

## INTRINSIC ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORIES BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

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**Abstract:** This study used qualitative design. The subject of the analysis is the thematic aspect of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. The main characteristic of Poe's short stories is the existence of what is so called *a single emotional effect*: all incidents in the story, the words and details that create the incident, must point toward this single, effect. Poe is known as the possessor of one most original imagination (Cline, 1969). Eight Poe's short stories were selected as subjects. The primary source of data is the eight short stories by Edgar Allan Poe. The secondary source of data is criticism, Poe's biographical note, ideas, theories, basic principles, opinions. The subject matters of Edgar Allan Poe's selected short stories. The themes of the short stories are (1) madness brings harm, (2) drinking too much alcohol cause catastrophic, (3) revenge exist even in a close friendship, (4) people are helpless when confronted to God's power, (5) love gets rid of the memory, (6) true friend will always be at our side, (7) God shows power through miracle and disaster; and (8) mental disorder can be hereditary features.

**Keywords:** short stories, Edgar Allan Poe, characters, themes.

Every time we talk about literature, undoubtedly we will have some interpretation in our mind. It is true that the term literature has more than one meaning and we have to be aware of its different definitions. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* on page 611 note three definitions of the word literature: 1) written works which are of artistic value, 2) all the books, articles, etc. on a particular subject, and 3) printed material, especially giving *information*. In their famous book, *The Theory of Literature*, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1956:20-21) state that the term "literature" can be defined as everything in print, or it can be limited to 'great books'. This thesis deals with "literature" which has broader meaning than those mentioned above. The term "literature" meant by this thesis is, borrowing Wellek and Warren's (1956:22) limitation, connected with the art of literature or imaginative literature. In short, the term "literature" here deals with any piece of work containing artistic and imaginative nuances.

The next interesting problem to discuss is: how was literature born? Moody (1984:2) theorizes on the origin of the literature, by implicitly stating that literature does not come from nowhere. Literature, then, appears from our innate fondness of telling stories, of arranging words in a nice pattern, and of expressing in words some special aspects of our human experiences.

According to Koesnosoebroto (1989:1) literature is rooted in one of the most basic human desires, that is the desire of pleasures. Since the invention of language, people have

taken pleasure in following and participating in the imaginary adventures and imaginary experiences of imaginary persons. Readers derive pleasure from literature's power to imitate life. Furthermore, literature also has an important role in educational world. It is taught to students in the high level, usually it is given to language-major college students as one of the subjects. Now let us see the place of literature in college, especially in a language major program.

Brooks (1989:10) states that literature has a definite place in any university level language-major program. In some cases, students do not realize the role of English literature courses in teaching English to nonnative-speakers at the university level. Salih (1989:20-25) claims that literature has an important role in developing student's language skills as well as their knowledge of linguistics. Literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistics system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as creative, critical, and analytical learners.

Enjoyment alone, however, is insufficient in reading literary works. It has to be complemented with understanding. The writer conducts this thematic analysis in order to help the students to understand literary works, in this study, in the form of short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe. It is true that thematic analysis can give essential contribution to the full enjoyment and understanding of fiction (Kenney, 1966).

The writer's first encounter with Poe's short story happened. A Poe's short story entitled *The Tell-Tale Heart* was included in the students handbook and was discussed in class. The writer was interested in the style and the theme of the short story. It seemed that Poe has a distinctive style in creating his stories which are dominated by terror and horror nuances. Then, the writer was lucky when he had an opportunity to see one of Poe's short stories, *The Black Cat*, was performed in a monoplay by Nawir Hamzah of Teater *Sendiri* Jakarta at Building H-11 two years ago.

## METHODS

This study used qualitative design. The subject of the analysis is the thematic aspect of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. The main characteristic of Poe's short stories is the existence of what is so called *a single emotional effect*: all incidents in the story, the words and details that create the incident, must point toward this single, effect. That is why Poe is known as the possessor of one most original imagination (Cline, 1969). The writer has selected eight Poe's short stories to be his subjects. The selection is based on the first, out of three, category of Poe's short stories. Those eight short stories are mentioned in the scope of the study.

In collecting the data the writer is going to go to the libraries to find literatures that are closely related to his topic. The primary source of data is the eight short stories by Edgar Allan Poe. The secondary source of data is criticism, Poe's biographical note, ideas, theories, basic principles, opinions.

## FINDINGS

### The Tell-Tale Heart

This is a dramatic monologue story: throughout the story, the narrator or the "I" is speaking to someone (Jones, 1988:101). He is trying to prove his sanity to his listeners, but he proves his madness instead. The following is a part of the opening paragraph of the story:

True! nervous--very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am, but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses--not destroyed--not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in Heaven and in the Earth.... (p.186)

By claiming that he has an extraordinary hearing capability, the "I" proves his madness instead of sanity. So, the subject matter of the-story is madness, because in the whole story we deal with a madman who tries to prove that he is mentally healthy by telling us a horrible story about a sadistic murder he has committed. The murder he describes in detail itself can be possibly done only by a mentally sick person. The victim of the murder is an old man who is rich and, actually, is his own master. His only reason in committing the ghastly murder seems ridiculous. He does not hate his master for he is treated well by the old man. He has no desire for the old man's gold, either. The problem for the "I" is the old man's eye:

I think 'it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eye resembled that of a vulture--a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees--very gradually--I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.(p.186)

The old man is suffering from glaucoma, a dangerous eye disease which can cause total blindness (Jones, 1988: 101). That is why there is a blue film over his eyeball. But, the "I" can not comprehend this. He thinks that the eye--he calls it Evil Eye--is the source of his agony and he has to kill the old man and stop the pain forever. After preparing himself for seven nights, he kills the old man cold-bloodedly at the eighth night. Then, he does a macabre thing to the body; an evil deed that can be done only by an ill-mad person. The narrator does not realize that he has done a sin. He, in contrast, is glad that he has vanished the source of his agony. The interesting thing is, he still has consciousness to hide the body, to conceal his wrongdoing. It is ironical also that finally, because of his own madness, he reveals his own secret to the policemen who come to observe the house. The theme of the story can be stated as follows: **madness can bring harm or a madman may commit dangerous things to his community.**

### The Black Cat

The subject matter of the story is alcoholism, a condition caused by continued and habitual drinking. The narrator of the story or the "I" used to be a person known for his docility and humanity. He had a heart of tenderness and was especially fond of animals. When he married, he collected some kinds of pet and bred them with his wife. Everything seemed to be all right at first, until then he experiences a radical change of his disposition:

I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others, I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them.(p.159).

The narrator's life starts to change drastically. The radical change is, doubtless, caused by his habit in drinking alcohol.

But my disease grew upon me-for what disease is like alcohol? (p.520)

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town .... my original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured (p.520)

I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.(p.520)

The effect of the alcohol is so fiendish that the narrator loses his good nature within his mind: the docility, the tenderness and the humanity are gone and replaced by an evil spirit called "PERVERSENESS".

Day by day, the perverseness enslaves the "I" and makes him uncontrollable. Pluto, his favorite black cat, once experiences atrocity done by its master. The "I" cuts one out of its eyes from the socket. That is caused, undoubtedly, by the spirit of the perverseness within his body and soul. The spirit grows bigger and bigger each day without being able to stop and this hurts the "I" much. Beneath the "pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good" within him succumbs. Evil thoughts become his "sole intimate the darkest and most evil of thoughts".

The catastrophe of the story, in which the narrator kills his wife and entombs her body within the wall of his cellar, seems to bear out the narrator's intimations of the fiendish spirit.

The theme we can derive from the story is: Drinking too much alcohol may cause dangerous condition which may lead people to a catastrophic end of life. In the story, alcohol changes the narrator's natures and finally leads him to the destruction to the disastrous ending of his life.

### **The Cask of Amontillado**

This is the shortest story in the selection which has a simple plot. From the first sentence of the story, we can define the subject matter: revenge. And it is reinforced by the closing phrase: *In pace requiescat*, which suggests mortality. The story, indeed, is about someone who committed revenge. The narrator, or the "I", takes revenge against Fortunato, his close friend. The reason is due to mockery: the "I" was insulted by Fortunato.

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. (p.207)

The "I" has done his best to help Fortunato solving his difficulties. It is reasonable if he is so disappointed and angry when Fortunato gave him insult. The rest of the story, then, deal with the detail of the narrator's plan in taking the revenge. He meets

Fortunato one evening and they are involved in a warm conversation. The "I" tells that he has received a pipe which is considered as Amontillado, a kind of wine. He is in doubt whether it is the real Amontillado or not and he is about to ask for help to Luchresi, an expert in wine. Fortunato who is drunk at that time insists on claiming that his connoisseurship in wine is better than Luchresi's. He also underestimates Luchresi by stating the following:

"Luchresi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

.....

"And as for Luchresi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado." (p.208)

The "I" is forced to take Fortunato to the vault where the Amontillado is stored. Fortunato expresses his willingness to help the "I" and, thus, the plan or the trap set out by the narrator seems to run smoothly so far. Both of them, then, go to the vault at the "I" is house. Before getting into the vault, the "I" pretends to warn his friend by saying that the condition inside the vault may damage his health, that its nitre can possibly make his cough worse. He asks Fortunato to cancel his strong will, but he is in vain for his friend still insists on going. The "I" is glad for his plan goes on smoothly so far. They start their voyage through the vault.

### **A Descent into the Maelstrom**

The story, which is the second longest in the selection, is opened with a paragraph from Joseph Glanvill:

The Ways of God in Nature, as in Providence, are not as *our* ways; nor are the models that we frame in any way commensurate to the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works *which have a depth in them greater than the well of Democritus.*(p.243)

The opening offers us the subject matter of the story itself. Throughout the story we are acquainted with natural sight, in this story, it is the rocky precipices by Norwegian coast and its environment. Poe wants to show God's-Almighty in nature via his story. As the conclusion, the subject matter of the story is the profundity of God-created nature. From the title of the story we can have a natural phenomenon which is exhibited in the story. Maelstrom here is the name of a violent whirlpool in the Norwegian sea. It is an enormous vortex which has horrible characteristics:

The edge of the whirl was represented by a broad belt of gleaming spray; but no particle of this slipped into the mouth of the terrific tunnel, whose interior, as far as the eye could fathom it, was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water, inclined to the horizon at an angle of some forty-five degrees, speeding dizzily round and round with a swaying and sweltering motion.... (p.246)

The story itself is actually an experience of an old seaman who escaped from the huge

whirlpool three years before. The old man thinks that it is an amazing experience, a miracle that he will never forget in his lifetime and that he will tell everybody about instead.

In the story, the old man shares his unforgettable experience with the narrator he guides in a sightseeing around the rocky hills.

The event happened three years before when the man and his two brothers were sailing across the sea to fish. A big trouble obstructed their journey when a violent hurricane attacked them. They could not do anything, even when the stormy wind drove them to the terrifying Maelstrom. They were facing an imminent disastrous danger that seemed impossible to avoid.

When the storm subsided, there was no wind blowing and they could not move their smack to get away from the deadly vortex. The most hair-rising moment came closer and closer without their being able to stop. Their little boat, a moment after, was absorbed by the monstrous Maelstrom, bringing them down the sea. The only thing the old man could do then was pray and left his destiny to the hands of Lord: "I muttered a hurried prayer to God" (p.254).

They kept moving downward. At that moment, the old seaman shocked with awe to see amazing sight about him:

"Looking about me upon the wide waste of liquid ebony on which we were thus borne, I perceived that our boat was not the only object in the embrace of the whirl. Both above and below us were visible fragments of vessels, large masses of building-timber and trunks of trees, with many smaller articles, such as pieces of house furniture, broken boxes, barrels and staves. (p.255)

The theme of the story above can be stated as: people are helpless when they are confronted with God's power, and their salvation is only by His miracle.

### **Ligeia**

The story is about a man, the narrator, who has a beloved woman, Ligeia, to whom he shares his love and life with. The death of his lady because of an unhealed disease makes him sorrowful. The narrator crushes "into the very dust with sorrow, could no longer endure the lonely desolation" of his life.

For the narrator loves his woman so much, he can not forget the shadow of his beloved wife easily. In the rest of his life, his buried beautiful lady always comes to his senses in the form of imagination; she haunts her former husband night and day. We can conclude that the subject matter of this story is death, for more specific, the death of a beloved woman.

After the death of his beloved wife, the narrator wanders along without having any destination. Being tired of walking for months, he stops and takes a rest in an old abbey at a remote area of England. In this abbey, he meets a fair-haired and blue-eyed lady who finally becomes his wife. The name of the lady is Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine.

Even though he has now a new wife, still the narrator can not get rid of the memory of his first wife. This influences his relationship with Rowena: in the beginning of their

marriage, she dreads the fierce moodiness of her husband's temper and she loves him little. On the other hand, the narrator hates his wife with a hatred belonging more to demon than to human. In short, they share a cold-frigid relationship.

About the commencement of the second month of their marriage, Lady Rowena is attacked by sudden illness. In her state of half-slumber, she speaks of sounds, and of motions that are perceived as fancy by the narrator. Finally, due to the severity of the malady, she dies. The narrator prepares everything for her burial.

Then, a bizarre thing happens: Lady Rowena lives again! But something has changed her. Intoxicated much by opium, the narrator experiences a horrible event which is happening before his eyes. The body of his wife changes, it grows taller than before. The narrator's memory goes back to Ligeia who used to be a tall woman.

When the body of Lady Rowena makes a movement, the narrator realizes that the soul of his beloved Ligeia has incarnated to the body of poor Rowena. He is more convinced when the apparition in front of him opens her eyes: the eyes are Ligeia's, for he is so overwhelmed by the beauty of those unforgettable eyes.

The theme we can take from the story is: when someone people love dies, it is difficult for them to get rid of the memory of him or her and thus it may bring to some trouble.

### **The Fall of the House of Usher**

This is the longest story in the selection which also is the most popular. The subject matter of the story is somewhat touching: friendship. The narrator of the story has to pass a very long way to the House of Usher. The mansion is owned by his intimate friend, Roderick Usher, who is suffering from a mental illness and has privately asked the narrator to come.

A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country--a letter from him--which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of an earnest desire to see me, as his best,.... (p. 129).

When the narrator first views the decaying mansion, he is convinced that there hang about an atmosphere peculiar to the place and is immediate vicinity. This condition of universal decay and imminent collapse are shared between the house with the "eye-like" windows and its inhabitant, Roderick Usher, whose physical frame and mental control are declining rapidly. The narrator does his best to accompany and encourage Usher in passing his suffering days. Usher's illness is such a bizarre one:

He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with terror. (p. 139)

Besides his strange illness, he is also enslaved by a constant terror of the future, an

apprehension of his own imminent destruction. The narrator, as Usher's only friend, tries to comprehend the circumstances and passes his days in the mansion pacifying his friend. The poor nobleman has a single sister, Lady Madeline, who is also suffering from a lingering disease which drags her to dissolution. She finally dies because of her unhealed malady. The narrator helps his friend in entombing the body. After the death of Lady Madeline, Roderick Usher is more melancholy and the narrator is busy in his earnest endeavors to alleviate it. At the same time, Usher also experiences a change on his disposition. "An observable change came over the features of the mental disorder" of Roderick Usher. His ordinary manner has vanished; his ordinary occupations are neglected.

The narrator has to work harder to watch over his friend who has no one who can take care of his malady. Their friendship is so strong that the narrator does not have the heart to leave his friend alone in such kind of bad condition.

Then, the terrible thing occurs. Lady Madeline, who is still alive actually, returns and confronts her brother, toppling upon him and sending them both at last to their deaths, as a whirlwind howls about the phosphorescent walls of the outer house. The House of Usher scrambles and falls into the nearby tarn.

After examining the whole story, the theme we can take from it can be stated as follows: true friend will always be at our side in good times and also in bad times. There is an English saying "A friend in need is a friend indeed" that would clarify our theme.

### **MS Found in a Bottle**

The setting of the story is the same as that of "A Descent into the Maelstrom": at sea. Here the readers will also be asked to comprehend the manifestation of God's power at sea; a simoom and a whirlpool, which play a significant role in the beginning and also at the end of the story. Thus, we can conclude that the subject matter of the story is God's power.

The story is about the narrator, a traveler, who sails to the Archipelago Islands. Accompanied by some sailors, he sails on a huge vessels which is loaded with some kinds of good.

Their voyage seems to be easy first until then the narrator feels that a bad thing is about to happen. He can see the symptoms: there is "a rapid change on the character of the sea", the air becomes "intolerably hot", every breath of wind "died away" and is-"loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron". Even though, the captain of the ship is unable to perceive any indication of the danger, and the narrator tries to warn him. He tells him his fear of the coming Simoom, but the captain pays no attention.

What is the narrator worried about, then, comes true. The Simoom, a dangerous tempest of the sea, engulfed the ship. All passengers and the loads, except the narrator and an old Swede, are destroyed by that natural anger. It is a miracle that the narrator escapes destruction and that is impossible to say. But, nothing is impossible if God wishes.

The narrator and his companion try their best to survive on their wrecked ship. They have spent six days waiting for a help from passing ships. Their bodies grow weaker because they have nothing left to eat.

When their hope is almost gone, God offers them His kindness again. Both of them see a big ship approaching. The problem is that the crews of the ship do not see them, so the

narrator decides to get in the ship by himself his companion is so weak to move that he has to leave him. He can successfully make his way to get in the ship without being found by the crews.

On the ship, the narrator finds many strange things. He sees the crews who are so bizarre in their performance: they are all looked so old, the language they used is not understandable and it seems that his existence on the ship can not be perceived by all of the crews. This condition encourages him to observe the parts of the ship. He even enters one of the rooms and write a manuscript that is placed in a bottle and thrown away into the sea. The encounter with the captain of the ship makes him more confused because:

.... He murmured to himself--as did the first seaman to whom I saw in the hold--Bome low peevish syllables of a foreign tongue; and although the speaker was close at my elbow, his voice seemed to reach my ears from the distance of a mile.... (p.226)

The narrator realizes, then, that he is dealing with the ancient voyagers from a distant land. The ship they are on is heading for the icy ocean or we know it as northern pole. When they, at last, reach the icy ocean, something bad obstructs their way. A violent hurricane lifts their ship bodily out from the sea. Here, God shows His power through the unresearchableness of the nature. The icy ocean opens suddenly to the right and to the left, forming a huge whirlpool which swallows the ship bodily. That is the disastrous ending of the story. To close the discussion of the story, the writer states the possible theme of this story, that is: God shows His power through miracle and disaster.

### **Berenice**

In this story we deal with a mentally diseased person who is also the main character and the narrator of the story. He has a singular mental disorder which he calls as "monomania", a condition of the mind in which a person keeps thinking of one particular idea or subject. Throughout the story, the narrator tells us briefly how the disorder influences him and how it, at last, destroys his life. The conclusion we can draw is that the subject matter of the story is mental disorder.

The narrator, whose baptismal name is Egeus, has no pride of his own family, thus he will not spell his family name. He comes from a wealthy family who own the most luxurious mansion in their district. His family line has been called a race of visionaries and the appellation is completely translated into the characteristics of the mansion.

Egeus has an uninteresting childhood memory. He was born in the same room wherein his mother died. He did not spent his days in ways the other kids did. Influenced by the spirit of visionary, he loitered away his childhood in books and dissipated his youth in reverie. As the result of his stagnant life in his parental house, a total inversion takes place in the character of his commonest thought. The realities of the world affects him as a vision while the wild ideas of the land of dreams become his material of everyday existence.

In the same mansion, lives also his beautiful cousin Berenice. They grow together but in a different way:

I ill of health, and buried in gloom--she agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy; hers the ramble on the hill-side--mine the studies of the cloister--I living within my own heart, and addicted body and soul to the most intense and painful meditation--she roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours.(p.176)

Lovely Berenice is, unfortunately, attacked by a fatal disease which seems to be a cataleptic malady. The violent malady destroys her and changes her appearance so badly that Egeus can no longer recognize her as the lovely Berenice.

In the meantime, the disease within the narrator's mind grow bigger. A ghastly monomania enslaves him. The disorder, in turn, drives him to the less important but more startling changes work in the physical frame of Berenice. The intensity of interest, then, lead him to a feeling he has never thought about before: love. He loves Berenice and asks her to marry him.

They marry at last, and the narrator's monomania develops more. It is clear, then, that Egeus admires Berenice's teeth which are white and resemble that of ivory. He can not stop thinking about it. Their marriage, however, does not last long. The death of Berenice due to her epilepsy is the end of their unity.

The ending of the story is startling and catastrophic. The servants of the house hear a moaning voice. Searching for the direction of the sound, they find a violated grave with a disfigured body--yet still breathing, still palpitating, still alive! It is Berenice within!

Everything is clear when they knew it was their master, Egeus, who damaged the tomb. The proves are so unequivocal: Egeus' garments are muddy and clotted with gore and in a box on his desk they find thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that have been taken from the body. Egeus, in his monomania, has done something evil to the body of lovely Berenice: he took her glowing teeth away.

Finally, the theme we can achieve from the story is: *mental disorder may be influenced by one's hereditary features and the ways a person grows up*. From the story, we can take a lesson that mental disorder could possibly make someone do dangerous and evil things out of his control and consciousness.

## CONCLUSION

The subject matters of Edgar Allan Poe's selected short stories are (1) madness, (2) alcoholism, (3) revenge, (4) the profundity of God-created nature, (5) death, (6) friendship, (7) God's power, and (8) mental disorder.

The themes of those short stories are (1) madness can bring harm or a madman may commit dangerous things to his community; (2) drinking too much alcohol may cause dangerous condition which may lead people to a catastrophic end of life; (3) revenge may exist or happen even in a close friendship; (4) people are helpless when they are confronted with God's power and their salvation is only by His miracle; (5) when someone people love dies, it is difficult for them to get rid of the memory Of him or her and thus it may bring to some trouble; (6) true friend will always be at our side, in good times and also in bad times; (7) God shows His power through miracle and disaster; and (8) mental disorder can be

influenced by one's hereditary features and the ways a person grows up.

Poe is very creative in putting his themes forward in the eight short stories of this analysis. All of the short stories are classified into Poe's terror stories. Nevertheless, we have various kinds of themes. In another words, Poe's themes in his terror short stories do not deal only with death, madness, and agony. Other universal human problem are also touched by Poe.

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