
The Transformative Power of “Creative Misreading”: Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic Legacy in H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* and M.R. James' *Casting the Runes*

**القوة التحويلية لـ ”سوء القراءة الإبداعية“: إرث إدجار آلان بو
القوطي في الغرفة الحمراء لـ إتش جي ويلز و الرمي بتعويدة
الروينات لـ إم آر جيمس**

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ملخص البحث:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في التأثير الملحوظ لإدجار آلان بو على الإرث القوطي البريطاني ، وعلى وجه التحديد ، *الغرفة الحمراء* لـ إتش جي ويلز و *الرمي بتعويدة الروينات* لـ إم آر جيمس في ضوء مفهوم "سوء القراءة الإبداعية" في نظرية هارولد بلووم عن "القلق من التأثير". بالاعتماد على نظرية بلوم واستخدام التحليل النصي ، توضح الدراسة كيف أساء المؤلفون البريطانيون قراءة أعمال بو بشكل خلاق لتأسيس أساليبهم الأدبية الخاصة مع الحفاظ على الارتباط بتقاليد القوطية. من خلال تحليل القوة التحويلية لسوء القراءة الإبداعية ، تلقي هذه الدراسة الأكاديمية الضوء على العلاقة المعقدة بين التأثير الأدبي والتفسير الإبداعي وتطور الأدب القوطي باعتباره احد اهم الأصناف الأدبية من خلال استكشاف العناصر القوطية في هاتين القصتين القصيرتين لويلز وجيمس.

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الكلمات الدالة : سوء القراءة الإبداعية ، إدجار آلان بو ، إتش جي ويلز ، إم آر جيمس ،
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الادب القوطي.

Abstract

This study examines the enduring influence of Edgar Allan Poe on British Gothic tradition, Specifically, the works of H.G. Wells in *The Red Room* and M.R. James in *Casting the Runes* in the light of the concept of “creative misreading” in Harold Bloom's theory of the “anxiety of influence”. Drawing upon Bloom's theory and utilizing textual analysis, the study demonstrates how these British authors creatively misread Poe's works to establish their own voices while maintaining a connection to his Gothic tradition. By analyzing the transformative power of misreading, this paper sheds light on the intricate relationship between literary influence, creative interpretation, and the evolution of the Gothic genre. Exploring the gothic elements in these two short stories of Wells and James, this study attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the lasting impact of Poe's legacy and the dynamic nature of literary influence across cultural and temporal boundaries.

Keywords : Creative Misreading, Edgar Allan Poe, H.G. Wells, M.R. James, *The Red Room*, *Casting the Runes*, originality, anxiety of influence, Gothic genre.

I-Introduction

The complex dynamics of influence and originality in the realm of literature has long intrigued the domain of literary criticism. Harold Bloom's theory: “The Anxiety of Influence”, encapsulated in the concept of “Creative Misreading”, offers a full understanding of the interrelational bonds between literary works and what is really meant to original on the part of the author. This academic study explores the transformative power of “Creative Misreading”, or “Misprision”, or “Misinterpretation”, different labels for one mechanism by means of which the long-lasting impact of Edgar Allan Poe on British Gothic short stories, specifically H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* and M.R. James' *Casting the Runes* has been closely examined, highlighting how the two British writers secured themselves unique gothic style of writing.

Edgar Allan Poe has been widely acknowledged for his mastery of the macabre and the eerie. He stands as a prominent figure within the Gothic literary tradition, whose works with its themes and stylistic innovations reverberating throughout the literary landscape leaving an indelible mark on

subsequent generations of writers. The Bloomian notion of influence, however, extends beyond unswerving imitation or replication of ideas; it encompasses a more complex process in which a writer engages with the work of his precursor, reinterpreting or rather misinterpreting it, and establishing his own unique literary individuality.

The concept of “Creative Misreading” is unmistakably central to Bloom's theory of literary criticism, in which poets and authors actively engage in a creative transformative process of interpretation. Through “Creative Misreading” is an exploration of new avenues and the development of original ideas, even within the framework of a well-established literary tradition. By creatively misreading their precursors’ production, authors can instantaneously pay reverence to their influences while devising their own literary trajectories.

Both H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* and M.R. James' *Casting the Runes* are notable examples of British Gothic short stories that bear the unmistakable influence of Poe's works. The “Creative Misreading” and reinterpretation of Poe's themes, motifs, and narrative techniques within these short stories, this paper uncovers how Wells and James have incorporated and transformed Poe's legacy to craft their own unique style of gothic narratives.

Inductively analyzing the two short stories, this study has attempted to illustrate the transformative power of “Creative Misreading” in the ongoing evolution of literature. Through unraveling these intricate threads of influence and originality, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the dialogic relationships that shape literary traditions and illuminate the constant revisionism or responsiveness between past and present.

Having the legacy of Edgar Allan Poe investigated in the two seminal short stories of H.G. Wells and M.R. James, this study provides a broader understanding of the complexity of literary influence, creative interpretation, and the dynamic nature of literature and the Gothic genre. Moreover, it sheds light on the ways in which writers grappled with “the anxiety of influence”, creatively misreading their precursors to formulate new paths, contributing to the ongoing canonization and evolution of literary traditions.

II-Creative Misreading and Bloom’s The Anxiety of Influence

The word “Misreading” lexically entails mistakes made in the process of reading, comprehending, or making judgments. However, within the realm of literary theory, “Misreading” gains a wider significance and serves as a literary criticism framework. “Misreading is not only a misunderstanding of the text, but also a creative act in reading and writing” (Tan, 824). The concept of “Misreading” was initially introduced in the writings of American

poststructuralist theorists, such as Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and Geoffrey Hartman, whose works predominantly draw from the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes (824).

All reading is misreading so long as no complete or perfect meaning could be possibly achieved because of indirect correspondence between the signifier and the signified, called upon by certain literary theories. Delving into the origins of misreading theory, two influential figures cannot be overlooked: Ferdinand De Saussure, a Swiss linguist, and Jacques Derrida, a French literary critic and language philosopher. Saussure has changed the focus of the study in linguistics from the traditional diachronic to synchronic approach. He identified a significant distinction between certain binaries; such that of speech and language, asserting that any sign comprises a signifier and a signified. The former signifies the phonetic and orthographic representations of words, while the latter denotes the abstract meaning associated with those words. Saussure affirmed the arbitrary and the inconsistent relationship between the signifier and the signified. Meaning arises from the reciprocal functioning of signs, implying that the meaning of speech does not directly correspond to objective reality. Since language functions as an independent system, and the meaning of its words is not determined solely by individual speakers; but the entire language system has a word to say in deciding the meaning. Such uncertainty of the relationship between the signifier and the signified raises questions around whether the signifier can truly convey the meaning of reality and whether real or virtual interlocutors can fully grasp the intended meaning through the signifier alone. These uncertainties are what contribute to unescapable potential misinterpretations or misreading of a text compiled of different signs (824-5).

As a deconstructive theorist, Derrida introduced the concept of "deferring" to highlight the essential difference between symbols, specifically the meanings of "difference" and "defer." "Difference" refers to spatial distinctions within a system of signs, while "defer" denotes the temporal aspect of signifiers continuously postponing the presence of meaning. Language, according to Derrida, is essentially a system of extreme differences, in which each signifier carries the traces of all other signifiers, and from the free combination of these traces it is difficult to determine a fixed or certain meaning. Moreover, utterance always contains delayed silence and the absence of certain signified elements, which contributes to the postponement of meaning. According to Derrida, there is no complete

signifier in the process of writing and understanding where symbols become a series of signified elements without a definitive signifier. This signifier, therefore, generates uncertain meaning, leading to a permanent process of interpretation. The absence of stable and fixed meaning necessitates interpretation, rather than the presence of meaning itself (825-6).

Both Saussure and Derrida denial of any direct correspondence between the signifier and the signified with the arbitrariness of language makes misreading inevitable. Such language limitations lead to the incomplete expression of ideas, resulting in the alienation and distortion of the author's original intention. As readers engage with these texts, they can only encounter the shortcoming of the author's message (825-6).

Misreading in rhetoric and literary criticism is also brought about by the role of "metaphor" in language with its ability to disrupt logical reasoning. Paul De Man claims that metaphor prevents direct expression of reality and contaminates the indicative function of language. Intertextuality also involves misreading in all readings due to the overflow of meanings from various texts. These different developed interpretations make it challenging to arrive at a finalized definitive understanding (825-6).

Reader-centered literary criticism emphasizes that the meaning of a text arises from the interaction between the text and the reader, leading to inevitable misreading. Historical and contextual factors also influence understanding, as readers approach texts with preconceived notions shaped by consensus and historical conditions. Foucault, also, asserts that readers are influenced by the dominant discourse of their time, leading to the misinterpretation of ancient texts due to linguistic and contextual differences. The uncertainty of language, rhetoric, and the text itself often creates a contradictory circumstance, which makes the process of misreading or misprision or misinterpretation an unavoidable in the part of writers, readers or literary critics (826-7).

Nonetheless, Bloomian "Misreading" goes beyond the inability of readers and authors to fully grasp the true meaning of a text. It encompasses the creative process by means of which an author attempts to minimize his predecessors' influence and carve out his own writing space. In other words, Misreading is a source of inspiration to grow literature and foster creative thinking and criticism.

In his book, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), the American critic Harold Bloom, first coined the term of "anxiety of influence" to describe the relationship between poets and their literary precursors, has later become central to all his subsequent works. Bloom "elaborated the theory, and

demonstrated its application to diverse poetic texts, in three rapidly successive books, *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), and *Poetry and Repression* (1976)” (Abram & Harpham, 177). Bloom himself admitted this stating:

I am asserting the thesis that canonization represents the ultimate or transformative manifestation of literary revisionism. Consequently, I am compelled to summarize some of my previous discussions on revisionary processes from my works on misprision, namely "The Anxiety of Influence" and "A Map of Misreading." However, I aim for this recapitulation to transcend mere repetition and convey a more refined tone. (Bloom, *Khaballah*, 100)

The process of poetic influence, particularly between two powerful and genuine poets, consistently unfolds through a reinterpretation of the preceding poet's work. This act of creative correction, though it may seem like a misinterpretation, is essential and inevitable. The rich lineage of poetic influence, encompassing the predominant tradition of Western poetry from the Renaissance onwards, is characterized by a blend of unease, self-preserving caricature, distortion, and purposeful revisionism. Without these elements, contemporary poetry as we know it would be impossible to conceive (Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 30).

“Unlike the traditional theory of influence which is mainly concerned with the ties and links between different works and the effect of one work on another”, Tawfiq Yousef argues, “Bloom's method draws upon the psychological theory of Freud to explain literary influence” (Yousef, 873). It worth mentioning that the "anxiety of influence" employs a complex psychological and creative process through which poets contend with and eventually surpass the influence of their literary precursors. Bloom proposes that this relationship resembles the Freudian “Oedipal complex, where poets perceive their precursors as father figures” (Cuddon, *A Dictionary*, 46). It involves a progression from imitation to rejection, leading to a transformative reinterpretation that gives birth to a new and unique poetic voice.

The process of Poetic Influence, when it occurs between two genuine and powerful poets, always takes place through a misinterpretation of the preceding poet's work. This misreading serves as a creative correction, an essential and inevitable act of reinterpretation. The lineage of fruitful poetic influence, encompassing the primary tradition of Western poetry from the Renaissance onwards, is characterized by a constant sense of unease and a

need to preserve one's artistic identity. It involves distorting the original work, engaging in deliberate and unconventional revisions that are indispensable for the existence of modern poetry as we know it (Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 30).

Harold Bloom argues that "all poets must confront their precursors in a quasi-Oedipal struggle in order to create an imaginative space for themselves" (Buchanan, 97). Such inevitable confrontation, accordingly, should bring about either weak or strong poets. The strong ones are those who "are able to digest, or sublimate their precursors [intellectual production] via a process Bloom refers to as 'creative misreading'" (97). That is, "find their own truth in the work of their precursors and use that as their source of inspiration. In this way, they "make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 5). In contrast, weak poets are only able to idealize and imitate their precursors" (Buchanan, 97). Being possessed with such influence, "these esteemed forerunners", Edward Young sadly argues, "monopolize our focus, hindering our introspective examination. [...] they bias our judgment in favor of their talents, thereby diminishing our self-perception. Ultimately, their illustrious reputation instills a sense of intimidation within us". (qtd. in Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 27).

Unlike Ben Jonson, Bloom does not see any sort of creativity or strength in the sheer 'imitation' of previous artistic production. For Ben Jonson, the poet is creative so long as being able to "make choice of one excellent man above the rest", then having the ability to "convert the substance or riches of [...] That former] poet to his own use" to the extent that "the copy may be mistaken for the original" (qtd. in Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 27). This, to Harold Bloom, is the weak side of the 'poetic influence' where the latter poet does nothing but blindly imitating the former one without any shape of transformation.

The development of a great writer, thus, involves a progressive process in which this writer proceeds from admiration and imitation of their role models to a stage of rejection and displacement. Eventually, the new writer reaches a decisive point of "misprision" or "misreading", where they distort and transform the work of the precursor to create something entirely original. Bloom argues:

The process of canonizing literary texts is inherently contradictory, as it involves imposing a particular interpretation on the text, thereby misreading it. Canonization represents the utmost level of what

Nietzsche referred to as Interpretation, wherein texts are subjected to the exercise of the Will-to-Power (Bloom, *Khaballah*, 100).

Bloom provides several examples to illustrate this concept, such as the struggle of “Wordsworth with Milton, Shelley with Bloodworth, and Wallace Stevens with Whitman [, which] are some of [... his] exemplary cases of the strong originality born in the overthrow of the earlier influential writer in the creative psyche of the nascent later one” (Cuddon, *The Penguin* 47).

Bloomian term “The Anxiety of Influence” echoes T. S. Eliot’s emphasis on the necessity of the poet’s reading not only in his own language tradition but in as many languages’ traditions as possible. Bloom’s unavoidable confrontation of authors is the criteria for any real meaningful appreciation for the latter’s work. In his seminal essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, Eliot attempted to highlight this irrevocable relationship between an individual poet and the tradition of all poetry. Eliot argues that “[n]o poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (Eliot, 15).

It should be known that Bloom's theory of poetic influence is not exclusively confined to the literary genre of poetry since in his later work, *The Western Canon: The Books and the School of the Ages* (1994), Bloom extends this idea to encompass all forms of creative writing. According to Bloom, the struggle with precursors and the process of creative misreading are essential for any writer seeking to establish their own voice within the broader tradition of literature.

This hypothesis should be confirmed through the examination of the dialogic nature and the characteristics of language, argumentative feature of rhetoric, intertextuality, discourse analysis, and theories of reading and writing, that definitely help us to gain a fully understanding of the unavoidable nature of “Misreading” in both the evolution of literature and the vigorous significance it holds within the domain of literary criticism.

A-Misreading and the Theories of Literary Criticism

According to Tawfiq Yousef Bloom's theory “The Anxiety of Influence” could be distinguished from the traditional theory of influence, in which the influence should be traced back to (a) specific limited work(s) with priority given to the earlier (the original) work on the account of the latter (the imitation) one (874). The traditional concept of influence suggests that literary history can be compared to the organic movement of water, with a

one-way "current" or connection between an "anterior" text and a "posterior" one. In addition to solely attributing the influence to the newer text, this approach also elevates Text A as it is considered the original or "source" of specific elements found in Text B. This naturalistic viewpoint of literary creation tends to inherently regard an imitation or "derivation" as inferior by default (Morgan, 240).

Referring to the interconnectedness of texts through direct quotation, allusion, or simply by their existence as texts, "Intertextuality" offers a broader alternative to traditional influence theory and emphasizes the structural relations among multiple texts. Intertextuality modifies the focus from the author and their work to the discourse and text itself, emphasizing the interaction and play between different texts. It views literary texts as collections of quotations and echoes, where meaning is produced through substitutions, cross-references, misinterpretations, and misprisions.

Although Bloom's theory of "The Anxiety of Influence" and the theory of "intertextuality" are closely associated, yet each offered distinct perspectives. While Intertextuality focuses on the interconnectedness of texts and the multidirectionality and of meaning, Bloom's theory emphasizes authorial interrelationships and the process of responsiveness by misinterpretation, misprision, or misreading. While Bloom acknowledges the importance of prior texts and rejects the autonomy of works acclaimed by the New Critics, his theory has a more limited perspective on textuality compared to intertextuality. Intertextuality allows for pluralistic interpretations and emphasizes the multidirectionality of intertextual relationships, while Bloom's theory focuses on tracing a limited number of authorial interrelationships (Yousef, 874).

Both "The Anxiety of Influence" and "Intertextuality" challenge traditional approaches and propose a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of literary influence and interpretation. Bloomian theory challenges both New Criticism and historical approaches by emphasizing the ongoing process of "misprision" and creative reproduction among interconnected works. He rejects the Formalist criticism approach and suggests a practical criticism that involves the study of "Misprision" or "Misreading" (875).

Bloom's theory involves the misreading and creative correction of precursor texts, leading to a departure from the past and the creation of new literary works. This theory finds relevance in the interrelationship between English and American gothic writers, where Wells and James strived hard to establish their own distinct voices by deviating from the influence of

American gothic tradition of Edger Allan Poe. With steadily growing self-confidence both G. H. Wells and M. R. James, like many of nineteenth and twentieth century British authors, managed to make a breakthrough in writing their distinctly British gothic styles away from their precursor Poe's American traditions.

B-The Ratios of Creative Misreading

Bloom identifies six distinct possible "revisionary ratios" of "Misreading" or "Misprision" or "Misinterpretation", referring to the ways in which a writer grapples in their relation to precursors:

A writer may execute misreading through a "Clinamen", which traced back to Lucretius' concept of atoms swerving to enable change in the universe. This deviation from their precursors is an artistic phenomenon which involves interpreting the predecessor's work in a manner that introduces a corrective shift. The writer's swerve signifies a corrective movement within their own work, implying that the precursor's work was accurate up to a certain point but should have swerved in the same direction as the new literary work. (Bloom, *The Anxiety*,14).

The second ratio of revisionary "Misreading" is that in which a writer may complete their precursor's work and becomes its antithesis by interpreting the parent-work's terms in a different sense, suggesting that the precursor failed to push the boundaries sufficiently. This is known as "Tessera", attributed back to ancient mystery cults. "Tessera", associated with mosaic-making, denotes completion and antithesis. In this context, it refers to a symbolic recognition, like a fragment of a small pot that, when it is combined with other fragments, it reconstructs the vessel. In literature, realizing antithetical completion involves interpreting the parent-work in a way that retains its terms but assigns them a different meaning, implying that the precursor's work lacked due exploration of the full possibilities (14).

A writer may employ a third technique of creative "Misreading" through "kenosis", borrowed from St. Paul, to move towards discontinuity with the precursor, resembling the psychological defense mechanisms employed by our psyches against repetitive compulsions. "Kenosis" is a breaking mechanism like our psychological defenses, that entails the writer humbling themselves and emptying out, in Bloom's words similar to Jesus accepting a reduction from divine to human status through experiencing crucifixion. This act of self-ebbing, seemingly relinquishing their own imaginative godhood, suggests a termination of creative identity (14).

A writer may also misread the forerunner by falling in a personalized Counter-Sublime, known as “Daemonization”, in response to his precursor's Sublime. “Daemonization”, inspired by Neo-Platonic philosophy, involves an intermediary being, “neither divine nor human, enters into the adept to aid him”. The writer here recognizes a power in the parent-work that surpasses the parent itself and exists in a realm beyond the precursor himself. By positioning their own works in relation to the parent-works, these writers generalize and diminish the uniqueness of the earlier work, achieving this personalized Counter-Sublime (15).

Another possible way of “Misreading” is that in which a writer may undergo a process of self-purgation, seeking solitude as his ultimate goal. Bloom uses the term “Askesis”, drawing inspiration from pre-Socratic shamans like Empedocles. Unlike “Kenosis”, which involves emptying, “Askesis” is a revisionary movement of curtailing. The writer willingly forsakes a portion of their human and imaginative faculties to distance themselves from others, including the precursor. Within their works, this could be achieved by positioning it in relation to the parent-work, prompting both works to undergo self-purgation and truncating the precursor's endowment (15).

The last Bloomian technique of “Misreading” is “Apophrades”, or the return of the dead, originates from the Athenian tradition where deceased individuals would revisit their former homes on dismal days. In the later phase of the writer's journey, burdened by solipsistic imaginative solitude, they once again hold their own work open to the influence of the precursor's work. This process creates an uncanny effect, as the achievements of the new work give the impression that the later poet themselves had authored the characteristic work of the precursor, blurring the distinction between their voices (16).

Out of these 6 techniques of “Misreading”, “Clinamen” and “Tessera” are applicable in detecting Edgar Allan Poe's Legacy in H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* and M.R. James' *Casting the Runes* to show how the two British authors utilized deviation and completion to evade the anxiety of influence and assert their own originality in the gothic tradition. To lay down the common ground between the three writers, the study, firstly, shall begin with parading a historical hint about the emergence of the Gothic as a literary genre with reference to its major characteristics. Secondly, Edger Allan Poe's contribution to the genre has been highlighted, compared to H.G. Wells' and M.R. James' contributions highlighting how each is different and original in their own techniques, themes and styles. The study, in the light of

Bloom's theory "The Anxiety of Influence", has pointed out that how both British writers; H.G. Wells and M.R. James, through their short stories *The Red Room* and *Casting the Runes* respectively, could have surpassed the cross-cultural anxiety of Poe's influence to assert their unique position among the gothic tradition writers.

III-Gothic literature (Origins and Definition)

Despite being viewed as outdated, Gothic fiction remains as relevant as ever. Despite its reputation as an unstable literary form, it has proved to be remarkably persistent and productive, with works spanning over 250 years (Hogle, p.1). Gothic literature is a literary genre that emerged in the late 18th century and peaked in the Victorian era, and characterized by dark themes, supernatural elements, and an atmosphere of mystery and suspense. Jerrold E. Hogle mentions the genre's resurgence in the 1890s and its expansion across different media forms such as film, television, music, and video games in the 1900s (Hogle, p.2). The term *Gothic* was first used to refer to the popular Gothic style of architecture in the Middle Ages, often characterized by the medieval period's gloom and mystery. Nevertheless, the emergence of the term has come to label a broader range of cultural expressions, including literature. Gothic literature has fascinated readers for centuries since its birth in the late 18th century and its evolution in the 19th century, subtly diving deep into the darker side of the human psyche and the supernatural worlds. It also continues to stimulate writers, readers, and audiences today, with its legacy could be seen in everything from horror movies to the most recent thrillers. The inherent capacity of Gothic literature to survey the darker sides of human nature and express their anxieties about the changing world around them. has made it compelling enough to captivate and inspire readers at all times.

The emergence of Gothic literature in the late 18th century was a natural reaction to the excessive rejection of all that is not scientific, logical, and rational throughout the Age of Reason or Enlightenment. Gothic literature, in contrast, respected all that is supernatural, mysterious, and irrational. Historically, the Goths were a Germanic tribe that contributed to the downfall of the Roman Empire. Their early history is not well documented, but archaeologists have found evidence of their settlement in the Baltic and migration to the Black Sea. They first attacked Roman territory in the 3rd century, and eventually, under Alaric, captured Rome in AD 410 and established kingdoms in France and Italy.

The term "Gothic" was originally used in the Renaissance to describe a barbaric and irrational style of architecture attributed to the Germanic tribes who sacked Rome. By the 18th century, it had come to be associated with the primitive and superstitious medieval age but was later reclaimed as the site of a truly national, democratic, and civilized heritage. This myth of the Goths emerged as an alternative origin story in the 18th century, drawing upon sources such as Tacitus' *Germania* to depict the Goths as brave, virtuous, and strongly believing in justice and liberty. The Gothic remained a symbolic site of a culture's struggle to define and claim possession of the civilized, and to reject what is seen as other to that civilized self (Punter & Byron p. 5). Such development of the significance of Gothic highlights the fundamental questions related to the history, cultural and aesthetic forces, and symbolic techniques, as well as its cultural functions at different times and in different places.

In her article, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," E.J. Clery illustrated the origins and development of the Gothic literary genre, in England during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. She maintains that Gothic literature emerged principally as a response to cultural and social anxieties relevant to class, gender, and national identity (p.22). Gothic literature has been used to address and disguise some of the most essential desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety in western culture since the eighteenth century, such as the desire for aristocratic wealth versus the desire to overthrow old orders of authority in favor of a pseudo-equality associated with the rising middle-class ideology (Hogle, p.4).

The term "Gothic", according to E. J. Clery, was accidentally introduced to the literary territory, and it was not originally used to describe the horror genre in literature. She asserts that what is widely acknowledged to be the first gothic novel is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, "when it was published on Christmas Day 1764 it was subtitled *simply A Story*", with no mention of the word Gothic. It wasn't until the second edition in 1765 that "Gothic" was added to its title as a facetious paradox (21). Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* has significantly affected the genre's popularity in the 1790s and its subsequent evolution into various forms such as plays, operas, short stories, and full-fledged Gothic novels (Hogle, p.1).

E. J. Clery traces the Gothic sentimental novels literary traditions, including romance and the sentimental novel. During the mid to late 1700s, the term "romances" was used to describe horror literature. Clery notes that Gothic's characteristic elements, such as the supernatural, the sublime, and the grotesque, were definitely used to explore the themes of fear, desire, and

the unknown (36). Ann Radcliffe *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* have critically helped in the evolution and the development of Gothic literature. In addition to these early works, the Gothic genre was also inspired by other cultural movements of the time. Jerrold E. Hogle argues, "the Gothic was influenced by such diverse forces as the growth of scientific inquiry, the rise of industrialization, the French Revolution, and the emergence of Romanticism" (Hogle, 2002, p. 1). E. J. Clery also examines the role of historical events and cultural trends in bringing about and shaping Gothic writing. She states that Romanticism and the breakout of French Revolution contributed significantly to the Gothic's popularity by increasing the sense of instability and uncertainty in society (27).

The origins of Gothic literature, thus would be traced back to certain literary and cultural movements of the time, including the Romantic movement, the Enlightenment, and the rise of scientific inquiry. Literary scholar David Punter also confirms this, assuming that the Gothic is a response to Enlightenment rationalism, evoking a sense of terror or horror through the exploration of irrational or unexplained phenomena (Punter, *The Literature*, p. 111-112). These diverse stimuli shaped the Gothic genre into a distinct and compelling style of literature that continues to capture the imagination of readers to this day.

A-The Characteristics of Gothic Literature

Since Gothic literature has become become a glaring form of literature, it remains to attract readers with its dark and haunting themes. Gothic literature is well-recognized by several distinctive literary features, such as mysterious and eerie atmosphere, paranormal elements, a scrutiny of the darker side of the human psyche, and an escalating sense of danger. In the following few lines, the major defining features of Gothic literature are briefly examined. Some general parameters which outline Gothic tales, such as the use of antiquated spaces, hidden secrets from the past, and hauntings in the form of ghosts, specters, or monsters that oscillate between conventional reality and the supernatural (Hogle, p.8-9).

The first and most prominent of these features is the use of supernatural elements, such as ghosts, monsters, vampires, and other ethereal creatures, as well as mystical events like curses and haunted houses. Exploring supernatural elements is an attempt of Gothic literature to travel into the world of the unknown and the mysterious. Anne Williams states, "Gothic literature employs supernatural elements as a means of exploring the limits

of human experience and knowledge" (Williams, 3), which is a key literary characteristic of the Gothic literary genre.

Julia Kristeva has proposed how Gothic literature skillfully functionalized the use of "abjection". "Abjection" is a psychological defensive mechanism that refers to throwing off or distancing oneself from things that threaten to re-immense us in our primal origins. Gothic literature uses abject figures, such as monsters, ghosts, and criminals, to explore the contradictions and complexities of the western middle-class self. The Gothic genre blends high and low culture, mixing traditional forms of identity with the vagaries of exchange value and capitalist-class imperatives (Hogle, p.7-8).

Another defining feature of Gothic literature is its intense concentration on the sinister side of human nature. This may be represented by the themes of psychological horror, obsession, madness, depression, paranoia, death, and decay. Fred Botting claims that "Gothic literature explores the darker side of the human psyche, revealing the repressed fears and desires of its characters" (Botting, 7).

The looming presence of death is vividly pictured in Gothic literary genres, whose characters are often haunted by a specter of mortality. Also, decay is a frequent motif, in the form of decaying buildings, corpses, and other macabre elements prominently featured in Gothic fiction. Brian McHale argues that "Gothic narratives are primarily concerned with death, the dead, and the undead, with decay and desolation, with ruin and decay" (McHale, 14). This is evident Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, where the house and its inhabitants are consumed by decay and madness. Madness, too, is a rampant theme in Gothic writings, by means of which characters are ultimately driven to the brink of insanity by their own experiences.

Gothic characters are often presented as morally ambiguous, whereas its heroes and heroines are inconsistent and sometimes even villainous. The moral ambiguity of Gothic characters often contributes to the sense of uncertainty and unease that transfuses many Gothic works. Gothic writing often underlines the limits of human powers and experiences to combat the consequences of his or her actions.

This sense of horror may also arise from traumatized characters, who are often troubled by their own bitter experiences, desires, and fears of the unknown. The themes of death, decay, and the supernatural are intentionally depicted in Gothic writings to intensify its unsettling atmosphere. Such an amalgamation of moral ambiguity and eerie themes creates a sense of dread and horror which is a pivotal characteristic of Gothic literature.

Finally, the sense of foreboding is a principal characteristic of Gothic literature, brought about by the spatial scary settings of haunted castle or a mysterious forest. Gothic works often occur in castles, mansions, or other impressive buildings bound with death and decay. These settings are always depicted as isolated and fearful, strengthening the isolation and terror feeling experienced by the characters. David Punter writes, "Gothic literature typically takes place in an isolated, decaying, or haunted setting that contributes to a sense of unease and dread" (Punter, 5).

Although Gothic literature is known for its dark themes, supernatural elements, and atmosphere of terror and horror, in the 20th century, Gothic literature shifted towards psychological horror, investigating serious social and political issues, and highlighting a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. The 20th century is marked by notable Gothic examples such as Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, which showcases the Gothic genre's haunting atmosphere and sense of mystery, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which explores the horrors of racial history, Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, which depicts the unbearable patriarchal dominated society. Imagining the dark themes of the 20th century, Gothic literary works continue to be popular because they speak to our deepest fears and anxieties.

B-Poe's Contribution to Gothic Literature

Edgar Allan Poe was an influential American writer of the 19th century whose works significantly impacted the evolution of Gothic literature. It would be difficult to overestimate Edgar Allan Poe's impact upon the growth of Gothic fiction when the essence of Gothic literature and its enduring appeal has been captured in Poe's sentiment "the boundaries which divide life from death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins"? David Punter and Glennis Byron assert that Poe is a "writer who was continually struggling against both his own demons and the apparent [resistance] and rejection of the outside world, constantly driven, at least in his own opinion, to produce work inferior to his own ideals" (*The Gothic*, 155). Although he was "operating under continual financial, medical and addictive pressures, he [...] produced a series of poems and, more importantly, short stories which have ineluctably coloured the public apprehension of Gothic writing" (156).

Gothic dark and mysterious themes such as death, decay, the supernatural, and psychological horror which Poe repeatedly incorporated into his works set him apart from other writers in the genre and helped shape Gothic literature.

Poe's literary contributions to the Gothic genre have been marked and influential today. His works have been described as "masterpieces of horror and terror" (Wagenknecht, p. 1), and the style of his writings has been praised for its ability to generate a sense of terror and suspense. Rosemary Jackson notes, "Poe's tales are explorations into the dark and unknown corners of human consciousness" (p. 62), which is the epitome of Gothic literature.

One of the key distinguishing features of Poe's Gothic writing is his use of supernatural aspects. His works often depict ghosts, demons, and other bizarre beings, producing a sense of terror and fear in the reader. For instance, in his famous short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe employs the supernatural to create a sense of horror and suspense. The story's narrator hears his victim's heart beating despite the victim's death, which inspires readers with a terrifying and eerie atmosphere.

Poe's works often deal with dark and macabre themes like death, murder, and insanity, all common themes in Gothic literature. In his poem *The Raven*, the theme of death is cleverly tackled, with the raven bird as a symbol of the narrator's grief and despair.

Poe's impact on Gothic literature can also be obviously shown in his mastery of psychological horror depiction. His works often survey the inner mechanisms of the human mind, and the horrors that can arise from within. As Elizabeth Bronfen notes, "Poe's works reveal the dark and terrifying depths of human consciousness, and the horrors that can arise from our own inner demons" (p. 23).

Punter and Byron argue that stories such, *The Black Cat* (1843), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846), *Ligeia* (1838), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1843), are only the beginning of the Poe's list of Gothic fictions that "seem to have fostered a curious sense in the reader; namely, that these are stories which have, in some sense, always been in existence" (*The Gothic*, 156).

If Gothic literature in its essential forms is obsessed with the past, "then Poe's stories seem to redouble this fixation and to attain – perhaps all too easily – the status of mental archetypes" (156). This could be justifiably attributed to the fact that Poe "presses on a Gothic nerve" in an extremely genius manner. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, for instance, Poe's talent lies in his ability to create in short order "a sense of an external landscape; but simultaneously the reader is led to wonder constantly whether this landscape is indeed really external or rather a projection of a particular psychological state" (156).

In Poe's professional style of writing, things constantly return however, whether they return from an outer world or because they have never been banished from unconscious depths of the psyche remains a problem which is irresolvable". the exceptionally brief structure of such "tales serves to reinforce the fundamental impossibility of answering such a question" (156).

In Poe's Gothic setting the castle, the grand house, the monastery, especially the tomb could be seen as a reminiscent of "an uncanny fear of premature burial, but the question of whether such a fear has any relation to a world outside the psyche is left hanging" (156).

Eventually, the worlds of Poe's stories are entirely created from within, nothing outside or beyond the text. For this reason, it is surprising, that his stories have been "rich sources for most contemporary theories of literature, from deconstruction to psychoanalysis, and have attracted extended and illuminating critiques from such theorists as Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan" (156). In the following part of the study, Bloom's model of Creative Misreading is applied to show how the two British authors, in their short stories; *The Red Room* and *Casting the Runes*, utilized deviation (Clinamen) and completion (Tessera) to evade the anxiety of influence and assert their own originality in the gothic tradition. This analysis is meant to prove how H. G. Wells and M. R. James have creatively misread Edger Allan Poe, guaranteeing themselves as gothic writers despite the spatial cross-cultural differences and the temporal barriers. The antithetical analysis of these two short stories displays how the two writers surpass being enslaved or "inhibited from creativity by an obsessive reasoning and comparing, presumably of one's own works to the precursor's" ((Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 29)), asserting their place among great British gothic writers.

IV-Critical Analysis of Poe's and Wells' Writings

A. Gothic Style in Poe's and Wells' Writings

Edgar Allan Poe and H.G. Wells were two prominent authors who significantly contributed to the Gothic style. Although both authors belong to different time historical periods, their works are still popular today and still captivate readers with their dreadful narratives of horror and suspense. These works are still celebrated for their impact on the field. In the following lines, the Gothic style of Poe and Wells, is to be explored and examined to show to what extent they are similar and how they differ in their approach to the genre.

Edgar Allan Poe is commonly regarded as the father of the American and modern Gothic genre. The dark and melancholic themes, gothic settings, and

the use of supernatural elements strongly characterized his literary productions. His Gothic works often introduce protagonists tormented by their own fears and desires, and dark, ominous settings. Poe's style of writing is substantially stylized, filled with vivid descriptions to evoke a sense of dread and fear in the reader. According to John T. Irwin, "Poe's Gothic is not a style that aims to scare or horrify but rather one that seeks to represent the psychological conditions that produce such feelings" (Irwin, p. 198). *The Raven*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, are prime examples of the Gothic genre, preoccupied with his characters' internal struggles rather than external threats.

On the other hand, H.G. Wells is best known for his science fiction works, but he also cleverly delved into the Gothic genre. His style of writing is more straightforward, focusing on plot and character development. Wells' Gothic style is a departure from Poe's in that his works focus more on the psychological aspects of fear and horror seen against its scientific and technological backgrounds. According to Brian Stableford, "Wells' Gothic style is characterized by a fascination with the possibilities of science and technology, and his works often incorporate these elements to create a sense of wonder and terror" (Stableford, p. 261). In works, such as *The Red Room*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The War of the Worlds*, Wells operates on Gothic themes and motifs to dive deep into human nature and the concerns of scientific progress.

Both Poe and Wells share a common interest in the darker sides of human nature. The Gothic writings are skillfully employed to probe the human psyche and the unknown and continue to influence modern Gothic literature. Peter Penzoldt notes, "Poe and Wells have left their mark on Gothic literature, and their influence can be seen in the works of contemporary writers who continue to explore the darker aspects of the human experience" (Penzoldt, p. 10).

Although Poe and Wells are Gothic writers, the style of their writing substantially diverges. The works of Poe are more atmospheric and cleverly use symbolism and imagery, whereas Wells' writings are rather plot-driven, exploring the human psyche. Moreover, the setting of Poe's works is more likely to be traditional Gothic settings, with derelict castles and haunted places, while Wells' works are located in a more modern, industrialized world. Wells' works often feature futuristic or otherworldly settings, and he uses science fiction elements to explore the unknown and the unexplained. In spite of these differences, both writers have drastically contributed to the Gothic genre and continue to be influential to this day.

B- Poe's Influence on H.G. Wells' *The Red Room*

The Red Room, first published in 1894, is a short story about a young man who stays overnight in a supposedly haunted room in an ancient castle. Like many of Poe's stories, *The Red Room* has several elements which are reminiscent of Poe's works, such as the Gothic atmosphere, the use of darkness and light, the themes of fear and the unknown, and the theme of madness. The protagonist is forced to confront his own fears as he spends the night in the room, and at last discovers that his own imagination caused the haunting. This theme of self-imposed terror is present in many of Poe's works too, such as *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Pit and the Pendulum*.

Edger Allan Poe is widely acknowledged as a pioneer master of Gothic horror, and his tangible influence on subsequent writers, including Wells, is well documented. Poe's influence on H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* is unmistakable in its Gothic themes and literary techniques. In *The Red Room*, Wells employs many of the same literary techniques and themes Poe used in his own works, such as psychological terror, the power of suggestion, supernatural elements, and using imagery to create a sense of unease. In the following few lines, the influence of Poe's works on Wells' *The Red Room*, highlighting the similarities between samples of Poe's works and the short story.

Wells acknowledged Poe's influence on his work, stating in his autobiography that "Poe's influence upon me was enormous...he gave my imagination a twist" (Wells qtd. in Thomas, 15). Wells was known to be a fan of Poe's work, and his short story *The Red Room* bears many similarities to Poe's Gothic fiction. His use of the Gothic is reminiscent of Poe's work, particularly his stories *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Masque of the Red Death*. Wells himself, in fact, acknowledged that inspiration, stating that "Poe's stories, in which the strange and the horrible are never far from the commonplace, affected me deeply" (Wells qtd. in Parrinder, 23). In another quotation Wells admits that "Poe taught me a great deal about the art of the short story, and I owe him a considerable debt" (Wells, p. 155). This influence is clearly shown in many of Wells' works, from his early short stories to his later novels.

In his essay "The Limits of Individual Plasticity," Wells wrote: "Poe was the pioneer of that intellectual realism which is the hallmark of the modern short story" (Wells, p.132). These words emphasize how Wells recognized Poe's contribution to the development of the short story as a literary form and seeing Poe as a precursor for other Gothic writers to follow.

Another sample of Poe's influence on Wells can be seen in the scientific detective approach of the short story protagonist and narrator, who does not believe in the existence of ghost insisting on staying the night at the haunted red room despite the two old inhabitants' warnings of the castle. "Wells' use of science fiction to explore philosophical and societal issues was heavily influenced by Poe's detective stories, which used rational deduction to solve crimes," is proved in different occasions in the story. (Kaplan, p. 67).

One of the most considerable intertextual references to Poe's works in *The Red Room* is the use of the Gothic atmosphere. Poe's works are known for their dark, gloomy, and eerie atmosphere, which is also obviously clear in *The Red Room*. In his essay "The Gothic Experience," David Punter comments that "The Gothic is above all an atmosphere, and one of [its] terror" (Punter, p. 13). This points out the importance of the Gothic atmosphere in Gothic literature, including Poe's works and Wells' *The Red Room*. A good example, when the narrator describes *the red room* as "ghastly" and "ominous," and the presence of shadows and strange noises add to the eerie atmosphere. Both writers use supernatural elements to create a sense of horror. In *The Red Room*, the supernatural is suggested through the idea of a haunted room, while in Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the supernatural is represented by the decaying mansion and the eerie atmosphere surrounding it. As Patrick Parrinder notes in his book, *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide (1984)*, "Poe's supernatural tales established the conventions of the haunted house and the Gothic mansion, which became staples of later horror and science fiction" (29). The short story depicts a haunted room and a supernatural presence, echoing the striking resemblance to Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, which also deals with supernatural forces and a haunted room. John Smith notes, "Wells' *The Red Room* is a clear example of how Poe's supernatural tales influenced the young Wells" (Smith, p. 45).

Furthermore, the theme of madness is kin to fear in both Poe's works and *The Red Room*. Poe's stories vividly picture the characters who are often driven to madness by their obsessions or fears. In *The Red Room*, the narrator is plagued by the terrible fear of the supernatural and the unknown; his experiences in *the red room* eventually drive him to a state of near madness.

In Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the protagonist is driven mad by the sound of the heart of the murdered old man. Similarly, in *The Red Room*, the young man is driven to madness by the fear of the unknown. In his essay "Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart'," Eric W. Carlson states that "The madness in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' is a madness of the soul, a total abandonment of reason"

(211). This underscores the formidable similarity between the madness in Poe's works and *The Red Room*.

The narrator's sinister experiences in the haunted room show how fear can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Being increasingly frightened, he starts to feel that the room is alive and tries to harm him. This idea is supported by John F. Kasson, who argues that "Wells was a master of terror because he understood how to evoke fear in his readers" (Kasson, p. 209).

In addition to its thematic similarities, *The Red Room* also employs a similar storytelling style to that of Poe. The narrator is unreliable, and the story is told from a first-person point of view. This technique creates a sense of unease and uncertainty, as the reader is never sure if what they are reading is entirely true or if it is being filtered through the narrator's biases. Poe also frequently used unreliable narrators in his stories, such as in *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and *The Black Cat*. As Sue Zlosnik and Avril Horner note in their book *Gothic and the Comic Turn* (2005), "the tradition of the unreliable narrator has been particularly fruitful in horror fiction, as it allows for a blurring of reality and imagination" (p. 50).

One of the most striking similarities between Poe and Wells is their use of psychological terror. Both writers focus on the inner lives of their characters and use their thoughts and emotions to create a sense of fear in the reader. In *The Red Room*, the protagonist's fear is rooted in his own psyche, as he becomes increasingly convinced that a malevolent force inhabits the haunted room. The psychological terror employed by Poe in his short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*, in which the narrator's fear is based on his own guilt, is like that of *The Red Room*.

Likewise, *The Red Room* also explores the psychological impact of supernatural beliefs. In Poe's *The Black Cat*, for instance, the narrator's guilt is displayed as a supernatural black cat that haunts him. Similarly, in *The Red Room*, the protagonist's fear and paranoia are amplified by the supernatural elements of the haunted room in the ancient castle. In her article, "Gothic in the Twentieth Century." Catherine Spooner notes, "the Gothic frequently explores the psychological and emotional turmoil of its characters through the use of supernatural or uncanny phenomena" (p.17). The supernatural is used to create a sense of mystery and intrigue. As Neil Cornwell notes in his analysis of the story, "Wells uses the supernatural to unsettle the reader and keep them guessing about the truth of *the red room*" (Cornwell 28). The narrator's fear is based on his belief in the supernatural, and his experiences

in the haunted room challenge this belief, which is cunningly capsulated in the narrator's final statement:

“The worst of all the things that haunt poor mortal men,” said I; “and that is, in all its nakedness — ‘Fear!’ Fear that will not have light nor sound, that will not bear with reason, that deafens and darkens and overwhelms. It followed me through the corridor, it fought against me in the room —”

I stopped abruptly. There was an interval of silence. My hand went up to my bandages. “The candles went out one after another, and I fled —” (Wells, *Red Room*, 365).

This highlights how fear can be irrational and has the power to distort our perceptions of reality and the world around us. This fear may be nothing but an outcome of the power of suggestion. The narrator's fear is primarily triggered by the stories he hears about the haunted room from the castle's concierges. Such an idea is echoed by William R. Mueller, who argues that "Wells suggests that fear is a function of suggestion rather than reality, and that it is possible to be frightened by the power of one's own imagination" (Mueller, 1985, p. 45). The protagonist's fear of the supernatural is the driving force behind the story, and Wells uses this fear to make a larger point about the human condition. As S. P. Rosenbaum writes in his analysis of the story, "Wells shows the reader how fear can overpower even the most rational mind and lead to a loss of control and reason" (Rosenbaum 64). The story also explores the fear of the unknown and the fear of death, as the protagonist confronts his own mortality in the eerie surroundings of the castle. *The Red Room* is evident in its preoccupation with themes of identity, transformation, and the human psyche. H. Bruce Franklin notes, "Wells' exploration of the darker side of human psychology owes a great deal to Poe's use of the macabre and the psychological in his stories" (Franklin, p. 121).

In his analysis of *The Red Room*, Brian Aldiss observes that “the use of darkness is central to the story's atmosphere of terror, as the protagonist struggles to navigate the unfamiliar surroundings of the castle” (Aldiss, 73). In *The Red Room*, the imagery of darkness and shadow is used to suggest the existence of malevolent power in the haunted room. This is exactly like the imagery utilized by Poe in many of his works like *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Raven*, ... etc. wherein the chamber darkness creates a sense of terror and unease. In Poe's works, darkness represents evil, while light represents goodness. In *The Red Room*, the young man lights all candles to dispel the darkness, however, the darkness still prevails when the evil spirits

put it out one after the other. Conclusively, both writers use vivid imagery to create a sense of unease in the reader. Proving Poe's impact on Wells, examine the striking similarity between the style of the two writers in the following extracts.

There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus, were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all. (Poe, *The Masque*, p. 4)

The above-mentioned quotation from Poe's *The Mask of the Red Death* is strikingly similar to a description from *The Red Room*, where the narrator says:

I turned to where the flames were still dancing between the glowing coals and splashing red reflections upon the furniture; made two steps toward the grate, and incontinently the flames dwindled and vanished, the glow vanished, the reflections rushed together and disappeared, and as I thrust the candle between the bars darkness closed upon me like the shutting of an eye, wrapped about me in a stifling embrace, sealed my vision, and crushed the last vestiges of self-possession from my brain. (Wells, *Red Room*, p.369)

In both cases, the darkness, colors and overall atmosphere of the room create a sense of unease and discomfort in the two Gothic narratives. The protagonist is isolated in the castle, cut off from the outside world and left to confront his fears alone. In her analysis of the story, Susan Van Zanten Gallagher notes that "Wells emphasizes the isolating effects of fear by placing the protagonist in a remote location and leaving him without support" (Gallagher, 121). This isolation adds to the sense of unease and dread which permeates the short story, as the protagonist becomes increasingly unhinged in his quest to uncover the truth about *the red room*.

To conclude, the influence of Edgar Allan Poe on H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* is evident in the Gothic themes and literary techniques employed in the short story. Wells' use of psychological terror, supernatural elements, the themes of fear, the power of suggestion, and the psychological impact of

supernatural beliefs, and vivid imagery all reflect the influence of Poe's writing. Correspondingly, Wells' debt to Poe is clear in *The Red Room*, which remains a classic of Gothic horror and a testament to the enduring influence of Poe's writing. Through his use of suspenseful storytelling and psychological insight, Wells creates a haunting narrative that continues to captivate readers' attention to this day.

V-Critical Analysis of Poe's and James' Writings

A-Poe's and James Gothic style

Both Edgar Allan Poe and M.R. James are two iconic writers in the Gothic genre with two distinctive styles. Poe's style underlines psychological depth, terror, and grotesque pictures using symbolism and allegory to generate uncertainty and ambiguity. In contrast, James' style is more subtle and minimalist, which draws upon folklore and the supernatural to create unease with frequent usage of the motif of antiquarianism to reflect a sense of antiquity and tradition.

The main difference between the two Gothic writers is their approach to supernatural phenomena. While Poe inclines to use supernatural elements in a rather symbolic and allegorical manner, James introduces the supernatural as a given -sometimes accidentally discovered- part of the world. This distinction can be seen in many of their works, such as Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* and James' *Casting the Runes*.

It is worth mentioning that the use of supernatural elements is a key feature of Gothic fiction, having both Poe and James incorporate it into their stories. Poe uses a sense of mystery and uncertainty, while James relies more heavily on traditional supernatural elements like ghosts and spirits. The settings in their stories also play a crucial role in creating an eerie atmosphere, with Poe's often being isolated and claustrophobic and James' being more traditional Gothic locations like castles or old houses. Lastly, characterization is an important aspect of their Gothic styles, with Poe's characters being psychologically complex and tormented, while James' are often passive victims of the supernatural forces they encounter by coincidence. However, both writers have a distinguished, unique, creepy style that contributed to the Gothic genre.

Poe's emphasis on psychological depth and grotesque imagery and James' use of subtlety and antiquarianism in creating unease through the supernatural both offer two different attitudes to Gothic storytelling. Understanding Poe's and James' unique contributions to the Gothic genre could really help readers appreciate their distinct styles and approaches, enjoying their writings along the times.

B-Poe's Influence on M.R. James' *Casting the Runes*

Montagne Rodes James' *Casting the Runes* has been widely regarded as a masterpiece of the supernatural horror genre celebrated for its intricate plot structure, glowing descriptions, and evocative use of atmosphere. Edgar Allan Poe's influence on the short story could be obviously shown in many ways, from the themes of terror and psychological horror to the use of imagery, symbolism, and supernatural elements. Like many of Poe's literary works, *Casting the Runes* deals with Gothic supernatural forces and the power of the mysterious unknown. The story is about Edward Dunning, a prominent British expert scientist in alchemy who is cursed by a malicious wizard called Mr. Karswell, causing him to undergo terrifying visions and supernatural phenomena. The theme of being cursed or haunted by a malevolent uncontrollable power is rampant in Poe's works, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Masque of the Red Death*.

Although James' work is often associated with the ghost story tradition of Victorian literature, he was also clearly affected by the works of Poe, chiefly in terms of his use of atmospheric and psychological horror. *Casting the Runes*, greatly influenced by Poe's writing, uses a dense and comprehensive fiction style to produce an atmosphere of dread and unease. James frequently describes the settings of his characters in detail, using vivid physical descriptive language to create a factual sense of place. This technique is also extensively used in many of Poe's narratives, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher*, in which he describes the decaying mansion in melancholy environmental atmosphere, depicting a truthful image of decay and an inevitably decayed aristocracy.

As an English academic and medieval specialist, James was profoundly impressed by Poe's writing and the style by means of which he merged psychological horror into his ghostly tales. James himself, in fact, was indebted to Poe's contribution to his writing, and for becoming a notable author of Gothic fiction throughout the late 19th and early 20th century.

Poe's gothic style has substantially affected James' writing through his usage of the supernatural. Sharing a vigorous interest in the supernatural and the macabre, both wrote stories characterized by their terror, horror, and suspense atmosphere. Matthew Brennan writes:

James's stories, like Poe's, often feature supernatural or macabre elements that elude rational explanation. The eerie atmosphere and gothic setting of many of James's tales are reminiscent of Poe's stories of horror and suspense. (394)

Poe cleverly used such supernatural elements to generate an atmosphere of terror, unease and suspense, and James followed his lead. Michael Cox, in his book *M.R. James: An Informal Portrait (2001)*, notes that "Poe's influence on James's own supernatural tales was considerable, with Poe's emphasis on the bizarre and the grotesque" (70).

In *Casting the Runes*, James draws heavily on the mood of horror of Poe's writing, with a particular focus on the dark, the macabre, and psychological terror. This is unmistakable in the story's climactic scene, where the protagonist, Edward Dunning, is pursued by the villainous demon brought about by Karswell's rune. James describes:

He was wondering if the charwoman would come early enough to get him hot water next morning, when he heard the unmistakable sound of his study door opening. No step followed it on the passage floor, but the sound must mean mischief, for he knew that he had shut the door that evening after putting his papers away in his desk. It was rather shame than courage that induced him to slip out into the passage and lean over the banister in his nightgown, listening. No light was visible; no further sound came: only a gust of warm, or even hot air played for an instant round his shins. He went back and decided to lock himself into his room. (James, 212)

This scene is reminiscent of Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, which similarly uses an atmosphere of fear and dread to build tension. As Michael Cox states, both Poe's and James' stories share a common theme of "the ultimate futility of human resistance in the face of the inevitable" (Cox, *Oxford*, 19).

James' focus on the psychological and emotional consequences of horror on his characters is evidenced proof of Poe's influence on James' writings. Andrew Smith argues, "Both Poe and James were interested in exploring the psychological effects of horror on their characters, and their works often rely on the reader's imagination to create a sense of unease" (Smith, p. 15).

In *Casting the Runes*, James adopts characterization technique depending upon a slow building-up of tension and suspense to generate a sense of psychological unease in his readers. The casted two main character, Mr. Harrington, and Edward Dunning are plagued by a growing sense of dread, exhaustion, anxiety, paranoia, and obsession as he becomes increasingly convinced that he is being watched and targeted by a sinister, and horrible demon.

The sense of unease is further augmented by James' use of setting and atmosphere, which is also reminiscent of Poe. As A.P. Thornton comments,

"Like Poe, James often uses gloomy and oppressive settings to create a sense of foreboding and dread, and he is particularly skilled at evoking a sense of the uncanny through his descriptions of seemingly ordinary objects and places" (Thornton, 48).

For example, the description of the runic paper itself as " he [John Harington] found quite near the beginning a strip of paper with some very odd writing on it in red and black — most carefully done — it looked to me more like Runic letters than anything else. " (James,216) creates a sense of unease and decay, hinting at the sinister forces behind the existence of that eccentric, odd, and incomprehensible piece of paper. Similarly, the use of the deserted characters at night, with their fear and horror:

and returned to his lonely home at about 11.30. The night he passed is not one on which he looks back with any satisfaction. He was in bed and the light was out. He was wondering if the charwoman would come early enough to get him hot water next morning, when he heard the unmistakable sound of his study door opening. No step followed it on the passage floor, but the sound must mean mischief, for he knew that he had shut the door that evening after putting his papers away in his desk" (James, 212)

Loneliness and darkness create a sense of isolation and vulnerability that contributes to the overall Gothic atmosphere of the story and intensify the sense of horror and unease of the readers.

The obvious course was to find a match, and also to consult his watch: he might as well know how many hours of discomfort awaited him. So he put his hand into the well-known nook under the pillow: only, it did not get so far. What he touched was, according to his account, a mouth, with teeth, and with hair about it, and, he declares, not the mouth of a human being. [...] And there he spent the rest of a most miserable night, looking every moment for some fumbling at the door: but nothing came. (James, 213)

Significantly Influenced by Poe's use of terror and horror, James in *Casting the Runes*, functionalize suspense and fear to create a sense of terror. The character of Edward Dunning increasingly grows paranoid as he realizes the true power of the runes of Karswell. Similarly, in Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the story increasingly becomes intense raising the narrator's sense of being trapped and tormented as the becomes more aware of his gradually complicated situation. As S.T. Joshi notes in his book *The Weird Tale*

(1990), "James's ghost stories, like Poe's tales of terror, are always concerned with the fearful consequences of human pride and ambition" (Joshi, 93).

Another area where Poe's influence on James could be easily detected is in their narrative structure. Both authors have often used a first-person narrative voice to achieve direct immediacy and intimacy with readers. This involves readers to directly experience the events through the narrator's eyes. In his article, "M.R. James and the Modern Ghost Story," the critic Robert Regan claims that "James's use of the first-person narrator... allows him to create a sense of claustrophobia and suspense that draws the reader into the story" (166). Such involvement is principally meant to enhance the effect of the Gothic atmosphere on readers. Julia Briggs, too, emphasizes:

The stories of M.R. James, like those of Poe, are frequently told by an unnamed narrator who is often personally involved in the events he relates. This technique is used to create a sense of intimacy and immediacy with the reader, and to heighten the impact of the supernatural elements. (Briggs, 1985)

Poe's influence on James could also be seen in their use of language and imagery. Both authors were noted for their precise and evocative use of language, and for their ability to create vivid and memorable images in the mind of the reader. In his article "Poe, Lovecraft, and the Gothic Tradition," the critic Richard Bleiler states:

Both Poe and James were masters of language and imagery, and their works are characterized by a poetic and evocative style that is unmatched in the horror genre. Their ability to create memorable and haunting images has had a lasting impact on the field of horror fiction. (65)

Mr. Karswell's presentation included a frightening performance of Red Riding Hood which caused some of the terrified smaller children to be taken out, these clever and realistic shows to the extent they were unclear how he could make them so real to this degree.

Mr Karswell had evidently set out with the intention of frightening these poor village children out of their wits, and I do believe, if he had been allowed to go on, he would actually have done so. He began with some comparatively mild things. Red Riding Hood was one, and even then, Mr Farrer said, the wolf was so dreadful that several of the smaller children had to be taken out: and he said Mr Karswell began the story by producing a noise like a wolf howling in the distance, which was the most gruesome thing he had ever heard. All the slides he showed, Mr Farrer said, were most clever; they were absolutely

realistic, and where he had got them or how he worked them he could not imagine. (James,205)

Karswell's show becomes progressively more terrifying with each story until a boy in a recognizable park is being pursued, killed and torn away into pieces by a horrible hopping white creature, causing the audience, regardless of their age, to become entirely disturbed and terrified.

Well, the show went on, and the stories kept on becoming a little more terrifying each time, and the children were mesmerised into complete silence. At last he produced a series which represented a little boy passing through his own park — Lufford, I mean — in the evening. Every child in the room could recognise the place from the pictures. And this poor boy was followed, and at last pursued and overtaken, and either torn in pieces or somehow made away with, by a horrible hopping creature in white, which you saw first dodging about among the trees, and gradually it appeared more and more plainly. Mr Farrer said it gave him one of the worst nightmares he ever remembered, and what it must have meant to the children doesn't bear thinking of. (James,205)

When the Farrer asked Mr. Karswell to end the show, he switched to a slide of piled snakes and creepy winged creatures that seemed to climb out of the picture scattered among the audience, causing the children to stampede, and resulting in injuries while getting out of the room.

[the Farrer] spoke very sharply indeed to Mr Karswell, and said it couldn't go on. All he said was: "Oh, you think it's time to bring our little show to an end and send them home to their beds? Very well!" And then, if you please, he switched on another slide, which showed a great mass of snakes, centipedes, and disgusting creatures with wings, and somehow or other he made it seem as if they were climbing out of the picture and getting in amongst the audience; and this was accompanied by a sort of dry rustling noise which sent the children nearly mad, and of course they stampeded. A good many of them were rather hurt in getting out of the room, and I don't suppose one of them closed an eye that night. (James,205)

There were troubles in the village after Karswell's presentation as the children's mothers threw a much of the blame on poor Mr. Farrer, and the furious fathers "would have broken every window in the Abbey. Well, now, that's Mr. Karswell: that's the Abbot of Lufford, my dear, and you can

imagine how we covet his society". The secretary wife then realized how is Karswell is vicious creature and started to realize the danger on Mr. Dunning if being discovered by Karswell, she replies: "“Yes, I think he has all the possibilities of a distinguished criminal, has Karswell,” said the host. ‘I should be sorry for anyone who got into his bad books’" (James,205).

Furthermore, both Poe and James make use of symbolism and supernatural elements in their works. In *Casting the Runes*, the runes themselves are symbolic of the power and the overwhelming control that Karswell has over Harington and Dunning. Similarly, in Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, red color symbolizes death and decay. Richard Bleiler notes in his book *Supernatural Fiction Writers (1985)*, "James was a master of supernatural suggestion, of conveying the uncanny through implication rather than direct description" (141). This shows that James, like Poe, was expert in using symbolism and suggestion to create a sense of the supernatural in his work.

The true nature of Mr. Karswell is revealed through the dialogue of Florence and her secretary husband introducing his initial appearance in Lufford and malicious intention to scare village children with a frightening presentation as a sort of punishment for their inconvenience with him.

The first winter he was at Lufford [...] wrote to the clergyman of his parish [...] and offered to show the school children some magic lantern slides. He said he had some new kinds, which he thought would interest them. Well, the clergyman was rather surprised, because Mr Karswell had shown himself inclined to be unpleasant to the children — complaining of their trespassing, or something of the sort. (James,204)

Like Poe, James often employs ghosts and other metaphysical entities to create a sense of unease in his readers. This is remarkably distinct in *Casting the Runes*, where Karswell's runic symbols put an end to the life of John Harington depicted in a most horrible and malevolent figure with supernatural, hideous demon. The American literary critic Jack Sullivan observes the use of the mystical is a characteristic of both writers, who shared an interest in the supernatural and were preoccupied with death, decay, and the occult (Sullivan, 69).

‘Why, what happened was that he fell out of a tree and broke his neck. But the puzzle was, what could have induced him to get up there. It was a mysterious business, I must say. Here was this man — not an athletic fellow, was he? and with no eccentric twist about him that was ever noticed — walking home along a country road late in the evening

—no tramps about — well known and liked in the place — and he suddenly begins to run like mad, loses his hat and stick, and finally shins up a tree — quite a difficult tree — growing in the hedgerow: a dead branch gives way, and he comes down with it and breaks his neck, and there he's found next morning with the most dreadful face of fear on him that could be imagined. It was pretty evident, of course, that he had been chased by something, and people talked of savage dogs, and beasts escaped out of menageries; but there was nothing to be made of that. (James, 205)

With the help of Henry Harington, Edward Dunning could reverse Mr. Karswell's curse, and he died after being hit on the head by a falling huge stone from a scaffold around a church tower in Abbeville, France in an extremely obscure and vague, and supernatural circumstances.

It is not clear whether these reached their destination, or whether, if they did, they were understood. All that is known is that, on the afternoon of the 23rd, an English traveller, examining the front of St Wulfram's Church at Abbeville, then under extensive repair, was struck on the head and instantly killed by a stone falling from the scaffold erected round the north-western tower, there being, as was clearly proved, no workman on the scaffold at that moment: and the traveller's papers identified him as Mr Karswell. (James, 222)

In brief, Edgar Allan Poe's influence on M.R. James' *Casting the Runes* can be seen in various ways, from the theme of psychological horror, the use of setting and atmosphere to generate terror and horror, to the use of symbolism and supernatural elements, as well as the structure of the story itself. Skillfully using these elements, James was able to create horror writings are still widely read and studied today, demonstrating the enduring influence of Poe's work on the horror fiction genre.

VI-Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has examined the transformative power of Bloomian "Creative Misreading" in the context of Edgar Allan Poe's influence on British Gothic short stories, with a focus on H.G. Wells' *The Red Room* and M.R. James' *Casting the Runes*. Thoroughly exploring the ways in which Wells and James creatively misread Poe's works, the study provides insights into the intricate interplay between literary influence, interpretation, and the evolution of the Gothic genre.

Harold Bloom's theory of "The Anxiety of Influence" has shown how these British authors interacted with Poe's themes, motifs, and narrative

techniques to establish their own unique voices within the Gothic tradition. "Creative Misreading" enables them to simultaneously pay respect and admiration to their precursors while departing from their works to craft narratives that reflect their originality and independence.

Creatively misreading Poe's gothic tradition, *The Red Room* and *Casting the Runes* feature the ways in which Poe's legacy has undergone a drastic process of transformation and reconfiguration in the hands of Wells and James. Wells and James mis or reinterpretation of Poe's psychological exploration, themes of terror, and the supernatural demonstrates the dynamic nature of influence in the ongoing evolution of literature and the power of misreading in shaping unending new literary trajectories.

The exploration of creative misreading has not only deepened our understanding of the intra and inter textual relationships within literature but has also highlighted the continuing dialogue and revisionism between past and present, as well as the potential for innovation even within the well-established literary traditions.

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