Poe's Myth of Self: A Structural Barthesian Reading on "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

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ABSTRACT
This research analyzes how the narrative structure of Poe's tales, namely "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," can be imposed with a certain idea about Self or the nature of human subjectivity. Poe's tales illustrate that human subjectivity consists of two contrasting tendencies for destructiveness/imagination and reflection/cognition. They also show that the Self is always in tension with the Other. To counter this tension, Poe's tales suggest that the Self should take a moment to reflect upon its subjectivity and let the Other reveal its alterity before interacting with it so that a more harmonious, or at least less problematic, relationship between the two can be established. Reading the selected stories using the Barthesian perspective, this paper sees this imposition as an act of myth-making which in itself is always ideological since there is a certain political and/or economic agenda driving it. Hence, the myth of Self in Poe's tales needs to be demystified, a process through which Poe's idea of Self is unmasked as his cries for those in power to take a moment of reflection about the mess they had put into the 1840s United States political-economic condition. This result implies that myths are not always constructed by the ruling class to justify its domination, but can also be written by the oppressed group to voice its concern. In this way, this paper subscribes to the Foucauldian notion of power.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, mythology, Roland Barthes, self, structuralism

INTRODUCTION

Among other things, Edgar Allan Poe was famous for his magnificent horror tales, and the fact that he was the father of detective stories (Thoms, 2002). These two things he was famous for seem to be conflicted with one another: in the former, he, most of the time, depicts a weak human subject that is overwhelmed by certain forces in the world and finally succumbs to self-destruction whereas in the latter he shows his readers an intellectual human subject, through the figuration of M. Auguste C. Dupin, who can pierce and solve the mysteries of the surrounding with his analytical capabilities. There is, therefore, a paradox that Poe's detective and horror tales produce concerning the concept of Self, that which constitutes human subjectivity and individual identity. The primary goal of the present article is to scrutinize whether this paradox is reconcilable to one another or not: whether Poe's tales seem to suggest a definitive conception of Self-arising from that paradox, i.e. a sublation (Hegel, 2019) of the contrasting illustrations of Self; or he merely wants to embrace the duality of human subjectivity.

The domain within which this paper operates is by no means a new one. Indeed, many previous researchers have tried to draw any philosophical ideas of Self from Poe's writings. Most of them, unfortunately, tend to regard Poe's works as merely an illustration of a philosophical school that they use as a theoretical framework. Seaman (1989), for instance, treats Poe's tales as illustrations of Jacques Lacan's conception of subjectivity. (He is likely to forget that Lacan himself was heavily influenced by Poe since he, in *Écrits* (2006) even

dedicates a whole seminar only to draw psychoanalytical theoretical implications from "The Purloined Letter"). More recent papers reading Poe in terms of a philosophy of Self, thankfully, let his stories speak for themselves in the sense that the readings on Poe's oeuvres result in new ideas of Self that complement the applied theoretical framework. For instance, using Jungian psychology, Popescu (2012) argues that Poe's horror tales describe the human tendency to immolate itself into the abyss that is its nature. Meanwhile, Taylor (2012) states that Poe's conception of Self deals with a tension between human subjectivity and the environment that surrounds it – a tension that may result in a cataclysmic collapse: the non-human subjects have the force against which the human subject can be annihilated both physically and metaphysically. Taylor adds that this tension is not given in the sense that the human subject, by the time it was born, is already separated from the environment it lives in; the tension occurs because a human tends to objectify nature. This is also to say that the tension in itself is fiction for the sake of self-preservation (and capital accumulation), but it comes with a cost: mankind's enabling kinship with nature will end in vain (see also Fugate, 2012). What is left between human subjects and the environment is, for Taylor as well as for Tindol (2021), the Self's irresoluble fear of its environment. This conception of Self, as bleak as it is, actually implies Poe's love for nature – and this is why Crosby (2014) says that Poe is an ecophilia. On a different theoretical ground, McCopin (2012), reading Poe's horrific tales, suggests that Poe describes the tendency of human subjectivity to escape from the truth about itself and thus gets caught up by multiple false personas –hence the reason why the narrators in Poe's horror tales are unreliable. McCopin's finding, however, is inversely proportional to Fernàndez-Santiago's (2016) who, after reading Poe's detective tales, argues that Poe subscribes to human traits for reflection – hence the Self is always truth-loving which, concerning environmental issues discussed earlier, would allow the Self to converse with the environment and therefore to treat nature rightly and justly. What one can learn from previous research on the concept of Self in Poe's oeuvres is that in general, they clarify the paradox of Self that Poe's works bring forth. At this point, one should take a moment to ask whether or not Poe intended to create a certain concept of Self throughout his oeuvres.

It should be noted that other than horror and detective fiction, Poe also wrote satirical prose, poems, and literary essays; meaning that, Poe has his system of thoughts, especially on aesthetics. What does it mean when one says that a certain artwork is good? Most thinkers (e.g. Plato or St. Augustine) would suggest that good art is that which instructs good morals. Poe, on the contrary, hated this view immensely, calling the poets/artists subscribing to this idea heretics. Poe was among the thinkers and critics who value art for art's sake (which is influenced by the notion of disinterestedness, see Kant, 2007), and that good art is that which is crafted masterfully – in this sense, he was, although not directly, a descendant of Romanticism. Yet Poe does not deny that arts come from the realm of ideals; he was aware that certain ideas must accompany a work of art. Although his treatment of this issue is ambiguous and vague, Poe seems to suggest that these ideas should be valued secondary in an aesthetic benchmark. For him, the sensation that art brings to its audience is more important and necessary. His treatises on literary criticism, such as "The Philosophy of Composition (2012)," "The Poetic Principle (2012)," and "Exordium to Critical Notices (2012)" reflect this insistence on his in the way that although there are specific propositions in them, they are merely written to entertain the readers so that each proposition might contradict one another and the lines of thought seem unintelligible. This is why his treatises are condemned by Anglo-Saxon writers such as T. S. Elliot but are adored by the Continental ones (especially the French such as Charles Baudelaire); while the majority of the former subscribes to moralistic and systematic thought, the latter understands what Poe intended to do, which is to ridicule the seriousness of theory (Ljungquist, 2002; Polonsky, 2002). That being said, it is but a job that ends in vain to seek Poe's original theory of Self. However, to seek Poe's intended theory and to draw the implication that Poe's works have about human subjectivity are two different things – and it is the latter that this paper strives to do.

To achieve what it wants to aim, this paper implements Poe's injunction to focus more on the literary form and thus acquire the sensation that the form brings forth rather than anatomizing the content. To do so, this paper uses structural analysis to infer the deep structure of Poe's selected proses. Structuralism, itself being an old theory, has been applied to Poe's oeuvres. The most recent studies to do so are Olson (2003), Phelan (2007), and McCopin (2012) who deal with the pattern of the narrators' unreliability in Poe's horror tales. Meanwhile, Piglia (2011) finds that "[a] classic short story *à la* Poe told a story while announcing that there was another (p. 64)." Indrusiak (2018), in a different route, relates the narrative suspense in Poe's works with the filmography of Alfred Hitchcock. Recently, Miller (2020) makes a discovery that must not be left unnoticed by Poe scholars: Poe's oeuvres invite the critics to relate their form with their historicism. As far as I know, unfortunately, no structural researcher analyzing Poe's works has related her/his findings with the philosophy of Self. This is perhaps because they are too preoccupied with the formal characteristics of Poe's works and thus neglect altogether the fecundity of their contents, which is typical of any structural readings.

There is, however, one structural reading method that enables its practitioner to move beyond the deep structure of literary works. This method is introduced by Roland Barthes in one of his early major books, *Mythologies* (1991). The center around which each essay in this book moves is Barthes' fascination with myth-making, suggesting that any media (literature included) is structured to construct a myth which in itself is an ideological imposition to be demystified. By applying this Barthesian mythological reading, therefore, this paper aims 1) to comprehend the deep structure of Poe's selected short stories; 2) to draw the myth that Poe's works may create concerning the Self from their deep structures, and 3) to demystify Poe's myth of Self by historicizing it with regard to the 1840s United States political-economic climate. Before we move further, however, the concept of deep structure and Barthesian mythology need to be clarified first.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The deep structure of structuralism

To understand structuralism, one should go back to its source which finds itself in the work of the father of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1986). There are four primary points de Saussure makes that become the bases of structural thinking: 1) that meanings are arbitrary (i.e. there is no actual correlation between a signifier and its signified, hence meanings are imposed by the human mind on words whose phonetical and morphological relationship with each other creates the linguistic system), 2) that meaning-making is relational (i.e. the meaning of a word is derived from a process of differing and deferring one word with another), 3) that language constitutes the way humans perceive the world, and 4) that language consists of *langue* (i.e. the overall system of language) and *parole* (i.e. the utterance that the linguistic system produces used by human subjects in the communication).

Among the first structuralists to implement those Saussurean principles is Claude Lévi-Strauss (2008) who suggests that myth is the *parole* of a *langue* which is the wider network of narratives constituting a mode of thinking in society. He suggests that myth does not have any inherent meaning in itself (for meaning is arbitrary), but can only be understood structurally, i.e. in terms of its position within the larger structure of narrative acts implemented in a certain society.

From Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, one can see that structural reading does not concern with the meaning of a text, but to understand the wider structure that contextualizes it:

> "[T]here is a constant movement away from the interpretation of the individual literary work and a parallel drive towards the larger, abstract structure which contains them."
>
> (Barry, 2009, 39)

In doing so structural reading deals specifically with at least three kinds of analysis: 1) an analysis of narrative structure, 2) an interpretation of a text through certain concepts corresponding to linguistic theories (e.g. Lévi-Strauss' mytheme that corresponds to the morpheme, which is the smallest unit in linguistics), and 3) deriving a universal structure applicable to any texts in human history. What this present paper is interested in is the first kind of the three. To do so, this paper implements a method that Terry Eagleton (2008) has illustrated, which is to draw out the deep structure from which the stories emerge. It is called the deep structure because it constitutes the minimum framework that stories operate. After doing so, this paper interprets how this deep structure in Poe's selected stories might get imposed with a certain meaning that is related to human subjectivity. This interpretation requires a different theory since, as I said previously, structuralism does not deal with deriving meanings from literary works. This paper finds Barthes' theory of mythology to be the most appropriate for this purpose, a theory that we now turn our discussion to.

Barthes' demystification of myths

As has been previously discussed, the process of meaning-making is derived, according to structuralists, from a process of differing and deferring one sign to another within the cycle of signification. For Barthes, this meaning-making process is not natural and innocent; instead, it is purely political. What Barthes means by "myth" is precisely a product of meaning-making on which an ideology has been imposed. Thus, the goal of structural readings after him must follow his famous mission: demystification, i.e. to unmask how ideology (itself being a socio-political strategy to perceive, explain, and justify how things) works in and is transmitted throughout any discourses and texts (e.g. science, philosophy, art, mythology, etc.).

In *Mythologies* (1991) where he analyzes various types of texts from advertising to professional wrestling (as well as in *Writing Degree Zero* (1990) where he analyzes the overall history of writing), Barthes explains that cultural institution produces myths with a two-layered meaning. The first layer, imposed on the structure of the sign system, deals with what Barthes calls the myth *per se*. Here, a myth serves as the naturalization of a particular worldview (that is, ideology) that seeks to maintain socio-political order. In so doing, myth deviates from reality by magically showing that that particular worldview cannot be refuted because it is so common and obvious (Barthes calls this myth-making mechanism ex-nomination). There are various ways through which myth achieves its agendas: 1) inoculation, 2) dehistorization, 3) universalization, 4) tautology, 5) neither-norism, 6) the quantification of quality, and 7) proverbial acts. The task of critics, for Barthes, is to uncover the second layer of meaning from which myths try to deviate: the socio-political reality which reveals the power relation inscribed in a discourse. This assignment that Barthes gives to critics is by no means an easy one, for it seeks to reveal the truth at the cost of disharmonizing things. The critics thus become conspirators, and polemicists, and would be seen as controversial.

But, how can myth, which is used by those in power to dominate the rest of social agents, get so many followers and believers among even the oppressed group? This is because, according to Barthes, the main power of myth rests in its impressive character: it can surprise, in a creative way, its audience – and a sensation is a much more powerful tool to manipulate the masses than a logical argument. The main task of critics, seen in this light, is to slap the masses, awakening them from their pleasurable delusions imposed by those who seek to dominate them.

METHOD

After the theoretical frameworks and tools that one uses for analysis, one thing needs to be clarified before reporting the results and stating the arguments: the methodology of one's study. It is crystal clear that the present article is qualitative and interpretative as it aims to interpret certain texts that are Poe's selected stories. This paper chose two of Poe's tales that signify his paradox of human subjectivity; hence, one tale was chosen among his horror stories

and another among his detective ones. More specifically, this study chose "The Black Cat" as the representative of the former, and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as the latter. The choice of these tales was motivated by the fact that "The Black Cat" is arguably the most popular among Poe's horror tales and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is the first detective story ever written.

After reading and analyzing the two tales, this study drew out the deep structures from which their narratives develop and compared the details of their deep structures (also of their contents). Hypothetically, the difference would reveal the dialectical movement of two contrasting tendencies of human subjectivity, that would eventually be sublated – and hence the myth of Self-imposed on Poe's works could be finally characterized. This myth would later be demystified by locating it in the historical context (especially concerning the political-economic climate) of the 1840s United States, the period the tales were written.

It should be noted that this research does not faithfully follow the original spirit of structuralism and the intended argument of Barthes' theory of mythology. As one can see, later on, this paper even presents certain critiques of them. What this paper did is more poststructural rather than structural because it resembles Paul Ricœur's (1974) long-way hermeneutics in the sense that it sought, firstly, to do a naïve reading of Poe's tales about human subjectivity (through structuralism) and then disrupted that reading using hermeneutics of suspicion (Barthes' mythologies). The two readings were then sublated to argue that one's philosophical conception of Self is contextualized by, and hence a reflection of one's historical condition, especially the political-economic issues that concern one materially, their physical and actual life process (see also Marx & Engels, 2011).

In addition, this paper made use of secondary data such as previous studies about Poe and historical records of the 1840s United States concerning (but not limited to) its political economy. This paper also made references to existing views of human subjectivity to complement its demystification of the Self.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The deep structure of Poe's tales

"The Black Cat" tells the narration of a man explaining why he was about to be hanged. This capital punishment that he was about to receive is the result of his murdering his wife and hiding her dead body within a wall in his house – and he did all these horrible acts because he claimed that he was bewitched by a black cat. He argued that in his infancy he was noted "for the docility and humanity of [his] disposition," he had a tender heart and "was especially fond of animals (Poe, 2021, para. 2.)." After marrying his wife, who was also an animal lover, he added in his house more numerous pets. They "had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat (para. 3). It is this cat, whom he named Pluto, that bewitched him to do evil acts as he claimed that it was witch "in disguise (para. 4)" who sought revenge for the evil deeds the narrator did to it during his intoxication of alcohol.

From a stylistic perspective, the overall narrative of "The Black Cat" seems to form an apologetic confession. It is a confession because it is a tale about someone who wanted to tell the truth about the terrible acts he had done. But, this confession is apologetic because the truth he wrote down is constructed in such a way as to justify the sins he had committed, i.e. by blaming the black cat. At this point, this paper acquires a similar finding as that of Olson (2003), Phelan (2007), and McCopin (2012) stating that the narrators in Poe's horror tales are unreliable; to which I add that they are mentally ill because, in the case of "The Black Cat," the narrator, to use Carl Gustav Jung's (2012) terms, unhealthily project his shadow to the cat instead of accepting the reality that it is him who did the horrible deeds and coming to terms with that reality.

Meanwhile, from a structural perspective, this paper agrees with Piglia (2011) and Indrusiak (2018) who finds that there are multiple stories in Poe's short tales. Different from them, however, this study finds that there are not just two stories being told, but three – and the way these sub-stories are structured is that they are layered to form a cohesive unity. The transition from one sub-story to another is marked by a temporal transition. Each sub-story has what I like to call a relational function that serves, in general, to connect each other to form an apparent unity of the short story; but, in its particularity, they also function to deliver specific utterances (that is, similar to what speech acts do in pragmatic theory; see Yule, 1996) that is different from one sub-story to another. The sub-story occupying the first layer of the entire narrative of "The Black Cat" is the narrator's confession. This sub-story structurally functions to envelop the rest of the sub-stories to form an apparent unity and cohesiveness.

Now, it has been noted that the narrator aimed not to report what happened, but to justify his terrible sins by stating that he was innocent because he was bewitched by a witch cat who wanted to avenge the cruel deeds it had received from him. This justification act is the relational function of the second sub-story, the second layer of the overall narrative of "The Black Cat", which is marked by the narrator's addition of supernatural acts and incidents which are illogical to human reason.

That the incidents and acts told in the second sub-story are illogical (hence the narrator's apologia is beyond superficial) presupposes the happenings that are actual and logical (hence why this second sub-story is a lie and the narrator is unreliable) – and this is the third sub-story, the main layer of the narrative of "The Black Cat" that is enveloped by the other sub-stories. One could conclude that the real happening (that is, the third sub-story) tells about how the narrator tortured and murdered his pets and wife, which is motivated by his intoxication of alcohol (Poe, 2021, para. 6); but one cannot be sure about the detail of this happening, since this third sub-story is not explicitly told but only announced implicatively.

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue," however, seems to challenge the traditional rules of narration during the Romantic era. The apparent narrative telling about M. Auguste Dupin's investigation of the murder of a widow and her daughter in an apartment in the Rue Morgue serves only as an illustration of the narrator's treatise on human reasoning faculty. The narrator's main argument in this treatise is that the faculty of analysis and that of imagination, although different from one another, must be complemented with each other by the human subject in their usages to achieve their full potentialities (i.e. to develop a more engaging argument that is closer to truth or to compose a work of art that could pierce one's soul; for a detailed discussion about this treatise, see Irwin, 1992). The narrator then showed that the full potential of the human reasoning faculty has been achieved by his intimate friend, M. Dupin, who combines both his analytical and imaginative power to achieve what other people cannot achieve. To prove this, the narrator gave one case when M. Dupin was able to read his thoughts. Later, to strengthen his argument, he narrated a detailed occurrence where M. Dupin solved the mystery of the murders in the Rue Morgue.

There had been two murders of a widow named Madame L'Espanaye and his daughter Mademoiselle Cecile in their apartment in the Rue Morgue. There is neither signal of robbery nor rape, but the victims died terrible deaths as if they had been struck by a kind of devilish creature. Indeed, after Dupin's investigation, dramatically illustrated and thoroughly described by the narrator, he concluded that the murders were done by an Orang Utan who had escaped his cage while carrying its owner's razor –trying to find someone to "shave." After making an advertisement concerning the Orang Utan in the newspaper to trap its owner, Dupin and the narrator successfully apprehended the partial truth from the owner's perspective who followed the animal right after the time the murders were taken place and deduced the possible completed truth about the horrible incident.

From a stylistic viewpoint, the story is very unique in the sense that it combines the sober philosophical atmosphere in the treatise, dramatic recounts in the narrative, and rigid journalistic elements in the murder case report altogether. But still, in general, the narrative

style of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" forms a kind of analytical treatise of human reason because the narrator insists on being the observer in his overall narrative.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of structuralism, similar to "The Black Cat," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," consists also of three sub-stories. The first sub-story takes its form in the narrator's treatise which binds together the other sub-stories to form the cohesive unity of the short story. The second one tells about how M. Dupin practiced his reasoning faculty in investigating the murder case. The third layer of the narrative, the third sub-story, similar to the previously analyzed text, concerns the real happening – the main difference between the two is that while in "The Black Cat" the reality is announced through presupposition in the readers' minds, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" presents the partial truth in the text, while the rest is only indicated by the confession of the owner of the Orang Utan.

Poe's dialectical myth of self

The similarity that "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in Rue Morgue" share is that their entire narrations are constructed through the narrator's knowledge and experience. In the former, the narrator exists in the tale as the doer; while in the latter, as the observer. But the credibility of the narrators is inversely proportional to one another: the narrator of the first tale, although telling his experiences (that is, his acts that make up the whole story), is unreliable because he was a mentally ill criminal who sought to justify his sinful deeds while that of the second presented his observation logically and hence faithfully acts in the story as a sober thinker who possessed knowledge in phrenology, philosophy, and mathematics.

Now, if one were to read this difference regarding the philosophy of Self from the perspective of, say, liberal humanism, one would jump to the conclusion that Poe depicts two conflicting types of human subjectivities, resulting in what I previously called the paradox of his conception of Self: between a weak and fragile Self and an intellectual and transcendent Self. Barthesian reading, however, obligates its practitioners to start with an investigation of the structure of the texts they want to read and, after the structure is recognized, to draw the difference between them. As structuralism views things as signifiers constituting a larger structure of langue, the meaning of a thing that is analyzed should be drawn from the process of differing and deferring it from the other. In this case, to conclude the myth of Self in Poe's tales, one should defer and differentiate the details of the deep structure of "The Black Cat" from those of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue".

Now, it has been made clear that the narrative of "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" has the same structure: a three-layered narrative. The difference between them, other than the kind of person who narrates them, lies in the relational functions that each sub-story carries out. In "The Black Cat," the first layer, despite uniting the rest of the sub-stories to form the unity of the short story, functions for the narrator as a confession; the second layer serves as a justification for his hideous deeds; while the third is the presupposition of the justification pointing towards the real horrible event that had occurred. However, the first layer of "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," which binds together the rest of the sub-stories is a treatise about human reasoning which is illustrated by the second layer of the narrative, the story of M. Dupin. The third sub-story presents the partial truth about the disastrous event that indicates the whole truth. The main difference between the first and the second tale, in this light, is that while the first tale illustrates the human capacity for imaginative justification, the second describes the human capacity for reflective reasoning.

Let us take a step back for a moment, before deducing any occurring myth about human subjectivity from the structural characteristics of Poe's proses, to investigate the intellectual dimension of Poe's tales by way of strengthening the previous finding. Indeed, in each tale this

paper analyzed, different as they are, there are some allusions to human sciences. "The Black Cat" is famous for Poe's notion of the spirit of perverseness:

> "And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Phrenology finds no place for it among its organs. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart — one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is Law, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself — to offer violence to its own nature — to do wrong for the wrong's sake only — that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute."
>
> (Poe, 2021, para. 9)

For the record, the idea of the spirit of perverseness has its root in Arthur Schopenhauer whose The World as Will and Representation (1966) was published twenty years before Poe wrote his story. However, there is no proof that Poe read Schopenhauer as his works drew very little attention even in his own country until the 1850s even though Poe was very fond of German philosophy (Fisher, 2002; Fugate, 2012; Ljungquist, 2002; Polonsky, 2002). Poe's spirit of perverseness explains what mankind needs to justify: its tendency to destructiveness. After Poe, this view is inherited by, among others, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan –proving to the world that his horror tales have, indeed, intellectual fruition to reap.

But, Poe himself was also very astute in regarding human beings as rational animals, as it was the philosophical atmosphere in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Now, if one regards the tendency to destructiveness as a kind of emanation of the imaginative capacity of human reasoning, one will see that Poe, in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" subscribes to the idea that human's egoistic tendency to destructiveness is necessary to complement his sober, reflective nature – and hence the dialectical nature of human subjectivity according to Poe: that the Self consists of two contrasting drives or wills, for the rational (cognition, reflection) and the irrational (destructiveness, imagination).

Poe's texts read structurally show that his treatment of human subjectivity does not deal only with its nature but also with its surrounding. Poe's stories describe the tension between the Self and the Other, which is illustrated by the Orang Utan in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and the cat in "The Black Cat." In this light, this paper agrees with Taylor (2012), Fugate (2012), and Tindol (2021) in the sense that it finds that the two tales suggest the existence of an irreducible gap between the Self and the Other – to the point that each can be a threat to one another. Quick to do things out of emotional impulses, as in the case of the narrator in "The Black Cat," toward the Other can result in the diminishing power of subjectivity, mental derangement, and physical destruction. This study also agrees with Crosby (2014) in viewing that, for Poe, the Other is a realm unknown which, although it may take a frightful form in the eyes of the Self, is sacred and has subjectivity (alterity) of its own. What one can learn from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," therefore, is that the Self should take a step back for a moment to reflect itself in the face of the Other and to let the Other reveal its alterity so that the former may be better understand the latter, and thus interacting with it better – and it is here that my alignment with Fernàndez-Santiago (2016) lies.

The unfamiliar Poe: Poe's myth of self demystified

So far, Poe's myth of the Self looks promising in terms of its logical, epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical values. However, there is one thing that one should note about myths:

their meanings are imposed on them in such a way that they seem natural, universal, and timeless – that they exist outside of history. Hence, demystification is needed to pull Poe's myth of Self from among the clouds, to put it on the ground it should belong: its particularity that sheds some light on its position within the spectrum of society. To do so, this article aims to contextualize Poe's Self within the 1840s United States political economy. But why should we focus on the political-economic aspect of the 1840s US only? Why should not we also regard, say, the religious or the education or the artistic trend of that era? It is because, following Marx (1977) whose thoughts exist in Barthes' overall oeuvres, it is this aspect by which other social realities are conditioned in history.

The political-economic reality of the US in this period is plagued by a recession resulting from what in history books is called the Panic of 1837, a financial crisis caused by domestic (e.g. the drastic decline of cotton prices and a collapsing land bubble) and foreign (e.g. international bullion coin flows and restrictive lending policies in Britain) affairs. This crisis resulted in a state of panic and depression in mercantile districts across the nation as capital profits and wages went sharply down while prices and the unemployment rate went sharply up. This depressive episode in the US economic history was felt much worse in the South, leading to an increase in the interest in diversifying crops, the rise of slave prices, and even total bankruptcy for most farmers (Knodell, 2006).

The economic crisis that occurred during this period, which was the result of the natural law of capitalism itself, was worsened by poor political policies. In July 1832, despite being fully aware of the volatile economic situation of his country, US President Andrew Jackson vetoed the bill to recharter the Second Bank of the United States as a national bank and the country's fiscal agent which would start its operations four years later; making the rest of state-chartered banks, especially in the West and South, relax their lending standards by maintaining unsafe reserve coins. President Jackson would publish two critical laws that would worsen this condition: the Specie Circular of 1836 (obligating the payment of lands to be done only with hard money) and the Deposit and Distribution Act of 1836 (placing federal revenues in local banks in the West which caused hardships in specie transfer to the East which is the nation's commercial center). These policies forced both the banks and the companies to scale back their loans, and thus panic broke out (Rousseau, 2002). Not only these, but the Jacksonian policy was also vehemently criticized because the government refused 1) to renew the charter of the Bank of the United States and withdrawal of government funds from the bank and 2) to use the emergency relief (White, 2014).

As Davis (2014) indicates, Jacksonian policies were made not by nationalists but by mercantilists who rose to government boards. In other words, the figure of Andrew Jackson can be seen, if not fully, as a doll controlled by the capitalists in disguise.

Thus was the political-economic reality of the 1840s United States. Poe, who had been struck by poverty since his childhood, was surely financially cornered during this time. The facts that literary authors in the US during the period were paid very poorly due to the lack of copyright legislation, and that they must work as editors (as Poe did) whose amount of time to work and wages are inversely proportional, shed more light on Poe's sad life. Therefore, it is not surprising that Poe, an economically dominated subject, would criticize the dominating subjects (especially the Jacksonian politicians). On this issue, many researchers such as Whalen (1992), Harris (2000), Beuka (2002), and Faherty (2005) have concluded so. Each of them analyzes different Poe's texts to come up with varied characteristics of his stance towards the 1840s United States political economy; but almost all suggest that Poe conceived himself as a fallen white aristocrat – in other words, Poe had, so did the majority of Southerners of the period, a conflicting stance towards slavery and Orientalism (see also Haspell, 2012: Lee, 2003; Schueller, 1995). However, after reading Poe more closely, one would notice that in some of his works, he took a more progressive and democratic stance on such issues. This is because,

as Goddu (2002) says, Poe was a subject to the literary market as he was forced to align his political-economic stance with that of the periodicals in which his texts were published, democratic or republican alike.

What, then, does the political-economic reality of the 1840s US and Poe's attitude toward it have to do with Poe's myth of Self? It is inferred previously that Poe illustrates the Self as having two conflicting tendencies (destructive/imaginative and reflective/ rational) and as always in tension with the Other. To deal with the tension, Poe seems to suggest that the Self must take a moment of reflection to comprehend itself and to let the Other unmask its subjectivity before creatively interacting with it. Now, the Other in Poe's stories take the form of non-human creatures: the black cat in "The Black Cat" and the Orang Utan from East Indies in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." The latter signals Poe's Orientalism as he regards the Anglo-Saxon and European Self (condensed within the figuration of the narrator) as in opposition with the Asian, African, and East Indies Other (the Orang Utan). The black cat, however, although conventionally understood as a manifestation of a female witch, can also be understood as a mark of blackness – which is the color of the slave. Poe's suggestion for the Self's treatment toward the Other must be read in this light since Poe, always caught up with the news, was aware that the 1840s US marks the beginning of a big change that would culminate in the Civil War that would break out around twenty years later (Wilentz, 1982). Poe was fully aware of the growing tension between the North and the South since the latter was aggrieved more by the government policy. He also fully understood the Southerners' insistence on slavery as opposed to the Northerners who wanted to abolish it. He must already know about the political, economic, and literary power each party had that was ready to clash. Poe's myth of Self, therefore, is not an ideological imposition by the ruling class as Barthes (1990; 1991) states, but a call cried by a dominant subject for the ones in power to rethink the problematic condition they had created for their society. It is a call for reflection, not to challenge, because Poe still considered himself an aristocrat, although he had fallen long before he was aware of that himself.

Before concluding the whole research, one should ask: is there a way to relate Poe's myth of Self which has its logical and ethical values to it with the reality behind it which is explicated through historical demystification? What to do with the gap that arises from the differences between the naïve reading and the hermeneutics of suspicion implemented in this research? According to Paul Ricœur (1974), the two readings should be brought into sublation that will explain human existence in the world. The result of this sublation in the case of Poe's myth of Self and his cries concerning the crisis in the 1840s US signifies none other than that one's conception of Self that constitutes one's way of existence that is conditioned by historical contexts – the philosophy of Self is always a reaction to the political-economic climate that directly influences one's actual, material, day-to-day life.

CONCLUSION

Poe's selected stories analyzed in this paper have the same deep structure: a three-layered narrative. Each layer is connected through a relational function that would make an appearance of unity and cohesiveness among them. In the case of "The Black Cat," the first layer functions as a confessional speech that was to be seen as the overall narrative. The second layer exists in the form of a supernatural and illogical sub-story that functions to justify the sinful, horrible deeds the narrator had done. The second layer presupposes the real event that occurred, the third sub-story within the short story – although it is not told in the narrative. Meanwhile, the first layer of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which unites the other stories layered in the narrative, functions as a treatise about human reasoning faculty. The second layer, telling about M. Dupin's investigation of the murders, serves as an illustration or a case example of the proposition delivered in the first layer. The third sub-story rests in the explication of the partial truth about the case and the indication of the whole.

After comparing the details of the deep structure of "The Black Cat" and those of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," this study observes that a myth about human subjectivity has

been imposed on the two tales. This myth of Self sees human subjectivity as consisting of two contrasting tendencies: destructiveness/imagination and reflection/analysis. To implement fully its subjectivity, Poe's tales suggest that, one should make use of both, complementing one with the other. This myth of Self also explains the irreducible disjunction between the Self and the Other that, to solve it, the Self must take a moment of reflection so that it can be aware of its ambiguous subjectivity and let the Other reveals its alterity before interacting with it. At this point, this paper implies that Poe's conception of the Self anticipates that of the phenomenological tradition founded by Edmund Husserl (2012).

However, although Poe's myth of Self has some logical and ethical values to it, one should contextualize it within the historical period in which it is constructed to unmask its particularity within the struggle for power in society. This paper finds that Poe's myth of Self is a cry made by the dominant subject for those in power to take a moment of reflection to comprehend the nature of the conflicting times (i.e. the US in the 1840s) they have put their society and its member into. This demystification of Poe's myth of Self implies that mythology is not always constructed by the dominating group, the way Barthes (1990; 1991) has shown. The dominant one can always alter a myth as a veiled ideology to justify or to naturalize their agendas – meaning that, following Michele Foucault (2007), the dominant group can always exert power to construct truth or to write a different myth.

There is, therefore, a gap created between the naïve reading and the hermeneutics of suspicion implemented in this study; between Poe's myth of Self and his cries about the 1840s US crises. To fill it, as Ricœur (1974) suggests, the two need to be sublated. The result of the sublation signifies that one's conception of Self and one's mode of existence are conditioned by, and hence also reactions to, the political-economic climate in one's society that directly influences one's well-being and living stability.

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