

# Edgar Allan Poe across Disciplines, Genres and Languages



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Edited by

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Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0387-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0387-8

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# INTRODUCTION

LINDA BARONE

Why dedicate a book to Edgar Allan Poe in 2017?

For his ability to penetrate the obscure cells of the unconscious; for his capacity to stare at death with manifold eyes; for the sense of solitude and anguish which leaps out from his pages and which was an irresistible magnet for Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, Walt Whitman, H. P. Lovecraft, William Faulkner, Herman Melville, Gesualdo Bufalino, Paul Auster, Ray Bradbury, Neil Gaiman, and many others. Because from his writing, new and revisited genres and subgenres bloomed, including gothic, noir, thriller, horror, detective fiction, science fiction and urban fantasy; because the genius of Roger Corman makes us *see* how high-quality cinema can be the ideal place in which to read and explore Poe's works.

We owe much to the Bostonian (or, actually, Baltimorean); his ingenious and profound writing, his brilliant command of language and his unique style, made up of sound and vision, recently led Neil Gaiman to state that one of the secrets to appreciating Poe was to read him aloud: "Read the poems aloud. Read the stories aloud. Feel the way the words work in your mouth, the way the syllables bounce and roll and drive and repeat, or almost repeat...Lines which, when read on paper, seem overwrought or needlessly repetitive or even mawkish, when spoken aloud reshape and reconfigure" (2004).

For these — and many other reasons — Poe's works can be read and explored from several perspectives: from literature to culture, from cognitivism to narratology, from sociology to (applied) linguistics, from stylistics to translation, from psychoanalysis to gender policies, etc.

Hence, that is why we need — yes, we feel it is necessary — to celebrate Poe in a far-reaching and deeply interdisciplinary publication, presided over by a two-headed scholarly body (linguistics/literature and communication) but, at the same time, open to many other academic offshoots which will guide us in our exploration of Poe's labyrinthine and variegated imagination.

We decided to classify the papers according to two main domains and sections, namely (I) *Edgar Allan Poe in Language, Literature and Translation Studies*, and (II) *Edgar Allan Poe in Communication and the Arts*.

Specifically, the book encompasses the following range of topics: language teaching, literary translation, machine translation, stylistics, pragmatics, lexical studies, corpus linguistics, literary studies, comparative literature, music, cinema, theatre and comics studies.

The first section opens with Peter Stockwell's *Poe's Gothic Ambience*, in which the author concentrates on the stylistics of the Gothic, and in particular on the feelings and the air of angst, oddness and terror that can be described and better understood by means of a stylistic analysis.

*Poe's Gothic Ambience* is defined and identified by bringing the disciplines of cognitive poetics and corpus stylistics together with references to literary criticism.

The second chapter is dedicated to one of the most renowned among Poe's short stories. Christiana Gregoriou approaches *The Tell-Tale Heart* through William Labov's framework for the structure of oral narratives in order to analyse the construction and the effect of the story. According to Gregoriou, "a first-person narrative within yet another first-person narrative lends itself to analysis not unlike that fitting for oral narratives, particularly due to the high level of Labovian 'evaluation' taking place throughout".

Bruna Di Sabato discusses the connection between Poe and language education through text-based approaches to learning, presenting some activities based on two of Poe's most famous stories. *Poe in the EFL classroom* proves that bringing Poe into the English as a foreign language classroom today has many pros that contribute to the learning of language through motivating activities.

"We commence, then, with this intention": *Pragmastylistic Aspects in the Italian Translations of Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven* focuses on translation issues dealing with stylistic and pragmatic aspects applied to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* (1845). In particular, Linda Barone concentrates on the fundamental sound devices Poe uses in his most famous poem — meticulously described in *The Philosophy of Composition* — and tries to see what is left of them in several Italian versions.

Roberto Masone's *Edgar Allan Poe's Metzengerstein. Machine vs. Human Translations* provides an empirical investigation into the ways in which automatic translation tools work and diverge from human cognitive processes when translating a text.

In the last three chapters of the first section the focus shifts to literature, starting with *Science Fiction Spaces in Some of Poe's Short Stories*, in which Bruna C. Mancini identifies Poe as the pioneer of science fiction, as the inventor, or better, the discoverer of the genre. Her views are supported, for example, by John Tresch, who affirms that “by making facts of physical philosophy the basis and central concern of an adventure tale, Mr. Poe has invented science fiction” (Hayes 2002, p. 113).

Daniela Liguori depicts the relation between Poe and Baudelaire. In *Marquis pour le mal. Baudelaire and Poe*, Liguori describes the influence Poe exerted upon Baudelaire, which can be seen, for instance, in the coexistence of the mathematical precision of the poetic expression and in what can be called a “chemical analysis of the soul”.

The first section closes with Eriberto Russo's *E.A. Poe and E.T.A. Hoffmann: A Case of Influence*, in which the author, starting from a comparison of the works of Poe and Hoffmann, aims to investigate the relationship between madness and chromatism in both authors, also referring to some paintings by Johann Heinrich Füssli and highlighting the key role colours play in their works.

The second section, which is focused on communication, opens with Alfonso Amendola's *The Word-Vision. Edgar Allan Poe and Cinema*, in which the author takes into account the fruitful relationship between Poe and cinema and the different ways in which the American writer was “exploited” by the film industry with movies based both on his life and works.

Paola Attolino's *The Tell-Tale Heart...of Mine: Poe told by Stewart Copeland* illustrates the opera written by the American musician, composer, and former drummer of *The Police*, Stewart Copeland, which was commissioned by the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden and premiered in London in April 2011. On the occasion of its staging, Richard Morrison, the chief music critic of *The Times*, wrote: “Copeland's score is perfectly effective. This murderer really does hear voices in his head—singing in harmony too. And his Jekyll-like split personality is cleverly conveyed by musical means”.

Vincenzo Del Gaudio's *Principles of Theatrology of Vision* intends to investigate the influence Poe exerted on the theatre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by taking into consideration both the works inspired by his life and those based on his poems and tales.

Mariateresa Franza and Iain Halliday start by focusing on the reasons why Poe's works have been such a magnet for musicians. *Edgar Allan Poe's Words as Musical Inspiration* then concentrates on the precise case study of Lou Reed's double album of 2003, entitled *The Raven*.

*Steps to a Metropolitan Mode: Cinematographic Tales by Edgar Allan Poe* by Sara Matetich analyses the elements of Poe's works that have been assimilated by the media and that are relentlessly replicated in new forms and considered contemporary and original to this day.

Mario Tirino, who closes this long journey dedicated to Poe, investigates the relationship between the American author and comics. *Gothic Clouds and Threatening Shadows. Edgar Allan Poe and the Comics: A Sociocultural Analysis* focuses on three main themes, namely the literature of Poe and the horror comics magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, the influence of Poe on the work of several masters of the genre, and, finally, the presence of Poe as a fictionalized character in various comics and graphic novels.

Since some works by Poe are recurrently cited in this volume, we decided to collect them in an appendix at the end so that the reader can appreciate them in full.

The works included in the appendix are the essays *The Philosophy of Composition* and *The Poetic Principle*; the poem *The Raven*; the short stories *The Black Cat*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, *Metzengerstein* and *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

## **SECTION I**

# **EDGAR ALLAN POE IN LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES**



# CHAPTER ONE

## POE'S GOTHIC AMBIENCE

PETER STOCKWELL

### **Tone, atmosphere and ambience**

The enduring legacy of Edgar Allan Poe lies in his position as a conduit for bringing European Romanticism and the Gothic to American literature, and then transforming it into a sensibility that was to influence many subsequent writers including Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, William Faulkner, and Stephen King. The Gothic, in Poe's hands, turned from a collection of motifs, objects and tropes that were coalescing towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century into a recognisable genre with a characteristic style (Thompson 1973). The inventory of the Gothic includes ruined abbeys and castles, mysterious monks and cults, pagan symbols, shadows and darkness, the trappings of medieval romance, fainting heroines and Byronic heroes. However, it is the stylistics of the Gothic that is my concern here, and specifically the vague, generic sense that there is a Gothic air of eeriness, dread and anxiety that can be captured and defined stylistically. Writing in 1846 at the beginning of his 'Philosophy of composition', Poe emphasises the importance of the 'air' and 'tone' in the overall narrative:

It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

(Poe 1846a: 163)

This chapter sets out to draw together literary criticism, corpus stylistics, and cognitive poetics, in order to arrive at an identification of Poe's Gothic ambience. Literary critical responses include both professional essays as well as the popular readership of Poe's work over two centuries (Halliburton 1973, Hammond 1981, Kennedy 1987, May 1991). Corpus stylistics is the use of large digitised bodies (corpora) of extracts of language, against which literary texts can be compared and

measured (Sinclair 1991, Semino and Short 2014). Cognitive poetics is the application of cognitive science to literary reading (Stockwell 2002).

The starting point, then, is the literary criticism that identifies Poe's writing as Gothic, and the popular sense of what constitutes Gothic-ness. Beyond the inventory of objects and the material description of the setting, the Gothic is widely felt to be a feature of the *ambience* of the fictional world. Like Poe above, readers generally find it difficult to articulate their sense of ambience, relying on impressionistic terms such as 'air'. In Stockwell (2014a), I set out a theoretical scheme for ambience that consisted of *tone* and *atmosphere*, both words that are very frequently applied to the sense of the felt environment in a fictional representation. Using the 100 million word British National Corpus (BNC), *tone* is most often collocated by English users with words like *sinister*, *positive*, *melancholy*, *playful*, *elegaic*, and *sunny*. For the most part, *tone* even when applied to written text retains its non-metaphorical sense as in 'tone of voice': the most common BNC collocates (within 5 items either side of the word *tone* in school essays and academic arts writing) are *mocking*, *dismissive*, *conversational*, *aggressive*, *mild*, *neutral*, *gentle*, *cool*, *scathing*, *sarcastic*, *smooth*, and *patronising*. Therefore we might conceive of *tone* as pertaining particularly to the narrative voice of a text. A simple crude search of all occurrences of *tone* collocating with *Poe* on the web produces 421,000 results (Google, January 2017), suggesting that the feature is a salient aspect of his writing.

The terms *atmosphere* and *atmospheric* are similarly highly productive as collocates of *Poe*, rendering 393,000 and 437,000 results respectively in a simple web search. Many of these (123,000) collocate within the phrase 'atmosphere of...' *tension*, *suspense*, *fear*, *foreboding*, *sorrow*, *melancholy*; or are premodifications such as *gloomy*, *melancholic*, *damp*, *dark* 'atmosphere'. In the BNC corpus (excluding literal usages as in *the Earth's atmosphere*), *atmosphere* tends to collocate with words denoting a place or location, such as *room*, *building*, *classroom*, *party*, or sports event. There is clearly a strongly spatial and locative element in its meaning, to the extent that, where we can typify *tone* as pertaining to a narrative voice, we can typify *atmosphere* as pertaining to the narrated world.

Focusing only on school essays within the BNC, the most common modifiers of *atmosphere* are abstract nouns or adjectives: *hopelessness*, *grandeur*, *sensual*, *relaxed* and *optimistic*. There is clearly, in written usage here, an emotional or aesthetic quality inherent in the notion of *atmosphere*. Both *tone* and *atmosphere* are almost always modified in some way, either premodified or modified by an adverbial phrase: this is



the typical syntactic formula when a vague or ineffable concept needs to be further specified. Altogether, we can characterise *atmosphere* and *tone* as two closely related but vague concepts that indicate a depicted world filtered through an observing consciousness, and a reader drawn into the *ambient* feeling of the narrated world.

Ambience, then, is a combination of tonal voice and atmospheric world, and the field of literary-linguistics gives us a useful set of frameworks for the investigation of these matters. *Tone* can be described in text-linguistic terms, as a matter of diction (simple word-choice) and register (choices of words and phrases within a customary domain of formality or social convention). *Atmosphere* requires a cognitive poetic description that takes account of the readerly sense of the contextual world of the depicted setting. Of course, tone and atmosphere are not entirely mutually exclusive. A world has to be depicted by someone in their own characteristic voice, and a narrative description has to depict a tangible content. The means of exploring ambience, then, has to be multi-faceted.

In the next section, I explore the lexico-grammar of ambience in Poe, where the main emphasis is on the Gothic atmosphere. In the subsequent section, I focus on the semantic priming of ambience, where the main emphasis is contrastively on tonal effects, and lastly I will outline the mind-modelling of a Gothic persona.

## The lexical semantics of ambience

The opening of Poe's story 'The fall of the House of Usher' is often cited, for example in many of the school essays, teachers' notes and literary criticism sources in the BNC mentioned above, as creating a 'foreboding, ominous atmosphere' and a 'deep, haunting tone'. How does it do this stylistically? In the opening reproduced here, elements of lexical semantic negation have been underlined:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was; but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant

eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?

(Poe 1839: 145, underlining added)

It is clear from a glance at these underlined items that there is a great deal of qualitatively negative lexis in this opening. The density of these lexical items across the excerpt helps to accumulate an overall atmosphere directly. However, many of these individual items are also echoically linked together, for example by phonetic parallelism: the repeated /d/ of ‘dull, dark... soundless... dreary... shaded... desolate... decayed... depression... after-dream... hideous dropping... unredeemed dreariness’ dominates the passage. Even more subtly, the /d/ set up and foregrounded by the repetitive and word-initial alliterative phrase ‘dull, dark’ is almost immediately followed negationally by ‘soundless’, which retains the ‘d’ visually but in which the /d/ read aloud would likely be soundless itself.

The sense of a negative quality is also carried by the restrictive, negational syntax in various places. There is an example of straightforward predicate negation: ‘I know not how it was’. This uncertainty, doubt and sense of vagueness underlies the entire passage, causing the thought process to stall the scene entirely at the end: ‘I paused to think’ is suspended between a repeated plea for exactness which remains elusive. Further, there are several restrictive particles ‘but’, ‘mere’, ‘simple’ and ‘a few’ (twice) used throughout, and negative particles in ‘no goading’ and ‘no earthly sensation’. Lastly there are several examples of morphological negation in ‘soundless’, ‘unrelieved’, ‘insufferable (twice)’ and ‘unredeemed’.

All of these features are the structural background for the negative semantic domains which are evoked across the passage, carried in the meanings of the words underlined above. Where a qualitatively neutral domain is evoked, the lexical choices point to a negative aspect of that domain. Here, for example, religion is brought to mind, perhaps initially in ‘the heavens’, but it is indexed then through miserable references: a gloomy ‘spirit’, a depressed ‘soul’, ‘no earthly sensation’, and ‘lapse’. Each particular index of misery and gloom must be represented in mind as an accumulated sense, a macrostructural representation of the ambience of

the passage. This ambient sense is largely carried not so much in the plain denotations of the words (though even they are miserable as well) as in the associations and looser meanings of the semantic domains that are evoked by the word-choices. Together, the alignments of lexical choices and the semantic domains that they evoke become very rich in the opening of 'The fall of the House of Usher'.

Two things are invariably required — first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness — some undercurrent, however indefinite of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much [...] *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term).

(Poe 1846a: 167)

Richness, in the narrative, is an effect that is more than the sum of its parts: in other words, a readerly sense of richness begins with the words on the page, but these are multiplied with the addition of experiential memory, effects, literary competence and all the loose associations that individual readers bring from the rest of their lives.

These looser associations – less prototypical sets of meanings evoked by a lexical item – can be explored collocationally as 'lexical constellations' of meaning (Cantos and Sanchez 2001, Almela, Cantos and Sanchez 2013). Words and phrases are not simply defined by their denotational ('dictionary') definition, but also by the looser sets of meaningful connotations and associations that they bring with them. Where phrases typically occur in the language generally in the vicinity of other characteristic words and phrases, these loose associational meanings are learned by fluent language users as vague, or ambient associated meanings. In corpus linguistics, this phenomenon has been called 'semantic priming' (Hoey 2005, 2013) or 'semantic prosody' (Louw 1993, Stewart 2010). In the Poe passage, there are three examples that can illustrate these subtle ambient effects: *utter*, *pervaded*, and *found myself*.

The word *utter* occurs in the phrase 'with an utter depression of soul'. This word (when used as here as an intensifier rather than as a verb) displays highly negational priming in English usage. Drawing again on the 100 million word BNC, we find 646 occurrences of non-predicate *utter*. The table gives a few illustrative contexts from the concordance.

at its most cynical and most opportune. What utter and unbelievable nonsense it is for the  
 Some commitment to the unemployed. An utter disgrace. Where do Labour stand on  
 She added: 'Frankly, I think she is an utter disaster from start to finish and  
 from the Montjuic track, staring vacantly ahead in utter despair after finishing only fifth.  
 The scene was one of utter devastation with suspected gas leaks, rubble,  
 screwed up inside or suffering from a sense of utter emptiness and loss of interest or emotion.  
 they start filleting themselves. With looks of utter disbelief on their faces, their hands jerkily  
 it has been treated with utter contempt on the grounds that charity  
 with wildly beating heart and in a state of utter confusion, of mingled joy, misery, despair.  
 relation to it. To my utter astonishment the motion was passed  
 this phrase was repeated. So: utter refusal, and refusal couched in terms of the  
 opened his eyes and was instantly aware of utter, spine-chilling silence. Everything was dark  
 predicament would be a cue for utter bewilderment or terror in Pynchon, whose  
 forced into me by my mentor, and to the utter amazement of all  
 I am sure that the whole House will join me in utter condemnation of this appalling attack. But

The semantic prosody of *utter* is not simply negative in tone, it often gestures towards a cognitive reaction or feeling. Further, the word occurs in contexts in which such feelings or reactions are highly intense or extreme. The deployment of the word at the beginning of Poe's narrative is likely to prime up all these sorts of experiential associations for a reader, contributing to the general sense of extreme gloom and miserable perception.

The word *pervaded* also occurs in the opening excerpt, in the clause 'a sense of gloom pervaded my spirit'. This verb tends generally to appear in a transitive form in which 'X pervaded Y', and so both the subject and object positions are of interest in the immediate semantic prosody of the word. The table for *pervaded* illustrates some of the 143 occurrences in the BNC.

An air of laziness pervaded the ranks after their extended rest.  
 dirtier than its neighbour. A sour fustiness pervaded the dingy room. In a corner of the  
 strong smell of floor polish pervaded the house and the kitchen was in  
 wrongness and the lack of humanity that pervaded the room sweep over her. Like  
 filled with massive, mahogany furniture and pervaded by a musty smell which seemed  
 the gloom that pervaded the air, or the look of hopelessness  
 in Berlin they were strongly pervaded by statism.  
 reported that the smell of corpses pervaded the town for days.  
 so overcome by a feeling of evil that pervaded a particular location that they  
 and still, with the peculiar lifelessness that pervaded closed-off places. It smelled of

The position to the right of *pervaded* is almost always occupied by a denotation of a place or physical location. Spaces are what are commonly pervaded, and so it is highly likely that a spatial and physical sense will be evoked, however subconsciously and delicately, whenever this verb is used. The word is especially atmospheric, in this sense, pertaining to the world of the fiction. Such spatial flavouring is probably felt even when the object that follows *pervaded* is not usually in itself spatial. This suggests, from the Poe excerpt, that 'my spirit' is likely to be felt to become 'de-spiritualised', as it were, by being preceded by the spatial verb *pervaded*. The narrator's spirit has become contaminated.

Even more interesting in the semantic prosody of *pervaded* is the leftwards collocation: what are the things that have the agency to pervade? Across most of the BNC examples, these are almost always unpleasant or unwanted things. Again, there is a sort of 'aura effect' of the use of this word: the negative, unpleasant expectation is so strong that even when the subject of the predicate is not unpleasant, it will become tainted by association. In an example from the BNC table, 'the strong smell of floor polish' might, in another co-text, be regarded as a pleasant experience, but the collocation with *pervaded* here renders it unwanted and nasty – a sense that the association with 'chaos' later in the sentence demonstrates clearly. So the appearance of *pervaded* in itself in the Poe excerpt serves to draw down mentally a sense of an unpleasant and contaminated place.

Lastly, the reflexive phrase *found myself* is interesting. It occurs in the second sentence: 'and at length I found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher'. The preceding sentence is stylistically primarily concerned with grounding the narrative. The main predication ('I had been passing alone') is embedded between a long series of locating prepositional phrases on both sides: 'During the day', 'in the autumn', 'when the clouds hung'; and 'on horseback', 'through a country'. Some of these locatives even have further precise prepositional phrases embedded within them: 'of a dull, dark day', 'of the year', 'in the heavens', 'of country'. Of course it is common for a narrative to begin with a description of the setting in time and space, but the strong emphasis here on the setting serves to foreground the surrounding world and its atmosphere, while contrastively diminishing the sense of a narrator. At the same time, whereas multiple locatives are usually used to specify very exactly the setting, in this case these prepositional phrases include the indefinites 'a dull, dark day' and 'a dreary tract of country'. What is specific ('the autumn', 'the year', 'the clouds') are generic to anywhere. The opening manages to be at once vague and pervasive as well as focused on the imagined world.

The tone of the passage is mainly carried through the narratorial voice, and *found myself* sets up this tone very well. The narrator in this opening excerpt is an observer and a thinker, but he has little active agency. The first main verb attaching to him ('I had been passing alone') has been deflected away from the most possible active form (*I passed alone*) by being rendered in a past perfect continuous aspect: this is a form which combines the modal with the passivised *to be*, in order to indicate an action which was progressing in the past but has now come to an end, as if all by itself. There is also a suggestion that the continuity of the action was incomplete. The lack of volition in *found myself* is also apparent from its semantic prosody across the BNC. There are 448 occurrences of the phrase, and the table shows some illustrative examples.

I've **found myself** under pressure to say yes, when  
 Sean recalled: 'I suddenly **found myself** on the same side as the shark an  
 This was the first fight I **found myself** screaming. When Razor went down  
 and then, **found myself** at the very same moment already  
 and I have **found myself** reluctant to make the telephone call  
 until I **found myself** in the remains of what must have  
 own aspirations, I **found myself** in an area of bleak but populous  
 and I soon **found myself** walking more and more quickly  
 and later I **found myself** in worse scrapes than on that first  
 and once again **found myself** confronting' the dreaded Grabham  
 I had **found myself** reacting more and more against  
 mind taking over again. I **found myself** half-way up the path between the  
 temptation denied, yet now I **found myself** wasting it on meals I didn't wan

The reflexive phrase *found myself* clearly diminishes the agency of the subject, but what is further apparent from all the BNC examples is that the lack of volition also results in bad outcomes. There are often multiple bad items to the right of *found myself*: the setting tends to be prominent, but the negative setting is quite often accompanied by rich description of further details about how bad it is. *Found myself*, then, possesses a semantic effect that primes involuntary action and a negative setting. The first two sentences in Poe's narrative contain these effects in a highly dense form.

The outcome for the reader is a 'unity of impression' (Poe 1846a: 163). In 'The fall of the House of Usher', this impression develops the ambience of the story by drawing attention more to atmospheric (spatial) matters and diminishing tonal (narratorial voice) aspects of the opening passage.

[I]t has always appeared to me that a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: — it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place. (Poe 1846a: 166)

By contrast with the emphasis on the external, the narrator is to an extent effaced, rendered agentless, and is reduced to the role of an observer and reflector on the scene. This role continues into the narrative itself: the narrator's main action in the rest of the story is to read out a further embedded narrative, which seems to have the effect of causing the house itself to crack and crumble. Again, though, the agency seems to be in the texture and telling of the recited story, rather than the volition of the narrator himself.

These elements are all carefully set up in the opening passage, along with fore-echoes of the animated house ('eye-like') and opium (which will become salient later in the story). The emphasis is on the quality of the material setting, the effacement of the narrator. Of course, what is ingenious in Poe's writing here is how he conveys the narrator's feelings not only by describing his internal thoughts but by externalising them materially in the setting. It would be easy to rewrite the passage as a pleasant evening journey on a sublime Autumn day and an agreeable encounter with a romantic and picturesque ruin. The fact that this is diametrically opposite in Poe's narrative opening is largely a result of the embodiment of the narrator's feelings not directly in his tone but in the atmosphere that is imputed to the scene. The narrator's feelings are rendered into the landscape, so that his fears, anxieties and dread are objectified and externalised. This materialisation of feeling seems to me to be a key characteristic of Gothic writing.

## **The dominion of the Gothic**

The loose associations of meaning that are carried by lexical choices and by the semantic prosodies of those choices are the location for atmospheric effects that are either subliminal or barely reach the level of conscious explicit awareness, for most readers. In 'The fall of the House of Usher', the reader's attention is drawn strongly towards the atmospheric setting which is also made to stand symbolically for the narrator's state of mind. In other Poe stories, it is the tone which is in profile and the atmospheric effects reduced, in order to create a different texture of the sense of ambience.

The cognitive mechanics of how such subliminal effects might be created was set out in Stockwell (2009, 2014b), drawing on Langacker's (1987, 2008) notion of *dominion* in Cognitive Grammar. Briefly, Langacker suggests a cognitive linguistic account of the sort of semantic priming and semantic prosody mentioned above. The corresponding psychological capacity for *spreading activation* or *priming* has been understood for some time (McRae and Boisvert 1998, Sternberg 2011, Lerner et al 2012). This is the notion that an incoming lexical item is not freshly processed every time it occurs: instead it motivates a set of associated meanings which are then readily and speedily available for further processing. Langacker suggests that any reference point in language (like a word or phrase) activates a network of memories of the typical items that are likely to be associated with that reference. Then, when the text or utterance proceeds and one of that set of possibilities actually occurs, the reader is ready for it and can process it easily. The meaning of an item thus consists of the reference point's set of (unrealised) possibilities plus the actual target meaning that happens in the text. This set of meanings is the *dominion* of the reference point's conceptualisation.

What this model of meaning entails is that, for every word, phrase or structure, there is the actual designated meaning plus a cloud of possibilities that are transiently available but then not realised in the text. My suggestion is that this cloud of possibilities might persist for a while as a subliminal sense of unrealised but salient meanings. Furthermore, as the text progresses, there will be a sequence of *dominion chaining*, and if the text is a coherent narrative, then the effect of this chaining will be to build up a persistent and genuine but subliminal ambient effect (Stockwell 2014b).

We can see this in action in the short narrative 'The tell-tale heart' (Poe 1845), a monologue of only 2210 words, in which a narrator tells of his murder of an old man whom he dismembers and hides under the floorboards, but whose heart he (thinks he) hears beating. By contrast with the narrator of 'The fall of the House of Usher', this character is almost always the agentive subject of each sentence: highly active, engaged, and directly responsible for every event and thought. There is a very strong focus on the narratorial tone, and much less on the atmosphere of the room, which appears merely as background. There is a great deal of ellipsis in the story:

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had



never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! — yes, it was this! One of his eyes 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.

(Poe 1845: 97)

These iconically breathless syntactic bursts serve to draw a reader's attention constantly back to the speaking voice, and even here at the beginning of the narrative, where the topic is foregroundedly visual, the sense of a speaker — rather than a writer — is highly prominent. Although the story begins with this visual emphasis, for the most part the story is dense with references to noise and sound. Indeed, contrastively there is a great deal of lexical focus on sounds and hearing in the text, and altogether these are likely to create a very strong dominion effect in most readers. During the murder of the old man, the narrator is preoccupied with how noisy he is being, and his over-protestations of sanity are undermined by the sounds he claims to hear increasingly as the story progresses. Unless the reader reads the tale as being supernatural rather than psychological, the sound of the dead man's beating heart in the end can only be in the narrator's guilty consciousness.

There are even more subtle effects throughout the narrative, brought about by the fact that a reader cannot really trust the narrator, and the narrator does not even really seem to trust himself. One such effect is in the sense of indeterminacy in the setting. The entire story is interior to a house and the old man's room, but beyond these scenes there is no further detail at all as to when and where the story occurs. The sense of claustrophobia — which is heightened to the point at which the narrator confesses aloud at the end — is carried in the fact that there are very few words denoting objects (a room, a lantern, a bed); instead there are almost exclusively only sounds: 'strange a noise', 'muffled sound', 'a bell sounded', even a tangible 'dreadful silence'. The narrator's paranoia and anxiety is particularly captured in the large number of indefinite phrases across such a short text. Taking 3-word clusters in 'The tell-tale heart' beginning with indefinite 'a', we find 40 examples, as follows:

<i>NPs (premod + N)</i>	<i>NP + particle</i>	<i>NP + V</i>
a dark lantern	a cricket which	a drum stimulates
a dull blue	a dream the	a madman have
a hearty tone	a film over	a mouse crossing
a heightened voice	a groan of	a shriek had
a hideous veil	a knocking at	a tub had
a high key	a little a	
a light heart	a mockery of	
a long time	a muscle and	
a loud yell	a neighbour during	
a muffled sound	a neighbour the	
a new anxiety	a night just	
a pale blue	a noise as	
a simple dim	a ringing in	
a single chirp	a sound as	
a single thin	a vulture a	
a slight groan	a watch's	
a very very		
a whole hour		
a very profound		

These are divided into three groups: the largest set (19 occurrences) consists of noun-phrases made up of the indefinite plus a premodifier (usually an adjective) plus a noun. The second set (16) consists of an indefinite noun plus a particle of some kind. The smallest set (5) is made up of a noun-phrase plus verb element. In general, the forms [NP (premod + N)] and [NP+particle] are used when the speaker is expressing uncertainty but is grasping towards some attempt at precision. The indefinite 'a' conveys the generic, while the premodifying adjective conveys an attempt at specification. The [NP+V] form usually indicates a new, unfamiliar item being introduced into a narrative: there are relatively few of these.

The overall effect of these patterns suggests a narrator who is highly familiar with his setting, indeed seems bound in by it and assumes that the narratee is as familiar with the objects in the setting as well. This aligns neatly with the narratorial perspective which appears at first as if it is an interior monologue, expressed elliptically as stream-of-consciousness, but which becomes towards the end a series of verbal outbursts culminating in his confession to the police. This trajectory can even be extended (drawing on the sentence 'this I thought, and this I think') to read 'The tell-tale

heart' as an actual police statement and confession made some time afterwards and recorded verbatim.

Again, many of these indefinite 3-word clusters invoke a dominion of sound, but the lack of definite articles suggests cumulatively over the text a sense of uncertainty about the exact nature of the noise. Of course, this is the exact paranoid doubt that increases in force in the narrator's mind as the story develops.

### **Mind-modelling a Gothic monster**

The tone of voice is central to 'The tell-tale heart', and sound is even captured in the 'tell-tale' title, where the ambiguity between spoken exclamation and written confession is further left ambiguous. Where atmospheric effects are matters of world-building (references to objects and people), tonal senses are more a function of the subtle stylistic choices made by narrators and their loose, cloud-like dominion effects. Of course, tone is also a matter not just of distributed semantic associations but also how a particular character – in Poe's case often a narrating character – presents a pattern of mind for the reader to build up a sense of person.

In cognitive poetics, readers are understood to be able to build up rich, complex mental representations of fictional people as a process of *mind-modelling* (Stockwell 2013, Stockwell and Mahlberg 2015). Our sense of a fictional mind (much like our sense of an actual mind) begins with the presumption that the person is essentially like us in terms of possessing consciousness, wilfulness, a body, physical conditions, and so on. The text then shapes that vague sense of personhood into the other fictional mind. The key stylistic aspect that allows mind-modelling is tone of voice. This can be quickly illustrated in the opening characterisation of the narrating character Montresor in Poe's story 'The cask of Amontillado'.

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point —this Fortunato —although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmery, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially.

(Poe 1846b: 216)

Montresor is a person whom many characterise as pompous and intensely self-centred and egotistical (Shurr 1977, Baraban 2004, Stott 2004). This is clear from the series of generic sentences in the opening above, which have an almost proverbial flavour: ‘A wrong is unredressed...’, ‘Few Italians have...’. In this way he lays claim to a universal sympathy or justification for his later murderous actions. By contrast, these plainly assertive, categorical sentences are surrounded mainly by highly modalised and negated utterances: ‘must’, ‘could’, ‘would be’, ‘not suppose’, ‘cause to doubt’, ‘did not perceive’, and so on. The effect is to hem the narrator in with the modality of obligation and duty, again diminishing his blame for the murder to follow (he bricks up poor Fortunato in a cellar).

Modalisations and negations like these create a rich conceptual texture. Each one requires a mental transition across a world-boundary: the difference between ‘I punish’ and ‘I must not only punish’ is a double-shift to a state-of-affairs in which punishment is first a moral force and then imagined as not being sufficient. Transitions like these – and there are very many in this story – demand an investment of attention and serve to draw the reader in towards the mind of Montresor. While the narrative progresses, the spokenness in the syntax and the em-dashes iconically figure the text as a confession forced out by anxiety and stress. However, unlike ‘The tell-tale heart’, this narrator seems much more self-collected and calm. This confession (possibly to the priest suggested by ‘You, who so well know the nature of my soul’) is certainly not penitent. Indeed, the ending suggests that Montresor is taking advantage of the secrecy of the confessional box by boasting about his actions:

I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!

(Poe 1846b: 218)

Where there is self-conscious and showy irony in the naming of the unfortunate Fortunato in the beginning, here at the end the final words sarcastically echo those of the priest presiding over a more conventional burial. Montresor is triumphant and celebratory in his secret confession, unable even to take his proud secret with him silently to his own grave fifty years after the murder.

To be sure, a cognitive poetic analysis of Poe's ambience produces often microscopic and highly delicate details as set out in the account above of atmosphere, tone and mind-modelling in three of his stories. It might be objected that such details go beyond conscious awareness, but it is a fundamental principle of cognitive poetics that subconscious and subliminal effects can have a cumulative and general effect, and – most importantly – these can be discovered by careful analysis. Almost all readers understand that there is a Gothic ambience in Poe's writing, but almost no one has been able to say precisely how it is created (see Meyers 1992, Peeples 1998). Poe is a particularly pertinent writer for study in this regard because of his compositional commitment to 'the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect' (Poe 1846a: 164). A close cognitive poetic analysis offers a means of discovery of literary creativity as well as readerly interpretation, even of subliminal, rarefied and delicate effects like ambience.

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