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## BODY, SPACE, AND SENSATIONS IN EDGAR AL- LAN POE'S "A PREDICAMENT"

### Abstract

This paper aims to examine the sensationalism of *Blackwood's Magazine* as evident in Poe's tale "A Predicament" and how Poe disengages from the tradition of *Blackwood's*. On the one hand, Poe conflates Psyche Zenobia's adventure into a Gothic Cathedral with the *Blackwood's* sensationalistic experience, which treats vehement sensations as the prime condition for stimulating the mind's engagement with a spiritual vision of a world beyond the material world. On the other, Poe's tale disengages itself from the tradition of *Blackwood's Magazine*: Zenobia loses her sensations altogether in the quest for final knowledge and there is no return to her real life. This paper will further look at the mutilated/deformed body in Poe's "A Predicament" as a body in pain, or without pain, through which the mind engages its imagination. It will also discuss how Poe, through Zenobia's gaze and speculation upon a sublime cathedral, installs an aesthetic appreciation that distances an imaginary space from reality and facilitates self-mesmerism through which Zenobia is grounded in the earthly world, both physically and spiritually.

**Keywords:** The deformed body, Gothic Cathedral, sensations, *Blackwood's Magazine*, Edgar Allan Poe, "A Predicament"

## Introduction

Poe believes that a significant universe exists beyond the material world. To examine the existence of the world beyond, he thus puts his heroes in an epistemological quest for "final knowledge." For Poe, the mind cannot approach the world—or the world beyond the material world—directly through "the vision" proposed by Romantic Idealists; in contrast, it is through sensations (the real experiences of the body) that the mind collides with the world or the world beyond the material world (Weiner 56). The circumscribed places—a Gothic architecture, an oceanic landscape, a confined room, etc.—are the spaces where "the objects" produce vehement sensations that men cannot experience in common daily life. Thus, the mind (consciousness) is animated in its connection with the outer world. As Paul John Eakin in "Poe's Sense of an Ending" observes, in those places Poe's heroes pursue "a systematic exploration of every imaginable form of human extremity" (18) in the quest for the "final knowledge" beyond the grave (4). Although vehement sensations facilitate the mind's engagement with the world beyond the material world, they block the mind from realizing the harmonious universe that exists beyond the material world. The reason they cannot enter the harmonious universe lies within the fact that the consciousness remains animated after death for merely a short while, but not perpetually, since the process of decomposition of the body (the five senses) forces the mind to cease its function in the body. When Poe's protagonists, in an epistemological quest for "final knowledge," experience the extremity of fear and suffering in order to stimulate sensations that function as a juncture between mind and matter, they cannot enter a harmonious universe. Instead, they are thrown into an apocalyptic dimension that ferries them to a state of delirium until they can or cannot recover their common sense. Most of his characters, in their pursuit of this final knowledge, cannot eventually attain an angelic stance (as Monos and Eiros do) to distance themselves from the Earth.<sup>1</sup> As G. R. Thompson argues, Poe casts despair "over the ability of the mind ever to know anything, either about the ultimate reality of the world or about the mind itself" (104).

To understand Poe's "final knowledge" that marries *Blackwood's* sensations, it is necessary to apply Bruce I. Weiner's argument in "Poe and the *Blackwood's* Tale of Sensation." Though convinced of the existence of heavenly oneness, Poe

<sup>1</sup> In "Marginalia" and "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," Poe posits his heroes and heroines in an angelic stance, transcending the limitations of mortality.

agrees with the *Blackwood's* sentimentalists who follow the viewpoint of the Scottish Realists and Common Sense (Locke's experimentalism) while flirting with the transcendental vision of the Romantic Idealist (Weiner 50). In his stories that involve the epistemological quest for "final knowledge," Poe illustrates how the mind deviating from common sense is trapped in delirium or madness, rather than transcending to a harmonious heaven-state as the mind transmits a message of pain and fear from the sensations of the body.

In the case of Psyche Zenobia's narration of her spiritual quest/adventure in a Gothic Cathedral, Poe derides her as a victim of vanity and heedlessness. As Gerald E. Gerber indicates, Zenobia is a caricature of the lady in Milton's "Comus," or a mirror of Eve in *Paradise Lost* (25). Zenobia is in a hopeless condition; she has no guardianship from God but, instead, receives guidance from an editor of *Blackwood's* who suggests she should kill herself and record her sensations at the moment of dying and death. Though Poe might be rather harsh on Zenobia's vanity, his humorous story reveals a serious view relevant to the relationship of death and sensation. In "A Predicament," Zenobia is manifested as a rare case, differing from Poe's other stories (e.g., "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Premature Burial") in which his protagonist-narrators are driven to the brink of insanity when confronting dire circumstances such as live burial, claustrophobia, starvation, and so on. Zenobia continues her narration even though she is dying/dead. She does not express despair and terror, nor does she descend into nightmare and madness. Instead, she calmly recounts what she perceives, including her common-sense view of reality. "A Predicament" is not simply a burlesque or a satire (see: San José Rico); it is a scientific experiment concerning speculations as "To what degree can the body tolerate pain?" and "If the body does not feel pain when dying or dead, does the soul (the mind) continue to stay in the body and remain animated?" Through the process of Zenobia's transcendence to an uncanny realm, Poe makes a sharp departure from the Romantic Idealists, revealing the soul as trapped in the material world of sensation, creating a predicament that prevents her rise to a harmonious heaven.

### Sensations in a Gothic Cathedral

"A Predicament" concerns men's senses and sensations—insurmountable obstacles to the harmonious heaven. The narrator/protagonist Psyche Zenobia, in "How to Write a Blackwood Article," consults Mr. Blackwood about writing in the "Blackwood style," viewed as being highly marketable. Psyche Zenobia

is then informed of the value of the writing of sensation if she is indeed striving to add marketability to her composition: "Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make note of your sensations—they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet" ("How to Write a Blackwood Article" 340). With the advice of Mr. Blackwood, Psyche Zenobia is determined to undertake her adventure to experience new sensations in "A Predicament." The advice of Mr. Blackwood is identical to the views of *Blackwood's* sensationalists in following the perception of the Common Sense school:

Published in London, the magazine [*Blackwood's*] emanated from Edinburgh and was an unofficial organ of the Scottish philosophy of Common Sense or Scottish Realism, as it was often called. Formulated primarily by Thomas Reid in the late eighteenth century, Scottish Realism was still the dominant mode of thought in Britain and America in Poe's day, despite the significant impact of French and German idealism. *Blackwood's* was known for being tolerant of French and German ideas and literature [...] but it was chiefly inspired by the rational, material, and conservative tenets of the Common Sense school. (Weiner 48-49)

The mind cannot sense the existence of exterior objects without any media (matter/material); it is the sense/sensation that functions as a juncture that connects the mind and exterior objects. According to Reid, "We human beings are so made that, in perception, the external object causes a conception of, and an immediate belief about, itself, by way of causing a sensation which in turn causes ('suggests') the conception and immediate belief" (qtd. in Wolterstorff 111-112). As senses are in contact with the outside world, perceptions tend to favor an epistemological quest for final knowledge. Humanity, consciously or unconsciously, seeks out dangerous environments since most dangerous circumstances can inspire humankind's most satisfying desire for knowledge. Those circumstances occur far from ordinary life; they benefit those who anticipate irrational or unnatural associations of transcendence, which in reality is nothing but the experimental knowledge of sensation (nature):

The first thing requisite is to get yourself into such a scrape as no one ever got into before. . . . But if you have no oven, or big bell, at hand, and if you cannot conveniently tumble out of a balloon, or be swallowed up in an earthquake, or get stuck fast in a chimney, you will have to be contented with simply imagining some similar misadventure. . . . Nothing so well

assists the fancy, as an experimental knowledge of the matter in hand. (“How to Write a Blackwood Article” 340)

Zenobia is encouraged to engage in extraordinary circumstances so as to dramatize such shocks of sensation, which for the sensations are the real experiences that propagate knowledge.

A cathedral that contains memories of painful ordeals—saints having suffered crucifixion, tortures, or in Zenobia’s case, decapitation—is an extraordinary space identical to the circumstances that she confronts to satiate her desire for knowledge. The paintings and sculptures shown on the columns, vaults and walls in a Gothic cathedral impress on spectators images that serve to inspire a desire to reach a transcendental realm. In legend, cathedrals do not lack stories of the decapitations of saints and promises of God’s love after suffering through ordeals. For instance, it is said that the Saint Denis Cathedral is the burial site of Saint Denis, the patron saint of France.<sup>2</sup> Gothic Cathedrals record the painful ordeals of martyrs and this history of suffering has been installed as an aesthetic appreciation within an imaginary space. In “A Predicament,” when Zenobia gazes and muses upon a sublime cathedral, the cathedral evokes specific sensations (in a visual sense) that Zenobia has never experienced in her common daily life. Upon approaching the cathedral, she imagines a mysterious power drawing her to the very location. She merges her sensation with the atmosphere of the grandiose cathedral; she projects onto the cathedral her desire of approaching death and attaining final knowledge. The Gothic cathedral is no longer an object that

<sup>2</sup> Saint Denis was beheaded on the Hill of Montmartre. He carried his head to the site of the current Saint Denis Cathedral and indicated that he would like to be buried there. A martyrdom church of St. Denis was then built in his memory. In the seventh century, Dagobert, the King of the Franks, commissioned the rebuilding of the church. The goldsmith Eligius created a new shrine to house Saint Denis’ remains:

Above all, Eligius fabricated a mausoleum for the holy martyr Denis in the city of Paris with a wonderful marble ciborium over it marvelously decorated with gold and gems. He composed a crest [at the top of a tomb] and a magnificent frontal and surrounded the throne of the altar with golden axes in a circle. (Dado of Rouen 150)

Saint Denis Cathedral is also the “royal necropolis of France,” the burial site of the kings of France and their families, including the beheaded King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. Another example is Amiens Cathedral. The cathedral contains the alleged head of John the Baptist. The initial impetus for the construction of the cathedral came from the installation of the head of John the Baptist in the thirteenth century. The western entrance of the cathedral illuminates the decapitated martyrs Victorinus, Fuscian, and Gentian, who died for their Christian faith in about the year 287. In *The Golden Legend: Lives of the Saints*, Jacobus de Voragine, recounts the history of the beheaded saints (247-248).

contains historical records of religious martyrdom, but it extends to the mind of Zenobia, who desires the experience of extreme suffering for the acquirement of final knowledge. In other words, the Gothic building is revised into an imaginary space, in which the spectator insists on the ordeal of martyrdom—decapitation—for the pursuit of the *Blackwood's* sensation that might inspire unknown knowledge.

### Psychological Space in Poe's Life and Writing

Critics have argued that Poe extends much of his physical space to a psychological one. As Fisher comments, the interiors of Poe's haunted setting are symbols contributing "to psychologically plausible narratives of multiple outreach" (84). Maurice Lévy, Richard Wilbur and Darrel Abel identify the Gothic setting with a psychological space. Both Wilbur and Abel see Poe's *House of Usher* as a human head/mind involved in the mystery of decadence. The staircase and other interiors within the house, for instance, reflect the mind of the dweller.<sup>3</sup> The interior decorations that Poe describes in his stories reflect the psychology of Poe's characters. The interior space sometimes contains supernatural forces, like necromancy and the return of the dead from the tomb, reflecting the urgent desire to communicate with the lost past and a violent will against annihilation. Poe's ghoulish stories, such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "Ligeia," intertwine the theme of the revival of the dying (or the dead) with man's desire against annihilation.<sup>4</sup> The circumstances are not merely a physical space; they are a material that details the senses and sensations as the body dwells upon unusual cases such as being buried alive and starvation so as to stimulate sensations and thus fantasies.

In the case of "A Predicament," the Gothic cathedral that perpetuates the spirit of martyrdom evokes the desire for transcendence. Zenobia accidentally wanders into a Gothic space that leads her into direct contact with the sensational experiences of final knowledge, beneficial to the creation of *Blackwood's* writing. Poe's Gothic space, a hybrid one overlapping the worlds of the Egyptians, Druids, Greeks, and the Medieval Ecclesiastics, is a place where the Devil

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the relation between Poe's haunted house and psychological space, see Abel 176-185 and Wilbur 255-277.

<sup>4</sup> Poe associates the resistance against annihilation with the Romantic uncanny sublime. Anthony Vidler, in "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime," investigates houses of diverse styles in ruin that insist "on the rights of the unburied dead" (18).

(nature) dominates.<sup>5</sup> The existence of the exterior world cannot be sensed unless the sense is affected by the objects of the exterior world. The death of the saints in the cathedral, strengthening the existence of final knowledge, is so explicitly projected on the visual experience of the narrator that she is immediately drawn into the “confined” space.

The experimental experience of sensation in “A Predicament” parallels Poe’s real experience of the “sense of claustrophobia and confinement” in his own abode. James M. Hutchisson, in *Edgar Allan Poe: Beyond Gothicism*, comments on Poe’s relationship to the environment through his observations on Poe’s predilection for his own abode:

Poe’s sense of environment was unique. He did not necessarily separate interior and exterior, rural and urban, in his mind . . . More interesting, the pattern of Poe’s attempts from year to year to establish some kind of permanent “home” was a pattern of diminishment rather than expansion. Each abode became smaller and sparser. How claustrophobic and tight Poe’s own spare existence must have felt to him when imaginatively confronted with such profligate spaces as we see in the settings of the house of Usher, the castle of Metzengerstein, or the palace of Prince Prospero. This style of living may also suggest why the interior settings in most of his tales are so constricted and claustrophobic—quite in contrast to the wide open spaces exalted by Poe’s peers and near-contemporaries like James Fenimore Cooper, Francis Parkman, and Washington Irving and as painted by Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, and others of the Hudson River School. (xi)

Due to poverty, Poe selected for himself a “diminished home” in real life. Due to the illness and death of Virginia, Poe’s abode contained a spirit that haunted him and retraced his past traumatic experiences. His creative works that embellish the interiors with an atmosphere of mystery (Egyptian style or arabesque)

<sup>5</sup> Poe’s Devil exists in nature, which is not an emanation from God since men have fallen from God’s primitive arrangement. The Devil is sometimes regarded as the embodiment of a force overwhelming humanity, as we see in “William Wilson” and “The Devil in the Belfry.” Nevertheless, this destructive force in Poe’s Gothic house where all must involuntarily succumb to the force of destruction facilitates men’s reunion with Divinity as long as men can purify themselves through death. In *Eureka*, Poe’s God is the cosmic/natural force of creation and destruction. Barton Levi St. Armand, in “Usher Unveiled: Poe and the Metaphysics of Gnosticism,” identifies a Gnostic God paralleling the mythologies of initiation rituals in Egypt and Greece (5-6).

within a confined space parallel the imaginations of a mind evoked by sensations of anxiety and horror in his "diminished home." The confined space that Poe chooses for himself or his characters, like Roderick Usher, is Poe's passage to a castle or monastic abbey, describing a place that tortures and haunts the Self. A staircase or vault inside the haunted house symbolizes the spiral fall downwards into the hidden passages unknown to the outside world. It is a place where the dead struggle out of a horrific space and memories of the past and mysteries are awoken. Poe's Gothic building emphasizes the theme of the predicament of a tortured body, echoing Poe's sense of environment in his own abode.

### Body In/Without Pain

In Poe's stories, his grotesque and deranged characters have something to do with the deformity of the body. As Hutchisson observes, Poe details the interconnection of the aberrant acts and deranged characters with the decline of the material—the decline of the physical world and (or) the deformity of the body:

New insights into a frequently seen concept in the tales, the dichotomy between the mind and body, may be drawn out if we investigate more extensively Poe's engagement with human physicality, notably his infirm, disfigured, or handicapped male characters. The body as both a mechanical and organic/chemical vessel intrigued Poe, and he frequently depicted deformity in its various physical states—for example, in "Berenice" or "Hop-Frog." The body as an independent entity also figures prominently into various of his plot paradigms, when one considers the degrees of sadism, masochism, and aberrant acts that are instruments of cruelty and/or revenge. Could we see the body as a version of the Other as well? (xiv)

The mutilated or deformed bodies in Poe's tales are the instrument for the philosophical speculation that Poe develops and connects with the darkness of the mind. The circumscribed space in the Gothic building is a domain manipulated by an unknown force—the Dead—and the deformity of the body tends to symbolize the manipulation of the Dead. In Poe's stories like "Berenice" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," it is at the moment of exposing the mutilated or deformed body that the truth is revealed. Overshadowed by an unknown force, Zenobia places her head upon the opening on the clock, which makes her "a martyr" ready to sacrifice herself for a faith (her faith is the *Blackwood's*). In opposition to the bodies in pain shown on the sculptures and paintings of the cathedral,



Zenobia's decapitated body does not undergo an aesthetic process—transforming from horror to aesthetic appreciation. Her body is exposed to the truth: the horror of nature. Along with the deformity of the body, the mind of the narrator is cut off from common sense, overshadowed by the uncertainty of reality, and occupied with a grotesque view of the exterior world approaching the domain governed by the Dead.

### Zenobia's Psychological Adventure

As Zenobia gazes upon the Cathedral, the building becomes a stimulus for the imagery of the sublime, through which mythical figures and events are evoked, and resonates with her desire for heavenly loftiness. More specifically, the passage from the street of Edina to the interior space of the cathedral is transformed into a psychological space where Zenobia undergoes the journey that will transform her to the body in pain. This transformation depends on the sensational experiences of appreciating the sublimity of the cathedral—from appreciating the loftiness of the building to immersion in the atmosphere that generates *Blackwood's* sensation (to experience extreme suffering). The space of the Gothic cathedral extends to the psyche of Psyche Zenobia.

A common scene in the streets—the boisterous men and women, the dogs at odds and dancing—stirs up the narrator's (Zenobia's) imagination into a world different from the common everyday life of Edina's men and women:

*Danced!* Could it then be possible? *Danced!* Alas, thought I, *my* dancing days are over! Thus it is ever. What a host of gloomy recollections will ever and anon be awakened in the mind of genius and imaginative contemplation, especially of a genius doomed to the everlasting, and eternal, and continual, and, as one might say, the—*continued*—yet, the *continued and continuous*, bitter, harassing, disturbing, and, if I may be allowed the expression, the *very* disturbing influence of the serene, and godlike, and heavenly, and exalting, and elevated, and purifying effect of what may be rightly termed the most enviable, the most *truly* enviable—nay! (“A Predicament” 347-348; emphasis Poe's)

The narrator imagines a world not through light-hearted memories, but instead she goes there through “a host of gloomy recollections.” The scenery of the cathedral that contains the history of sacrifice of the martyrs becomes the ma-

terial or media for Zenobia to imagine a process of spiritual journey. The influence of the serene, godlike, and heavenly world does not tranquilize but disturbs her. For Poe, emotional disturbance and gloomy memory/atmosphere convert one's mind from common daily activities to "a supernatural space." Psyche Zenobia, like the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher," shows her desire to stroll into a dream-like realm, to escape from the confounding streets into her own recollections with her dancing, but an uncanny gloomy atmosphere evokes her fear of encountering the uncommon world; she stops herself with self-admonition as she hesitates to enter the unknown space.

Accompanied by the dog Diana and servant Pompey, Zenobia continues her journey. Suddenly, she sees a Gothic cathedral. The impetus for approaching the cathedral comes from "an uncontrollable desire":

On a sudden, there presented itself to view a church—a Gothic cathedral—vast, venerable, and with a tall steeple, which towered into the sky. What madness now possessed me? Why did I rush upon my fate? I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to ascend the giddy pinnacle, and thence survey the immense extent of the city. ("A Predicament" 349)

The venerable tall steeple connects the two realms—heaven and earth. In "Milton and Poe's 'Modern Woman,'" Gerber notes that Poe's "A Predicament" is a parody of Milton's "Comus" (25). While the lady in "Comus" has Heaven's aid, Zenobia, in reality, is taking the journey without any providential protection nor any religious faith as her guide. Zenobia is attended by a dog and a servant and believes she can encounter her guide-angel. She goes through the entrance of the church and up the steps of the spiral staircase to the steeple. In *Poe's Tell-Tale Clocks*, Dennis W. Eddings compares the scene of Zenobia's ascent to the steeple to the narrator's spiral ascent in "The Assignation," with the argument that both ascents symbolize liberation from a "restrictive view of life" and the realization of "self-awareness" (4-5). It is the feeling of uncertainty, or the uncanny, that urges her to approach reality.

On the stairs to the top of the church, Zenobia continues her journey of predicament that evokes her desire to approach her imaginary heaven through her sensational experiences. She complains that she could not feel the existence of the rat and rejects the assistance of her servant due to her pride. Quarrels between Zenobia and Pompey continue until they fall upon the floor of the belfry. She suspects that each step on the staircase is a false one and, for the error she

has made, she admonishes herself to be more reserved. Each predicament may block the road towards the loftiness of the church, leading towards abandonment. The sole light, getting into the dark chamber of the belfry through the keyhole, reignites Zenobia's passion of perceiving "the sublime prospect":

and we looked about the room for an aperture through which to survey the city of Edina. Windows there were none. The sole light admitted into the gloomy chamber proceeded from a square opening, about a foot in diameter, at a height of about seven feet from the floor. Yet what will the energy of true genius not effect? I resolved to clamber up to this hole. A vast quantity of wheels, pinions, and other cabalistic-looking machinery stood opposite the hole, close to it; and through the hole there passed an iron rod from the machinery. ("A Predicament" 351)

The keyhole symbolizes a boundary through which Zenobia perceives her incarcerated world—Mr. Blackwood's office. "Cabalistic-looking machinery" refers to "Mr. Blackwood's cluttered, cloistered office" (Eddings 5) where Zenobia has long been enslaved by the commercialized Blackwood model. She clearly sees herself as an enslaved body reduced to a mechanical life. Unwilling to remain so, Zenobia desires to perceive another world in opposition to Mr. Blackwood's office. She asks Pompey to let her stand on his shoulders so that she can put her head into the keyhole. With her head at the keyhole, Zenobia perceives the sublime Edina and the structure of the church:

Having, in some measure, satisfied my curiosity in regard to the extent, situation, and general appearance of the city, I had leisure to survey the church in which I was, and the delicate architecture of the steeple. I observed that the aperture through which I had thrust my head was an opening in the dial-plate of a gigantic clock, and must have appeared, from the street, as a large keyhole, such as we see in the face of French watches. . . . Having noticed these particulars, and some others, I again turned my eyes upon the glorious prospect below, and soon became absorbed in contemplation. ("A Predicament" 352)

In much the same way, Zenobia's neck symbolizes the boundary between the two worlds—Mr. Blackwood's cloistered office and the world of the lofty cathedral. As her body is still in the dark chamber, her head goes beyond the physical body. According to Eddings, her

neck, the connecting point between head and body, is the bridge between the two worlds Zenobia inhabits. Zenobia's situation, in other words, is a brilliant representation of Poe's view of the relationship between the physical and spiritual. The physical self may be imprisoned in time, but awareness of the spiritual realm can be reached through the power of the imagination, the "neck" between the two worlds. (6)

The narrator, absorbed in "the glorious prospect" ("A Predicament" 352), cannot help but savor the moment of approaching liberation.

The gigantic clock Zenobia perceives through the keyhole symbolizes the time of life and death. The clock, or the image of a clock, also appears in Poe's other tales: "The Devil in the Belfry," "The Pit and the Pendulum," "The Masque of the Red Death," and so on. In "Edgar Poe or the Theme of the Clock," Jean-Paul Weber associates the clock in "The Scythe of Time" ("A Predicament") (84) with the tarn in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (87) and the pendulum in "The Pit and the Pendulum" (95-96). Clocks are thus common in Poe's tales. Sometimes it is an ebony clock quietly sitting in the corner of a mansion, or a monstrous scythe as in "The Pit and the Pendulum"; sometimes it is a symbol associated with a mechanical world in a village or a Gothic house. In addition to the mechanical time to which mortals submit, there is an imaginary time—thirteen o'clock—that does not exist in the mechanical world. Interestingly, a devil is capable of shuttling between the two worlds—the mechanical world and transcendental realm—and causes disturbance. Eddings thus contrasts the freedom of the Devil with the enslavement of the villagers in Poe's "The Devil in the Belfry":

The Devil who saunters into Vondervotteimittiss embodies the very principle of the unexpected that the villagers have attempted to negate. They would control existence by regulating it through their watches and clocks. Consequently, when the Devil causes the clock to strike thirteen, chaos results. The villagers' enslavement to the clock makes them imaginatively incapable of grasping the transcendent notion of thirteen o'clock, a time beyond time. The contrast in appearance between the villagers, with their collective sameness, and the Devil reinforces the dual possibilities symbolized by the hills. Coming from beyond the hills, from a world of imaginative freedom, the Devil can convert old time into new. Because they

are imprisoned within the hills, within a mechanical world, the villagers have no means of creative transcendence. (3)

The opposition of enslavement and freedom is associated with the image of a clock. Poe's clock draws the line between earthly time and the time beyond this. It has a double meaning: the time bound to the mechanical world and the time in the transcendental realm.

The clock that Poe imagines as “the scythe of time” in “A Predicament” is merged with Zenobia's imagination in a commercialized mechanical world; the movement of time towards death will bring her uncommon experiences, beneficial to her writing that elicits interest from the *Blackwood's* readers. The clock is not a lifeless object but an animate object that looks inanimate. It has arms that vitally evoke emotions and resonate with Zenobia's desire to reach somewhere. It draws one to the territory of death.

As the scythe of time (the hands of the clock on the belfry) is cutting off Zenobia's head, the mutilated or deformed body submits itself to an ambiguous condition. Zenobia feels relieved for this is a moment when “sensations were those of entire happiness” (“A Predicament” 355). When her head rolls down into the middle of the street, Zenobia feels herself alive with “the most mysterious, the most perplexing and incomprehensible character,” as if she becomes “the hero who, in the heat of the combat, not perceiving that he was dead, continued to contest the battle with inextinguishable valor” (“A Predicament” 355-356). On the surface, Zenobia, through the process of decapitation, attaches to spirits inhabited in the décor in the Gothic architecture. It seems that the interior space of the Gothic cathedral—the spiral ladder, giddy pinnacle, archway, and gloomy belfry—holds the spirit of Zenobia just as it does those of the martyrs. In reality, Zenobia becomes confounded. She cannot decide which one is the real Zenobia, the severed head or the headless body that remains in the confined space. Ed-dings argues that Zenobia fails to transcend since her body is still entrapped in the dark chamber of the belfry and unable to escape from her material view of life:

Poe, I submit, sees the completion of personal identity and being in the integration of mind and body, the harmonious relationship between reason and imagination embodying the hallmark of such integration. Dupin, being both poet and mathematician, characterizes Poe's view. Zenobia's failure to achieve such integration is made literal when her head is sepa-

rated from her body. Insisting that she is “*all* soul,” she ignores that which truly liberates the soul—the imagination. Her assumed name, Psyche, provides an ironic comment on her pretensions. (7; emphasis Edding’s)

Poe does not present a transcendental spirit of the pious martyrs but rather caricatures “the modern nineteenth-century woman” (Gerber 26). Zenobia is still confined in a limited space and her ordeal of decapitation renders not a process of spiritual elevation but the experience of being abandoned in an ambiguous boundary between life and death.

“A Predicament” is one of the stories in which Poe mixes *Blackwood’s* sensations and burlesque but the narrator—as opposed to most of his protagonist-narrators—is not brought back to common life after a grotesque journey. Zenobia does not suffer mental delirium; even though she is thrust into the condition of decapitation and “exquisite pain” (“A Predicament” 354), she does not fall into delirium or cry an inarticulate shriek of horror as most of Poe’s *Blackwood’s* protagonists do (e.g. “The Pit and Pendulum” and “Berenice”). Does the world of the cathedral in which she indulges apply mesmerism to her sensations? Does she experience what occurs in “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” in which a doctor uses mesmerism on a dying tuberculosis patient in order to delay death? Is the record of “afterlife” through the application of mesmerism possible or is it merely a hoax? Poe does not offer certain answers but what he reveals to us is not the exaltation of success with regard to postponing death. His Zenobia does not awake from her hypnotic state; if the cathedral serves mesmerism, then she does not suffer from a dead body.

At the sight of Zenobia, Pompey becomes scared and flees (“A Predicament” 356). Pompey’s response has two possible interpretations. First, he feels guilty for Zenobia’s death as he abandoned her; second, Pompey identifies Zenobia with the bodiless monster, Medusa. In Freud’s *Medusa’s Head*, decapitation is equivalent to castration. A woman’s decapitated head, in this context, is associated with the fear of castration. We might sympathize with the black slave since he is, as Teresa A. Goddu points out, the victim in the “sensationalized discourse of slavery” (95).<sup>6</sup> For him, Zenobia bears the image of Medusa; thus

<sup>6</sup> In “Poe, Sensationalism, and Slavery” Teresa A. Goddu reads the tale “A Predicament” as a reversal of the social position of whites and blacks. She believes that there is a reversal of hierarchy in the story since Pompey gets revenge by sending Zenobia to the hands of the clock and then abandons her. “The neat hierarchy of power, structured through race and species, set up at the beginning of the tale, collapses by its end” (Goddu 102).

he flees from the Gothic cathedral, the Gothic world of darkness, dominated by death. In “Ligeia,” there is a description of Ligeia as a monster or demon when the narrator fears the power of the Dark Lady. In much the same way, Pompey fears the uncanniness in Zenobia since the latter has revised the Gothic cathedral and integrated her body as one sacrificed for *Blackwood’s* sensations.

“A Predicament” shows the contrast between Zenobia and Pompey as well. While Zenobia is absorbed in the beauty of the Gothic church, Pompey perceives a natural power and horror in the church. The bodiless Zenobia stirs not awe but dread in the mortal. Influenced by his sense of guilt for abandoning Zenobia, Pompey looks for escape from the church, which is for him a haunted house. As Jennifer R. Ballengee states, “Gothic fiction is rooted, after all, in the characteristics of the medieval gothic architectural style—with its emphasis on the awe-inspiring, the heavenly intention, the evocation of awe and dread that derives from associations with the supernatural” (28). While Pompey senses the danger of plunging into destruction, Zenobia imagines the Gothic space as her psychological journey into a realm different from her common daily life. Zenobia is involved in the epistemological quest for “the final knowledge” that leads her to deviate from common sense, and her expectation of the heavenly loftiness in the cathedral is the effect of sensations on a mind trapped in self-hypnosis.

## Conclusion

The Gothic cathedral in “A Predicament” is no longer a simple object that contains the records of the history of religious martyrdom but is revised as one that extends to the mind of Zenobia, who desires the experience of extreme suffering in order to acquire the final knowledge. Eventually, Zenobia does not transcend but perceives the plight of mortality. Both her body and head are still confined in a circumscribed space. She loses “her view of the ‘glorious’ scene below her” (Gerber 25). Confined to Earth, she perceives the decomposition of the body as she takes the last glimpse of her dog Diana’s body cruelly devoured:

Alas! What [a] horrible vision affronted my eyes? *Was* that a rat I saw skulking into his hole? *Are* these the picked bones of the little angel who has been cruelly devoured by the monster? Ye Gods! and what *do* I behold—is that the departed spirit, the shade, the ghost of my beloved puppy, which I perceive sitting with a grace so melancholy, in the corner?

Harken! for she speaks, and, heavens! it is the German of Schiller— ("A Predicament" 356-357; emphasis Poe's)

Both Zenobia and her animal companion experience extreme destruction in the gloomy, prison-like belfry. The last scene of the dog Diana reflects an inescapable doom—the triumph of death, of dissolution, of the Devil on Earth. Nevertheless, Zenobia's consciousness remains animated. She is not like Poe's narrators who cry shrieks of horror in the stories such as "The Pit and The Pendulum" and "The Premature Burial" when they are driven to the brink of insanity in a confined circumstance. She does experience extreme physical pain at the moment of decapitation, but she does not withdraw from this extraordinary circumstance; she neither returns to real life nor recovers common sense. Zenobia becomes insensitive to pain and lacks other neuropathies that can evoke her desire to leave the deformed/inanimate body. Perhaps she has entered a mesmeric trance—a mental state that shelters from fear and pain. Despite having followed the principle of the *Blackwood's* sensationalists (or the perception of the Common Sense school), she is disengaged from the extremity of fear and pain that can stimulate sensations, which in turn facilitates an immediate link to the final knowledge or stimulates the desire to draw back toward common sense. Consequently, Zenobia does not quit the body that has become deceased nor does she transcend to a harmonious heaven. Instead of making coherent the quest of final knowledge for his heroine, or at least a return to her real life, Poe places her in a circumscribed space. Bewildered by her predicament, Zenobia continues to compose in *Blackwood's* style through a state of "posthumous consciousness" (Eakin 2), though she is incapable of expressing her sensations due to the loss of them.

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## TIJELO, PROSTOR I OSJETI U PRIPOVIJETCI „NEVOLJA“ EDGARA ALLANA POEA

### Sažetak

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Cilj je ovog rada analizirati prikaz senzacionalizma *Blackwood's Magazine* u pripovijetci „Nevolja“ Edgara Allana Poea te Poeovo propitivanje tog senzacionalizma. Poe istovremeno isprepliće pustolovine *Psyche Zenobije* u *Gotičkoj katedrali* i *Blackwood's* senzacionalističko iskustvo, koje snažne osjete smatra glavnim stimulirajućim uvjetom za interakciju uma sa spiritualnom vizijom svijeta izvan materijalnog svijeta, ali se i distancira od tradicije *Blackwood's Magazine*. Zenobia u potpunosti gubi svoje osjete u potrazi za ultimativnim znanjem te se ne može vratiti svom stvarnom životu. Rad se bavi i osakaćenim/deformiranim tijelom u Poeovoj pripovijetci kao tijelom koje osjeti, ili ne osjeti bol te tako omogućuje umu da se koristi imaginacijom. Naposljetku, rad pokazuje kako Poe, pomoću Zenobijina pogleda i razmišljanjima o uzvišenosti katedrale, promiče estetski doživljaj koji odvaja imaginaran prostor od stvarnosti te stvara samoopčinjenost koja smješta Zenobiju i fizički i spiritualno u zemaljski svijet.

**Ključne riječi:** deformirano tijelo, gotička katedrala, osjeti, *Blackwood's Magazine*, Edgar Allan Poe, „Nevolja“