

## E. A. Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*: Symbol vs. Allegory?

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The paper is concerned with E. A. Poe's unique symbolic method as manifested in his tale *The Masque of the Red Death*. It offers a picture of the general state of critical treatment of the supposed opposition between allegory and symbol. I present a historical overview of how the distinction between the literary terms arose, tracing the roots of the issue to the end of the 18th century and showing its development over the next two centuries. The second section of the paper is devoted to the analysis of *The Masque* in the light of the theoretical background provided in the opening section. *The Masque* is interpreted in terms of Poe's modulation of "closed" and "open" symbolism by focusing on aspects of the story that relate to the use of numbers, colors, and time.

**Keywords:** symbolic method, allegory, allegory-symbol opposition, closed symbol, open symbol

The power delegated to nature is all in every part: and by symbol I mean, not a metaphor or allegory or any other figure of speech or form of fancy, but an actual essential part of that, the whole of which it represents ...

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*The Statesman's Manual* (1816)

Under the best circumstances, it must always interfere with that unity of effect, Which, to the artist, is worth all the allegory in the world.

—Edgar Allan Poe

*Tale-Writing*—Nathaniel Hawthorne (1847)

### Introduction

Any scholar undertaking the study of the essence and/or mechanism of functioning of the symbol and allegory in Romantic literature or rather, in literature in general will inevitably find himself/herself confronted with an intricate question of the opposition of allegory to symbol (or, to put it more precisely, with distinction between allegory and symbol), implying a preliminary solution of theoretical problems and shifting the analysis of individual works somewhat to the background. Establishing the standpoint gains relevance in the light of the countless multitude of studies on allegory and symbol virtually in every area of the humanities. In addition to this, literary terms such as *allegory* and *symbol* frequently lack clearly defined and precise senses, a fact that may reflect either the state of literary studies or the nature of their subject matter or a combination of both. It holds true for Edgar Allan Poe's tales as well. In order to discuss the use of symbols and/or allegories in Poe's stories, it is very important to define the two concepts in order to avoid confusion.

### Emergence of the Opposition—Romantic Conceptions

According to *The Dictionary of Literary Terms*, *symbol* is an object, person, idea, etc., used in a literary work, film, etc., to stand for or suggest something else with which it is associated either explicitly or in some more subtle way. An *allegory* is the technique in which the apparent meaning of the characters and events is used to symbolize a deeper moral and spiritual meaning. The main difference between *a symbol* and *an allegory* is that the former is connected with the image and the latter is not. This distinction between allegory and symbol emerged at the end of the 18th century, though no distinction like this was drawn previously. Since then Allegory has generally been regarded as inferior to symbol, supposedly being arbitrary and mechanical where symbol was motivated and imaginative. Symbol for Goethe, Schelling, Coleridge, and their successors involved an absolute unity of form and meaning with a consequent infinite suggestibility of meaning (Since a symbol's meaning was inseparable from its form, it could not be abstracted from that form as a precise proposition). Allegory by contrast was seen to involve an external and arbitrary relationship between form and meaning. This meaning consequently was easily abstractable and so fixed and definite, without suggestibility. Where symbol was organic and imaginative, allegory was arbitrary and mechanical.

This kind of distinction, labeled as "the radical opposition of symbol and allegory" by Peter Crisp (Crisp, 2005, p. 323), which has dominated the last 200 years emerged quite suddenly. Gadamer observed that in the 18th century the senses of the lexemes allegory and symbol and their cognates were virtually indistinguishable, functioning in Winckelmann for example as synonyms. This 18th century non-opposition of allegory and symbol was general across Europe (Gadamer, 1993, p. 72). In France "allegorique" and "symbolique" were virtual synonyms. In England, there was also a similar lack of differentiation. Definitions of "allegory" and "symbol" in Johnson's dictionary are virtually indistinguishable. The belief that there are fundamentally different things that one can call allegory and symbol thus only emerged, quite suddenly, at the end of the 18th century.

It was in attacking Winckelmann that Goethe differentiated allegory from symbol. Crisp argued that following Goethe, the Romantics saw allegory and symbol as fundamentally opposed or different, the opposition being built upon the idea that the relation between meaning and expression in allegory is arbitrary while that in symbol is deeply motivated. Out of the three possible accounts available when faced with the emergence of a new conceptual opposition ((1) Recognizing an opposition that has always been there in reality; (2) Reflecting or even partially constituting the emergence of a new opposition in reality; and (3) Labeling the opposition as an illusion), Crisp choosed the third one, arguing that allegory like symbol was well motivated and seeing no fundamental difference in kind between kinds of text referred to as allegorical or symbolic, he was trying to prove that the allegory/symbol opposition, with the cognates of symbol signifying positive values in all cases, was misconceived (Crisp, 2005, p. 324). Denying the fundamental opposition in kind between allegory and symbol, Crisp tries to explain how the illusion of such an opposition arose. According to Crisp, due to a range of political shocks and psychological needs, portions of the secular intelligentsia, having rejected the traditional category of religious mystery, came in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to feel the need for a "free" version of religious mystery, one to be supplied above all by poets and artists.

The Romantics identified symbol as some embodiment and revelation of the infinite in which the infinite is made to blend itself with the finite. Anything in which such a blending occurs, from a flag through a poem to the universe, is a symbol. The idea that a symbol could be anything up to and including the entire universe was commonplace. This is what

the doctrine of the symbol was about. The symbol was the free expression of the religiously inexpressible in the constantly shifting contexts of art and the world. The rejection of allegory, in its time referred to indifferently as allegory or symbol, was bound up with the rejection of traditional religious symbolism. Allegory was found unsympathetic because it was so closely linked to traditional religious orthodoxy... The idea that symbol and allegory were fundamentally opposed in kind was thus the ideological expression of the desire on the part of many literary and aesthetic intellectuals to constitute an informal, secular clergy. The symbol as they vaguely conceived it embodied their claim to quasi-religious authority. (Crisp, 2005, pp. 327-328, 336)

Championing allegory, Crisp argued that Romantic belief in the arbitrary nature of the allegorical sign/meaning relation was mistaken and there was no basis for opposing symbol as something motivated and suggestive to allegory as something arbitrary, unmotivated and semantically fixed. Rejecting the idea of allegory and symbol as things different in kind, Crisp, on the other hand, argued that they were not virtual synonyms either. The distinctions between allegory and symbol, both being forms of conceptual metaphor, did not, however, amount to a fundamental opposition in kind; although there was a distinction worth making between allegory and symbol, it was one of degree rather than kind. Namely, symbol was more radically polysemous than allegory (Crisp, 2005, p. 333).

Crisp concluded his essay by stating that as an expression of conceptual metaphor, allegory like symbol was highly motivated, motivated by the very nature of human cognition (Crisp, 2005, pp. 336-337).

Not intending either to look in more detail at Crisp's arguments or to give an overall assessment of his comprehensive essay "Allegory and Symbol—A Fundamental Opposition?", I would like just to touch upon some points relevant to my discussion:

Firstly, trying to explain why "the illusion of the fundamental opposition between symbol and allegory" arose, Crisp referred to the explanation provided by Gadamer as the best one available. According to Gadamer, the original sense of "symbolon" did not denote linguistic entities and consequently, there was nothing uniquely linguistic about the Romantic symbol. The original sense of "allegoria" by contrast was purely linguistic in denotation. Gadamer argued that it was this that allowed symbol to take on a much wider role than allegory at the end of the 18th century. Symbol was able to carry the quasi-religious concept of the revelation of the infinite in and through finite thing because anything, linguistic or non-linguistic, could be a symbol (Gadamer, 1993, pp. 73-81). Thus, Gadamer's explanation (like Crisp's) emphasizes the quasi-religious nature of the Romantic concept of symbol. When symbol was opposed to allegory, it was a mystical doctrine at issue. Symbol's organic unity of form and meaning expressed the immanence of the infinite in the finite. The consequent infinite suggestibility of its meaning was the expression of the infinite itself. Allegory was arbitrary and lacking in suggestibility because its finite sign had no relation to the infinite. But Crisp's discussion missed another important point emphasized by Gadamer. Despite carrying residual contrast between the linguistic and the non-linguistic or rather, because of this very contrast, *symbol* and *allegory* could not constitute a fundamental opposition in kind in Romantic aesthetics; rather, what we have to deal with is a distinction in role and scale, any other distinctions resulting from this major one; in other words, anything, linguistic or non-linguistic, could be a symbol, while due to allegory's confinement to the linguistics proper only a figure of speech could be an allegory. Thus, the Romantics' distaste for allegory and sympathy for symbol was caused by the very nature of these concepts. Symbol was distinguished from and not opposed to the Enlightenment conception of allegory; Moreover, the two could not form a fundamental opposition in kind. Nicholas Halmi sounded fairly convincing

stating that though probably derived from Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (in which "the symbolic" is distinguished from "the schematic") and unquestionably introduced in discussions of art, the Romantic symbol was neither exclusively, not even primarily, an aesthetic concept. Thus, its opposition to allegory, a concept that remained largely confined to aesthetics, was therefore, misleading, fostering the impression that the Romantics sought either to describe a distinct form of figurative expression or to disguise authentically allegorical practice with self-mystified theory (Halmi, 2004, p. 1113). The Romantics were less concerned with maintaining the opposition itself—and hence less with identifying separate instances of symbolism and allegory—than with promoting the concept of the symbol and extending its applicability to the whole of reality.

Secondly, Crisp was clearly exaggerating the role and significance of the "symbol-allegory" opposition in the Romantic aesthetics and thought. Important as the concept of the symbol itself was in Romantic thought and even if its opposition to allegory existed in reality, it was not widely observed. Thus, Friedrich Schlegel used the terms synonymously, Schopenhauer treated the symbol as a species of allegory, and G. W. F. Hegel categorized the symbolic and allegorical not as antithetical, but as geographically and historically distinct forms of art. In his dialogue *Erwin* (1815), Solger adopted the Romantic conception of the symbol as "the deep and inseparable fusion of the universal and the particular in one and the same reality", but he rejected the opposition of symbol and allegory in favor of a more nuanced (or at least less clear) distinction. Appearance and idea are unified and at rest in the symbol, but in motion in allegory (Halmi, 2004, p. 1114).

Thirdly, explaining the emergence of the opposition in question by purely ideological and religious factors (rejection of traditional religious symbolism and allegory's close connection with traditional religious orthodoxy), Crisp completely neglected Romantic aesthetic imperatives. Not allegory (designated as "artificial sign") but symbol defined as "natural sign" fitted well the purpose of many Romantics to create "organic" poetry as opposed to the other mode of poetry which could be adequately accounted for in mechanical terms. In the binary opposition "Mechanical Fancy" versus "Organic Imagination", the Romantics gave preference to the latter (Abrams, 1953, pp. 167-177). For some Romantics (Coleridge, for instance) it was symbol not allegory through which organic, inseparable unity of meaning and expression could be achieved; on the contrary, allegory, communicating by what the 18th century critics called "artificial signs", risks confusing or deceiving the reader—that is, it risks mimicking madness—unless the narrative it presents to the eye is strictly and transparently separate from the meaning it presents to the intellect. In addition, some Romantics' dislike for allegory could be accounted for by the widespread confinement of allegory, among the 18th century poets, to didactic and satirical literature.

It seems relevant to conclude this discussion with the statement that there is no such thing as the unified Romantic reception of the concepts of *symbol* and *allegory*; although having the Romantic aesthetic imperative as a common framework, the theoretical reflections on and the aesthetic functions of these concepts vary from one Romantic critic/poet to another.

### ***The Masque of the Red Death: Poe's Method***

Critics often ask whether Poe's method as manifested in his *The Masque of the Red Death* (and in his Gothic tales generally) is symbolic or allegoric and, asking it, immediately take sides. That the entire story is an allegory about man's futile attempts to stave off death (Fisher, 2002, p. 88) is by no means a commonly accepted

interpretation. There is much dispute over how to interpret the tale. Some critics offer allegorical reading of it. Richard Wilbur, for instance, states: "...Poe's stories are allegorical not only in their broad patterns, but also in their smallest details" (1967, p. 104).

Jean-Paul Weber's views are similar in "Edgar Poe or the Theme of the Clock" (Weber, 1967). In his informative work "Peculiarity of Literature: An Allegorical Approach to Poe's Fiction". Jeffrey Deshell provided an allegorical approach to Poe's fiction, though he avoided Poe's own comments on allegory in favor of Walter Benjamin's. The first chapter introduces Walter Benjamin's theory of allegorical criticism to which DeShell returns intermittently throughout the volume. Poe's comments on allegorical suggestiveness or indirection were not discussed at all in DeShell's monograph (DeShell, 1997).

As is commonly known, Poe expressed his dislike for *allegory* as a tale in prose or verse in which characters, actions or settings represent abstract ideas or moral qualities. Poe argued that allegory was an inferior literary form because it is designed to evoke interest in both the narrative and the abstract ideas for which the narrative stands, which distracts the reader from the *singleness or totality of effect* that Poe most valued in literature: Under the best circumstances, it must always interfere with that unity of effect which, to the artist, is worth all the allegory in the world.

This view of allegory is in keeping with the Romantic conception of allegory as an "artificial sign" risking to confuse or deceive the reader; besides, in keeping with the Romantic tradition, Poe rejected allegory as part of his campaign against didactic literature, and he also tended to disparage allegorical works when they made explicit what should have been suggested. In several essays, Poe distinguished between an upper-current and an under-current of meaning, which could be held in balance by a skillful author. Rather than the explicit, one-to-one relationship between a literary detail and its abstract meaning in traditional allegory, Poe preferred more indirect methods, allowing disclosures of meaning to erupt while retaining their suggestiveness. Being well aware of Poe's negative attitude towards allegory as a literary form, some critics still state that Poe's stories in general and *The Masque of the Red Death* in particular are allegoric narratives. For instance, Edward Davidson, although admitting that Poe has often been cited for his detestation of allegory and for his pungent remarks on the "heresy of the didactic", argued that these comments must be taken several ways: In their own time and context, they were Poe's rejection of the tale as simply moral—that attitude which made art into science, religion, morality, and anything else the artist may cover. According to Davidson, Poe was attacking a view very common in his day and one especially noticeable in fiction or the prose tale which, ever since the 18th century, was a suspect form anyway. The tale had to assume that it was a narrative and then everything else too; In Davidson's opinion, Poe's war was on the necessity of the tale to be allegorical and to be moral. The other direction of Poe's attack on allegory was no doubt more personal. He himself could not write "allegories"; he could not do that work which was so remunerative in the gift annuals and in the periodicals. They were merely sneers at a profitable commodity in the literary marketplace. Despite all these statements, in the final analysis, Davidson came to the conclusion that Poe was an allegorist:

Yet Poe was an allegorist in spite of himself. An allegory was a means whereby his creative imagination undertook to solve certain problems of its own mind and art; they were ways of reducing reality to determinate and logical outlines. Together they formed a significant group—perhaps the most considerable demonstrations of Poe's art as it came closest

to a consideration of the religious, social, political, and imaginative worlds in which it lived. They were ways of making a fractured and dismembered world obtain some form. (Davidson, 1957, pp. 181-182)

Arguments against the allegorical interpretation of Poe's stories are, for one, that they can be read at different levels and therefore the allegorical interpretation's claim to absoluteness is not fulfilled, and, for another, that although the stories as a whole seem to have referential character, the individual detail in large part eludes unambiguous allegoric interpretation. Some critics suggest that *The Masque of the Red Death* is not allegorical, especially due to Poe's admission of a distaste for didacticism in literature (Roppolo, 1967, p. 134). If the story really does have a moral, Poe showed restraint by not explicitly stating that moral in the text. For those looking for the moral, then, it is there, while for others it has no message (Quinn, 1998, p. 331).

Poe scholars criticizing allegorical approach to his stories emphasize their symbolic nature and point out that they are not simply "ghost" or horror stories. A. Staats in his comprehensive work *Edgar Allan Poes symbolistische Erzählkunst* seeks to explain the symbolic character of the short stories by means of the psychology of reader response. According to this concept, however, the reader's imagination, adjusting to the perspective of the first-person narrator, succeeds only at the end of the story in overcoming "in a dramatic process the allegorical variant of the metaphor in favor of the symbolic one" (Staats, 1967, p. 69). Commenting on Staats' statement, Gerhard Hoffmann argued that although it was correct that the constituting of a symbol demanded a psychic process in the sense of empathy, since the symbol, in contrast to allegory, must be grasped intuitively and experientially if it was to yield up its inherent meaning, it was not true that this psychic process occurred only at the conclusion of the story. According to Hoffmann, on the contrary, from the very beginning, Poe used the "tone" as well as the diversity of "analogical resemblance" in order to exclude "the allegorical variant of the metaphor". Besides, as Hoffmann put it, the symbolic character of the tales was independent of the use of a first-person narrator, as was apparent, for instance, in *The Masque of the Red Death*, which had a third person narrator. The very elements which the symbolic structures and means of presentation in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (first-person narrator) and *The Masque of the Red Death* (third-person narrator) have in common indicate that it is not the figure of the narrator which is decisive; rather it is the delineation of space, by means of which, with mood-invested space as starting point, the symbolic quality of the narrative is constituted (Hoffmann, 1979, p. 3).

Taking the lead of Gerhard Hoffmann, I will try to analyze *The Masque of the Red Death* in terms of its symbolic meanings as determined by the narrative context and the delineation of space, with mood-invested space as starting point.

In *The Masque of the Red Death*, different kinds of symbols may be distinguished on the spectrum between associative symbol at the one extreme and rational allegory at the other; these are designated as the "open" and the "closed" symbol, the latter approaching allegory but maintaining its symbolic structure by means of its manifold relationships with an epic (i.e., narrative) context.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the "open" symbol is ambiguous, associative and inexpressible/inexplicable in logical terms. "Closed" symbol, on the contrary, approaches allegory with its clearly outlined meaning; the meaning of the "open" symbol can be grasped only intuitively,

<sup>1</sup> On the concept of the symbol see W. Y. Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (New York, 1955); on the symbol in narrative literature, see especially H. Levin, *Symbolism and Fiction* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1956), and U. Brumm, *Symbolism and the Novel*, *Partisan Review*, 25 (1958), 329-342.

while that of the “closed” symbol can be rationally explained. Close analysis of *The Masque of the Red Death* reveals that setting is an expressive atmospheric unity that rigorously excludes any isolation of an object as an allegory unrelated to the whole.

*The Masque of the Red Death* is told auctorially and thus (usually) from distance. Although the narrator occasionally chooses a close focus and writes from the perspective of a certain character, the story as a whole is conspicuously impersonal in tone all the time. Poe therefore achieves the decidedly dense atmosphere not by means of the narrator's mood-investment, but by stylizing space and the characters' expressive gestures throughout. Expressive elements in the static space relationships come to be contrasted and the (temporal) sequence of events within these spaces is rendered rhythmic (Hoffmann, 1979, p. 8).

The symbolic nature of the narrative and the internal structure of the symbols are determined by the following factors:

- (1) Narrative context and intertextual elements (allusions, references) contained in it;
- (2) Mood-invested space,<sup>2</sup> which arises from the relationship of object and subject, expressive thing and mood-invested persons, forming a closed unit of expression (“Gothic” elements, horror-invested space, “Supernatural horror”, “Supernatural forces” etc.);
- (3) Circumscribed, hermetically closed and unified symbolic space, the referential qualities of which grow out of the expressive unity of the mood-invested space; disintegration and reintegration of the symbolic space.

In his *Philosophy of Composition*, Poe gave as reason for his approach “that a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: —it has the force of a frame to a picture”. By following this method, he achieved an intensification and dramatization of interpersonal relationships or the relationship between man and the organic or inorganic world surrounding him.

I'll try to demonstrate how the above-described factors determine the symbolic nature of the narrative and internal structure of separate symbols in *The Masque of the Red Death*.

The structure and the plot of the story are based on the binary opposition. As Gerhard Hoffmann put it, the primary formative principle was contrast, which began with the spatial opposition of outside and inside (Hoffmann, 1979, p. 8). This opposition can further be subdivided into a set of interrelated oppositional pairs: polar forces of Life and Death; danger and death outside versus security and enjoyment inside; the natural daylight outside the house contrasted with the artificial illumination of all the windowless rooms by the flickering flames of the “tripods”; an artificially created realm arbitrarily isolated from the realm of natural life and natural order; the bizarre autocracy of the individual in the person of Prince Prospero and the inexorable lawfulness of time and death, embodied in the figure of the “Red Death”.

The principle of contrast (like the principle of rhythmization) can also be observed in the arrangement and decoration of the interior rooms. On the one hand, they show the Prince's preference for the bizarre by the

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<sup>2</sup> The expression “gestimmter Raum” (“mood-invested space”; “Gestimmt” is from the verb “stimmen”, which can mean “to tune”, for example a musical instrument, or “to put into (a certain kind of) mood”, for example a person) comes from E. Stroker (Stroker, 1965), who aims to lay the foundation for geometric space, but in an extensive first part investigates the “gelebten Raum” (lived space). Characterizing this “lived space”, which she subdivides into “Aktionsraum” (space of action), “Anschauungsraum” (observed space), and “gestimmten Raum” (mood-invested space), she follows psychological investigations, above all those of K. V. Durckheim. The following characterization of “mood-invested space” in the present essay is based on E. Stroker (Stroker, 1965, pp. 22-53) and G. Hoffmann (Hoffmann, 1979, pp. 9-12).

strangely irregular and unclear arrangement with “a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards”, which runs counter to the customary arrangement of an “imperial suite” with its “long and straight vista”; the rooms are arranged in an irregular fashion similar to the winding passages in other stories by Poe. On the other hand, however, as G. Hoffmann pointed out, the presence of firm orderly lines—the entire establishment extending from East to West and its orientation towards the seventh room—points to an immanent/inherent order (Hoffmann, 1979, p. 9). By moving us through the rooms from the East to the West, Poe is mimicking the path of the sun, which suggests the movement of life from dawn to dusk. The seven rooms are also thought to represent the seven ages of man, which Shakespeare outlines through Jaque’s soliloquy in *As you Like*. The ages are pinking infant, whining schoolboy, sighing lover, quarrelsome soldier, the round-bellied justice, the shrunken elder, and finally the second childhood “Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything”. So the seven rooms might be representing a circle of life, a circular movement returning to the starting point in the end—to non-existence—where the opposites are united (*coincidentia oppositorum*) or rather, fundamental existential oppositions lose their significance. But the possible/potential meanings of “seven” in the story cannot be exhausted by this allegorical interpretation; while an allegorical reading suggests that the seven rooms represent the seven stages of one’s life, from birth to death, “seven” might also be representing many other things: the history of the world was thought to consist of seven ages, just as an individual’s life had seven stages; the ancient world had seven wonders; universities divided learning into seven subjects; there were seven deadly sins with seven corresponding cardinal virtues, and the number seven is important in mysticism. Thus, at first sight, “seven” seems to be a numerical allegorical sign but it is impossible to delimit the meanings of “seven” to just one allegorical interpretation; it would definitely result in the impoverishment of symbolic and associative richness of this number as realized in the narrative.

The same becomes apparent in the coloration, which is uniform within each room but changes from one room to another. Many critics have tried to find significance in the colors of the rooms which is by no means an easy task. Color symbolism is clearly intended to create a specific “effect” in the story. However, none of the common theories are satisfactory.

The sequence of the expressive colors—blue, crimson, green, orange, white, purple, and, in the seventh room, black and red—on the one hand seems to express the Prince’s “love of the bizarre”, his extremely individualistic autocracy and freedom; on the other hand, however, the execution of the seventh room in black and red color tones and the breaking of the formative principle of uniform coloration in this very room show the rhythmic encounter of the polar forces mentioned earlier (Hoffmann, 1979, p. 9). The colors black and red (respectively, Death and Blood/Life) in the last chamber, as well as the direction of the suite from East to West, contain elements of the closed symbol approaching allegory. But it is significant that the same does not apply to the other colors; their meaning remains open to a great extent. Here closed and open symbols are contrasted in dialectical manner.

The place standing out within this entire mood-invested space is the last or seventh room, because it is the last of the rooms and because it has accompanying symbolic associations tied to the number seven, to the room’s situation toward the West or the setting sun, and to black, the color of death. This is in this very chamber that the central symbol of the story—a gigantic ebony clock—is situated. At first the clock, which, in the final analysis, can be said to be the most conspicuous mood-investing device, seems to be merely an allegorical piece of stage



property, an allegorical sign designating measurable time; its resemblance to an allegorical sign is further reinforced by the fact that it is very similar to a kind of allegorical personification: Although the clock is an object, it quickly takes on human aspects as the author describes it as having its own "human" organs and even its own "life" ("minute-hand", "face", "brazen lungs", "life" (Poe, 2003, p. 324)). But at the same time, and primarily, it is a part of mood-invested space and as such is open to various interpretations, i.e., maintains its symbolic structure due to its ties with the narrative context. Within this tension and its resolution lies the uniqueness of the symbolic method in this story. The structure of the clock symbol is determined by the double embodiment of time: as a kind of personification, it has the fixed, immovable meaning of the measurable time and so constitutes an allegorical sign designating "earthly time"; but as a part of the mood-invested space, it acquires additional contextual meaning and, thus maintaining its symbolic structure, constitutes what might be called a "closed" symbol with allegorical traits. In particular, it also symbolizes the power of fate that sets an end to all life on earth. This double aspect is emphasized by the clock's location "against the western wall" in the last, seventh westernmost black chamber, evoking with the image of the setting sun that of the ultimate end, while the order of time and fate is illustrated by the monotonous movement of the pendulum, which is also set off by the rhythm of the language. Alongside with the location its color (black) also indicates that this object symbolizes the "Day of Judgment", "the Last Day", or apocalypse. Even more important, however, is the striking of the clock, its tone measuring time and creating within the suite a uniform mood in the sense of being directed towards the end.

On the other hand, as a part of the totality of furnishings, especially in the last chamber, as a body of sound, which divides measurable time by its striking, it belongs to mood-invested space and directs the action: Its chimes strike out the passage of life and can be heard in every other room of the entire suite. As the party goes on to enjoy their revelry, they are forced to pause every time the clock rings and so are reminded that life is short. So the striking of the clock, by investing the space with a uniform mood in the sense of being directed towards the end, reintegrates irregularly arranged and disintegrated space.

The figure of the "Red Death" is also approaching a "closed" symbol with allegorical traits. Its semantic structure (the connection between its explicit and implicit meanings) is determined by the narrative context and intertextuality.

In the beginning of the story, it might be perceived by the reader as an allegorical personification of a lethal epidemic disease, but as the action unfolds this allegoric meaning is overcome in favor of symbolic one in the reader's imagination: The Biblical reference at the end of the story turns it from a purely allegorical figure into a "closed" symbol with allegorical traits: He had come like a thief in the night (Poe, 2003, p. 329).

This phrase is borrowed from the *New Testament* (I Thessalonians 5: 2-3) where it refers to the God's "Second Coming" or apocalypse. By comparing the appearance of the "Red Death" before the revelers to the God's "Second Coming", it acquires additional symbolic meaning of the end of all life on earth. Interestingly enough, the "Red Death" appears in the last black chamber and stands in the shade of the black clock. The figure of the "Red Death", in its turn, invests the space with a uniform mood and creates an emotional framework for the narrative.

As mentioned above, unlike other colors, "Black" and "Red" are "closed" symbols containing allegorical traits. In creating the last suite, Poe linked the colors red and black with death and time. The red color in the story ("Scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim") indicates the presence of the "Red

Death". Blood, the very substance of life, becomes the mark of death. Death, then, is not an outside antagonist, to be feared and walled out as Prince Prospero attempted to do; but instead it is a part of each of us, we hear the echoes of the "ebony clocks" that we carry within; it is a part of life and more than that, the two are actually the same. By making the red color render two opposite phenomena—Life and Death—Poe actually identifies them with each other.

Besides the instances of turning allegorical signs into "closed" symbols with allegorical traits, the process of translating a (relatively) "open" symbol into a "closed", one can also be observed with particular clarity at the end of the story in the flames of the "tripods". At first, these lend movement to space by means of their flickering light and invest it with mood—the flames evoking only very vaguely the idea of individual life—and not until the very end does the element of meaning emerge more clearly, though without assuming, in spite of its closedness, the character of allegory:

And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the "Red Death" held illimitable dominion over all. (Poe, 2003, pp. 329-330)

### Conclusion

Thus, Poe's use of the symbol in *The Masque of the Red Death* exhibits two characteristics: for one, the multiple variation in mode of linking meaning and phenomenon between the two poles of symbolic atmosphere and objective allegory, making it impossible to limit Poe to only one way of using the symbol (such as the allegorical); for another, the supplementary use of different modes of connection, such as the "open" and the "closed" symbol with its many variants. The complementary use of both, or the integration of the "closed" symbol into the narrative context, does not allow the abstractable meaning to predominate. This is accomplished by means of the firm establishment of even the "closed" objective symbol within the greater unit of the mood-invested space. The more intimately a symbolic object blends with its surroundings and is fused with the context, the more it seems to be open to various interpretations. A relatively "closed" symbol approaching rational allegory maintains its symbolic structure by means of multiple references within the context. The use of different kinds of symbols in one and the same story then has a definite purpose: With the openness of certain symbols, Poe knows how to counter the danger that the obvious meaning will be found to smother its insinuated one, while the "closed" symbol (at times in connection with a poetic allusion) causes hidden meanings to become apparent. This very combination and complementary use of different kinds of symbols make Poe's symbolic method unique. Different kinds of symbol coexist and interact with allegoric details and figures in a specific way in *The Masque of the Red Death*—this or that narrative detail is constantly modified on the spectrum between associative symbol at the one extreme and rational allegory at the other but eventually always maintains symbolic character due to the mood-invested space, narrative context, and intertextuality. Consequently, allegorical and symbolic interpretations do not exclude but complement each other—this kind of combination should be able to demonstrate associative richness and adequately accommodate the inexhaustible meaningfulness of the texture.

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