

**Impact  
Factor  
3.025**

**ISSN 2349-638x**

**Refereed And Indexed Journal**

**AAYUSHI  
INTERNATIONAL  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
RESEARCH JOURNAL**

**UGC Approved Monthly Journal**

**VOL-IV**

**ISSUE-IX**

**Sept.**

**2017**

**Address**

• Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.  
• Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512 (MS.)  
• (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 8999250451

**Email**

• aiirjpramod@gmail.com  
• aayushijournal@gmail.com

**Website**

• www.aiirjournal.com

**CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE**

**Harmony Between Musical Words and Melancholy Thoughts in the Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe**

**Dr.Prashant M. Mannikar**

Head, PG & Research Dept. of English,  
Dayanand College of Arts, Latur. MS.

**Abstract**

*Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), the 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet, has been a much discussed figure in the history of American poetry. He has been a subject both of appreciation and condemnation. He dwells in a vaporous world, in a region where dreaming cities crumble into fathomless seas, in a fairyland with dim vales and shadowy woods, in haunted palaces, or in a lost and wandering star. Poe admitted melancholy as the most legitimate of all the poetical tones. He held that a poem needs to be short to an artifact. Another important defining criteria Poe associated with poem was its musicality. Poe defined poetry as the rhythmical creation of beauty. The readers shall never appreciate Poe if they keep comparing him to men of stronger and more human nature. Poe must be taken as one of the voices, almost the shadow of a voice- that sound in the temple of song, and fill a little hour with music. He is not, like Homer, or Scott, or Shakespeare, or Moliere, a poet that men can live with always by the sea, in the hills, in the market-place. He is the singer of the rare hours of languor, when the soul is vacant of the pride of life, and inclined to listen, as it were, to the echo of a lyre from behind the hills of death. Poe's poems teach nothing, they mean little; their melody may be triumphantly explained as the result of a metrical trick- a trick that only Poe could play. In Poe's genius, there was a kind of pre-established harmony between musical words and melancholy thoughts. Poe remains a master of fantastic and melancholy sound.*

**Key Words:** *Melancholy as legitimate passion in poetry; sense and sound; Rhythmical creation of Beauty; truth, morality and the province of poetry.*

***The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. -***

***William Shakespeare***

The poet who manifests Shakespeare's visionary poet is the 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). He has been a much discussed figure in the history of American poetry and a subject both of appreciation and condemnation. The great Victorian British poet Alfred Lord Tennyson considered Poe as the greatest American genius. To W. B. Yeats he was always and for all lands a great lyric poet. The French symbolist poets from Baudelaire to Paul Valery adored Poe as 'Edgarpo.' The American poets, however, had a little unwelcome feeling for Poe. The great American writer, philosopher Emerson called Poe a "jingle man," while Robert Lowell thrashed him as a "three-fifths genius and two-fifth sheer fudge." Poe's views on poetry also led to tag his poetry with immorality. Poe once wrote:

Beyond the limits of beauty the province of poetry does not extend. Its sole arbiter is taste. With the intellect or the conscience it has only collateral relations. It has no dependence, unless incidentally, upon either duty or truth.

Like the poet-critics Horace, Sidney, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and T.S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe defended the kind of poetry he wrote. Poe's essays like "The Poetic Principle" and "The Philosophy of Composition" bring out his views on poetry. Poe held that a poem to be exquisite essentially needs to be short. In his essay "The Poetic Principle" Poe categorically remarks, "I hold that a long poem does not

exist. I maintain that a phrase ‘a long poem’ is simply a flat contradiction in terms.” The poems of Poe stand testimony to his conception of poetry as they are essentially short. Another important defining criteria Poe associated with poem was its musicality. Poe’s verse was very musical and strictly metrical. He defined poetry as “the rhythmical creation of beauty,” and beauty was in his eyes most beautiful when it was least alloyed with matter. That is why such topics as war, patriotism, prosperous love, religion, duty were absolutely alien to Poe. The same indefinite but intensely poetic effect is produced still more obviously by Poe’s management of his metres. His poems *The Raven*, *Ulalume*, *Annabel Lee* are, each in its own way metrical marvels. The well-known critic George Saintsbury rightly points out:

Though Poe’s language not unfrequently passes from vagueness into mere unmeaningness in the literal and grammatical sense of it, yet it never fails to convey the proper suggestion in sound if not in sense.

Poe aspires to find a beauty in unearthly forms. This burning thirst belongs to the immortal essence of man’s nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of man’s perennial life. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is not the mere appreciation of the beauty before us. It is a wild effort to reach the beauty above. W. H. Longfellow, however, considered the demands of morality and truth as the true aim of poetry. He assumed that “the inculcation of a moral” was essential to poetry. Edgar Allan Poe acknowledged a deep respect for truth, but differed from the standpoint of Longfellow. Poe, on the other hand, suggested that a calm, unexcited disposition allowed the mind to discover the truth, a different mood from that which allowed access to the poetical. Poe refused to mix “the obstinate oils” of poetry, truth, and morality. In the “Letter to Mr. —,” republished in revised form as “Letter to B—” in the *Southern Literary Messenger* (July 1836), Poe commented on the aims of poetry as opposed to the objectives of science and other literary forms:

A poem... is opposed to a work of science by having for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth; to romance by having, for its object an indefinite instead of a definite pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with indefinite sensations, to which end music is essential, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. ***Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without the idea is simply music; the idea without the music is prose from its very definitiveness.***

Poe felt that the poet should be oriented toward indefinite images and sensations enhanced by music or sweet sound. Music could thus be a vehicle for the exploration of unearthly beauty, not to be confused with mere prettiness. As he wrote in “Letter to B—,” poetry might render the “airy and fairy-like,” but latent in its impact was “all that is hideous and unwieldy”. Poe deliberately discarded sanity and chose fantasy for his poetic exuberance. To Poe poetry was a passion. Moreover a poem for him was nothing but a “rhythmical creation of beauty” and it was the essence and function of poetry. His poetry was all sound and little sense or as Andrew Lang brilliantly phrases it “sense swooning into nonsense.” He had no claims to make with regards to meaning/message in poetry. He endorsed the claims of Archibald MacLeish “A poem should not mean, but be.” He would also sing with Mallarme “To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create.” He regarded his own verses as trifles “not of much value to the public, or very creditable to myself.” Commenting on the nature of Poe’s poetry Andrew Lang makes a very subtle observation:

They [Poe’s poems] teach nothing, they mean little; their melody may be triumphantly explained as the result of a metrical trick- a trick that only Poe could play. Poe remains a master of fantastic and melancholy sound.

Poe had been preoccupied with the thought of death and the condition of the dead. In his prose romances his imagination is always morbidly busy with the secrets of the sepulcher. His dead men speak, his corpses hold long colloquies with themselves, and his characters are prematurely buried and explore the veiled things of corruption (Lang). This wistful regret, almost hopeless of any reunion of departed souls in “the distant Aiden,” and almost fearful that the sleep of the dead is not dreamless is the dominant note of all his poetry. He knew what he calls, “that sorrow which the living love to cherish for the dead, and which, in some minds, resembles the delirium of opium.” His spirit was always beating against the gate of grave, and the chief praise he could confer on a woman in his maturity was to compare her to one whom he has lost while he was still a boy. In this regard, Mr. Ingram writes:

For months after her decease, Poe would go nightly to visit the tomb of his revered friend, and when the nights were very drear and cold, when the autumnal rains fell, and the winds wailed mournfully over the graves, he lingered longest and came away most regretfully.”

Even when his thoughts are not busy with death, even when his heart is not following some Lenore or Annbel Lee or Ulalume, his fancy does not deal with solid realities, with human passions. He dwells in a vaporous world, in a region where dreaming cities crumble into fathomless seas, in a fairyland with “dim vales and shadowy woods,” in haunted palaces, or in a lost and wandering star.

Poe admitted that melancholy is the most legitimate of all the poetical tones. Poe believed that melancholy is the emotion most devoid of actual human stuff, the most etherealized, so to speak, the least likely to result in action. Edgar Allan Poe shares with Melville a darkly metaphysical vision mixed with elements of realism, parody, and burlesque. He believed that strangeness was an essential ingredient of beauty. His stories and poems are populated with doomed, introspective aristocrats (Poe, like many other southerners, cherished an aristocratic ideal). These gloomy characters never seem to work or socialize; instead they bury themselves in dark, moldering castles symbolically decorated with bizarre rugs and draperies that hide the real world of sun, windows, walls, and floors. The hidden rooms reveal ancient libraries, strange art works, and eclectic oriental objects. The aristocrats play musical instruments or read ancient books while they brood on tragedies, often the deaths of loved ones. Themes of death-in-life, especially being buried alive or returning like a vampire from the grave, appear in many of his works. Poe’s twilight realm between life and death and his gaudy, Gothic settings are not merely decorative. They reflect the over civilized yet deathly interior of his characters’ disturbed psyches. They are symbolic expressions of the unconscious, and thus are central to his art.

In every genre, Poe explores the psyche. To explore the exotic and strange aspect of psychological processes, Poe delved into accounts of madness and extreme emotion. The painfully deliberate style and elaborate explanation in his works heighten the sense of the horrible by making the events seem vivid and plausible. Poe’s combination of decadence and romantic primitivism appealed enormously to Europeans, particularly to the French poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, and Arthur Rimbaud. But Poe is not un-American, despite his aristocratic disgust with democracy, preference for the exotic, and themes of dehumanization. On the contrary, he is almost a textbook example of Tocqueville’s prediction that American democracy would produce works that lay bare the deepest, hidden parts of the psyche. Edgar Allan Poe’s best-known poem, in his own lifetime and today, is “The Raven” (1845). In this eerie poem, the haunted, sleepless narrator, who has been reading and mourning the death of his “lost Lenore” at midnight, is visited by a raven (a bird that eats dead flesh, hence a symbol of death) who perches above his door and ominously repeats the poem’s famous refrain, “never-more.” The poem ends in a frozen scene of death-in-life:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,  
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted- nevermore!

Mr. Henry James has spoken of Poe's "valueless verse." In reply, Andrew Lang argues that Poe's verse would appear valueless if one asks for more from his verse than what they could offer. It has nothing to give but music, and people who want more must go to others that sell a different ware. Andrew Lang rightly warns the readers of Poe, "we shall never appreciate Poe if we keep comparing him to men of stronger and more human nature," and that "we must take him as one of the voices, almost the "shadow of a voice," that sound in the temple of song, and fill hour with music. He is not, like Homer, or Scott, or Shakespeare, or Moliere, a poet that men can live with always by the sea, in the hills, in the market-place. He is the singer of the rare hours of languor, when the soul is vacant of the pride of life, and inclined to listen, as it were, to the echo of a lyre from behind the hills of death.

**Works Cited:**

1. Hayes, Kevin J. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge, UK: CUP, 2004.
2. Lang, Andrew. Introduction. *Edgar Allan Poe: Poems and Essays*. London: J. M Dent & Sons Ltd. *Everyman's Library*, 1927.
3. Ljungquist, Kent. "The Poet as Critic" in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* Ed. Kevin J Hayes. Cambridge, UK: CUP, 2004.
4. Poe, Edgar Allan. *Edgar Allan Poe: Poems and Essays*. London: J. M Dent & Sons Ltd. *Everyman's Library*, 1927.

