Chapter – IV

Mystery through Death, Horror and Madness

“Tell-Tale Heart” is one of Poe’s shortest stories that provide a study of paranoia and mental deterioration. Poe ransacks the story with unadorned entities to highlight the murderer’s obsession with the old man’s eye, the heartbeat, and his own claim to sanity. Poe’s economical style and pointed language thus contribute to the narrative content, and perhaps this association of form and content truly exemplifies paranoia.

To exemplify the paranoia, this story illustrates a murder plot that contributes to the psychological contradictions. For example, the narrator admits, in the first sentence, to being dreadfully nervous, yet he is unable to comprehend why he should be thought mad. He articulates his self-defense against madness in terms of heightened sensory capacity. Unlike the similarly nervous and hypersensitive Roderick Usher in “The Fall of the House of Usher”, who admits that he feels mentally unwell, the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” views his hypersensitivity as proof of his sanity, not a symptom of madness. This enables the narrator to tell this tale in a precise manner as Poe uses the stylistic tools of narration for the purposes of his own sanity plea. However, what makes this narrator mad and most unlike Poe is that he fails to comprehend the coupling of narrative form and content. He masters precise form, but he unwittingly lays out a tale of murder that betrays the madness he wants to deny.

An incognito narrator tries to confess he has murdered an old man while he defends his sanity. He starts to narrate the story by addressing the hearer that he is nervous but not mad. Neither passion nor desire for money motivated him to kill the old man but he claims a fear for the old man’s pale blue eye. He keeps insisting that he is not a madman.
He regularly, though secretly, observes the old man sleeping in his apartment every night. This becomes his routine for a week, but then the narrator decides that the time has come to kill the old man.

The narrator decides to stall the old man on the eighth night. He remains still as the old man sits awake frightened and cries out. The lonely terror of night frightens the old man and then the narrator listens to the dull pounding of old man’s terrified heartbeat. This makes the narrator nervous, he attacks and kills the old man as he is worried that a neighbor could hear the loud thumps. The horror struck narrator keeps his cool as he clears off the evidences. He dismembers the body and hides it below the floorboards in the bedroom. Even a drop of blood is not left on the floor when the clock strikes four. At the same time, he realizes the police have arrived when he hears a knock at the street door. Without acting suspiciously the narrator leads the officers all over the apartment.

The police men do not suspect a thing as the narrator brings them into the old man’s bedroom - the scene of the crime. This proves his bravado, but then he starts to faintly panic as he starts to hear a low thumping sound. He pictures the low sound as the old man’s heart beat pounding away beneath the floor boards. He becomes uncomfortable as he believes that the policemen might also hear the sound and come to know of his guilt. With their pleasant chatter, the policemen try to mock the agony of the narrator, who has been driven mad by this idea of confessing the crime.

The uneasy tension between narrator’s capacities for love and hate justifies another contradiction to the story. Poe explores a psychological mystery a century before Sigmund Freud made it a leading concept in his theories of the mind. In this story, the narrator is not a greedy or vengeful person yet he claims to love the old man. The narrator fixates on the old man’s pale blue-vulture like eye to inspire such a violent murder. He insists to separate the man from his “Evil Eye” so he can spare the man as a proclamation
for his own sanity. In an obsessive fashion, he fails to see that the eye is the “I” of the old man, an inherent part of his identity that cannot be isolated as the narrator perversely imagines.

The murder of the old man illustrates the extent to which the narrator defines the old man’s eye completely separate from his identity and as a result, he is capable of murdering him while maintaining that he loves him. His conception of the old man’s eye as separate from the man confirms that the narrator plans to dismember the old man. That strategy turns against him when his mind imagines other parts of the old man’s body working against him.

The narrator’s newly heightened sensitivity to sound ultimately overcomes him as he proves unable to distinguish between real and imagined sounds. Because of his warped sense of reality he hears the low beats of the man’s heart yet shows little concern about the man’s shrieks, which are loud enough to attract the neighbours and the police to the scene of the crime. The police do not perform a traditional, judgmental role in this story. Ironically, they aren’t terrifying agents of authority or brutality. Poe’s interest is less in external forms of power than in the power that pathologies of the mind can hold over an individual. The narrator’s paranoia makes it inevitable that he will give himself away. The police arrive on the scene to give him the chance to betray him. The more the narrator proclaims he is cool, the more he cannot escape his own heart when he mistakes of the beating the old man’s heart. When he confesses to the police in the final sentence, he addresses them as ‘villains’ indicating his inability to distinguish between their real identity and his own villainy. With his “Tell-Tale Heart,” Poe offers a fascinating material to scholars all over the world. The interesting narrating structure of the text and the fact it provides in a few pieces of information gives room for several possibilities of examination and interpretation in diverse directions. Poe’s art of writing is based on the
knowledge of traditional rhetorical handbooks, especially on Hugh Blairs Rhetoric and Belles Letters; he adapts some of Blair’s ideas to create a solid structure of his tales, including “The Tell-Tale Heart.” By examining “The Tell-Tale Heart,” some typical parts of classical oration are found.

“The Tell-Tale Heart” shows a narrator being driven mainly by his ego. The narrator starts out by claiming that he is not mad and continues to make this claim throughout the story using a logical approach. As his story continues it clearly shows the opposite of what he claims, but the narrator seems to refuse that he is insane and uses many arguments to prove it. The narrator is fixed on doing his crime with caution but in the end, his ego causes him to confess his deed. When one first reads they are inclined to feel that it is his ego controlling him, but when you look closer more evidence seems to point that his ego is more in control. His id and superego has any role in his action, for clearly they do, but the id and the super ego only play a small part in the narrator’s thoughts. From the beginning of the story it is clear that the narrator’s ego is in control. The last few sentences in the first paragraph clearly show this “The disease had sharpened my senses not destroyed not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute.” I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily how calmly I can tell you the whole story” (TTH 40). Logically speaking, a mad man would not be able to recount a murder. One critic refers to the narrator as being “an egocentric who derives pleasure from cruelty” (Pritchard 144). This idea of the narrator being egocentric (or self-centered) is supported by another critic who says he shows the stages of “Ego-Evil” (Ki 25). The narrator shows his self-centeredness when he says:

I think it was his eye!yes, it was this! He had the eye 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 (TTH 40).

He is clearly obsessed with the eye and what it means to him has no regard for the old
man. The narrator adds to his self-centeredness through the boasting: “But you should
have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded with what caution with what
foresight with what dissimulation I went to work!”(40-41). Towards the end his ego-
centric nature makes him to confess his crime to the police, since he feels they are
mocking him. The narrator’s ego-centric personality is shown throughout the story.

Symbolism means using an object, a person, or an action to represent a quality, an
attitude or a value. Symbolism is presented in the “Tall-Tale Heart” as the most essential
device to break mystery. Every story of Poe is a store house of symbols. One can find
main symbols in the tale; the old man’s eye, the watch, the lantern and the bedroom.

The major symbol in this short story is the old man’s eye which is the reason for
killing the old man. The eye may symbolize evil as he says; “the evil eye” or it may
represent the relationship between the old man and the narrator. The narrator describes
the old man’s eye as “a vulture- a pale eye, with a film over it” (27). The vulture-like eye
of the old man drives the narrator to murder him. As he says, “Whenever the eye 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” (27). Since the old
man’s eye makes him extremely uncomfortable and angry, he feels there is an urgent need
to get rid of the old man’s vulture-looking eyes. The eye is viewed differently by different
critics: Pitcher mentions that the eye is the same as the “I” due to their common sound -
so the murderer and the victim are, in fact, the same persons. Thus the narrator in “The
Tell-Tale Hearts” symbolically kills his reason and intellect. The old man with his “Evil
Eye” is the personified moral and intellect separated from the speaker (Kennedy 2005).
Kirkland, on the other hand, claims that the usage of the Evil Eye is based on the old belief that some people can harm others physically or mentally with their vicious look. This myth is widespread and it occurs in some cultures where Poe lived for some years.

The beating of the heart reflects the narrator’s guilt. He does not feel guilty to tell the audience of the previous happenings. At first he hears the heartbeat which is guilty feeling. According to the narrator, at the beginning, it is “— a low, dull, quick sound” (TTH 31). But later, the sound increases, and it becomes “quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant” (31), as the old man’s terror grows more and more intense. After the old man has been killed, the narrator can still hear his heart beat particularly when the police come. His head aches and his face grows pale as the sound increases, too. In fact, what he hears is the reflection of his mental condition. When people do something wrong, their deeds are known by others and it is no longer a secret. The narrator feels guilty. At last, the noise of the heartbeat is too loud for him to endure. He realizes his guilt and he cannot bear it. So, he confesses his crime to the police.

Poe loves clocks and watches which can be seen in his short stories in: “The Masque of the Red Death” and “The Pit and the Pendulum” locks, and time symbolize the approach of death, according to Poe. In “The Tell Tale Heart” the watch is being mentioned several times. Each ticking of the watch symbolizes a movement closer to the inevitable death that all humans face. As Poe says:

A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine” (28). The narrator compares himself to a watch, a watch watching the old man’s death and controls the time of his death. So it can be said that he’s walking “death watch F: At this second it was very clear “He was still sitting up in the bed listening; – just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall. (TTH 29)
The word “watch” is mentioned several times in this story: “— Now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton” (31). The old man’s heart is also a watch; the sound of this heartbeat haunts the narrator, he has killed the old man but the old man lives in the narrator’s mind. It shows the narrator’s guilt and insanity.

The focus is on the psychological state of the narrator which makes the mystery less opaque for a reader of the story by references to the Freud’s Theory of Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis theory studies and analyzes the psychological aspects of a story. The mysterious diction of the narrator and his repeated pleas to the reader “How, then, am I mad?” And “but why will you say that I am mad?” (TTH 27) only support the doubt that he is mentally ill. In addition to his manic monologue, there is his scary attention to the old man’s eye as further proof of insanity. The description of the eye “a pale blue eye, with a film over it” (27) vexes the narrator and it is the reason to murder the old man. The terror in this story shows both internal (the mind of the narrator) and external (the horrific murder). This horror story is actually about the end of two men. It is not just a masterly portrait of madness but an example of how guilt can make a crazed man even crazier. The narrator asserts “I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in the hell” (27).

In “The Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator-protagonist displays typical indications of partial insanity or “moral insanity.” On the one hand, he retains his rationality in “calmly” telling the story, premeditating the crime, cunningly carrying it out and trying to hide it; but on the other hand, he displays “dreadful” nervousness, the need of a rational motive for killing the old man as he says: “The old man had never wronged me. He had never given me insult” (27). The illogical fear of the old man’s eye which the narrator regards as an “Evil Eye” depicts the narrator’s obsession with an odd idea. “It is impossible to
say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night” (27).

As one reads the story, one comes to know about the old man only through the narration of the insane protagonist. The murder is a mystery because the narrator claims that he loves the old man and that the old man had never wronged him: “I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult” (27). But the narrator kills him! However, the reason behind this crime is the old man’s odd, pale blue eyes which troubles the narrator: “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” (27). Although, the old man is apparently quite rich for he had ‘treasures’ and ‘gold’ the narrator has no desire for his gold.

Poe’s tales take place either in an undetermined time framework or they are contemporaneous with Poe’s century. “Time” is a secondary theme in the story. It is notable that the action in this narrative occurs mainly during one long night, the numerous references the narrator makes to time show that the horror he experiences has been building over time. “The Tell-Tale Heart” is jammed with references to time and clocks. As the narrator says, “It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed” (TTH 28). This time management technique suggests extreme loneliness. One learns later that the narrator has problems sleeping at night. “And this I did for seven long nights-every night just at midnight” (28). The narrator reminds the readers that they are in a gothic tale where all bad things have to wait until just after midnight before they can play. “A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine” (28). The narrator sees himself as a kind of a clock counting the old man’s death. Yet after killing the old man, the narrator says that for many minutes, the heart beat was going on. He repeats his comparisons of the heart
beat to a ticking watch whose unrelenting sound drives him to confess to the police. “It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night” (27). If the narrator thinks about inventing a cure for cancer or something, this tunnel vision might be a good thing. His version of reality is dangerous to himself and others. As he says: “Do you mark me well, I have told you that I am nervous: so I am” (31). The narrator obviously does not think that nervousness is a component of madness; it also seems separate from this disease “Hearken! And observe how healthily-how calmly I can tell you the whole story” (27).

It is understood that the narrator is a healthy person, but as we read the story we find that he is saying the opposite “the officers were satisfied, my manner had convinced them” (TTH 33). It is questioned if the narrator outsmarts the police officers, or if they hang out with the narrator because they suspect him. It is really, a strange thing. “…and every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it – oh so gently!” (TTH 28). If the old man leaves his door unlocked, it means he trusts the narrator, but the result is that the narrator is not confined “and every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night” (28). This strange person as he is not the same one at the night and especially at midnight, he is not kind to the old man, but in the morning he changes, he speaks to the old man, calling him by name and courageously he asks him how he passed the night “I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever” (27).

The old man is old, probably he is going to die, but the narrator kills him not to get rid of him but to get rid of his pale eyes. “All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim” (30). This is an odd sentence. At first, it seems the narrator is simply personifying Death. He refers to
himself as Death with Capital D, the nemesis of the “Evil Eye.” The narrator is the stalker and his shadow is black: “it took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed” (28). “…and this I did for seven long nights - every night just at midnight” (28). It seems Poe reminds the readers that we are in fact in a gothic tale, where all bad things have to wait until just after midnight before they can play. “A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine” (28). This is an amazing line in which the narrator sees himself as a clock, counting down to the old man’s death.

Poe uses the gothic elements of mystery and oddity to serve his specific style of writing and to give a sense of fear to this story. His motives behind the use of these elements, is to make the reader feel and live the story as it is real. The quotes above show that Poe achieves the effects of mystery and oddity not only through the content but also through his sentence structures and diction. It is clear that he uses psychoanalysis theory. Poe’s story is a psychological tale of inner struggles and madness.

In “The Black Cat,” an unnamed narrator opens the story by proclaiming that he is sane despite the wild narrative he is about to convey. The narrative begins years before and the narrator is a well known celebrity. He confesses a great love for cats and dogs as they show fidelity and friendship unlike men. He marries at a young age and introduces his wife to the joy of owning pets. Among birds, a dog, rabbits, a monkey and a beautiful black cat named Pluto who is his favourite.

Though he loves Pluto, the narrator suffers from mood swings due to the intake of alcohol. He starts to mistreat not only the animals but also his wife. He spares only Pluto. After returning home, one night, over drunk the narrator lashes out at Pluto. Believing that the cat has avoided him he grasps the cat only to be bitten on the hand. In a demonic rage, he pulls a pen knife from his pocket and cuts out one of the cat’s eyes. Next
morning he wakes up with sadness, unable to reverse his black soul. Ignored for certain
how by the wounded cat the narrator takes further retaliation. He is overwhelmed by a
spirit of perverseness. He hangs Pluto from the limb of a tree.

On the night of Pluto’s hanging, the narrator’s family’s house burns down, but he
ignores the connection between the two events. After the fire, which destroys the
narrator’s possessions, he witnesses a group of neighbours standing around a wall that
remains standing. Looking at their amazement, the narrator finds that an impression of a
gigantic cat with a rope around its neck on the surface of the wall. The narrator attempts
to rationally explain the existence of the impression but he finds himself haunted by this
phantasm over the course of many months. One night while he drinks, he finds another
black cat resembling Pluto but a splash of white on his fur.

The narrator starts to have a great fondness for the new cat. The cat becomes part
of the household and much adored by his wife. However, like before, the narrator soon
cannot resist feelings of hatred for the cat. These murderous sentiments intensify as the
narrator imagines that the splash of white fur has taken the shape of the gallows, in which
a hanging taking place.

One day, as descending in to the cellar of the building with his wife, the narrator
strips over the cat. Enraged the narrator grabs an axe to attack the cat, but his wife
defends the cat. Further enraged, the narrator buries the axe in her head. The narrator
considers many options to dispose of the body. Taking advantage of the damp walls in the
cellar he entombs the body behind their plaster well. Without any difficulty, the narrator
creates a tomb in the plaster wall, there by hiding the body and all traces of his murder.
When he wants to bury the cat, the cat is missing, and he concludes that the cat has run
away.
On the fourth day after the murder, the police arrive at his house. The cool and composed narrator leads them through the premises, even into the basement. Though they face the crime scene, the police do not suspect and prepare to leave the residence. The narrator keeps trying to pacify their suspicion. He taps the wall behind where lies his buried wife with a cane. In response to the tapping, they hear a loud cry from behind the wall. The police storm the wall and dismantle it, discovering the hidden corpse in whose head sits the missing cat.

Much like the “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Black Cat” follows the narrator’s descent into insanity after he says that he is sane in the tale’s opening paragraph. Even the narrator acknowledges. The wild nature of the tale by keeping his mental conditions is away from the events of the plot. The narrator’s madness differs from that of the “The Tell-Tale Heart.” The narrator confesses that alcoholism produces mood swings. Alcohol is like the cat, an external agent that intervenes on the dynamics of the plot. The introduction of alcohol as a plot device is also significant because Poe himself was a drunkard throughout his life time. His biographers asserted that he died of alcohol poisoning in a gutter in Baltimore. More recent biographies insist that the exact cause of Poe’s death cannot be detected. It is certain that he died of deleterious effects of alcohol consumption throughout his life.

The influential literary critic Tzvetan Todorov introduced a concept of the “fantastic” in the early 1970s to discuss literature of horror, and this idea can be applied to “The Black Cat.” The fantastic, he asserts explores the indefinite boundary between the real and the supernatural. The fantastic is a literary category that contains elements of both rational and irrational. One of the fantastic elements in “The Black Cat” is the existence of the second cat with a flash of white fur and its sudden appearance sitting on the head of the corpse behind the wall. These plots are challenging the reality yet they do
not completely substitute a supernatural explanation for a logical one. The plot twists
derive only from the insanity of the narrator. As a result there is a fantastic hovering
between the real and the supernatural. The resolution of the story is rationally possible
and tremendously unlike, the cat could inhabit the basement walls; but it unbelievable
how it would remain silent inside the wall for a long time or go unnoticed by the overly
meticulous narrator.

“The Black Cat” is Poe’s second psychological study of domestic violence and
guilty, however this story does not deal with premeditated murder. The reader is
introduced to the narrator as a happily married man, who is very kind and gentle. He
brings about his downfall by the Fiend Intemperance and The Spirit of Perverseness.
Perverseness, he believes, is “…one of the primitive impulses of the human heart” (TBC
7). Perverseness makes the rationale for otherwise unjustifiable acts, such as killing the
first cat or rapping with his cane upon the plastered-up wall behind which his wife’s
corpse …already greatly decayed and clotted with gore” (23). The narrator says that
“perverseness” is actually his conscience. Guilt about his alcoholism seems to be the
“Perverseness” as he maims and kills the first cat. The guilt about his actions affects him
indirectly so that he kills his wife when she shows the follows on of the second cat’s
breast. The disclosure of the crime as in “The Tell-Tale Heart” is caused by a warped
sense of triumph and the conscience of the murderer. What makes this story different
from “The Tell-Tale Heart” is that Poe added a new element to evoke the dark side of the
narrator and that is the supernatural. Now the story has an added twist as the narrator
hopes that the reader, like himself, will be convinced that these events were not “…an
ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects” (21).

A human being has a wicked side that can drive him into doing evil things that
have no proper motive. The narrator himself admits that perversed desire to do evil even
though he has no reasons for doing it. Indulging in alcohol triggers his violent behaviour. Drinking is the cause of evil in a human being. Alcohol abuse alone does not cause the narrator to strike out. But, as he readily acknowledges it certainly puts him in a foul mood. A weak, drunkard human psyche may be highly vulnerable to the power of suggestion.

   Evil deeds invite vengeance. Pluto gets even when it causes the fire that burns down the narrator’s house and the second cat is indeed Pluto’s reincarnation. Pluto succeeds in this revenge by alerting police with his cry behind the narrator’s wife. Fear of discovery can bring about discovery. At the end the narrator’s strange behaviour makes the police suspicious of him.

   Previously the cat loved the narrator following him around. Licking his hands but after the cat loses an eye it sees the narrator as an unpredictable, dangerous man and it gains insight that it lacked before. Readers learn that the narrator is obviously changed. He tells the readers that excessive drinking makes him violent. The narrator tells his story from his demented point of view. As in his many other short stories, Poe does not name the narrator. A possible explanation for this is that the unnamed narrator becomes every human being thus enhancing the universality of the short story. In other word, the narrator is one who has acted perversely and then has to pay for his deed. “The Black Cat” is one of the most powerful of Poe’s stories, and the horror stops short of the wavering line of disgust” (Quinn 395). Poe constructs this story in such a way that the events of the tale remain somewhat ambiguous. As the narrator begins to recount the occurrences that “…have terrified – have tortured – have destroyed him,” he reminds the reader that may be “…some intellect, more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than his own,” will perceive “…nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects” (TBC 308).
As the narrator begins to tell his story, the reader discovers that the man’s personality had undergone a drastic change which comes from his alcohol consumption and the perverse side of his nature. The reader also finds that the narrator is superstitious, as he recounts that his wife made “…frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, [that] all black cats [are] witches in disguise” (311). Even though the narrator denies this as the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” denies that he is insane, the reader becomes aware of the narrator’s superstitious belief as the story progresses. As in other Poe stories biting and mutilation appear. The narrator of the “The Black Cat” first becomes annoyed when Pluto “inflicted a slight wound upon hand with his teeth.” After he is bitten by the cat, the narrator cuts out its eye. Poe relates “eyes” and “teeth” in their single capacity to take in incorporate objects. This dread of being consumed often leads the narrator to destroy who or what he fears (Silverman 207).

Poe’s pronounced use of foreshadowing leads the reader from one event to the next (“one night,” “one morning,” “on the night of the day,” etc.). Within the first few paragraphs of the story, the narrator foreshadows that he will violently harm his wife (“At length, I even offered her personal violence”). However, all the events of the story, as the narrator suggests are based upon “.an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effect” (315). By using the three main events in this story (firstly, the apparition of the first cat upon the burned wall: secondly, the appearance of gallows like pattern upon the chest of the second cat, and thirdly, the discovery of the second cat behind the cellar wall), Poe makes convincing case for both sides.

While making a case for the logical as well as the supernatural, one must remember the state of mind of the narrator. All views are described to the reader by an alcoholic who has a distorted view of reality. The narrator goes to lengths to explain the apparition of the cat in the wall; however the chain of events that recreates in his mind is so highly
coincidental that an explanation on the supernatural may be easier to accept. Once again, the reader wonders if the narrator’s perceptions can be believed as he describes the gallows like pattern upon the chest of the second cat. Maybe what he sees is a hallucination of a tormented mind. The markings of an adult cat would not change easily, unless the pattern is not apart of animals fur but a substance which in time could wear off. After all, the second cat is also missing an eye. Poe carefully avoids to state, if it is the same eye of Pluto which was deprived. The cat is frightened and seeks a shelter. The strange thing is that when the police search the cellar several times, the cat does not make a sound. It is when the narrator heavily raps the cellar wall with a cane, the cat responds. As Poe writes:

Upon its head, with red extended mouth and a solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb. (324)

The narrator faces new perils when the second cat comes along. The cat follows him day or night. If the man falls asleep it sits on his chest breathing on his face. So, the narrator stops sleeping. The narrator describes the cat as a “Night Mare,” though some texts run the two words together to form nightmare which is the contemporary spelling. According to a footnote in The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, The Night Mare myth was a dream horse that trampled people in their sleep, its great weight causing a sense of suffocation” (353). In many Poe stories, it is not completely sure whether the narrator is asleep, aware or somewhere in between. “The Black Cat” is one of those stories. The narrator admits to nodding off frequently, and to sleep deprivation. His dreaming life and waking life combine to form an almost seamless nightmare scope. As with all his other problems, the narrator blames this situation on the cat; if it is his old
days, he might have considered the cat’s snuggling a sign of affection, but the cat has fallen a easy victim to his rage. He sees it as a sign of his guilt. He is able to sleep when the cat and his wife are gone. The pen knife, eyes and vision symbolize “The Black Cat” as a brutal story, where the home becomes the site of torture, terror and murder. The man admits to abusing his wife and animals, but only goes into detail a few times. The first time involves a pen knife which he uses to sharpen his quill pen. It is a knife and always has the potential to be used as a weapon. When the narrator uses the knife to “deliberately cut one of Pluto’s eyes from the socket” (313) the knife’s potential is fulfilled. It creates some intense image in the reader’s mind which provokes a variety of feelings.

The knife is meant to sharpen pens but the imagery gets confused. The mind wants to see a pen where it sees an eye. Symbolically, the man is sharpening the cat’s eye with his knife. Pluto learns to see that his beloved master is cruel and also will experience a literal change of vision by seeing the world through only one eye. Not coincidentally the reader’s eyes are sharpened at this moment as well. Crimes not seen before are revealed.

In literature, damage to a character’s eye represents a changing vision in the story. The violence in the story along with damaged-eye symbolism might also put us in a space to experience changed vision ourselves. Most notably it might make issues of animal cruelty and spousal abuse visible to us. It gets even deeper. As the narrator reminds us in the line the one quoted above, he is penning or writing his confession. By making the man the writer of his own story, Poe creates a twisted double of himself, the real writer of the story. Working with the Pen-Knife, the story becomes an allegory about writing. Writers often draw from the real life to write their stories. There is also the possibility of hurting the readers, either with bad writing or with good writing that gives readers bad thoughts.
The axe and the cellar offer some vivid imagery. We can imagine that in a story like “The Black Cat” going into the cellar is a bad idea. We can smell the musty cellar and even experience a slight clouding of vision as the narrator, his wife, and the cat descend into the darkest depths of the old building. The image is vague until we get to the axe. Like the knife, the axe has the potential for violence. Most uses of the axe is violent like chopping wood, for example. Fire fighters use the axe to save the people but the axe is still used violently to break things down. Here the axe is a symbol of the man’s breakdown, and the breakdown of the family. If we see some one holding an axe, we might slightly feel uncomfortable. We probably do not want one hanging about in our living room either. When the narrator says he picked up an axe, we think, we know what’s going to happen next. When he says that he “buried the axe in his wife’s brain” our predictions come true. We are certainly horrified at the brutal murder of the woman but relieved that the cat managed to escape unscathed. The narrator’s fancy prose can hide meaning if one does not read carefully. Here, he is surprisingly blunt. Nothing fancy is one of the story’s strongest images and we can understand it instantly. Since the narrator keeps us in the cellar for the rest of the story, we get walled up, or trapped, in the story. It also speaks of the narrator’s trapped state of mind. Although he is free to hurt others, the story shows him imprisoned. Everything comes together in the cellar – which is just one step away from the jail cell.

The masquerade functions in this story as a celebrity retreat from the air which has become infected by the plague. The masquerade dispels the sense of claustrophobia within a palace by releasing the inner demons of the guests. These demons are then embodied by the grotesque costumes. Like the carnival, the masquerade urges the abandonment of social conventions and rigid senses of personal identity. However, the mysterious guest illuminates the extent to which Prospero and his guests police the limits
of social convention. When the mysterious guest uses his costume to portray the fears that the masquerade is designed to counteract, Prospero responds antagonistically. As he knows, the prosperity of the party rules upon the transformation of fear about the Red Death in Revelry. When the mysterious guest dramatizes his own version of revelry as the fear that cannot be spoken, he violates an implicit, social rule of the masquerade. The fall of Prospero and the subsequent deaths of his guests follow this logic of the masquerade.

When Montresor decides to take revenge for the “thousand injuries of Fortunato,” (TCA 7) he does not expose his feelings. Although the honor code of the day might have called for a public challenge and duel to the death, Montessor decides that he will not give utterance to a threat” (TCA 8). While he waits for his opportunity, he behaves as though nothing is wrong: “It must be understood, that neither by word not deed had I given Fortunate 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” (TCA 8).

The word for Montresor's behaviour is that he conceals his true motives and feelings beneath a deceptive exterior. The word, of course is related to “duplicate” and “double”. Montresor behaves as his own opposite in his dealings with Fortunato. As the story progresses, however, it becomes clear that the other side of Montresor’s personality is not the smiling face he offers to Fortunato.

The story is filled with twists and opposites. The characters names, for example, are echoes of the same idea. The name “Montresor” carries the idea of “treasure,” and “Fortunato” implies “fortune.” As the two men walk along the damp passageway, Montressor offers Fortunato two bottles of wine. Medoc is thought to have medicinal powers and promising to “defend us from the damps,” and De Grave, a wine brand whose name means “of the grave.” Just afterwards, Fortunato makes a secret gesture that shows
he is a member of the Free and Accepted Masons, a secret fraternal order. Montresor produces to trowel from beneath his cloak, a sign that he too is a mason of a deadly variety.

As the story opens, the men seem more different than alike. Montresor is cold and calculating in every sense of the word. Fortunato greets him with warmth for he had been drinking much. Montresor wears a black mask, a short cloak and a sword, the very image of a gentleman. Fortunato, on the other hand, is dressed in supreme madness, the jester’s costume, complete with ‘tight fitting parti-striped’ clothing and a pointed cap with jingling bells at the tip. A drunken man with bells on hot seems no match for Montresor, and it is hard to find Fortunato as “a man to be respected and feared” (TCA 9). He sways and staggers on the prospect of tasting more wine, the Amontillado.

Montressor continues his duplicity and suggests that Luchesi could taste the wine instead of Fortunato, knowing that it makes Fortunato more eager to taste the wine himself. He repeatedly urges over Fortunato’s health, proposing that they ought to get to town before the foul air affects his friend but in fact his true intention is Fortunato will never leave the catacombs alive. He emphasizes the ways in which they are opposites: “You are rich, respected, admired, and beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter” (TCA 11), upto this point, even the conversation between the two establishes their different purposes. Looking over Montresor's shoulders, Fortunato says, “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough” (TCA 12) and Montresor replies, “True true.” Even though Montresor’s plans have not yet been revealed, the reader knows certainly Fortunato will die. When Montresor and Fortunato share the therapeutic Medoc, Fortunato drinks “to the buried that repose around us,” and Montresor replies, “And I to your long life” (TCA 14).
From this point, things begin to change. Montresor's determination to hold himself as unlike Fortunato slips, and more or less he becomes like Fortunato due to the effect of the wine. “The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc” (15). Previously, Fortunato has twice taken Montresor's arm to steady himself as they walk. Montresor returns the gesture, “I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow” (16). When they reach the end of the final passageway, Poe presents a flurry of twos: two men in “the interval between two of the colossal supports” confronted with “two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet” (16). But as soon as Montresor fastens the padlock on the chain around Fortunato's waist, the two are one. When Fortunato speaks, Montresor echoes his words:


Montresor becomes unnerved when Fortunato abruptly stops the game, when he refuses to speak any more. “I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient” (18). It is when he gets no answer except “only a jingling of the bells” that his heart grows sick.

The most chilling moment in the story happens, surely not midnight, when the two men transcend human speech and communicate oneness in another voice. Fortunato begins it with “a succession of loud and shrill screams bursting from the chained form” (18). Montresor does not know how to react to this communication and moves “violently back” and trembles. He waves his rapier around in fear that Fortunato is coming for him, but is reassured at the touch of the solid walls. The thought of an instant, the realization that Fortunato is tightly bound, makes Montresor feel safe, and his reaction is dramatic and bizarre: “I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him
who clamored. I reechoed I aided I surpassed them in volume and in strength” (TCA 19).

It is difficult to imagine the sounds produced by two men, enemies and opposites, hundreds of feet underground howling at midnight in a damp stone chamber. Surely the volume and the echoes would not yield two distinct voices, but one grotesque sound. For that moment, the two are one.

After the wall is completed, fifty years pass before Montresor tells the story. For most of the story, Montresor's language is clear and direct, although the formality of nineteenth-century speech may seem difficult to modern readers. In the story's opening paragraph, told fifty years after the crime, the language is uncharacteristically convoluted and opaque: “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” (2). Most readers pause over these lines, to sort out the redresser and the redressed from the redresser. If the roles are confusing, it is because in Montresor's mind the lines between avenger and victim are no longer distinct. When Montresor speaks the story's last line, “In pace requiescat” (“rest in peace”) (20), he speaks of Fortunato and himself. By the end of the story, the two are so connected that it is all the same.

Daniel Hoffman explores Poe's theme of “the fate of the man haunted by his own double, his anima, his weird”(Hoffman 66). When one of Poe's protagonists is wrestling with guilt, Hoffman explains, he sometimes “doubles his character and then arranges for one self to murder the other by burying him alive. In repeatedly telling stories of murderous doubles (“The Tell-Tale Heart,” “William Wilson,” and others), Poe attempts to deal with his own demons, his own repressed guilt. Poe’s biographer William Bittner claims that Montresor and Fortunato “are two sides of the same man Edgar Poe as he saw himself while drinking.” For Betina Knapp, author of the book titled Edgar Allan Poe, the “shadow figure emerges as a personification of the narrator's hostile feelings and
thoughts, symbolizing the repressed instincts of the personality.” In his criticism and his daily life, Poe “felt himself striking back, at those forces in society or particularly individuals who might have wronged him” (Knapp 45).

Characters encountering and slaying their doubles are found throughout history from Aristotle’s story of a man who could not go out without meeting his “double” to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde to Luke Skywalker meeting Darth Vader in Yoda’s cave, killing him, and seeing that the face beneath the mask is his own. The Germans have a name for the phenomenon doppelgänger, meaning double walker and psychiatrists have recorded thousands of accounts of people who believe that they have encountered the images of themselves, usually at night. Like other archetypal images, the encounter with the double, is a powerful image that has attracted and repelled for centuries. Poe anticipates modern psychology with its id, ego and superego through his stories that the monsters outside are nothing compared with the monsters we carry within us.

Poe is often considered a master of the Gothic tale, and “The Cask of Amontillado” contains many of the standard elements of Gothicism. Gothic stories are typically set in the medieval castles and feature mystery, horror, ghosts, long underground passages, and dark chambers. Poe is fascinated with the devices of the Gothic novel, although he prefers to work in the short story form. He is a great admirer of Walpole, and the American gothic writer Charles Brockden Brown. “The Cask of Amontillado” takes many details from the Gothic tradition: the palazzo of the Montresors with its many rooms, the archway that leads to the “long and winding staircase” (TCA 3) down to the catacombs, the damp and dark passageway hanging with moss and dripping moisture, the piles of bones, the flaming torches that flicker and fade, and the “clanking” and “furious vibrations of the chain” (4) that Montresor uses to bind Fortunato to the wall. The overall atmosphere of brooding and horror also comes from this tradition.
Some elements of the Gothic Poe intentionally avoided: there is no hint in “The Cask of Amontillado” or in most of his horror stories, of the supernatural. Poe was quite clear on this point, explaining that the plot of a short story may be involved, but it must not transcend probability. The agencies introduced must belong to real life. Montresor's crime is terrible, but it is believable, and committed without magic. Although there may be a hint of the supernatural in his remark that for the half of the century no mortal has disturbed” the pile of bones outside Fortunato's tomb, those beings that might not be mortal are not described, and indeed Fortunato does not reappear as a ghost or a vampire. Poe uses Gothic conventions to create an atmosphere of terror, but then subverts the convention by using only human agents for terrible deeds. For Poe, it is not supernatural beings that people should fear. The real horror lies in what human beings themselves are capable of.

The force that drives Montresor to commit the murder of Fortunato is his lust for revenge. His first words in the story speak of it: “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge” (1). The idea of revenge is repeated several times in the opening paragraph. Montresor will not rush to act, he says, but “at length I would be avenged” (1). He is determined to “not only punish, but punish with impunity”(2). The terms of the revenge are clear in Montresor's mind. He will not feel fully revenged unless Fortunato realizes that his punishment comes at Montresor's hand; a wrong is not redressed “when the avenger fails to make him feel as such to him who has done the wrong.” In seeking revenge, Montresor is acting out the motto of his people, as it appears on the family coat of arms, *Nemo me impune lacessit* (“No one wounds me with impunity”).

As many critics have pointed out, the nature of the injuries and offenses is never revealed. Montresor appears to be telling or writing his story to someone who has more
knowledge than Poe's reader, and who may be assumed to know something of Fortunate's conduct before the fateful night. Unlike Montresor's audience, however, Poe's audience/reader has no basis for judging the extent to which Montresor's actions are reasonable. The focus is not on the reason for revenge, but on the revenge itself, not on why Montresor behaves as he does but only on what he does.

Just as Montresor does not reveal his motive for the crime, other than to identify it as a crime of revenge, neither does he share with his reader his response when the deed is done. Nineteenth-century audience scanned the story for hints of negative feelings. Poe's intention is to focus his story tightly. He does not explore the events leading up to the crime, nor the results of the crime, but focuses the story narrowly on the act of revenge itself. Although the action of the story revolves almost entirely around the deception and killing of Fortunato, the questions in readers' minds have revolved around Fortunato's thoughts and deeds before the crime, and Montresor's thoughts and deeds afterward. While the time between their chance meeting and the laying of the last stone would have taken only five or six hours, the fifty years following are more intriguing.

For forgiveness to occur, there must first be guilt and then remorse but there is no question of Montressor asking forgiveness of Fortunato or reconciling with him and no mention is made of Montresor's paying any reparations to Lady Fortunato. Atonement, if any, must be with God alone. At the time of the murder, however, Montresor hears and rejects Fortunato's appeal that he stop “For the love of God, Montresor!” (8). The murderer replies, “Yes, for the love of God!” (8). But he does not stop building his wall. Surely he does not mean that he is acting for the love of God; instead, he is blatantly and defiantly rejecting it.

In other ways Poe keeps the idea of the Christian God in the foreground. Fortunato is chained to the wall in a standing position has been compared to the posture
of the crucified Jesus by some critics. His narrow space behind the wall echoes Jesus’s placement in a tomb. The story’s last words, *In pace requiescat* (Rest in Peace), are taken from the Roman Catholic funeral ritual. Critic John Gruesser believes that Montresor tells the story of his crime “as he presumably lies on his deathbed, confessing his crime to an old friend, the ‘You’ of the story’s first paragraph who is perhaps his priest” (Gruesser 127). Montresor’s guilt is not just an earthly legal guilt, but in the eyes of a God that both victim and murderer recognize. The question remains: Was Montresor sorry for what he did? Poe does not appear interested in answering the question, although he surely knew that he was raising it, and knew that he had placed the answer tantalizingly out of reach.

A few adventurous critics conclude that, the theme of “The Cask of Amontillado” is in terms of split within the psyche of the narrator – protagonist or within the author himself. Edward H. Davidson has ably related the story to Poe’s broad concern with the multiple character of the self. Davidson concludes that the narrator, “Montresor, is capable of becoming two distinct beings with little affinity to each other” (89).

“The Cask of Amontillado” is the tale of another nameless person who has the power of moving downward from his mind or intellectual being and into his brutish or physical self and then of returning to his intellectual being with his total selfhood unimpaired. On the other hand, William Bittner, unconcerned with the division within Montresor, speculates that the “two characters are two sides of the same man Edgar Poe” (Bittner 76). Unfortunately, Davidson weakens his judgment by ignoring the role of Fortunato, and Bittner’s opinion, if valid, would tell us more about Poe than about Poe’s story.

“The Purloined Letter” opens in a small room in Paris. An unnamed narrator sits quietly with his friend, C. Auguste Dupin. He ponders over the murders in the Rue morgue, which Dupin solved in that story. Monsieur G, the prefect of the Paris police
arrives, having decided to consult Dupin again. The prefect presents a case that is almost
too simple: a letter has been stolen from the Royal Apartments. The police know who has
taken it: the minister D, an important government official. The prefect tells, a young lady
possessed the letter which has information that could harm a powerful Individual. When
the lady was first reading the letter, the man whom it concerned came in to the Royal
Apartments. Not wanting to arouse his suspicion, she put it down on a table next to her.
The sinister Minister D then walked in and noted the letter’s contents. Quickly grasping
the seriousness of the situation, he produced a letter of his own that resembled the lady’s
letter. He left his own letter next to the original one as he began to talk of Parisian affairs.
Finally when he left the apartment, purposely retrieved the lady’s letter in place of his
own. The prefect explains, the Minister D possesses great deal of power over the lady.

Dupin asks whether the police have searched the Minister’s residence, arguing
that since the power of the letter derives from its being reality, available, it must be in his
apartment. The prefect says that they searched the Minister’s residence but have not
found the letter. He recounts the search procedure in which the police systematically
searched every inch because the reward offered in the case was so generous. Upon
Dupin’s request, the prefect reads him a physical description of the letter. Dupin suggests
that the police search again.

One month later, Dupin and the narrator are again sitting together when the prefect
visits. The prefect admits that he cannot find the letter, even though the reward has
increased. The prefect says that he will pay 50000 Francs to any one who obtains the
letter for him. Dupin tells him to write a check for that amount on the spot. Upon receipt
of the check, Dupin hands over the letter. The prefect rushes off to return it to its rightful
owner, and Dupin explains how he obtained the letter.
Dupin admits that the police are skilled investigators according to their own principles. He explains this remark by describing a young boy playing “even and odd.” In this game, each player must guess whether the number of things held by another player is even or odd. If the guesser is right, he gets one of the toys. If he is wrong, he loses a toy of his own. The boy whom Dupin describes plays the game well because he bases his guesses on the knowledge of his opponent. When he faces difficulty, he imitates the facial expression of his opponent, as though to understand his feelings. With this knowledge, he often guesses correctly. Dupin argues that the Paris police do not use this strategy and therefore could not find the letter. The police think only to look for a letter in places where they themselves might hide it.

Dupin argues that the Minister D is intelligent enough not to hide the letter in the nooks and crannies of his apartment exactly where the police first investigate. Dupin describes to the narrator a game of puzzles in which one player finds a name on a map and tells the other player to find it as well. Amateurs, pick the names with the smallest letters. According to Dupin’s logic, the hardest names to find are actually those that stretch broadly across the map because they are so obvious.

Dupin with this game in mind, recounts the visit he made to the Minister’s apartment. After surveying the Minister’s residence, Dupin notices a group of visiting and a letter accompanying them. It has an exterior different from that previously described by the prefect, but Dupin also observes that the letter appears to have been folded back on itself. He becomes sure that it is the stolen document. In order to create a reason for return to the apartment, he purposely leaves behind his snuffbox. When he goes back the next morning to retrieve it, he also arranges for someone to make a commotion outside the window while he is in the apartment. When the Minister rushes to the window to investigate the noise, Dupin replaces the stolen letter with a fake letter. He justifies his
decision to leave behind another letter by predicting that the Minister will embarrass himself when he acts in reliance upon the letter he falsely believes he still possesses. Dupin remarks that the Minister once wronged him in Vienna and that he has pledged not to forget the insult. Inside the fake letter, then, Dupin inscribes, a French poem that translates into English, “So baneful a scheme, if not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes” (TPL 33).

“The Purloined Letter” has called attention to qualities other than the skillful handling of the method of deduction in detective stories. Jacques Lacan’s reading of the tale, implies a theory of perception in so far as the letter is seen as a type of floating signifier to which significances are applied by the different perceiving intellects of the characters as the letter moves from hand to hand. For David Halliburton, an American critic, Dupin is an investigator endowed with a strong imaginative element and capable of a hermeneutic approach through which he identifies himself with the consciousness that created the text to be deciphered, discovers the connection between the original intention and the achievement, adds the missing links, and solves the mystery. In such approaches to Poe’s tale, the letter is not only the object to be found by an detective but also on the symbolic level, an object capable of acquiring meaning, a text to be deciphered, and “The Purloined Letter” is not only a tale of detection but also a comment on the relationship between mind and reality. The analysis of the process by which the letter acquires meaning is instructive in so far as it reveals Poe’s awareness of the distinction between what may be called structures of presentation as well as his awareness that these structures invite correspondingly different modes of approach.

The concept of presentation is germane to the present approach to “The Purloined Letter” in so far as the letter exists only in the context of modes of presentation in symbolic contexts which require from those who approach them a specific procedure, the
procedure of creative participation by means of which the meaning of symbolic structures is revealed. The Prefect’s initial account of the theft in the royal boudoir evinces the situation of the letter in a context which makes it both visible and invisible in its relation to the range of vision of the possible spectators and their ability or inability to perceive the intricate net of possible relationships in a given pattern.

The variations of the range of vision in the boudoir scene are presented in a crescendo as we are shown the perceptive ability of the king, of the queen, and the Minister. The king’s good eyesight and poor insight are evinced in his initial game of “even and odd” with the queen who, perceiving that the king’s vision would be seeing the letter in her hands but not on the table, wins the game. Her own insight, however, fails in dealing with the wider context of the Minister who, in turn, has the upper hand at the game. The Minister, in fact, “immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret” (TPL 9). The Minister’s lynx eye perceives the increased complexity of the game and uses this superior perception for his own purposes.

The game of odd and even as described by Dupin implies a theory of perception in which there must be the identification of subject and object, of the reasoner’s intellect with his opponent’s in a symbolic context so that every separate element may be unified in an all-encompassing pattern. The opponent in this case is, of course, transformed into a component of the symbolic pattern since he no longer exists in his integrity but only as an extension of the reasoner’s mind in terms of a measurement of his astuteness. The Queen identifies herself with the object in context and achieves a design which would be successful for her particular purposes had not the ingenuity of the Minister envisaged a wider context which, as Lacan’s analysis of the tale reveals, redefines the letter in terms of meaning: the meaning of the letter for the queen could be phrased as treason to be kept
secret, but the Minister, by fathoming her secret, reinterprets it as “secret treason as a source of power” (16).

On the symbolic level, the Queen and the Minister must find, therefore, a mode of approach to a structure of presentation in which the organicity of the picture to be analyzed implies the involvement and the creative participation of the subject in its organization. Whereas the King sees it as an object while the Minister and the Queen see the letter in a context; and the context illuminates its meaning.

The procedure by means of which a sense emerges from the contextual interaction of elements to be appropriated by the subject implies an initial surrender rather than an assertion of subjectivity and corresponds to the hermeneutic approach in which the intentionality always implicit in a text must be understood before an explication takes place. “For Dupin as for Poe,” as Halliburton points out, “every language-using being — a man on the street, an author, a character, or God Himself — is endowed with intentionality” (Halliburton 242). In order to discover this intentionality, the interpreter must identify himself with the text in the passive attitude of one who listens to echoes and the reverberations of its horizon. In such an approach the text is never an object to be seen from a distance, as it would be in a context of pure representation.

The process of explication, implied rather than stated in the boudoir scene, is fully developed in the section of the tale more directly concerned with the Prefect, Dupin, and the Minister. As Lacan points out, the actions in which these three characters are involved paraphrase, in terms of their different perspectives, the previous scene, in so far as the Prefect, like the king, sees nothing, the Minister sees a partial context and presently becomes part of a larger context which is apprehended by Dupin only. The spatial common to the three characters is the hotel in which the Minister lives and in which the Prefect, looking for the letter, took his time and searched everywhere. The Minister plays
the game of odd and even with the Prefect and succeeds, but he ignores Dupin’s superior skill in the game. When Dupin visits the Minister’s premises, he thoroughly checks the room and the Minister, the detective discovers the letter and recovers it in a second visit.

The Prefect’s angle of vision is at fault in that he uses the approach characteristic of a structure of representation to solve the mystery of a symbolic structure of presentation. His search aims at finding an isolated object in a circumscribed space where it must necessarily be, his procedure is direct and logical, an ingenious effort which aims at the exhaustion of space. As Lacan says in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*:

…and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before. (35-36)

The Prefect’s approach is required by structures of representation. He must search every object in the limited space he has before his eyes in order to separate the letter from the context of its hiding place. Once separated, the letter will be as visible as any other object, and it will be magnified by means of his concentration on it out of context. But the object so magnified must first be an object separable from its context by the observer’s discovery procedure.

The Prefect is the subjective interpreter of an enigma who, instead of obeying the rules offered thereby, follows his own rules, attempting to impose them on the problem from the outside, from the distance of his a priori conceptions and prejudices. He cannot find the letter because the letter can be found only by its own rules: it exists not in the
Prefect’s space and time but in a space and time of its own, that is, in an organic, self-sufficient context to which the searcher must imaginatively submit.

The Prefect is forever removed from the world of the “odd” since, as the narrator observes that, he had a “fashion of calling every thing ‘odd’ that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of ‘oddities’” (VI 29). The Prefect’s understanding is limited to what is out of context, to what exists only within the range of his limited ingenuity. His methodical reasoning is not at fault in itself. As Dupin tells the narrator, referring to the search of the premises by the police, “The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it” (VI 39-40).

Dupin, on the other hand, recognizes the relational nature of the object. His approach to a contextual reality which identifying the object in the act of appropriation and a further logical explanation based on the truth revealed by the object and not, as in the case of the Prefect, on the truth of a priori prepositions taken to be universally valid. In his first visit to the Minister, Dupin’s eyes, “going the circuit of the room” (TPL 9), have these plastic powers of imagination: they unify the world of objects into a significant pattern. He sees the letter not in isolation, but in its complex relationship with the poet and mathematician who, in hiding it, leaves his mark on the letter and is marked by it as well. The letter, in fact, has been refolded and addressed to the Minister himself in a feminine handwriting. As Dupin points out, the letter is now, “to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description” (VI 49). The letter in context is radically different from the letter in isolation.

The letter has been disguised either by the Minister or by the context created by the Minister and of which he is a part Dupin’s approach must involve the identification of
object and subject; it must also be an indirect to the Prefect’s direct, approach to the object. A contextual reality cannot be seen by a straight look. Dupin’s view of the truth must be mediated by the context, since the lack of this mediation blinds the Prefect and the king. Finally, the explanation depends on the oblique angle of vision that bridges the gap between imagination and analysis by making them complementary steps in the interpretive process rather than radically contrasting attitudes. As the narrator of “Murders in the Rue Morgue” explains it:

> Between ingenuity and the analytic ability there exists a difference far greater, indeed, than that between the fancy and the imagination, but of a character very strictly analogous. It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the truly imaginative never otherwise than analytic. (149-150)

The mechanical ability of fancy and ingenuity can only note the mere aggregation of things, not their relationship. Dupin’s analyses rely on the power of imagination insofar as they imply the perception not only of isolated objects but also of the unity of these objects into an overall pattern. Thus while analysis is the means by which the unity of vision can be explained, a unified vision of the whole is itself a necessary precondition for analysis.

Thus, Dupin is creative in the very act of analyzing his enigmas, in that he reconstructs these enigmas in a procedure analogous to the reading of a text. This constructive procedure, which has its origin in a surrender to the source of meaning, ultimately allows Dupin to assert himself as creator, for, in his hermeneutic reading of a structure of presentation, he appropriates a meaning which is his creation in that he reenacts its contextual reality. If Lacan argues in these terms, he might add that this “meaning” is also Dupin’s creator, in the sense that the detective has absorbed the
structure of presentation so that it might eventually be known: in the process of
discovery, Dupin’s own existence acquires a new significance.

Kopley finds word play galore camouflaged in the narrative of “The Purloined
Letter,” for example, Dupin speaks about a rebus: words spread as if invisibly across a
chart, and therefore likely to go undetected. For Kopley, this same verbal puzzle finds its
double in Poe’s very tale. Thus, Dupin explains his procedure for finding the purloined
letter” by using the example of the children’s game where one schoolboy tries to guess
another’s choice of odd and even. To win the game or find the letter, one must be able
almost literally to identify with the other. Kopley regards this game as the “mise en abime
for the entire work” That is, just as Dupin identifies with the Minister in order to retrieve
the letter, so Kopley’s close reader does the same with Poe, the tale’s author. Such a
reader will note, for example, how the word “odd” is repeated in the first part of “The
Purloined Letter” but drops out in the second, where it gets replaced by “even” (22).

Kopley claims to have arrived at this conclusion by identifying with “Poe as a reader”
(63), that is, as a reader of the newspaper articles in question. He finds between the
Purloined Letter and the Queen Caroline’s affair mostly convincing and entirely original.

The central symbol of the tale “The Purloined Letter” is the same as the title. It
betrays the textual self-inclusion that Poe intends to create giving the symbolic object the
same qualities of the text itself. This aspect of the letter is evident by its most unique
quality, the fact that it is always hidden in plain sight. In the royal boudoir it is concealed
on the table with its address and the content unexposed and in the Minister’s office. It
hangs in a card rack above the mantelpiece turned inside out like a glove. The object
called the purloined letter, described and thus contained in the story called “The
Purloined Letter,” is a self-included linguistic representation of the text’s own
representational status, in effect a symbol of the conditions of linguistic representation
ally” (Irwin 22).
Self-inclusion or the mirror image, in Lacanian terms, is seen as either an opposition or as something identical, identifying the adversary with a version of the alter ego. This kind of relation, be it in contrast or identical, is classified by Lacan as “imaginary,” a realm where mirroring juxtaposes intersubjective structures but also a realm where the imaginary must be disrupted so that the symbolic may emerge.

The case which is “very simple” and yet “excessively odd” (TPL 104) is posed in front of Dupin by the Prefect of police. There are no newspaper declarations in this case because it is a highly confidential matter pertaining to “a very high quarter” (Letter 104). The whole matter lies in the fact that “a certain document of most importance has been purloined from the royal apartments” (104). For arresting the reader in the narration, suspense comes into play. Poe declares that this letter is not just a piece of paper but “gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable” (106). It is from this declaration that “a reader’s gratification” (Bursikova 5) is aimed at and achieved too. “In a ratiocinative tale, Poe thinks every point is so arranged as to perplex the reader and to whet his desire for elucidation” (Zhao 122). It is a fact that “the reader must accompany the detective… and apply his own powers of logic and deductions along with the detective” (Zhao 126) and one can readily find it while reading “The Purloined Letter.”

The simple plot of the story is a titular crime, a letter has been purloined and “the ascendancy” (TPL 105) which it provides to its possessor. That ascendancy “would depend upon the robber’s knowledge of the loser” (TPL 105). The plot comprises a simple narration and is free from complexities of any sort. The case and its solution are presented with utmost honesty and they feature the element of gemutlich. Hence, Poe’s creation of the plot holds two important points, “first that no undue or inartistic means be employed to conceal the secret of the plot; and secondly that the secret be kept well”
(Zhao 122). In this story, the culprit is known since the beginning of the story but the essence is still preserved in the way Dupin is going to recover that letter.

The recovery of the letter is the work of the rationalistic detective “whose unique process of discovery informs the logic of reasons” (Givens 21). Dupin is approached by “Monsieur G- the Prefect of the Parisian Police” (TPL 103). The same has happened in the two previous stories. By the time the reader comes to read “The Purloined Letter,” Dupin’s reliability is deep-seated in their minds. A further character elaboration is not required in words. The readers readily enter into the “ultra-rational world of the detective” (Bursikova 47). Dupin’s success and fame lies in solving this particular case in the most ordinary yet effective way.

Bursikova says in his *The Metaphysical Defective Story in Paul Austen: The New York Trilogy* that “The reader should be presented with a mystery and simultaneously a key to its solution interwoven in the text in the form of clues” (5). Evidences are provided largely by the Prefect of police directly to Dupin. The Prefect tells Dupin the fact that, the letter is still in possession of the robber. He could say this with affirmation because of the “non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber’s possession” (TPL 105).

The eyewitness from whose “royal boudoir” (105) the letter is stolen, also plays a very important role in this story. It can be inferred that the royal lady who is both, the eyewitness and the robbed, is a helpless being. She has seen Minister D take it, but “the entrance of the other exalted personage” (Letter 105) forbade her from making this issue public and take any immediate action. In the narration, Prefect also mentions the way Minister D has taken away the letter “to which he had no claim” (TPL 106) by producing “a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other” (106). Dupin is further assisted by the “minute account
of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document” (110) provided by G. Dupin has no interest in all evidences collected by G- because for him the case solving lies in some other method. It is as if the police had merely been wasting time all through. The fact that the Minister remains absent all night from his hotel has been deliberate because he wanted to evade suspicion. This character trait of the Minister could only be understood by the shrewd Dupin and not the Parisian police. Thus, with all the clues, Dupin commences to sort and solve them as “The detective has to read the clues in order to assign corresponding meanings to them” (Bursikova 6).

In this story also, the search is initially to be done by the Parisian police who as usual, fail at their thorough attempts. It is Dupin whose detection brings forth fruitful results. Leaving no stone unturned, the Prefect makes a “thorough search of the Minister’s hotel” (TPL106) under cautious circumstances for “three months… ransacking the D- Hotel,” (107) its “entire building… room by room… furniture” (108). The Prefect has had the Minister “twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched” (107). The job had been so painstaking for the Prefect that not even “a single grain of gimlet-dust” (109) was spared. Taking off from this level, Dupin starts “picking up clues by internalizing the process and sorting the problem out in his head” (Chotiudompant 72). Dupin’s simple and naturalistic approach lies in entering the Minister’s premises in his presence, and lamenting “the necessity of spectacles,” (TPL119). He “cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation” (119-20). In scrutinizing the whole room on the first day, Dupin discovers the letter “upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard” (120). He utilizes the second day only to recover the letter thus discovered and replaces it with a “fake-simile” which he has “carefully prepared… imitating the D-cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread” (121).
The solution lies in bringing forth the culprit and it is in this story that the culprit is known since the beginning of narration. The labour of suspicion and arrests of people not guilty of crime is saved. The Prefect announces that “the individual who purloined it is known; this beyond doubt; he was seen to take it” (105) and that individual is “Minister D-, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man.” (105) All the clues aptly point towards Minister D, a shrewd man with a “lynx eye”(105).

Minister D has successfully fulfilled his motive behind purloining the letter, not once but many times now. He has been taking undue advantage of its possession and the Prefect solidifies the idea that “the power thus attained, has for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent” (106). This statement also emphasizes the need to recover that letter to its rightful owner urgently. “It takes a literary genius, and a Chevalier, to pull off an ending like that,” states the article “Le Chevalier and the Art of Ratiocination.” Thus, the fourth chapter analyses the mysteries in the selected short stories of Poe with the elements of death, horror and madness.