

**POE BICENTENNIAL.**  
*Universul lui Edgar Allan Poe.*  
*Repere interdisciplinare cu ocazia bicentenarului,*  
**Mihai A. Stroe (coord.)**  
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2009 simply proved too short to accommodate all the events meant to commemorate Poe; some of them had to be postponed until the intended effect matched the grandeur of the American author. Such is the case of a collection of essays which appeared in 2011 at Institutul European, Iași, under the supervision of Mihai A. Stroe: *Universul lui Edgar Allan Poe. Repere interdisciplinare cu ocazia bicentenarului* [Edgar Allan Poe's Universe. Interdisciplinary Markers Occasioned by the Bicentennial].

This outstanding bicentennial volume gives equal prominence to every dimension of Poe's work (poetry, prose, essays) and careful consideration to Poe's influence on writers, literatures, cultures and the like. It comprises seven “fundamental contributions to understanding Poe's universe” signed by “specialists nationally and internationally acknowledged”, as coordinator Mihai A. Stroe points out in the *Introduction* (p. 7), all of which are eager to demonstrate and (re)evaluate, from slightly different standpoints, Poe's modernity and fecundity as a mythmaker. As a founder of modern literature, we are reminded, Poe invented detective fiction, pioneered science fiction, and immensely contributed to the horror / gothic genre, with the grotesque and arabesque subtypes he preferred to explore.

The first in the series of studies, Monica Pillat-Săulescu's research (*Imagination and Reason in E. A Poe's Short-Stories*) is as utterly compelling for Poe specialists as for readers who might need an introduction to Poe's work. Its well-balanced, synthetic, yet finely-woven texture clearly outlines, in but 22 pages, the origin and avatars of Poe's major rhetoric "gimmicks", with their palimpsestic Illuminist, pre-romantic or Gothic traces.

Deeply preoccupied, as ever, with Poe's modernism, Monica Pillat anatomizes his ambivalent narrative discourse and places Poe, once more, among the forefathers of "dark romanticism". She revisits tales of ratiocination and approaches the unity of impression and the one pre-established design with the necessary philosophical vein implied by poetic and narrative theories.

At the very heart of the study lies a tripartite classification of the major ways Poe attempted to rationalize the fantastic in his short-stories. There are, on the one hand, stories like *The Black Cat*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* or *The Imp of the Perverse*, which record the very preparation and perpetration of an abominable crime (supposedly in cold blood because thought of as perfectly logical). In such stories, the narrative is suffused with realism, there is an accumulation of details which materializes and internalizes the exterior fantastic. Secondly, Monica Pillat-Săulescu mentions stories about limit-experiences (shipwreck, torture, collapse in some kind of abyss etc.); here, what evades the fantastic is the hero's struggle, his desperate attempt to postpone the implacable doom, followed by the echoes of a consciousness no longer fearful, but peacefully resigned. Finally, the third, most complex and somewhat different category, that of thrillers, produces an image of a detective who, M. Pillat believes, creates the fantastic only to decipher it. Self-isolated in his shuttered residence, Dupin creates not only a sort of artificial night, but imbues the common fact, the tritest detail, with supernatural, fantastic powers.

Thus, it is by use of verisimilitude (springing from an inductive-deductive method in investigating the innermost chasms of the human psychic) that Poe turns the ineffable of the consciousness into a fairly tangible something. Furthermore, the elements the American writer takes from the picaresque novel or the Gothic fiction are refined into rationalizing narrative instruments, especially when it comes to the underlying space / time dimension and the essentially Manicheist characters.

After giving a thorough account of the endlessly multiplying and insidious space in Poe's fiction, Monica Pillat-Săulescu ventures a (non-)rhetorical question: What is the significance of such an environment? If in the Gothic novel, the space becomes fantastic as a result of the destruction of the hero's inner balance, Poe practises (on) the Gothic in order to build a fantastic context (that he often rationalizes). Moreover, the expansion and occasional stretching of time are more often than not dictated by the inner rhythm of a character's thoughts.

Monica Pillat keenly observes a gradual refinement in Gothic decorum as employed by Poe in *Metzengerstein*, *The Black Cat* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*; however, she also promptly remarks that if Poe is interested in creating an atmosphere, a tension vacillating between certainty and uncertainty, a space of interference and of echoes, it is rather a means to investigate human reason and consciousness.

An insightful description of the key-aspects underlying Poe's fantastic, Monica Pillat-Săulescu's study gracefully opens the door for a handful of other articles in the volume administered by Mihai A. Stroe, meant to refresh the memory of Poe.

The same topic of narrativity is approached in *Edgar Allan Poe and His Short-Stories*, an essay by Manfred Pütz, in Mihai A. Stroe's translation into Romanian. Starting from Poe's critical theories, as presented in *The Poetic Principle* and *The Philosophy of Composition*, especially those centered upon the unity of effect,

the suggestiveness of meaning and pre-established design, Pütz analyses several aspects of E. A. Poe's short fiction from an aesthetic-philosophical and narratological point of view. The tale of ratiocination, the ambiguity-as-technique, the burlesque are some of the features consistently displayed by Poe's short-stories which are detailed upon in the second section of the book.

*The Poetic and Fictional Imaginary in the Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (Liviú Cotrău) deals with a vast array of concepts such as the medusa-like beauty, the half-closed eye, the dream circle etc. from an exceedingly complex theoretical perspective. However, what captures the reader's eye and mind beyond everything else is the systematic and comprehensive coverage of the stratified and composite nature of time, which Cotrău places under a very significant metaphor, "the scythe of time". He thus identifies in Poe's work / characters a state of being under time, which he calls *subtemporality* (or *catachronism*); a state of being over time: *supertemporality* (*epichronism*); the state of perceiving time so sharply that it produces pain to the perceiver: *hypertemporality* (*hyperchronism*); the state of perceiving time to a smaller degree than normal: *hypotemporality* (*hypochronism*); the state of being behind time: *anatemporality* (*anachronism*); the state of being ahead time: *metatemporality* (*metachronism*) and, finally, the state of exalting the perception of a repetitive, static, subterranean time, called *hyperchronous catachronism* (a combination of hyperchronism and catachronism). This catabasis into the creative matrix of Poe's imaginary (worlds) is supported by numerous illustrative examples that are judiciously selected (from Poe's short fiction above all) through the filter of textual psychoanalysis.

Another attempt at deciphering Poe's fictional contrivance, Mihai A. Stroe's chapter, "*Eureka*" and *Edgar Allan Poe's Romantic Cosmological Vision: Horizons between Science and Art*, discusses the romantic elements in Poe's cosmology. A focal

point of the section is on the primordial material particle – postulated by Poe as being the first germinal manifestation of the physical Universe – that, according to Stroe, could be seen as the “Titanic Atom” of Titanic Atoms.

Remus Bejan’s ample account (*The Thought within Thought: Edgar Poe and Ion Barbu*) approaches Poe’s system of thought comparatively, through an analogy between Poe and Ion Barbu, a Romanian poet whose highly hermetic prose poem, *Veghea lui Roderick Usher* [The Vigil of Roderick Usher] is both an homage paid to Poe and a proof of his major influence on writers all over the world.

Dumitru Dorobăț (*The Reception of North-American Writers in the Modern Age: Edgar Allan Poe*) explores the similar phenomenon of Poe’s influence on Romanian writers and culture and pinpoints the special significance attributed to Poe’s French supporters in the extremely dense and complex network of relationships that is literary reception.

The seventh and last section of the book, signed by Florin Mircea Tudor and Lucia Alexandra Tudor, offers *Biographical Guidelines* – an insightful biography with details regarding editions of Poe’s works, filmography, translations into Romanian, essential critical references.

If the purpose of this collection of essays from noted academics, scholars and intellectuals, was that of producing a cohesive survey on Poe’s research in Romania, 200 years after his birth, it definitely succeeded in doing so and so much more.

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