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**VOICES FROM THE GRAVE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN IN
POE'S SHORT STORIES**

Campina Grande – PB

Junho, 2012

TATIANA REIS DA SILVA

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STORIES

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RESUMO

Este trabalho se propõe a analisar as personagens Morella, Madeline, Ligeia, Rowena, Berenice e Eleonora nos contos de Poe, sob o ponto de vista apresentado por Estés em sua definição de ideal de Mulher, e das teorias de Millett e Figes acerca do comportamento feminino. Ambientado quase sempre em ambientes internos, psicológicos, as personagens femininas de Poe apresentam características como morbidez, fraqueza física, palidez, falta de vigor, isolamento, tristeza, depressão, sensibilidade, solidão, humor sombrio que podem ser relacionadas às consequências de uma repressão provocada pelo seu papel na sociedade e exercida por seus companheiros. Todas elas são condenadas à morte precoce. Assim sendo, elas são percebidas tradicionalmente como sendo belas e frágeis, sem força de personalidade. Nosso estudo tenta desvendar esta impressão, mostrando que na verdade, as mulheres que aparecem nos contos de Poe possuem um nível de inteligência fora de comum, uma vitalidade enorme, e a capacidade de exercer seu poder sobre seus detratores, assustando e punindo-os até após a morte.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Mulher, Poe, Morte, Vida, Arquétipo.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to analyze the characters Morella, Madeline, Ligeia, Rowena, Berenice and Eleonora, who appear in the short stories of Poe, from the perspective of the Ideal Woman presented by Estés, and the theories of Figs and Millett about female behavior. Poe's women are always confined to gloomy interiors which reflect psychological states. They present characteristics such as morbidity, physical weakness, paleness, lack of vigor, isolation, sadness, depression, sensitivity and loneliness, which could be attributed to the repression provoked by the role dictated to them by society and imposed upon them by their male partners. All of them are condemned to an early death. As a result, they are traditionally perceived as being beautiful and fragile. An attempt has been made in this study to contest this point of view, demonstrating that actually the women who appear in Poe's short stories possess an uncommon level of intelligence, an enormous vitality and the capacity to exercise their power over their detractors by terrifying and punishing them even after death.

KEY WORDS: Women, Poe, Death, Life, Archetype.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women have been relegated to an inferior position relative to men because they are considered incapable of achieving anything of value. This idea can be seen reflected in literature over the centuries. The tales of Edgar Allan Poe, whose own life was very sad, have given women even more peculiar aspects thanks to the melancholy, haunting, dark and supernatural aspects of his writings. His stories about the dark side of human nature have won the admiration of critics and literature lovers all over the world. These tales portray women as weak, without initiative and in a state of "living death", if not totally dead. In fact Poe felt that the death of a beautiful woman was the most beautiful poetic subject. In this connection Dylan Thomas comments:

The most beautiful thing in the world to Poe was a woman dead: Poe is not to be challenged on the grounds of taste, but on those of accuracy, for a woman dead is not a woman at all, the spirit that made her a woman being fled and already metamorphosed. To love a dead woman does not appear to me to be necessarily unhealthy, but it is a love too one-sided to be pure. (THOMAS, apud MEYERS , p.103)

The fragility of women is therefore the aspect that fascinates Poe.

The theories studied in this work agree about the condition of subordination of women, but at different levels. The psychoanalytic theories of Clarissa Pinkola Estés show us that the woman owns a psychic force that is able to overcome male superiority, but is subdued by indulgence or unconsciousness. This force comes from the female spirit and is represented by the archetype of the Wild Woman, a set of behavior patterns that, if followed, would result in freedom and vitality of the soul and the body of the woman. The aspects of this behavior are also depicted and supported by literature. Kate Millett shows us that the functioning of society as we know it depends on a power relationship between superordinate and subordinate. In this relationship it is the woman who is at a disadvantage due to the fact that most of the credit for achievements in human history is attributed to men. Eva Figes' analysis of Freudian theories about the behavior of women in society also shows the restrictions underlying female behavior, seen as the weaker sex.

The intention of this work is to give a new interpretation of the female figures in Poe's tales, analyzing the women in the stories "Morella" "Ligeia", "Berenice", "Eleanora" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" according to the theories mentioned here, and to show that despite

their apparently enslaved behavior and their vulnerability, these women are far from weak and repressed, they are women who have, in fact, a hidden force, power, intelligence and vitality which can challenge male power.

2. FEMINIST THEORIES

Edgar Allan Poe declared that the “most poetical topic in the world” was the death of a beautiful woman, and this idea is repeated obsessively in his poems and fiction. This has sometimes been explained as the consequence of the early deaths of many beautiful young women whom he loved: his mother Eliza Poe, his foster mother Frances Allan, his friend’s mother Jane Stannard and his wife, Virginia Clemm. Poe’s female characters correspond to two types, his feminine ideal of “the beautiful, naïve maiden who dies an untimely death” and “the willful dark-haired woman who fascinates but also threatens the narrator with reminders of his own vulnerability and decay” (WEEKES, 2004, p.159). Studying the theories of Clara Pinkola Estés, Kate Millett and Eva Figes may help us to understand Poe’s attitude to the willful women who appear in his fiction.

2.1 THE ARCHETYPE OF WILD WOMAN

The Wild Woman archetype is the subject of study in Clarissa Pinkola Estés’s book *Women Who Run With Wolves* (1992), in which she talks about the natural instincts of women and their relationship with the world, comparing this with the wild animals’ instinct, more specifically with wolves. She illustrates her ideas through the analyses of tales that involve women’s nature. Her version of Bluebeard’s story is worth special attention.

Estés discusses original female nature and wild nature, comparing their characteristics and arguing that both are continually ignored or destroyed as they are seen as a threat to society. She argues that wild wolves and Wild Women share many psychic characteristics, being strong, inquiring and having great powers of endurance. They are adaptable and brave. In spite of this:

[...] both have been hounded, harassed and falsely imputed to be devouring and devious, overly aggressive, of less value than those who are their detractors. They have been the target of those who would clean up the wilds as well as the wildish environs of the psyche, extinguishing the instinctual, and leaving no trace of it behind. (ESTÉS, 1992, p.4)

A pure female interior exists in each woman that is comprised basically of a hidden instinct that is responsible for female vitality and reveals itself or even mingles with what

psychology calls human psyche. To understand how this *intrinsic nature* works, it is not enough only to understand the social and cultural factors but also the thoughts, feelings and efforts that create the natural power of woman.

Woman has been relegated to an inferior position throughout history. She was obliged to abandon the ancient wisdom in favor of modern life and her instinct and nature have been reprimanded. Estés believes that the comprehension of female psyche as a wild woman is the way of retrieving female vitality. But she feels that modern psychology has been proved to be inadequate to reach the female spirit. Thus "the goal must be the retrieval and succor of women's beautiful and natural psychic form" (p.6) and not their forced adaptation to the demands of society.

According to the author, there is a dormant memory inside women, a memory about their deepest instincts or their female essence that is activated at the sound of the words *woman* and *wild* because of an innate intuitive power that exists in all women. The word "wild" here is related to something pure and natural, to live according to what nature provides internally and externally. This essence appears quickly in little happenings or the "transient tastes of the wild" and also "fleeting tastes": moments of human greatness in which women are swayed by their interior strength (such as the birth of a child, for example) showing the wild woman inside them.

This savage spirit is implicit in beautiful sights or sounds and also in "written or spoken words", as a sensation of identification with a story or the beauty of a poem or anything that makes a woman reflect about who she is (woman in general) and what she has done for herself, for her inner satisfaction. When it is retrieved, the wild nature of women becomes necessary and needs to be preserved to support the female being's soul and body.

The wild woman has an area of expertise so wide in the female psyche that her names will depend on the need for which she presents herself. In Estés words, "Wild Woman engenders every important facet of womanliness, [...] by naming her we create for her a territory of thought and feeling within us." (p.9) She is the guide, guiding lost women, she has the necessary wisdom to point out the way and the support needed to follow it. A woman in harmony with the Wild Woman is a woman in harmony with the world and with herself. She does not live only for others' purposes, whatever it is - family, work, partner or society.

She lives mainly for herself. And this vitality exceeds the limits of psychic and transpires in the external world. This psychological nature never goes away. On the contrary, it always returns: “Even the most repressed woman has a secret life, with secret thoughts and secret feelings which are lush and wild, that is, natural. [...] she knows intuitively that someday there will be a loophole, an aperture, a chance and she will hightail it to escape.” (ESTÉS,1992, p.10).

Without the Wild Woman, women become just shadows, specters of what might they have been. Their strength, their vigor, their dignity, their resistance, their pride, their safety, their conscience, wit, power and protective instinct, which are also found in wolves, are shrunken. Wild woman is the wild spirit that dictates the rules of thinking, emotions and actions of woman. She is the understanding of the female’s soul. She lives in every living thing that exists in nature such as the wings of a butterfly, the noise of the rivers, the song of birds, the cry of a baby, the smile of children and the beauty of flowers, for example.

The following characteristics describe a woman who has lost contact with her wild instinct in Estés’ view:

[...] feeling extraordinarily dry, fatigued, frail, depressed, confused, gagged, muzzled, unaroused. Feeling frightened, halt or weak, without inspiration, without animation, without soulfulness, without meaning, shame-bearing, chronically fuming, volatile, stuck, uncreative, compressed crazed (p.11)

The story of Bluebeard is used by Estés to illustrate the oppression of women by men, and how one resourceful woman was able to emerge victorious.

Bluebeard’s tale

There was a gigantic man with a blue shine in his beard. This man flirted with three sisters, but they were afraid of him. After going out with him, the youngest accepted to marry him and she went to live in his palace. One day, before a trip, he gave the bunch of keys of all the rooms to his wife and told her that she could use every room of the palace except one that could be opened by a little and different key. The older sisters went to the palace to stay with their youngest sister and keep her company while her husband was away. Together, they decided to find what door that particular key opened. They found a little door and discovered that it was the door in question. On the other side there was a small room full of bones and

blood of Bluebeard's other wives. The key immediately started to bleed nonstop, staining the wife's clothes. On the next day, Bluebeard returned and discovered his wife's disobedience and he decided to kill her. He took her by force to the room of death, but she asked for time to prepare herself for death. During these few minutes she ran to other room and asked the sisters (shouting from the window) if they had seen their older brothers. After three attempts they answered that they had. Their brothers appeared and killed Bluebeard.

On the occasion of the trip, Bluebeard gives all the keys to his wife, including the one that cannot be used. This gives the wife the knowledge that something is wrong. But if she is naïve and prefers to ignore her curiosity, accepting orders from the person that she believes to be her protector, she will never discover what is wrong. Her supposed freedom is actually a prison, since she is blocked from knowing the truth about her husband and therefore about her own life. Her two older sisters, on the other hand, follow their instincts and agree according to their wild spirit. They understand, unconsciously or not, that disobedience is necessary, to discover what is hidden is necessary, and that to listen to their feelings is necessary.

Estés mentions the belief that doors made of wood and stone – elements of nature – contained a guardian spirit, remitting specially to something spiritually valuable stored or imprisoned. This door is a kind of psychic magic barrier and what prevents women from opening it is the fear of the unknown or what she does not want to know.

The little door in the story of Bluebeard therefore, represents the obstacles, the barriers that guard, holding or hiding something. The little key is the weapon that can break this barrier and allow what is hidden to show itself. In Bluebeard's tale these keys, actually ask a question, the question that inspires woman to find out the truth: "Where do you think the door is, and what might lie beyond it?" (p. 52) or "What stands behind? What is not as it appears? What do I know deep in my ovaries that I wish I did not know? What of me has been killed, or lies dying?" (Ibid, p.56)

The bleeding key is the proof that the wife now knows the truth about the real situation of her spirit. She sees the wound, and to know that it exists makes the pain and the bleeding increase. But this is necessary to alert her about the seriousness of the situation.

Clothes represent something that cover people, a mask that hides or disguises what people really are. When blood stains clothes, the mask has lost its utility, since something

very bad is obviously happening and needs to be explained. Bones of a corpse are the most difficult to decompose. In the archetypal vision they represent what cannot be destroyed so easily. Thus, despite having their identity, strength, beauty stolen, something remains. Something that can be rebuilt. Here, we have another representation of the feminine soul, the essence that cannot be destroyed. Freud calls this the "return of the repressed", in sense that any archetypal force, the Shadow, the Animus, etc, survives and returns whenever is repressed.

The discovery of the *room of death* by the three sisters revives the wild woman in the youngest. Now naivety is replaced by astuteness, the wife can now plan a strategy. She pretends to accept death, but her asking for time is a trap for the predator which he does not expect. If the woman cannot accept her submission any more, the predator also cannot accept her disobedience and he decides that her punishment is death. The moment of confrontation occurs just when the woman is very weak and tired. However, her natural, wild instinct gives her the power that she needs, forcing her to continue until the predator is arrested.

The call for the older brothers represents the psychic energy attributed to violence and aggressiveness that is a characteristic almost always attributed to the male universe. Brothers are the defender side of Wild Woman, in Estés's text called *animus* (p.62). Having become astute, woman will count on this "internal male energy" to escape from the predator. This *animus* will be the connection between the woman's internal and external world. The woman will feel safer to be who she really is, if her *animus* is strong enough for that. This security will be felt even in the outside world.

The evil represented by Bluebeard is neutralized and transformed, not destroyed. This neutralization happens on a mental level with the valorization of positive thinking, for example, a woman who avoids negative thoughts about herself, her projects and ambitions. The innate predator will recover appeal through negative facts and thoughts to suck her positive, creative and evolutionary energy.

This recycling of the predator is the woman's last step in her fight against him. She removes from him the energy that was taken from her and transforms his negative feelings into positive energies. Although the predator can return, he returns weaker.

In Estés's study, apart from this inner positive strength called *Wild Woman*, there is an opposite one, the inner negative strength that acts against wild nature. This *innate predator* exists in the unconscious and represents the "drama within a single woman's psyche" (p. 44). It is brought to the conscious side of mind in tales through the representation of the "failed magician". The internal predator is like a magic creature, that, in some tales, tries to go beyond what is allowed and is punished for it. He (the predator) feels hate and revolt, dedicating himself to destroy what is good in others. As an example, Estés quotes the rebellious angel that was thrown from the sky because he wanted to be like God. To be aware of her nature, woman should be able to recognize both sides of her psyche, and face her internal predator, however, without being imprisoned by it.

Estés calls the innate predator of women the "animal groom". He is characterized as something or someone that, at first glance, looks good but is actually bad. So, the good fiancé soon becomes the perverse husband. The happy bride soon realizes that her happiness is a farce, and that something very valuable has been destroyed. However, by realizing it, she is dedicated to dominating him and gets free of him. Estés believes that his presence, often in dreams, though noxious, is also a warning signal, a revealing slap in the face of someone, who until then, has been unable to perceive her own destruction.

The animal groom gradually destroys the deepest dreams and ideas of a woman's mind, until she, almost completely blind, lives her life only accepting the "truths" that are imposed on her. The origin of her self-destruction comes from this *inability* of realizing the lack of connection between her desires and her attitudes. However this is also the clue that indicates that something is wrong. If on the one hand, she agrees to her destruction by her predator, on the other hand, she can discover the truth and escape from him. It is the Wild Woman's warning of danger, trying to make the woman take a correct attitude to recover her energy and stop the bleeding key.

What the innate predator will do is not to allow the woman to have this awareness. This is derived from the idea that if the truth hurts, it is better not to know it. The desperate act of fixing the key (stopping its bleeding) can be compared with trying to forget what is seen. But the bleeding does not stop. Then she realizes that she has to face the truth and face the dark side of her psyche that denigrates her. To see only what is easy to see gives her a false concept of herself. "The only thing that we possess that is difficult to destroy is our soul. [...]"

even though its outer vitality has been taken away, even though life has essentially been wrung out of it, it has not been destroyed utterly. It can come back to life.” (Ibid,p.58) Thus, when she is able to accept the real state of her soul, she can react.

There is a common itinerary followed by naïve woman that consists in being captured, discovering the enemy or her degradation, facing it, and escaping from it, getting more maturity and strength. This way, all women are innocent in the beginning of their lives, unable to see what is implied or hidden between the lines. They ignore or even disregard the eyes of intuition. At a certain moment in life, even well guided young ladies find their predator and give themselves up. In the beginning of the tale the wife ignores the existence of the innate predator and she is led by a desire for happiness that actually is an illusion. The Wild Woman inside her warns her of dangers, but these warnings are ignored, and she marries.

To combat the predator, woman has to remember that, besides him, there is a positive force whose function is precisely to help her in this fight. That force is the Wild Woman and she should be fed with the use of positive thoughts that shred the statements of the predator, and make a woman do the opposite of what he says. This will give her the energy to be reborn.

2.2 SEXUAL POLITICS

Kate Millett (2000), talks about a close relationship between politics and sexual behavior. Millett defines “politics” as referring to relationships based on power or the dominance of one group of people over another. This control can be based on differences of race, class or gender. Speaking of sexual politics, the author concentrates on the universal and ancient scheme of the domination of the male over the female in human society and the consequent subordination of women. In the patriarchal society which exists in today’s world, women are considered inferior beings and “every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands” (MILLETT, 2000,p.25.) In this sense “sex is a status category with political implications” (Ibid, p.24). Millett’s book was published for the first time in 1969, when feminist theories were starting to appear. Today,

with all the changes in modern life, women, have conquered some positions of power in society and government.

The relationship between the sexes hides a set of beliefs, values and principles guiding the behavior of an individual or of a society. Millett defends the necessity for a new psychological and philosophical perspective for the term politics that would include the contact and interaction between people.

Power can be exercised either through consent or violence. In patriarchal society, women are ideologically conditioned to accept the superior status of men and their own inferior status. The temperaments of men and women are divided into stereotypes:

[...]based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue," and ineffectuality in the female.(Ibid,p.26)

As a result, the "superior" sex, the male, is allowed to exercise control over the "inferior", the female. Consequently, tasks are distributed according to the division between the sexes:

[...] sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. The limited role allotted to the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience. Therefore, nearly all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity [...]is largely reserved for the male.(Ibid, p. 26)

Millett disagrees with the widespread idea that these sets of differences between man and woman are products of biological differences (derived from physical and anatomical factors). She argues that the cultural factors influencing the individual are far more influential than biological factors. Among most mammals the male is physically stronger, but among human beings this advantage is increased through better diet and exercise for men. Male superiority is due to the value system and not biology. Millett refers to the replacement of physical force throughout history for other types of force, such as knowledge, weapons or machines to prove that it is not absolutely necessary for domination. Millett disagrees with the idea that patriarchy is endemic in human social life. She speculates about a period preceding patriarchy:

What would be crucial to such a premise would be a state of mind in which the primary principle would be regarded as fertility or vitalist processes. In a primitive condition, before it developed civilization or any but the crudest technic, humanity would perhaps find the most impressive evidence of creative force in the visible birth of children, something of a miraculous event and linked analogically with the growth of the earth's vegetation.(Ibid, p.28)

Millett points out that there is a distinction between the terms *sex* and *gender*, in which the first is related to the biological factor (male and female sex) and the second has a heavy psychological burden (masculinity or femininity), being inevitably tied to culture (STOLLER apud MILLETT p.29). Thus it is understood that the characteristics related to gender (or the differences in temperament) are learned throughout life and not innate to human beings. Just the sexual organs, although they are part of sexual identity, do not determine the identity completely.

The social aspects guarantee the difference between genders – between what is feminine and masculine. Consequently, she or he will have acquired one of the implicit foundations of the patriarchal system: the dominator is aggressive, the dominated is docile.

The family is the foundation of Patriarchal Society. It is the family which is responsible for inserting the individual into its value system, making the connection between society and state. In the institution of the family there is a clear sense of masculine power and control. According to Maine (apud MILLETT) "his [the man's] dominion extends to life and death and is as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves." (Ibid, p.34) In both religious and secular institutions, man holds the sovereignty and to him is attributed power over property, authenticity of family, the right to practice violence on his material and human (wife and children) acquisitions. However, in modern western societies, this kind of behavior no longer applies in most families.

Courtly love or *romantic love*, despite the apparent idea of elevation of the woman's soul, actually has the hidden purpose of subordinating the female figure through the illusion of a higher emotional status:

Both have had the effect of obscuring the patriarchal character of Western culture and in their general tendency to attribute impossible virtues to women, have ended by confining them in a narrow and often remarkably constricting sphere of behavior. (Ibid p. 37)

Patriarchal Society keeps a hold on woman because she is not permitted to acquire appropriate or complete knowledge that gives her a real sense of her role. Such is the capacity of freedom through power of knowledge: 'If knowledge is power, power is knowledge, and a large factor in their subordinate position is the fairly systematic ignorance patriarchy imposes upon women.' (Ibid, p. 42)

The patriarchal system, although extremely discreet, always had the need to use force to maintain control over those considered weaker. Even when, in the early days of history, its use was 'blatant', this was disguised under the label of something exotic or primitive. The justification for the acceptance of the cruelties imposed by force is that it is directed towards an inferior or even non-human being. Force is generalized through (once again) the temperamental differences between genders: men hold it because they are 'physically and psychologically' suited to it, but women, because of their physical and emotional training, are not able to use it, they are, then, harmless. Millett points out that the image of woman is designed from a male perspective and it is appropriated to their needs in order to subordinate women, with the theoretical and logical support that women are poisoned against themselves, beginning to consider themselves inferior and man superior.

Literature (tales, myths, stories) represents an efficient transmission of values, because it is built on moral and symbolic concepts. Millett mentions (p.51), as examples, the myth of Pandora's box and the Fall. The first is a representation of the destructive nature of woman, whose box, once opened, spreads death and the consequent evils of curiosity (sexuality). The second presents the idea that all the degradation of mankind is due to the guilt and deceit (at sexual levels) of woman. This version ignores the fact that Eve was seduced by the phallus (serpent), the symbol of male reproductive powers and virility, and Adam's share of guilt for involvement in the Original Sin. Despite representing the lack of the reproductive power in man, Eve has no meaningful representation for humanity, which is said to have degenerated only because of the involvement of Adam. It is worth mentioning also that the whole idea of transgression in this myth is directly related to the symbolism of sexuality, which began to be regarded as sinful only after the Fall.

Women's passive acceptance of man's control ends up tying them to a situation of dependence on the male. This passivity is so strong that woman is considered incapable of

violence, whether to protect herself or to commit a crime. This "natural" incapacity to perform certain acts makes them similar to children, in their vulnerability. Thus, woman is infantilized as she cannot be held responsible enough for her decisions, having the obligation to ask permission or approval from the male.

The continual surveillance in which she is held tends to perpetuate the infantilisation of women even in situations such as those of higher education. The female is continually obliged to seek survival or advancement through the approval of males as those who hold power. She may do this either through appeasement or through the exchange of her sexuality for support and status. (Ibid,p.54)

We should reinforce that although Patriarchal Society has been much more repressive to women than to men, civilization has basically been an enterprise that has suppressed instincts and set the rules for social co-existence. In this broader sense, one might say that the Western Judeo-Christian civilization has tried to erase instinct not only in women, but also in men.

2.3 LEARNING TO BE A WOMAN

In *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970) Eva Figes presents Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which discusses the construction of the role of women in a society controlled by men, and a *psychological taboo* generated by current social rules that prevent women from being independent in various aspects of life. This Freudian theory is based on the existence of a *superego*, or "on a conscious restraint of libidinous demands in the interest of civilization".(FIGES, 1970, p.136).

Freud was a defender of the morality of his time, even recognizing that this morality had generated a *neurosis* about the social values and principles which underlie it, whose main victims were women. In this moral system, society is the result of acts by *civilized people*, which include the defense of the ideals of marriage, division of roles between men and women, male leadership and female passivity, the notion of controller and controlled, and sexual indulgence. However even these ideals of a perfect society caused physical, emotional and psychological frictions in individuals.

Freud's theory assumes that society is only society because it is civilized and that civilization depends on a constant renunciation of instinctual demands, especially by

men (or controllers) and appropriate behavior of women (and / or controlled). Thus, men are considered rational enough to exercise control over their own instincts and those subordinate to them, assuming positions of leadership and making rules. Repression becomes the main tool for the composition of society.

If the man is assigned the work, the pursuit of economic stability, and consequently the constitution of family, to the woman is given the least ambition, as she is considered incapable of giving up her instincts. Woman must be shaped to adapt herself to the society she lives in and her involvement in male areas, such as work, are considered a problem for the maintenance of society:

Women represents the interest of the Family and of sexual life. The works of civilization has become increasingly the business of men [...] Thus, woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it. (Ibid,p.138-139)

Freud uses the principle of *romantic love* mentioned by Millett (2000, p.37), to create the ideal woman, who is actually nothing more than a delicate sexual object made to satisfy the needs of the male: "[...] their [woman's] main function to be ministering angels to the needs and comforts of men.[...] he had only one type of sexual object in his mind, a gentle feminine one.[...] he [Freud] regarded them as finer and ethically nobler than men." (JONES apud FIGES, p.141)

According to Figes (p.147), it is the woman who renounces her most basic instinctual demands, and not man, considering that the very male social status assigns to him very satisfactory rewards for the male ego (sexual, psychological and professional freedom). Still, Figes reflects that perhaps it would be fairer to shape society to women's needs and not vice versa.

A *brainwashing* is done to make women accept their situation of passivity and submission. Thus: "if you are unhappy, the tendency is not to look at your situation and change that, you look within yourself and try to adapt yourself to the situation." (Ibid, p.148). The ideal woman is loving, gentle, accepting without question her role and does not deviate from it.

In the next chapter an attempt shall be made to apply the theories of Estés, Millett and Figs to the analyses of the heroines in some of Poe's short stories.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN IN POE'S SHORT STORIES

The objective of this chapter is to study the personalities of the female protagonists of the short stories “Berenice” (1835), “Morella” (1835), “Ligeia” (1838), “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) and “Eleonora” (1842), how they are viewed and treated by the male protagonists, and how they react to this treatment, and to see if they are really as weak as they have traditionally been thought to be.

Karen Weekes (2004) comments that Poe's fictional ideal “is a woman who can be subsumed into another's ego and who has no need to tell her own tale; she is killed off so quickly that her silence is inscribed quite irrevocably” (WEEKES, p.150). Nina Baym is also severe in her criticism, saying that there “... are neither portrayals of women, nor attitudes towards them in Poe's fiction and biography, since he uses females to stand for ideas that can almost be construed as morals of his tales” (BAYM, apud WEEKES, p.150).

The female characters in Poe's stories are almost always involved in a marital relationship. They are almost always wives or aspirants to wives, and, despite their admirable intelligence they are always confined to a world not much larger than their own homes. Even when there is an external environment, this is limited and inhabited by other people. For example, we can mention the valley in which Eleonora lives, or the House of Usher, where Madeline lives. They seem to have no tasks or responsibilities. Here we find women that, at some point in life are repressed, infantilized and isolated; there is no reference to their wants or needs. We can understand that somehow, a *brainwashing* was done. However, the fact that most of them have strong personalities suggests that “Poe's literary imagination was intent upon producing tales in which feminine characters possessed a dynamism lacking in their male survivors / storytellers” (FISHER, 2008, p.73)

3.1 IDEALIZATION OF WOMEN AND ROMANTIC LOVE

Talking about the idealization of women in Poe's short stories, Weekes (2004), comments that “the most significant trait of his ideal is her role as emotional catalyst for her partner. The romanticized woman is much more significant in her impact on Poe's narrators than in her own right.” (WEEKES, p.148) Women in Poe represent a more idealized than

real beauty. None of them is described through practical and common standards of beauty. There is always an aspect of spiritual, mystical, and supernatural related to them. Like any idealization, this is fragile and can be undone at any time, therefore transforming the admiration into disappointment. Thus, we see the behavior of the narrator change in the course of the stories. "Ligeia" and "Morella" are the tales in which this aspect appears with more transparency.

Morella and Ligeia are made attractive by their curiosity for knowledge. The idealization of the strange beauty of Ligeia is evident in every detail and can be explained by references to opium, and the description seems to contain some fantastic element, absent in human standards, but its beauty is not enough to keep her alive, disappointing the narrator. We have the "oneiric" words describing Ligeia:

In beauty of face no maiden ever equaled her. It was the radiance of an opium-dream --an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered vision about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos. [...] Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity --although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange." I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead --it was faultless --how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine! --the skin rivaling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and repose, the gentle prominence of the regions above the temples; and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, "hyacinthine!" I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose --and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly --the magnificent turn of the short upper lip --the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under --the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke --the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid, yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin --and here, too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek--the contour which the god Apollo revealed in a dream [...](POE, P.160,161)

The comparison of Ligeia's beauty to that of the daughters of Delos, the island sacred to Apollo and Artemis, reinforces the connection to light, as they are the deities of the sun and the moon.

The name Morella on the other hand, means “blackish” and “suggests the dark mystery of her identity” (MEYERS, p.79) Morella's erudition is what attracts the attention of her husband. Curiously this same factor seems to cause a shadowy presence between them, when what previously attracted him now repels him:

Morella's erudition was profound. As I hope to live, her talents were of no common order—her powers of mind were gigantic, I felt this, and in many matters, became her pupil.[...] then, when, poring over forbidden pages, I felt a forbidden spirit enkindling within me [...] But, indeed, the time had now arrived when the mystery of my wife's manner oppressed me as a spell. Shall I then say that I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella's decease? (POE, p.153,154)

This idealization of qualities is a characteristic of *romantic love* that is present in all the stories mentioned here. According to Millett (p. 37), this attitude aims to limit female behavior, which can be easily seen in the tales. Actually the idealization ends when the narrators perceive neither Ligeia or Morella can be controlled. Despite the attempts to limit their behavior patterns through divine attributions, they escape from the control and comprehension of their husbands. This independence in women is what turns the husband's admiration to rejection.

At this point we should observe that knowledge is the source of the power of independence (Millett, p.42). This power was, in the history of society, forbidden to women. However, knowledge is exactly what makes Morella and Ligeia exceptional beings for the narrators, who in turn try to control it, through marriage, discovering later that this is a force that cannot be contained. None of the characters mentioned passively accept the control of a husband nor do they accept being treated as children. They show their strength acting through the control of life and death. Rowena returns from the world of the dead with Ligeia to frighten their husband, Morella, though dead, takes their daughter's life.

The notion of romantic love, lack of passivity and control of death can also be found in the narrator's relationship with Eleonora and Madeline's with Usher. The latter is the target of the supposed love and protection of her brother, but ends up languishing until her supposed death. Madeline is still able to wake up from her “sinister” sleep only to die again, accompanied by her sibling, her oppressor in the skin of loving

brother. The narrator's love for Eleonora does not free her for a horizon beyond the valley in which she lives, but her power of influence is maintained through the promise that holds the lover to the same valley. Although he leaves it, remorse accompanies him until the moment when Eleonora, through some power of influence from the world of the dead over the world of the living frees him from his burden.

3.2 VITALITY

Poe's description of characters and places underlines the changes that lead to loss of vitality. In 'Eleanora', at the beginning of the tale, the author describes the beautiful scenery belonging to the valley in which the protagonists live and whose beauty can only be exceeded by Eleonora's beauty. After the discovery of the passion between the cousins, all the landscape seems to become even more beautiful:

A change fell upon all things. Strange brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been before. The tints of the green carpet deepened; and when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel. And life arose in our paths; for the tall flamingo hitherto unseen, with all gay glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us. The golden and silver fish haunted the river, out of the bosom of which issued, little by little, a murmur that swelled, at length, into a lulling melody more divine than that of the harp Aeolus—sweeter than all save the voice of Eleonora. (POE, p.144)

May comments that "this imagery suggests the intrusion of physicality into the fairy-tale world of the children of the valley" (MAY, p.67)

For Weekes, "Eleonora epitomizes Poe's ideal, young, unlearned, impressionable, and completely dedicated to her love for him. Only fifteen years old, compared with her lover's age of twenty, she is significantly also his cousin" (WEEKES, p.154).

When Eleonora dies, the beauty of the landscape fades, it seems that in the eyes of the narrator, nature accompanies the fall of Eleonora as if both were linked by a bridge of thinking and spirit. Here are the words of Poe to describe changes in the valley:

[...] but a second change had come upon all things. The star-shaped flowers shrank into the stems of the trees, and appeared no more. The tints of the green carpet faded; and, one by one, the ruby-red asphodels withered away; and there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten, dark, eye-like violets, that writhed uneasily and were ever encumbered with dew. And Life departed from our paths; for the tall flamingo

flaunted no longer his scarlet plumage before us, but flew sadly from the vale into the hills, with all the gay glowing birds that had arrived in his company. And the golden silver fish swam down through the gorge at the lower end of our domain and bedecked the sweet river again. And the lulling melody that had been softer than the wind-harp of Aeolus, and more divine than all save the voice of Eleonora, it died little by little away, in murmurs growing lower and lower, until the stream returned, at length, utterly, into the solemnity of its original silence. And then, lastly, the voluminous cloud uprose, and, abandoning the tops of the mountains to the dimness of old, fell back into the regions of Hesper, and took away its manifold golden glories from the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. (POE, p.146)

We note here the idea of imprisoning the woman to male influence and its consequences, since the death of Eleonora takes all the beauty and vitality from the place, including the cloud that hung over the valley at the time that Eleonora and her cousin fell in love. This cloud has brought more beauty to the place, but also further involved and isolated them still more, like a luxurious prison. However at some point, the Wild Woman in Eleonora sickens, because unconsciously she would have realized the extent of her limitations. Eleonora loses her life, and the place where she lived loses its brightness, its majesty, its vitality.

The author describes a strange river, belonging to the valley that presents a strange silence and stillness, which at the time of the love between Eleonora and her cousin seems to acquire life and energy. The river that was lifeless before now features various forms of fish and is visited by the most beautiful birds. The river was once silent, but now makes sounds that are full of life:

There crept out a narrow and deep river, brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora; [...] We called it the 'River of Silence'; for there seemed to be a hushing influence in its flow. No murmur arose from its bed, and so gently it wandered along, that the pearly pebbles upon which we loved to gaze, far down within its bosom, stirred not at all, but lay in a motionless content, each in its own station, shining on gloriously forever. [...] for the tall flamingo, hitherto unseen, with all glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us. The golden and silver fish haunted the river, out of the bosom of which issued, little by little, a murmur that swelled [...]" (Ibid, p. 143-144)

But when she dies, Eleonora seems to carry away the life of the river, which gradually returns to its previous silence and stillness:

And life departed from our paths; for the tall flamingo flaunted no longer his scarlet plumage before us, but flew sadly from the vale into the hills, with all the gay glowing birds that had arrived in his company. And the golden and silver fish swam down through the gorge at the lower end of our domain and bedecked the sweet river never again. And the lulling melody that had been softer than the wind-harp of Aeolus, and more divine save the voice of Eleonora, it died little by little away, in

murmurs growing lower and lower, until the stream returned, at length, utterly, into the solemnity of its silence. (Ibid, p. 145- 146)

The whole idea of life and losing it leads us to suppose that the River of Silence, by its own silence and still character represents Death. We can assume that when they fall in love, young people awaken to a life not yet explored, and this is represented by all the vitality that the river gains. But Eleonora's death has consequences for this unexplored world. Her departure from this world leads to the loss of vitality of the place and the river returns to its original silence. Death returns, this time to settle permanently within the river.

In the short story that is named after her, the narrator seems particularly impressed by the strange beauty of Ligeia. Fisher explains that this strangeness "may link up with her pre-eminent will and her movements being likened to those of a shadow. "(FISHER, p.75)It is worthy of a long, subjective and detailed description, in which a special importance is assigned to the eyes. They provide the narrator with a nameless feeling that can be reflected in the world around him. The beauty of Ligeia seems to be related to an exterior world, related to things of Nature like beauty and wisdom:

I mean to say that, subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always aroused within me by her large and luminous orbs. [...] I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine --in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean; in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars [...] in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. (POE, p.162)

The eyes, like the other parts described of Ligeia, reflect something extraordinary, something that the narrator's mind realizes but cannot understand. The difficulty of understanding Ligeia's beauty is so subjective that he gives to it the spiritual character of "the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth" (POE, p.161) According to Basler, the narrator "identifies Ligeia with the dynamic power and mystery of the entire universe. She becomes not merely a woman, but a goddess, through the worship of whom he feels that he may pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden" (BASLER, p.54) . He also mentions that Poe had earlier used the name Ligeia in the poem *Al Araaf* for a divinity representing the same dynamic beauty in all nature.

Fisher comments that the narrator marries Ligeia because “he is impressed by her mind, as indicated by his dwelling on her face (which houses her mind as well) and her eyes (which in legend are windows into the mind /soul).” (2008, p.75). Weekes is of the opinion that “The light that shines in these myriad eyes [of Poe’s heroines] is synonymous with these capitalized traits, Beauty and Hope.” (WEEKES, p.153)

The Wild Woman in Ligeia, at least at the beginning of the marriage, is so vigorous that it cannot pass unrecognized in her husband’s eyes. Her natural female strength is broadcast through the eyes and irradiates life. This power of “*intensity* in thought, action, or speech” (Ibid, p.163), is also broadcast in Ligeia’s intellectual curiosity, and arouses in her husband an interest in something that he is naturally incapable of understanding. The quality of strangeness is attributed to it. The power of will, so relevant to the narrative, represents this hidden desire for freedom, of overcoming something that appears unachievable. Thus, the vitality of Ligeia appears to depend on this ‘thirst of mystical knowledge’, with one particular idea that contaminates her husband:

And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will. (POE, p. 162)

In this context, Fisher comments that:

Ligeia herself is another of Poe’s female characters whose will is so powerful and dominant that they seem almost superhuman, as well as supernatural Perhaps the impact of that strong will so envelops the narrator, her survivor, that he can no longer recall just where they met [..]or Ligeia’s family name- nor much else other than her classic features[...] (FISHER, p.75)

More than her beauty, Ligeia's eyes reflect the passion that consumes her. Ligeia was really in love with her husband and he knew and loved her. But he did not feel the same physical passion that she did for him. However it is on her death bed that the Ligeia’s passion shows itself stronger and more domineering. The narrator seems to feel trapped by this passion, reflected in the eyes: “[...] she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. [...]” (POE, p. 163).

But Ligeia falls ill, and her eyes give her husband the signal of imminent death:

Wanting the radiant lustre of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill. The wild eyes blazed with a too --too glorious effulgence; [...]. I saw that she must die [...] (POE, p.163-4).

Speaking of Ligeia's illness and death, Fisher says that the narrator's "eventual disenchantment with so much mind leads to Ligeia's death, though she apprises him that death of the body does not necessarily mean a corresponding death of the will." (2008, p.76)

Finally, Ligeia realizes that she is tied by passion. Wild Woman now finds herself reprimanded, maybe by the ties that are implicit in marriage and in everyday life. We can understand that her will was subjugated by herself, and now Ligeia fades. Although the narrator does not relate Ligeia's decline to marriage, he admits the greatness and the harmfulness of this passion, and considers himself unworthy of it:

I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion. But in death only, was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection.[...] Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, [...] (Ibid,p.164)

When Ligeia bends over the narrator during his studies, Jordan sees this as proof of Ligeia's "usurping the male prerogative as the sexual aggressor. But it also conflates knowledge and carnality and shows Ligeia's domination in both these areas." (JORDAN, apud WEEKES, p.158)

However, Ligeia does not surrender without a fight. Unlike Eleonora, Ligeia, though frightened by the idea of dying, remains serene and calm and seems to use all her forces to fight for life. Her husband is sympathetic to this desire to live even though his efforts are small, compared to hers. The narrator feels impotent before the death of the beloved, admitting the uselessness of their efforts and the inability to understand her strength:

And the struggles of the passionate wife were, to my astonishment, even more energetic than my own. [...]. Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. [...] I would have soothed --I would have reasoned; but, in the intensity of her wild desire for life, --for life --but for life --solace and reason were the uttermost folly [...] It is this wild longing --it is this eager vehemence of desire for life --but for life --that I have no power to portray -- no utterance capable of expressing.(Ibid, p.164)

The Wild Woman twitches inside Ligeia trying to keep Herself alive and powerful. But Ligeia appears to be unable to 'feed' her appropriately. We can suppose that she failed to try kill her "thirst of knowledge" in the moment that she was imprisoned by passion. However she is possessed by an amazing desire for life (by the Wild Woman), that gives her the necessary strength to postpone death, until she is overcome with fatigue and dies. Basler points out that "the hero's approach to power is thwarted by Ligeia's death, just at the point when triumph seemed imminent" (BASLER, p.55)

Another interpretation is also possible if we think of the possibility of curiosity as representing a sin liable to punishment as we see in Estés. So Ligeia could have fallen ill as a result of this thirst for knowledge forbidden to female figures.

Berenice completes the group of heroines who lose vitality during the stories studied here. Geoffrey Meyers (2000) explains that the name Berenice comes from the Greek poem of that name written by Callimachus. The name means "bringer of victory". In the poem, Berenice, the wife of King Ptolemy of Egypt promises her hair to Aphrodite if her husband returns victorious: "Instead of voluntarily sacrificing her hair for her husband, Poe's Berenice loses her teeth and her life to her mad fiancé" (MEYERS, p.77). Egeus presents his cousin, Berenice, as a happy and healthy young girl, (completely opposite to him) because she is "agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy. "[...] roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path" (POE, p. 148). Berenice's vitality is gorgeous until the time she gets sick, acquiring a morbid and unhealthy aspect:

Its emaciation was excessive, and not one vestige of the former being lurked in any single line of the contour.[...] The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once golden hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with ringlets now black as the raven's ring [...]The eyes were lifeless, and lusterless. (Ibid, p.150)

Thus, we can realize the decadence in appearance and spirit of these heroines, as something related to the male influence in some way. We also can suppose that Egeus, who was attracted by solitude and had a dark temperament, saw this in Berenice when she was sick, becoming an admirer not of her beauty, but of her decay.

3.3 CURIOSITY, INTELLIGENCE, STRENGTH

Poe's women characters are generally thought to be weak and fragile, but a study of his short stories shows us that this is not true. Many of Poe's women have great intelligence, contrary to the prevalent idea in the patriarchal system that women were intellectually inferior. The intellectual side is so predominant that even the narrators come to declare themselves the apprentices of their wives, and acknowledge them as their guides. This is easily perceived in 'Morella' and 'Ligeia'. Both women have superior intellectual power, which causes much of the admiration of the narrators. Morella is seen by the narrator at the beginning of the story as a woman of strong intellectual spirit who is always looking for new learning to satisfy her curiosity. Her studies influence the narrator so much, that at some point the mystical writings that so impress his wife also become the object of his curiosity, and even make him transfer the main object of his devotion (his wife) to her writings. He acknowledges her superiority by calling himself her "pupil" and saying that he submitted to her "guidance":

Morella's erudition was profound. As I hope to live, her talents were of no common order-her powers of mind were gigantic, I felt this and, in many matters, became her pupil.[...] She placed before me a number of those mystical writings [...] These, for what reason I could not imagine, were her favorite and constant study – and that, in process of time they became my own [...] I abandoned myself implicitly to the guidance of my wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of her studies. (POE, 153)

Fisher (2008) comments that in Morella's case, "The wife's will has such binding force upon her husband's will, that, as he senses the circumstances, a magic spell seems to be at work" (FISHER, p.74)

In 'Ligeia', the power of her knowledge seems to have even more relevance than her beauty, which is generally the main object of admiration in women, not only because it is mentioned before her beauty, but also because it is described in more detail by the narrator. According to Hoffman, "it is incontestable that Ligeia herself is associated in the narrator's mind, with *knowledge*. She is described, admired, adored, nay worshipped, not so much for who she is, but for what she knows" (HOFFMAN, p.90)The narrator considers himself as a child to be guided by her:

I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense --such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. Indeed upon any theme of the most admired, because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the academy, have I ever found Ligeia at fault? How singularly --how thrillingly, this one point in the nature of my wife has forced itself, at this late period only, upon my attention! I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman --but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive, that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance [...] Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted." (POE, p. 163)

There is a declared reversal of roles. The power of woman's knowledge makes the man feel infantilized to the point of submitting to the implicit will of woman. It is she who points out the ways and not the contrary. Cynthia Jordan comments that "Ligeia's authority over him was like a mother's over her child, his language speaks of emasculation" (JORDAN, apud WEEKES, p.158).

3.4 THE ANIMAL GROOM

All the male characters are "animal grooms" in the tales of Poe. They all seem to bring something good and helpful to their companions, but somehow not quite explicitly it turns out to be evil and the cause of their misfortunes.

When attached to a masculine ideal of a wife, women appear (or become) devoid of their deepest dreams. Poe gives us the beauty, intelligence and curiosity of his heroines (everything that can be seen externally), but their dreams and desires are not mentioned. Women seem to have no voice, no right of opinion, to say what they want. There is not one direct mention or dialogue that indicates their satisfaction or otherwise of the women in relation to their role or about their daily lives.

So, the female mental environment remains a mystery enhanced by the use of first person speech in his stories (except in "The Fall of the House of Usher", in which we have an external point of view, but from someone that does not participate directly in it). Thus the psyche of the male predator is well represented, but the female one remains mysterious because the narrators seem to care only about their own feelings. They cannot (or are not

interested, or do not allow) unravel the wishes and desires of women, for natural reasons. Women are secluded in a world where they have no right to speak, having to live their lives as shadows of their husbands.

The connivance of men in relation to the chaotic state of their wives is a good indication that the husbands are actually bad husbands. The animal groom remains with the mask of the good husband, seeing the wife's distress, but doing nothing to help her. Some even seem worried and upset about the degradation of their wives/sister (Ligeia, Berenice, Madeline, Eleonora), but there is no sign of a search for its cure, or even a question about how they feel, or what they can do to improve the situation. So, Ligeia and Rowena's husband, despite the admiration and love for Ligeia, remains a passive spectator of their deaths, being a predator without disguise to Rowena. Eleonora's cousin is also passive in relation to the illness and death of the beloved cousin. Usher, enjoying the role of protective brother, also only observes the degradation of his sister, being responsible for her premature burial. Egeus, the "animal groom" par excellence, captures Berenice and appearing mournful because of the state of his cousin, later becomes the monster that disfigures her. Morella's husband, with time feels revulsion for his wife, causing their mutual destruction.

3.5 CAPTIVES AND VICTIMS OF THE PREDATOR

Rowena, Ligeia and Berenice are victims of a predator existing in the male characters in Poe's tales. The coincidence of the illness and death of Ligeia and Rowena after marriage to the same man is an obvious signal of the predator aspect of the husband. It is possible to identify the previous itinerary followed by woman-victims described by Estés. Both are captured by the same man, and seem to be fine, until the sudden consciousness that something is wrong with them when they fall ill. Discovering their degradation, the two women get enough strength to postpone death and haunt the husband with the aspect of sickness. Then, they escape through death and also through it they punish him. We can understand that they both join, becoming only one creature, joining in strength to destroy the enemy or weaken him.

The marriage to Rowena is not successful because the narrator says that he is still in love with Ligeia, even after her death, declaring his love for her aloud, during his delusions stemming from opium, to the point of yearning for her return:

My memory flew back, (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love [...] In the excitement of my opium dreams [...] I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned --ah, could it be forever? --upon the earth. (POE, p.169)

Unlike Ligeia, Rowena does not love her husband, fearing him, and keeping away from him due to the mistreatment she suffered even in the "unhallowed hours" of the first month of their marriage. The Predator shows his face by admitting his hate for the second wife, seeing her fear as an incentive for his hatred:

That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper --that she shunned me and loved me but little --I could not help perceiving; but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise. I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man.(Ibid, p.168)

It is clear from these passages that Rowena is captured by the predator, but soon realizes that she has fallen into a trap, because her husband has married her only to mistreat her. She is the object that he uses to get revenge for Ligeia's abandonment, seeing Rowena as a usurper of her place, though he himself is responsible for giving her this position.

The interval between the death and marriage of Rowena (she dies two or three months after the wedding) is shorter than in the case of Ligeia. Rowena does not share the physical and intellectual qualities of her predecessor and probably because of this, the predator shows himself to Rowena soon after marriage, due to the bitterness that he had not been able to live longer with Ligeia.

In the case of Berenice, she exudes health and grace, until the moment that the illness takes over. Her vitality decays, her powers decline and she passes into a state of physical-and spiritual decadence. We must point out a subtle coincidence: Berenice falls ill at the same time that Egeus begins to observe her with more attention:

Disease – a fatal disease fell like the simoon among her frame; and even, while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! Alas! The destroyer came and went!—and the victim -- where is she? I knew her not –or knew her no longer as Berenice!(POE, p. 148)

The narrator is aware of Berenice’s love for him, but his admiration for her only begins after her decline. It is her dark aspect that leads him to propose marriage to her:

During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings, with me, *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind. [...] I had seen her — not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream — not as a being of the earth — earthly — but as the abstraction of such a being — not as a thing to admire, but to analyze — not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation. [...] I knew that she had loved me long, and, in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage .(Ibid, p.149)

The tale does not mention the reason for this change but mentions her admiration for Egeus. We can understand that Berenice falls in love and because of this her spirit is reprimanded. The predator in Egeus realizes her weakness and finds the right moment to act, proposing marriage to her even though she is really and disgustingly ill.

Her teeth seem to represent a threat to Egeus, becoming the object of his strange obsession. It is only by the possession of what threatens him that the predator can have control of the situation, and thus restore his tranquility. Berenice thus represents a power that threatens him, constantly making him fearful of her:

Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died! [...]. But from the disordered chamber of my brain, had not, alas! departed, and would not be driven away, the white and ghastly *spectrum* of the teeth. Not a speck upon their surface — not a shade on their enamel — not a line in their configuration — not an indenture in their edges — but what that period of her smile had sufficed to brand in upon my memory. I saw them *now* even more unequivocally than I beheld them *then*. The teeth! — the teeth! — they were here, and there, and every where, and visibly, and palpably before me, long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development. [...] In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. All other matters and all different interests became absorbed in their single contemplation. They — they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of my mental life. I held them in every light — I turned them in every attitude. I surveyed their characteristics — I dwelt upon their peculiarities — I pondered upon their conformation — I mused upon the alteration in their nature — and shuddered as I assigned to them in imagination a sensitive and sentient power, and even when unassisted by the lips, a

capability of moral expression. [...] – ah, *therefore* it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore my peace, in giving me back to reason. (Ibid, p. 150)

Then, he sets up a trap and in an appropriate moment, when Berenice is extremely vulnerable, deprives her of this force. The height of cruelty occurs when the fiancé, thinking that she is dead, pulls off her teeth.

3.6 THE DOOR

The idea of a room or container that holds something sacred can be observed in the case of both Madeline and Berenice. The first is enclosed living in a sort of crypt by her brother. Madeline could represent something so sacred, so powerful and so frightening that Usher had to leave it safe, hidden, trapped, unable to get into action. Like Egeus, Usher's attempt to immobilize what he considers dangerous in woman materializes when his sister is totally vulnerable, because Madeline is in a cataleptic crisis, and appears to be dead. She cannot react to the funeral arrangements made by her brother. We can see in these words of the narrator the sorrow, darkness and oppression in the environment in which Madeline is placed:

The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; [...] a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp grating sound, as it moved upon hinges. (POE, p. 211)

The narrator explains the temporary burial because his friend, Usher, recognizes the possibility of Madeline waking from a cataleptic crisis. The final contemplation of the body shows signs of a strange vitality through a thin veneer of a smile, contradicting the cadaveric appearance of the body. Was this suspicious smile a sign that Madeline has not perished and a provocation to her brother, a threat of revenge? Even so, the coffin is locked and the heavy door closed:

We partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant. [...] Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead –for we

could not regard her unawed. The disease which has thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face and a suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron[...]" (Ibid, p.211)

Although it is not Usher who reports the story, his friend, as a spectator close to the situation, shares his fears and anxieties. That is, the whole situation is told from an external point of view, which does not prevent the narrator (who is also a man) from being influenced and infected by the impressions of his friend: "It was no wonder that his condition terrified me – that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, that wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions." (Ibid, p. 212)

Thus we see that both men fear something horrible and dangerous in Madeline. This is represented for the narrator by the impressions caused by their disease (of the twins) and for Usher by predictions about her mystical abilities. Below is a passage in which Usher admits his fear:

I shall perish," said he, " I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in this absolute effect –in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR. (Ibid, p.204)

The solution is to trap Madeline, but Usher's fear and disease do not disappear and he is haunted by the guilt for the premature burial of his sister. Somehow the Wild Woman in Madeline regains her strength, and she reacts. Inexplicably, the weak and sickly Madeline not only has the strength to awaken from the trance as well as to escape from the coffin and break the door of the vault, walking toward the main door of the house looking for her brother who seems to be aware of these events:

We have put her living in the tomb! [...] I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them—many, many days ago—yet I dared, I dared not speak! And now—to-night—Ethelred—ha! ha! The breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield!—say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footsteps on the stairs? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible

beating of her heart? [...] Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!
(Ibid, p.215)

Madeline returns from death to fetch her brother.

The box in which the teeth of Berenice are kept also gives us the idea of trapping the female force. Already we emphasized that the teeth represent the strength of its own disruption, a power against predatory Egeus, who tries to control the female through their possession and retain them in a small box that breaks when it hits the ground. That is, both Berenice and Madeline have a force so powerful that no door or lid can hold it.

Another important detail in relation to Madeline is the blood that stains her clothes given the idea that stained clothing represents the consciousness of some problem that needs resolution, we understand that the spots are the marks left by the violent repression of Madeline's spirit. Madeline's moment of revenge implies that she is conscious of her brother's guilt, and they go together to meet death:

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. [...] [She] fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.(POE, p. 216)

3.7 REPRODUCTION

An interesting feature can be observed in the absence of "animal activities of reproduction" among Poe's women, with the exception of Morella. There is no mention of the desire for motherhood in these women. Although this is one of the key roles of married women, they seem unable to reproduce. There is no mention of an interest in children by any of the couples. As for the desire to be a mother, we find that Berenice and Eleonora do not live long enough to be married and thus be allowed to produce children. Madeline is devoid even of a lawful relationship, so the idea of a child would be impossible at best and disturbing at worst hypotheses. Ligeia has a strong desire for knowledge, but no reference to motherhood is made. Rowena cannot wish for this as she is not even loved by her husband.

The exception now is Morella who dies while giving birth to a child, fruit of her marriage to the husband who, with time, felt disgust for her. Weekes feels that "one theory for the

rejection of his wife is her intellectual threat” (WEEKES, p.157). The death of Morella in child birth can “prove” indirectly the guilt of the husband, because he is the father. In other words, he destroys her by impregnating her. Weekes points out that “Although Morella appears to accept passively her husband’s disregard, her deathbed curse and re-incarnation in the person of their daughter prove otherwise” (WEEKES, p.157). But the baby becomes the object of the father’s devotion. Ironically the daughter is very like her mother. Meyers sees this as the theme of malign reincarnation (p.79). Was Morella protecting her daughter from the risk of same rejection (a later stage coming after admiration) that she had suffered some time after marriage, because she was so similar to her mother? Here we can suppose a metempsychosis in which the soul of mother was passed on to the daughter’s body: “Morella’s will lives on in her daughter” (FISHER,,p.74) Johanyak feels that “the daughter represents even more strongly the independent strengths and talents for which her mother died” (JOHANYAK, apud WEEKES, p.157). Meyers thinks this has reference to the question of whether personal identity is lost after death (p.79). According to him, “Morella seems to have discovered the secret of survival and predicts “I am dying, yet shall live”[...] The philosophical mother has fulfilled her prophecy by prolonging her own life through her daughter”. (MEYERS, p.79)

The girl's death can be attributed to the posthumous power of Morella. This is noticeable by the grim coincidence that the child dies at the time of baptism when she is to receive the same name as her mother. The fact that there is no body in the tomb may be interpreted in two ways, as a sign of Morella’s posthumous power, or simply as due to natural disintegration. Whatever the reason, motherhood is, in this tale, the way to punish the animal groom, Morella’s revenge. Fisher comments that “in keeping with the first Morella’s will, what haunts the survivor originates far more in an emotional than a physical presence, reinforcing the theme of will” (FISHER, p.74).

3.8 THE ILLNESS OF POE’S HEROINES

These women are forced to accept this miniature world, and consequently end up succumbing to a strange disease that gradually deprives them of life and energy, shrinking both in spirit and in physical appearance. This physical and emotional decline often appears

or worsens after the involvement with a partner. Weekes points out that “Especially in his poetry, [Poe] idealizes the vulnerability of woman [...] The woman must die in order to enlarge the experience of the narrator, her viewer” (WEEKES, p.148). Joseph Moldenhauer calls Poe “symbolically a killer of beautiful women” (MOLDENHAUER, apud WEEKES, p.150).

Morella, Ligeia and Rowena end up victims of a strange disease, which attacks them after they marry. Eleonora sickens and dies sometime after she and her cousin, the narrator, are united in love. If the woman is strong and creative, the spirit needs an appropriate environment so that she can develop psychological and physical health (as we see in Estés); and the family relationship and the demands of society end up depriving her of a broader horizon, limiting her area of operation in the world and decreasing her capacity to almost total impotence (as Millett says); It is not surprising that these women die at the end of the tales. Their deaths can be conceived as representing the results of forced adaptation to the demands of society that takes away all the power of being and doing in the world, tying them to a role that is not enough to satisfy their most basic needs.

The same can be said of Madeline, but with a single exception. The reasons for the disease of Madeline, are unknown, but she appears isolated, under the supposed protection of her twin brother, who, strangely enough, is as sick as her.

Madeline already appears sick in the story, and there is no mention of a previous state of vitality except for the girl's young age. Her strange disease having already been installed a long time before his arrival, the narrator does not find an explanation for it and Usher blames his sister's disease for his own critical condition:

He admitted, however, although with hesitation, that much of the peculiar gloom which thus afflicted him could be traced to a more natural and far more palpable origin—to the severe and long continued illness—indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution—of a tenderly beloved sister [...]The disease of lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, were the unusual diagnosis.(POE, p.204-5)

Even though she is sick, it is possible to see Madeline's strength in her effort to resist the disease, taking to her bed only one day after the arrival of her brother's friend: “Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally

to bed; but, on the close of the evening of my arrival at the house she succumbed'' (Ibid, p. 205).

It is interesting to study the meaning of the name of Usher's sister. According to Fisher (2008), Madeline means ''Tower of Strength'' and could be linked to a ''name – strength – house – family'' relation. However, Madeline is weak and extremely depressed in the major part of the tale, but a revolution occurs at the end, and the weak Madeline becomes a powerful woman, able to break open the coffin, the door of the vault and the door of Roderick Usher's chamber, and subjugate her brother. At this time, Madeline does not need a voice. Her acts speak for herself. What Poe gives us is an example of breaking limits, a fortress disguised as a woman, a wolf ready to attack its prey. Fisher explains Madeline's sudden strength by the possibility that she is a vampire. Vampires are suspended in a state between life and death and can survive for long periods without nourishment. They also prey first on family members and loved ones: ''Her looking more alive after she is presumed dead is another vampire trait'', surmising that ''Madeline may have turned vampire to immortalize whenever Roderick and the house should cease to exist'' (FISHER, 2008, p.80).

If Madeline represents a ''tower of strength'', the tower being a part of a building, Madeline's fall would be directly related to the fall of the house. Her name also means ''lady of the house''. We should remember that the house presents a dark and degraded aspect since the arrival of the visitor. After Madeline's 'false death', the house is still standing although its decaying state remains. This would be understood as a signal that Madeline is still alive. But is exactly on the occasion of the twins' death (after Madeline's return) that the house crumbles. We can understand that she is the supporting pillar of the House of Usher, the pillar that keeps the house standing.

A house is made to house families, to give them a home. Thus a house is not just a building or a property but a characteristic of people who inhabit it, even acquiring their name. Thus we find the collapse of the Tower of Power of Usher's family. Understanding the term *dissolution* used in the tale with the sense of severance, termination, breakdown or decomposition, we can believe that Usher sees Madeline's imminent death mainly as the end of his family, a break of the continuation of his name in Earth, the end of his lineage. The loss of his sister would cause fear in Usher more because of the probable inexistence of a future part of himself on Earth rather than the loss of his sister herself. After all, Usher

and his sister are the last in the lineage. So we see a story in which the house and family of Usher is threatened.

Fisher (2008) gives other interpretations of Madeline's name. It could also be derived from Mary Magdalene in the Bible, who died a saint, but was originally thought to be a prostitute. This could refer to the probable incestuous relationship between brother and sister from which she wants revenge.

One fact deserves special attention: The narrator sees Madeline only once, briefly, on the day of his arrival, and only sees her again at the end of the story with her return from the grave. The news of the worsening of Madeline's condition is given by her brother. To the narrator is not given the opportunity to visit her at her bedside. The question remains: did she really succumb to her disease as her brother said? There is not enough information to prove this.

Madeline has not a single moment of dialogue in the story: "Madeline Usher is speechless in her only pre-entombed appearance" (WEEKES, p.150) We could assume that Madeline and Usher are identical in appearance, personality and spirit. But there are some differences. Madeline's lack of voice is the most expressive of them. Do the differences in the spirit of the siblings come only from Madeline being a woman? We know that the differences between men and women do not come only from biological factors but mainly through cultural factors. One of them is the idea that the female is passive and the male is active. We can imagine that Madeline keeps quiet and secluded thanks to the fact of being female. The idea of near equality in this story could not be more explicit: the two are siblings born on the same day and of the same parents. Both live in the same house since birth. Both share almost the same physical and spiritual qualities. Even their disease (although some features are not common to both) seems to be related by some hidden bridge of mysticism. Why, then, is Madeline presumed dead? Why is it she who succumbs to disease while Usher, despite his nervous disease, still roams around the house having pitiful and grieving conversations with his friend? Why is the chance to have company given to him, someone to listen to him, while Madeline has no companion?

The question is if it was her illness that caused his, or the contrary; or if the fact that they were twins caused the illness simultaneously. What could have happened inside the house that

resulted in the disease of both? Was Usher consciously or not in love with his sister, depriving her of life beyond the walls of the house and causing the nervous disease that consumed her either by the consciousness of the sacrilege or the chaining of her spirit? The limitations imposed on Madeline are even greater than that of the other characters. In this case, besides all the limitations already mentioned, she would be deprived of the role of wife because of the impossibility of maintaining an incestuous relationship with Usher. Her premature burial (when she is still alive) symbolizes the isolation of her body and her spirit in an environment even smaller and more decadent than the house itself. To her nothing is given, absolutely no role, no purpose in life. Fisher feels that “Roderick’s burial of his sister, who is subject to cataleptic trances (what we today call epilepsy), symbolizes repression of an important element of life, namely the physical.” (2008, p.79). Fisher goes on to say that if Madeline represents the physical life which Roderick tries to repress and deny, “Their final encounter depicts repression’s violently bursting free[...] Madeline’s falling upon Roderick represents her claiming his will, and therefore, his dying from fear” (Ibid, 81-82).)

In ‘Berenice’ there is a variant: she only attracts the attention of the narrator after being touched by the disease, which worsens gradually after the engagement. She attracts the obsession of the groom by her teeth, and her disfigurement, by its removal. We saw that one of the reasons for the oppression of those considered inferior is precisely the fact that they are not really inferior. Once they are aware of their rights and their ability, it is possible that these inferior beings could emerge from the darkness and change the situation in their favor. It is precisely this that the oppressors fear. Therefore, their reaction is to dismember the enemy so that he or she cannot be useful to the interest of others except for their own. Thus, according to feminist theories we can assume that women, with all their capabilities, represent a threat to the male race, always so proud of their position. Consequently, we also can assume that the violation of Berenice’s teeth means the oppression of the female voice, depriving her of the right to speak about what oppresses her heart. In the story, Berenice never speaks: “Berenice smiled her ghastly grin, but “spoke no word” (WEEKES, p.150). It is that deprivation that causes her death and not the sickness itself.

Another explanation for the mutilation of Berenice is also offered by Weekes : Showing one’s teeth in a smile can indicate sexual interest, and if the “peculiar meaning” of Berenice’s grin is carnal desire, the cerebral narrator would be doubly overcome.” (WEEKES, p.156).As

Egeus speaks of her “moral condition”, Weekes is of the opinion that she is changing her innocence for sexuality, and that this frightens her reclusive cousin/fiancé. Weekes also points out that Berenice’s appearance in his library may also seem a threat to Egeus, as this is the place where male knowledge is stored. Whatever the explanation, the pulling out of her teeth is an effort to eliminate the threat she presents.

In Estes' vision, the death of woman is related to the oppression of Wild Woman, which leads to female instincts and vitality. It becomes easy to understand that the decline and death of Poe's heroines are related to the abandonment or Wild Woman's inability to operate freely. They are forced to conform to the situation and adapt their and soul to the situations that are imposed on them.

3.9 POWER OF SURVIVAL

A mixture of intellectual and physical beauty, is an integral part of feminine strength and the woman’s ability to attract, convince, persuade or manipulate. Moreover, often in Poe's tales, women have an ability to postpone death, incomprehensible in the eyes of the narrator. So, we see Rowena resist her illness and recover (but not completely) from it, but with constant relapses, even thus delaying as much as possible her death. Morella’s husband, who is unable to tolerate the strange behavior of his wife, cursed her days and desired her death and after that he is haunted by her image reflected, in intelligence and beauty, in his daughter. Eleonora manipulates her cousin using her sick and dying aspect to get the promise that he would never abandon her or leave the Valley in which they lived. Usher is influenced by the strange disease that consumes his sister’s energy. Finally, we see the narrator's strange attraction to Berenice after the emotional and physical decay caused by her strange disease. This obsession with decaying women who resist death is directly related to Poe’s own marital experience.

The teeth are for most mammals their defense; in women we can suppose that they signify not only the capability to defend themselves, but also a sign of beauty. Then, not only her defense but the “beauty” of Berenice are taken from her. Pulling out the teeth may be equated to disarming or depriving woman of her power of seduction and self-protection.

3.10 POWER AFTER DEATH

Poe's women are not as inoffensive and weak as they appear. According to Weekes, "The heroines' unexpected capacities for life beyond the grave indicate that females may have more strength than the delicate models of his verse." (WEEKES, p.148). The basic feature of female docility in humans does not hold fully. Women are always suppressed by some hidden factor in their lives, but they do not willingly accept their social role, looking at the end of the tales for some way to attack their oppressors. All the male characters in the tales studied here; in the end invariably succumb to the strong female presence either by remembering, by death, with tormenting thoughts, with the loss of something precious, with guilt, or the incapacity to deal with their own brutality. In the latter case we can mention the terrifying discovery of the narrator of having been able to pull out Berenice's teeth while she was still alive. Usher is killed by his sister's embrace when she returns from her coffin to find him. Charles E. May (1991) comments that "Morella's consciousness or identity does indeed survive in the only way that it can be embodied, in the child, born simultaneously with her death" (MAY, 1991, p.61). The death of Morella's daughter is the punishment for her widower who did not love her enough when she was alive and wished for her death. Ligeia's reappearance in Rowena's dead body is a sign of her power of will: "Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will." (POE,p.132). She even defeats death. According to Weekes:

The power struggle between Ligeia and her husband is much more clearly resolved, as at the end of her tale she shrinks from his touch and stands, regally, while he is at her feet. Ligeia's mighty will proves more than an equal for the protagonist; she is the only female in Poe's tales or poems to triumph both over death, and more significantly, over her narrator. .. The narrator is terrified by Ligeia's reappearance not so much because it means she has conquered death, but because she does it through an act of vehement will, a powerful volition that renders him prostrate. (WEEKES, pp.158- 159)

"Eleonora" was the last of the tales about women. Fisher comments that:

In an inversion of the emotional and physical horrors in the earlier tales with women's names, this one ends happily[...] Grim and gruesome though the earlier tales about women may have been, the negative context results from the male protagonist's distorting or unbalancing what should be a harmonious union [...] Therefore the happy ending in "Eleonora" foregrounds more emphatically than most of the earlier woman tales, balance in gender as essential to a healthy self. (FISHER, p.84)

Eleonora forgives her lover for breaking his promise and remarrying, but not before he has been haunted by guilt. Weekes says that “Eleonora’s love is as all-consuming as the narrator could wish, but her jealous acceptance of the promise of fidelity introduces a question of power that does not arise in the poetry. However, the power struggle is absolutely resolved in favor of the narrator” (WEEKES, p.155). She presents an exception among the heroines of Poe by her docility, as she is the only one that frees him from a promise that holds him to her, avoiding any confrontation with him, and allowing him to have a peaceful life with his second wife. In this connection, May comments:

Nothing in the conventions of this parable nor in its ostensible body / spirit theme can account for the fact that the protagonist does not have to suffer the unspeakable punishment for the violation of his promise. The most plausible explanation is that Eleonora’s whispered exoneration of his transgression suggests that the “Spirit of Love” transcends any individual manifestation of love – an idealization that indeed can only be made known to the narrator in Heaven, as it was made known to Eleonora herself after her death. (MAY, pp.67-8)

Weekes also affirms that a delicate female like Eleonora presents no intellectual or sexual threat, and that her sudden, poignant death serves several purposes. The relationship with the male protagonist is ended in the early stages of absolute devotion, and the protagonist is not threatened with ideas of his own mortality: “But most importantly for Poe their dying serves the poetic purpose of enhancing the male’s experience of melancholy Beauty, “that pleasure [...] at once the most intense, the most elevating and the most pure” (WEEKES, p.160). Meyers adds that in this story “Young love transcends death and survives in spiritual union” (p.243)

Weekes feels that the true horror for the narrator in “tales of terror” like “Morella” and “Ligeia” is that “a beautiful woman can wield her own power” (WEEKES, p.159). In “The Philosophy of Composition” Poe said that “the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” certainly he creates this situation repeatedly in his stories. These deaths seem to be the only way that the narrator can re-establish his power, but most of the dead women insist on re-appearing to re-establish their power.

4. CONCLUSION

The image of women in Poe's short stories is reshaped at the end of the tales, though at the beginning, these women correspond to the ideal required by patriarchal society. An analysis of these women's behavior reveals the patterns described by Estés as being typical of the Wild Woman. Repression by their male partners, who constantly affirm that they love these women, distorts their personalities, but as time goes by they acquire the capacity for revenge. The repression of the spirit of the Wild Woman has caused their illness, and caused the decrease of female brightness. But at the end of the tales, the women forget the kindness and gentleness which are considered to be typical of their sex. They are strong enough to conquer death and stifle their oppressors, punishing those whom they believe to be responsible for their downfall. The predator becomes the victim of his own poison. The suffering they caused their wives now destroys them, when the women return from their graves with a new strength. The victory of these women is always a victory after death, which means that they are strong enough to conquer this barrier. Death is ever present in these stories and can be viewed as a liberation from prison of the female spirit, for it is through death that these women are able to free themselves from the limitations of the body, from social repression and the animal groom. The female spirit is able to subdue man to its will without his always being aware of it.

These voices, forced to remain silent in life, return to the place where they were overwhelmed, break the barriers of the spiritual and material world, and are left to echo in the highest-pitched sound to make their mark in the world, to deafen those who tried to suppress them. These women show that they can change themselves and what is around them. They are the voices that reappear out of nowhere, the place where everything is transformed, where the end is the beginning of a new, free and grand stage. The voices from the grave.

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ANNEXES

SUMMARIES OF THE SHORT STORIES

ELEONORA (1842)

The narrator is Eleonora's cousin, with whom she lives in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass, a valley surrounded by a beautiful natural landscape isolated and of difficult access. In the valley there is a river which because of the stillness and silence of its waters is called the River of Silence.

Eleonora and her cousin fall in love in youth, and their union in love brings to the valley a new phase of greater beauty. There is more life in the place, for animals not noticed before began to appear, the plants were most beautiful, the skies filled with birds, and the river began to show signs of movement in swimming fish never seen and even the sounds of this lively up then awakens.

Sometime after, Eleonora falls sick. Her illness takes away her energy, death is imminent. Eleonora, asks her lover/ cousin to promise that he will never leave the valley in which they lived and never give his love to another girl. The narrator promises what she asks. She promises that she will always be with him through nature and that if it is possible, would appear to him in his natural way to care for him.

Eleonora dies and signals of her presence appear to her cousin, but the valley gradually returns to its previous state of beauty, however surrounded by an air of sadness and regret that the narrator cannot stand and then he leaves the valley.

Although troubled by the guilt of not fulfilling his promise, the narrator marries Ermengarde. One night he has the impression of hearing whispers .It is Eleonora releasing him from his promise to remain faithful to her forever.

BERENICE (1835)

Egaeus grew up in a mansion with a gloomy, solitary temperament and poor health. His favorite place is the library, the place in which he was born and his mother died. There, he spends his time absorbed in books and in misty memories and meditations.

Among his memories is Berenice, his cousin. She grew up with him but she was a cheerful, graceful and lively girl until a strange nervous disease affected her, which terribly changed her temperament and looks. She became, a pale, gloomy, melancholy girl, with a morbid and awful aspect. Her disease, sometimes, caused in Berenice a false impression of death (catalepsy), after which she would suddenly wake up. Attracted to this Berenice (not for love, but for interest in her new aspect), Egeus decides to marry her.

At the same time, Egeus himself develops an illness. He suffers from a type of *monomania*, or an impulsive and fruitless observation of trivial things. One day, Egeus sees his sick bride in the library for a brief moment and she smiles at him. But he is influenced by his *illness* (or his insanity), therefore, Berenice's smile and white shiny teeth immediately become his obsession..

The next night, he receives the news that Berenice is dead and that everything is ready for the burial. At the funeral, Egeus has the feeling that a finger of the dead has moved. When he looks at her face, the teeth were there. They are shown by her half-open mouth in a discreet smile (or what looks like one). He leaves disturbed by that scene and, in the library he is lost in thought about the image of the teeth.

At midnight he becomes conscious once again and is confused,. He does not remember very well what happened after the funeral, but he knows that something has happened. He notices a little box on the table. A servant enters the library, he is frightened and says something that Egeus just understands in pieces: a female cry, a violated grave, a disfigured body that was still alive. In that moment, Egeus understands the meaning of his dirty clothes, the marks of nails on his hands, a spade in the wall. The little box slips off from his hands and shows *instruments of dental surgery and thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances* scatter on the ground.

MORELLA (1835)

Morella and the narrator meet and marry. She is in love with him, he is attracted more by her mystical intellectual influence. He admits he does not feel love for his wife at any moment of their relationship. Over time, Morella's studies also influence her husband to the point of becoming the object of his curiosity. Among the strange subjects of study mentioned the narrator mentions the mysteries surrounding the spirit and personality, which is supposed to dissolve completely at death.

Slowly, the narrator's admiration for his wife turns into disgust, and he begins to wish for her death. Morella, already sick, sees the disgust of the husband but does nothing about it. On her death bed Morella gives a sort of promise, to curse her husband; "I am dying yet shall I live.[...] the days have never been when thou couldst love me – but her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore." (POE, p.154). And then she dies.

But Morella is pregnant and her death occurs during the birth of their daughter who just starts to breathe after the cessation of breathing of her mother. Growing up, the daughter of Morella comes to seem more and more like her, both physically and in spirit and personality. The father loves his daughter although he realizes the frightening resemblance to her mother. Anyway, on the day of her baptism, a strange force seems to prevent the father from choosing another name for the daughter instead of that of her mother. In pronouncing the name chosen - Morella - the girl dies. When the father goes to bury her in the family tomb, he finds to his surprise that there is no sign of the first Morella's body.

LIGEIA (1838)

The narrator is the devoted husband of Ligeia, a woman of strange, dark and placid beauty endowed with a rare and magnificent knowledge and owner of a quiet temperament. Ligeia is intelligent and curious about the mysticism of the world. Within the knowledge of Ligeia, one aspect arouses special curiosity: the idea of the power at will. This fact gave the Ligeia an intensity of action, thought and word, according to the impressions of the narrator. Her influence over her husband is so much that he considers himself a disciple, a child to be guided by her. The husband has deep admiration for the woman, taking special interest in her big black eyes, the reflectors of her expression, as if they were carrying the secret of her being and the vitality of the things of the world. The narrator confesses to the reader that he does not know about the origins of Ligeia or her last name,, though she brought him more wealth than he needed.

Ligeia's eyes begin to lose their luster and she falls ill. The husband feels helpless in dealing with the illness of his wife but she tries with all her strength to resist the disease, maintaining her serenity, despite her thin and decadent aspect and the fear of the approaching death. Ligeia fights to live. Finally, overcome with fatigue, she dies, bringing the narrator great sadness and regret.

The narrator then rents a sad and gloomy abbey. In a moment of mental alienation the narrator marries Lady Rowena Trevanion, a blonde with blue eyes. He designs their room with a pentagonal shape and domed with a sarcophagus on each side, decorated in Gothic style, with a single window and a kind of metal hanging in the center that reflects, with the help of outside light, various multicolored rays, characteristics that gave it a ghostly effect.

But Rowena has never been loved by her husband, and fears his violent temper. The narrator confesses his hatred for his second wife and says her fear only gives him more motivation for his hatred. Rowena's husband, then addicted to opium, is frequently lost in daydreams about Ligeia, pronouncing her name in the illusion of bringing her back from the dead.

Soon Rowena falls ill and although she recovers briefly, her relapses become more frequent. Rowena says that she hears voices to which the husband pays no attention. When she faints, the narrator gives Rowena a wine prescribed by doctors. But when he goes

to fetch the wine, he has the feeling of something passing him, and a strange shadow on the carpet. When he gives the wine to Rowena, he hears footsteps in the room and seeing Rowena lift the cup he has the impression of seeing drops of a ruby colored liquid fall within it. But he pays no attention to this as he is under the influence of opium.

Three nights later Rowena dies. During the funeral the narrator is possessed by memories of Ligeia. He then begins to have repeated impressions of a murmur from the coffin, or a slight movement of the corpse. The widower comes to think that Rowena is still alive, but she soon returns to her morbid and immobile state, disappointing him. This way, he spends most of the night, until sitting in his chair he sees the dead rising from his deathbed and walk up to him. But the body that is before him has black hair and black eyes like those of Ligeia.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER (1839)

Roderick and Madeline Usher are identical twins who live in a large decaying mansion. Usher is under the influence of a strange nervous illness and writes a letter to a childhood friend who visits him and who is the narrator of the tale. The Usher family mansion is shown as a mysterious place and its dark look seems very strange, sad, sick, and evil. But though the strange atmosphere of the house makes Usher afraid, he remains isolated there with Madeline.

Usher's sister appears in the tale, very sad and physically weak. He believes that his illness appeared because of concerns about her illness. Among her symptoms is a tendency to catalepsy. There is no explanation for Madeline's disease. Madeline appears in the tale, still alive, once and quickly walking from one room to another, and her sickly aspect impresses Usher's friend. Madeline fights against the disease, but after the arrival of the visitor it gets worse and she takes to her bed, according to her brother. A few days later, Roderick gives his friend the news of the death of his sister.

Usher and his friend take Madeline to a kind of crypt, belonging to a part of his own home. Usher uses the excuse of the catatonic aspect of the disease of Madeline to justify her "temporary burial". But he does not hesitate to screw the coffin and shut the heavy stone door of the room with exit for the outside of the house.

Some days go by, and the melancholy of Usher seems to be worse, he seems to fear some future event. One stormy night, a loud noise can be heard from inside the house of Usher: a noise like stone and wood breaking. Usher remains terrified and says he has wrongly buried Madeline alive. Then they listen to sounds of heavy footsteps coming from the outside of the house toward the front door. The door opens abruptly and Madeline falls on her brother. Both fall dead on the floor and the house collapses, leaving only a pile of rubble in its place.

EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809 -1849)

Edgar Allan Poe's life was full of failures and losses. He was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston. He was the son of an actor, David Poe Jr. and the English actress Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins Poe. He was abandoned by his father in 1810. He had two siblings, but lost his mother after the birth of his younger sister Rosalie. After this, he was adopted (though not legally), by a wealthy merchant, John Allan and his wife, Frances.

Intelligent, but also very moody, he studied at Stoke-Newington school in London, Charlottesville University in Richmond, and continued his studies at the University of Virginia in 1826, but in 1827, thanks to gambling and problems with drink and debt, he gave up studies and remained for two years in the U.S. Army.

He lost his adoptive mother in 1829. Then, he entered the Military Academy of West Point, but he left there in 1831 after the publication of some poems. At this time. Poe cut off relations with his foster father and went to live in Baltimore with a very poor widow aunt, Maria Clemm, and her daughter, Virginia Clemm whom he married in 1836 when she was just 13 years old. Living in poverty, he depended on writing for a living. But at the end of 1835 he became the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* until 1837. The following year he was working on Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine*. The couple lived in Philadelphia, New York and Fordham. But his wife died of tuberculosis in 1847 in a house in the Bronx. Now it is known as Poe Cottage and is open to the public. Poe had become an alcoholic. He moved to New York, becoming the editor of the *Broadway Journal*. In 1845 he published "The Raven". He became the target of censorship by the press after the publication of "Eureka".

He returned to Richmond and then went to New York. On October 3, 1849 he was found by a friend in a delusional state, having been dumped near a tavern wearing dirty, oversized and torn clothes. He was taken to hospital where he died four days later, on 7 October 1849 at age 40. The causes of death are unknown until today, it is believed that the writer had an overdose of opium, or he was the

victim of alcoholism. He did not recover consciousness to explain the conditions in which was found.

Poe wrote novels, short stories and poems, exerting considerable influence in key authors such as Baudelaire, Maupassant and Dostoevsky. But his greatest talent was in writing short stories. He wrote tales of horror or "gothic" tales and detective stories based on ratiocination. The tales of horror have characters who are invariably unhealthy, obsessive, fascinated by death, dedicated to crime, dominated by hereditary curses, creatures ranging between lucidity and madness, living in a trance, like frightening specters of a terrible nightmare. Among the tales, the following stand out: "The Black Cat", "Ligeia", "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "Berenice" and "The Cask of Amontillado". Among his famous detective stories are "The Mystery of Marie Roget", "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter". Unlike the tales of horror, these are conspicuous for the rigorous logic and deduction which lead to the solution of apparently insoluble crimes.

In his tales, Poe focused on psychological terror. Generally, the characters suffer from an overwhelming terror, the fruit of their own phobias and nightmares, which were almost always a portrait of the author himself. The character's delirium mingles with reality so that one can not differentiate any more if the danger is real or just an illusion produced by a tormented mind. In almost all the stories, there is always a dive into certain depths of the human soul, into certain morbid states of mind, in hidden recesses of the subconscious.

The idea of women in Poe's tales probably was probably strongly influenced by his sad experiences of death, with the loss of his mother and foster mother, and the loss of his wife who was his cousin, a remarkable coincidence that can be seen in the tales and Berenice and Eleonora, where both characters are cousins of the narrator. His work is remembered for stunning and impressive narrative talent, creative force and monumental artistic achievement, causing Edgar Allan Poe to be considered one of the greatest writers of tales of terror.

