

DISTORTIONS, HALLUCINATIONS AND AFFECTATION OF REALITY: AN APPROACH TO POE'S

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TECHNIQUES AS A CREATOR OF AN OPPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE¹

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ABSTRACT

Distortions, hallucinations and affectation of reality are some of the most powerful weapons an author can use. As we shall see, the effects are multiplied when the writer is Edgar Allan Poe. On the other hand, or in addition, there is hardly something that can delight more than reading Poe. Our common thread is the use, or absence, of details and sound imagery by means of repetitions, silences and other devices. Besides, we must bear in mind the effects of sound on his productions as integrated in the horror genre and how experiencing them or ignoring this effect alters singularly the impact on the readers. In fact, Poe, as well as being an exceptional conductor in terms of suspense, is a master of sound effects.

KEY WORDS: Unreliable narrator; audiovisual; perception; Edgar Allan Poe.

RESUMEN

Las distorsiones, las alucinaciones y la afectación de la realidad son algunas de las armas más poderosas que puede usar un autor. Como veremos, los efectos se multiplican cuando ese escritor es Edgar Allan Poe. Por otro lado, o además, apenas hay algo que pueda

¹This contribution comes to light as a research carried out with several (under)graduate students. This research is included in a project designed in the form of cooperative work with students of different educational levels, and presented at a round table entitled “Edgar Allan Poe in the classroom: new proposals for teaching in the 21st century”, in the I International EAPSA Conference, “Poe in the Age of Populism”, held in Valladolid (Spain) between January 31st and February 2nd, 2018. The participating students are:

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deleitar más que leer a Poe. Nuestro hilo conductor es el uso, o la ausencia, de detalles e imágenes sonoras, tales como repeticiones, silencios y otros mecanismos. Además, debemos tener en cuenta los efectos del sonido en sus producciones integradas en el género de terror y cómo experimentarlas o ignorarlas. Este efecto altera singularmente el impacto en los lectores. De hecho, Poe, además de ser un director excepcional en términos de suspense, es un maestro de los efectos de sonido.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Narrador no fidedigno; audiovisual; percepción; Edgar Allan Poe.

“Tones and sounds, light and shadow brightness and darkness are additional phenomena which create atmosphere.” (Hoffman, 1979, 3).

INTRODUCTION

The human being needs to use the senses to know his/her environment and (inter) act within it according to his/her interests or needs from both a biological and social point of view. In addition, sensory perception can affect us in our emotional state, in our memories and in the way we interpret the reality surrounding us. The presence or absence of visual or auditory stimuli—which are the ones we are going to focus on in the present study—can distress, calm, startle or, ultimately, produce in us an oscillating and malleable emotional state.

Edgar Allan Poe was aware of the power that sensitive perception exerts on individuals and, he was even able to introduce images and sounds (or darkness and silence) in his texts with great mastery to obtain the reader’s attentional and emotional control. Therefore, a squeaky door, the dim light of candles, the horrible meow of a cat, the jovial bells of a character’s clothes, or the brightness and the whistle of a sharp pendulum became the trap with which Poe involved the reader to the point of making him/her feel like a direct witness to the story being told.

In many of the stories, visual and auditory perception are projected from the narrator’s² point of view, which can be affected by an altered mental state, as well as by sensory stimuli. In addition, in some cases such as the story “The Tell-tale Heart” we can consider the possibility that the characters (and by extension the reader in general) can perceive as real auditory stimuli (as we will see in this specific case) or visual ones which are hallucinations projected by our own mind (Spiekermann, 2007).

² We consider pertinent to clarify that the narrators presented by Poe and which we analyse here are always male.

The American author plays and deceives with his plots both the characters of his stories and the readers, who try to enter that multiform world full of chiaroscuro. It is worth mentioning the use of the figure of the unreliable narrator by Poe. In addition to a sensory perception that confuses and anguishes us in most cases, he adds a character that contributes to increasing that state of confusion and distrust towards what seems like a partial version of the story. All this makes the reader bring into question every sentence as s/he reads.

The effects achieved thanks to the intervention of the sensitive world with which Poe envelops the reader greatly impact his mind and generate feelings of terror and claustrophobia, among many others. For this reason, we can affirm that the level of visual and auditory suggestion reached by Poe's narrative is able to seduce and abduct the reader in such a vivid way that it operates in favour of producing an inevitable need to abandon reading and consent being guided by the hand of each narrator whose threads, in turn, managed by Poe from the shadows lets us know that he is there but not seen.

What Poe brings to light in the first paragraphs of many of his short stories is that the inexplicable facts belong to a higher dimension of reality, and that is only accessible through madness. Some critics as Brett Zimmerman point out that, although the term did not indeed exist in Poe's days, several of the narrators suffered from a case of schizophrenia. Throughout the short stories, several of the signs fit inside this psychological profile: the sound and auditory hallucinations, his inability to recognize the real facts from the imaginary ones, etc. (Zimmerman, 1992, 40-41). From his view, Robert Shulman (1970, 261) points out that Poe, in his short stories, gives an anatomy of the psychological paralysis that in a claustrophobic way is trapped in his own depth of insanity that is fighting in vain to release himself from unknown and threatening forces (May, 1991).

THE UNCANNY IN POE'S WRITING

The German word *Unheimliche* is considered as untranslatable; the equivalent term in English, *uncanny*, is by itself difficult to define. This indescribable quality is in fact an integral part of the understanding of the uncanny experiences. These recurrent topics that activate our more primitive desires and fears are the true signature of this kind of fiction.

According to Freud's description, the uncanny represents "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (1985, 340); in other words,

it projects its terror not only from something external or externally unknown, but, on the contrary, from something strangely familiar which avoids our efforts to separate us from the origin of that terror. Freud argues that an author can evoke an uncanny answer in the reader when he places the action between the boundary of reality and unreality inside fiction itself; for these purposes, Freud treats the uncanny as a psychological fact and at the same time as a literary one. Focusing on Poe, in very few authors one is able to find with so much accuracy the boundaries between fantasy, unreality and reality itself.

When a story is narrated, one of the most useful elements to make the reader feel uncanny effects is to create a sense of distrust and uncertainty in the reader about whether a certain character is good or bad, real or unreal, sane or insane, and do it in order that this attention is not centred directly on that doubt so that we cannot explain that matter. The hesitation of the certainty about what one sees is the essence of Poe's productions with which he manipulates the capability of the reader's reasoning (Shen, 2008, 321-45). On the one hand, a character sees or thinks s/he sees extraordinary things that might be hallucinations projected by his own mind. On the other hand, some common elements can hide under the most banal appearance a second disturbing, mysterious, terrible nature.

The fear of the uncanny appears when we face the disguised and distorted images of our repressed desire. It is possible that terror derives simply and directly from our own feelings of fear, pain or death, the threats that can harm us or that we simply do not recognize. The intensity of the emotions that are produced by the supernatural creates doubts and confusion. For Kilgour, in his book *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (1995), by means of the uncanny something becomes estranged from us.

The uncanny appears as a breakdown of the universal coherence, a (threatening) aggression takes place, which breaks the stability of a world in which the laws were considered as rigorous and unchangeable until then. The impossible occurs without warning in a world where it was believed that the impossible was dismissed by its own nature. Caillois (1967, 9-10) asserts that its essence is the appearance, what cannot happen and despite everything it happens, in a precise moment, in the middle of a known universe and in which it was thought mystery was excluded. Everything seems to be peaceful, without anything unusual, and suddenly the unacceptable is suggested or it is displayed unexpectedly. For Ana M^a Barrenechea (1985, 48), a violation of the worldly, natural or logical order takes place; the strange is everything that on the level of the natural or supernatural, physical or metaphysical is considered out of what is socioculturally accepted.

Some critics (Tatar, 1981; Madden, 1993; Royle, 2003; Schöpp, 2006; Windsor, 2019) maintain that Poe is able to intensify the emotional impact of the feeling of the uncanny in his works to unsuspected limits. In these terms, Freud points out some ideas about the relation between the uncanny in real life and in literature: "...many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature, and that in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life" (cited in Chieffalo, 2001, 15).

The essence of the uncanny is connected to the concept of the unreliable narrator (the rational versus the irrational, the natural versus the supernatural), they are dimensions that are simultaneously mingled in a surprising and strange way from the main character and the reader's perspective who are living the experience of that tension and / or conflict (Herrero Cecilia, 1998, 27). Just as professor Herrero Cecilia pointed out, this can be read in Rosemary Jackson's words, who, before in time, asserts that "It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently 'new', absolutely 'other' and different" (1981, 8).

In the short stories we are going to analyse, Poe introduces common characters; thus, there is a taste for the real; that is, according to Sancho Cremades, the emphasis on daily life is typical of the terror during all historical times (1995, 381). Even worse is the fact that the agents of terror are found in our closest surroundings. Horror, if set up in a familiar environment and close to the reader, is much more fearful since it provides the feeling that it can happen at any time. Poe introduces common characters –with whom the reader could identify himself–, happening horrible things, in a familiar environment (such as a house similar to that to the reader's, or with nice neighbours such as those of the reader's...). We are not so afraid of a seven-headed dragon as of a sweet and affectionate man, since we plainly know we will never meet the former one, whereas the latter may be possible.

THE RATIONAL AND THE IRRATIONAL IN POE'S STORIES

Focusing on the historical context that frames Poe's stories, we should highlight the fact that the atmosphere of that period was favourable for the exploration of the two sides of the humanity: the rational thought and the belief in the supernatural. The rationalist position holds that human reason is the supreme tool to understand and rule the world. Man, accompanied by reason, becomes independent from God and from religion. Moreover, everything that evokes any religious postulate or beliefs is rejected. All natural and social events can be explained only by the intervention of reason. Thus,

many of the popular beliefs that have been steadily maintained during many centuries have been rejected by rationalism and they are considered as simple superstitions typical of ignorant people.

María Teresa Ramos González asserts that, in this age, Rationalism and irrational beliefs coexist and they reject each other at the same time, because their conception of reality is the opposite from one to the other. And, it turns out that the second trend is a reaction against the scientific and deterministic vision of the first one (1988, 42). In this sense, this type of literature is an exaltation of the irrational, in which the inexplicable and supernatural mystery shatters our assumptions about the world and reality, our belief in the scientific laws that rationally rule (or at least that is what is expected) the universe, and opens the abyss, the chaos, under our feet (Pardo García, 1992, 145).

In fairy tales, for instance, the world of the fantasy goes to a second level from the beginning, and the belief embraced it openly. The fulfilment of desires, the secret powers, the power of thoughts, the liveliness of the unanimated objects, all the elements so common in fairy tales cannot exert any sort of uncanny influence here. The reason behind the previous statement is based on, as we have explained, that feeling cannot emerge unless there is a conflict of judgement about the things that have been surpassed and can be considered as incredible cannot be possible after all; and this problem is removed from the beginning because of the hypotheses of the world of fairy tales.

Giving light to this point, Rosemary Jackson considers that this literature brings in “something completely other and unseen, the spaces outside the limiting frame of the human and the real, outside the control of the word and the look” (1981, 179). Her position consists of introducing what it is called otherness. The emergence of works where the double is fundamental coincide wholly with some consequences that include a desire of subvert reality (1981, 4).

At this point, it is essential to consider these ideas from a new and complementary point of view: the artistic manifestation of the fears and consciousness of human beings. Thus, we cannot avoid referring, perhaps concisely, to the literary and artistic perspective that comes as a last resort from the revolution and that impregnated the consciousness during the period that preceded romanticism: we are regarding, obviously, to the Enlightenment. It would be a good example of this relation between the perception and use of the play between consciousness and unconsciousness of human mind and the creation of an unreal nightmarish world that affects the feelings of the people who

read a story or contemplate an artistic painting. Now we can recall the ideas that Goya expressed in his etching “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos” (1799).³

It is precisely the eagerness of understanding and reasoning reality to its last consequences what leads the reader to the rediscovery of the artistic genre that Poe masterfully ruled. The beliefs in the past are rejected, and this literature needs the involvement of the reader, the suspension of his disbelief in order to provoke fear. The dream of reason produces literary monsters in which we can conjure up the spirits of personal fears. Since 1793, Goya executes his series of *Caprichos*, populated by threatening monsters. Nevertheless, the existence of these beings is not objective: they are inside ourselves, at the inner depths of our subconscious and, they break away from it as soon as our logical intelligence rests. For modern man, monsters in general are not only terrifying because they exist, but because they carry out their fears and their most secret desires.

Poe’s literature is not directed to a superstitious audience which believes in ghosts and supernatural beings. His readers accept the rules of the game that propose the new genre (“and if it would be true that...”)

First, the reader is conditioned to consider the world of the characters as a universe of real people and it makes him doubt about whether it is truthful or a supernatural explanation of the events that occurred. Secondly, this doubt is also experienced by a character. In this way, the role of the reader is identified the real intentions or features that have any relation to the narrator and the plot in order to find clues to the best understanding of the story. This explains that one of the most favourite narrative techniques would be the narration in first person. Thirdly, the reader adopts a determined attitude to the text: realistic interpretation and explanation of the events (Todorov, 1970).

Tzvetan Todorov, in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), holds that one essential feature is precisely astonishment when facing an incredible fact, indecision between a rational and realistic explanation, and acceptance of the supernatural.

Regarding the topic of the double which we have mentioned, this was dealt with by Otto Rank in an essay (1914). Rank looked into the connections that the double has with the reflections in the mirrors, with the shadows, with the guardian spirits, with the belief in the existence of the soul and with the fear to death. *The technique of the*

³ It can be accessed via <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/el-sueo-de-la-razon-produce-monstruos/e4845219-9365-4b36-8c89-3146dc34f280> (retrieved from the Internet on February 18th, 2020).

doppelgänger is described as a reflection or duality of a character's identity, it refers to its twin, its double shadow, its double demon, the double personality (Snodgrass, 2005).

The figure of the double can be analysed not only from the psychological point of view, but also as a contrast, as a duality, as a figure that is projected in a mirror where the reflection emerges as a unit with two different faces, that sometimes takes us to a surprising similarity, obsessive, exasperating.

The situation is modified as soon as the writer presents the story inside the world of common reality. In this case he will also accept all the conditions in order to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and all that could have an uncanny effect in reality is present in his story. But in this case he can increase the effect –and indeed multiply it– going further than what could happen in reality, by introducing events that never, or almost never, factually occur. Doing this, he is, in some way, handing us over to the superstition that we had surpassed in an evident way; he misleads us promising to give us the whole truth and, in the end, overtaking it. We react to his inventions as we would have reacted to the real experiences; but by the time we have realised about his deception it is too late and the author has achieved his purpose. Poe's narrations make us think if what we perceived, fiction, is not at last, the reality (Penzoldt, 1965, 16). Therefore, we are presented a burst of supernatural in the real world, an intrusion of mystery in everyday life, a breakdown of the recognizable order, “una irrupción de lo inadmisibles en el seno de la inalterable legalidad cotidiana” (Caillois, 1965, 36). Poe demonstrates that the macabre can happen at any time and in any place.

HOW TO HAUNT THE READERS THROUGH THE SENSES

But, how does one introduce an author like Poe who is, in the fantastic narrative of the XIX century, the main and most famous and representative figure? Poe is the great master in the field of the visual and auditory suggestion, together with the descriptions in which some never-ending terrifying features accumulate, being, moreover, oppressive and asphyxiating.

Edgar Allan Poe was the most daring explorer of terror encompassing mankind: “he foresaw some of the nightmares of twentieth century man” (Brooks, 1973, 353). Poe, the last great romantic poet in North American literature, recovers the terror of the Middle Ages, and he takes it to a time closer to the reader and also to some places that seem to be familiar and recognizable to the general public. The great achievement of his work comes from transforming terror into something close and immediate, into an almost touchable sensation that the reader could experience in his own flesh. Poe does

not only rescue terror from the past but also he projects it toward the future (toward us), discovering a new dimension of human terror, the terror of consciousness. Lovecraft (1973, 53–54) asserts:

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[Poe] saw clearly that all phases of life and thought are equally eligible as subject matter for the artist, and being inclined by temperament to strangeness and gloom, decided to be the interpreter of those powerful feelings and frequent happenings which attended pain rather than pleasure, decay rather than growth, terror rather than tranquillity, and which are fundamentally either adverse or indifferent to the tastes and traditional outward sentiments of mankind... His elevation of disease, perversity, and decay to the level of artistically expressible themes was likewise infinitely far-reaching in effect.

Poe lays the foundations of the literature in which the literary and the psychologic are continuously mingled. Consequently, the psychological is transformed into a key point for the understanding of Poe's work. But as a last resort, Poe combined the purist psychology with the Gothic, the rational with the horror, certainly creating modern bases (Holte, 1998, 36). With Poe, the extraordinary, the superhuman, the frightful, reach the highest peaks. In fact, "no writer knew more about pain and horror than Edgar Allan Poe" (Hopkins & Potter, 1998, 1)⁴. In his works there is always one evil element present which hangs over everything and everybody –the reader included–, a close, uncanny and dark place: dead people come back, living people give up hope and an infernal world that is believed impossible becomes real; Poe is continuously in search of other worlds⁵. Therefore, a break in routine occurs, and the reader starts to suspect the possibilities of existence could be wider. In relation to the phantasmagoria as a sublime metaphoric modality, Terry Castle (2000, 40) asserts the following:

Some nineteenth-century writers, to be sure, sensed an epistemological abyss at the heart of the metaphor. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, in his supernatural tales, used the phantasmagoria figure precisely as a way of destabilizing the ordinary boundaries between the inside and outside, mind and world, illusion and reality.

⁴The greatness of Poe's terror resides in that its origin is not linked to Gothic, but it comes from the soul; hence, its strength. Just as he expresses it: "If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul, –that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results." (cited in Thompson, 2004, 621)

⁵A reading of *Aspectos estructurales y temáticos recurrentes en la narrativa breve de Edgar Allan Poe* (1998), by Margarita Rigal, offers us a right, convenient and masterful point of view.

Poe's influence in literature has been as universal as incalculable. Who has not felt inclined to follow Poe in a conscience or unconscious way? But above all, he had a decisive influence on some French authors –the symbolists lead by Baudelaire, who took from him aesthetic ideas. They were the ones who discovered him and put him on a pedestal while in the United States and England he was considered a crude writer: “Well before his twenty-first birthday he had earned the right to call himself a poet, but by British standards he was not an important one” (Baym, 1989, 1356). For High (1998, 55) “Poe made important contributions to American literature in three areas: the short story, literary criticism, and poetry”. In Spanish language, he influenced Emilia Pardo Bazán⁶ (1851–1921), and of course, Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) and Julio Cortázar (1914–1984).

Poe raised the flag of Romanticism which ruled in the old continent and that arrived in America. Precisely, inside that European influence, his English experience is highlighted. It also been highlighted by the magic of the old neighbourhoods, ancient houses, wet basements and the gloomy corridors, that carry Poe's excitable spirit to an extreme passion for the macabre and mysterious.

In Poe's stories, the past is darker, fateful, and resides in the heroes and heroines who are weightier than in Horace Walpole or Anne Radcliffe's works. Brooks (1973, 356) states that:

though affected by the circumstances of his own life, his interest in a world of nightmare was related to a cultural situation that was just beginning to emerge in his own homeland and would not reveal its full character until the middle of the next century.

THE SENSES AFFECTED BY THE OPPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE

As we have pointed out before, this research is going to be focused on some chosen works from Edgar Allan Poe. He was an American author who lived during the first part of XIXth century and who managed to leave his footprint in the history of universal literature. The works which we are going to work with are his essay “The Philosophy of Composition”, his poem “Annabel Lee” and four of his most famous and significant short stories: “The Pit and the Pendulum”, “The Black Cat”, “The Cask of Amontillado” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”.

⁶ Not only Poe will influence this Spanish author, offering situations similar to those found in some stories such as “The Black Cat”, although the development and the environment of the Spanish writer are different; also the naturalist Maupassant is felt in his stories and novels. But Poe's influence on Spanish authors should not surprise us. One of the authors who best shows this influence is Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, who knew the work of the North American writer very well; in 1856 he had written an article in which he admirably analysed his way of cultivating the genre. Let us remember Alarcón's story “La mujer alta. Cuento de miedo”, one of the best Spanish fantasy stories of the nineteenth century.

The reasons we have chosen such works for the present research are explained below. In the essay “The Philosophy of Composition”, Poe defines and details the explanation of his artistic and creative theory whose conception allowed him to design, mould and build his short stories and poems. This essay is of great interest since we can see how the author, meticulously, looks after the election of the settings, characters, language and many other elements to influence the reader, direct his attention to the author’s interests, manipulate his spirit and disposition to a specific goal with the intention of provoking in him the desired effect as we will see later. Poe does not leave anything left to chance and that is what he manifests explicitly in his essay.

We have included the poem “Annabel Lee” as a paradigmatic example to be analysed from the same point of view as the other narrative works and, this way, we will show and give an example of Poe’s writing skills. Within the wide range of possibilities to choose from among the vast amount of Edgar Allan Poe’s works, we have opted for these, as they present many examples for analysis.

Our contribution tries to focus and analyse some features specific to Poe’s work such as the universe of visual and sound perception and how, thanks to different eminently intelligent and well thought-out resources, he manages to create a memorable world in his short stories with a dark, oppressive atmosphere where scary and law-breaking characters are involved in scenes of mystery and horror.

The reader as a direct witness of the story and the narrator’s credibility.

The Gothic genre is closely linked to the conscious and calculated use of sensory perception. Thanks to the suitable treatment of the world of senses, it is possible to create an atmosphere of a noticeable oppressed nature and a sensation of fatality and anguish as much in the characters as in the reader. The detailed descriptions make us notice a constant uncertainty that produces a strong sense of unease in some moments during the stories.

According to the RAE dictionary, the word perception comes from Latin *perceptio* and we want to emphasize the second meaning of the word.⁷ All we perceive affects us as much on the psychological as on the physical level although we are not aware of it.

⁷ “sensación interior que resulta de una impresión material hecha en nuestros sentidos” taken from DRAE (2015) *Dictionary of the Spanish Language*. Retrieved from: <http://dle.rae.es/?id= SX9HJy3> on January 23rd, 2019. “inner sensation that results from a material impression made in our senses” (the translation is ours).

The exceptionality of Poe's genius, his topics and techniques lead him to build, in the first place, an extremely well-cared-for-design architecture, to later lead the reader to the deepest abyss. Opposite the romantic vision of any work of art produced after a thorough creative process, the American author thought, in the same way, that the mathematical and theoretical techniques shouldn't be disdained. Poe rejected the opinion of the Romantics about the fact that the creative works are, in fact, the result of a spontaneous process of creativity, stressing and focusing his attention on the mechanisms used in the creative process (Hayes, 2007, 43).

As well as being a misunderstood visionary, many studies of his intellectual games describe him as an engineer who, when creating his works, applies some rules similar to mathematical principles (Hayes, 2007, 178). This assertion can be clearly observed in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition", where Poe explains the method he uses in order to create a story using as a model the poem "The Raven" which follows his methods by focusing on order and beauty, since: "Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears" (en Reidhead, 2003, 1600). Moreover, Poe stresses that in a planned way precision and technique provide resolution without leaving anything to chance: "It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (en Reidhead, 2003, 1599).

That is why, in "The Philosophy of Composition", he makes it clear to what extent he takes care of every single element of his work and follows some specific guidelines. In a masterful way, he creates environments and characters that are able to blur the edges that separate the fictional world presented to us from the reader's real world that becomes not only a witness but, in some way, an accomplice of some of his first person narrators.

The presence/absence of the visual resources it is shown continuously in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. They symbolize the rational capability of the characters, their sanity and their interpretation of the information they perceive. Thus, we observe that usually it is during the day (in daylight) when the characters of the analysed stories control their impulses. However, at night, these narrators reveal an anxiety of which they are victims and they are not able to control their violence and we see how they are being manipulated by it. This way, by presenting much more extreme feelings during the night, the reader is incited to mistrust the narrator who narrates the story from his personal account.

Therefore, the senses play a revealing role in literature; especially, its huge expressive burden helps to create an uncanny effect in the reader, which is exactly what Poe considers vital to build a good text. We aim, thus, to analyse the light and the lack of it –darkness and gloom– as well as sound and, consequently, the perception of all these by the narrators. In the same way Jackson (2011, 9), in the case of the use of these visual effects, asserts: “Poe develops a dramatic backdrop of vocal expressions to simulate and intensify a unified emotional effect. Shrieks, groans, and hisses reverberate across the page, disturbing the silence of the reader.”

Starting with “The Black Cat”, we see the author creates a visual stimulus in its title: the black colour. Then he describes that animal in these words: “This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree” (Mabbot, 1978c, 681)⁸. Moreover, when we talk about a cat with these features, culturally, we associate it as a sign of a bad omen, something negative, sinister. In fact, in the short story, the wife and future victim refers to them in these terms that denote their superstitious believes: “... my wife, who at heart was not a little tintured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise” (Mabbot, 1978c).

But in this tale, the auditory perception is the most impact. Thus, when he delivers a blow with an axe to his wife’s head, he makes reference –with the same coldbloodness as when he murders and hides the corpse– to the absence of any kind of groan. In other words, while he is narrating a terrible crime he is able to do it with the shadow of silence dominating the scene. Analysing his texts from the sensorial point of view, the presence of some stimuli is as important as the complete absence of them. “She fell dead upon the spot without a groan” (Mabbot, 1978c).

At the end of this story, the reader receives the two last sensory blows. On the one hand, it is a revealing moment since the main character is exposed due to the groan coming from the wall. The narrator causes it when he hits the wall with a walking stick showing off the sturdiness of the wall. It is important to emphasize the effect in the reader’s mind that it is provoked by the blows of the walking stick as well as the revelation of the crime.

⁸ For all Poe’s quotes, we have followed Mabbot’s edition project, which can be consulted online at: <https://www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tominfo.htm> (retrieved from the Internet on January 28th, 2019). From this very moment, when we cite that work, we will mention Mabbot’s edition in which the quote is located.

... I rapped heavily with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brickwork behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.
(...)

No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!—by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation (Mabbot, 1978c).

The description of this groan is well explained due to a series of similes so that the reader knows exactly what kind of groan is discerned by all those present: the narrator and the police. With the expressions “like the sobbing of a child”, “a cry”, “one long, loud, and continuous scream”, “a howl” (Mabbot, 1978c), Poe makes us perceive exactly the kind of sound that makes our hair stand on end and makes our blood run cold as well. As we can appreciate in this brief paragraph, the concentration of hearing stimuli makes the reader feel curious and scared, in spite of the fact that he knows that the murdered wife is hidden behind the wall.

In the last lines of the story, like a final touch, Poe evokes in us the sense of sight, because when they open the wall, the macabre scene is described in great detail.

The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and 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” (Mabbot, 1978c).

The final image is hair-raising: it points out in great detail the bloody corpse and the horrible and disturbing cat sitting on her head. It is a shocking captured in our mind. With only nine words he is able to give the reader a visual stimulus that goes beyond an image: “...with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire...” (Mabbot, 1978c). Here we find the –real– symbolism of the red colour, and although it has not been named until now, the reader has already guessed its existence. In this case, red colour becomes the protagonist of this scene. With this last picture, Poe shows his skills to immerse the reader inside the narrative due to the commendable use of the visual and

hearing perception and, as if it was a game, he is able to make us feel as a character in the story.

Let's analyse how the author used these resources already mentioned in two more of his short stories: "The Tell-Tale Heart" y "The Cask of Amontillado".

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In the first of these two stories the tensest scenes happen at night. Thus, he describes the darkness of the bedroom where the crime is going to happen: "His room was as black as a pitch with the thick darkness..." (Mabbot, 1978b).

We want and must highlight, related to this topic, his nocturnal visits to the old man's bedroom where darkness and silence rule. In other words, the lack of visual and auditory perceptions provokes in us a deep reaction of confusion and a certain degree of horror. The lacking sensorial stimuli in this room are perceived in a creak of the door when it is half-closed and the lantern light which indicates the old man. With all the information the reader is receiving he knows that imminently something terrible is about to happen. Indeed, the narrator feels horror due to that uncanny sensation that prevails in the setting: "And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror" (Mabbot, 1978b).

In relation to "The Cask of Amontillado" we should have in mind, as well as in the productions mentioned previously, the analysis of the visual and hearing stimuli. In this sense, the first point that catches our attention in this story is the carnival setting. Poe uses this festival to tinge his narration with an ironic tone and to play with the contrasts of fun, good times and colour and to place in this context the macabre plan in which the vindictive narrator has prepared in the wet and dark catacombs of his palazzo.

The author describes, with a calculated intention, the clothes of both characters. Regarding Fortunato, we can read about him "The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells" (Mabbot, 1978d). We realize that the aesthetic of both characters is absolutely the opposite to the other and we imagine Fortunato as a ridiculous drunk wearing colourful clothes. By defining the clothing of this character, Poe produces a visual effect that the reader assimilates as he reads more of the story.

The jingling bells of Fortunato's hat is a recurrent sound along the narration: "The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode." (Mabbot, 1978d); "He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled." (Mabbot, 1978d); "There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells" (Mabbot, 1978d). With this sound, that apparently has no importance because of its insignificance at the beginning of our reading, we can verify the idea that Fortunato is still alive. The jingling symbolises life and, when that sounds stops, we assume that Fortunato is motionless, he is not trying to escape anymore and we presume he is dead. Other hearing perceptions that we observe as readers are the sound of the cough that is present since starting the descent to the deepest of the catacombs and, at the same time, it is used with irony by the assassin who pretends to be worried about the health of the one who is about to die. Also heard are the sounds of Fortunato's shackles, the screams of the murderer so he does not have to listen to Fortunato's screams and his irrational laughs while his friend is being confined. In this way Poe creates a dramatic and sinister environment using the groans and the sound of metal provoked by the violent struggle of the prisoner against the chains.

The visual stimulus carries us to the most sordid and deepest place of the palazzo as well as the human soul, as gothic literature does. This deliberately chosen setting is undoubtedly hostile, wet and gloomy besides which the space description is very detailed: "We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame." (Mabbot, 1978d)

We shall analyse the reception of the visual and hearing perception in "The Pit and the Pendulum". This short story stands out among the others because of the richness of the sensorial world used by the author.

Echoing Muñoz-Basols's article (2012), we will direct our attention to the rhetorical figure he uses as the starting point in his article titled "Cromatismo y percepción sensorial: nuevos indicios sobre la técnica compositiva de la novela *Aura* de Carlos Fuentes".

We are going to focus in the term hipotiposis. Due to the close relation between this literary resource and the topic we are researching in this last epigraph, we are going to take several examples in this North American author's short story.

Muñoz-Basols gives us the definition of the term hipotiposis, being something that we should know to better understand how Poe creates the settings where his stories

will take place, as well as move closer and transmit to the reader the feelings of some of the characters in the stories. Javier Muñoz-Basols (2012, 49) refers to hipotiposis with these words "... pinta las cosas de una manera tan viva y enérgica que las pone en cierto modo ante nuestros ojos y convierte un relato o una descripción en una imagen, un retrato o incluso una escena viva". Moreover, he explains it in more detail making reference to Paul de Man's definition: "La hipotiposis hace presente para los sentidos algo que no está a su alcance, no sólo porque no se encuentra allí mismo, sino porque consiste, ya sea en su totalidad o en parte, en elementos demasiado abstractos para la representación sensorial" (1978, 26).

Besides all that, we are going to take some examples to use them as a paradigm of this rhetorical figure so closely related to the sensorial world. There are many examples containing descriptions that make the reader get completely involved in the scene. Nevertheless, at this point we focus only on the use of the visual and audio worlds regarding the environment but not with the main character's physical and mental health in this story since later we are going to connect them to the narrator's credibility. Everything that surrounds him and the way he perceives that reality influences the way he understands the situation in which he is absorbed. That perception from the oppression and the torture questions its credibility.

It is important that, in the lucid moments, the narrator of "The Pit and the Pendulum" feels an intense pain since he realizes the extreme situation in which he guesses the upcoming end of his life. The images of the rats with the whistling of the sharp blade moving from side to side over him implies a central theme stimulating his senses in the worst possible ways. Both perceptions produce a fatal terror in the narrator who guesses that his time is running out: "A slight noise attracted my notice, and, looking to the floor, I saw several enormous rats traversing it" (Mabbot, 1978a). "The sweep of the pendulum had increased in extent by nearly a yard" (Mabbot, 1978a).

Related to the visual perceptions we could highlight the moments in which there is hardly any light, none or when the figures shine at the end of the narrative, revived by the fire which is heating the walls; when he sees the walls move and they are going to squash him, which generates more horror indeed. The tension is so great that everything he sees and listens presages death; a cruel and painful one.

It is essential to point out that the main character perceives the sound of his own heart. This internal echo contrasts with the sounds surrounding him. He is trapped in an oppressive and threatening space. The dangerous situation is present since the very beginning when he listens to the death sentence, when he almost falls into the

well while he was walking in the darkness, when he appears tied under that demonic pendulum that was descending, or when he realizes the walls are moving... He feels a continuous suffering coming from everything he perceives. The scene in which the narrator explores the depth of the well shows us openly how the narrator discovers that there is a well in the centre of the dungeon and in order to calculate the depth he throws a stone inside it. The sound and visual references we find in this scene that grab our attention are:

For many seconds I hearkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm in its descent; at length, there was a sullen plunge into water, succeeded by loud echoes. At the same moment, there came a sound resembling the quick opening and as rapid closing of a door overhead, while a faint gleam of light flashed suddenly through the gloom, and as suddenly faded away (Mabbot, 1978a).

It would be interesting to point out in this short story, from the point of view of the study of movement, we can see the contrast between the motionless of the narrator and his environment full of kinaesthetic movements such as the pendulum, the rats, the walls, the ceiling and those pictures that seemed to come to life. They are images that mark the emotional development of the narrator as well as the reader. Thanks to the constant use of the figure of the hipotiposis, it is easy for us to feel the same way as the prisoner.

One detail that we shouldn't overlook and relates to the perceptions we are researching in this work is the semantic fields. In other words, some terms refer to the auditory sense such as "musical", "hum", "hissed" and "thunder", and others refer to the visual sense such as "blackness", "glittering" and "glaring".

In short, with the use of this kind of detailed and planned descriptions concerning visual and hearing stimuli, he is able to create tension that is sustained and increased throughout the whole story with a gothic, sinister atmosphere that makes the blood run cold for the victim and for the reader as well who is suffering in his own flesh anguish that seems to have no ending.

As a continuation of this, we are going to delve into the sensory resources used in the poem titled "Annabel Lee". First of all, we should mention that, as a poem, a certain amount of rhyme and musicality is implied when it is read aloud. Thus, alliterations and different sounds are so important, elements which appear in the poems, as Poe

explains so well in “The Philosophy of Composition”. In particular, he shows his theory applied to the narrative poem “The Raven” which is used as a paradigmatic example to explain every single point in that essay. With this starting point, if we pay attention in the alliteration of the letter “l”, we can observe how this points out a sound that causes in the reader a melancholy and deep sadness sensation. For instance, in verses 15 and 16, we can see that: “A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling/ My beautiful ANNABEL LEE;” (Mabbot, 1969). Furthermore, in the first of these two verses a series of words –“wind blew out”– evoke the sound of the wind blowing.

The repetition of the young lover’s name can be found seven times. Through poetic license almost as an echo the reader hears the repetition of his lover’s name over and over again emphasizing the main idea throughout the whole poem, in verse 39 we find an anaphora which reiterates all that “Annabel Lee” means to the voice of this narrative poem, highlighting that he loves her and he will love her beyond death: “Of my darling–my darling–my life and my bride,” (Mabbot, 1969).

The two last words of the poem make a subtle reference to a hearing stimulus (“the sounding sea”, Mabbot, 1969), several times named throughout the poem, but that sound does not appear until the end.

On the other hand, visual stimuli appear in these lines: “the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams”, “the stars”, “the bright eyes” and “the night-tide.” (Mabbot, 1969) These references let us perceive a night in which the moon and the stars shine. It is rather a symbolic night in which “Annabel Lee” could be seen represented as the same shining of the moon which brings her live memory in the narrative voice of his beautiful and adored mate.

VISUAL AND HEARING PERCEPTION AS A TRIGGER OF THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

Once we have analysed the use of the visual and hearing stimuli in general in the works we are working with, we are going to make a more detailed study to see how the perception of these sensitive stimuli affect the credibility given to the narration by the reader and, definitely, to the (double or not) narrator’s intention.

It is important to point out that Poe differentiates in respect to the effect the sensitive stimuli can affect the reader’s confidence regarding the version the facts coming from a homodiegetic narrator –that is, a narrator who is also the main character in the

storyworld (Martens, 2008, 79)–. On the one hand, we can highlight that in “The Pit and the Pendulum” we find a person whose health is affected due to the torture and confinement he is suffering. Right from the very beginning it is made clear that his senses are abandoning him: “I WAS sick–sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me” (Mabbot, 1978a). Consequently, he explains to us how he feels physically. He also gives details that his death sentence was the last auditory stimulus he perceived and, from that instant, he can see how the inquisitors move their lips but he was not able to grasp any sound. He discerns an uncertain reality among the shadows, the weakness and the loss of the conscience he suffers in some moments. He is not able to see with a clear mind the reality that surrounds him and he spends a good part of his confinement investigating his surroundings. Sometimes he touches the walls and at others he tries to guess the depth of the well which he discovers when he is about to fall down the well. Due to the fallacy of the senses, he gives us mistaken information that comes from the distorted information provided by his own senses. He does not want to confuse us but, undoubtedly, the reader guesses he cannot trust him because he is very confused.

Poe gives another perspective completely different when the narrator is a murderer as in the other short stories we are studying. As readers, we perceive some contradictions and incoherence inside the narration. In some occasions, as in “The Tell-Tale Heart”, the narrator makes a series of assertions based on his hearing sense. These clues warn us that we cannot trust him too much: “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” (Mabbot, 1978b). The narrator considers his hypersensitivity as a unique feature that makes him special and he does not consider it as clear evidence of his mental disorder. As the story progresses, we can see how the visual perception and, over all, the auditory one, are increasing in importance. On the one side, an obsession is awakened towards the old man that, supposedly, comes from the feelings provoked by one of the old man’s eyes: “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” (Mabbot, 1978b). Moreover, when he commits the crime he starts to listen to, even stronger, the old dead man’s beating heart. Thus the reader knows that it is an impossible fact and that sound only exists inside his mind, mistrusting everything coming from the narrator. There are many examples we could chose to demonstrate that he is completely convinced that he is listening the old dead man’s heart. Indeed if he has been dismembered and confined: “But the beating grew

louder, louder!... the sound would be heard by a neighbour!" (Mabbot, 1978b).

The visual perception that Poe uses in the story "The Black Cat" reveals that the narrator is not telling us the truth. We know this because we realize that although some facts can be considered as supernatural, the source of that information comes from the narrator's perception affected by a mental illness and overwhelmed by his own emotions. It is important to note that we know he is an alcoholic and that leads us to doubt all he is describing.

When his house burns and the walls fall down, with the exception of one of them, we can observe on its surface a stain in which something completely unexpected and unbelievable appears: "The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck" (Mabbot, 1978c). But, was it really a gigantic figure? The narrator, in his effort to find a logical explanation for the fact (and remove any sense of guilt if he may have) sees its shape was engraved on the wall. However, if this were true, it would not justify that the stain could be as big as he suggests. The reader finds here one more of the narrator's numerous incongruities and he understands that is inside the narrator's mind where the image takes on such great dimension.

And, finally, in the story "The Cask of Amontillado" it is not precisely the visual and auditory stimuli that are connected to the fact that the reader mistrusts the narrative voice. There are other different reasons besides the sensorial factors. Effectively, the reader considers him as an unreliaables.

CONCLUSIONS

The boundaries between the real perception that comes from outside and the hallucinatory messages emitted by the brain and assimilated as true are often blurred in Poe's narrative. Thus, by means of details that apparently do not have the greatest importance, this author manages to weave a spider web that catches and impacts the reader making him transform what he is reading into images, auditory impressions and, ultimately, into emotions that leave the reader breathless. The shouts, the darkness and other stimuli well posed by Poe, who always looks for the effect that he mentions and describes in his essay *The Philosophy of Composition*, are part of the collection of resources that hypnotize the reader and make him feel on many occasions the same as the narrator feels, or great confusion for the distrust he comes to feel for Poe's words that tend to deceive and trick the reader.

There is no doubt that Poe was the one who gave literature a psychological appearance without any precedent in English language narrative. The American writer either created a series of psychologically tormented characters or he played in his productions with possible subjective interpretations: “Tension is often created in Poe’s tales by the dichotomy between the rational tone which the narrator adopts, and the perverse, irrational nature of unconscious mind which the narrative reveals” (Walker, 1993, 120).

The common features in Poe’s texts, thus, consist of putting at the forefront both visual and auditory suggestion. The true topic is the reality about what we can see and hear: believe or not believe, discern another haunted and hellish world behind the daily appearance. It seems his productions are meant to enter through the eyes and ears, to be limited to a succession of images. It is not surprising that cinema has been fuelled so much from these stories.

As we have observed throughout the present work and have supported with several examples, we see how the author constantly tests the intuition and the ability for rational analysis by the reader. Being a great expert of how such a puzzling mixture of reality and fantasy operates, Poe is able to play with the reader’s imagination to such an extent that the narrative space is perceived mentally although with the feeling that he is contemplating it through his own eyes.

Finally, we want to highlight how Poe not only transmits concepts and images but also generates emotions. Furthermore, it is interesting to see how Poe is also able to build and furnish the narrative space through sounds and objects processed in the mind of the reader and interpreted in a totally personal and subjective way, trying to give unity and connection to all those stimuli that he collects throughout his suggestive reading.

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