

‘THAT WAS POE,
THE GREAT AMERICAN HACK’:
RETRACING ECHOES
OF POE’S GOTHIC TALES
IN STEPHEN KING’S *THE SHINING*

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ABSTRACT: Burton Pollin argues that, despite Edgar Allan Poe’s evident legacy in Stephen King’s fiction, Poe’s influence on the writings of this author from Maine has often been overlooked and even ignored by Poe scholars. Pollin suggests that King’s most acclaimed horror novel *The Shining* (1977) was mostly inspired by Poe’s gothic tales “The Masque of the Red Death” and “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Taking Pollin’s premise as a point of departure, this article aims to retrace examples of transtextuality – to use Gérard Genette’s term – between King’s novel *The Shining* and some of Poe’s gothic tales, thus following Pollin’s initial proposal, but with the view to analyse different passages from King’s novel in comparison with other Poe’s tales that have been hardly mentioned in relation to *The Shining*.

RESUMEN: Burton Pollin defiende que, pese al evidente legado que Edgar Allan Poe atesora en la ficción de Stephen King, la influencia que Poe ha ejercido en las obras del escritor de Maine a menudo ha sido menospreciada o incluso ignorada por parte de los estudiosos de la obra de Poe. Pollin sugiere que la novela de terror más aclamada de King, *El resplandor* (1977), fue inspirada principalmente por los relatos góticos de Poe “La máscara de la muerte roja” y “La caída de la casa Usher.” Tomando la premisa de Pollin como punto de partida, este artículo pretende identificar ejemplos de transtextualidad –

utilizando el término de Gérard Genette – entre la novela de King “El resplandor” y relatos de Poe, siguiendo la propuesta inicial de Pollin, pero con el objetivo de analizar diferentes pasajes de la novela de King comparándolos con otros relatos de Poe que apenas han sido mencionados en relación a *El resplandor*.

Critics such as Michael L. Burdick (1992), Frederick S. Frank and Anthony Magistrale (1997), as well as Burton R. Pollin (2004) have referred to the significant parallelisms existing between the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King, but it has been particularly the author from Maine who has mostly emphasised the important influence that Poe has exerted on his works, to the extent that, in his critical volume on horror fiction *Danse Macabre* (1981), King defines terror as “the sound of the old man’s continuing pulse beat in Poe’s tale ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’” (37). Poe and King share a significant series of elements with respect to gothic fiction, mainly their outstanding contribution to the genre, as Poe is heralded as the author who endowed the gothic with an important modern flavour, moving from eighteenth-century gothic clichés to more introspective and psychological narratives, while King is responsible for thrusting horror fiction, which had been commonly considered a minor genre, into the mass market arena, as well as for reshaping the gothic lore and updating the classics of the genre to suit contemporary readers.

In their role as authors, both Poe and King display a high degree of awareness regarding the poetics of writing gothic fiction, as shown in their respective critical essays on horror and creativity, which underpin similar theories about the need to create a particular effect on the reader, through Poe’s narratological precepts about the pre-established design and the unity of effect, and King’s will to resort to the three main levels he identifies in gothic fiction – terror, horror, and gross-out – to create fear. Likewise, both Poe and King also paid close attention to the demands of the readership, which would turn them into icons of popular fiction, Poe being well aware of the fears present in his time, owing to his interest in nineteenth-century theories about the diseases of the mind and the current frightful news published in the press, while King even dared produce a top ten list of the fears that he identified as most frightening according to contemporary readers.

The writings of Poe and King also underscore the cathartic function of gothic fiction, as, following psychoanalytic interpretations

of Poe's tales, the Bostonian writer resorted to gothic narratives in order to exorcise his innermost fears, whereas, upon pondering on the function of horror fiction, King admits that "we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones" (*Danse Macabre*, 27). The fiction of both Poe and King is also endowed with a profound allegorical quality that reflects the spirit of the age, since, according to Burdick, Poe's tales refuse the optimistic ideas at the onset of the American Renaissance and challenge the current transcendental hopefulness, while King's novels often reflect national anxieties and the debacle of the American middle-class family, thus showing, according to Gary Hoppenstand and Ray Browne, that the American dream may easily turn into an American nightmare. Likewise, the writings of both Poe and King display a manifest sense of irony, as the demented narrators in Poe's tales often make use of humour to underline their psychotic traits and show the unreliability of their narratives, while King resorts frequently to sarcasm in order to alleviate the impact of gross-out scenes in his novels, establish sustained empathy with his readers, or as Poe does, unveil the narrator's insanity in some of his writings.

In spite of the evident parallelisms between Poe's and King's poetics of writing gothic fiction, Poe scholar Burton Pollin argues in his article "Stephen King's Fiction and the Legacy of Poe," published in the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* in 1993, that the study of Poe's influence on King's writings has often been unappreciated, and to use Pollin's words, it has been "almost entirely ignored by students of Poe and only lightly touched upon by King devotees" (230). In his article, Pollin argues that King's major horror novel *The Shining* (1977) was mostly inspired by Poe's gothic tales "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Masque of the Red Death" (233). In fact, it is mostly in *The Shining* that King seems to explicitly acknowledge Poe's pervasive influence on his works, as when Jack Torrance takes part in a ghostly masked ball in the Overlook, he admits to himself that the place "was the farthest cry from E. A. Poe imaginable," arguing that the scene inevitably came out of "Poe, the Great American Hack" (170).

Given King's own explicit reference to the Bostonian writer, in his study, Pollin identifies echoes of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" in King's *The Shining* in terms of the final dissolution of the Overlook Hotel, which is highly reminiscent of the destruction of the House of Usher, or Jack Torrance's artistic insanity, which presents important points in common with that of Roderick Usher. In

addition, Pollin also enumerates a series of passages in King's novel in which Poe's tale "The Masque of the Red Death" is clearly evoked or even quoted explicitly, thus showing King's deliberate purpose to acknowledge his debt to Poe.

Bearing in mind King's explicit references to Poe and Pollin's ground-breaking comparative study, King's novel *The Shining* arises as a fruitful starting point to draw parallelisms between both authors. As a case in point, the most recent study to date which approaches such comparative analysis is that of Maros Buday, who taking over Pollin's initial cue, analyses *The Shining* in comparison with Poe's tales "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of the Red Death", and "The Black Cat." Nonetheless, a closer analysis of King's *The Shining* shows that Poe's influence on this particular novel is even more important than has been noticed up to now and should be expanded to encompass other Poe's tales whose impact on King's novel has been neglected.

Taking Pollin's original thesis as a point of departure, this paper aims at retracing examples of transtextuality, to use Gérard Genette's term, taken as any obvious or veiled relationship established between two texts, ranging from explicit intertextuality – that is, direct allusion – to broad hypertextuality – that is, the transformation or extension of a preceding text or hypotext –, between King's novel *The Shining* and a series of Poe's tales. Following Pollin's proposal, echoes of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Masque of the Red Death" will be mentioned as a point of departure, but the focus of attention of this article will mostly lie in identifying traces of other Poe's tales that have scarcely been mentioned with regard to King's *The Shining*, in particular "The Black Cat," "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Oval Portrait," "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "William Wilson."

THE PERVASIVENESS OF PERVERSITY

Some of the narrators in Poe's tales are driven by self-destructive tendencies, as is the case with the compulsive characters in "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Black Cat," who are not only drawn to criminal deeds, but also to irrational acts of confession that ultimately underscore their apparent will to be punished. For Poe this alluring paradox lies in the intricate nature of perverseness, which Magistrale defines as "the unreasonable

counterpoint to security and self-protection" (90), suggesting that human beings are inevitably led to self-destruction. Given the fact that Poe's "The Imp of the Perverse" is a combination between a confession and a discursive essay, this tale best conveys an acute insight into the narrator's self-destructive predisposition and his ultimate desire to be caught. Nonetheless, as Frank and Magistrale argue, the narrator's urge to confess his deeds does not respond to guilt and remorse, but rather to "the perverse pleasure involved in actively dooming himself" (174), since it seems that the imp of perverse, which the narrator reflects upon, cannot be fully gratified until the narrator's criminal acts are divulged and made public. Likewise, in Poe's tale "The Imp of the Perverse," the narrator admits that, owing to perversity, "we act for the reason that we should *not*" (1220), but it is precisely owing to its puzzling quality that the narrator realises that not only does he act against others, but he also finds himself acting against his own interests.

The same spirit of perversity that haunts Poe's narrator also torments Jack permanently in King's novel, as he displays through his process of recollection of all the events which finally lead him to accept the post of caretaker at the Overlook. If in Poe's tale, the narrator is driven by the imp of the perverse, when Jack recalls his erratic treatment of friends and relatives, his alcoholism, and his defiance of authority figures, he often admits to himself, as a litany repeating itself, that he lost his temper on all these occasions. As he confesses, "he had always regarded himself as Jack Torrance, a really nice guy who was just going to have to learn to cope with his temper someday before it got him in trouble – the same way he was going to have to learn how to cope with his drinking" (118). Jack's words are reminiscent of those of the narrator in Poe's tale, insofar as Poe's compulsive narrator claims that this tendency responds to an "innate and primitive principle" (1220) of self-destruction to which all human beings are susceptible. Jack thus considers himself an inherently kind-hearted person who struggles to keep his temper under control.

Nonetheless, although he shares with Poe's compulsive narrator this universal primitive tendency, Jack's proclivity towards self-destruction seems mostly grounded in his creative gift as a writer, admitting that any flare of fierce temper aimed at others is ultimately addressed to himself. Like Roderick Usher, as an ill-fated artist, Jack is able to anticipate their ultimate dissolution, and yet, they refuse to do anything to prevent it and even accept it willingly.

Their sense of fatality can be partially explained through their wish to commune with the romantic idea of the tormented bard, as, in his role as a writer, Jack admits "a real artist must suffer" (250). In this respect, Jack recollects the awful events that took place and led him to be expelled from the high school where he worked as a teacher, such as his increasing alcohol abuse, as a result of which he might have caused a road accident and the likely death of cyclist, or his rough confrontation with one of his best students, George Hatfield, after scorning him publicly for his mere tendency to stutter. As he admits to himself, Jack ponders that his erratic behaviour at the time might have "stemmed from an unconscious desire to be free of Sovington and the security he felt was stifling whatever creative urge he had" (115). Hence, even if inadvertently, Jack's habit of losing his temper with others ultimately unveils his rejection of a secure means of making a living for him and his family for the sake of safeguarding his creativity as a writer. Nonetheless, as also happens to Poe's narrator in "The Imp of the Perverse," his erratic behaviour ultimately underpins his self-destructive tendencies, which render him to fall an easy prey to the malignant powers of the Overlook.

THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT

In King's novel, Danny Torrance, together with other characters such as Hallorann, are endowed with the gift of acute extrasensory perception, which they popularly call the power to shine and whereby they are allowed to perceive traces of the past and the future that lie hidden, being enabled to gain insight into a different dimension that others cannot possibly detect and much less grasp. While his father Jack canalises his creativity through writing, Danny's extraordinary imagination finds release in his acute perception, which symbolically turns him into an artist with a visionary disposition. While discussing his gift with Hallorann, the latter establishes a parallelism between their extrasensory perception and some artistic manifestations, thus stating that "people who shine can sometimes see things that are *gonna* happen, and I think sometimes they can see things that *did* happen – but they're just like pictures in a book" (94), images of the unconscious that cohabit with the real world. Hallorann's words about their extraordinary gift underpin the existence of a parallel artistic dimension that coexists with an ordinary reality in a way that bears close resemblance with the blurring dichotomy established between art and its tangible

counterpart in Poe's "The Oval Portrait." Given this parallel dimension, Hallorann advises his symbolic apprentice, Danny, to look the other way whenever he may stumble upon any of these visions or pictures in the Overlook, well aware of the overwhelming impact they may have on him. In contrast, even though he lacks his son's power to shine, Jack is also given access to this analogous dimension of the Overlook, partly through his visionary gift as a writer and partly through the hotel's will to turn him into a convenient means to achieve its malefic purposes.

It is thus in the Overlook that Jack becomes an allegorical artist, as he is granted access to this parallel reality and finds it increasingly difficult to establish a clear cut division between the boundaries separating these two coexisting dimensions, which will ultimately pave the ground for his final descent into madness. In fact, Jack had already shown his predilection for giving free vent to his creativity to the detriment of the security afforded by a steady job and the welfare of his own family. In this respect, in his role as an artist, Jack resembles the protagonist of Poe's "The Oval Portrait," insofar as, imbued with the malignant powers of the Overlook, he gives away his love for his actual wife, Wendy, and his family for the sake of his artistic pursuits. In analogy, as Magistrale claims, in Poe's "The Oval Portrait," the artist "suffers from a selfish blindness in his willingness to sacrifice his love for a flesh-and-blood woman in exchange for creative immortality [while] his female model similarly suffers from a blindness born out of adoration" (68-9). If the artist's obsession with painting a lifelike portrait literally drains the life of her meek wife to bestow it upon her artistic counterpart on the canvas in Poe's tale, in King's novel Jack also increasingly draws his attention from his devoted wife, Wendy, to the ghostly figure of "a beautiful woman" (384) — with whom he dances in the masquerade taking place every night at the Overlook — and also considers putting his wife's life to an end.

According to Elisabeth Bronfen, Poe's "The Oval Portrait" examines the classic coupling of women and death, thus underlining Poe's own statement regarding the death of a beautiful woman as the most poetical topic in the world. Nevertheless, Bronfen further notices that, through inverting the Pygmalion myth, as the artist transforms living material into art in this case, Poe was also exposing the self-destructive nature of aesthetics and the dangers of masculine creation. Drawing on this interpretation, feminist critics such as Cynthia Jordan have pointed out that Poe's women's tales

exposing the dangers of silencing female experience underscore Poe's critique of patriarchal creativity. Similarly, with regard to Poe's tales such as "Morella" or "Ligeia," in which a dead woman returns from the dead, critics such as Joan Dayan have argued these women's symbolic transformation into revenants responds to their ultimate will to shift their position from passivity to revenge. In analogy, in *The Shining*, through his portrait of Jack Torrance as an artist, King also reflects upon the threat of neglecting one's duties as a family man for the sake of creativity as well as the changing role of women. As Jack symbolically relegates his wife to a surrogate position for the benefit of his ghostly muse, Wendy gradually leaves behind her role as a meek wife to acquire a powerful role as an independent woman capable of raising her son on her own after Jack succumbs to the evil powers of the Overlook.

The characterisation of Jack as an artist in *The Shining* is also strongly reminiscent of that of Roderick Usher in Poe's tale. As Magistrale explains, Roderick Usher can be regarded as "the archetypal Poe protagonist" (64), insofar as he is portrayed as a dying artist living in seclusion and fated to doom, who, as Magistrale notices, presents important parallelisms with Poe himself (66), particularly with regard to their artistic temperament and creative vein. Showing his artistry, Roderick Usher declaims his poem "The Haunted Palace," whose plot about a king who feels his palace is threatened by sinister forces runs parallel to the plot of Poe's story itself, in a display of metaliterature and of art within art. In fact, critics such as Scott Peeples have referred to the artistic subtext lying beneath Poe's tale, stating that "The Fall of the House of Usher" becomes "a particularly apt story for examining Poe's 'constructiveness'" (178). In analogy, in *The Shining*, Jack also arises as a representative character in King's fiction, inasmuch as he is a writer, tormented by his past and his alcoholism, and haunted by his own characters – his own ghosts – to the extent that he is eventually unable to distinguish fact from fiction. As happens with Roderick Usher and Poe, in his role as a writer, Jack also turns into an *alter ego* of his own creator, King, as, Jack decides to write a novel about the hotel, and his motivation in order to pursue this project is disclosed as follows:

He would write it because the Overlook had enchanted him – could any other explanation be so simple or so true? He would write it for the reason he felt that all great literature, fiction and

nonfiction, was written: truth comes out, in the end it always comes out. He would write it because he felt he had to. (244)

Even though Jack fantasises about writing a novel about the Overlook hotel, he never achieves his purpose and it is actually Stephen King who takes over his character's project and accomplishes his aim of writing the story of the Overlook, thus upsetting the boundaries of fact and fiction that separate the roles of character and writer.

Likewise, as is the case with Poe's tale, King's novel also underlines issues related to literary constructiveness and the idea of the house as a text, since, through significant displays of transtextuality, King's Overlook, as an epitome of the haunted house arises as an amalgamation of different texts, as it pays homage to precedent narratives of the genre, in particular, Poe's seminal tale of the House of Usher. In addition, though, when Jack finds in the basement of the Overlook a series of newspaper articles, bills, clippings, and scrapbooks that disclose the unsavoury history of the hotel, he immediately contemplates the possibility of writing a novel, as he realises "there was a story [...] one hell of a story" (179) out of the lives of its owners and guests. Jack thus finds himself emulating Auguste Dupin in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," as the detective, Poe's *alter ego*, made use of news reports about the murder of Mary Rogers in order to try to unravel the mystery of her death.

The Shining also evokes "The Masque of the Red Death" insofar as the main character of *The Shining*, on whom the narrative mostly focalises, also arises as Prospero's counterpart. Owing to his name, endowed with significant literary echoes, the main character in Poe's tale necessarily refers back to the protagonist of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the exiled Duke of Milan, as both indulge in the fantasy of creating a parallel universe, where they would feel safe and sound from the threatening reality outside. Likewise, if, in Poe's tale, Prospero and his aristocratic comrades isolate themselves in a castle to escape the destruction that the plague brings about, in King's novel, Jack accepts the post of caretaker at the Overlook to live in seclusion with his wife and son in order to try to escape to a world of his own. In Poe's tale, in full display of his faith in his creative artistry, Prospero hosts a ball of masks within the protective walls of his castle in an attempt to indulge in a perpetual atmosphere of merriment and dissoluteness, which will ultimately lay bare his useless efforts to escape death and attain immortality. In analogy,

Jack is also drawn to a ghostly masquerade taking place every night at the Overlook, and as his wife Wendy realises, he gradually gets involved in this decadent atmosphere of evil to the point of wishing "to be one of them and live forever" (*The Shining*, 360), thus yearning for the immortality that Prospero and his comrades also covet in Poe's tale.

Prospero's delusions of defeating death also find their counterpart in the narrator's scientific ambition and its awful results in Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," which are also evoked in different passages of King's *The Shining*. Through his artistic temperament and his ambition to write a novel, Jack aims to bring the past of the Overlook back to life, symbolically awakening the dead. Jack's creative gift brings to life "the woman in the tub [who] had been dead for a long time" (239), while as he is served by the waiter Lloyd in the bar of the Overlook, where he relapses back to alcoholism, Jack notices how "Lloyd's face seemed to be running, changing, becoming something pestilent" (380). Jack's delusions of immortality as a writer involve the unnatural awakening of a past that has been dead for long, and the vivid descriptions of the ghosts of the past bring to mind Poe's portrayal of Valdemar as he is awakened by the narrator and turns into a "nearly liquid mass of loathsome [...] detestable putridity" (1243), like the woman in the bathtub or the bartender at the Overlook.

HOUSES AS LIVING ENTITIES DOOMED TO EXTINCTION

In his article on Poe's heritage in Stephen King's fiction, Pollin claims that, taking into consideration King's novel *The Shining*, "the Poe tale which has lent itself more basically is 'The Fall of the House of Usher'" (233), particularly with respect to the prosopopoeial characterisation of both the House of Usher and the Overlook Hotel, as well as the artistic temperament and decadent disposition of Jack Torrance, which inevitably brings to mind that of Roderick Usher. According to Magistrale, the House of Usher can be regarded as "the first truly American haunted house" (64), insofar as it inspired many gothic mansions for generations to come, among them, the Overlook Hotel in King's novel. In analogy with the House of Usher, the Overlook arises as a definite presence, turning into another character in the narrative, and as a living dwelling that threatens to prey upon its inhabitants, transfer onto them its malignant psychic energy, and pursue their ultimate doom. If in Poe's seminal tale, the

narrator's attention is drawn to the pervasive "vacant eye-like windows" ("The Fall," 397) of the House of Usher, King reproduces this initial scene in his novel when Jack beholds the Overlook in this particular way,

He looked up at the banks of windows and the sun threw back an almost blinding glare from the many-paned surfaces but he looked anyway. For the first time he noticed how much they seemed like eyes. They reflected away the sun and held their own darkness within. (*The Shining*, 306)

Likewise, both the House of Usher and the Overlook become extensions of their present dwellers, Roderick Usher and Jack Torrance. With respect to Poe's tale, in his seminal article "The House of Poe," Richard Wilbur argues that, allegorically, the House of Usher stands for Roderick Usher's physical body, and its interior turns into his visionary mind (28). The symbiosis established between the House of Usher and its owner becomes pervasive inasmuch as the description of the house matches the portrayal of Roderick Usher, both the house and its proprietor bear the same name, while the death of the landlord inevitably brings the ultimate collapse of his manor. In analogy, in King's novel, the Overlook gradually takes possession of Jack so that he perpetrates the murder of his own family and the hotel accomplishes its malignant purpose of incorporating the Torrance family as new members of its ghostly crew. As Jack relapses into insanity, his wife Wendy becomes aware of the fact that "Jack wasn't out there anymore – she was hearing the lunatic, raving voice of the Overlook itself" (*The Shining*, 456), thus implying the inherent association between the Overlook and its caretaker, which is finally sanctioned when the collapse of the hotel also involves the death of its custodian.

Drawing further on the characterisation of the houses through personification, both dwellings also possess an inherent capacity to become alive, but also to propitiate their own devastation. In Poe's tale, the fissure that extends from the roof of the house to the bottom of the tarn symbolically endows the manor with a life of its own, as it upsets the fundamentals of the building and even propels it into movement, but it is also the widening of this fissure that finally impels the collapse of the house. Correspondingly, in King's novel, as the caretaker of the hotel, Jack is given instructions to watch over the old boiler of the Overlook, being warned that it should be

maintained on a regular basis, insofar as it is considered the engine, or in symbolic terms, the heart that keeps the Overlook alive. In fact, a parallelism is established between the boiler of the Overlook and a beating heart, as Danny notices that "the mechanical roaring sound, which he now recognized as the boiler at the Overlook [...] had developed an ominous, rhythmic hitching [which] began to sound like ... like pounding" (156). The terms in which the boiler at the Overlook is described is highly evocative of "the low, dull, quick sound" (795) of the beating of the old man's heart in Poe's tale "The Tell-Tale Heart." Likewise, Danny's extrasensory perception, which allows him to eavesdrop the pounding sound of the boiler at the Overlook, is also clearly reminiscent of the narrator's "over acuteness of the senses" (795) in Poe's tale, owing to which he is permanently haunted by the nervous beating of the old man's heart. In analogy, if in *The Shining*, it is the eventual detonation of the Overlook's symbolic heart, that is, that of the boiler which finally sets the hotel on fire and brings about its own destruction owing to Jack's negligence as a result of his gradual relapse into insanity, in Poe's tale, it is also due to the relentless beatings of the old man's heart that the narrator feels the urge to confess his crime, thus finally giving himself away.

This ongoing sense of impending doom which becomes pervasive in King's novel also finds its counterpart in Poe's tale "The Masque of the Red Death." As Pollin claims, King clearly derived the "underlying theme" of *The Shining* from Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (233), insofar as both narratives address the impossibility to escape death despite any human hope to indulge in pleasure and merriment, even if momentarily, in order to try to avoid the lethal effects of the scythe of time. The seven multi-coloured chambers in Poe's tale, which represent the passage of time and the symbolic different stages of life up to death, represented by the ebony clock which presides over the black chamber, also find their correspondence in the colourful rooms of the Overlook, which collect memories from all years since its foundation, and its imposing clock, whose chimes are heard all across the hotel. Owing to the symbolic synergy established between the different chambers and the clock in both narratives, it can be argued that that Poe's tale and King's novel exemplify Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (*The Dialogic Imagination*), thus referring to the intrinsic connectedness existing between time and space, as they fuse and intersect with each other within the walls of Prospero's castle and the Overlook hotel.

In Prospero's castle, the masked aristocrats are disconcerted every time they hear the chimes of the ebony clock striking another hour, as this sound anticipates that the hour of death, when the Red Death will make its appearance, is approaching fast. Poe's tale reaches its climax when the ebony clock strikes twelve, anticipating the appearance of the Red Death and the ultimate death of Prospero. The passage in which the ebony clock strikes midnight in Poe's tale is also evoked and transformed in *The Shining*. As happens in Poe's tale, once the clock strikes midnight, the music ceases and the guests are told to unmask, and while in Poe's tale, Prospero faces his double – the Red Death – thus eventually finding his death, in King's novel, as Jack beholds the clock and its mechanisms, he also becomes the Red Death of the Overlook, as he turns into the subject chosen by its evil forces to inflict death and destruction onto his own family, as symbolised by the two figures of the clock, representing Jack and his son.

DOMESTICITY IN TROUBLE

The influence of Poe's tale "The Black Cat" on King's *The Shining* appears to be more blatantly evident in particular with respect to the issue of domestic crisis and the debacle of the home that this tale explicitly addresses. The narrator in "The Black Cat" states that his purpose is "to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events" (849), and owing to this initial premise, critics such as Leland Person argue that Poe's domestic tales, such as "The Black Cat," portray the home as "the nightmarish site of barely repressed hostility between men and women" (134). King's *The Shining* particularly draws on this reading of Poe's tale, and in this respect, it can be argued that King's novel establishes a relationship of metatextuality with Poe's "The Black Cat." As Hoppenstand and Browne claim, King's novel can be described as "a soap opera that also just happens to be a haunted house novel," insofar as, despite its evident supernatural quality, *The Shining* mostly focus on "the disintegration of the Torrance family" and "the frightful consequences of a domestic relationship gone dreadfully wrong" (6). In fact, both narratives actually tackle the degradation of family men – the narrator in Poe's tale and Jack in King's novel – who, owing to their alcoholism and their latent propensity for perverseness, move gradually from meek contentment to utter violence, as a result of his frustration upon perceiving that

his role as a family man is under threat. As Jonathan Davis claims, King's *The Shining* shows how "the Torrances cannot come together as a family unit" (93), given the fact that Jack's failure to play his role as a father and as a husband leads to Wendy's detachment, while marital discord between Jack and Wendy ultimately leads to Danny's further alienation.

The violent outbursts befalling Poe's narrator in "The Black Cat" and Jack Torrance in *The Shining* are mostly grounded in a gradual symbolic sense of emasculation and powerlessness, as they are entrapped in a domestic scenario, they feel overwhelmed by their domestic responsibilities, and they believe themselves subjected to the will of their respective wives. As Magistrale claims with respect to the narrator in Poe's tale, he is, above all, "a man in crisis" (87), while, in a similar manner, Person argues that the narrator's increasing fits of violence in "The Black Cat" not only take place in domesticity, but they also appear to be "a product of that sphere and its claustrophobic limitations" (134). In analogy, in King's novel, Jack's increasing frustration and ultimate violence also seems to respond to the fact that he feels his status as a father and husband is being constantly put under threat, to the extent that he blames his wife's continuous demands on him for his alcoholism, stating that "she had, pardon the expression, driven him to drink" (*The Shining*, 193). It is precisely as Jack's fits of insanity and frustration as a man come to their climax that he is confronted with his ghostly double, the former caretaker of the hotel, Herbert Grady, who arises as a great reactionary custodian of the male *status quo*, and who reprimands him harshly for what he perceives as Jack's submissive and docile ways as a family man, thus stating: "a man who cannot control his own family holds very little interest [...] [a] man who cannot guide the courses of his own wife and son can hardly be expected to guide himself" (*The Shining*, 390).

The gradual transformation that the narrator in Poe's tale and Jack Torrance in King's novel undergo is enacted symbolically in both cases through their attachment to animals. The narrator in "The Black Cat" admits that his childhood was characterised by "the docility and humanity of [his] disposition" (850), which led him to become especially fond of all sorts of pets. As he comes of age and falls prey to alcoholism, he begins to direct his rage onto his cat, first torturing the animal, and finally, hanging his formerly beloved pet to death. Likewise, the close connection that is established between the cat and the narrator's wife, as Poe himself admitted that "all cats are

she" ("Desultory Notes," 2), is ultimately reified when the narrator redirects his rage from the cat to his wife, murdering her with an axe. Nonetheless, the cat in Poe's tale gradually turns from victim into villain, as, in spite of the fact that the narrator kills the first cat named Pluto, a second cat makes its appearance to unveil that the narrator is guilty of having murdered his wife. In a passage from King's *The Shining*, Jack also recollects that, when he was a child, he used to be particularly fond of a hive that his father gave him, which he kept in his room as a token of his father's love for him, until his progenitor became alcoholic and vicious to the point of abusing his wife. Jack then recollects how his father set fire to the hive to kill the bees so that he could keep the hive, and how this violent act, which struck him deeply as a child, became symbolic of his father's latent ferocity, which would ultimately turn against his own family. In due course, at the Overlook, Jack finds himself emulating his father, as, while he is mending the roof, he finds a hive, and decides to kill the bees so that his son Danny can also keep it as a token in his room. As happens in Poe's tale through the return of the second cat, in *The Shining*, the bees also become alive mysteriously and haunt Jack, awakening bitter memories of his abusive father, but also accusing him of having neglected his own son, as the bees furiously attack young Danny owing to Jack's carelessness as a father.

Taking into account the narrator's sense of emasculation in Poe's tale, in her seminal psychoanalytic study, Marie Bonaparte interpreted "The Black Cat" in relation to the classic myth of Oedipus, who put out his own eyes in punishment for his incest, while his mother and wife Jocasta chose to die by hanging (469). As Bonaparte recounts, in "The Black Cat," the narrator, who is afraid of the threat of castration that the cat represents as its mouth emulates a *vagina dentata*, decides to counteract this threat by blinding the cat, which is taken as a universal symbol of castration, but then, the narrator hangs the cat, in an unconscious attempt to produce a symbolic rephallisation (470). Hence, the cat in Poe's tale, named after the god of the underworld, truly reflects the narrator's inner hell owing to his sense of symbolic emasculation, and as Roberta Reeder claims, in Jungian terms, it represents the narrator's anima, that is, the narrator's repressed feelings (20). As the narrator in "The Black Cat" attacks his pet in a useless attempt to defy his male frustration, in *The Shining*, Jack is in charge of trimming and giving shape to the garden topiary, which consist of a series of hedge wild animals in the playground of the hotel, which Jack ultimately

finds out that have a life of their own, as they make noises and are able to move to the extent of threatening him both physically and mentally. Like Pluto, in Poe's tale, these wild animals also arise as a materialisation of Jack's inner demons, which he constantly tries to exorcise by trimming them but finally awake into life to show him his powerlessness and his useless effort to deny his fears and repressed instincts.

Drawing on the importance attached to the domestic discourse in King's novel, both Jack and his wife Wendy had a troublesome relationship with their respective progenitors, as Jack's father and Wendy's mother stood for parental figures to imitate during their childhood, but also possessed a series of traits their children found most despicable. Jack Torrance loved his father, but also hated him for his abusive behaviour towards his mother, and owing to his ambivalent feelings towards his father figure, Jack lives in fear of mirroring him and committing the same abuse on his own family. As Clare Hanson claims, Jack's closeness to his father came to an end when, being a child, Jack saw his father beat his mother, and from that moment onwards, Jack developed an ambivalent relation to his father (51). Through the recollection of this turning point, Jack often wonders "exactly what his father had seen" (422) which unleashed his violent reaction towards his mother. Jack's father's eye is evocative of that of the old man in Poe's tale "The Tell-Tale Heart," in which the narrator's hatred towards him is mostly grounded. As the narrator in Poe's tale admits, "it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye" (793). Likewise, if owing to the narrator's sharpened sensitivity, he is able to overhear the beatings of the old man's heart even after his death, in King's novel, as Jack becomes increasingly insane, he also perceives that his late father materialises as another ghostly figure in the Overlook.

If Jack was initially afraid of resembling his father as he grew older, through his process of descent into madness, he begins to sympathise with his father and even accept his father's urge to correct those family members who do not behave as he thinks they should. Jack's demeanour thus begins to mirror that of his male progenitor, and he symbolically transforms into his father. According to Clare Hanson, who interprets King's *The Shining* from a psychoanalytic approach, focusing on Danny's entry into the symbolic, it is precisely Jack's incapacity to release himself from his father which locks Danny in the oedipal moment and makes him unable to progress through it to reach the symbolic order. As Hanson

further argues, the tension between father and son, between Jack and Danny, mostly stems from the dichotomy between the unconscious and the everyday world, since, while Jack is disturbed by unconscious images of his own father, Danny must take a different path from his father to try to master the symbolic. Similarly, in her canonical psychoanalytical reading of Poe's tale "The Tell-Tale Heart," Marie Bonaparte also interprets the relationship between the old man and the narrator as that of a father and a son, and explains the son's oedipal wish for his father's death through the son's discovery that the father is responsible for the mother's castration. As Bonaparte further contends, the father has threatened to castrate the son for his guilty desires of possessing the mother, and because the father has previously committed this crime against the son, it is subsequently that the latter wishes to commit the same crime in retribution. It can thus be argued that, both the narrator in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Danny in King's novel wish to symbolically disassociate themselves from their father figures as embodiments of authority in order to enter the symbolic phase and pursue their path towards adulthood.

DOUBLES AND UNIFIED SELVES

Poe's tale "William Wilson" has been traditionally considered his most seminal text exploring the symbolic character of the *doppelgänger*, since, as Dawn Sova contends, it turns into Poe's attempt to come to terms with his own dual nature, trying to reconcile his self-destructive conduct through his more rational self (256). In a display of hypertextuality, echoes of Poe's tale exploring the figure of the double also become pervasive in King's novel, as *The Shining* is suffused with doublings of characters and mirror scenes, tackling the symbolic psychic split of opposing forces between Freud's *superego* and *id*, and Jung's *persona* and *shadow*. Poe's tale exemplifies the duality inherent in human nature, as its protagonist, who increasingly acquires vices and reproofing habits, is constantly pursued by his double, who turns into a materialisation of his conscience, as he mainly makes his appearance when the protagonist is about to indulge in dissolute behaviour. Likewise, in *The Shining*, as, like the Overlook, which is also found to conceal terrible secrets in spite of its acknowledged social grandeur, the three members of the Torrance family also possess their dualities and ambivalences, and thus, their own doubles, as their ego often

has to mediate between a moralising self and the personification of their instinctual self, between the social mask they would like to wear in front of others and the repressed unconscious aspects of their personality.

Taking into consideration that in Poe's tale, William Wilson begins to notice the presence of his double as he comes of age, the character of Danny in *The Shining* also exemplifies the symbolic process of individuation as he becomes an adult and he finally leaves behind his own double figure. Along his process of growing up, Danny possesses an invisible friend, Tony, his double, who is portrayed as an older self, but who also stands for the materialisation of his extrasensory perception, as Danny often encounters Tony before he has some terrifying visions that warn him of the terrible events that are to take place. The imaginary character of Tony thus turns into Danny's double, as, quite tellingly, he often equates looking at Tony with looking at himself in the mirror, as also happens in Poe's tale, as, in the final scene, the protagonist notices "a large mirror [...] where none had been perceptible before" ("William Wilson," 447), while, once his process of individuation is completed and Danny enters the world of adults, Tony finally vanishes. As portrayed in King's novel, "Tony stood directly in front of him [Danny], and looking at Tony was like looking into a magic mirror and seeing himself in ten years, the eyes widely spaced and very dark, the chin firm, the mouth handsomely molded" (466). However, if Tony disappears as Danny comes of age, since Danny's invisible friend represents his persona and older self, it can also be argued that, as an embodiment of Danny's keen perception as a child, Tony's disappearance also symbolises, as Marie Bonaparte argues with regard to Poe's "William Wilson," "the introjection of the repressive father system" (539), as the hero has been battling against himself, that which derives from the authoritarian father and becomes our moral conscience or super ego.

In the *Overlook*, the concatenation of double figures multiply constantly, in particular with respect to the character of Jack, since, as evidence of metaliterature, he is writing a play portraying the fight between two antagonistic characters, while, significantly, in the course of the ghostly ball of masks, Jack meets Herbert Grady, the former caretaker of the hotel, who turns into Jack's double, as, in his insanity, Jack will also try to emulate Grady's horrible murder of his own family. Nonetheless, above all, Jack's actual double becomes the *Overlook*, as it is the hotel itself and its ghostly presences that finally

take possession of Jack and turn into his shadow. In fact, in *The Shining*, Jack finally transforms into a masked individual personifying all the ghosts of the Overlook, who finally attacks himself, since, as portrayed in King's novel, "aiming the hard side of the roque mallet at its own face [...] the mallet began to rise and descend, destroying the last of Jack Torrance's image" (476), thus recreating the final scene in Poe's "William Wilson," in which the protagonist kills himself as he tries to slay his double, stating "how utterly thou hast murdered thyself" ("William Wilson," 448). As Clare Hanson claims, from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is at this stage that Danny finally manages to enter the symbolic, as he confronts, through the use of language, his father who has transformed into a maniac figure swinging a phallic mallet. As Hanson further argues, Danny has to split his image of his father, blending all the positive aspects from his father into an image of the good father different from that of the maniac, and it is through the splitting image of his father that Danny can overcome his own split personality and guarantee a unified self.

CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of King's novel *The Shining* and Poe's tales gives evidence of a series of examples of transtextuality, not only with respect to Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Masque of the Red Death," which Pollin had already suggested, but also in relation to other tales, which have scarcely been mentioned with regard to King's *The Shining*. The important number of obvious and implicit references to Poe's tales in King's novel *The Shining* corroborates Pollin's proposal to continue studying Poe's legacy on King's literary works, given the fact that King's novels "have been rich in their allusions to Poe [...] and have often been patently shaped, in part, through schemes, methods, and devices derived from that author" (230). This article has thus shown the multiple references to Poe's tales in King's *The Shining* ranging from explicit intertextuality to hypertextuality, pointing out King's acknowledgment of Poe's influence on his writings, and thus, paving the ground for the need to continue identifying Poe's pervasive presence in King's major novel, *The Shining*, but also in all of his gothic works.

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