

Edgar Allan Poe's Narrative Use of Literary Doubling

Miriam Fernández-Santiago, PhD.

University of Granada, Spain.

Email: mirfer@ugr.es

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Abstract

The present article analyzes the incidence of the literary tradition of doubling in the short narratives of Edgar Allan Poe. It presents an analysis of doubling in Poe's short narratives from the different critical perspectives of previous research on literary and non-literary doubling, and also from Poe's own views as a literary critic. It contends that Poe's compliant and subversive use of traditional literary doubling corresponds with his critical views on the compositional unity of effect as he developed them in "The Philosophy of Composition."

Key Words: *Literary Doubling, Short Narrative, Aesthetic Effect.*

"Since the world began there have been two Jeremys"¹

1. Introduction

The theme of the double in literature has been subject to extensive critical analysis both from the literary and non-literary perspectives, including Psychoanalytic elaboration, sociological connections, and mythological, religious or anthropological approaches. In this article, I would like to analyse the literary convention of the double in the narrative fiction of Edgar Allan Poe. In my analysis, the convention of the literary double is extended from its classical constriction to characterization into a wider concept including elements from the literary fabric such as setting construction and implied criticism. The purpose underlying such extension is to establish a basis for literary analysis that considers Poe's own critical vision relating to the compositional requirements of textual effect. I contend that Poe's use (compliant and subversive) of the literary convention of the double might transcend the merely Gothic use of psychologically unbalanced characters to become an artistic statement on compositional harmony in terms of unity and balance, and also a critical reflection on the nature of art as mimesis.

2. Defining the Literary Double

Within the Psychoanalytic tradition that approves of making paradigmatic use of literature (fictional or else) for the study of the human psyche, Eder associates the origin of the double to ethnological and mythological sources that situate the first appearance of the double "in physical images of the self, such as shadows and reflections, and in psychic projections of the self, such as gods and devils, guardian angels and familiar" and connects it to allegorical representations of "a struggle between personified virtues and vices" such as can be found in medieval morality plays.² Herdman affirms that this "theology of the moral conflict between the opposing wills in man, natural and spiritual, was developed by St Paul," and he traces it back to the Calvinist doctrine of election through Gnosticism, Manichaeism and St. Augustine's *Confessions*. At the end of the 18th century, a growing corpus of literature describing the native cultures of newly colonised peoples produces an alteration in the literary tradition of the double, causing that "[t]he concept of moral evil became associated with the primitive, the savage and the untamed in the human spirit" typical of Romanticism.³

The theme of identity is central to the literary double, but according to Dryden, it becomes more pressing for nineteenth-century subjects, who have to face the dilution of their individuality into the emergent mass of people gathering in expanding metropolis.⁴ The special interest in the theme of the double during the nineteenth-century has

¹ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe (The Griswold Edition, 1850-1856)*, 4: 267. <http://www.eapoe.org/works>.

² Eder, Doris L. "The Idea of the Double." *Psychoanalytic Review*, 65.4 (1978): 579-614, 580, 582.

³ Herdman, John. *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: MacMillan, 1990), 4-9, 11.

⁴ Dryden, Linda. *Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles*. Stevenson, Wilde and Wells (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 16.

also been explained in relation with the rise of Psychology and the theories of dual consciousness developed by Mesmer, Schubert, Charcot, Binet and Janet.⁵ The figure of the double would later develop into the Freudian unconscious; a subdivision of the human psyche that stages the moral struggle between good and evil—or primitive appetite and its civilized constriction—within the individual's own mind.

The coinage of the term *doppelgänger* is attributed to Jean Paul Richter,⁶ but it was Hoffman who in the early 19th century, would relate the figure of the literary double with a part of the personality and spread enthusiasm for duality to the rest of Europe.⁷ But the theme of the literary double is much older than that. In Western culture, some of its variants can at least be found in both the ancient Greek (mythological, dramatic or epic texts), and Judaeo-Christian traditions. Although the Gothic development of the literary double into the figure of the *doppelgänger* is often the best known and more thoroughly analyzed version of the theme of the literary double, there is also a long literary tradition of doubling in comedy.

The literary double "has been apt to take a comic turn—to turn, for instance, in a manner prefigured by Shakespearean duality, into a comedy of errors and impostures."⁸ In fact, doubling has been described as intrinsic to humor in general. Willeford notices how "[t]he fool often appropriates or replaces the image of someone else" and analyses classical representations of the Fool's bauble as an elaboration of a mirror-image that sticks out its tongue to the mirror holder (33).⁹ Also, the doubling nature of the jester as Harlequin is present in its patched costume and masked identity, and its often numinous nature.¹⁰

Alter makes an interesting distinction between two types of *doppelgängers*; the split and the double proper. To him, the split would portray a "self divided inwardly in a kind of moral *meiosis*"¹¹ that addresses a contradictory difference within the self and that connects with Herdman's historical account of the double. Alter's distinction of the figure of the split clarifies the reason underlying Herdman's description of the double and its host as a pair that "reflect hostility and conflict, yet at the same time mutual dependence and interlocked destinies"¹² and is reminiscent of the Freudian *Unheimlich*.

To Alter, the double proper, "encounters a disturbing mirror-image in the external world" and would therefore be closer to Eder's ethnological and mythological account of the origin of the double. "The double [proper]" Alter explains, "draws on a background of folktales about confrontations with demonic figures who exercise a maddening ability to mime the self, generally as part of a scheme to destroy it."¹³ Eder's psychoanalytical dissection of the literary theme of the double distinguishes several categories of doubles such as mirror images (very similar to Alter's split), manifest or latent doubles (both complementary and oppositional), foils and multiple personalities. She also distinguishes between subjective and objective doubling, and detects an underlying "psychomachia between the forces of Eros and Thanatos" in most double fiction.¹⁴

The figure of the double also seems to be related to a Romantic anxiety for (moral) freedom that is often represented in contrast with the threat of imprisonment.¹⁵ This moral constraint that seems to repress the Romantic double is sometimes represented as claustrophobic projections of the self (host) into Gothic settings. But for the romantics, the self's impossibility to escape his/her own dark nature also takes the literary expression of fate. Romantic protagonists, Herdman argues, "attribute their possession to the inscrutable workings of a destiny which they are powerless to evade,"¹⁶ which is directly linked to the idea of predestination.

This moral tincture in the construction of the literary double is retained in the Psychoanalytic readings that view the double as a possible expression of unconscious, repressed desires of *doppelgänger* hosts that (rather liberally) include forms of "consciousness" as diverse as authors, narrative voices or other characters. The literary expression of the double thus transforms fiction into the discourse of freedom from social constraints (including the Jungian Signifier).

⁵ Eder, "The Idea," 580.

⁶ Eder, "The Idea," 580.

⁷ Miller, Karl. *Doubles. Studies in Literary History* (Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1987), 49.

⁸ Herdman, *The Double*, 88.

⁹ More precisely, one of Holbein's illustrations to Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, based on an illustration to Brant's *Narrenschiff*. Willeford, William. *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience*, (London: Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 1977), 33-4

¹⁰ Zucker, Wolfgang M. "The Image of the Clown," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 12.3 (1954): 310-317, 311-312.

¹¹ Alter, Robert. "Playing host to the *Doppelgänger*" *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 (1985), 1190.

¹² Herdman, *The Double*, 15.

¹³ Alter, "Playing host," 1190.

¹⁴ Eder, "The Idea," 582, 598.

¹⁵ Dryden, *Modern Gothic*, 87; Alter "Playing Host," 1190; Miller, *Doubles*, 157.

¹⁶ Herdman, *The Double*, 12.

Moreover, the heavy sexual load of Psychoanalysis turns attention to gender roles and power relations that become apparent in the tension of literary dualism. Of special relevance in this direction are Queer Studies on the literary double as either extensions or contestations of the Psychoanalytic reading of the myth of Narcissus.

I would like to finish this introduction to the idea of the literary double with Alter's illustrative sketch of the social profile of the figure that becomes hosts to the *doppelgänger*. In it, he includes details like the host's gender (male), sociability (single, without friends or visible relatives), financial means (ample), and literacy (educated and intelligent). "Sterility," Alter adds, "disconnection, the displacement of personal by professional life, a developed mind with the leisure to exercise it, are the general fate of the *Doppelgänger* host."¹⁷

Most of these features, which are currently associated with the literary figure of the double, are liable to provide critical clues to Poe's often cryptic work. The moral dimension; the numinous, demonic character of the double as shadow; the issue of identity; the notion of fate; the Icarian contestation to social or mental imprisonment, the threat of mental imbalance, the humorous distancing and the gender perspective are useful tools for the analysis of double characters. Still, doubling is also a characteristic of the textual fabric that can shed light on the compositional techniques and critical positions that are present in Poe's narratives.

3. The literary Double in Poe: Characterization

A.- Homodiegesis.

A most pervading manifestation of doubling in Poe's narratives is the presence of a homodiegetic narrative voice. It could be argued that ninety-eight per cent of Poe's prose fiction is homodiegetic. Homodiegesis signals an internal dualism that splits the narrative voice into speaking subject and spoken object. This double quality of the narrative voice often takes the form of some "duality of mood" in the homodiegetic character, "which sometimes manifests itself in fluctuations of tone."¹⁸ Poe's homodiegetic voices frequently get so fluctuant in tone that they make readers distrustful of character consistency. Although mental imbalance (usually a family legacy) and drug or alcohol abuse often provide an acceptable explanation in terms of Aristotelian standards of mimetic probability, the account that Poe's homodiegetic narrative "voice-as-subject" gives of its behaviour as "voice-as-object" is often relegated to the unutterable.

In "The Tell Tale Heart," the narrator asks readers to bear witness of his sanity; "observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story." However, in the following paragraph, he suggests that he might have killed the old man he loved, and who had never wronged him, because "[o]ne of his eyes resembled one of a vulture;" which is suggestive of his mental imbalance. As it often occurs in Poe's narrative, and despite the fact that he *does* narrate the story, the narrator of "The Tell Tale Heart" accepts his impotence to make meaning out of it: "It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain."¹⁹ The fact that the narrator seems to be "absent" from the reasons that lead his own actions, together with narrative inconsistency or fluctuation in tone, point at doubling as the structural frame of the narrative voice.

In Poe's fiction, the homodiegetic double might appear as both an internal division of a diseased or intoxicated mind (the split), or as the external impersonation of some haunting demon (the double proper). The narrator's alcoholic intoxication in "The Angel of the Odd" is embodied in a "genius who presided over the *contre temps* of mankind"²⁰ and whose negative influence on the disastrous fate of the narrator is presented as the natural consequence of the narrator's actions. When the Angel of the Odd is first described, he appears as a mirroring image facing the homodiegetic narrator, but also as an outer being that is referred to as "monster" and "creature:"

I bethought me of looking immediately before my nose, and there, sure enough, confronting me at the table sat a personage nondescript, although not altogether indescribable. His body was a wine-pipe or a rum-puncheon [. . .] two kegs, which seemed to answer all the purposes of two legs. For arms there dangled [. . .] two tolerably long bottles, [. . .] All the head that I saw the *monster*²¹ possessed of was one of those Hessian canteens [. . .].²²

The Angel-double has elements of the undecidable in the narrator's difficulty to describe it and in the reader's difficulty to follow its speech, which is a transcription of the phonetic distortions of a drunkard's (more specifically the narrator, whom the Angel doubles).

¹⁷ Alter, "Playing host," 1190.

¹⁸ Herdman, *The Double*, 22.

¹⁹ (1:382).

²⁰ (4:282).

²¹ *Emphasis added*.

²² (4:279-280).

The open acknowledgement or underlying suggestion of madness in the homodiegetic narrative voice does not only account for the presence of the double within such voice as character. It might also render the narrative voice as the double of a host long lost in textual ambiguity, which opens up the question of usurped identity that is typical of literary doubling. The signer of the homodiegetic adventures of Hans Pfaall, introduces himself in the following terms: "I, the writer of this communication, am the *identical* Hans Pfaall himself."²³ His emphasis on similarity rather than identity (but also including the pun in "identical") adds to a lunacy that is suggested by his voyage to the Moon as much as acknowledged by Pfaall himself "lest I should be supposed more of a madman than I actually am."²⁴ In Poe's narrative, the reader often faces the uncanniness of suspecting the double's actual usurpation of the narrative perspective, which traditionally belongs to the host-subject. The Angel of the Odd, The Imp of the Perverse, and William Wilson incarnate the voices of a good consciousness that haunt a depraved host; a reversal of the double types that makes suspicion turn to the narrative voice as the true wicked double of the moral pair.²⁵

Poe's use of narrative homodiegesis is inscribed within the tradition of literary doubling through fluctuations in tone, character inconsistency and shifts of narrative perspective. The effect of a double voicing in Poe's short stories does not only create a narrative tension that adds to plot development, but also causes a certain metafictional discomfort in readers by continuously undermining suspension of disbelief. Still, other issues related to character doubling should be addressed before analysing the implications of doubling in the textual dimension.

B. Reading Queer

In accordance with Alter's social profile of the host to the doppelganger, most of Poe's double characters are male, which has often caused that some critics see a projection of his own internal division on his characters.²⁶ More recently, Queer Studies have developed a double direction in a Queer reading of Poe's doubling that renders him either homophobic,²⁷ or an advocate of sexual ambiguity.²⁸ Notwithstanding the cultural, social and biographical interest of this approach, I would rather consider the development of double characters in Poe's texts as evidence of his interest in artistic composition as an intertext of the scientific discourse of his time.

The contradiction existing between Dupin's objective "investigative method" and his "subjective implication" with his object (subject) of study in "The Purloined Letter" is interpreted by Person as Poe's "homophobic repressions of erotic identification between men."²⁹ However, Dupin himself describes it as "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent," and he lectures the narrator on the subject: "This response [. . .] lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."³⁰ As he observes Monsieur Dupin, his roommate and literary double, the narrator of "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" dwells "meditatively upon the old philosophy of the *Bi-Part Soul*, and amuse[s him]self with the fancy of a *double* Dupin — the creative and the resolvent."³¹ As it is expressed, Poe's elaboration of the idea of doubling in Dupin would be much more justifiably seen as a dialogue between the literary tradition of the double and the nineteenth-century philosophical/scientific interest in theories of double consciousness, than to the gender issue—notwithstanding the terms used by the narrator to describe their relationship.

The nineteenth-century criminalization of same-sex desire has also been considered an expression of the Gothic potential of the *doppelganger* as an incarnation of the demonic shadow that haunts the individual's moral, social and identity status. To nineteenth-century readers, homosexuality is suggestive of a perverse psychology³² as much as murder or theft. Person and Bradley³³ make a similar approach to the queerness in "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Cask of Amontillado." Despite his Queer approach to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Lint

²³(1:5). *Emphasis added.*

²⁴ (1:15).

²⁵ Particularly illustrating in this respect is Bate's analysis of character reversal in "William Wilson." Bate, Nancy Berkovitz. "I Think, but I am Not: The Nightmare of William Wilson" *Poe Studies*, 30 (1997): 27-38.

²⁶ Buranelli, Vincent. *Edgar Allan Poe* (Boston: G.K. Hall&Co., 1977), 34.

²⁷ Stadler, Gustavus T. "Poe and Queer Studies." *Poe Studies*, 33 (2000): 19-22, 19.

²⁸ Person, Leland S. "Queer Poe: The Tell-Tale Heart of His Fiction." *Poe Studies*, 41.1 (2008): 7-30, 8. Lint, Brad. "The Hermaphrodite in the Abyss: Queering Poe's Pym." *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 7.1 (2006):49-60, 51.

²⁹ Person, "Queer Poe," 9.

³⁰ (1: 272).

³¹ *Emphasis added*, (1: 183).

³² Lemay, Leo. "The Psychology of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'" *American Literature*, 54.2 (1982): 165-188, 172.

³³ Bradley, Jaqueline. "Character Doubles and Barrier Imagery in Poe's Work," *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 9.2 (2008): 55-66. Person, "Queer Poe."

acknowledges that Fiedler's interpretation of homoerotic desire in *Pym* as a Gothic element might make a plausible reading. "[T]he language of horror," Fiedler notices, "becomes that of eroticism, the [. . .] longing to fall and the desire for the dark spouse are one, a single perverseness."³⁴ Lint does not fail to see that it is precisely the ambiguity in Poe's representations of suggested, homosocial behaviour what might justify a Queer reading of doubling in his texts as resistance to normality.³⁵ Still, ambiguity is not only characteristic of doubling by itself—with no need to refer to homosocial behaviour for its interpretation—but also of the Gothic Sublime, and even (possibly) of Poe's critical conception of art as mimesis. Thus, Stadler's reading of "The Man of the Crowd" where "*er lasst sich nicht lessen*" is interpreted as a suggestion of homoeroticism,³⁶ might find a more plausible reading as an expression of Poe's vision of literature as imitation.

C.- Male-Female pairs

Although the host to the *doppelgänger* might typically be male, being a shadow of demonic tradition, the double can in fact take many shapes. Poe has represented it as the Imp of the Perverse (split) and as a Black Cat or a Fay (double proper). But when it is not a man, the most common form of the double in Poe's tales is a female one. In fact, the male-female doubling is also an important representation of doubling in literary tradition that can be traced back to the Adam/Eve pair in *Genesis* or to the androgynous primeval man of Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*: "Man and wife are among the most compelling of all dualities—opposites of a sort, a pair who may become the parents of a pair of opposing subsidiary selves."³⁷ Although Poe's female characters have often been analysed as the victims of an often mentally disturbed male characters, they so obviously parallel and oppose their male partners that their analysis as literary doubles is more than justified. They are usually twin souls or close relatives of the narrator/host (Madeline Usher, Ligeia, Berenice, Morella, Eleonora); but they are also shadows or ghosts (also the wife of the narrator in "The Black Cat") in an uncertain, threatening way (even sweet Eleonora as the guarantor of an oath) that makes them dangerous for their male hosts. Thus, the female double must be destroyed for her host to survive in terms unaffected by her existence.

Bradley sees "Berenice as the narrator's double in that what happens to one invariably affects the other,"³⁸ but also as the narrator's "phallused competitor double," which leads him to bury her alive to preserve his sense of power.³⁹ A similar approach is found in "The Fall of the House of Usher," where Roderick buries his sister alive in the house's dungeon. In this case, like in "William Wilson," the doubles are so close that the destruction of Madeleine (female double) implies the destruction of her brother (male host). Also like in Wilson's case (and "Angel of the Odd" or "The Imp of the Perverse" mentioned above), the literary tradition of the female *doppelgänger* (represented by the Eve/Adam, Mcbeth/Lady Mcbeth pattern) is subverted by having the (female) double be the good (instead of the bad) half of the doubling pair. Poe's female doubles are extremely beautiful, intelligent and noble by nature, whereas their male counterparts are perverse in a way that suggests the later are rather the wicked doubles of a female host. Although the painting in "The Oval Portrait" has been analyzed as a double that replicates/substitutes the painter's wife, the image of the painter in the act of painting is suggestive of his looking at himself on a mirror that reflects his own (perverse, murderous) image rather than his wife's. But female doubles also replicate themselves as black cats do (which often indicates their indestructibility), or their re-appearance as resurrections that continue as long as the host lives; since they belong to the host and cannot be separated from him.

D. Female pairs:

One of the most obvious cases of female doubling in Poe's tales is that of *Ligeia*, where the spirit of dark, mysterious Lady Ligeia (double) possesses the body of blonde, innocent Lady Rowena (host) as the latter dies. Lady Ligeia is characterized by her strong *will*—which is the key to the tale, as indicates the epigraph by Glanvill—a psychoanalytical reading of which leads to the typical *psychomachia* between the doubling vicious *id* and its hosting virtuous *ego*.⁴⁰ Although the character of Morella in the eponymous tale (where an epigraph from Plato's *Symposium* is illustratively included) is described as the "shadow," and "the forbidden spirit enkindling within" the narrator;⁴¹ she is herself doubled

³⁴ Lint, "The Hermaphrodite," 53.

³⁵ Lint, "The Hermaphrodite," 57.

³⁶ Stadler, "Poe and Queer," 21.

³⁷ Herdman, *The Double*, 24.

³⁸ Bradley, "Character Doubles," 60.

³⁹ Bradley, "Character Doubles," 61.

⁴⁰ Eder, "The Idea," 582.

⁴¹ (1:469).

by her daughter-twin, "the perfect resemblance of her who had departed,"⁴² who would finally answer to her mother's name and whose corpse would fill the absence of her mother's in the grave. But the second Morella has a characteristic of the literary double that her mother lacked; the *Unheimlich*. Thus, she will be as attractive as repulsive, as familiar as disgusting, as close as distant; and therefore, the love the narrator feels for her is as legitimate as suggestively (incestuously) forbidden.

The narrator's loving wife and cousin Eleonora reads like a redeeming double to vengeful Morella. She is also a dead wife, but contrary to Morella; she does not wish to be replaced by any double, which creates the narrative tension that sustains the interest in the tale. Ermengade, who finally replaces her in the narrator's heart, is described with the epithet "ethereal," and identified with a "seraph,"⁴³ which endows her with the shadowy qualities of the double. Identification of the two women is not only justified by the alliterative assimilation of their names, but also by the narrator's ambiguous use of the object pronoun in italics: "Oh, divine was the angel Ermengade! and as I looked into the depths of her memorial eyes, I thought only of them—and *of her*."⁴⁴ In fact, the narrator's final absolution from his vow of faithfulness can only make sense if Ermengade and Eleonora are two versions of the same woman.⁴⁵

The death of the painter's wife in "The Oval Portrait" seems to be caused not only because "he *would* not see that the light which fell so ghastlily in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride,"⁴⁶ but by "the exactitude of the conveyance of life into art."⁴⁷ Art, which is considered as "her rival" is the only thing that the artist's wife, who is "all light and smiles,"⁴⁸ hates. As the perfect double that would finally replace her, the portrait comes to life as the painter's wife dies. But the relevance of "The Oval Portrait" in relation with the tradition of literary doubling lays not so much in its transgression of the male-male/male-female character pattern of the double, but in that doubling is transferred from character to the concept of mimesis itself as a double that competes with and can replace life. To Freeman, the issue in "The Oval Portrait" is both aesthetic and moral: "The implication of the parasitic relationship of art and reality is that art feeds on nature [. . .] in effect destroying it in the act of converting it to art. Transformation [. . .] of life into art, is inevitably a form of murder."⁴⁹

E. Echoing the Double: Settings.

Alter, Dryden and Mills find doubling to be usually accompanied by the anguish of imprisonment and the impulse of flight.⁵⁰ The typically repressed double that fights for individual freedom from social and moral imprisonment is a threat for the socially integrated identity of the host who represses him. Thus, it is not uncommon to have literary doubles involved in actions occurring in claustrophobic settings that intensify the double's anguish of imprisonment by somehow replicating it.⁵¹

Paradigmatic of this replication is the case of "The Fall of the House of Usher," where the term "house" stands for both the building and its inhabitants, whose fate and nature are so closely linked to the building that when it breaks in two and sinks within the dark tarn that reflects its inverted image, the Usher siblings sink with it. The building itself has human-like features such as "eye-like windows"⁵² and the impression it produces on its host is typical of the double: "He [Roderick] was *enchained*⁵³ by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted [. . .] an

⁴² (1:472).

⁴³ (1:451).

⁴⁴ (1:451).

⁴⁵ Although Silverman argues that Eleonora "returns, but not in another body," the epigraph by Lully at the beginning of the tale rather suggests the opposite: "*Sub conservatione formae specificae salva anima*," the soul is saved through preservation of a specific form (1:446). Silverman, Ken. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 170.

⁴⁶ (1:368).

⁴⁷ Freedman, William. "Poe's Oval Portrait of 'The Oval Portrait.'" *Dark Romanticism: History, Theory, Interpretation*, 34.1&2 (2001): 7-12, 8.

⁴⁸ (1:368).

⁴⁹ Freedman, "Poe's Oval Portrait," 8.

⁵⁰ Alter, "Playing Host," 1190; Dryden, *Modern Gothic*, 87, 102; Mills, Bruce. *Poe, Fuller, and the Mesmeric Arts: Transition States in the American Renaissance* (Columbia, MO, USA: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 85-101.

⁵¹ Buranelli contends that Poe uses atmosphere to reinforce the description of his characters' mental state (Buranelli, Edgar Allan, 79). A study of the use of chromatic references in his narrative shows a clear predilection for black and white, weak illumination, obscurity and a nightly atmosphere; which are meant to reflect not only dark deeds, but also crooked minds. Castillo, Debra A. "Borges and Pynchon: The Tenuous Symmetries of Art," *New Essays on "The Crying of Lot 49."* Patrick O'Donnell, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21-46, 45-46.

⁵² (1:291).

⁵³ *Emphasis added*.

influence which some peculiarities in the form and substance of his family mansion, had [. . .] obtained over his spirit.”⁵⁴ The Ushers are not only doubled by a (their) house that mirrors them and is called like them, they are also imprisoned within their house in the two senses of the word; as the decaying building that would bury them and also as a family lineage limited by the biological legacy of their mental illness.

To Cagliero, “Poe’s interiors are always a *Haunted House* of thought”⁵⁵ that reflects or doubles the nature or mental state of his characters. The decoration of Lady Rowena’s bridal chamber in “Ligeia” is presented as a reflection of the “incipient madness” of its narrator, whose description ends with the “hideous and uneasy animation” of the chamber as a phantasmagoric product of his own mind that somehow seems to contribute to her progressive decay. The location of the eccentric bridal chamber being “a high turret of a castellated abbey” is also suggestive of physical and mental imprisonment between the fairy tale and the lunatic asylum.⁵⁶

Bate’s argument that the narrator of “William Wilson” might in fact be the double of a subject who dreams him is based on her identification of the narrator and his environment.⁵⁷ In fact, the narrator’s double Wilson is first introduced after the description in binary terms of the boarding school where the narrator passed from childhood to adolescence. The two-story school is an Elizabethan “prison-like” building with an impossible interior design that is claustrophobically labyrinthine. The desolate play-ground at the rear of the building and the green front exit are separated by a “sacred division.”⁵⁸ The narrator even suggests that the existence of his double might be caused by his seclusion in the school: “Encompassed by the massy walls of this venerable academy, I passed [. . .] the years of the third lustrum of my life. The teeming brain of childhood requires no external world of incident [. . .] I must believe that my first mental development had in it much of the uncommon — even much of the *outré*.”⁵⁹ If, as Bate argues, the narrator is the double who calls himself “William Wilson” although such is not his real name, he seems to be the product of a repressive institution he needs to flee. The boarding-school as a repressive instrument doubles Wilson’s good host-conscience as much as the narrator does, in a way that identifies character and setting as mutual doubles and doubles of an original host.

According to Dryden, dichotomist oppositions in elements that depict a setting “like day and night, light and dark, upper worlds and lower worlds” are characteristic of “tales of Gothic duality.”⁶⁰ The horizontal double settings of Poe’s tales described so far are sometimes doubled by a vertical doubling that by distinguishing between the upper and lower halves of a setting, echoes the division of character identity between an upper-conscious literary host and its lower-subconscious double. The inside-outside distinction of the prison-like horizontal setting is also reinforced by the vertical double setting, whose claustrophobic atmosphere is suggestive of entombment.

The doublings of the narrator and the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and of Montessor and Fortunato in “The Cask of Amontillado”⁶¹ is reflected in both the vertical division between the upper world and the underworld and the repressive entombment of the literary double. The old man’s “evil eye” (*I*) that watches and threatens the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and the usurper Fortunato of “The Cask of Amontillado” are respectively walled up and buried alive (or at least beating) underground so that their hosts can be freed from them.⁶²

The underworld in “A Descent into the Maelström” with its incredible destructive potential serves as setting for the struggle for survival of two brothers. The surviving one narrates the story—significantly—from the top of a mountain. In “The Assigination,” the silent waters both hide the secrets below their surface and reflect the characters above. Cole argues that the initial description of the waters “creates a surface/depth dichotomy, which presupposes the possibility of disclosing ‘secrets,’ of enacting a hermeneutic operation that would comprehend a mystery.”⁶³ Such secrets involve the couple formed by the Marchessa di Mentoni and “the stranger”⁶⁴ who rescues her son from his liquid prison, and suggest

⁵⁴ (1:297).

⁵⁵ Cagliero, Roberto. “Poe’s Interiors: The Theme of Usurpation in ‘The Cask of Amontillado.’” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 2.1 (2001): 30-36, 30.

⁵⁶ (1:461-462).

⁵⁷ Bate, “I Think,” 27.

⁵⁸ (1:419-420).

⁵⁹ (1:421).

⁶⁰ Dryden, *Modern Gothic*, 17.

⁶¹ In the case of “The Cask of Amontillado,” doubling is also replicated by the carnival masks and disguises that characterize Harlequin as Herlekin (the leader of a troop of demons who rode the night air on horses. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, at <http://www.etymonline.com>, retrieved 01/26/2011).

⁶² Notwithstanding the fluctuant identity of host and double in these tales, the vertical division of the settings mirrors and reinforces their doubling.

⁶³ Cole, Merrill. “The Purloined Mirror.” *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 8.2 (1997): 135-151, 139.

⁶⁴ (1:374). It must be noted that the name of the stranger is not revealed and that he first appears out of a niche in the prison of the Old Republic that is most conveniently “right opposite her chamber window” (1: 372). The stranger has thus all the features of the literary double; eschatological elements that suggest his being a (phantom) shadow, a nature that is opposite and complementary to the

they lead a double secret life as lovers. The existence of this double reality (the apparent above and the real below) also produces the narrative tension that leads the plot to its climax at the end of the tale.

Finally, Hans Pfaal's doubling into his comic doppelganger is most illustratively doubled by the setting where action develops: "Hans's pflight and possible Pfaal are several things at once: [. . .] a scientific experiment, and an exercise of poetic fancy [. . .] in a vehicle both ramshackle and precisely calibrated."⁶⁵ Pfaal ascends and descends from and to the Moon and the Earth in his attempt to escape and return to his being Hans Pfaal. As the tale's epigraph suggests with the reference to Tom O'Bedlam, Pfaal's is a phantom doubling; but a doubling that follows many conventions of the literary tradition, including the urge to escape and the Gothic development of the literary double as a mental fabrication of his host.

Since the threat of doubling resides in the possible replacement of the original host, echoing double characters with other types of doubling should increase the reader's response of terror to the tale, and imply strengthening the tale's unity of effect. Poe's use of the doubling literary tradition is subversive in several ways that include gender reversals of the pattern and the personification of settings as character doubles, but its most significant subversion is that he often presents the double's perspective instead of the host's. This doubles the effect of awe and terror in readers since it suggests the most dreadful conclusion that the reader has been led to identify not with the host, but with his evil usurper. In mimetic terms, this means that the imitation or doubling of a character claims for an identity and status prior to the "natural" item it imitates. Although in Poe's—like in Cervantes'—times, this is as much as being mentally disturbed, a late twentieth-century perspective would see it as the precession of simulacra.⁶⁶

F. The Textual Exegesis of Mimesis as Doubling.

A similar argument is defended by Bate when he affirms that "Edgar Allan Poe's 'William Wilson' presents a cosmos that foists upon the timorous reader the possibility that the universe itself is a dream or a fiction: "[r]esembling a 'dream within a dream,' this tale blurs the boundary dividing the 'real' world from the dreamscape, that fictive cosmos inhabited by the artist."⁶⁷ Eder considers the theme of the double to be of an intrinsic interest to artistic production: "It is easy to understand the attraction the idea of the double has for the writer, whose consciousness is, by the very nature of his task as creator-observer *and* participant in the world he imagines, sharply dual. Self-consciousness always implies duality—the subject reflecting on himself as object."⁶⁸ However, her focus on identity makes her miss the implications of the theme of the double for the idea of mimesis as an artistic construct. A more subtle connection between doubling and artistic representation is described by Herdman when he affirms: "Psychic duplication and division, on the one hand, and the open mind, on the other, are conceptions which are kept apart by historians of Romanticism: but they were pursued at the same early point in its history, [. . .] They are conceptions which predict, and participate in, the young idea of the following century—the Modernist view of art's impersonality, of the artist's need to be absent from his creations."⁶⁹

In Poe's tales, it is not unusual to see doubling extended from the merely fictional to the metafictional level in a way that unites literature and literary criticism as it questions the primacy of the real over the artistic. Like the portrait of Dorian Gray, which would finally become the real term in the artistic doubling of its host while the physical Dorian tried "to realize an aesthetic ideal in his life,"⁷⁰ the portrait of the artist's wife in "The Oval Portrait" exchanges places with its original and comes to life as she dies. The portrait itself becomes the original of "a small volume which [. . .] purported to criticise and describe [it],"⁷¹ and the volume itself is also described and commented by the narrator of the tale. The reader that intends to follow the series would unavoidably reach the conclusion that this narrator must be doubled by other narratives that take it as their original. To this argument, Freedman adds that the awe-inspiring perfection of lifelikeness of the portrait "is achieved not by studious attention of the life it renders but by an ardor for the labor that refuses to perceive it"⁷² because the artist "turned his eyes from the canvass rarely even to regard the countenance of his

Marchessa, and the impulse to flee his imprisonment. The image reflected by the channel is therefore the doubling of character doubling.

⁶⁵ Herdman, *The Double*, 161-162.

⁶⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, trans. (New York: Semiotext(e) 1983), 1-75.

⁶⁷ Bate, "I Think," 27.

⁶⁸ Eder, "The Idea," 580.

⁶⁹ Herdman, *The Double*, 22.

⁷⁰ Dryden, *Modern Gothic*, 122.

⁷¹ 1:366.

⁷² Freedman, "Poe's Oval," 9.

wife."⁷³ The "labor" that is added to the artistic double accounts for the unfamiliar tincture of uncanniness typical of doubling and that is absent from the natural host. A similar deferral of the original is found in the falsifications of "The Purloined Letter," where the purloined original seems to be fatefully doomed to be replaced by a double that is never overtly acknowledged to be anything but an original by its holder.

To Freedman, "Poe often demands [from his readers] the reluctant simultaneous suspension of belief and disbelief alike"⁷⁴ that in "The Oval Portrait," is a consequence of the tale's concern "with the entangled relationship between carnal reality and the art that rejects, transcend, and yet unavoidably includes it."⁷⁵ The fact that most of Poe's tales that incorporate doubling among their themes are narrated by the homodiegetic characters that are suspicious of doubling their hosts makes their narratives equally unreliable as mimetic representations of the supposedly original narratives that would have been replaced by Poe's tales. Poe creates doppelgangers of his narratives that mirror (and subvert) the tradition of the literary doubling of characters. In his paradigmatic tale on doubling, the narrator Wilson recalls how difficult it was to ascertain in which of the two *stories* of the boarding school "one happened to be," given "its incomprehensible subdivisions,"⁷⁶ which can be read as a pun on two possible readings of that would question which Wilson is the host and which the double in the eponymous tale. Cole argues that the ambiguity pervading Poe's tales is achieved by means of narrative doubling; "the text's mirror chamber, where every viewpoint is immediately doubled and reversed, every stance creates its opposite, and the play of reflection recedes into the endless abyss of opposing mirrors."⁷⁷ Ware sees this ambiguity as possibly resulting from the irreducible dualism of the allegorical and the fantastic levels of the tale.⁷⁸

As the undecidedness of character identity in literary doubling is often expressed by either having two characters share the same name/initial (Usher, Wilson, D.), or by leaving them unnamed (the stranger in "The Assignment," the artist's wife in "The Oval Portrait," "The Man of the Crowd"), the ambiguity of the double text is often expressed in Poe as the problem of naming. His narratives are endemically affected by the impossibility of expression: dates are usually incomplete; characters' family names and places of birth, impossible to remember; the means of thought, inscrutable; character behaviour, absurdly incomprehensible. To Stadler, the undecidability caused by doubling in "The Man of the Crowd" produces the narrative action that constitutes the tale,⁷⁹ which might point to undecidability as the possible key to interpret the tale. Similarly, Cole considers that character doubling parallels the notion of text as mimesis when he argues that: "Just as the narrator's journey within the past time of the narrative is a quest for knowledge that never succeeds fully, so is the quest of the implicit reader."⁸⁰ In the same sense, Ware defends that "the narrator's [William Wilson's] interpretive hesitations are a thematization of an appropriate reader response."⁸¹ Or to put it in terms more in tune with Poe's critical views, resolving ambiguity in Poe's tales of duality "would be to suck the lifeblood out of the *aesthetic effect*,"⁸² which is the same as saying that narrative doubling is intentionally designed to contribute to the achievement of the tales' final effect.

G. The Tale is Doubled by its Frame.

Miller sees Derrida's famous contribution to the twentieth-century discussion of "The Purloined Letter" to have a "place in the long history of duality" since Derrida attributes Poe's literary uncertainty to his "employment of words with a double and undecidable meaning."⁸³ To Derrida, "[t]he fictional structure [of the tale] is reduced as soon as it is related to the condition of its truth."⁸⁴ He argues that it is "possible to read the whole thing [the tale] as a matter of writing, and of writing off its course, in a writing space unboundedly open to grafting onto other writing."⁸⁵ He not only finds the analogy

⁷³ (1:368).

⁷⁴ Freedman, "Poe's Oval," 7.

⁷⁵ Freedman, "Poe's Oval," 10.

⁷⁶ (1:420).

⁷⁷ Cole, "The Purloined Mirror," 136.

⁷⁸ Ware, Tracy. "The Two Stories of 'William Wilson.'" *Studies in Short Fiction*, 26:1 (1989): 43-48, 47.

⁷⁹ Stadler, "Poe and Queer," 21.

⁸⁰ Cole, "The Purloined," 137.

⁸¹ Ware, "The Two Stories," 47.

⁸² Moores, D.J. " 'Oh Gigantic Paradox:' Poe's 'William Wilson' and the Jungian Self." *Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 7.1 (2006): 31-48, 46.

⁴⁶ *Emphasis added.*

⁸³ Miller, *Doubles*, 22. In fact, although Miller speaks of Derrida's work in more general terms, Derrida's description of the purloined letter in Poe's eponymous tale as undecidable and in terms of doubling makes Miller's reference to "The Purveyor of Truth" quite obvious.

⁸⁴ Derrida, Jacques. "The Purveyor of Truth." *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975): 31-113, 53.

⁸⁵ Derrida, "The Purveyor," 102.

between "The Purloined Letter" and the "two other stories to which 'this one' is grafted"⁸⁶ to be the core of the tale, but the text to be framed by settings that work as intertextual hosts or doubles to the tale by means of analogy. A similar procedure is followed in "The Murders in Rue Morgue," where what Derrida calls the tale's frame and its preface exchange places⁸⁷ as both terms of textual doubling (what could be called the host and the double text). Doubling at multiple levels, Derrida argues, "imprint[s] the purloined letter with an incorrigible indirection."⁸⁸

Just like double characters are often recognized in the text by their "act[ing] out of character,"⁸⁹ Poe's tales on doubling also "act out of text." Such is the case of "The Mystery of Marie Rôget," a pastiche of periodical publications that double each other as they double a supposedly original plot that is *finally* narrated by the text that reproduces them (the tale). The same narrative frame is provided for "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," which does not only build the story on allusions to personal and journalistic texts that also (mis)translate and copy each other, but overtly expresses its intention to speculate on "the *results* of the discovery"⁹⁰ and ends with a reflection on "Speculation."⁹¹ Finally, Hans Pfaall escapes Rotterdam on "a balloon manufactured entirely of dirty newspapers;"⁹² which makes a perfect allegory of the "volatile" nature of journalistic textuality as it shifts into narrative fiction. In all of these cases, ambiguity relating the nature of text and frame as either host or doubling text, contributes to exegetical uncertainty.

Stadler's homoerotic reading of "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" leads him to find in the supposedly liminal representation of male characters and Poe's fascination with the irrational, an "instance of his proto-poststructuralism."⁹³ Be it that Poe advanced Post-structuralism (as he would have also advanced Symbolism), or that post-structuralist readings of Poe's texts are putting forward different interpretive possibilities (as his reading by the French Symbolists did), Poe's narratives seem to show a series of features that make them specially sensitive to a post-structuralist approach; and that are somehow related to doubling as literary technique that affects both means (mimesis) and content (characters, settings and plot), and to textual uncertainty as its consequent literary effect.⁹⁴

4. Conclusion. The Artist and the Critic

Finally, I must be allowed the concession of one more analogy to be able to argue that the artistic and the critical facets of Poe do also partake of the traditional elements of doubling. This is not only because his critical reviews often present the tone and rhetorical elaboration of his literary texts, but also because the later also give overt and implied expression to his critical opinions on artistic composition. In his analysis of the character of Dupin, Kelly proposes a reading of Poe's detective stories that may "connect [Poe's] attitudes as a reviewer and [his] practices as a creative writer," arguing that "those attitudes evident in [his] critical work may appear in his creative practices at levels of technique and content."⁹⁵ The interest of such an approach would not only lie in the intertextual doubling of author and character proposed by Kelly, but also in the possibility of establishing an intertextual dialogue between Poe's literary and critical work that might render a plausible interpretation of Poe's literary work from his own critical perspective.

⁸⁶ Derrida, "The Purveyor," 101.

⁸⁷ Derrida, "The Purveyor," 103.

⁸⁸ Derrida, "The Purveyor," 110.

⁸⁹ Moores, "Oh Gigantic Paradox," 43.

⁹⁰ 1: 102.

⁹¹ 1: 108-109.

⁹² 1: 2.

⁹³ Stadler, "Poe and Queer," 20.

⁹⁴ Although I might feel particularly critical with readings that anachronically find post-structuralist elements in early nineteenth-century literature, I have to accept that Poe's own aesthetic views are often presented in a form that requires little commentary (or perhaps too much) when contrasted with post-structuralist views. Consider the following extract from "The Philosophy of Composition." Since Poe italicizes, I have underlined for emphasis: "I prefer commencing with the consideration of an effect. Keeping originality always in view — for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest — I say to myself, in the first place, 'Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?' Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can best be wrought by incident or tone — whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone — afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect" (1:259-260). The text is not only philosophically ambiguous, but even funny in a silly way that must/might have delighted Derrida.

⁹⁵ Kelly, Warren Hill. "Detecting the Critic: The Presence of Poe's Critical Voice in His Stories of Dupin." *Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 4.2 (2003): 77-86, 77.

To Kelly, the content of the Dupin stories “comment on the proposed purpose of the narrative technique,” which to him would be “that of exposing readers’ insensitivity.”⁹⁶ Notwithstanding Poe’s collusive inclination to tease the readers of his narratives, he expressed his critical concern for the response of his readers towards (his) literary work more overtly in relation with the unity of effect in art. In “The Philosophy of Composition,” he argues that “it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes—that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment.”⁹⁷ Although the intended effect of Poe’s tales may differ from each other, that they are concerned with truth and passions rather than beauty (which according to Poe is the main purpose of poetry) would indicate that both the intellect and the heart should be involved in it.⁹⁸ As has been showed above, the effect of doubling often involves both raising certain the passions in readers (terror in the Gothic tales, hilariousness in the humorous ones) and questioning identity, fiction and narrative as objective truths (confusion, uncertainty, undecidability), which makes of it a useful literary technique.

Aware as he certainly was of its potential, Poe makes doubling permeate all of the layers of his tales. Doubling (double characters) makes the incident that builds the thesis of the story, and draws the setting where it happens. The effect of awe that is usually intended for the Gothic tales is achieved by the combination of the fear (passion) and wonder (intellect) elicited by the uncanny quality of doubling. Doubling also serves the purposes of humorous tales as its effects also include surprise and hilariousness in its appeal to both the intellect and passions. Literary doubling provides the two opposing poles the tension between which allows building plot to its climax. And finally it gives an appropriate tone for the incident (uncertainty) by means of unreliable homodiegesis at the level of narrative voice, of metafictional ambivalence between the natural and the mimetic aspects of the literary work, and of metacritical undecidability by means of intertextual deferral of literary sources.

If Beauty, as Poe argues in “The Philosophy of Composition,”⁹⁹ is the effect (elevation of the soul) “experienced in consequence of contemplating ‘the beautiful,’ then Truth and Passion must be the effects (elevation of intellect and heart) of the contemplation of “the true” and “the passionate.” The reader of Poe’s tales on doubling appeal to the intellect and the heart at so many levels of the narrative composition that contemplation of doubling in them is a holistic experience that constitutes an act of doubling itself. “One result of this too-neat duplication,” Lemay argues, “is an aesthetic pleasure in the extraordinary unity of the tale’s formal motifs and plot.”¹⁰⁰ Although Lemay misses the critical aspects of doubling in the metafictional and metacritical traits of Poe’s tales, he still perceives the aesthetic dimension achieved through them.

Poe’s intended unity of effect is achieved in many of his tales by means of literary doubling, a technique he used as he inherited it from the previous literary tradition and that he also manipulated, transformed and subverted to transcend the merely thematic and intertwine with the technical aspects of short narrative. Although Cagliero argues that the reference to “Arabesque” in *Eureka* shows Poe’s preference for the “metaphysical unity of the many in contrast with the monstrous uniformity of the double created by the mirror”¹⁰¹ and in spite of the fact that he is discussing poetry, the possible influence of Victor Hugo’s theory of the grotesque in art (the union of *les qualités les plus opposées*) on Poe’s aesthetic paradigm¹⁰² might gain a new dimension when applied to doubling.

His originality with respect to this, “demands in its attainment less of invention than negation”¹⁰³ since both the effects of Awe (as it appeals to both intellect and heart) and Beauty (as the elevation of the soul) share the ineffable as a means for achievement in the literary work. But as negation is paradoxically founded on the “original” term it negates, also does literary expression find the ineffable as its basis, as do the two mirroring terms of literary doubling.

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⁹⁶ Kelly, “Detecting the Critic,” 80.

⁹⁷ 2: 262.

⁹⁸ 2:262-263.

⁹⁹ 1:262.

¹⁰⁰ Lemay, “The Psychology,” 171.

¹⁰¹ Cagliero, “Poe’s Interiors,” 31.

¹⁰² Pollin, Burton R. *Discoveries in Poe* (London, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 5, 23.

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