

## TALES OF MYSTERY AND DARKNESS: ANNE RICE AND EDGAR ALLAN POE

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*Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to define mind and its unbelievable shifts. What happens when we let dark thoughts gain control over our bodies? Detective story pioneer Edgar Allan Poe and horror novelist Anne Rice gain insight into tormented minds and souls. What powerful humane forces can lead their characters to commit murders and acts of excessive cruelty? Both Rice and Poe went through loss, despair and alcoholism. Therefore, they create voices that ask for revenge, answers and forgiveness. Dark, secluded places where atrocities happen symbolize man's addiction to self-infliction and violence. Supernatural interventions make up the setting for suspense, rich imagery and introspection. Authors Ian Ousby, Martin Priestman and Katherine Ramsland offer further directions throughout this analysis.*

*Keywords: alcoholism, haunting thought, madness, murder, absolution.*

Edgar Allan Poe was a novelist, a poet, a critic and an author of both detective and horror stories. His character Auguste Dupin was the predecessor of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Poe inspired Dostoyevsky, Nabokov, Stevenson and Wilde. Detective stories can be traced even in the Bible, "when Daniel nails the guilt of the elders who seek to discredit Susanna and in Voltaire's *Zadig*, when the hero describes what a particular horse and dog look like just from the traces they leave"<sup>1</sup>. Poe's stories, however, are the first to shift the emphasis from the action to the investigation of the murders. Anne Rice is an author of many genres such as horror, memoir, erotica and Christian fiction. Her characters resemble Poe's, looking at their introspection, despair and mutiny. In addition, Rice recommended one of Poe's books on her website and his influence on her writings reside in the setting, the characters' personalities, horrible and bloody descriptions of violence and murder.

In *The Black Cat*, the narrator creates a connection with the reader by motivating his wretched state to unknown, supernatural forces. One possible explanation for his violent temper is the intoxication with alcohol; he studies gradually his irritability and self-harm by hurting the others, including his cat. After maiming the cat by tearing an eye out of her socket and finally hanging the poor pet in the garden, the narrator's house burns entirely. The mark of the dead pet on one remaining wall gives the man the impression that evil forces have corrupted him all along.

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<sup>1</sup> Ousby, Ian, *The Crime and Mystery Book. A Reader's Companion*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, p.15.

Regretting his past deeds, the man seeks another animal companion. Ironically, he finds a cat resembling Pluto but, as expected, he becomes irritated by the pet after bringing her home. Disgust turns into bitterness since the animal reminds him of his past act. The moment the white spot on the cat's chest turns into the shape of a gallows, the character starts to lose his mind completely. In addition, the pet had one eye missing just like Pluto. The man has nightmares, is filled with fright and feels haunted by the cat he sees as a beast, a demon. In a fit of rage he tries to hit the animal with an axe but his wife interferes and ends up killing her. The man hides the corpse behind a wall in the cellar and is left by worries, hatred or nightmares. Ironically, when the police comes for further inquiries on the missing wife, the husband boasts with the fine walls he had built. The cat hidden near the corpse shrieks with both sorrow and triumph, letting the visitors know about her master's evil deed. The man is finally convinced that it is the pet that cast its evil spell on him and led him to do such terrible acts. *The Tale-Tell Heart* follows a similar plot and the narrator has the same perverseness when it comes to arguing his murders. Both men believe that laws tempt one to break them and elaborate their killings and hiding of the victims with lucidity and ease of soul. They are cunning and at the same time with unbalanced minds. For, they complain of their distress caused by their obsessions (the black cat/ the evil eye) and appear to be asking for divine help. Nonetheless, they cease easily to their violent and aggressive impulses.

Anne Rice created *The Vampire Chronicles* so that she may connect with her readers. The metaphor of the vampire is the means by which Rice argues what's wrong and right in the world today. She touches topics like world hunger, wars, bullying at school, civil rights, racism or sexism. Her vampires are sensitive to human problems and permanently informed and well read. For example Marius and the other vampires try to convince Akasha not to start a war based on mass killing because it's primitive and disastrous. They argue that people have common sense and plans according to their dreams. They will follow their principles accordingly, letting time have the last word.

Published in 1976, *Interview with The Vampire* tells the adventure of male vampires Louis and Lestat and their vampire daughter Claudia. They live in New Orleans where Louis owns a plantation and start feeding with the slaves. Their experiences suffer many shifts including the attempts to kill Lestat. Louis tells his life story to a boy (Daniel Molloy) who interviews him. Daniel is fascinated by what Louis tells him and after hours of talking he tells the creature he wants to be like him. Numb with disappointment and feeling a monster under a curse, Louis is terribly angry with Daniel's statement; he feels the boy didn't learn anything from this story. Going with the impulse of the moment he bites Daniel leaving him in continuous turmoil. Though ill, the boy goes on to publish *Interview with The Vampire* that becomes a popular novel.

Published in 1988, *The Queen of The Damned* traces the beginning of vampires and their kind. Akasha, the mother of all vampires and their queen wakes up after six thousand years of sleep because of Lestat's loud rock music. She wants to start a world war and Lestat and his group of vampires try to stop her. Set in the present day, the novel presents the destruction of all vampires by means of combustion. They are killed by Akasha who wants to follow a primitive and selfish plan: to kill all men on Earth and leave only the women. This will assure the peace and paradise everyone yearns for. Equipped with incredible power and strength, her intentions and thoughts are sensed by vampires everywhere. The last remaining vampires join and manage to defeat her.

*The Vampire Armand* follows through Armand's story of his life. It is mostly filled with sorrow, pain and disappointments. This character proves to be almost as sensitive and as

human like Louis. The novel presents Armand's childhood in Kiev, his education in Venice during the Renaissance period, his independent life in nineteenth century Paris and present day New Orleans. All in all, Armand's tormented by unexpected events that occur in his life. As young Russian Andrei he is simple and dedicated to his Christian lifestyle until he is plunged into the Renaissance period by Marius. Here he becomes Amadeo and Marius' lover. No sooner does he manage to adapt that he is incarcerated by Santino and his children of darkness. This way, Armand suffers a great deal before finding his inner peace and voice.

Edgar Allan Poe's characters act with suspicion and restraint. That's because they are overwhelmed with grief after having lost a loved one. Otherwise they are careless and cruel, ruining other people's lives or getting into trouble; if not doing so, they imagine doing it. Fearful and anxious, they tend to become mad. Rice's character Armand butchers little Claudia, making a monster out of her; he does as such because she was standing between him and charming Louis. Armand is a reminder of the mad man who butchers the old man with the evil eye in *The Tale- Tell Heart*. Santino, who lives in the catacombs, first prisons Armand in a wall of bricks; later on he will trap Louis into a casket in order to starve him. In addition, the murderer in *The Black Cat* attempts to hide his dead wife in the cellar, behind an improvised wall of bricks. The cellar also symbolizes the man's mind which is imprisoned into hallucinations, confusion and madness. The man's wife is an example of innocence and patience, putting up with his ill-manners and alcoholism. She is a victim just like young Claudia born into darkness by Louis because he looked for a companion more likeable than Lestat. *"An outsider to humanity, seeking a new perspective on good and evil, he is concerned with the experience of immortality in a way that echoes his questions about mortality. Contrary to the popular vampire tradition, where the vampire is depicted as a heartless and evil monster, Louis possesses a conscience, feels lonely, shows moral sensitivity, and seeks fellowship with others like himself. He experiences a breakdown of self and has to reinvent his identity."*<sup>2</sup>

A name like Toby O'Dare is anything but accidental. Rice's *Angel Time* tells the story of a young man whose interior burden lead him to an existential crisis. Finally, leaving his pride aside, he turns to God. Obviously, narrator Toby is the author's reflection.

An assassin paid by the government, Toby is met by a surprise immediately after killing his victim. Malchiah, a seraphim, approaches him and offers Toby a way out of darkness. Nothing's accidental and the mind works miracles. Toby knew something would happen on that very day because he had to complete a mission in the place most dear to him; a Californian hotel where he feels at ease, away from the hustle and the bustle. This way, his insecurity took its toll especially when he observed a silhouette in the darkness. It was a mysterious creature that appeared from nowhere. Malchiah appears to be from another world; his look, attitude and voice were supernatural and charmed Toby from the very start. The intervention of the supernatural reminds one of Poe's stories; Madeline comes back from the dead and haunts twin brother Roderick Usher.

Toby's existence meant a continuous torment, a back and forth movement that only made him miserable. He is a murderer, certain he will pay for his sins in hell and takes revenge on God by means of his missions. That's because God took his loved ones away from

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<sup>2</sup> Ramsland, Katherine, *Anne Rices's Deconstruction of Darkness, Anne Rice: The Vampire Chronicles, 4 Volumes* by Alfred A. Knopf in *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 69-75, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jung1.1992.11.1.69>, accessed on 12.09.2013, at 04:33, p.72.

him and he couldn't cope with the grief. On the other hand, in spite of the blood on his hands, he visits a little catholic church where he finds peace. He feels regrets for his deeds and thinks about past dreams that will never come true. He loved to play the lute and had a profound love for God and the Church. He wanted to become either a successful artist or a dedicated priest. He initially has a secure, healthy and normal background just like Poe's characters: the man whose landlord is his benefactor but whose wicked eye haunts him; the family man who loves animals and has a black cat as the favorite pet. Still, his best friend becomes his worst enemy due to the intervention of evil forces that trouble the man's mind.

Toby's continuous murdering to quench the anger caused by his misfortune do anything but help; it keeps dragging him down until he hits rock bottom and is filled with dark thoughts. He knows what he's doing is wrong but he sees no other way out since he's cursed and a wretched soul anyway. So why change for the better if sins like his can never be forgiven? To him, there is no God in this world, not a single event or moment to confirm a heavenly presence or support. Albeit, Toby still calls his angel. There's a voice of hope deep inside him which he uses in his darkest times. He requests help from his angel, for he didn't know how he was going to cope with killing in the room dearest to him; in the place where he would get away from it all, where he would dare to see himself a better person than he thought he was. But for this divine intervention there needed an angel of a higher status; a seraphim. Malchiah catches Toby's attention and arrives at the right time. Compared to Poe's characters, those of Rice look for further help from divinity; they fight more to stay on the right side whereas Poe's murderers cannot help themselves and lose control over their mind completely.

Brought up by alcoholic parents, Toby felt uneasy and insecure about himself as a young boy. His father, a policeman would humiliate and beat him. Finally, he was imprisoned for an illegal business and later got killed while his mother drowned his two siblings and then she committed suicide. Poe lost his mother to consumption and his father to alcohol and Rice lost her mother to alcohol as well. She started drinking herself in order to cope with the loss of her daughter Michelle. The novels illustrate Rice's struggle in her relationship to God whereas Poe's stories present his disbelief in the society he was living. For, he was scarcely given a chance as a writer and tried to survive solely by his literary works.

In *The Vampire Chronicles* the body is described as means by which everything is possible. The characters desire one another in order to feed or they wish to destroy their enemies by butchering them. At least this is how Armand deals with Claudia and Madeleine. The gothic body refers to the dark side of material decomposure. Anne Rice describes scenes of extreme cruelty that involve the destruction of the body. Akasha kills the other vampires by means of spontaneous combustion. They burn from the inside out and what's left is a dark liquid and their clothes floating on it. When killed by Mekare, Akasha has her head plucked from her body; Mekare respected the curse she inflicted on Akasha thousands of years before. The witches' people keeps the tradition in which relatives eat the body of the deceased who was part of family. When ready to eat their mother's heart and brain, Mekare and Maharet are interrupted violently by Akasha's soldiers who destroy everything around including their mother's body and disrespect their last act. The revenge of the matter refers to the wrong doings and inflictions done to the flesh. Once one hurts, kills someone or butchers his/her body, that spirit takes his/her revenge. At the beginning of the homonymous novel, the vampire Armand is described when he tears his victim's hair from his roots. Rice's vampires are portrayed as possessing excessive cruelty, violence and thirst for blood. They have fits of anger and become aggressive just like Poe's murderers but most of them feel sorry for their wretched condition. In Poe's stories, on the other hand, the evil doers try to get away by

hiding their victims; a basic instinct followed by child vampire Claudia who hides her female victim on the bed under the pile of dolls.

In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the character visits his old friend Roderick Usher and is taken aback by the appearance of the old building. It breathes sorrow, death and desolation, situated in a gloomy landscape with a terrible fissure and under a tarn. This adds the gothic element to the story. Both Roderick and sister Madeline suffer from a horrible disease as a consequence of a family curse. They are pale, thin, remnants of the people they used to be. Their visitor remembers an old rhapsody of a beautiful, glorious kingdom that finally turned into a ruin due to evil forces. Like a ruin or a dying flower, young Madeline falls seriously ill and passes away. While reading a story to his old friend one stormy night, the narrator hears strange noises as if someone wanders around the mansion. Madeline wakes up from her tomb and to Roderick's shock, falls lifeless into his arms; the man himself passes away due to horror and frailty. The guest runs away, leaving behind a mansion that crumbles to pieces into the tarn under it. Madeline is buried alive by the two men just like Santino and his coven burry Louis and Armand and imprison Claudia and vampire companion Madeleine. Rice's vampires reside in dark and cold places like cemeteries at night and catacombs by day, sleeping in their coffins and carrying them along when they travel.

In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the narrator lives with his friend in Paris, by themselves, in an old mansion. During the days they read, write and when night falls they roam on the streets going on with their discussion. Dupin, the narrator's friend uses moral judgement and sense while carrying out his analysis on anything he observes peculiar. The two men involve in the investigation of a mysterious murder. Dupin's suspicion that an orang-outang killed the two women proves right and is pleased to having solved the murder. The narrator tells mostly Dupin's story of the investigation. His belief that the author of the killings is not human adds the science fiction detail to the story. Poe worked assiduously at his craft. "*The effect for which he was best known was that of gothic horror and it has been argued that Rue Morgue is something of a halfway house between the grisly trapping of gothic and the determined rationalism of a form better suited to an age of science*"<sup>3</sup>. The detective turn in Rice's *Of Love and Evil* reminds of Poe's whodunit. It is the sequel to *Angel Time* and follows Toby's return to family and the Catholic Church. Toby confronts the dibbuk who haunts the Italian community and manages to restore peace to everybody; just like in Poe's detective stories, Rice adds supernatural elements such as demons' and angels' interventions, the return back to previous centuries in various corners of the world.

Rice and Poe built characters possessed by ruling, powerful forces that lead them to commit atrocities. At the beginning of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, "*Poe's essay on the analytical faculty celebrates the power of the human mind(or rather the mind of the extraordinary individual) to triumph over whatever is mysterious, whatever is puzzling.(...) The detective story, then, began, as a dream of reason and of the triumphs reason can achieve*"<sup>4</sup>. An unique author, he was the first to be fully concerned with the characters' introspections and their psychological processes. As a result, he connected the effects of the psyche with distorted images of reality and added gothic descriptions, supernatural interventions to the plot.

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