

# "Edgar Allan Poe: The Spiritual And Emotional Dimensions Of His Love Poetry"

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The salient features of Poe's love poetry can be identified as a form of creativity. To him love was a hysterical experience and his poetry vibrates with the echoes of spirituality. This amorous verse is permeated to its core with an aura of spiritual emotionalism. His sentimental references to women are everywhere haloed with the dominant image of the religiosity of love. Poe's love experiences in real life were tintured with the chimerical quality of religious thoughts. In his letters he wants Mrs. Whitman in a "divine trance" to be his "hereafter and forever, in the Heavens"<sup>8</sup> and secondly Mrs. Richmond wife of my soul "Not on earth even in Heaven". Again he writes to Mrs. Whitman, "I notice you were my Helen. The Helen of a myriad dreams."<sup>9</sup> Just after one month Poe again wrote to Mrs. Richmond, "oh! my dear, my Annie, my dear Annie, my fairy angel, wife of my soul... to be mine forever even in the Heaven"<sup>10</sup> Poe's prose echoes masculine vigor while poetry echoes female tone.

**Keywords:** Hysterical, spirituality, amorous, tintured, chimerical

Edgar Allan Poe's grandfather was a General in American Army. His family had a historical fame. His Grandfather is said to have rendered 'Lafayette' valuable accolade and have been highly respected. The family background of Poe goes like this: Elizabeth Arnold, an actress, at the age of nine came to America along with her widow mother. At fifteen she married an actor named Hopkins. There was no issue from this marriage, after three years Hopkins died and shortly after Elizabeth Arnold married David Poe. She became a good singer and dancer gradually. But David Poe was a tubercular and addict to wine. Elizabeth gave birth to her first son in 1807 and in 1809, she gave birth to her second son Edgar. In July 1810, David Poe suddenly disappeared. No evidence if he deserted his family or died. Edgar at the early age of eighteen months was left alone at home with his pregnant mother and in 1810 a daughter Rosalie was born. Several doubts arouse about the paternity of this child who was born the few months after the death or disappearance of her legitimate father. These suspicions made subsequent injurious effects on Edgar's relation with his foster-father.

Elizabeth rented a cheap room in the house of Mrs. Philips who was in the trade of perfumes and cosmetics. Mrs. Frances Keeling Allan and William Mackenzie were two customers of Mrs. Philips and these two women helped Elizabeth Arnold in her destitution and disease. After her death Mrs. Allan took Edgar to her home, at that time Edgar was two years and eleven months old and his sister Rosalie who was one years old was adopted by Mrs. Mackenzie. Edgar was very delicate child and preferred girls to boys as his playmates. He was intelligent too, "He would also be brought into the drawing room to recite, his talent used to astonish and please the guests. Poe's misfortunes began in the early age. Also, mounted on the table, he would pledge the guests in water and wine."<sup>1</sup>

In the school he did well and began to write short stories at the age of eleven. In the school he made several girl-friends and Rosalie, his sister, also a student in the same school served as a messenger between Edgar and his girl-friends. He loved Mrs. Stannard, Catherine Elizabeth Potiaux but Frances Allan, his foster mother, was his most dear one. Edgar was in love with Elmira Royster but at the age of seventeen when his heart was broken by this lady, Edgar bowed down to hard drinks. He started gambling in school, he was expelled from the college and John Allan his foster-father disowned him and got married again. Afraid of atrocities and corporal punishment of his foster father, Edgar left home. He wrote to his foster-father, "I have not even a coin with me to provide any food."<sup>11</sup> Later he joined US Army and became a thoughtful poet and "wholly broke new grounds"<sup>2</sup>. "He was the greatest American poet"<sup>3</sup>. He was "the most legitimate, the most classical of all the modern poets"<sup>4</sup>

Throughout his life Poe craved for physical love which became a "ghastly disease"<sup>6</sup> for him. Among his sixty

poems, thirty (means one and half ) fairly deal with his love for women.

Thou were that all to me, love, For which my soul did pine, A green isle in the sea, love, A fountain and a shrine,  
All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers, And all the flowers were mine.<sup>5</sup>

The salient features of Poe's love poetry can be identified as a form of creativity. To him love was a hysterical experience and his poetry vibrates with the echoes of spirituality. This amorous verse is permeated to its core with an aura of spiritual emotionalism. His sentimental references to women are everywhere haloed with the dominant image of the religiosity of love. Poe's love experiences in real life were tintured with the chimerical quality of religious thoughts. In his letters he wants Mrs. Whitman in a "divine trance" to be his "hereafter and forever, in the Heavens"<sup>8</sup> and secondly Mrs. Richmond wife of my soul "Not on earth even in Heaven". Again he writes to Mrs. Whitman, "I notice you were my Helen. The Helen of a myriad dreams."<sup>9</sup> Just after one month Poe again wrote to Mrs. Richmond, "oh! my dear, my Annie, my dear Annie, my fairy angel, wife of my soul... to be mine forever even in the Heaven"<sup>10</sup> Poe's prose echoes masculine vigor while poetry echoes female tone. Poe's life was a tragic account of his weaknesses for drinking, borrowing and gambling. He was unfortunate in experiencing the love and attachment of sweethearts. In childhood he was influenced by the tender love of Frances Allan and Nancy Valentine. He won the sentimental approval of Mrs. Stannard in his toddler age. In his youth he was attached with Catherine Potiaux. He had a deep inclination to his cousin Sarah Elmira Royster and Virginia Clemm. He addressed his valentine songs to Sarah Anna Lewis, Miss Herring and Louise Olivia Hunter. Maria Clemm and Frances Sargent Osgood were also close friends of Edgar, with Mrs. Osgood he shared some poems too. Mrs. Osgood was sharing Poe's poems with Griswold also who was in love with her and Griswold was not ready to forgive his rival Edgar Allan Poe even in his grave for this crime. Griswold's article "Ludwig" ruined Poe's fame for decades. Even Dickens had exclaimed about Griswold, "the man must be the devil". No doubt Poe was an outstanding poet, critic and story-writer. He was a man of good birth but evil fate. He wrote about his misfortunes, "It is my sadness that is unaccountable and that makes me sadder. I am aware of coming forebodings. Nothing cheers or comforts me. My life seems wasted- the future looks a dreary bleak....."<sup>7</sup>

*Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of His Poetry*, a book by Sahitya Bhandar, Meerut came into existence in 2004. The book disclosed many new paradigms of Poe. Poe was active from 1809-1849, he was a Bostonian poet who wrote poems in his own strain and propounded his own theory of poetry. As a writer he was a multifaceted genius. As a prose writer and critic, he needed no defense. For his fame he had two faces: one in America and the second outside.

Americans called him plagiarist, poor, gambler, philanderer, impotent, drunkard and addict to Narcotics. For French writers he was father of French symbolism and rare literary figure whose works were translated in different languages.

Poe's four volumes of Poetry: *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), *AI Aaraaf, Tamerlane and other poems* (1829), *Poems* (1831) and *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845) contain not more than sixty poems in all. While going through these poems, one catches the conversation with his own soul and passions and the poet also speaks out of mind and heart in verses with complete ease and without any type of inhibition.

Everyone who reads Poe's poems, is so hypnotized that he begins to imagine himself as Poe. He was a precursor of a new theme and technique for the modern century. In the light of Poe's American and French faces this study evaluates Poe's fame as the poet of the age and his value into the Modern time. Poe started writing poems, tales, essays and literary criticism at an early age of fifteen. Later he preferred to write for journals for economic reasons. He did not get encouraging response from his contemporaries for his literary criticism. Rather this criticism became an eminent reason for being discarded by the Americans. The book is classified into seven chapters. In the first chapter the author lays emphasis on how and why Poe did not deserve the baseless allegations, raised by contemporary Americans on him. R.W. Emerson, the father of transcendental theory, called him 'the jingle man' in a lecture 'contemptuously'. Even Aldous Huxley called his literature as 'vulgar'. In fact, American society was passing through a moral crisis in Poe's time. In the realm of worldly achievements, Poe was unlucky but for his erudition he was matchless, therefore, for the former he met wide deprecation and for the latter he was not understood well by his fellow Americans on account of his innovative contributions to poetry. His greatness lies in the fact that he turned back from the beaten track and wrote in his original style.

Poe did not travel on the hackneyed track of the English Romantics while more or less his fellow Americans were the followers of the British Romantics. He searched his own ways to travel in his imaginative universe by the unique wings of romanticism apart from the traditional romantic vision. He did not write on morality, society and politics. He gave two new themes to new century: that salvation of soul was the sole purpose of poesy and disintegration of personality is also a choice. These two themes of poetry were the major themes in the last decades of twentieth century up to present days. Thus, Poe unluckily suffered for his originality.

T.S. Eliot, calls Poe's poetry 'immature' on one hand and accepts his poetic theory 'a poem for poem's sake' on the other hand by saying, 'art for art's sake'. Moreover, Griswold, Baptist minister, author and editor of *Graham's Magazine*, became Poe's literary executor on his request.

The irony of misplaced trust became evident on the very day of Poe's funeral on October 9, 1849, when Griswold published his slanderous letter signed 'Ludwig'. It was considered authoritative and was widely reprinted. It did irreparable damage to Poe. It was the result of Griswold's purposeful distortion further revealed in his memoir in 1850, though many friends of Poe did their best to defend him but could not stop blasphemy against

Poe's publicity as a good writer in America and abroad for decades till now. All this happened because of rivalry in love as both of them, Poe and Griswold, loved Mrs. Osgood.

Poe suffered for his audacity secondly, he criticized the ancient authors too. The core readers of these ancient authors could not tolerate it. That is why Poe looked at fellow Americans in distrust and they mistrusted him. Moreover, Poe was wild-eyed lover, he loved American women and American men hated him. Poe's *The Raven*, *To Helen*, *Al Aaraaf and Tamarlane* are apt examples. *The city in the Sea* and *Israfel* are wildly read poems for symbolism and transcendentalism. Through the book an attempt has been made to justify Poe's place in the history of poetry. No doubt he was exceedingly original and innovative and neither he belonged to any school of poetry nor did he follow other poets. I owe to Prof Rajeswar Pal who has motivated me by his enriching content to reveal that Poe's grand style set the highest standard for judging the merits of poetry. The book *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of His Poetry* is interesting and useful for reading. The readers feel enlightened while encountering several new facts which look like revelations about Poe. Elegant and clear cut, the book is a major contributor to Poe's literary world.

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