

A Deconstructive Reading of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"

Ladan Farah Bakhsh

M. A. Student in English Studies, Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz, Poland.

ABSTRACT

Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven" is a mysterious poem about the loss of a loved one. Critics have been trying to solve its mysteries since its publication in 1845. Even Poe himself provided a sort of self-criticism after its publication and provided its readers with an authorial meaning. It can also be read in the light of poststructuralist literary theory that revolves around the concept of deconstruction. It was introduced into literature by the renowned French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction that takes Saussurean linguistics as its basis states that understanding and interpretation is impossible. Like Saussure, he also believes that meaning is not *representational*, that is words refer to what is objectively out in the real world, but it is *differential*, that is it lies in the difference between the arbitrary signs. However, he adds the concept of *deference* to the structuralist concept of binary oppositions and coins the term *différance*. According to him, meaning is not only arbitrary but is always deferred and unstable; as a result, literary texts are always open to interpretation. Applying this approach to "The Raven" can deconstruct former interpretations, even Poe's own authorial meaning, and add more mysteries to it. In order to do that, the binary oppositions in the poem are detected; then through the textual contradictions, it will be shown that the centrality of one side of the oppositions due to social, historical, and authorial reasons, is arbitrary; hence the meaning will be disturbed.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven," Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Binary opposition, Jacques Derrida, *Différance*

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present article is to study Edgar Allan Poe's canonical poem, "The Raven," in the light of Derridean *différance*. This deconstructive analysis, which offers a postmodern and post-structuralism reading of the poem, pivots around such binary oppositions as melancholy/happiness, fantasy/reality, and reason/emotion and subverting them in an attempt to discern semantic and conceptual possibilities that *différance* can bring about. The central questions of the present article, therefore, are: Is it possible to deconstruct the fundamental concepts of the poem using Derrida's notion of *différance*? What are the dominant binary oppositions of the poem and what happens if we subvert or decentralize them? In order to answer the questions, first postmodernism and *différance* are briefly introduced, then key facts about Poe and "The Raven" are provided, and in the next step such binary motifs as melancholy/happiness, fantasy/reality, and reason/emotion are deconstructed in the "Discussion" section.

Postmodernism, which covers a wide range of associated ideas, according to some critics has only emerged as an area of academic study since the 1980s. It has been described by many as an elusive and inclusive term, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study including art, architecture, music, sociology, communication, fashion, and technology. Perhaps the easiest way to start thinking about postmodernism is by thinking about modernism, the movement from which postmodernism seems to have

grown or emerged. It is not always easy to define modernism and postmodernism independently, because the borderline between the two varies according to their various applications by different authors. Sometimes one critic's postmodernism is another's modernism, and the other way round. For instance, on the similarity of these terms Huyssen has written:

The amorphous and politically volatile nature of postmodernism makes the phenomenon itself remarkably elusive, and the definitions of its boundaries exceedingly difficult, if not per se impossible. Furthermore, one critic's postmodernism is another critic's modernism (or a variant thereof), while certain vigorously new forms of contemporary culture ... have so far rarely been discussed as postmodern. (1988, 58-59)

Some critics interpret postmodernism as a continuation of modernism rather than a departure from it. For instance, Silverman has written:

However, just as the post-impressionism of Van Gogh and Cézanne was not an *attack upon and rejection of* the impressionism of Monet, Renoir, Manet, Degas, and Pissaro, so too postmodernism is not a simple refusal to accept modernist principles and perspectives. Rather postmodernism extends but also brings to a close the fundamental tenets and activities of the modernist outlook. (1990, 2)

Racevskis, too, holds that the critical function of postmodernism is determined by its intrinsic and dependent relation to modernism. The term postmodern itself explicitly reveals this inevitable dependency and a cause-effect relationship between an age and its aftermath (1993, 7). Yet despite their undeniable interrelatedness, modernism and postmodernism are not exactly the same; from a more appropriate and scrupulous viewpoint, postmodernism can be seen to have a distinct character of its

own. Postmodern writers tend to revise the modernist notions of autonomy, authorship, and semiology. They have abandoned the modernists' dependence on the order of myth as the shaping power of their works. In comparison with modernism, postmodernism shows more capacity for a solid realism. Also, postmodernists tend to portray the human predicament in a more playful, ironic, and detached way.

Another major difference between these 'isms' is the concept of time. Both in modernism and postmodernism time is a main issue; yet, each of these movements has developed its own way of treating it. Postmodernists believe that their predecessors possessed an overriding penchant for transcendence, and in so doing, dissociated themselves from time and its subsequent relevance. In fact, modernist writers showed a preference for a transcendental and mystical order of time, but it is an order postmodernists cannot accept, probably because of their doubt over the possibility of achieving any kind of transcendence. Such attempts, they hold, are not only irrelevant, they are elitist. According to postmodernists, few can grasp the concept of transcendence and fewer can say they have experienced it, if it exists at all.

Fundamental to postmodern thought is the aversion from the structuralist sense of closure. Such notions as sign, referent, signifier, and signified – which are the bases of Saussure's structuralism – are no longer considered to be reliable means of critical interpretation. According to Marshall,

When discourse enters the picture, that is, when the center – the transcendental signified – is never present, then language becomes movement. Language becomes slippage from signifier to signified, rather than from signified to absolute signified. This is the 'overabundance of signifier' of which Derrida speaks. (1992, 69)

That is why postmodernism finds more affinity with poststructuralism and

hermeneutics than with the semiotics of structuralism. Narration, fiction, representation, subjectivity, and authorship are given novel dimensions in the demesne of postmodernism. In postmodern narrative, for instance, we witness a shattering of 'grand narratives' of the Western history in which narrators, as the unquestionable authority of artistic representation, assume a God-like figure to mirror the ultimate Truth. Thus Truth is replaced by 'truths,' and language as the devastating and powerful means of expressing Truth gives way to 'language games.' The implication is that truth and fiction become indistinguishable, and history and politics become subjective rather than objective sources of certitude. Postmodernism changes History into 'histories'; it questions the objectivity of historical records and invites us to view it as a discourse and ask – in Foucauldian terms – *who* is representing *what* history to *whom* and toward *what* purpose? Hutcheon has called this approach to history "historiographic metafiction." Hutcheon defines postmodernism as "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" (1988, 4). It is 'contradictory' since on the one hand it asserts such principles as value, meaning, control, and identity, and on the other, it deliberately and constantly refutes them. Through such techniques as parody, irony, metaphor, and other destabilising devices, it "establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past" (118). The entire notion of historical knowledge, in her view, becomes problematic in the postmodern domain for its existence is reinstalled and reinterpreted as a discourse. For her, postmodernism is basically political in its interrogation of all institutions and systems that are considered and manipulated as sources of meaning and value; nevertheless, it never offers any political agenda. As she claims in her *The Politics of Postmodernism*: "the postmodern may offer art as the site of political struggle by its

posing of multiple and deconstructing questions, but it does not seem able to make the move into political agency" (1989, 157). Owen views postmodernism as a crisis in Western representation, its authority and universal claims. This crisis is announced by heretofore marginal and repressed discourses such as feminism which, as a political as well as epistemological movement, challenges the order of the patriarchal society on the one hand, and the structures of its representation on the other (in Foster, 1990, xi).

Fundamental to postmodern thought and literary practice is Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which is another blow at structuralist semiology and logocentrism and which is frequently referred to throughout my second chapter and in some sections of my fourth chapter. In fact, one of the main objectives of the present research is assessing the degree to which Eliot's poems open themselves up to Derridean *différance*. In Derrida's view, every signified referent opens itself up to an array of other referents; instead of showing itself as a determinate entity, it enters into a set of possibilities, or even at times, a set of opposite possibilities. In his "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" and "Différance," Derrida invites us to replace the structuralist notion of difference – as the basis of signification – with the deconstructive notion of *différance*, meaning to 'differ' and to 'defer.' As Marshall has discussed, in deconstruction we no longer deal with a closed representational matrix or a closed system of direct reference between objects and words in the presence of an organizing center (Truth), since such a center is to be replaced by the free play of signs or an endless signification. It means that sign, here language, always represents a lack or an absence of immediate representation. Language, therefore, will stand for something that is not present; it initiates a slippage from one signifier into another and denies direct correspondence between

signifiers and signifieds (Marshall, 1992, 68-69). Derrida writes that every concept is inscribed in a chain or system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts by means of systematic play of difference. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of a conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general ... *Différance*, is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it. (1982, 11)

In Derrida's view, imposing any center in language results in totalization, binary opposition, and closure. He argues that center implies presence or fixity. It both orients, balances, and organizes language structure, and guarantees that the organizing principle of structure would limit its "play." Centre forbids the substitution of contents, elements, and terms, as well as the permutation of transformation elements. He argues that the term centre is "paradoxical" for it is simultaneously inside and outside language structure; on the one hand, it is the center of totality, and on the other, the totality "has its centre elsewhere" because the center does not belong to totality as it is not a part of it (1978, 278-79). Derrida calls for a language that can operate as an inexhaustible field of substitutions which always incorporates a gap and an absence. In such a decentered language, the play of signifiers becomes a dynamic of "supplementarity":

One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence – this sign is added – occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a

lack on the part of the signified. (1978, 289-90)

Derrida's view of meaning as *différance* – an endless process of differing and deferring rather than simply as difference – and his view of language as a deconstructed, decentred, and dynamic framework of supplementarity and absence constitute one of the most radical critiques of traditional representation. He has proclaimed that

The universe articulates only that which is in excess of everything, the essential nothing on whose basis everything can appear and be produced within language ... this excess is the very possibility of writing and of literary *inspiration* in general. Only *pure absence* – not the absence of this or that, but the absence of everything in which all presence is announced – can inspire, in other words, can *work*, and then make one work. (1978, 8)

Deconstruction in literature is a critical approach towards texts to show that there is no stable and final interpretation. In other words, "meaning" can never be definite and singular and is always "deferred" and "plural". Derrida was against any logocentric criticism that depended on reason to arrive at a self-validating knowledge of a text. According to him, meaning "expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a spacing and temporalizing that puts off until later what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible" (1970, 475). He says this while explaining his coined term *différance* which lies at the core of deconstruction. While he agrees with the structuralists that meaning is in "difference" between the signifiers, he believes that the signifieds are always "deferred" and there is no central or what he calls "transcendental signified". Poststructuralist criticism rejects the structuralist idea that each text must have a central logic around which its binary oppositions revolve. In other words, "to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it

undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies" (Culler, 1982, 86). However, deconstruction does presuppose an underlying philosophy even though it is unstable and is violated by textual indeterminacies. In Miller's words, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock, but thin air" (1976, 34).

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" is no exception from this interplay of signifiers. It is a narrative poem that tells the story of a bereaved man who mourns over the loss of his beloved. This poem is rife with mysteries about conflicts such as life and death, hope and despair, reality and fantasy, etc. However, probably the most important mystery is his "melancholy" and whether he can overcome it. Even though Poe himself described the composition of the poem in a paper called "The Philosophy of Composition" (1850) and seemingly anchored an authorial meaning for his poem, the text cannot evade from being deconstructed, and the poem's meaning can be found "nevermore". In the following pages, first a short digest on Poe and his "Raven" is offered, then the authorial meaning and the dominant binary oppositions are studied, and finally the binary opposition and a several opposite pairs are deconstructed in context.

2. DISCUSSION

Born on January 19th, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, Edgar Allan Poe became an orphan in an early age. When he was nearly three, he lost his mother, Elizabeth Arnold. He was then raised by his paternal family who abused and neglected him. During his life, Poe suffered many deaths and losses (worst of all that of his beloved wife, Virginia Clemm, who is represented as Lenore in "The Raven"), depression, suicidal impulses, loneliness, and chronic diseases. All of these found their way into his poems and short stories. This implies that many of his works,

including "The Raven" contain autobiographical overtones. Beside autobiographical elements, other major motifs in his works are: Romantic sentimentality, insanity, homicide, premature burial, and hallucination.

In his essay titled "The Philosophy of Composition" (1850), which he published after "The Raven," Poe sheds light on the structure and the purpose of the poem. He confesses that

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression — for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, *ceteris paribus*, no poet can afford to dispense with anything that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once. (1850, 12)

Poe certainly believed in, and was aware of, the "physical power of words" (1983, Feidelson, 37). He claims that his intention is to create a poem "with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (1850, 13). He also admits that each poet should have the intention laid before him and all the elements of the poem should "tend to the development of the intention" (1850, 15). He explains that his intention in "The Raven" is to create the "single effect" of "beauty" through evoking the feeling of "melancholy" in his readers. The best way he finds to evoke this sensation is the loss of a loved one. In other words, the "presence" of an "absent" happiness creates the most important binary opposition in the poem, which is "melancholy/happiness". According to AzebChikh,

Whenever we hear the name Edgar Allan Poe, we remember "The Raven," a poem that became popular due to the musicality of its refrain "Nevermore". Poe is not only a poet

but also a short story writer. He is known for his tales of fantasy, terror, horror and ratiocination stories; hence, he is the father of the detective stories. Edgar Allan Poe as an American dark Romanticist suffered a lot in his life. His woeful life made his way for writing. He suffered a lot with poverty and death that took all of his family. Thus, death was an essential theme in his works. (2012, 11)

Apparently Poe creates the meaning of the poem by ascribing the focus to the melancholy pole of the opposition and quite arbitrarily ascertains a stable signified for the signifier. However, it does not mean that happiness should replace melancholy as the signified. By the end of this essay it will be shown that not only in this opposition but also in the other oppositions in the poem, there can be no central axis of meaning, hence the meaning remains "undecidable". Let us take a quick look at the famous opening stanzas of the poem:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door—

"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—

Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;

And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow

From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain

Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;

So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating,

"'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—

Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—

This it is and nothing more. (2013, 12)

On these lines and the overall meaning of Poe's poem, AzebChikh has observed that

In this poem, the speaker in this poem is a lover lamenting his dead beloved Lenore. In a dreary night of December, the lover is tired and weak, reading an old book to help him to forget his lost beloved ... Since the beginning of this poem, we can feel the ambiguity of the man's mental state that has been introduced. His inner fear from the unknown makes him somehow irritable... After a while, the dying embers on the floor trigger certain memories about his lost Lenore. It is clear that the lover become unconscious, and he is in a moment of a flashback, as if he is living again a specific situation from the past ... Then, a raven enters his chamber and perches "upon a bust of Pallas" above his door (Line 41). A discussion then starts between the lover and the raven. The lover believes that the raven is a prophet that could predict something concerning his lost beloved. Unfortunately, each time the raven replies him with the same word "Nevermore". His curiosity increases each time, and the raven utters no other word. Hence, his passion to torture himself leads him to ask the raven for the last time if he is going to meet his lost beloved Lenore in the Heaven, but the raven replies him, "nevermore." (Azeb Chick, 2012, 27-28)

Kopley has contended that "The Raven," which is now read and analyzed in middle schools, high schools and universities, has created a literary myth around itself (2002, 193). In his *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, Stern expounds that the raven's repetition of the word "Nevermore" contributes to the mood of the

poem, evoking sense of despair and hopelessness. Poe repeats the word *nevermore* because it best captures the melancholic mood of the poem. In addition, in the last two stanzas, the raven resembles something different than its usual sign of evil. This time, it represents the "Mournful and never-ending Remembrance" (Stern, 1977, 564).

2.1. Melancholy/Happiness

Poe creates a melancholic atmosphere through a very dark setting in the beginning lines of the first two stanzas: "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary" and "Ah distinctly I remember, it was in the bleak December" (1975, 943). As it was discussed before, Poe's intention was to create the single effect of beauty by giving preference to "melancholy". However, the signifier "beauty" can never be fixed and stable. Reading the poem one might find the hope that the narrator has constructed for himself through reading of the "forgotten lore". This hope can also signify beauty. The phrase "forgotten lore" is of utmost importance here. It shows that such melancholic stories of loss have occurred in the past and people have managed to forget them. However, the fact that he consciously wants to remember the past and find a reasonable solution for his loss makes the poem problematic and contradictory. Discussing melancholy and the general sense of gloom in "The Raven" in his article "Devil Lore in "The Raven,"" Howell asserts that

It's not simply that she is dead. It is that he has damned himself. It is no mistake that the month is "bleak December" rather than an equally dreary November. The forces of darkness are never more powerful than during the high holy days of the Christian year, and December, with its share of the twelve days of Christmas, ranks foremost. The mention of "each separate dying ember [which] wrought its ghost upon the floor," is reminiscent of Coleridge's "Christabel" in which

other embers reflect the presence of evil in much the same way. (1972, 35)

The raven, therefore, can be seen as a substitute for the narrator's subconscious mind. In other words, he is talking to himself, or it is better to say that he is reasoning with himself to escape from the pain. Some believe that the raven "is nothing more than an anthropomorphized version of the narrator's subconscious despair" (Jung, 2012, 3). This interpretation can be justified by the penultimate line in the tenth stanza "on the morrow *he* will leave me as my Hopes have flown before". This line apparently proves that the narrator is a hopeless lover plunged into despair. However, the famous repeated word "nevermore" makes us think again, as If Poe himself was aware of the contradictions of his thoughts. Although as he claims in "The Philosophy of Composition", he used this word because its sonorous "O" evokes the feeling of melancholy. If the raven is in the narrator's mind and reminds him of his lost love, and if it leaves him by tomorrow, it could mean that he will forget the painful memories and he will be happy. So the readers of the poem cannot decide on which side to take in the intertwined binaries of hope/despair and melancholy/happiness. Hence, the signified is "undecidable" and can only be supplemented by temporary meanings. On one hand, he says "eagerly I wished the morrow" (line 9) and he wants to forget, on the other hand he wants to "remember" the "forgotten lore".

2.2. Fantasy/Reality

There is a very thin line between fantasy and reality in general. It can even be claimed that reality is always formulated by language; consequently, any reality is bound to be nothing but a construct of the mind. But does this mean that all realities are fantastic, in the sense that they are all imaginary? It is impossible to polemically and confidently answer the question from Derrida's standpoint because even the binary opposition of fantasy/reality is a linguistic construct. In other words, as

Tyson has proclaimed, "No concept is beyond the dynamic instability of language, which disseminates an infinite number of meanings with each written and spoken word" (2015, 242). Even if we take this conventional construct to be true, there are still contradictions in the text than can never be solved. As Adams has written in his essay "Classical Raven Lore and Poe's Raven,"

In the course of the poem, the Raven develops and modifies this and its other associations, becoming more and more a private symbol, more and more a dream or hallucinatory figure generated by the persona's emotional bankruptcy, increasingly symbolizing private spiritual dryness rather than personal lamentation for a specific loss. (1972, 66)

Right from the start of the poem, the narrator tried to remain as realistic as possible. He is in a constant state of denial even though it is midnight and he is extremely tired and prone to hallucination. He keeps repeating to himself "Only this and nothing more" (line 1), "This it is and nothing more" (line 12), "Darkness there and nothing more" (line 18), "Merely this and nothing more" (line 24), and "Tis the wind and nothing more" (line 32). This repetition could mean that he has come up with the word "Nevermore" in the bird of his fancy as a defense mechanism to resist against his illusory and delusional thoughts. However, repetition is a crucial element in deconstruction. Derrida uses the term "iterability" that does not simply signify repetition as in 'reiteration'; rather, every iteration is an alteration, or a modification of the same. Therefore, the word "Nevermore" can also mean that the narrator is resisting to forget. Maybe he does not want to drink "necemthe". Therefore, if the raven is a real bird who is haunting the man's real house, then the ending will inevitably become sad because his "soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor/Shall be lifted-nevermore". However, if it is an imaginary

bird he might be alive, and whether he manages to forget his sad or happy memories will still be unknown. As it can be seen no stable meaning can be fixed.

2.3. Reason/Emotion

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe stated that the narrator of the poem is a young scholar. Even though there is no direct statement in the poem, the fact that he keeps the statue of Pallas, who is the goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology, is a good evidence to accept that hypothesis. This man of reason tries to unravel the mysterious word "nevermore" making the best use of his faculties. Ironically, the more he thinks, the less reasonable and the more emotional he becomes. His first answer is the most reasonable: "What he utters is its only stock and store" (line 66). He speculates that the raven is parrot-talking and is repeating an ominous word from his unfortunate master who has apparently gone through a disaster. Then he links "fancy unto fancy" and he becomes more delusional. The raven once more proves contradictory. How does he expect from an ominous bird to bring him good news of Lenore's well-being from Eden?! Moreover, the bird has come from the "Night's Plutonian shore" that is a symbol for the land of the dead in Greek mythology and is located in the underground, and is in stark contrast with the Christian Eden which lies on the sky. The more he tries, the more impatient he becomes to the point that he wishes for a "necemthe" to forget, or a "balm in Gilead" to alleviate his pain and "Horror". This decline in his reason is also evident in the change that the bust of Pallas has gone through from "placid bust" in line 60 to a "pallid bust" in line 104. So the death of his soul at the end of the poem could also mean the death of his reason.

Another binary opposition that is closely related to the binary of "reason/emotion" is light/darkness". However, one cannot decide to associate which to which. In the too dark atmosphere of the poem there is also the flickering light of the lamp-light that is repeated in different

occasions. It could be the narrator's last glimpse of hope. It could be said that it is the light of his reason that can save him from the darkness of his emotions, or that it is the light of his emotion for his radiant and beautiful maiden that protects him from the dark abyss of his reason. If there is one thing that Derrida absolutely disagrees with, it is the western biased idea that everything can be understood through the faculty of reason. He believes that reason is also a linguistic construct that can only be understood outside of language. He opposes the idea that "logos" or speech comes first and then we write it down. It could have been the other way around, that is maybe we wrote things first without reasoning them and then reason was created based on the writings. Therefore, maybe the emotions that are seemingly irrational are the primary source of humanity. Maybe we act as instinctively as animals with the difference that we are conscious of our instincts. This contrast between man and animal is also evident in the relationship between the raven and the narrator. However, it does not mean that emotion is now at the center and can be granted the privilege of the signified. Derrida even disagreed with Rousseau who held such a natural philosophy. It is just another signifier that can be linked to another signifier at infinitum.

3. CONCLUSION

This article endeavored to offer a deconstructive reading of Poe's "The Raven" and to challenge and decentralize certain fixed notions such as melancholy/happiness, fantasy/reality, and reason/emotion. Using Derridean well-known notion of *différance*, the present research identified and subverted the principal binary oppositions of the poem and showed that these opposite terms can easily run into each other and be used interchangeably, thereby making it impossible to assign a finalized and premeditated meaning to them. From what has been discussed, it can be concluded that no definite meaning can be ascribed and

attached to the recurrent motifs of the poem as its dominant binary oppositions including melancholy/happiness, fantasy/reality, and reason/emotion, along with several related oppositions like darkness/light are not contained within, or reducible to, any fixed center. It was argued that within the context of the poem, meaning resists finality and closure and is constantly deferred and made unstable. However, it does not mean that meaning does not exist at all; rather, it implies that it keeps changing, expanding, and evading finality.

REFERENCES

1. Adams, John F. "Classical Raven Lore and Poe's Raven". *Poe Studies*. 5 (2): 56-75, 1972.
2. AzebChikh, Nahla. *The Attitude towards the Death of a Beloved in Edgar Allan Poe's Poems, The Raven, Lenore, Ulalume, and Annabel Lee*. Dissertation. Biskra: The University of Mohamed Khider, 2012.
3. Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 1982.
4. Derrida, Jacques. "Différance" In: Julian Wolfreys (ed.). *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*. New York: New York University Press, 1970.
5. _____. *Writing and Difference*. tran. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
6. _____. *Margins of Philosophy*. trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982.
7. Feidelson, Charles Jr. *Symbolism and American Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
8. Foster, Hal, ed. *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 1990.
9. Howell, Granger Byrd. "Devil Lore in "The Raven"". *Poe Studies*. 5 (2): 33-52, 1972.
10. Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988.
11. _____. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
12. Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass, Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Macmillan, 1988.

13. Jung, Kyle. "Fantastic Conflict in "The Raven,"" 2012. <https://artifactsjournal.missouri.edu/2012/07/fantastic-conflict-in%C2%93theraven%C2%94/> (last retrieved 3.14.2020)
14. Kopley, Richard. "Two Verse Masterworks: The Raven and Ulalume". In *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Kevin J. Hayes. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
15. Marshall, Brenda K. *Teaching the Postmodern Fiction and Theory*. London: Routledge, 1992.
16. Miller, J. Hillis. "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure." *Georgia Review* 30 (2): 30-48, 1976.
17. Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Raven." In *Edgar Allan Poe Complete Tales and Poems*. New York: Random House. 1975.
18. _____. *The Raven*. California: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform. 2013.
19. _____. *The Philosophy of Composition* (1850). California: GrateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.
20. Racevskis, Kalis. *Postmodernism and the Search for Enlightenment*. Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1993.
21. Silverman, Hugh J., ed. *Postmodernism – Philosophy and Arts*. London: Routledge, 1990.
22. Stern, Philip Van Doren. *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Penguin Press, 1977.
23. Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

How to cite this article: Bakhsh LF. A deconstructive reading of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven". Galore International Journal of Applied Sciences & Humanities. 2020; 4(2): 19-28.
