



LITERATURA, CRÍTICA, LIBERTAD
Estudios en homenaje a
Juan Bravo Castillo

Coordinadores:
Hans Christian Hagedorn
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SERIE
HOMENAJES

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(coords.)



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Juan Bravo Castillo

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THE USE OF SPACE IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S SCIENCE FICTION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Space has long been regarded at two different levels: microcosmic and macrocosmic, as the gaps among things that keep them apart and as the larger container into which all things are inserted, respectively. Since antiquity, Western thinking has been determined by this way of understanding space, making it neutral, homogenous, insignificant and meaningless, only the things which occupy space being of significance to philosophy or the sciences. However, in the twentieth century, space began to be seen as less homogenous or neutral (West-Pavlov 2009: 16).

Likewise, spatial theorization in the humanities and the social sciences has moved from being cutting edge and controversial to the mainstream of critical theory, becoming an essential tool for any scholar or academic. This «spatial turn» in the human sciences has been widely explored by great thinkers, such as Henri Lefebvre, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze or Félix Guattari, who have focused on theories of space in society and spatial practices (Blank and Rosen-Zvi 2010: 1). These important theorists «have discovered space and used it as a critical and analytical tool during the second half of the twentieth century» (Blank and Rosen-Zvi 2010: 1). Thus, their considerable body of work will contribute to get to understand better what Edgar A. Poe wanted to convey in his works of fiction.

The contributions of Poe to literature are without any doubt admirable, and it is because of them that he has been acclaimed worldwide as the father of detective

fiction (Rigal Aragón 2010: 47), of the literature of psychological horror and one of the earliest authors of science fiction literature.

The early examples of this last genre were very different from the science fiction of today. In fact, Edgar Allan Poe was a noteworthy author of proto-science fiction, as Patrick Parrinder declares, benefitting as much as possible from his narrow scientific background in order to modify it in his fictions:

Most early or «proto» science fiction was the product of writers who stood at some distance from the science of their time and set out to mock, satirise, discredit, or at best to play with it. I am thinking here of Lucian, Godwin, Cyrano de Bergerac, Swift, Voltaire, Mary Shelley, and Poe. Poe comes the nearest to generic science fiction, though his imitations of scientific discourse can never be taken at face value (Parrinder 2000: 24).

Thus, different spaces are discovered and explored by the characters that Edgar A. Poe introduced in his proto-science fiction tales. This article will mainly focus on three different spaces: outer space, sea space, and inner space, and it will delve into the fears and motivations that led Poe to place his stories in these thought-provoking spatial contexts.

2. OUTER SPACE

Outer space is one of the first spaces of Edgar Allan Poe's science fiction that will be analysed in this paper, focusing our attention on six different stories. However, readers can distinguish at least one important difference between them: the setting within this outer space. Poe decided to place three of these tales in the sky («The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall», «The Balloon-Hoax» and «Mellonta Tauta»), including outrageous mechanisms of displacement, while there are other three stories which took place in Heaven («The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion», «The Colloquy of Monos and Una» and «The Power of Words»), due to different motivations and reasons that will be studied below.

2.1. Crossing the Sky

Since the dawn of mankind, human beings have dreamed of being able to fly, and there have been several attempts throughout history to achieve this incredible goal. Classical mythology and numerous old religions considered this possibility, and also included flying and winged beings among their teachings and principles. The origins of aeronautics can be traced to the second or third century AD in China or, even before, when trying to explain the mystery of the Nazca Lines, in Peru

(Baker 2008: 140). Nevertheless, modern aviation is thought to have been born in the eighteenth century, and, two centuries after, man set foot on the moon.

Taking the dream of flight into account and bearing in mind the writer's era¹, it is not surprising that outer space was one of Poe's favourite settings, about which he wrote three different, but similar, stories. «The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall» is one of the first tales where Edgar A. Poe relates a trip to the moon, introducing the topic of outer space. It is, at the same time and for obvious reasons, one of his first popular hoaxes and also a key story within his production of science fiction.

This story was published in June 1835 in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond (Virginia) as «Hans Phaall, a Tale» (Quinn 1998: 208), widely recognized later as «The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall». The narrator describes a trip to the moon and, in spite of his burlesque tone, he gives accurate details about the technique used to make this journey (Jiménez González 2010: 112). This precise knowledge was revealed by Edgar Allan Poe himself in one of the visits that he paid to John H. B. Latrobe, a prominent nineteenth-century Baltimore citizen:

I was seated at my desk on the Monday following the publication of the tale, when a gentleman entered and introduced himself as the writer [...] I asked him whether he was then occupied with any literary labor. He replied that he was then engaged on a voyage to the moon, and at once went into a somewhat learned disquisition upon the laws of gravity, the height of the earth's atmosphere, and capacities of balloons, warming in his speech as he proceeded. Presently, speaking in the first person, he began the voyage, after describing the preliminary arrangements, as you will find them set forth in one of his tales, called «The Adventures of Hans Phaall», and leaving the earth, and becoming more and more animated, he described his sensation as he ascended higher and higher, until, at last, he reached the point in space where the moon's attraction overcame that of the earth, when there was a sudden *bouleversement* of the car and great confusion among its tenants (Beaver 1976: 340).

Furthermore, Poe was keen on astronomy and outer space in his early youth. When John Allan, his stepfather, bought a house in 1825, Poe installed a telescope on the second floor in order to study the stars and explore the mysteries of our natural satellite: the moon (Beaver 1976: 340).

¹ Edgar Allan Poe belonged to the nineteenth century, when outer space had not yet been explored, so this type of literature was totally new, risky and unknown.

Concerning the story itself, this voyage is not only original and innovative for its time but it is also a brilliant way to introduce some key factors in his narrations about outer space: a device of displacement, an astronaut and an extra-terrestrial character. As described by the writer, this creature of outer space is very singular, completely different from an average and normal human citizen:

This was in truth a very singular somebody. He could not have been more than two feet in height [...] His feet, of course, could not be seen at all. His hands were enormously large. His hair was gray, and collected into a *queue* behind. His nose was prodigiously long, crooked and inflammatory; his eyes full, brilliant, and acute; his chin and cheeks, although wrinkled with age, were broad, puffy, and double; but of ears of any kind there was not a semblance to be discovered upon any portion of his head (Poe 1994: 389).

It is also interesting to point out the veracity that Poe wanted to convey, as Reiss states:

In this account Poe wrote with great care, and his descriptions show that he evidently had read considerably on such subjects as gravitation, astronomy, and the topography of the moon, besides having acquainted himself with the instruments used by aeronauts, with the construction of balloons, and with the effects of atmospheric pressures. This show of learning was certainly designed to lend credibility to a chronicle of an unusual journey (Reiss 1957: 306-307).

Apart from outer space, other unknown spaces are described through the introduction of pseudoscientific ideas, such as the idea that the Earth was hollow and the poles were connected. This is something that the main character explains when approaching to the North Pole in his ascent: «The convexity of the ocean had become so evident, that the entire mass of the distant water seemed to be tumbling headlong over the abyss of the horizon, and I found myself listening on tiptoe for the echoes of the mighty cataract» (Poe 1994: 417). In the same way, Pfaall declares that he catches a glimpse of the *Rupes Nigra*, an invented magnetic island believed to be located at the North Pole: «At the Pole itself, in a circular centre, sharply defined, whose apparent diameter subtended at the balloon an angle of about sixty-five seconds, and whose dusky hue, varying in intensity, was at all times darker than any other spot upon the visible hemisphere, and occasionally deepened into the most absolute blackness» (Poe 1994: 418). Also Pfaall mentions the concavity of the Earth in another passage: «What mainly astonished me, in the appearance of things

below, was the seeming concavity of the surface of the globe. I had, thoughtlessly enough, expected to see its real convexity become evident as I ascended; but a very little reflection sufficed to explain the discrepancy» (Poe 1994: 408).

In continuing the theme of outer space, we can also highlight «The Balloon-Hoax» (1844) along with «Mellonta Tauta» (1849), where Edgar A. Poe tried to imagine and describe unknown spaces as perfectly well known. «The Balloon-Hoax» is one of the writer's most surprising stories since it was published, with a different title (for obvious reasons), in the *New York Sun*² as a real account of a transatlantic voyage on board a balloon in only three days, coming up with the idea of crossing international airspace:

BY EXPRESS.
ASTOUNDING INTELLIGENCE BY PRIVATE EXPRESS FROM CHARLESTON VIA NORFOLK! – THE ATLANTIC OCEAN CROSSED IN THREE DAYS!! –ARRIVAL AT SULLIVAN'S ISLAND OF A STEERING BALLOON INVENTED BY MR. MONCK MASON!! (Poe 2000: vol. II, 1066).

Once again there is a fine line between fact and fiction in this story, which is divided into two parts, as Castillo Martín explains. The first one describes to the reader the details of the modes of transportation and the state of aviation at that particular moment, while the second part is devoted to the collection of data during the trip (Castillo Martín 2011: 67).

For the last story within this set, «Mellonta Tauta» (1849), Edgar Allan Poe chooses a future time and space: the society of the year 2848. The title itself warns the reader that the tale is futuristic, since the expression «Mellonta Tauta» comes from the Greek *μελλονταταυτα*, meaning «these things are in the future», as P. Parrinder explains (Parrinder 2000: 24).

«Mellonta Tauta» was published for the first time in *Godey's Lady's Book*, exactly eight months before Poe's death and, like the previous stories, this one also takes place in outer space. The narrator uses her experience across the Atlantic Ocean aboard a balloon to complain about her society, quoting Poe's reasoning, who takes advantage of it in an effort to express «his distrust of the democratic

2 The *Sun* was the first penny newspaper published in New York and it was specialized in scoops and the sensational treatment of news, what explains the circumstances around the launch of the story (Beaver 1976: 368-369).

mob, underscore man's inability to learn from the lessons of history, and deplore the conformity of his fellow citizens» (Galloway 1983: 18).

In spite of the fact that the writer describes future American society, this story is neither a utopia nor dystopia, since all the scientific, social, technological and historic changes and advances seem to be different (not better or worse). Therefore, for Poe, it is simply a faithful drawing of American reality, particularly its social and political organization.

Readers find, from the very first paragraph, a narrator who tries to deceive them by defining the story as an «odd-looking MS. Found, about a year ago, tightly corked up in a jug floating in the *Mare Tenebrarum*» (Poe 2000: vol. II, 1291). As the author, who receives the nickname of Pundita³, says, this document is a punishment for one of her friends, who will have to read it «on account of my *ennui* [boredom] and your sins» (Poe 2000: vol. II, 1292).

2.2. Philosophical Essays in Heaven

Poe's most important apocalyptic tales are set in outer space as well: «The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion» (1839), «The Colloquy of Monos and Una» (1841) and «The Power of Words» (1845). These three short stories, mostly considered philosophical essays, take place in a peculiar setting, which is Heaven, or *Aidenn* in the case of «The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion» and «The Power of Words», and the characters are described as souls, spirits or angels. Space and spatial forms play an important role in these stories, especially in «The Power of Words», since they provide a perfect opportunity for developing both the use of the concept of power/knowledge and the importance of the spatial dimension when it comes to understanding social relations (Zielenic 2007: 125).

«The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion» is Poe's first apocalyptic tale, and it is based on new scientific advances. It is commonly regarded as another example of science fiction because it involves the destruction of the world, a theme that will be examined by means of a dialogue between two dead people who have been renamed as Eiros and Charmion in Heaven – *Aidenn*:

EIROS. Why do you call me Eiros?

CHARMION. So henceforth will you always be called. You must forget, too, my earthly name, and speak to me as Charmion.

EIROS. This is indeed no dream!

3 It is important to highlight that the name of the bluestocking protagonist, Pundita, is also a play on words itself, as the three first letters of the name reveal. Furthermore, the letter with the details of the voyage is dated April Fool's Day.

CHARMION. Dreams are with us no more; but of these mysteries anon. I rejoice to see you looking like-life and rational. The film of the shadow has already passed from off your eyes. Be of heart and fear nothing. Your allotted days of stupor have expired; and, to-morrow, I will myself induct you into the full joys and wonders of your novel existence.

EIROS. True, I feel no stupor, none at all. The wild sickness and the terrible darkness have left me, and I hear no longer that mad, rushing, horrible sound, like the *voice of many waters*. Yet my senses are bewildered, Charmion, with the keenness of their perception of the new.

CHARMION. A few days will remove all this;— but I fully understand you, and feel for you. It is now ten earthly years since I underwent what you undergo, yet the remembrance of it hangs by me still. You have now suffered all of pain, however, which you will suffer in Aidenn.

EIROS. In Aidenn?

CHARMION. In Aidenn (Poe 2000: vol. I, 455-456).

Thanks to this conversation, the disaster⁴ is related by Eiros, a spirit who has just arrived in Heaven. There, Eiros is received by Charmion, a woman who died ten years before, and he makes a great effort to explain to her what earthly life was like since she arrived in Heaven. The previous quotation clearly states the transformation that Eiros is undergoing, not only physical and psychological, but also at every level, involving mainly an unavoidable and significant spatial alteration from Earth to Heaven.

Two years later, in August (1841), «The Colloquy of Monos and Una» was published in *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*. As with the previous, this conversation is also held in Heaven by two blessed souls, similar characters as before, something that reveals that this technique was commonly used by the author. In this second dialogue, Monos and Una talk about a modification suffered by the world due to a mistake made by men, who defended practical science and industrialization instead of art (Jacobs 1960: 404).

As Jacobs suggests, Poe declares that the world could have been saved if men had followed the poets' advice, whose «taste» would have led them back to «Beauty, to Nature and to Life» (Poe 2000: vol. I, 610). However, according to

4 In spite of the fact that this story is an account of the destruction of the world by a comet, this does not happen due to collision, as it is common in this type of narrations. The disaster that hit our planet is a direct consequence of the Apocalypse, produced by the flame of a new comet that destroys everything.

the dialogue between Monos and Una, men decided to underestimate art and this led to «the Art-scarred surface of the Earth» (Poe 2000: vol. I, 611) in favour of practical science:

One word first, my Una, in regard to man's general condition at this epoch. You will remember that one or two of the wise among our forefathers—wise in fact, although not in the world's esteem—had ventured to doubt the propriety of the term «improvement», as applied to the progress of our civilization. There were periods in each of the five or six centuries immediately preceding our dissolution, when arose some vigorous intellect, boldly contending for those principles whose truth appears now, to our disenfranchised reason, so utterly obvious—principles which should have taught our race to submit to the guidance of the natural laws, rather than attempt their control. At long intervals some master-minds appeared, looking upon each advance in practical science as a retro-gradation in the true utility (Poe 2000: vol. I, 609).

The dialogue revolves around the immortality of the soul and the ability to live everlastingly after passing away far from Earth, as in «The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion». The perfect place to exist under these conditions is exactly the space where Poe placed the story: Heaven. There are two key concepts in this story, «death» and «everlasting life», as Eakin points out (Eakin 1973: 15), and both of them are introduced by Una when explaining the incidents of her own «passage through the dark Valley and Shadow» (Poe 2000: vol. I, 608). This view is similarly shared by Monos after his experience: he considers death a process of regeneration instead of a barrier. In fact, death is regarded as a new life, only made possible when crossing from the earthly space to the heavenly one; according to Monos, death does not imply the end of everything but the beginning of a final salvation that will take place in a different location.

Regarding «The Power of Words», Arthur H. Quinn and Thomas O. Mabbott, along with other important literary critics and theorists, have agreed that this prose poem is a precedent for Poe's most popular cosmogonic essay, «Eureka», since both of them were written around reflections on the universe, philosophical judgments and scientific ideas. Additionally, it is usually considered the best of Poe's three imaginary dialogues of blessed spirits held in Heaven, as Mabbott declares (Poe 2000: vol. II, 1210).

This story is one of the shortest tales by Edgar Allan Poe, which does not imply that it is the easiest or simplest one. The dialogue between Oinos and Agathos, two spirits who no longer live on our planet but instead in a different heavenly space, takes place in the future after the destruction of the world. The characteristics of

these winged characters, along with their non-corporeal conditions, make them perfect creatures in order to wander around *Aidenn* once more. Furthermore, they embody Poe's ideas about the creation of the world, who takes the position that God only created in the beginning (Quinn 1998: 469). Both Oinos and Agathos engage in a dialogue that allows them to explore the themes of knowledge and happiness, considering the idea that happiness is the direct result of a spirit's willingness to acquire more and more knowledge, thus leading to an everlasting search for information⁵ and consequently a pursuit of happiness.

3. SEA SPACE

Leaving outer space, our attention must now be focused on sea space, where Edgar Allan Poe based some of his science fiction stories. For instance, «MS. Found in a Bottle» (1833) was the first story that allowed the author to examine a space that was unknown to him. In this tale, the narrator describes how he was involved in a terrible ship accident⁶ that led him to discover an unexplored sea area, a hidden space in the centre of the Earth beyond reason and human knowledge.

This is an exact reference to the Hollow Earth hypothesis by John Cleves Symmes Jr.⁷, who thought that the Earth was hollow and the poles were connected. It was also believed in this era that the North Pole was magnetic and consisted of an endless hole that attracted and pulled in intrepid sailors. This unknown space was depicted by Gerard Mercator in a sixteenth-century map of the Arctic, where the black island called *Rupes Nigra* could be found, under which the hole was located.

This hollow-earth theme is repeated in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1837), which details another sea voyage based on a contemporary topic: the exploration of unknown spaces (sea spaces in this case). This story takes place entirely at sea beginning with the moment when the main character, Pym, goes aboard the whaling ship *Grampus*. After experiencing several misfortunes, such as cannibalism, sea storms and mutinies, the story ends with a final confrontation between the protagonist and a weird creature that emerges from the water.

In *Pym*, Poe revisits the thread of adventures in the ocean, a popular theme in the first half of the nineteenth century. The main character, commonly known as Pym, feels proud of «opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exci-

5 While Poe promoted the idea that happiness is based on knowledge, Michel Foucault seriously believed in the fact that knowledge is a form of power and power is something that can be acquired (Foucault 1980: 43).

6 The tragedy was motivated by a terrible storm that sent almost everybody overboard, followed by the collision with a magical vessel.

7 Although this theory is also introduced in «The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall», it is much more relevant in this tale, since the plot depends directly on this hypothesis.

ting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention» (Poe 1994: 166). Pym mentions the mystery attached to Antarctica, a space that has always been intriguing to the people of this era. As Wijkmark highlights, Poe's *Pym* refers to an Antarctic continent, something surprising since the famous explorer James Cook⁸ had already commented on its existence (Wijkmark 2009: 84). This pioneer was able to arrive at a place where nobody had been before: 71° 10'S, a space he named *ne plus ultra*, and he did not find any hole leading to the centre of the Earth between the poles. Thus, what began as the story of a sea journey unleashed a much more unbelievable fiction where the main character discovers weird lands and cultures in the polar region (Wijkmark 2009: 84).

«A Descent into the Maelström» (1841) is an account of a dangerous trip along the Norwegian coast, indicating that the story is again located at sea. In this case, Edgar Allan Poe explains how a sailor survived a shipwreck and a whirlpool, coinciding this story with the nineteenth-century sea exploration and the myths that grew around it.

In «A Descent into the Maelström», we find a story within another story. A first-person narrator, just as the wedding-guest created by Coleridge in «The Rime of the Ancient Mariner», tells what an old Norwegian sailor has previously told him near a cliff in the Helseggen mountain. The narration of this fisherman is a personal testimony, since he himself lived the violence of the whirlpool. The story starts as the anticipation of an imminent end, «an event such as never happened before to mortal man – or at least such as no man ever survived to tell of» (Poe 2000: vol. I, 608) but it radiates optimism, since it is told in first person. The narrator was on a boat with his two brothers when this terrible whirlpool surprised them and threatened them until, thanks to his physical analysis, he could save his life and survive in order to narrate his great deed.

4. INNER SPACE

The human body has been represented since prehistoric times, as demonstrated by several discoveries of cave paintings. However, accessing and getting to know our inner body, the area that is not visible at first sight, without having to sacrifice life, required a shift in perspective. The emergence of modern science in the Renaissance led to developing the notion of «deep seeing» (Wilson 2012: 13) and this also enabled the exploration of inner space, by means of which Poe thought that other mysterious spatial contexts could be discovered and explained.

⁸ After a deep reading of this story, it is evident that Edgar A. Poe wanted to take up again the question of the exploration of the South Pole in this narration, challenging Cook's idea in order to be able to speculate about the existence of new spaces that have not yet been discovered.

In exploration of this theme, the author published several science fiction stories dealing with the pseudoscience of mesmerism or animal magnetism, the discipline that fuelled modern hypnosis. This form of alternative medicine in Poe's era was understood as the belief in a natural life fluid or vital force that could work as a therapeutic agent in human beings healing illnesses. Thus, mainly thanks to «A Tale of the Ragged Mountains» (1844), «Mesmeric Revelation» (1844) or «The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar» (1845), the reader can explore other unknown spaces from the hand of the author himself: the human mind and the human body, guided by the doctors performing different experiments, cures, and healings.

Animal magnetism was in vogue at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The most important cities across Europe and in the United States of America boasted exhibitions and lectures delivered by famous mesmerizers, such as Franz Anton Mesmer, the originator of this pseudoscience. Furthermore, amazing experiments — which put patients into a light sleep or convulsion— were also carried out, and mesmerism, along with electricity, and other disciplines, was declared the «Great Acting Power of Nature» (Stern 1968: 162), revealing the worldwide impact that this pseudoscience was having.

In fact, Mesmer and his supporters referred to animal magnetism as:

An autonomous physical force pervading both the animate and inanimate worlds, accounting for the mesmerists' therapeutic powers at the same time that it attracted iron to magnets, kept the stars in their places, and gave rise to the «influence mutuelle entre les corps célestes, la terre, & les corps animés» (Falk 1969: 536).

Edgar A. Poe was very keen on mesmerism and, as Carlson states, his «interest in science has been thoroughly documented, but mesmerism provided Poe with a particularly Gothic means of fabricating the hypnagogic state in which special spiritual revelations might be brought forward» (Carlson 1996: 264).

The three tales that have been selected share many common features. For example, there is always a patient or *sleep-waker* on the brink of death, who starts a kind of internal voyage, going deep into a mysterious inner space. These *sleep-wakers*, as Edgar Allan Poe refers to them, are in fact something similar to sleep-walkers who are suffering from an induced trance that makes them travel along unknown areas⁹. Their voyage is led by different «doctors»¹⁰ who take advantage

9 In the case of «A Tale of the Ragged Mountains», the patient's deep trance was induced by a doctor who used a poisonous *sangsue* in his healing treatment.

10 The author of these three stories refers to them as doctors but they are not anything else but mesmerizers and mesmerists.

of the situation to learn about the dark regions of the mind and even about death. This trip beyond rationality is started by the pseudo-doctors by means of magnetic passes that lead the patients to a state of deep hypnosis. Finally, these three stories include an account of what the patients have experienced while being in this state. In «Mesmeric Revelation», the narrator, conveying Poe's ideas, talks about this voyage along an unknown space more related to death: «Had the sleep-waker, indeed, during the latter portion of his discourse, been addressing me from out the region of the shadows?» (Poe 2000: vol. II, 1040).

So significant these tales were among pseudoscientists that the story «The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar» was believed to be a real account, as Robert. H. Collyer, one of the most popular mesmerists in Boston, told Poe himself after reading the tale:

DEAR SIR – Your account of Mr. Valdemar's case has been universally copied in this city, and has created a very great sensation. It requires from me no apology, in stating, that I have not the least doubt of the *possibility* of such a phenomenon; for I did actually restore to active animation a person who died from excessive drinking of ardent spirits. He was placed in his coffin ready for interment.

You are aware that death very often follows excessive excitement of the nervous system; this arising from the extreme prostration which follows; so that the vital powers have not sufficient energy to react.

I will give you the detailed account on your reply to this, which I require for publication, in order to put at rest the growing impression that your account is merely a *splendid creation* of your own brain, not having any truth in fact [*sic*] (Ingram 1880: 49-50).

Even the writer Elizabeth Barrett Browning had to confess that:

Then there is a tale of his [Poe's] which I do not find in this volume, but which is going the rounds of the newspapers, about mesmerism, throwing us all into most admired disorder, or dreadful doubts as to whether it can be true, as the children say of ghost stories. The certain thing in the tale in question is the power of the writer, and the faculty he has of making horrible improbabilities seem near and familiar (Harrison 1903: 386).

Such was the excitement created around these stories that Edgar A. Poe himself had to deny that they were true:

The evidence indicates, rather, that Poe intended them as serious fiction, even though they were of the «horror» variety, but that when they were greeted with enthusiasm by mesmerists, spiritualists, and sundry mystics, and with cries of incredulity by the sceptics, he declared them to be hoaxes in order to capitalize upon the attendant publicity. Certainly, he went to inordinate lengths to convince his friends that the tales were hoaxes, once widespread comment had been aroused, even though he maintained at the same time, if only briefly, a certain ambiguity regarding their authenticity (Lind 1947: 1094).

Thus, inner space is explored by pseudo-doctors, guided by Edgar Allan Poe himself, who take advantage of dying patients in order to narrate what the voyage from life to death is like. He demonstrates that the limits and frontiers of our body can be crossed, and that knowing what lies within us, that is to say, examining unknown spaces that go beyond human understanding, can help explain supernatural phenomena. It is true that this exploration is dangerous and threatening, but it is at the same time an evidence of the mind-body connection.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After going through the selected tales, it can be stated that three are the most prominent spaces that are present in the science fiction stories by Edgar Allan Poe: outer space (including sky and Heaven), sea space and inner space. And, why did he decide to set some of his science fiction tales in these different spaces¹¹? The answer becomes more obvious after studying his background and vital context: his choice and decision were not arbitrary at all, but based on his own real space and time, that is to say, the first half of the nineteenth century in America.

From its very early origins, science fiction literature has always been determined by the circumstances of the age in which it was produced. Thus, when selecting the topics, characters, and plots for his fictions, the author from Boston took advantage of his own society, his time and his space. He drew on popular themes of his time, such as Atlantic voyages, sea exploration or mesmerism, among others, and turned them into masterpieces that can be read today and always.

Edgar Allan Poe, on the one hand, used his own *space*, which is his country, with its society and culture, and his lifetime itself, to develop these tales; on the other hand, he modified the borders of this space to reinvent at the same time different spaces in his fictions, such as inner spaces and outer spaces. This can be

¹¹ Poe anticipated some political and theoretical assumptions that were shared afterwards by Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, insisting that «space is not a pre-existing container for artefacts and practices, but is constituted by them in a relationship of reciprocal influence and inflection» (West-Pavlov 2009: 24).

verified after reading his science fiction literature and comparing and contrasting it with news and articles from magazines, journals and newspapers published during the life of the author.

For example, the concept of exploring the outer space was more and more fashionable after the creation of the first hot air balloon in 1770 by Joseph and Étienne Montgolfier, the first flights some years later, and the excitement that the sighting of the Halley's comet generated in 1835 (Beaver 1976: 356).

The exploration initiative continued into the nineteenth century as several naval expeditions sought to discover the Northwest Passage to the Arctic, and the long-fabled channel that connected both poles. Other explorers pinned all their hopes on looking for the *Terra Australis Incognita*, a place where the Antarctica was located (González Moreno 2010: 245). Edgar Allan Poe was not unaware of this issue and personally reviewed an account by the North American explorer Jeremiah Reynolds in 1836, dealing with some of these questions.

In the same way, Poe was very keen on delving into the wonders of mesmerism, the pseudoscience that allowed him to explore the inner space that we have been commenting on. A broad number of articles have been found from the nineteenth-century press, some of them advertising conferences near the places where the Bostonian writer was living, suggesting that he was aware of its popularity.

Thus, in general terms, it can be stated that apparently in the works analysed the concept of space, as used by Edgar A. Poe, becomes an allegory of the unknown. This is without any doubt related to the need to know and to learn, key in Poe's life and generation.

Thus, we can conclude that Poe's science fiction tales and short stories are reflective examples of what he was living, that is to say, a mirror of his own life space. Through close examination into Poe's works, one can understand how influenced Poe was by his own time, being his literature an echo of his fears and obsessions, of his worries and concerns, being his pen in charge of documenting his life for future generations.

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