

Abstract

The focus of this thesis aims at mental illness in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, their incorporation in his short stories and their function as a means of inducing of horror in the reader. It will be attempted to establish a typology of madness based upon the insane characters from eight of Poe's stories. These stories, chosen for their clear depiction of mentally deranged characters, are "The Black Cat," "The Cask of Amontillado," "Ligeia," "Eleonora," "Berenice," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson."

This thesis will consist of four main parts with a small additional chapter dedicated to the life of Edgar Allan Poe, since the author's life experience is also important for the understanding and appreciating of his work. Chapter 1 will focus on Poe's narrators in the stories "Eleonora" and "Ligeia." Their insanity, stemming from love, passion and loss, and especially from a vain attempt to achieve the ideal of beauty manifests in their later depression or drug addiction. In essence, the characters are driven mad by unhappy love. Chapter 2 will show the physical manifestation of madness into murder. It will deal with Poe's insane murderers from the tales "The Black Cat," "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." In these tales, the narrators attempt to defend their sanity while in reality, they unconsciously show their crisis of rationality instead. Their insanity stems from their unhealthy fixation upon a certain object or a need they need to fulfill. This is then demonstrated with their perverseness and rage. Poe also makes use of the insanity-defense controversy here by showing the then common view that a person governed by reason cannot be driven by insanity. Chapter 3 will analyze the melancholic Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and the monomaniac narrator in "Berenice," with respect to the disruption of the characters'

life certainties. Their mental balance is linked to the stability of their world which, upon crumbling, takes away the characters' sanity as well. That later leads to the harming of others, specifically to their premature entombment. Here the insanity stems from the characters' introversion and obsession. The final chapter will then discuss the theme of doppelgangers which can be found in the tales "William Wilson" and "Ligeia." The madness in these stories is seen in the narrators who are being driven to murder after dreaming up a nonexistent individual. Their insanity stems from an uncontrollable desire in one story, and in the other, it is a battle with one's conscience in a personality split.

Although the focus on mind and mental illness is usual in the Gothic genre, Poe's focus on the personality splits in his characters, the split between reason and emotion or the split between rationality and insanity, is described in extraordinary depth with the use of both rational analysis and emotional intensity and that makes his interpretation of mental illness in literature novel.