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## Exploring Textual Elements in Edgar Allan Poe's Fiction through the Lens of Text World Theory: A Cognitive Analysis of Narrative Construction and Interpretation

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### Abstract

The current study applies the cognitive approach of Gavins' (2007) Text World Theory to analyze three selected short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. The basic premise of Text World Theory is that when readers engage with texts, they construct mental representations in their minds. Based on this idea, this study argues that readers draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences and the linguistic cues provided by the texts to grasp the fictional worlds of the narratives. The present study examines how textual elements like plot, setting, character, theme, and point of view help the readers to construct the Mental Worlds in Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842), and *The Black Cat* (1843). The analysis, further, takes into consideration the role of Poe's utilization of the unreliable narrator and the gothic ambiances in shaping the readers' comprehension of the stories. Stressing the significance of Text World Theory as a valuable tool to examine literary narratives, the study raises some questions related to the possibility of applying the theory to investigate longer narratives such as the novels and to explore dramatic works. It presupposes that readers can construct a broader understanding of a whole narrative or a play rather than dealing with single excerpts from texts. The study conducts a qualitative analysis, selecting some extracts of the chosen narratives. These extracts are examined using Text World Theory as a framework, focusing on how linguistic cues prompt readers to construct mental representation. The analysis discloses that Poe's strategic utilization of textual elements significantly impacts the readers' mental world- building processes.

**Keywords:** (Text World) Theory, Gothic, Discourse World, Mental Model, World-Building Elements, Function-Advancing Propositions.

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## استكشاف العناصر النصية في أعمال إدغار آلان بو من خلال نظرية العوالم النصية: تحليل معرفي لبناء السرد وتفسيره

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### المستخلص

تطبق الدراسة الحالية المنهج المعرفي لنظرية "عوالم النص" لغافينز (٢٠٠٧) لتحليل ثلاث قصص قصيرة مختارة لإدغار آلان بو. تنطلق هذه النظرية من فرضية أساسية مفادها أن القراء، عند تفاعلهم مع النصوص، يقومون ببناء تمثيلات ذهنية في أذهانهم. بناءً على هذه الفكرة، تفترض الدراسة الحالية أن القراء يعتمدون على معارفهم وخبراتهم السابقة، بالإضافة إلى الإشارات اللغوية التي يوفرها النص، لفهم العوالم التخيلية في السرديات. تفحص الدراسة كيفية مساهمة العناصر النصية، مثل الحكمة، والمكان، والشخصيات، والموضوع، وجهة النظر، في تمكين القراء من بناء العوالم الذهنية في قصص بو "قناع الموت الأحمر" (١٨٤٢)، و "الحفرة والبندول" (١٨٤٢)، و "القطعة السوداء" (١٨٤٣). كما تأخذ الدراسة في الاعتبار دور استخدام بو للراوي غير الموثوق به والأجواء القوطية في تشكيل فهم القراء لهذه القصص. من خلال التأكيد على أهمية نظرية "عوالم النص" كأداة قيمة لتحليل السرديات الأدبية، تطرح الدراسة بعض التساؤلات حول إمكانية تطبيق هذه النظرية في دراسة السرديات الأطول، مثل الروايات، واستكشاف الأعمال الدرامية. تفترض الدراسة أن القراء قادرون على بناء فهم أوسع للنص السردى أو المسرحي ككل، بدلاً من التعامل مع مقتطفات منفصلة منه. تعتمد الدراسة على التحليل النوعي، حيث يتم اختيار بعض المقاطع من السرديات المختارة وتحليلها باستخدام نظرية "عوالم النص" كإطار مرجعي، مع التركيز على كيفية توجيه الإشارات اللغوية للقراء نحو بناء تمثيلات ذهنية. يكشف التحليل أن الاستخدام الاستراتيجي الذي يوظفه بو للعناصر النصية له تأثير كبير على عمليات بناء العوالم الذهنية لدى القراء.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** نظرية "عالم النص"، القوطية، عالم الخطاب، النموذج العقلي، عناصر بناء العوالم، مقترحات تعزيز الوظائف.

### **1. Text World Theory**

Text World Theory is rooted firmly in Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology. The theory is based on the idea that individuals construct mental representations while engaging in communication. Gavins (2007:8) indicates that Text World Theory is a model of human communication which is based on the ideas of mental representation found in Cognitive Psychology and which shares the principles of Cognitive Linguistics.

Narrative texts are produced by writers once but readers generate new reproductions through the reading process in the sense that each reading of the same story offers a new interpretation. Text World Theory is concerned with this relationship between writer, text, and reader. In this regard, the writer and text are static entities while the reading process is dynamic as readers constantly generate diverse mental worlds. According to Text World Theory, when people read or hear a story, they construct mental models of the fictional world based on the information provided in the text. These mental representations are continually being updated as new information is encountered.

According to scholars, Text World Theory was formulated to account for the language use in context. For instance, Gavins (2007:8) asserts that Text World Theory is a discourse model that it is concerned both with how a particular text is built and how the context surrounding that text influences its production and reception. Hargreaves (2012:1) states that the theory is primarily concerned with how language and the context in which it is produced prompt the participants in the discourse to construct mental representations for the situations being described. From a Text World Theory perspective, communication is not simply a matter of transmission of message from one participant to another, rather “communication is both the means by which knowledge is transferred between human beings and the process by which those human beings interconnect the new knowledge structures they encounter through communication with existing beliefs, immediate perceptions and previous experiences” (Gavins, 2007:24).

Text World Theory was firstly pioneered by Paul Werth in the late 1980s and early 1990s “to account for and explore the mental spaces that construct all spoken and written discourse.” Werth suggests a series of

rich textual worlds which are constructed in the mind of the individual in accordance with their personal knowledge and perceptions (Norledge, 2012: 53). Stockwell (2002:137) pinpoints three significant reasons why Text World Theory stands out as an innovative approach. First, it helps contextual knowledge to be managed economically. Second, it inseparably connects text and context, treating them as an integral part of a unified cognitive process. Lastly, it is founded on the analysis of entire texts and the worlds created in the minds of readers. Werth's Text world Theory was limited to analyzing short extracts from literary text and his aim was only to exemplify rather than to evaluate. Because of his untimely death, Werth was not able to apply his framework to a wide range of discourses. Following Werth's death, many scholars were primarily concerned with testing and broadening the application of his framework. The most comprehensive model which will be adopted in this study is Gavins' (2003, 2007). Gavins' approach differs slightly from Werth's original framework. However, a typical Text World Theory consists of three interconnecting levels. While in Werth's (1999) original framework the levels are the Discourse World, the Text World, and Sub-Worlds, Gavins retains the first two worlds, arguing that departures from a text world will create new worlds; world switches and modal worlds (Gavins, 2003:131).

As the scope of this research paper is inevitably limited, the study will examine the Discourse World and the Text World in the selected narratives, and only introducing the Sub-worlds (world switches and modal worlds) in the theoretical part. What follows will explain each of these worlds separately.

### **1.1. The Discourse World**

Werth (1999:83) defines the Discourse World as "the situational context surrounding the speech event itself" which is not limited to the place, the time, and the discourse participants, but also extends to include considerations of the relationships, knowledge and experience the participants employ to understand the language used. Semino (2009:56) shares a similar perspective on the Discourse World, defining it as the context in which communication takes place, whether face-to-face or through other means. This context is inhabited by the participants in communication, such as authors and readers, and influences the

overall meaning and interpretation of the discourse. Expanding on this idea, a discourse world can be seen as the fictional world that unfolds within a text through the reading process. This mental construct is used to comprehend and keep track of the narrative's events and components. The Discourse World could be regarded as an area of cognitive mediation bridging both tangible reality and projected fictions (Stockwell, 2002:94).

For a discourse World to exist, there should at least be two participants engaged in the discourse. Gavins introduces two distinct forms of Discourse World, shared and split. In shared Discourse World, as observed in face-to-face interaction, the participants share the same physical space and time during the interaction. Conversely, in split Discourse World, as seen in written texts, the participants are separated temporally and spatially but their Discourse World is contained within the text itself. In the case of split Discourse World, the participants do not depend on direct perception but rely heavily on background knowledge and imagination due to the temporal and spatial distance between the writer and the reader (Gavins, 2003:130; 2007:26).

For a Discourse World to exist, there should at least be two participants and the discourse itself. Gavins distinguishes two distinct forms of Discourse World. Discourse worlds can be shared (face-to-face interaction) or they can be split (written texts). In the former case the participants will share the same immediate physical surroundings while in the latter they will be separated in time and space yet their Discourse World is the text itself. In the case of 'split' Discourse World, the participants rely heavily on background knowledge and imagination rather than perception. This is because the writer and reader are separated temporally and spatially (Gavins, 2003:131; 2007:26).

### **1.2. The Text World**

Text World constitutes the next level of Text World Theory. As the participants communicate to one another, they construct a mental representation in their minds to propel and understand the discourse being negotiated. This mental representation is known as Text World. Barsalou (1992:66) defines the mental representation as a cognitive representation of the world that is used to understand, reason, and make predictions about events. It is a simulation of the world that allows

people to think about how the world works and how things might turn out in the future. It is a dynamic model that is constantly being updated as new information becomes available for the readers during the reading process (Johnson-Laird, 1983: 4).

Text World is depicted both by “linguistic indicators contained within the discourse and by further inferences drawn from the participants’ background knowledge and experience” (Gavins, 2003:130). The text provides linguistic cues that help to create the mental model and with their experiences and knowledge, the readers contribute to fill in gaps. Therefore, the mental model serves as a bridge connecting the Discourse World (the real world of text production and reception) with the Text World (the hypothetical world created in response to the text). The mental model is not a real representation but a hypothetical framework that embodies the reader's comprehension of a text (Herman, 2004:64). It is built through a process of inference, as readers draw on the text and their own understanding of the world. However, the concept of the Text World is vital to Text World Theory as it enables researchers to analyze how readers grasp and comprehend fictional worlds portrayed in narrative texts.

Text World is composed of two fundamental aspects: World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing Propositions. As proposed by Stockwell:

World-building elements constitute the background against which the foreground events of the text will take place. They include an orientation in time and place, and they create characters and other objects that furnish the text world available for reference. Function-advancing propositions propel the narrative or dynamic within the text world forward. They constitute the states, actions, events and processes, and any arguments or predications made in relation to the objects and characters in the text world (Stockwell, 2002: 137).

In general, World-Building Elements are those linguistic cues and information that the readers need to create their mental representations of the narrative. They encompass descriptions of settings, characters, and other elements that contribute to the readers’ understanding of the

fictional world. On the other hand, Function-Advancing Propositions are those statements and propositions employed in the text to drive the events forward. They include elements like, goals, plans, actions, and events that establish causal connections and character motivations.

### **1.3. Sub- Worlds**

The final layer of Text World Theory is called Sub-Worlds. According to Werth's (1999) framework, these Sub-Worlds may be created either by the discourse participants, thus described as participant-accessible, or by characters in the text world, in which case they can be described as character-accessible. According to Gavins (2003, 2007) Text World Theory, these departures are simply new worlds that can be divided into two distinct categories: world-switches and modal worlds.

#### **1.3.1. World- Switches**

World-Switches are created when the central focus of the discourse is switched to a different place. The shift in time and place as in flash backwards or forwards produces a similar effect. Moreover, direct speech and direct thought also create world-switches, "since they alter the temporal parameters of the text world by introducing present-tense discourse into a past-tense narrative" (Gavins, 2003:131).

#### **1.3.2. Modal Worlds<sup>1</sup>**

In addition to the World Switches, other worlds, known as Modal Worlds, can be created through modalization in discourse (Gavins, 2003: 131). Linguistic communication serves various functions, one of which is creating and preserving social harmony among people. To do this, speakers and writers have a repertoire of linguistic expressions to communicate their feelings and attitudes. These expressions are categorized as modality which is defined as "the term given to those aspects of language which express a speaker or writer's attitude to a particular subject" (Gavins, 2007: 91).

According to Simpson (1993:43), "*Modality* refers broadly to a speaker's attitude towards, or opinion about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. It also extends to their attitude towards the situation or event described by a sentence". Drawing upon Simpson's (1993) classification of modality, Gavins proposes that the Modal Worlds happen for one of several reasons:

Firstly, the use of boulomaic modality, including any description of wishes, desires or fantasies, will generate a boulomaic modal-world in the minds of the discourse participants. Secondly, the expression of any degree of obligation, from permission through to requirement, will generate a deontic modal-world. Finally, epistemic modal-worlds occur whenever some form of epistemic commitment is expressed in discourse (Gavins, 2007:126).

Simpson (1993:43) defines deontic modality as “the modal system of ‘duty’, as it is concerned with a speaker’s attitude to the degree of obligation attaching to the performance of certain actions.” This category of modality includes modal auxiliaries as (may, should, and must) which convey degrees of permission, obligation, and requirement respectively. The action being modalized with these verbs expresses unfulfilled future situation separate from its original text world (Gavins, 2003: 131). As Palmer (2001:86) points out “deontic modality refers to events that are not actualized, events that have not taken place but are merely potential.”

Closely related to deontic modality, boulomaic modality expresses the speaker’s or writer’s wishes, desires, and wants. This modality can be formed by using verbs like want, hope, wish, desire expressing a degree of boulomaic commitment to a particular proposition. Similarly, the action being modalized with these verbs creates an unrealized world unlike that of the initial text world (Gavins, 2003: 131).

Yet, there is another possibility for individuals to create modal worlds in their minds through using epistemic modality. Simpson (1993:44) defines epistemic modality as the category of modality which is “concerned with the speaker’s confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed.” As indicated by Palmer (2001:84), epistemic modality can be easily detected among the other kinds of modality since speakers make judgments not assertions when engaged in a discourse. It is concerned with the speaker's attitude and considered as the modal of propositions rather than of actions, states and events. Using epistemic modality in any discourse “establishes a distinct text-world, an epistemic modal-world, containing a situation which may be unrealised at the time and place from which its description originates” (Gavins, 2007: 110).



Other remote worlds can be created with perception modality, conditional constructions, hypotheticals, focalized narratives, or special linguistic constructs. These other modal worlds are not within the scope of this particular study and thereby one can refer to Gavins (2003: 132, and 2007: 115-120) for more extensive elaboration on this topic. Below is a table that summarizes the three main layers of worlds in Text World Theory that will be dealt with in this study:

**Table 1: The Layers of Worlds in Text World Theory**

World	Definition	Characteristics
The Discourse World	The real world wherein the text is being interpreted.	Includes the author, the reader, and the context in which the text is located.
The Text World	The fictional world that is created by the text.	Includes the characters, plot, setting, events and the themes of the text.
The Mental Model	The reader's own mental representation of the text world.	Includes the reader's interpretation of the text, their understanding of the characters and events, and their emotional response to the text.

## 2. Investigating the Worlds of Poe's Fiction

The study employs a qualitative approach where some passages of the selected narratives will be examined through the lens of Text World Theory. The data are some seminal works of Poe's fiction: *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842), and *The Black Cat* (1843). The analysis in this section focuses on exploring the Discourse World and the Text World within these stories.

### 2.1. The Discourse World of the Stories

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), one of American's highly acclaimed literary writers, is renowned for his distinctive and mysterious writing style. His works have left a lasting impact on the world of literature. Poe's elevated style, marked by its dark and creepy ambiance, the inclusion of gothic traditions, psychological exploration of the human psyche, and colorful use of language, has fascinated readers for generations. As noted by Fisher (2004:84), Poe's stories are inspired by the Gothic tradition and he draws from some Gothic elements to infuse his tales with a highly sophisticated style. His portrayal of characters

with their motives, the symbolic use of buildings and rooms, all contribute to the depiction of the inner workings of human minds. Significantly, “Poe found in Gothic tradition the very kinds of settings and characters that, transformed in his imagination, would contribute wonderful symbolism to psychologically plausible narratives of multiple outreach.”

According to Text World Theory, the Discourse World is situated outside the world of the text. Therefore, to better understand the stories, readers should acquaint themselves with information about the writer and the contexts in which the texts were produced. The following table shows the Discourse World of Poe’s stories:

**Table 2: The Elements of Discourse World in Poe’s Selected Stories**

<b>Discourse World Elements</b>	<b>The Masque of the Red Death</b>	<b>The Pit and the Pendulum</b>	<b>The Black Cat</b>
Author	Edgar Allan Poe	Edgar Allan Poe	Edgar Allan Poe
Reader	Any reader	Any reader	Any reader
Publication	1842	1842	1843
Cultural Context	Medieval Ages	The Spanish Inquisition	19 <sup>th</sup> Century United States

As Table (2) displays, the stories selected for this study share some common features. They are written by the same writer, Edgar Allan Poe, belonging to the same period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the reader could be any reader, whether a 19<sup>th</sup> century reader or from subsequent periods. The difference in these stories lies in the cultural contexts of each story. Though Poe is a 19<sup>th</sup> century writer, he chooses diverse settings and time periods for his stories. Although Poe’s place and time periods vary in his narratives, his topics are firmly rooted in the time when he produced his stories. The selected stories for this study exhibit different backgrounds but they reverberate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century traditions.

Given that Poe’s writing style is characterized by a dark and mysterious world, therefore, readers’ background knowledge, readers who are familiar with Poe’s style, immediately operates in the discourse process before the narrative unfolds. Based on this background knowledge, readers are expected to carry in their minds a number of preconceived ideas they might expect to find in the narrative.

The Discourse World of *The Masque of the Red Death* is the 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The "Red Death" in the title may simply address the "Black Death" that spread in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Since Poe's story is about the outbreak of a fictitious disease called the Red Death, the story could be a symbolic reference to the spread of several deadly diseases like cholera and tuberculosis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The story reflects the cultural values that were prevalent in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which are characterized by dark and supernatural elements, which is perfectly in line with Poe's writing style. The story of *The Masque of the Red Death* shows the fear of disease and death, which was indeed the case during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a century which was characterized by deadly diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera. These epidemics caused widespread fear and panic in society, and Poe's story depicts this anxiety about mortality and the fragility of human life.

The Discourse World of *The Pit and the Pendulum* is the 15<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Inquisition, a period characterized by the fear of religious persecution and the use of torture as a form of punishment. Again, before engaging with Poe's story, readers will have all these practices in their minds expecting to meet them in the story. They create mental representations of what *The Pit and the Pendulum* will tell. However, the story makes use of several gothic elements popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century like the gloomy and dark places (the dungeon), which is a recurring setting in gothic fiction. This setting helps to create a sense of dread and suspense in the readers' mind.

Though not clearly identified, the Discourse World of *The Black Cat* is believed to be the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The unidentified setting offers the readers a wide area to imagine the story, giving it a universality of time and place. The story does not only reflect the social values of its time but it is a story that could happen elsewhere and everywhere. The unnamed narrator's descent into madness and addiction reflects the common concerns of the 19<sup>th</sup> period. Horror, guilt, the supernatural, and the exploration of the depth of the human psyche are recurring themes in Poe's fictions and are better examples readers expect to find in *The Black Cat*.

## 2.2. The Text World of the Stories

Once the Discourse World is conceptualized, readers are now in a position to comprehend the Text World as they engage with the story. The worlds imbedded in the text are not separate entities, rather, they all work together to arrive at an understanding of the narrative. The Discourse World and the Text World are interconnected in a number of ways. The Text World is created by the author who is part of the Discourse World. The Discourse World of the reader, which encompasses their knowledge, experiences, and beliefs, can influence their understanding of the Text World in a story. This means that the Text World is always influenced by the Discourse World, even though it is not a part of it.

As indicated earlier, the Text World includes all the entities, characters, events, settings, and other textual elements presented in the discourse. The focus in this section will be on elements like focalization, setting, recurrent themes, literary devices, Gothic elements, psychological depths, and symbolism that help readers grasp the meaning of Poe's stories as shown in the following table:

**Table 3: Overall Elements of Text World in Poe's Selected Stories**

Text World Elements	The Masque of the Red Death	The Pit and the Pendulum	The Black Cat
Focalization	Third-person perspective.	First-person perspective.	First-person perspective.
Time Place	The Middle Ages Abbey	15 <sup>th</sup> century Spain A Dungeon	19 <sup>th</sup> United States A House
Recurring Themes	Mortality, the inevitability of death, and the uncanny.	Fear of death, torture, and survival.	Guilt, madness, and the uncanny.
Literary Devices	Allegory and symbolism.	Suspense and sensory imagery.	Unreliable narration and foreshadowing.
Gothic Elements	The eerie masked ball and the presence of the Red Death.	The dark and terrifying dungeon where the protagonist is imprisoned.	The mysterious black cat and the eerie atmosphere in the narrator's house.
Psychological Depths	Prince Prospero's attempts to escape death through decadence.	The unnamed narrator's intense fear and will to survive.	The narrator's descent into madness and his struggle with guilt after committing

			heinous acts.
Symbolism	The masked figure of the Red Death personifies mortality.	The pit and the pendulum symbolize the inevitability of death and the ever-present threat of suffering.	The black cat symbolizes the narrator's conscience and guilt.

The Text World of Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* is marked by a hauntingly surreal ambiance which serves as a symbol for the inevitable nature of death and the useless attempt to escape it. Poe's skillful employment of descriptive language, allegories, and a ubiquitous tone of dread contribute together to shape the mysterious and frightful world within the narrative. The following excerpt from the story contains some elements that help readers to construct a mental representation of the scene:

But in the western or black chamber, the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all. (Poe, 2006: 38-39)

The point of view in this excerpt is restricted to an external perspective where the narrator, rather than delving into the inner thoughts or feelings of the characters, focuses on describing the contents of the room and the reactions of the characters as they enter it. The lack of depicting the internal thoughts and feelings of the guests is replaced with external description. Moreover, the setting plays a significant role in creating a sense of foreboding and fear.

The choice of words in this excerpt is very important to encourage the readers to imagine the whole setting. The black chamber is described to be 'ghastly in the extreme', with 'fire-light', 'dark hangings', and 'blood tinted panes' which all produce a 'wild look' on the guests' faces. The marriage between the colors, black and red, contributes to the overall gothic nature of the setting. The black chamber is by itself a symbol of death and immortality, with the blood-tinted light symbolizing the

impending danger of the Red Death. These vivid visual elements help readers to construct mental representations in their minds, imagining the imminent danger that awaits the revelers. The combination of visual, psychological, and emotional descriptions creates a mental space in the readers' minds that help in shaping the entire tone and tension in the story.

In Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the Text World is characterized by terror, confinement, and a psychological nuisance of an unnamed narrator. In the opening lines of the story, Poe uses rich descriptive language, a first-person narrative, and a focus on the protagonist's emotional and sensory experiences to engage the reader in the nightmarish atmosphere. The following extract from the story offers necessary information needed for the reader to construct mental representations that will help to set the tone for the rest of the narrative:

I was sick, sick unto death, with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence, the dread sentence of death, was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of *revolution*—perhaps from its association in fancy with the burr of a mill-wheel. This only for a brief period; for presently I heard no more. Yet, for a while, I saw; but with how terrible an exaggeration! I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white—whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words—and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness, of immovable resolution, of stern contempt of human torture. I saw that the decrees of what to me was Fate, were still issuing from those lips. I saw them writhe with a deadly locution. I saw them fashion the syllables of my name; and I shuddered because no sound succeeded (Poe, 2006: 43).

The story is related from the perspective of an unnamed narrator who is experiencing the events. The selection of first-person narration allows

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the reader to share the feelings and fears of the narrator, creating an intimate connection between the reader and the character. The absence of a description of the setting is justified due to the narrator's senses preoccupation with the sentence of the inquisitors. Poe takes his readers into a psychological trip inside the mind of the narrator providing them with a limited and subjective viewpoint of the setting and the events.

The use of verbs of perception like (felt, heard, saw which is repeated several times) in the aforementioned extract indicates the narrator's inability to exert a physical action. He completely surrenders himself to his looming fate which he calculates as a fatal death. The extract conveys themes of agony, despair, the fear of the unknown, and the vulnerability of the human mind. Poe masterfully weaves all these themes in these opening lines that will pervade all along the story.

Moreover, this extract is saturated with various literary devices that enhance the reader's perception of the narrative. In the first place, the narrator's use of hyperbole 'sick unto death' intensifies his great agony and fright. The metaphorical description of the inquisitors' lips as 'whiter than the sheet' expresses their coldness and unfeeling nature as they sentence the narrator to death. The repetition of the phrase 'I saw' appearing at the beginning of several sentences emphasizes the visual experience of the narrator, highlighting his physical powerlessness on the one hand, and his fixation on the inquisitors' lips on the other.

These linguistic aspects introduced in the introductory paragraph of the story help the reader to imagine and foreshadow what will happen over the course of the narrative. They highlight the sense of terror that will override the whole story and the endeavor of the narrator to escape both his physical and mental imprisonment.

In Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat*, the Text World is shaped by a gloomy and disturbing atmosphere, with an emphasis on the psychological turmoil and culpability of an unnamed narrator. The narrator's descent into apparent madness is reflected through a careful employment of various linguistic elements such as vivid imagery, paradox, and a confessional tone. The following extract, taken from the story, is the introductory paragraph where the narrator is about to recount the events leading to his downfall. This introductory paragraph raises questions about the (un)reliability of the narrator. Readers who are

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familiar with Poe's technique of the unreliable narrator will undoubtedly seek information, beyond the narrator's confession, imbedded in the story to form their own understanding and interpretation:

FOR the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror—to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*. (Poe, 2006: 192)

The abovementioned passage is presented from the narrator's point of view, using 'I', 'me', and 'my' throughout the narrative. He makes the readers his audience to judge his sanity, to believe his story, and to justify his actions. This introductory paragraph reveals important information about the disturbed mind of the narrator as his proclamation that his story is wild yet most homely, that he does not expect or solicit belief, and that he is mad and then he is not. This suggests psychological disorder because he could not focus on a single idea. Another revelation in this paragraph is the declaration of the protagonist that he will die tomorrow and for that reason he wishes to unburden his soul. This assertion creates immediate suspense in the readers arousing their curiosity as how 'homely narrative' and 'mere household events' will cause the death of the narrator.

The opening paragraph of this narrative serves a variety of functions that help in shaping the readers' mental representations of the narrative. It sets the stage of an unreliable narrator through raising questions about his sanity and that the whole narrative he is about to recount may be fabricated and embellished. This is evident through the paradoxical tone of the narrator as he claims the narrative to be both wild and homely. Additionally, his claim that his narrative will be about 'a series of mere household events' reassures his insanity and mental

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disorder. Based on this claim, readers are led to believe the story about ordinary events, but the narrator adds next that these events have terrified, tortured, and destroyed him, suggesting that there has been something far more sinister at play.

The introductory paragraph sets a paradoxical tone, preparing the reader for a narrative that is both wild and homely. The narrator establishes an immediate sense of disbelief, emphasizing the impending death and the urgent need to unburden their soul. The mention of "mere household events" heightens the contrast between the ordinary and the terrifying. This creates a mysterious and suspenseful atmosphere, prompting readers to question the nature of the impending horror and engaging their curiosity in the unfolding narrative. Another function that this paragraph conveys is the creation of suspense and unease that will pervade throughout the story when the narrator declares that he will soon die. It immediately immerses the readers into a world of terror and mystery, introducing themes of obsession, guilt, and the depths of the human darkness.

Although the setting is not explicitly stated in this specific paragraph, readers could imagine that the events take place in the house of the narrator based on some words like 'homely' and 'mere household events.' The narrator's reference 'But to-morrow I die' may imply that the narrator is now in jail waiting for execution after confessing to his crime.

Poe masterfully uses some literary devices to enhance the feeling of terror, the unsettling mind of the narrator, and the fine line between reality and illusion. The contrast between 'wild' and 'homely' engrosses the readers to think of the dual nature of the extraordinary and ordinary events which will unfold in the narrative. The foreshadowing of the imminent death of the narrator adds a sense of urgency to the narrative. The use of parallelism as in 'plainly, succinctly, and without comment' contributes to a balanced and cohesive expression in the sentence. Also, the repetition of the verb 'have', which forms a parallel structure, coupled with the alliterative 't' sound in the verbs as in 'these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me', brings a focus to each action and creates a rhythmic quality.

All these linguistic elements engage the alert reader in a world filled with contradiction, guilt, and insanity. They, in effect, contribute to the overall understanding and interpretation of Poe's *The Black Cat*.

### 3. Examining World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing Propositions in Poe's Selected Stories

World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing Propositions work together to help creating a coherent mental representation of the text world. World-Building Elements are the elements readers need to construct their own worlds of the text. Usually the narrator is the primary source for providing the information needed, but sometimes readers work out inferences based on their personal experiences and background knowledge. World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing propositions cannot be treated separately. They are interconnected, working together through a cause-and-effect line.

In Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, several examples of World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing Propositions can be found. The following table displays the overall elements, illustrating how they work together to create a rich and engaging narrative:

**Table 4: Overall World-Building Elements & Function-Advancing Propositions in Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death***

World-Building Elements		Function-Advancing Propositions	
Time	During the outbreak of the Red Death.	Goals	The company determined to shut themselves up in one of the magnificent abbeys.
Place	A gigantic, secluded, opulent, and amply provisioned abbey.	Plans	Many locks were burst asunder and many bolts were drawn by strength.
Characters	The Prince Prospero and a thousand of his friends.	Actions	The company enjoyed their presence.
Events	The characters secluded themselves in a well-guarded abbey to escape the Red Death.	Events	The presence of a masked figure ( <i>The Red Death</i> ) which had arrested the attention of no single individual before.

The following passage taken from the opening lines from the story contains abundant World-Building elements and Function-Advancing Propositions that not only describe the immediate situation, but also shed

light on future understanding of the story. They work together to create a suspenseful and foreboding world:

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the "Red Death." (Poe, 2006: 37)

As the above passage indicates, the world-Building Elements, encompassing time, place, characters, and objects are all informing. The time is during an outbreak of a plague called the Red Death that is depopulating the city. This creates a sense of urgency and imminent catastrophe. The place is a secluded abbey which is fortified with strong walls and locks, suggesting a sense of isolation and privacy. The characters mentioned in this passage are the Prince Prospero and some of his friends. The description of the Prince as being 'happy and dauntless and sagacious' suggests a person who seeks for pleasure. His meticulous selection of light-hearted friends to be his companion in this isolated abbey reinforces the idea of hedonism and escapism. The number of the invited friends (a thousand) suggests the huge size of the abbey and the Prince's richness to feed all this number for a long period of isolation.

The description of some objects like iron walls and welded bolts, the Prince's supply of all the appliances of pleasure presupposes the looming danger outside, informing a long stay in this seclusion.

The Function-Advancing Propositions in *The Masque of the Red Death* are also effective in creating suspense. While the World-Building Elements provide a context for the narrative, the Function-Advancing Propositions sets the stage for future events. Based on the descriptions of the fortified abbey, the plans to escape the Red death, and the supply of provision, readers are left wondering whether this secluded company will survive or meet their fatal destiny. These propositions trigger themes of mortality, death suddenness and unexpectedness, and the inevitability of facing fate.

In Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, very little description of World-Building Elements is provided. The lack of describing the setting definitely enhances the darkness that surrounds the place and the unfamiliarity of the narrator with the objects in the dungeon. The narrative focuses on psychological torment rather than engaging with physical objects. Nevertheless, the World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing Propositions create a world of survival and horror in the face of harrowing menace. The following table shows the overall distribution of World-Building Elements and Function-Advancing Propositions as they appear here and there in the story:

**Table 5: Overall World-Building Elements & Function-Advancing Propositions in Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum***

World-Building Elements		Function-Advancing Propositions	
Time	Set against the backdrop of the Spanish inquisition.	Goals	The narrator had to find a way to escape.
place	A dungeon, somewhere in Toledo, Spain.	Plans	He began to examine the walls of the dungeon.
Characters	An unnamed narrator.	Actions	Mental sufferings rather than physical actions.
Events	The narrator is "condemned to death" by the inquisitors.	Events	To the narrator's surprise, "the sweep of the pendulum had increased" and that "it had perceptibly descended."

The following extract from Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum* takes place as the narrator begins his exploration of the place after the inquisitors leave him. It delves into the psychological depths of the narrator as he experiences the darkness of the dungeon. This experience is a psychological journey rather than a physical one:

At length, with a wild desperation at heart, I quickly unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I struggled for breath. The intensity of the darkness seemed to oppress and stifle me. The atmosphere was intolerably close. I still lay quietly, and made effort to exercise my reason. I brought to mind the inquisitorial proceedings, and attempted from that point to deduce my real condition. The sentence had passed; and it appeared to me that a very long interval of time had since elapsed. Yet not for a moment did I suppose myself actually dead. (Poe, 2006: 45-46)

As the aforementioned passage indicates, the complete darkness of the place suggests a possible underground space. This lack of sight creates a sense of fear of the unknown, serving simultaneously the insignificance of time for the narrator since he is in a totally dark place. The narrator's utterance 'The blackness of eternal night encompassed me' not only reinforces the setting, but it also carries a metaphorical death, a sensation of being buried alive. This idea is further highlighted when the narrator supposes for a moment that he is 'actually dead.'

Despite his feeling of slow death due to the desolation of the place, the narrator does not lose hope in searching for a way out. The inquisitors' death penalty is no less cruel than the horrifying place he is in. Left with less information about the physical objects of the place, readers are prompted to construct their own worlds by making inferences about what might happen to the narrator. Their perceived understanding of the text would open new other worlds that help to propel the plot of the story forward.

Likewise, in *The Black Cat*, Poe uses very little World-Building Elements focusing on Function-Advancing Propositions to drive the plot of this narrative. Through these Function-Advancing Propositions like the narrator's goals, plans, and state of mind, Poe successfully creates a

haunting story of guilt, psychological suffering, and moral degeneration as shown in the following table:

**Table 6: Overall World-Building Elements & Function-Advancing Propositions in Poe's *The Black Cat***

World-Building Elements		Function-Advancing Propositions	
Time	Unknown	Goals	The narrator wanted to get rid of the cat.
Place	A small and rather mean dwelling in a retired part of the town.	Plans	The narrator decided to hang the cat from a tree.
Characters	The narrator, his wife, and Pluto	Actions	The narrator strangled the cat with a rope.
Events	The narrator became increasingly cruel to the cat.	Events	The narrator murder of the cat and his own wife.

The following passage from Poe's *The Black Cat* takes place rightly after the narrator stated his kindness and love for pets especially his cat, Pluto. The confession in this extract marks the transformation of the narrator's character due to his addiction to alcohol:

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity. (Poe, 2006: 193-194)

What is remarkable about the above extract is the minimal World-Building information it includes. However, the 'night' may suggest serenity and secrecy especially the event happens in a private place, the house of the narrator. The 'pen-knife' is the crime weapon the narrator uses to remove the cat's eye from the socket. The most important events in this passage are the narrator's inclination to alcohol and his cruel treatment of the cat. In the first sentence, the narrator seems to justify his brutal act by stating that he was 'much intoxicated', imagining that the

cat deliberately ‘avoided him.’ The narration of the story runs with a blend of physical actions (seized, inflicted, opened, grasped, and cut) explaining how he manages to harm the cat and mental actions (intoxicated, fancied, seemed, blush, burn, and shudder) that reflect uncertainty, remorse, and unintentionality of committing the crime.

This description helps to steer the plot forward creating a sense of suspense and fear in the story. It further opens new conceptualized worlds in the readers’ minds. This abrupt transformation of the narrators’ personality questionable. Readers are left contemplating on what the narrator will do next, while at the same time questioning the reliability of the narrator who has already introduced himself as a kind person who loves pets.

#### **4. Extended Analysis: The Mental Models (Representations) of Poe’s Stories**

It has already been explained that the worlds of text world theory are not separate worlds, rather, they are interconnected and complementary, enhancing each other to reach a better understanding. However, this study deals with these worlds on separate sections to show the systematic steps that lead to the construction of the readers’ mental representations of the narratives.

As a cognitive process, the Mental Model is constructed through the readers’ knowledge and experiences drawn from the Discourse World (the real world) and the inferences generated through the readers’ engagement with the Text World (the hypothetical world). Consequently, this process helps in creating various mental spaces allowing readers to mentally imagine the events presented in the stories. These mental representations are continually updated through the reading process based on new information and events in the narratives.

In the context of Poe’s stories, readers would build their Mental Models fusing text intricacies with personal insights. In the case of *The Masque of the Red Death*, readers would employ their cognitive skills to relate the details of the fictional world of the story such as the fortified abbey, the masked party, and the pestilence with their own experiences of concepts like mortality, isolation, the inescapability of death. Therefore, the Discourse World of the readers is likely to shape their comprehension of the Text World. For instance, if a reader has a

personal experience with epidemics, he is likely to sympathize with Prince Prospero's preparations to keep himself safe from the infection of the Red Death disease.

In *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the readers' background knowledge about historical cruelty, the humanity sufferings, and the limitations of human endurance would significantly help them to understand the messages addressed in the story. Their personal experiences with the real world will open new imagined worlds within the text. This allows them to profoundly feel the narrator's agony and reflects on the story's themes of suffering, survival, and psychological pain.

Likewise, within the context of *The Black Cat*, readers could fuse psychological textual elements with emotions and experience. The interaction between the Discourse World and the Text World allows readers to delve into the narrator's disturbed mind, while at the same time reflecting on broader themes of guilt, morality, and the destructive power of addiction. Readers' mental representations will undoubtedly enrich their understanding of the psychological depths of the human psyche.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study has examined some iconic works of Edgar Allan Poe through the lens of a cognitive approach. By engaging Text World Theory, literary analysis, and stylistic features with some specific episodes in three of Poe's selected short stories, this study has examined some significant questions related to the importance of the reader's mental representations in the comprehension and understanding of literary texts.

Through a meticulous analysis of some selected passages from the stories, the study has illuminated how a reader's background knowledge and experiences with the real world help in shaping the understanding of the literary texts. The interplay between the Discourse world and the Text world creates a mental space in the reader's mind, contributing to provide insights into the world of Poe's fiction. By analyzing some key elements such as characters, setting, focalization, and themes, this study has shown how these components harmonize within the reader's cognitive realm, resulting in producing coherent and emotionally charged contextual experiences.



The three investigated short stories in this study have pointed to an engagement of readers in a couple of significant social and psychological issues. Firstly, these short stories have addressed some experiences that exist in various venues in real life such as those caused by contagion, imprisonment, and addiction. Secondly, these stories engage readers in such a way as to warn them of perhaps meeting the same lots of the characters encountered in the fictional world. Thirdly, these narratives raise the readers' awareness about the possibility of overcoming these painful experiences.

The analysis has disclosed that Poe's choice of the narrative perspective contributes to the overall impact of horror, suspense, and psychological depth that are distinctive characteristic of his writing style. Whether narrated from the troubled and distracted mind of a first-person narrator, as in *The Black Cat* and *The Pit and the Pendulum* respectively, or through the detached focalization of a third-person narrator, as in *The Masque of the Red Death*, Poe skillfully immerses his readers into his macabre and gothic worlds.

The study has further underscored the important role of Poe's utilization of the unreliable narrator. Where narrators are expected to be the primary source of information in the texts, Poe's narrators break this rule. Moreover, the minimal descriptions of World-Building Elements in some instances in the selected stories is also remarkable. These two techniques, the unreliable narration and the deliberate lack of providing sufficient information about the characters and settings, prompt readers to seek information beyond what is questionable and not mentioned, urging readers to trigger their understanding of the narratives based on their own mental representations of the events.

Since the study has managed to analyze short stories, it could be possible to use Text World Theory to examine longer narratives like novels and dramatic works. This is primarily because the short story shares common elements with the other genres like characters, plot, themes, and setting.

By applying a cognitive approach to the analysis of literary texts, this study has demonstrated the significance of Text World Theory as a useful tool in understanding the complicated world of Poe's fiction. Examining how readers construct mental representations of Poe's

intricate narratives offers new insights on the lasting allure of his fictions.

#### Notes:

<sup>1-</sup> This section contains parts of the already published article: Abood, Ayad A. "A Study of Modality and Point of View in Some Selected Short Stories." *Journal of Basra Research for Human Sciences*, ISSN: 2707-3599 (Electronic) Vol. 43, Issue 4, 2018: 1-16. <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/article/155931>

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