# The Dark Psyche of Self-Destruction in Poe's Haunted House and Landscape

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**Abstract:**

As J. O. Bailey notes, Poe held a "land of dreams in his mind." Poe's dark, mist-wreathed landscape resembles the gloomy atmosphere in his haunted architecture that confines human beings within a grotesque world. If this weird geography, his haunted house, is "a peculiarly personal land of dreams" (Bailey), then Poe reaches out for a psychological journey or dreams of humanity through an eerie nature, inter-crossing the weaker realm of humanity and the realm of Spiritual universe/sublimity (Dennis W. Eddings) or terminating in an abyss. This article will concentrate on Poe's scheme of self-destruction in dreams and the psychological journey of the imp of the perverse. This perverse demon, possessing the power to de-materialize the outer stable state, is allegorized as a decayed house or a haunted landscape in the ambience of sadness where an ethereal character completes its self-destruction in a secluded place.

**Keywords:** The Fall of the House of Usher; Dream-Land; Ulalume; the Imp of the Perverse; self-destruction

## Introduction: The Imp of the Perverse

James Tuttleton in "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe" portrays Poe as a poet who encountered a series of predicaments in life while seeking "a primal Paradise" beyond his trials. Poe's creations are evidence of a poet's "passionate means of trying to unify the fragmented world of fallen reality, to recover from the primal alienation produced by the Creation itself" (Tuttleton "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe"). While Poe grasped a poet's world of beauty in "an Ideal World marked by a Unity and Oneness occurring in some primordial far-off antiquity" (Tuttleton "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe"), he suffered from the trials of predicament in real life. The more closely he approached the world of the poet, the more predicaments he

encountered. It is not plausible that Poe was unable to support himself financially: Poe was adopted by an affluent family and loved by his foster parents, received a good education, and had friends who helped him develop his literary career. Poe scholars associate Poe's miserable life with his tendency toward perverseness. Poe would have had a secure life if he had not deliberately violated his foster father's principles (for example, he plunged into gambling, though he knew that John Allan "hated profligacy even more than overextended credit" (Kennedy 535).) He had the opportunity to obtain the position of government official, yet he allowed his intoxication to sabotage this hope. Poe might not have had a miserable life if he had avoided being influenced by this tendency toward perverseness. However, the irrational tendency that insulated Poe from a world of security led him to the world of poetry.

Since this drift toward perverseness led Poe to his downfall, this tendency is generally associated with the impulse of self-destruction. J. Gerald Kennedy in "The Violence of Melancholy: Poe against Himself" attributes self-inflicted injury and self-destruction to the imp of the perverse (537-538). In "The Imp of the Perverse," Poe identifies the imp of the perverse as an impulse that commits acts against his own self-interest. This impulse against self-interest is incomprehensible: Poe impetuously commits such acts, knowing well that such behavior would lead to reputational and financial ruin, and even cost him his life.

> We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnamable feeling...and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. ("The Imp of the Perverse" 3)

The person is impelled by the imp of the perverse to approach danger since the impulse to approach danger overwhelms the impulse to shrink from danger. The existence of the perverseness is incomprehensible to "moralists" and "phrenologists" ("The Imp of the Perverse" 1). The imp of the perverse is irrational, but the incentives are very irresistible. Those who inflict self-torment on themselves can feel thrilled and delighted in self-injury. They fail to remind themselves of the result of approaching danger caused by the imp of the perverse, as the pleasure of self-torment is stronger than the impulse toward combativeness. The result is death; thus, the imp of the perverse is generally associated with the impulse of self-destruction.

The tendency to cause self-injury might be caused hereditarily or by one's environment.

Theodore Dreiser applies John W. Robertson's *Poe: A Study* to read Poe's life in terms of naturalism—a study of predetermination of heredity and environment:

> "I accept wholly," he [Dreiser] wrote, "his [Dr. Robertson's] theory of morbid heredity in the case of Poe with the corollary that 'he [Poe] was not always to be held responsible either for his words or acts.' He unquestionably belongs, as I have always thought, and as he makes clear, 'to that coterie of Sensitives who wear the fetters of heredity.'" (qt. in Riggio 516)

Poe was a victim in terms of naturalism, as he suffered from grief across his entire life.[1] His long-term grief might have been caused by the loss of his parents as well as the absence of parental love in his young age. As Kennedy indicates, "Poe's recurrent experience of orphanhood—of losing, again and again, his maternal nurturers and paternal protectors—deepened his melancholia, shattered his sense of self-worth, and intensified his need to inflict self-torment" (543).

Many of Poe's stories concern the imp of the perverse impelling his protagonists to act against self-interest, if indeed self-interest means living well in the physical world. Well-known perverse characters include William Wilson, the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator of "The Black Cat," and Roderick Usher. When Poe's perverse characters act against self-interest, they desperately plunge into a world of abyss. Grief prevails among Poe's stories, whether it be the melancholy of the characters or the atmosphere of sadness in the environment. The mood of sadness is the most appropriate emotion for evoking perverseness. Affected by the imp of the perverse, Poe's characters incline to approach danger and seek to dehumanize themselves through their scheme of material collapse. This perverse demon possesses the power to de-materialize the outer stable state. He is allegorized as a decayed house or a ghoul-haunted space in nature where an ethereal character completes self-destruction in a secluded place. This essay will focus on the imp of the perverse—the dark psyche allegorized in Poe's house and landscape.

## Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

In "Triangulating Edgar A. Poe," Eric W. Carlson notes that death of Beauty mentioned in Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" is the most poetic effect, as her death (or dying) links Poe's protagonists to grief and death.

> He [Poe] stressed that "the pleasure which is experienced in consequence of contemplating 'the beautiful' as an effect...the intense and pure elevation of *soul*—not of intellect, nor of heart" (16) ...

> the highest manifestation of Beauty is its tone of *sadness*. "Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones... 'When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*, the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world'" (19). The most popular of artistic effects in lyric verse is the refrain, which "depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought—and of repetition" (17-19). (Carlson 11-12)

"The death of a beautiful woman is the most poetic topic" because her death is the dissolution of the earthly subject-matter of the woman in the process of elevation to spiritual Beauty (Wilbur "Introduction"). In the theory of poetry or aesthetics, Poe legitimizes the emotion of sadness/grief/melancholy as the most appropriate affection; the emotions "are not the ordinary emotions of men, but a 'psychal' excitement appropriate to the mock-destruction of this world and dim glimpsing of another" (Wilbur 37). Grief effectively evokes the force of the dark psyche (the imp of the perverse) in the scenario of the collapse of the material physical world. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," to reinforce grief and the power of the imp of the perverse, Poe applies the techniques of the rhythmic music of monotone, the poem of "The Haunted Palace" as a parallel of the story, death-deferment scenarios, etc. The emotion of grief is reiterated in a form of monotone as if it is designed to achieve the effect of "incantatory power" (Carlson 12) on its poet-God/Roderick—the never-ending mourning of the dead. The theme of Beauty[2] is immersed into the music of monotone expressed in the description of the house and its surroundings. Poe's theme of the death of Beauty is accompanied with the theme of perverseness and of ultimate destruction. The rhythmic music of monotone echoes the dynamic orchestra of the house in the hypnagogic dream of Roderick. Roderick composes a poem entitled "The Haunted Palace," in which a monarch is haunted by his thoughts of destruction; the story about the monarch reflects Roderick's emotions. As David M. Rein says, "storytelling, like dreams, may reflect the teller's deepest feelings, unconscious and conscious" (367). This poem implies Roderick's design of his own death through grief; the poem predicts that Roderick will plunge into a profound abyss and be completely dehumanized/dissolved with Madeline.

Poe's house has a will of its own.[3] In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the decayed house has a dynamic force impelling its dwellers towards destruction.[4] The decayed house with its force of destruction represents the will of the imp of the perverse. It confines Roderick in his inward space of the mind, separating him from the "temporal, rational, physical world" (Wilbur 267). It is a "closed system" (Peeples 187) schemed by the master-artist Poe: the structure of merging destruction and life in a "closed system" is an illusion under the master-artist Poe (187). Roderick is irresistible to

the unconquerable force of the imp, and at the end of the story, he plunges into destruction. Wilbur argues that Roderick's destruction in the collapse of the house is blissful, as it is a destructive transcendence beyond the mundane world "corrupted by rationalism and materialism" (258).

> *The Fall of the House of Usher*, then, is not really a horror story; it is a triumphant report by the narrator that it *is* possible for the poetic soul to shake off this temporal, rational, physical world and escape, if only for a moment, to a realm of unfettered vision. (Wilbur 267)

Roderick cannot escape from the collapse of the house and its surroundings, since the collapse exemplifies what Allen Tate notes in "The Angelic Tradition": the reverse motion of the universe into its annihilation (Tate 252). The house is the will of an "angelic delegate of God" (252) who is "empowered to perform" annihilation of the material universe (252).[5] Roderick is the "angelic delegate of God" who executes the annihilation via the will of his imp of the perverse.

Poe details the dynamic force of destruction and the interaction of Roderick and his demon "the imp of the preserve" who is concretized as the House of Usher. "The Fall of the House of Usher" concerns the story of a man's encounter with his perverse imp in his psychological world. The destructive power, propelling Roderick toward destruction, is Roderick's imp of the perverse. The imp of the perverse "grows into palpability" ("The Imp" 3); the imp is real in an imaginary space, and the feelings that the imp evokes affect one's breath and cause palpitations of the heart. In the story of Usher's House, Poe concretizes emotions of grief, fear, and "the delight of its horror" ("The Imp" 3) through the designs of the house (a hybrid characteristic of the Gothic style, the Arabesque design, the Egyptian pyramids, and the Druid's Stonehenge)—its gloomy and muffled atmosphere, acoustic effects (e.g., sounds of approaching storms, shriek of a dragon in the story of *The Mad Trist*, a real shriek and cracking and ripping sounds from the house's vault, etc.)[6], and visual images of horror (e.g., the surroundings of the house, the dying Madeline, etc.). Affected by grief, Roderick impetuously approaches the danger as the atmosphere produced by the imp is so thrilling that he cannot escape from indulging in the pleasure of approaching death.

Grief and melancholy overwhelm Roderick. We do not know the reasons why Roderick is confined to his *prolonged grief*, but perhaps his grief reaction is a hereditary inclination, or is caused by an unknown disease in the Usher family. Why does Roderick immediately bury Madeline in the family tomb as she *has just passed away*? He chooses the family vault for her tomb because he protects Madeline from being exhumed, but he knows this entombment might

lead to a horrible result of premature burial because her *death* is caused by her illness of catalepsy—a neurological condition that might make her death a temporary lifeless phenomenon. Roderick schemes Madeline's premature burial to lead to his own death. It is Roderick's imp of the perverse who propels Roderick to bury Madeline. Roderick wants to intensify his grief over the loss of Madeline since he intends to use his feeling of grief to kill himself. Perhaps Roderick has opportunity to escape the influence of the imp when his friend tries to calm him by reading a medieval romance entitled *The Mad Trist*, but a piercing shriek in the romance and the noise of the outside storm evoke his recalling of Madeline's sufferings. Temporary relief from grief is merely death-deferment.[7] Madeline *revives*, painfully climbing out of the tomb, and in confronting her imminent death, she helplessly walks towards her brother. Roderick is so appalled by Madeline's struggle against death that he himself dies. The series of events—premature entombment, revival from a coffin that has been nailed shut, collapse of the twin into a corpse—sounds unbelievable; yet they must be incomprehensible as they exist not in real life, but in Roderick's dream of annihilation of materialism. Madeline is symbolic of "earthly, physical Beauty being immolated to Psyche" (Wilbur 26), and the process of her destruction is "the soul's struggle to free itself of earth and move toward the supernal" (Wilbur 11). Had Roderick released himself from grief, he would not have evoked the destructive force of the imp of the perverse propelling him to death through the scheme of Madeline's premature entombment.

The atmosphere of melancholy is ubiquitous. The will to dissolve is also ubiquitous; it occupies not only the unconsciousness, but also the environment, and it resides in its space in the form of melancholy and affects its beholders. Barton Levi St. Armand in "Poe's Landscape of the Soul: Association Theory and 'The Fall of the House of Usher'" applies the theory of associationism to the relationship of the environment and humans in Poe's house and landscape:

> The power of the landscape does not simply reside in the combination or association of its separate elements, arranged in a certain pattern or manner, which produces a corresponding resonance in the mind of its beholder: it resides in the landscape itself. The landscape *is* sad; its very essence is of melancholy and dolor and dread, for Usher's domain possesses a soul and not merely a self. (36)

Associationism theory[8] helps demystify the relationship of Roderick Usher, the landscape and the house, the narrator, and the ubiquitous power of destruction in the environment. Roderick's will (the will of self-destruction) has penetrated the surroundings of the house and the house itself before the narrator arrives and visits his friend, Roderick. The narrator enters the

mental world of Roderick as he enters the house. He is unable to understand what it is, though he senses some intense emotions of sadness within every object—tree, tarn, stone, etc.—in the landscape and/or house. Urged by his impulse of combativeness, the narrator is terrified and escapes the collapse of the house; he is "a rationalist to the end, refus[ing] to accept the full conclusions of his failed experiment in associationism because such acceptance would ally him directly with Roderick Usher" (St. Armand 37). In contrast, Roderick, whose mind extends its dark psyche into the visionary realm, eventually yields to death utterly.

**Poe's "Dream-Land"**

The landscape in "Dream-Land" is a world of Death. Its natural realm is intertwined with a supernatural realm. The atmosphere in the supernatural realm is grief/melancholy, and the speaker envisions Death in the supernatural realm that the inhabitants cannot see.

Critics have studied the geographical references in Poe's poem "Dream-Land." J. O. Baily in "The Geography of Poe's 'Dream-Land' and 'Ulalume'" believes that the geographic details in "Dream-Land" and "Ulalume" bear similarities to those in Belzubia in *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* or Mercator's North Polar region in "Nautical Chart of the World":

> If Poe's dream-land is his imaginative development of Belzubia, this stanza describes the route of travel to it. The traveler (or his soul) has gone northward to "an ultimate dim Thule." This outpost of the northern world is his starting point on the route "obscure and lonely," perhaps down the river shown on Mercator's "Chart" northwest of Norway, then over the edge of the world, past the "Eidolon, named NIGHT," or the "black rock" of the North Pole, to "these lands" that lie "Out of SPACE—out of TIME." (Bailey 517)

Belzubia in *Symzonia* is a land of "dark and evil" inhabitants, "originally exiled from Symzonia to Belzubia when the utopian state was established" (Bailey 516). In the translated version of Mercator's "Nautical Chart of the World" given by Fite and Freeman, there are four canals in the North Polar region that "flow with such current to the inner whirlpool, that if vessels once enter they cannot be driven back by any wind; and he said that nowhere was there wind strong enough for transporting grain" (qt. in Bailey 514). Thomas Ollive Mabbott takes Richard Wilbur's thought that Poe's "Dream-Land" is inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*, II, 890-896 (Ronnick 41):

> Before their eyes in sudden view appear
> The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark

Illimitable Ocean without bound,

Without dimension, where length, breadth, and highth,

And time and place are lost; where eldest Night

And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold

Eternal anarchy ... (qt. in Mabbott 342)

In addition, the ultimate Thule in Poe's poem is found in Virgil's *Georgics,* 1.30, "tibi serviat ultima Thule" (Ronnick 41). According to Ronnick, Poe's geographic description in "Dream-Land" is similar to the landscape/ocean-scape in Seneca's tragedy *Medea* (41):

venient annis saecula seris,

quibus Oceanus vincula rerum

laxet et ingens pateat tellus

Tethysque novos detegat orbes,

nec sit terris ultima Thule. (*Medea* 375-79) (qt. in Ronnick 41)

[There will come an era in the following years during which Ocean will loosen the chains of things, when Tethys will reveal new worlds, and Thule not be a limit to the lands.] (*Medea* 375-79) (qt. in Ronnick 41)

In putting those references together, Poe's "Dream-Land" describes a world of a fallen state not inaccessible to the spiritual realm.

The speaker in "Dream-Land" falls into sleep and envisions the world of Death. James B. Reece in "Poe's 'Dream-Land' and The Imagery of Opium Dreams" notes that the graphic images in the poem have their counterparts in the opium-dream imagery that occurs in George Crabbe's "Sir Eustace Grey" (1807), Thomas De Quincey's *The Confessions of an English Opium-Easter* (1821-1822), and Water Colton's "Turkish Sketches: Effects of Opium." Images of "chasms, sunless abysses, and depths below depths" in De Quincey's dreams parallel "chasms, caves, and Titan woods" in Poe's "Dream-Land." Colton's description of the cataract has its counterpart in Poe's description of the waters in the poem. Crabbe's burning mountain and a steep cliff echoes Poe's "mountains toppling evermore." Poe uses the vision of the opium dream to produce the graphic effect of a world intertwining natural and supernatural realms. Guided by the imp of the perverse, Poe's speaker in the poem "Dream-Land" enters a state of

opium-induced reverie; in a trance, he envisions a supernatural realm beyond the physical world.

The situation in "Dream-Land" differs from the one in the "The Fall of the House of Usher." Roderick, as having entered the inward space/mind/dream and isolated from the rationalism of the physical world, is approaching Death. The collapse of the house into the landscape happens when Roderick reaches Death; it symbolizes the destruction of the material world. The speaker of "Dream-Land" has reached the world of Death. While the inhabitants still remain within their physical world, "a nightmare state of separation from the sublime Unity of the Spiritual Universe" (Eddings 6), the speaker does not indulge in the delusions of the physical world. Nonetheless, both Roderick and the speaker of "Dream-Land" are urged by their imp of the perverse in an atmosphere of melancholy.

The first two stanzas in "Dream-Land" can be compared to falling from Heaven to a corruptive physical world. The speaker in the first stanza is waking up as he has dreamed a dream wherein he has visited the Spiritual Universe: "I have reached these lands but newly/From an ultimate dim Thule—/From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,/Out of Space—out of Time." The speaker still contains a divine spark within himself, though he is trapped in the physical world after having fallen from the immaterial world.

In the second stanza, the speaker recalls his dream where he wanders in a supernatural realm. The landscape in his dream is a world of Death: "bottomless vales and boundless floods," "chasms," "caves," "Titan woods," "Mountains toppling evermore/Into seas without a shore," etc. The speaker sees a supernatural realm in the landscape which is an infinite abyss/nothingness. In contrast, the inhabitants of the physical world cannot see what the speaker sees. Those images for the inhabitants, as Eddings notes, are "grotesque and absurd" (7) in "the contradictory world of materiality" (7). For them, those images are "a hellish Miltonic Hades of gargantuan figures obscured in the dull, fire-red cast of its sulfuric atmosphere" (7).[9]

The third stanza describes "the inhabitants of the world of the living dead" (Eddings 7) in the physical world. The inhabitants in "Dream-Land" are hopelessly living with "a deluded hope in a world controlled by materiality" (Eddings 7). The inhabitants, since they obey the rule of materialism, symbolize the evil inhabitants of Belzubia. The speaker does not believe in the deluded hope. In dreams, the speaker sees "the swamp," "the toad," and "the dismal tarns and pools"; he sees Death, rather than the deluded hope. As the speaker senses the melancholy atmosphere that has penetrated the surroundings, those objects become supernatural. He hears "sad waters, sad and chilly," "by the grey woods," and "by the dismal tarns and pools." He sees ghouls dwelling in the world of grief. Images of sad and chilly waters and the ghouls

imply that the speaker indulges in the emotions of grief within opium-like dreams.

The fourth stanza is the turning point from a hellish landscape to "a peaceful, soothing region" in the physical world. Eddings suggests this shift occurs not because the inhabitants have returned to Heaven, but because they indulge in "a deluded comfort in the insane world of materiality" (7). "Eldorado" refers to the insane world of materiality. The inhabitants obey the dictates of the King, who forbids them to eye the Ideal: "Never its mysteries are exposed/To the weak human eye unclosed." Only the sad Soul knows the city of "Eldorado" is an incarnation of Death. With the help of the sad Soul, the speaker is perverse and refuses to agree with the King: he "would be able to deny the dictates of the King and enter the realm of the Ideal" (Eddings 8). In contrast, the inhabitants, loyal to the King, remain awake to fake ideals and shut their eyes to the Ideal.

The sad Soul is the speaker's imp of the perverse who urges the speaker to disobey the dictates of the King. In terms of associationism theory, the sad Soul is sentient to the melancholy atmosphere and transmits its sense of sadness to others. The ill angels and the ghouls are affected by grief and melancholy. "Dream-Land" intertwines the two worlds: the mind of the sad Soul and the King's delusive "peaceful, soothing region." The images in the landscape present a deluded hope for the inhabitants of the physical world, while they manifest the world of Death that only the speaker can envision. Accompanied by the sad Soul, the speaker senses the Ideal "shrouded" (hidden) in a supernatural realm.

The final stanza is the conclusion of the journey where the speaker takes the same route "in the opposite direction" (Eddings 8) towards the Ideal. Eddings argues that the speaker will successfully transcend to the realm of the Ideal. The journey in "Dream-Land" reiterates the theme of first awakening from the dream, and then the theme of recalling the images in the dreams and glimpsing the world of Death in a gloomy atmosphere. The destiny of the speaker—whether eventually transcending the chaotic world or not—remains uncertain, as he is still going through the same route "obscure and lonely." One thing is certain: he is being guided by the sad Soul in the landscape of Death, the imp of the perverse.

**Poe's "Ulalume"**

The poem "Ulalume" concerns the dramatic world of a grieving speaker-narrator who makes a journey towards the tomb of his lost lover, Ulalume. This psychodrama monologue begins with the scenery of gloom and sadness which reflects his grief over the loss of the beloved Ulalume. Later, the grief is repressed, and the speaker can resume daily dialogues with others as

he encounters Astarte, a bright rising star associated with Venus and sexuality. What follows is a conflict between the sensual self (the speaker) and the spiritual self (Psyche). Though the speaker persuades Psyche to stay in the sensual world with Astarte, he is still guided to the tomb of Ulalume. In the denouement, the emotion of grief returns and is aggravated, and the speaker recognizes grief as a reality. As he returns to the grave of Ulalume, the speaker returns to the scene of sadness—"my heart it grew ashen and sober"—and he might submit to death beside the tomb of Ulalume.

Critics have various explanations on the denouement of the protagonist's psycho-dramatic world in "Ulalume." David Robinson in "'Ulalume'—The Ghouls and the Critics" argues that the narrator, though he has left Astarte, does not reach the ideal world, but stays within the vortex of grief. Eric W. Carlson perceives that the protagonist, having recognized deluded hope in Astarte's sensual temptation and left her behind, returns to the grave of Ulalume and spiritually reaches "the unified organic tripartite self (the physical, the moral, and the intellectual or artistic)" (Carlson 37). The protagonist is "driven to despair in an effort to recapture his ideal integrity" (37). Lou Ann Kriegisch reads "Ulalume" as a poem that "contains a moral and philosophical sense of profanation arising from the Platonic conflict of sensuous love and spiritual love" (29). Joseph P. Kenyon in "Auber and Avernus: Poe's Use of Myth and Ritual in 'Ulalume'" identifies the narrator's guidance by Astarte as a journey to the underworld described in the *Aeneid*; this journey embodies "Poe's mental gyrations" (Kenyon 64) toward madness, and Astarte—in replacement of Ulalume—draws the protagonist to the world of love and death.[10] Psyche is the soul that "strives to bring the narrator's conscious mind back to rationality" (Kenyon 65), and she succeeds since the protagonist "finds, at the end, a reunion not with his Dying Woman but with his own sanity" (Kenyon 66). The explanations of the denouement, as we see above, are not identical. Only one thing is certain: the protagonist returns to "the ghoul-haunted woodland of weir" and his heart is "ashen and sober," remaining in a grieving yet tranquil state. "Ulalume" can be perceived as featuring a self-conscious move toward destruction through a deliberate scheme of aggravating sadness. Two factors support this view. First, Poe wrote the poem just as Virginia had left him; he created this poem as a reminiscence of his beloved, for he needed grief to connect himself with memories of Virginia. Second, as the geographic details in "Ulalume" bear an apparent similarity with those in "The Fall of the House of Usher," this poem is about the destruction of material world—the earthly deluded hope—as a result of extreme grief. "Ulalume" has the perfect literary structure for reiterating the emotion of sadness for the never-ending remembrance of the beloved.

The theme of "Ulalume" concerns the escape from (or repression of) the feeling of sadness and the return to the emotions of grief for ultimate dissolution. As the self seeks combativeness eluding his grief-stricken double through a deluded hope, indulging in sensuality, the imp of the perverse with "a strongly antagonistical sentiment" overwhelms its defense mechanism. At that moment, this grief-stricken imp reverses the situation, destroying the rational "I" and thus urging the self to destroy itself.

In the conflict between combativeness against the feelings of sadness and the spiritual soul's search for the dead, ghouls are located in the mental world of the narrator as a repressive force against grief. Carlson reads the ghouls[11] as the introspective self of the narrator, as the latter seeks oblivion of grief (the loss of Ulalume): a "ghoul-haunted woodland" as "symbolizing the buried self, where inhibitions, complexes, and rationalizations abound" (Carlson 30). Similarly, Robinson identifies Astarte as the tool used by the ghouls to elude sadness: the ghouls use Astarte, "the peace of forgetfulness" (Robinson 10), to "prevent the narrator's discovery of the tomb, thus saving him the return of grief" (9). The world of the ghouls—"the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir"—is an "inner landscape of imagery traditionally used both for death and sexuality" (Runcie 13). This sexuality refers to sensual love with Astarte, who helps him forget the loss of Ulalume. As the creators of Astarte, the ghouls might be merciful and well-intended as they prevent the narrator from grief. However, there is another force in the poem that guides the protagonist to death (the tomb of Ulalume). The real scheme in Astarte's comfort (combativeness against grief) is to draw the protagonist to fall deeper into the abyss of melancholy for the fulfillment of self-destruction. That "the ghoul-haunted woodland" reappears in the last stanza signifies that the protagonist still grieves for the loss of Ulalume; he is reminiscent of Ulalume as grief returns, and this grief is more aggravating than that in the previous two stanzas. The protagonist eventually circumscribes himself to the structure of a grief-shrouded world for self-destruction.

Astarte, a "nebulous lustre" star, symbolizes the opposite of the conscious Psyche, and the double of Ulalume, who holds a secret of the protagonist's lamentation and self-destruction. She appears in the fourth stanza as the rising star or the moon goddess with the "duplicate horn" or "miraculous/bediamonded crescent." She is the double of Aphrodite and Venus, and people confuse her with them:

> ...the Phoenicians sometimes confused Astarte with a moon goddess, represented in Oriental headdress art as the moon goddess with a crescent. As the great Asia Minor goddess of fertility and

> sexual love, she became associated with Adonis, and identified with Aphrodite and Venus. As Venus, she was both the Morning and Evening Star. (Carlson 31)

Astarte's "duplicate horn" is "a duplicate of the horn of Dian" (Bailey 520). She is the material correspondence to the spiritual Ulalume and is characteristic of the shadow light of Ulalume: an ideal vision (Mulqueen "The Meaning of Poet's 'Ulalume'"), "the illusory nature" (Carlson 33), and the "sensual beauty" "which the unenlightened man mistakes for true beauty" (Kriegisch 30). She appears when the protagonist seeks a replacement for Ulalume in the ghoul-haunted woodland; "Astarte is described as the temptation of sensual love to console him [the narrator] in his grief over the death of his former love" (Carlson 32); she is "a manifestation of Ulalume's 'secret'" (Runcie 13), with power in the skies and the underworld (corresponding to the Egyptian mythology of Hathor and the constellation of Leo and Virgo) (Kenyon 63-64). She represents a deluded hope, bringing temporary comfort—"the Lethean peace"—to the grief-striven protagonist (Kriegisch 30), and she is the media/material aspect of Ulalume, transporting the protagonist to the realm/grave of Ulalume.

The inner world of the narrator—extreme grief—is reflected in the environment/the landscape, which itself is an extension of the psychological world of the dark psyche into the visionary realm. The landscape of "Ulalume" is located in "the realms of the boreal pole," comparable to the description of Belzubia in *Symzonia* or Mercator's North Polar region in "Nautical Chart of the World" (Bailey). The name "boreal pole" comes from "Boreas," "who carries Psyche to Cupid's palace" in the myth of Cupid and Psyche (Kenyon 63). The narrator enters the landscape paralleling the environment of the house of Usher—a hypnotic trance-condition and grief-shrouded world. Through the use of tone, rhythm, repetition, monotony, and sounds (Carlson; Van Doorn), the narrator in the monologue depicts the hypnotic effect of the environment as it lulls him into the sadness enshrouded world. "The monotonous rhythm, the repetitious but slow beat, beat, beat with its lulling, hypnotic effect, emphasizes the non-rational state of the speaker's mind" (Miller "Ulalume Resurrected" 202). Hypnotism is necessary, as this world is circumscribed for Roderick Usher as well as for the narrator of "Ulalume." The denouement of the poem (the last stanza) returns to the first stanza—the scene of the grave of Ulalume; "my heart it grew ashen and sober" echoes "the skies they were ashen and sober" of the first stanza for the reiteration that the melancholy landscape has completely extended itself to the narrator's dark psychological world. Immersion in grief and ending in death is blissful for the narrator. As suggested in the title, the word "Ulalume" signifies

the combination of light and death. Palmer C. Holt notices "Light of the Dead" (qt, in Carlson 35) in the title; Mabbott suggests "the light of or in sorrow, or wailing" (qt. in Carlson 35); Runcie notes that "'Ulalume' is possibly made up of *ululare*, to wail and *lumen*, light. But *-lume* also is a homophone of gloom, womb and tomb" (Runcie 12). Kenyon identifies the Irish Gaelic *Ul-ul-loo* as a sound tied to the meanings of both magic and tomb (59). Both Astarte and Ulalume hold a "secret" (Runcie 12), as they are the double. The protagonist's temporary oblivion of sadness through emotion-repression and the sensual love with Astarte (as it begins in the fourth stanza) does not make the feeling of grief disappear, but instead strengthens the melancholy. Just as Poe needs the antithetical characters to repress or suppress the grief until the next outburst of emotions that brings back the memories of the bereaved love, so the psycho-dramatic world in "Ulalume" is structured with the dramatic love of Astarte for the return of the "Light of the Dead," for the perpetual immersion in the gloomy world of Ulalume.

In the last stanza, the narrator reaches the world of Death and asks himself, "Ah, what demon hath tempted me here?" The demon might be Astarte, the ghoul, or the narrator himself. The demon, who brings the protagonist back to the grave of Ulalume, is the incarnation of the perverse imp. As it happens, the imp of the perverse (the demon) appears earlier when the narrator approaches danger. As the narrator encounters Astarte and becomes obsessive with her, Psyche strives to pull him back: "Sadly this star I mistrust." Psyche, the "good counsellor and good guide" (Runcie 13), is the rational aspect of the narrator; Psyche is terrified as the narrator approaches Astarte, the double of Ulalume, who will eventually lead him to the grave of Ulalume. Urged by the imp of the perverse, the narrator violates his reason, Psyche, and finally reaches Death.

**Conclusion**

Within Poe's stories, physical space—landscapes, seascapes, architecture, etc.—is an embedded atmosphere of sadness reflecting and affecting the soul of man. Grief prevails among the environment, affecting human emotions, and the ambience of sadness in the environment evokes the imp of the perverse—the dark psyche impelling Poe's characters to approach danger and seek out dehumanization, dissolution, and ultimate destruction. Perverseness provokes irrationalism that might lead to annihilation. For Poe in *Eureka*, this annihilation stands for the spiritual transcendence to Divinity. Yet Poe demonstrates the horror of decaying materials rather than spiritual transcendence in most of his literary works—crime stories (murders), (pseudo)sciences, Gothic-mist environments, mental illness, grave-yard fantasies, etc. His literary

works center on the theme of the evocation (or aggravation) of grief and the feeling of fear in confronting one's imminent death. Poe's protagonists, whether they are plummeting into destruction or temporarily elude mental crisis as we see in the drama of Astarte schemed by the ghouls in "Ululume," cannot escape their ultimate destruction, since they are the designers of their own destruction. Poe sometimes uses death deferment to strengthen the effect of grief or the effect of fear in the drama of confronting imminent death. The problem that concerns human's irrational response, perverseness, is unsettled. Perverseness brings "destructive transcendence" to Poe's characters who design their own self-destruction, annihilating their earthly subject-matters. Perverseness is also a power against despotism, as we see in the poem "Dream-Land." Yet "the soul's reconstitution and purification in death" (Wilbur 28) via the power of the imp is connected to the soul's experience of suffering and horror before entering the blissful afterlife. Whatever the situation to which the perverseness leads, Poe perfectly creates the effect of grief; he presents a world of ubiquitous melancholy and allegorizes his house and landscape as an extensive space of dark psyche bonded to an ambience of grief and horror.

**Endnotes:**

1. Perhaps alcoholism is the most coercive fetter of heredity for Poe. According to *The Poe Log*, Poe's "predisposition toward alcoholism" might have been caused by a nurse who fed the infant Poe and his sister "gin and other spirituous liquors, with sometimes laudanum" to make them quickly fall asleep (Tuttleton "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe"). Alcohol had a great impact on Poe: he was so "sensitive to alcohol that a single glass of wine would make him violently ill for days" (*The New York Times*, "Poe's Death Is Rewritten as Case of Rabies, Not Telltale Alcohol").
2. Poe's female characters like Ligeia and Eleonora symbolize spiritual beauty: "a positive 'psychal' force" or "clue to the psychal transcendentalism" (Carlson 13). Madeline symbolizes earthly beauty; she is structured around death or the collapse of the physical world in the process of her transformation. See Wilbur's "Introduction" in *Poe: Complete Poems*.
3. Richard Wilbur in "The House of Poe" identifies the House of Usher as the mind of Roderick. His house is actually his mind in the hypnagogic state: "The hypnagogic state...is a condition of semi-consciousness in which the closed eye beholds a continuous procession of vivid and constantly changing forms" (Wilbur 265). John T. Irwin sees this self-consciousness in Poe's space: "reflexiveness is associated with infinity in Poe's figurations of self-consciousness" (398). Stephen Rachman in "From 'Al Aaraaf' to the Universe of Stars': Poe, the Arabesque, and Cosmology" identifies Poe's Arabesque-designed house as "a trope of the reflexive, the infinite, and the self-conscious" (10).
4. Patricia C. Smith in "Poe's Arabesque" views in Poe's Arabesque-designed house "something kinetic—the motion toward unity—in a static medium" (45). This kinetic power whirling toward death and unity parallels Wilbur's statement that the House of Usher/Roderick's mind is on the verge of dynamic collapse. Stephen Rachman in "From 'Al Aaraaf' to the Universe of Stars': Poe, the Arabesque, and Cosmology" adds the elements of an Arabesque-designed house to Poe's house. As the light falls on the Arabesque-style house, it collides with its Arabesque design, symbolic of the mind of Michelangelo in "Al Araaf," and the protagonist thus dies: "It is a collision of the concrete

with the abstract figure: the concrete light ray…falling on an illustration of nonrepresentational labyrinthine abstraction (the Arabesque)" (10).

5. In the middle of the 20th century, close readings of Poe's works began to appear as psychoanalytic criticism on Poe waned. Significant Poe scholars offered alternatives to psychoanalysis: Edward Davidson, Allen Tate, and Richard Wilbur. See "Introduction: The Unfolding Investigation of Edgar Poe," page 7.
6. For the further study of how sounds (phonetics, phonology, metrical arrangements, etc.) generate the sense of emotions in Poe's poetry, see Studniarz's *The Time-Transcending Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe: An Explanation of the Mechanics of His Poetic Speech*.
7. Death-deferment prevails among Poe's stories. In "The Pit and the Pendulum," the narrator cannot be isolated well in the dreaming mind where he is surrendering to death. Though he collapses into a trance and perceives the image of a demon in his dreams, starvation forces him to awaken from his reverie. Moreover, the odor of putrefaction and the sound of the pendulum-like knife that intrude in his dream cause stimuli and thus the interruption of the dream. In *Pym*, Pym is well-protected within the hideout of a whaling vessel, the *Grampus*. Nevertheless, the sensation of hunger urges Pym to look for an outlet leading to the above-ground world, symbolic of the mundane world of rationalism and materialism.
8. The theories of associationism are associated with Lockean empiricism, Romanticism, reverie, and emotions:

   > …the philosophy of Associationism, a mode of thought which took its impetus from Lockean empiricism…As Wylie Sypher writes in a chapter entitled "Psychological Picturesque: Association and Reverie" in his suggestive study *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*: "In its early phases this psychology is mechanistic—nearly behavioristic; but it was changed by Coleridge and the romantics to an 'organic' theory of imagination, a power to envision another higher order of reality, or even to create it, as in a dream"… reverie involves the particular pleasures of private recollection as well as an overall emotional appreciation for larger aesthetic categories such as the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque…(St. Armand 34-35).
9. Thomas P. Haviland in "How Well Did Poe Know Milton?" identifies Miltonic style in Poe's literary works. The second and third stanzas of "Dream-Land" resemble Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." Haviland notes, "'Dreamland' certainly feels the magic of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' particularly the second and third stanzas with their preponderance of trochaic tetrameter and the unmistakable lines (31-32)" (857).
10. Kenyon reads Poe's "Ulalume" in terms of the Celtic ritual of wailing for the dead, in addition to referencing Egyptian and the Greek mythology. Mythology that Kenyon mentions includes the myth of Aeneas, the myth of Psyche, the cypress tree, Mount Erebus, Boreas (the North Wind), the goddess Hathor, mythical references to the constellation Leo and Virgo, and the journey to the underworld.
11. The ghoul in ancient Arabic folklore "belonged to a diabolic class of jinn (spirits) and were said to be the offspring of Iblīs, the prince of darkness in Islam": "A *ghūl* stalked the desert, often in the guise of an attractive woman, trying to distract travelers, and, when successful, killed and ate them. The sole defense that one had against a *ghūl* was to strike it dead in one blow; a second blow would only bring it back to life again." See the term "ghoul": https://www.britannica.com.

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