Cover Essay over Annotated Bibliography on Edgar Allan Poe

I was able to find an array of exceptional scholarship on the notable, yet mysterious Edgar Allan Poe. The topics of the articles range from summaries or analyzes on some of Poe’s most famous stories (“The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Black Cat,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” as well as others) to overarching thematic elements ubiquitous among his published work (murder, slavery, symbolic mother figures, women as evil beings, self discovery, and so on). The focus of certain scholarship becomes more personal in articles where the writers or journalists investigate disputes Poe had with others in the literary world as well as look into various contemplations of the cause of his mysterious and uncertain death. Poe’s influential role during the Romantic era is also thoroughly explored in several of the articles I gathered.

I chose to research Edgar Allan Poe, because I have always enjoyed reading his work, but I also assumed there would be an abundance of scholarship on him, for he is quite a peculiar man and literary artist. I wondered about his use of the unreliable narrator, hoping to find material that would explore this literary practice further. I was also curious about his motivation, because what could possibly inspire someone to write about a man who is buried alive? I discovered a vast amount of information about both Poe and his work in terms of theme, setting, plot, characters, inspiration, and the list certainly goes on. The state of scholarship on Edgar Allan Poe is considerably efficient, for there are several scholarly, peer-reviewed articles on all of his notable
stories as well as commonly used themes. Because Poe left so many critics and readers pondering about his motivation, literary associations, and mysterious death, it is undoubtedly reasonable that the scholarship would be extensive. Poe developed a variety of intriguing yet puzzling characters, for he indeed was one himself, thus giving critics the initiative to investigate this brilliant, influential literary artist.

In his article, Robert Belton, journalist for the *Woman's Art Journal*, shares the connections Surrealist artist Max Ernst, in his pieces *Hungry Feast* and *Berenice*, as well as Surrealist artist Rena Magritte, with his piece *The Rape*, make in their work to the famous writer and poet, Edgar Allan Poe. The literary work under discussion, in regard to the correlations developed in the art, is Poe’s wonderfully thrilling story, “Berenice.” The Surrealists had set views about women, according to Belton, for they believed women were inherently evil. Belton indicates that this principle, along with the horrific themes in Poe’s story “Berenice,” and Freud’s concept of “penis envy” can each be interpreted in these works of art.


Raymond Benoit, writer for the *Explicator*, discusses in his article the struggles the narrator faces in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” with his soul or inner self. The real problem Benoit describes is the narrator’s “utter depression of soul” (79). The narrator does not realize that the self is more than a mere “heap of perceptions” but rather could transport him toward an inner discovery (79). At the conclusion of Poe’s story, Benoit explains that the narrator finally comes to realize that he must “begin to live with body and soul” (81). Though hesitant at first to discover his soul, the narrator recognizes the true importance of his inner self in time.
Frederick Burwick explores in his article the methods Edgar Allan Poe uses to draw in the reader, for his style of narration allows the reader to see through the eyes of the narrator. Because of the visual representations in his work, the terms “sublime” and “grotesque” define Poe’s use of descriptive imagery. Burwick discusses visual arts in greater detail by providing its origins as well as influential writers like Edmund Burke, who have utilized the visual arts in their works and have inspired those like Poe to do the same. Throughout his article, Burwick identifies elements of the sublime, grotesque, and picturesque prevalent in Poe’s literary work.

In his article, David Cody discusses the possible sources of inspiration for Edgar Allan Poe’s famous tale of horror, “The Cask of Amontillado.” He states that the most direct source must have been Joe T. Headley’s “A Man Built in a Wall,” which was in the “August 1844 issue of Columbian Magazine” (36). Cody explains that there were other various sources as well that could have motivated Poe to compose this horrific tale. Another inspiring notion was that Poe wrote the tale after having a harsh “literary feud” with Thomas Dunn English and Hiram Fuller. Cody hints that there was a strong possibility that Poe wrote the tale as an imaginary revenge plot he wished to have implemented against these two gentlemen. This, Cody elucidates, as well as the Headley article and an anecdote of a “cruel practical joke played on an unfortunate victim
by the notoriously irascible Sir Walter Raleigh,” all stem similarities and were perhaps motivating concepts for Poe’s famous tale (37).


William Crisman, writer for *ATQ*, discusses the plausibility of Poe’s plagiarism accusation made against Hawthorne in 1847. Poe was under the impression that Hawthorne’s story “Young Goodman Brown” bared close resemblance to a section entitled “The Friends” in German writer, Ludwig Tieck’s work *German Romance*; although, critics in favor of Hawthorne have been known to question Poe’s fluency of German. Crisman explains the collected feedback of critics, which indicate that neither Poe nor Hawthorne had much German language skill, if any. Critics believe that the accusation resulted from mere word substitution through translations or that perhaps Poe translated Tieck’s work himself and simply made errors in translation. Crisman makes connections between Tieck’s work and Hawthorne’s, agreeing that there are similarities in setting, but the differences distinctively lie in their endings as well as their overall plot. Crisman and other critics describe Poe’s inaccurate allegations as utter “meanness.”


Stephen Dougherty writes in his article about the increase of blood used in nineteenth century entertainment. People were amused by the fear of death and blood, Dougherty explains. Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” was the emerging tale of Gothic horror, bringing to
the literary world the era’s nightmare of death and the anxiety it causes. Dougherty analyzes Poe’s work, connecting it to thematic elements of the Gothic genre.


The authors of the article explain that the Dionysian spirit is expressed in three works of Edgar Allan Poe: “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Mask of the Red Death,” and “William Wilson.” The authors define Dionysus as the god of wine and carnival. Demonstrating the Dionysian spirit, a carnival spirit is present in each of the works distinctively. In the three stories, a “fearless courage” exists within one of the primary characters, which then turns into “irrationality” of this character or “tragic hero,” for the authors elucidate that the hubris or pride causes the character to fall.


Roger Francis discusses in his article the final days in the life of Edgar Allan Poe. He contemplates the possible causes of death as well as the chronology of the last few days of Poe’s life. The potential causes of death range from alcohol overdose to tuberculosis or even a stroke or brain tumor. According to Francis, in Poe’s final days, he visited Richmond, Virginia, to raise money for the literary magazine, *The Stylus*. He then left for Baltimore and intended on going to Philadelphia and New York. He never made it to either place, for he became unconscious outside
of a tavern in Baltimore. When taken to a hospital, Poe remained unconscious, woke for a few hours in the morning with tremors and a few jumbled words, and then died most likely on October 7th, 1849, at the young age of 40, yet there is no death certificate, Francis explains.


In his article, John Grammer speaks of writer Terence Whalen’s book *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America*. We learn from the article that Whalen explains in his novel how Poe utilized his writing as a commodity. Poe knew that each literary piece he composed had economic value, and thus wrote with this capitalistic mind state. Grammer states that Poe recognized the aesthetic value and truthfulness in his work but treated his writings mostly as products and understood his readers to be consumers. He worked as the editor for the *Southern Literary Messenger* for a short time, but he spent the majority of his career as a writer only, so he worked diligently to conform to the economic methods of a literary marketplace.


Clark Griffith explains in his article that Edgar Allan Poe and Ralph Waldo Emerson are the most notable forces of the American Romantics, though they are completely different in terms of their interests as well as the works they produced. So Griffith divides Romanticism into “Emersonianism” and “Poeism.” “Emersonianism” deals more with the metaphysical, while
“Poeism” is more psychological. Griffith contrasts the views of each throughout the article, providing works of other writers that fall into the category of either “Poeism” or “Emersonianism.”


Kevin Hayes’ article is about Edgar Allan Poe’s attempt at creating his idea of a perfect magazine, of which he entitled *Stylus*, for he believed it would demonstrate broader significance to readers with such a title. After working with and befriending Thomas Cottrell Clarke, the proprietor of the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum*, Poe convinced Clarke to fund his magazine. In Poe’s prospectus, he included a biographical and critical essay as well as a wood-engraved portrait based on a recent daguerreotype. This would give potential readers a taste of what the magazine would entail. Engravings and portraits were both options for Poe’s literary magazine, because he believed that an image next to a literary biography would beneficially supplement the written material as well as reveal the personality of the author. Though his magazine never fully developed, Hayes explains, Poe still managed to introduce an array of aesthetic options for literary magazines soon to develop.


Edward Lawrence begins the article by stating his reasons for why Edgar Allan Poe should have been a lawyer, the main incentive being his “inventive mind with an eye for detail” (41).
Lawrence believes that Poe would have been properly “memorialized” if he had pursued Law, but we all know he chose writing instead. Though, as Lawrence indicates, Poe has kept quite a presence in the media—film, television, as well as written media, such as comic books and graphic novels. To manage his living expenses, Poe made several public appearances and was known for his “publicity stunts.” What makes Poe’s work powerful is the “exploration of emotion,” Lawrence shares (43). The “emotional complexity” in Batman, Poe’s personal superhero, as well as the literary works of Poe is what draws readers in to find their inner darkness.


Maurice Lee, journalist for American Literature, discusses Poe’s views on slavery that are demonstrated in his essays, stories, and poems as well as his political associations. In Poe’s poem, “Eureka,” he establishes ideas about “oneness” and “unity,” yet in his essay “Metzengerstein,” he defines and accepts the dualisms of race. Lee explains that Poe disagreed with abolitionists but was not a slave-owner himself. He simply did not agree with the abolitionists’ progressive ideals in regards to slavery. Lee explores the underlying racial themes in Poe’s essay, “Metzengerstein” and identifies Poe’s position on slavery as “anti-abolitionist.” Further works that demonstrate Poe’s racial views are “Silence—A Fable,” “The Black Cat,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Murder in the Rue Morgue,” as well as others. Lee furthers his discussion on the racial undertones of “Metzengerstein,” by clarifying that the themes of “absolutism” reveal Poe’s metaphysical views on slavery. Lee then goes into detail in
explaining the racial prevalence in the other works of Poe. He ends his article by identifying Poe as somewhat distant in his views on political, moral matters such as slavery.


Maurice Lee writes in his article about Poe’s heavy influence on Romanticism in regard to chance. Lee states that Poe includes this idea of probability in works such as “The Purloined Letter,” “The Murder in the Morgue,” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget.” In these works by Poe, a sense of skepticism is revealed and Lee shares that Poe was often seen as more of a scientific thinker than a literary artist. Though he often mocked and questioned science, Lee explains that Poe was quite knowledgeable in many areas of science, especially probability and metaphysics. Lee explores and analyzes the works of Poe that have scientific undertones as well as textual evidence of the scientific knowledge of Poe. He compares Poe’s expertise and pragmatic nature to that of other writers such as Emerson. Shining through in his work, Poe lived a life of “skepticism under conditions of chance” (247).


Roger Platizky discusses in his article Edgar Allan Poe’s inspiration for his last written and well-known short story, “The Cask of Amontillado.” Platizky explains that Poe was fixated and had somewhat of an “obsessive nightmare” of being buried alive along with others in “18th and 19th century America and Europe” (207). People were going so far as to attach bells to the feet of the
dead, just in case they were mistakenly buried alive. Platizky mentions that Poe encapsulates this fear with the murder of Fortunado, as he is buried alive by the stonemason, Montresor, because he had “provoked” Montresor “with impunity.” This motto demonstrates not only Montresor’s reason for the murder, but also the emotional and historical conflicts of untimely death.


In this article, Brian Prestwood describes Edgar Allan Poe’s formation of a new type of Romanticism, breaching away from traditional European Romanticism into an “American, Dark Romanticism” (21). Prestwood claims that Poe was disgusted by the jovial, youthful works of such poets as Wordsworth—particularly his work “Imitations.” Poe disliked Wordsworth’s inclusion of youth and nature in his writing, for Poe focused predominantly on melancholy topics of death and recognized no optimism in the process of aging. Prestwood explains that Poe makes these contrasting critiques of Wordsworth’s style in his own literary work, “Introduction.” The distinctive aesthetic differences between Poe and Wordsworth are represented in each of these works—“Introduction” and “Imitations.”


Holly Pritchard identifies in her article the sexual language and analogies used in Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Tell-Tale Heart.” She labels the narrator as bipolar and sadist. She also refers to the story as a “psychosexual tale” (145). Pritchard then describes the narrator’s pleasure of inflicting pain on the old man. She points out the sadomasochism prevalent in the narrator’s
actions and his bipolar feelings toward the old man, as the narrator both loves and hates him. The sadomasochism is explained further by Pritcher as she identifies the narrator’s consistent obsession with the old man’s eye as well as his continual repetition, for he watches the old man for seven nights. All evidence provided in the article illustrates the fact that the narrator is indeed a bipolar sadist.


Chirstopher Rollason, a writer for Atlantis, discusses in his article the heavy influence Edgar Allan Poe has had on famous musical artist, Bob Dylan. When he moved to New York, Dylan lived in a house once inhabited by Poe. He also produced an album of which he entitled Tell-Tale Signs, of which Dylan was inspired by Poe’s stories “Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Pit and the Pendulum.” Both Poe and Dylan have been in the public eye, enjoyed and accepted all around the world. Rollason continues to point out similarities between the two artists throughout his article, connecting Dylan’s songs and Poe’s stories thematically. Lyrics, too, draw close connection to Poe vernacular. Some have questioned Dylan’s inclusion of Poe’s work in his own, for he has not always cited the material directly. An act of plagiarism and inquiry of originality has been put into question in regard to Poe’s strong presence in Dylan’s songs. It may simply be that there is a strong interconnectedness, Rollason explains, between the artists.

Gary Scharnhorst traces in his article the changing location of the letter Poe wrote to journalist and actor, Joseph M. Field, in 1846. Scharnhorst explains that in the letter, Poe addresses the allegations that had been made against him in a previous article in the New York *Evening Mirror.* Field comes to Poe’s defense in an article he writes in *Reveille* in June of 1846. Because of the popularity Poe developed in the public eye, Scharnhorst comes to the conclusion that this letter became quite notable. Field kept it in his belonging until his death, when he passed it on to his daughter, Kate Field. After her death, it was passed on to her friend and literary executor, Lilian Whiting, who then later gave the letter to poet and collector, Edmund Clarence Stedman. And we learn from Scharnhorst’s article that after Stedman’s death, Whiting published the text of the letter and sold it at an auction for $490.


Walter Shear, journalist for the *Midwest Quarterly,* shares a common theme in works by Poe, which is a strong focus on the individual mind and its sensibility. Shear explores the idea that most of Poe’s characters are alone or stuck in some form of isolation. Works where this sense of remoteness is prevalent are “The Masque of the Red Death,” “Ligeia,” and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym.* Shear explains, through textual evidence, how each of these applies to the theme of solitude and individual entrapment in the material world. And through his analyzes, Shear indicates that Poe’s storylines focus primary on the “fate of the body” in the isolated
“material world,” for the physical meaning of this is of more intensity than the tragic fate of his protagonists (289).

**Stark, Joseph.** "Motive and Meaning: The Mystery of the Will in Poe's "The Black Cat."


Stark, a journalist for the *Mississippi Quarterly*, investigates Poe’s possible affiliation with science and religion through analysis of his stories and other literary works. In exploring the narrator’s potential motives for the murder of his wife and cat in Poe’s short story, “The Black Cat,” Stark points out multiple underlying clues embedded in the story that Poe leaves for critics and readers to discover, many of which demonstrate theological concepts. The most prominent of these motives, which correlates with presumptions made about Poe in relation to theology, is human depravity. Stark defends his argument with textual evidence and shares other possible motives for the murder that indicate Poe’s anti-Calvinistic views.


Stavros Theodorakis discusses a motto, originally phrased in Latin, which is commonly used by Edgar Allan Poe but sometimes omitted in works such as “The Purloined Letter”: “Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than excessive cunning” (25). Poe gives credit to Seneca for the motto, yet it derives from the writings of humanist, Petrarch. Petrarch was, though, often referred to as the “modern Seneca,” which could explain the confusion as Theodorakis explicates. Due to his
incorrect reference, Theodorakis concludes it likely that Poe discovered this popular motto from a source other than the original.


John Timmerman draws focus in his article to Madeline Usher in Poe’s famous tale, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” for he believes she has slipped through the pages of literary analysis and criticism. He mentions that an array of attention has been placed on Poe’s character, Lady Ligeia, with her dark, Gothic persona, but little light has shown on the underlying mysteries of Madeline Usher. Timmerman reviews essential aspects of the story (such as the importance of the mirrors), comparing it to other works by Poe, and he proposes potential inspirational sources Poe used in his composition of the story, which demonstrates his strong and influential role in Romanticism. Timmerman then brings concentration to the significance of Madeline’s character, explaining that she is a mental transition or “evanescence” of escape from reality.


In his article, Jules Zanger discusses groupings, which have been combined by critics, of works similar to that of Edgar Allan Poe. The stories share a theme of “forbidden knowledge,” Zanger explains. And this was not necessarily established by Poe himself but by literary critics. This concept of “forbidden knowledge,” which once gained “brings destruction,” derives from Goethe’s “bible of Romanticism” entitled Faust (533). Zanger describes in his article how this
thematic element is ubiquitous in each of the works by Poe (works such as “Ligeia,” “The Black Cat,” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”) as well as works (“Morella,” “The Loss of Breath,” and “Metzengerstein”) by other authors that fall into that particular Poe grouping. Zanger justifies that the dramatized conflicts of the stories draw close connections to that of Poe, which binds them to critique alongside the works of Poe himself.


Brett Zimmerman, writer for *Style*, investigates Edgar Allan Poe’s literary style. He mentions the few authors and/or literary critics (Mark Twain and Margaret Fuller were two of the few), who did not care much for Poe’s style, for they believed his narrators were too much alike. Zimmerman then mentions others who found Poe to be a superb and versatile stylist. Zimmerman takes the side of those who enjoyed the “versatility” of Poe’s writing style. Throughout his article, Zimmerman explores the commonly used rhetorical and literary devices Poe uses in his writing. Referring to notable style guides, Zimmerman defines and provides examples of the devices and analyzes the structure of Poe’s writing.


Carrie Zlotnick-Woldenberg analyzes Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “Ligeia,” explaining that it is a psychological tale rather than a supernatural one. The narrator seems to have a similar
background to that of Poe, because he seeks a mother figure in the women he marries. Zlotnick-Woldenberg explains that Poe lacked much of a mother figure, for his mother died when he was rather young. And so, his narrator in the story recognizes Ligeia as the “good mother” with romantic, mysterious attributes and Rowena as the “bad mother”; he settles for her after Ligeia’s death. He also sees these women as mere objects. Zlotnick-Woldenberg explicates that the tale is psychological because the narrator cannot distinguish between the real and unreal, which could be the result of his opium intake. Though the narrator is left perplexed, Zlotnick-Woldenberg declares that Ligeia comes from the dead to kill Rowena, and then the narrator is left with no one.