

## ABSTRACT

This study is primarily concerned with the diverse processes of constitution and deconstitution of subjectivity at work in the writing of Edgar Allan Poe. The analysis is largely confined to the short fiction, although some reference is made to Poe's other work; twenty-one tales are examined, in greater or lesser detail, with the aid of various theoretical perspectives - sociological, structuralist and, above all, psychoanalytic.

The aim is to present a new reading of Poe's texts which rejects traditional "unity"-based interpretations. The thesis privileges the psychological dimension, but in textual, not biographical terms; it stresses the tales' often undervalued element of modernity as well as their receptiveness to emergent processes and discourses.

The psychological dimensions analysed include: the explicit presentation of mental splitting ('William Wilson') and institutionalised madness ('The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether'); the signification of alienation ('The Man of the Crowd') and self-destruction ('The Imp of the Perverse', 'The Black Cat', 'The Tell-Tale Heart') as constitutive of the subject at a determinate historical moment; the simultaneous construction and subversion of mythical signifiers of an illusory "full" subject, both metonyms (the detective, the mesmerist) and metaphors (the artwork, the interior); the symbolic emergence from repression of active female desire, perceived as threatening in the male unconscious ('The Oval Portrait', 'Ligeia'); and the disintegration of the subject under the pressure of its own repressions ('The Fall of the House of Usher').

Particular stress is laid throughout on the textual undermining of the dividing-lines between "normal" and "abnormal", "sane" and "insane", "respectable" and "criminal". It is concluded that Poe's work constitutes a map of the vicissitudes and contradictions of subjectivity in patriarchal culture; from the study of these texts, the "I" emerges as formed out of a massive repression, and as therefore constantly liable to fragmentation and rupture.