



## DARK ROMANTICISM – AN IDIOSYNCRATIC PIECE OF GOTHIC ROMANCE

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### ABSTRACT:

The Dark Romanticism movement, one of the most significant ones that altered the course of American writing, is one of the many literary trends that have influenced American literature. It was a reaction to the transcendentalist who brought about an influx of positive emotion and feeling in romantic literature. Along with this positive note, several authors took a more realistic and depressing approach to the movement to expose, traumas, sin and the pessimistic nature of individual beings like Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Emily Dickinson. Dark romantics always depict individuals' emotions and their life experiences under adverse circumstances where the conflicting mind has a significant impact on building an individual's character or personality. Psychologically, an individual's emotions and life experiences are nothing but the struggle with themselves and their conscience. These human traits are the weapon for gothic writings but it is very much darker in tone whereas, Dark romanticism is always shadowed under gothic but it is more general and beautiful in depicting circumstances. It is anti-romantic, where, the themes like dark, melancholy, death, madness, obsession, sin and guilt can also be studied. This paper would be an honest observation of such factors that contributes in creating dark and intense tone to know the unknown in the works of famous dark romantic writers of the time.

**Key words:** - *A reaction to the Transcendentalism, Prevailing pessimism, Depiction of human fallibility, Emphasis on Individuality, Emotion, and Subjective experience, Psychological repercussions of sin and guilt, Relation to Gothic fiction, Death, Madness and Melancholy.*

### INTRODUCTION :

Dark Romanticism is one of the major subgenres of romantic literature that flourished in 19th-century America. It is often conflated with gothic romance because of its similar characteristics. There is a very minute but distinguishable difference between the two. When it is about gothic romance, it is more particular in that sense, but when it is about dark romanticism, it is more general in that sense. The source of these facts can be found in the dark Romantic Movement, which had its start in Germany at the start of the eighteenth century, and was characterized by an emphasis on the value of an individual, a fascination with the power of the person, and an obsession with intense emotions like dread, love, and terror. There are many similar and quite distinguishable references in the works of the dark romantics; Dark romanticism is nothing

but one of the most beautiful, individual, and idiosyncratic pieces of gothic literature.

### A reaction to the Transcendentalism

The movement known as transcendentalism, which took place in New England in the 1820s and 1830s during the 19th century, was comprised of writers and philosophers who were loosely associated by their adherence to an idealistic school of thought based on the conviction that all things are fundamentally interconnected, people are inherently good, and that intuition always triumphs over reason and experience in the quest for the revelation of the most profound truths. Individualism, idealism, and the divinity of nature are deeply ingrained in the three basic values of the transcendentalist movement, which is made up of a wide range of views.

A reaction to the transcendental movement, Dark Romanticism emerged in the middle of the

nineteenth century as this was a shift of viewpoint for the mind from the dogmatically religious Puritan/Anglo-Saxon way of thinking to rigidly pious Puritan/Anglo-Saxon philosophy<sup>(1)</sup>.

In 1844, Poe told his friend Thomas Holley Chivers: “*You mistake me in supposing I dislike the transcendentalists – it is only the pretenders and sophists among them.*”<sup>(2)</sup> There is, however, good reason to believe that Poe disdained the New England Transcendentalists, especially in light of his public declarations. When people thought about their sin and nature, they were not particularly interested in optimism. The famous poem, “*The Raven*,” is also regarded as the best example of dark romantic poetry and is also considered an anti-transcendental work.

### **Prevailing pessimism**

Dark romantics have the habit or tendency to look at the evil part of things instead of the good part. This approach to analyzing things is known as pessimism, and it can be found in most of the dark romantics' works. As the king of pessimism for his tales of mystery and the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe is well recognized for his gloomy writings. His twisted, dismal creations are full of gloom. Poe was a person whose life has been filled with many challenging experiences. To escape from his dark and saddened world, Poe used to drink and write short stories and poems. Because of being surrounded by such situations his writings discover new art for expression of the feelings which gave birth to his dark masterpieces. Thus, it could also be said that being a pessimist is what made Poe such a great and creative writer. He not only could be creative but was also able to mould his feelings beautifully, even with his pessimistic approach, which as a result brought out the dark side of his work. His poem “*The Raven*” greatly portrays his own life and his feelings after the dismissal of his wife Virginia.

### **Depiction of human fallibility**

The most advanced and expressive social being on earth is the human, but human nature is one of those fundamental topics that writers have been struggling with since the first written word. There is no uniform idea of how it works. Few consider humans to be inherently good and caring beings. Yet for other writers, humans are a little more than animals that can behave according to the rules and laws of society. Some writers visualize people as inhuman and as beings that only need a slight vector in the direction of negativity to become beings full of malice and hatred, capable of heinous acts. Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne's works are also filled with such a keen and discerning sense of morality, where belief in God and the belief that humans are born sinful are the most prevailing concepts. Melville's “*Billy Budd*” and Hawthorne's “*Scarlet Letter*” are clear examples of such kinds of writing.

The most prolific writer, Edgar Allan Poe, has been a writer who has had a greater capacity to embrace the dark side of humanity, as is seen in most of his works. Humans are depicted as being only capable of cruelty and evil in several of Poe's works. Many of his writings have dealt with topics where the foundation is torture, revenge, and death. It looks like many of Poe's works were directly affected by his own life, which was full of terrible tragedies. Some of his legendary art pieces portrayed these views, such as “*The Tell-Tale Heart*,” “*The Red Masque of Death*,” “*The Pit and The Pendulum*,” “*A Cask of Amontillado*,” and “*The Black Cat*.” The perspective on the evilness residing in humanity is evident in all of these pieces, which also deal with some very sinister subjects. In “*The Tell-Tale Heart*,” an unknown, but extremely anxious and insane narrator is mentioning his hate for the old man's pale and blue eyes. He says, “*it is not the old man I hate, nor am I jealous of his wealth. It is his eye, I hate*” (Poe, *The Tell Tale Heart*).<sup>(4)</sup> He finally concludes to end the old

man's life to avoid the torture that his eyes are blue. The narrator not only took a man's life but also dismembered him and buried him under the floorboards.

### **Emphasis on Individuality, Emotion, and Subjective experience**

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the dark romantic writers that capture the essence of an individual's feelings over time. One of the most significant aspects of dark romance is the psychology of the mind and how it should be interpreted concerning romance, which represented various aspects of human emotion and expression throughout his writing. Dark romances feature elements such as the past, love, and emotions as subjective experiences where they represent different aspects of human emotions and expressions in particular scenarios. In general, the bright and dark sides of romanticism have presented opposing viewpoints, particularly regarding human emotions. Even if it cannot be seen with the bare eye, romanticism and writers like Edgar Allan Poe have a sense of singularity when it is evaluated. The individualism of love has replaced any sense of loss or death as we enter the age of romanticism. Even though the author physically lost Annabel Lee, their spiritual love would always be felt between the two worlds. "Love stays forever" demonstrates Romanticism's virtues and adds the author's affinity to the poem.

The poem "*The Raven*" begins with the narrator in a bedroom grieving the loss of a woman named Lenore, and then it concentrates on a Raven repeatedly repeating "Nevermore." Dark thoughts begin to cross the narrator's mind, and he or she feels hemmed in by the shadow of the raven. The raven kept repeating "Nevermore" throughout the poem, giving Edgar little hope in anything and even making him angry. Edgar used to get mocked and teased by the raven, who claimed he would never see Lenore again.

Edgar conjures up the raven as the devil or some supernatural figure using his imagination. Edgar demonstrates individualism in his deep introspection and emotional anguish, where he also experiences loneliness.

The Romanticism subgenre encompasses these two poems by Edgar. Symbols in Edgar's writing can be used to portray romanticism. Love, emotion, beauty, and other Romantic concepts abound in Annabel Lee's writing. While describing the actions of a man who lost his true love, Edgar crafts a picture of a terrible love story. The grief of women and how his experience hurts him are other topics covered in "*The Raven*." Edgar sees a raven as a supernatural being by using his imagination and menacing ideas. Romanticism is portrayed throughout Edgar Allan Poe's writings on love, passion, and the natural world.

Both poems are unique in the way they express the emotions and sentiments that both narrators experienced and offer a general opinion of Edgar. Numerous facets of this author have demonstrated the connection between the contrasting themes and the unusual events that have occurred and Romanticism. The contrast between sadness and love reflects Poe's variety of thoughts, which helps explain why his use of foreshadowing and improbable symbolism all relate to a single theme that reveals who he is as a person through literature.

### **Psychological repercussions of sin and guilt**

American romanticism in literature is known for its mixed kind of writings. A psychological study of human beings and their behavior is a part of a study in American literature which can be judged and analyzed through the characters present in the works. Dark romantics deal with such subjects where inner conflict of mind works as a weapon for writing. That Dark Romantic doesn't mean darkly or deeply romantic or anything of a kind, though both the

actual literary dark romanticism and what people might think of dark romanticism are exploring the inner workings of the mind. Edgar Allan Poe has used it skillfully as an art of writing that discusses the shadowy approach to the fantastical.

Usually, The American Romantic writers took an optimistic approach to the mystical aspects of the universe where sins are properly punished and those who are truly good are rewarded. For example, in Washington Irving's 'The Devil and Tom Walker,' Tom Walker is punished for his greed. It serves as a moral story to stop hypocrisy and wickedness. On the other hand, the Dark Romantics, like Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville who are the master of gothic and horror tales, were more particular and fond of the darkness and evil in those same aspects, preferring the evil aspects over the good. As a result, their writing typically has the characteristics like lots of creepy symbols, horrific themes and psychological effects of guilt and sin. In particular, Edgar Allan Poe could show something that represents something else. 'A red rose', for example, is a common symbol of love, romance, passion, and vitality. But if we change the colour of the rose to black, it becomes a symbol of something more sinister death, loss, and possibility. <sup>(3)</sup>

#### **Relation to Gothic fiction**

Dark Romance explores the themes of darkness and obscurity in literature. Although it's common to group all dark or weird aspects of romance into subcategories of "dark romance" or "gothic," these themes are seen throughout romantic writings. In the 19th century, there was a move away from the extreme intellectual and scientific pursuits of the Enlightenment. Romanticism arose from a time when some writers were exhausted by the constant pursuit of knowledge and the loss of social traditions. Religion and poetics were confiscated for

scientific purposes. The Age of Enlightenment celebrated the exposure of the unknown and promoted the image of rationalization as superior thinking. Romanticism was a dramatic rejection of the ideals enlightened thinkers espoused. While the Enlightenment celebrated bringing things to light and revealing the unknown, Romanticism loved the dark and obscure. Romantic writers lived only in darkness. Dark romantics idealized the unknown because they believed there was innate beauty. The love romantic writers felt for these concepts can be seen in their literary works. Romantics aren't just inspired by light. Rather, they appreciated the sublime beauty of the unknown.

#### **Death, Madness and Melancholy**

The themes of death madness and melancholy are very much common in dark romanticism which can also be found in gothic literature. Dark romanticism always tries to serve the cautionary element of human life where terrible human conditions may result in revealing the truth. The impression of the same can be seen in his work "*The Masque of the Red Death*" here his thoughts were mainly concerned with death which is filled with darkness, foreboding, and disillusionment and shows how metaphorically it's inescapable, but as per Poe people continues to behave as if they are immortal. "*The Masque of the Red Death*" thus is one of his stories which reveals fear and terror and demonstrates how time never stops, and no one can escape death.

Poe, on the other hand, stood out. Poe's stand on loneliness and alienation as an answer to sentimental literature can be observed primarily through his different works such as "*The Pit and the Pendulum*," "*The Man of the Crowd*," and "*William Wilson*", Where, alienation in Poe's life has heightened the depth of ideas in his works. As an impact, he contributed and encased an even better literary personality in his short

stories like, “*The Tell-Tale Heart*,” “*The Black Cat*,” and “*The Fall of the House of Usher*”, all exhibit narrators experiencing madness and his melancholy mood.

#### CONCLUSION:

Dark Romanticism, a subgenre of Romanticism gain popularity in the nineteenth century as a reaction to the transcendentalism philosophy where the depiction of human fallibility, psychological recursions of sin and guilt, and death madness and melancholy are the pessimistic aspects used to unravel the individual’s emotions and life experiences. It is an idiosyncratic piece of Gothic romance where general aspects of life can be studied beautifully. Gothic literature and dark romanticism are the subgenres of romanticism, but when it is about gothic romance, it is more particular in sense, and when it is about Dark Romanticism it is more general in sense. Many famous writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville nourished Dark Romanticism in contrast to the transcendentalism. They perceive mysterious and dark tones as a weapon for unravelling the unknown which is nothing but the most creative and distinct characteristic of Dark Romanticism that makes it more popular.

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