems stagnant yet alive would threaten his/her grasp of reality. If this theory is applied on some of Poe's poems, it would help the reader understand why a familiar castle may turn into a haunted palace or why a familiar bird like the raven may seem threatening. This paper tries to answer and clarify this feeling by analyzing Poe's poems in the light of Freud's uncanny.

The term uncanny has become a familiar word that is used to describe anything that is unfamiliar and beyond logical perception. In his 1919 essay on the "Uncanny", Freud defines the uncanny as something that: "belongs to all that is terrible-to all that arouses dread and creeping horror." (Freud, 1919, p.219) The term itself is not coined by Freud, but rather by the German Psychiatrist E. Jentsch, who uses the term *unheimlich* which, in German, means not from the home, i.e., unfamiliar, and scary. (Ibid, p.221) From this definition, Freud draws his notion of the uncanny as something that threatens a person's perception of the familiar surroundings s/he is used to, in other words, things that are alien to people's understanding and to what people define as natural, as Ray Malewitz explains "This tendency to view "alien" others as evil or frightening is, of course, often itself evil and frightening, as countless stories from history and literature remind us" (1) Nonetheless, what is interesting is that the familiar object, under certain circumstances, can easily turn into an uncanny object. Remarkably, both Jentsch and Freud applied the uncanny theory to literature since it is hard to try to explain it in real life, and the interesting fact is that people's connection to the uncanny happens at adulthood rather than childhood because as children we tend to embrace unfamiliar objects with a more innocent unsuspecting perception. It is important to clarify that the concept of the uncanny is related to feelings and psychological reactions rather than rationality, because rationality fails when it comes to the understanding of the supernatural phenomena. As R Gray affirms:

The uncanny is something fearful and frightening, and as such it has been neglected in the history of aesthetics. But Modernism marks a turn in aesthetics in general toward a fascination with the ugly, the grotesque: a kind of "negative" aesthetics. Freud's essay makes a contribution to this supplement to the aesthetics of the "beautiful" by examining what we might call the aesthetics of the "fearful," the aesthetics of anxiety. (2021, p.1)

What makes uncanny objects more terrifying is the assumption that certain animate objects maybe alive or haunted. In this concern Jentsch states: "in telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton" (cited in Freud, p.227) On the other hand, Freud confirms that the idea of the uncanny has its source in the theme of the double which relates to the split self, shadows, and spirits. Freud thinks that people experience the feeling of the uncanny because they are under the effect of anxiety when they face the case of the return of the spirits or ghosts. During childhood, due to active imagination, the child may experience the impersonation of multiple characters. As we grow into adulthood, we embrace our single identity, so the idea of the double, or multiple character

sounds a little bit uncanny, and this may be a source of anxiety. This psychological experience of anxiety has its roots in a human being's ancient fear of death or dead people. So, the uncanny is, ultimately, an outcome of the confusion between reality and illusion. Or to use Freud's conclusions, the uncanny is created by the person's notions based on the person's own fears. Hence, as is stated above, the most popular demonstration of the uncanny is in spirits, darkness, and loneliness. In this view, Freud argues that the uncanny usually develops from childhood fears: "when we consider that primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based upon them, we shall not be astonished to find the distinction often rather a hazy one." (Freud, 1919, p.249)

Freud tries to explain how the uncanny works by referring to a famous short story by Hoffmann entitled the "Sandman". In this short story the uncanny manifests itself in the shape of a doll called Olympia and its relation to the myth of the sandman who pulls out children's eyes. Hoffmann very cleverly demonstrates the effect of the supernatural through the tangible figure of the doll. Gary explains:

For Freud the source of the uncanny is tied to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes. Why? Here Freud turns to the experience of the psychoanalyst: In dreams, myths, neurotic fantasies, etc. loss of the eyes = fear of castration. In "The Sandman" Coppélius, the "bad" father, interferes with all love relationships. He is the powerful, castrating father who supplants (kills) the good father who first protects Nathaniel's "eyes". The uncanny thus marks the return of the familiar in the sense of our psychic economy (in which nothing is ever lost or wholly forgotten). It is the castration complex as part of our infantile sexuality (genital phase) that is re-invoked by the fear of loss of the eyes in this story. What is uncanny here is thus the return of something in our psychosexual history that has been overcome and forgotten. (2021, p.1)

As a result, to this childhood fear, the main character in the story, Nathanael, commits suicide at the end because he thinks he has seen the mythic sandman in the crowd. Freud argues that Nathanael, the mature man, gives up his life when his adult brain fails to explain the return of a childhood nightmare. Since the character of the sandman is related to a dark and fearful childhood memory, Nathanael, as an adult, finds it too uncanny to understand or cope with.

Towards the end of his article, Freud justifies the use of the uncanny in literature by stating that the uncanny comes to life more evidently in stories because the concept is intensified and clarified since literary works do not follow the rational judgment of reality. What happens is that the speaker, or character, in a literary work, addresses our fears and our repressed notion of anxiety. By accepting the work's fictional development, the reader reacts to the uncanny effect as if it were a real-life discovery or trauma, but ironically, it is not real that is why it is unexplainable. By the time the story ends, it becomes too late for the reader to separate himself emotionally from the effect the uncanny. Even if the reader denies the involvement in the experience, s/he is a part of it because the work projects the reader's fears, and this encourages the reader's identification with a certain character in the story. That explains why sometimes normal stories or events may sound uncanny to certain readers. The reader's reaction to the uncanny nature of a work is an outlet to certain fears that the reader has had since childhood. It is somehow related to Freud's concept of the return of the repressed, but this time on a fictional level. Therefore, the uncanny stories offer a deep look on the psychology of everyone based on that individual's reaction to what s/he reads and what they make out of it. One of the best writers who knows how to provoke the readers through his uncanny situations is Edgar

Allan Poe, whose poems will be used as a sample in this paper to explain how the uncanny works successfully.

After this summary of the meaning of the uncanny, the paper will try to apply the theory to two of Poe's poems: the first one entitled "*The Haunted Palace*". This poem is included in Poe's short story "*The Fall of the House of Usher*" (1839), and it is strongly reflective of the story's gothic nature. The mysterious and ambiguous nature of Poe's themes and styles make his work ideal for psychoanalytical study. The poem opens with a speaker describing an ancient palace, a palace that was once glorious and famous but now falling into ruins:

*In the greenest of our valleys
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion,
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair! (Haunted Palace, 1-8)*

Poe begins by introducing a familiar atmosphere to the reader that will turn eventually to be unfamiliar and uncanny. Everything is common and joyful. There is a green valley with an old mansion that is left empty a long time ago. It is important to notice that the speaker is talking in the past tense in the first three stanzas, so the reader understands that this is all past happiness, and the time shift with which Poe plays is important since it adds to the mysteriousness of the background. As Fiola Kuhon comments: "the readers can find a twist of atmosphere although it is only a short implied between the second stanzas. After describes everything beautifully, the poet than inserts these lines which indicate a bad sign that leads the readers to think that all the beautiful description about the palace or the king is all exist in the past only". (2018, p.3) In stanza three, the most striking symbol emerges:

*Wanderers in that happy valley,
Through two luminous windows, saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tuned law,
Round about a throne where, sitting,
Porphyrogene!
In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen. (17-24)*

The medium through which the travelers and peasants behold what happens inside the mansion are two large windows in front of the palace. In the past, these two windows reflected the happy life of the owner and inhabitants of the mansion. And it is through these two windows that the poem takes a shift towards the uncanny. According to Jentsch the best way

to revoke the uncanny is by presenting an experience in which the characters, in a literary work, are not sure if the object they deal with is alive or not, and the source of this uncertainty are childhood beliefs and fears.

In the case of Poe's poem, the travelers assume that they behold happy spirits of the landlord and his companions in the two large windows of the mansion. Freud carries this idea furthermore when he connects it to the anxiety of losing one's eyes. In his uncanny paper, Freud explains that most people suffer from the fear connected to the eye or eye sighting because of a childhood fear and experience. (Freud, 1919, p.231-232). Seen in the light of this, the two windows can be regarded as a symbol of two eyes that reflect wishes and fears of the travelers and peasants alike. This explains the shift of tone in the next two stanzas. The sense of happiness and goodness becomes a nostalgic feeling that find no place in the present where the palace is haunted by unexplained powers. In stanza four the readers confront the immediate change of the poem's attitude:

*But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn!—for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed. (33-40)*

The reader is informed that an evil spirit crept into the monarch and corrupted it. The whole sense of comfort and joy vanishes now from the mansion and is replaced by the sense of fear and anxiety:

*And travellers, now, within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While, like a ghastly rapid river,
Through the pale door
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh—but smile no more. (41-48)*

The last stanza demonstrates two remarkable changes: first, the speaker talks about the gloomy present now and secondly, the two windows, that are red now, reflect the ghastly figures of the evil spirits. The two windows, or the eyes, reflect an emerging concept of horror that is different from the past perception of the mansion. So, the last two stanzas mark the change of the windows from familiar objects of everyday life to uncanny objects of terror and awe. In this way, the concept of the window has been defamiliarized by changing its connotation in the mind of the

beholders from reflecting past joys to projecting evil spirits. As mentioned in the introduction, Freud believes that one of the highly uncanny subjects that disturbs people is the existing of spirits, especially evil ones. Besides, a red color has been used by Poe to intensify the effect of evil, since red is usually connected to bloodshed and horror. According to Freud, the eyes are highly important parts that are linked to human psychology. A person's definition of the world around him\her depends on the pictures s\he sees from childhood to adulthood. Consequently, how we react towards a certain object depends on how we see it and link it to different meanings. The windows in the poem stand for the eyes of the beholder, and the interpretation of their meaning; again, depends on the beholder.

The poem concludes with two spooky lines: "A hideous throng rush out forever And laugh—but smile no more." (47-8) All the past laughter and joy turn to a vicious evil laugh, a laugh full of despair. This creepy laugh is an echo of the evil existence that is hard to understand or explain and: "Moreover, the deranged thoughts and maniacal music "rush" from the present into the future with alarming velocity. The dance of the "hideous throng," of language derailed from sense, provokes a sinister laughter that is divorced from pleasure". (Bloom, 1999, 34) The palace that was once welcoming and familiar seems now terrifying and driving people away because of the existence of a mysterious evil power. Interestingly, the reader is never informed about the nature of this evilness. Is it a demonic existence, or is it a creation of the travelers' mind? Poe leaves it to the reader to conclude for him\herself, and this; brilliantly, intensifies the uncanny feeling when one reads the poem.

In the same manner, Poe takes an ordinary occasion and turns it into a creepy situation full of uncanny expectation in his poem *The Raven* (1845). Dana Gioia (2020) conforms that "we can begin to understand the poem's strange authority by isolating at least four key elements—its compelling narrative structure, darkly evocative atmosphere, hypnotic verbal music, and archetypal symbolism" (1). Beginning with the medieval sense of the speaker, which attracts the reader to the story, the speaker is shown as sitting alone one cold solitary December night reading a book:

*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. (1-4)*

The speaker is described as a man who isolates himself from others because he is full of grief for the death of his beloved Lenore. Even his room seems to embrace that sense of desolation, the curtains look "sad". Suddenly, the speaker hears a tap on his door, and the ordinary tap on the door is transformed easily into a ghost story through the interesting elements that Poe introduces in the poem: the dreary night, the memory of the dead beloved, the curious movements of the "purple curtain" and the ghost stories the speaker recalls. As Kyle Jung states "The Gothic and Fantastic elements that permeate the poem are most evident in the second, thirteenth, fourteenth, and eighteenth stanzas. These passages are the most explicit in terms of the division between the real and unreal." (2021,1) Meanwhile, as the speaker decides to open his door bravely to see who is outside his chamber, he is astonished to find only bleak darkness. Standing alone at the doorway, the only thought that comes to the speaker's mind is

to utter the name of his deceased beloved Lenore, and to his amazement he hears a sound echoing the name:

*But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!" –
Merely this and nothing more. (27-30)*

When the speaker returns to his room, he hears another tapping. He tries to cling to the world of rationality to explain the mysterious tapping on the door. As he opens his window, a raven comes in and lands on the edge of his door. As the speaker contemplates the possibility of the bird being possessed by a ghost, he asks the raven its name, it replies "nevermore". At first, the speaker thinks that the raven is Lenore's spirit, but then he pushes the idea away and says that the raven is a demon spirit coming from hell to disturb his tranquility, Malewitz suggests that:

The speaker considers both uncanny scenarios after a mysterious talking raven appears, which leads the speaker to descend into madness. But before any of this happens, (and before the uncanny can therefore operate), Poe's poem must "pretend to move in the world of common reality." Poe does this by having his speaker insist that there is a rational explanation for the tapping (2021,p.1).

Annoyed by the ominous presence of the bird, the speaker asks the raven to leave, but the bird again replies "nevermore". The whole atmosphere of the poem shifts from the rational perception of the speaker of the world around him, to the uncanny feeling which results from the appearance of the raven. Bloom asserts that "Poe's bird is at once a literal and a symbolic presence, a visitor from the dark external world and an emblem of the darkness of grief within the speaker's soul" (1999, p.46). At this point of the poem the speaker realizes that the raven's shadow will never leave his soul.

*And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore! (107-09)*

In his essay "The philosophy of composition" 1846, Poe discusses the art of composing his poems and he refers to "the Raven" as an example of composition. Poe declares that he has chosen the raven as a symbol of sadness and death, but what Poe did not realize is that when the poem is read it leaves that sense of suspense and an uncanny feeling due to his choice of setting and symbols. Poe, very skillfully, transforms the raven into an uncanny object and he creates a completely new symbol. Traditionally, the raven signifies a bad omen or witchcraft. Poe, in the poem, presents the raven as a medium of a dead spirit. According to Freud, the uncanny subject makes the reader uncomfortable and this is exactly how the reader feels towards the raven in the poem. As the speaker of the poem's agitation is increased with every detail, so is the reader's confusion as the raven starts to seem more and more as an uncanny object. The ending of the poem adds to the sinister situation as the speaker asks for salvation but the raven answers "nevermore", thus confirming the speaker's worst fears of being haunted forever. The poem concludes with the probability that the speaker will continue his

life under the shadow of the uncanny presence of the raven, and the reader is left with this dark image of the speaker's future.

In conclusion, it becomes evident that employing Freud's concept of the uncanny can be used as a very striking element in literary works. Poe, on the other hand, is very famous for his love for any subject that is mysterious and awkward. Thus, it is not surprising that his poems and short stories reflect the uncanny feeling as they are read and examined, and his work is ideal for any person who wishes to understand what the uncanny is about. As it has been discussed above, both *Haunted Palace* and *The Raven* offer very good examples of Freud's ideas of how to morph an ordinary object into an uncanny one. Poe's tone in both poems shift from familiar to uncanny, from rationality to irrationality and from calmness to distress. The palace shifts from being an ordinary place of residence to a lively demonic terrain thanks to Poe's skills. Likewise, the raven changes from an ordinary bird to an uncanny messenger of hellish spirits. So, Freud was right when he predicted that it is so easy to create an uncanny object out of familiar things. All that a writer needs to manipulate his work's surrounding and characters to create the illusion of uncanniness, and that's exactly what Poe admirably did.

REFERENCES

- Bloom, H. (Ed.) (1999). *Edgar Allan Poe*. US: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Bowra, C.M. (1961). *The romantic imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Freud, S. (2020). *The uncanny*. Retrieved from https://uncanny.la.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/freud-uncanny_001.pdf on September 15, 2020.
- Jung, K. (2021). *Fantastic conflict in the Raven*. Retrieved from <https://artifactsjournal.missouri.edu/2012/07/fantastic-conflict-in-%C2%93the-raven%C2%94/> on January 5, 2021.
- Gary, R. (2020). *Freud and the literary imagination*. Retrieved from <http://courses.washington.edu/freudlit/Uncanny.Notes.html> on September 20, 2020.
- Gioia, D. (2020). *On Edgar Allan Poe's the Raven*. Retrieved from <http://danagioia.com/essays/reviews-and-authors-notes/on-edgar-allan-poes-the-raven/> on October 10, 2020.
- Hoffmann, E.T.A. (2020). *The sandman*. Retrieved from <http://art3idea.psu.edu/metalepsis/texts/sandman.pdf> on October 3, 2020.
- Kuhon, F. (2018). Symbolism in Poe's *The Haunted Palace*. *Academic Journal Perspective: Language, Education and Literature*, 6(2), 89-95.

- Malewitz, R. (2020). *What is the uncanny*. Retrieved from <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-uncanny> on October 12, 2020.
- Poe, E. A. (2020). *The Haunted Palace*. Retrieved from <https://poets.org/poem/haunted-palace> on September 20, 2020.
- Poe, E. A. (2020). *The philosophy of composition*. Retrieved from <https://www.eapoe.org/works/essays/philcomp.htm> on September 22, 2020.
- Poe, E. A. (2020). *The Raven*. Retrieved from <https://poets.org/poem/haunted-palace> on September 15, 2020.
- Wilbur, R. (2003). *Edgar Allan Poe: Poems and poetics*. New York: American poets' project.