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**HYSTERIA AS ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITY IN THE GOTHIC DISCOURSE
OF THE 19TH CENTURY:
THE CASE OF E.T.A. HOFFMANN, EDGAR ALLAN POE AND GUY DE
MAUPASSANT**

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***Abstract:** From its onset, the Gothic has attempted to challenge established norms and conventions, either for sensational effects or to question their homogenizing and reductive tendencies. The questioning or reinforcing of received notions of femininity in Gothic fiction has been much debated by critics, with the concept of masculinity coming second. The present paper discusses normative masculinity as it was perceived in the 19th century and how E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant challenge its validity by creating male characters who adopt a hysterical, almost feminine voice, contesting the belief that hysteria was a “female malady”. The characters expose their unconventional masculinity, which resists the model of the ‘ganzer Mann’ in Germany, ‘marketplace man’ in US and the ‘conjugal heterosexual’ in France.*

***Keywords:** male hysteria, Gothic fiction, normative masculinity, alternative masculinity, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, Guy de Maupassant.*

1. Introduction

Since Gothic texts address extensively the concept of otherness, gender studies have always been prolific interpretative lines for the genre, especially feminism and queer theory, with femininity and non-normative masculinity being more debated than the normative one. However, this may seem paradoxical as, in most cases, the Gothic

expresses the anxiety of the mainstream majority that it will be invaded and replaced by 'the other'. The present paper focuses on 19th century normative masculinity and its 'uncanny' double (the effeminate masculinity) present in subversive Gothic fiction written by male authors. In order to do so, the paper will discuss the concept of normative masculinity as viewed in the 19th century. Then it will consider hysteria and the hysterical narrative as alternative means of expression for male characters used to question normative masculinity, offering, at the same time, creative modes of unconventional masculinity. Given that nineteenth-century hysteria was, according to Goldstein (1991), "a conceptual space for the conventional, stereotypical definition of femininity", it is no coincidence that it became "potentially a conceptual space for the subversion of gender stereotypes" (p. 134). Finally, the article aims to demonstrate that all the three writers, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant, create male characters that subvert the conventions of normative masculinity as it was perceived during the times when the three writers wrote and published their fiction. In order to do so, the characters under scrutiny adopt a hysterical narrative within the Gothic genre, whose heroine, unlike male characters, is considered the "classic hysteric" (Sedgwick, 1986, p. vi).

All the three writers are characterized by their adherence to the "post-Enlightenment subjectivity" (Baker, 2007, p. 166) and to the Gothic. They create masculine figures that question "the construction of the unitary, rational Enlightenment subject" (Baker, 2007, p. 165) by incorporating "the 'mad', the non-rational, the 'passionate'" (Baker, 2007, p. 165). However, they are different from other alternative masculinities such as the "Noble Outlaw", "Satan", "Faust" or "Byronic Heroes" (Thorslev, 1965), who, even though they are unconforming by embracing a highly excessive and transgressive self, nonetheless belong to the heroic literary tradition. Hoffmann's, Poe's and Maupassant's hysterical men are closer to the "Hero of Sensibility", meaning the "Gloomy Egoist" or the "Man of Feeling", a late 18th century creation which describes "a hero who is distinguished not by daring exploits or superior intelligence, but quite simply by his capacities for feeling, mostly for the tender emotions - gentle and tearful love, nostalgia, and a pervasive melancholy" (Thorslev, 1965, p. 35). Such a character is easily recognizable in Hoffmann's tales where he acquires a dark, Gothic dimension, visible in his dubious sanity. Then, due to the increased interest in German literature in America, he crosses the ocean to encounter Poe's Dark Romantic sensibilities, mainly via Walter Scott's text about the German author, published in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (Cobb, 2008, p. 104). The American writer perfected this

hysterical character by giving him more often the role of the narrator, thus allowing him to dissect his madness with abnormal acuity. Later, he crosses again the ocean this time to France, where due to Baudelaire's translation of Poe's stories (Fusco, 1994, p. 49), he transforms into Maupassant's over-refined dandy and 'degenerate' bachelor.

Additionally, the three of them perpetuated a model of subversive masculinity that left a lasting impact on the Gothic art of the following century, from fiction to cinematography, music or fashion. Male Goths of the 1980s, the 21st century emo, singers and fans embracing dark alternative cultures such as post punk, dark wave revival, synthpop or electro-dark, adopt a form of androgyny – the tragedian, masochist, sentimental, antirational, feminine man – reminiscent of and influenced by 19th century Gothic masculinities.

2. Nineteenth century hysteria, normative masculinity and the Gothic

2.1. Normative masculinity and the 19th century

Connell's term, hegemonic masculinity, though coined in the 1980's, is still stirring controversy among critics. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell (2005), is "normative": it stands for "the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (p. 832). Many studies (Traister, 2000), (Friedman, 2010), (Hobbs, 2013) dedicated to the 19th century concept of masculinity in the British-American space revolve around normative and alternative masculinities, focusing mainly on how fragile and arbitrary the boundaries between them are. In *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick is among the first to challenge such binary oppositions by signalling the impossibility of setting boundaries between normative and non-normative, homosexual and heterosexual masculinities. Masculinity has always been "ambivalent, always complicated, always dependent on the exigencies of personal and institutional power" (Berger et al., 1995, p. 3). Despite its apparent sturdiness or robustness, to use words associated with the concept, masculinity has never been a 'safe' category, not even the normative or dominant category.

The whole idea of normativity and dominance has suffered subtle changes throughout time. Herbert Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (2008) analyses the changes in normative masculinity triggered by urbanization and alterations in social class system. By analysing

Robert Browning's, Thomas Carlyle's and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's work, the author comes to the conclusion that masculinity was not so important when it came to a man's identity. It was learned behaviour defined by self-repression and the exclusion of the feminine and the erotic. Broughton (as cited in Friedman, 2010, p. 1085) notes that texts written by male writers "actually share many of the concerns of nineteenth-century women's writings, such as dissatisfaction with the strictures of the normative Victorian marriage, and the burden of silence and repression that structured Victorian discourses of the self". In most male writing, patriarchal authority is being questioned and revealed as fragile. When it comes to the US, Chapman and Hendler (1999) warns against too much critical attention given to "masculine types such as the anti-domestic American Adam or the individual loner / revolutionary" marginalizing the so-called "sentimental man" (p.5).

However, there are critics, such as French and Rothery (2011, p. 142) who argue that "aspects of deep-seated and enduring forms of *hegemony*" and "an underlying and enduring patriarchal 'system' between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries" (p. 143) survived. In other words, beneath the shifting notion of hegemonic masculinity, a "fundamental *habitus* of masculine values" (p. 153) persisted. The two authors construct their argumentation using Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to demonstrate that honour, virtue, responsibility to others, self-control, independence are constant male values (p. 153). To these ingrained values, we add middle-class conceptualization of masculinity around domesticity at the end of the 19th century: the man as 'pater familias', the head and provider of the family. When analysing the three authors, I will return to the concepts of normative and non-normative masculinity in relation to the three cultures Hoffmann, Poe and Maupassant come from.

2.2. Hysteria – a 'female malady'?

Hysteria has a long history of terminological debate and confusion. Associated successively with spirit possession, "wandering womb", mesmerism, hypnotism, and finally with anxiety, borderline personality disorder or other "dissociative, conversion, and somatoform syndromes" (North, 2015), hysteria as a diagnosis or symptom has known a convoluted path: from superstition and pseudo-science to modern day psychiatry. However, it is female hysteria that has caught most critics' attention. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault (1988, pp. 136-158) dedicates one sub-chapter to both hysteria and hypochondria as seen by the 18th century physicians, with the former considered a female disease located in the womb and the latter, in the stomach and the intestines.

The 19th century take on hysteria added another layer to the already confusing and controversial ‘disease’, that of guilt, as it became associated to immorality. Women have “frail fibers”, they are morally weaker, thus more prone to sin (Foucault, 1988, pp. 156-158). The moment madness, in general, and hysteria, in particular, were considered moral diseases, hysteria became both feminine and immoral. It was “metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady”, even when diagnosed in men (Showalter, 1987, p. 4). According to the same famous study of hysteria, “moral insanity redefined madness, not as a loss of reason, but as deviance from socially accepted behaviour” (p. 29). Therefore, the asylum of the 19th century, following “the familiar model”, endeavoured to correct this aberrant behaviour by bringing “madness into the circle of the familiar”, thus domesticating “the brutish lunatic” (p. 28). The public asylum became one big family where the medical superintendent and his wife act as a father and mother to their patients, and the attendants, as older siblings (p. 28). The feminization of hysteria meant that men displaying its symptoms should necessarily be effeminate, womanish, sentimental or homosexual. “Thus ‘the young effeminate man’ (thrice feminized by his youth, effeminate disposition, and emotionalism) embodies the cultural stereotype of the male hysteric, since it was assumed that men could be overpowered by a female disease only if they were of a type undermined by femininity to begin with” (Kavka, 1998, available online).

At the end of the 19th century, Charcot, French neurologist, pays special attention to male hysteria, though much of his work was later overshadowed by his interest in hypnotism. He is the first to try to systemize its symptoms by coming up with four stages of hysteria, which failed to be sustained by later research. However, what makes Charcot stand apart from his contemporaries is his challenging of the “established beliefs that hysteria was typically female and linked to gynaecology” (Barberis, 2018, pp. 180). The symptoms are the same, regardless of the patient’s sex and the disease has no gynaecological base, being triggered by a traumatic event (p. 176).

Charcot’s theories, nonetheless, are not devoid of social and gender bias. According to his theories, men from lower social classes are more prone to develop forms of hysteria, since they are often exposed to traumas and accidents, “the perturbing consequences of painful moral emotions” (Ouerd, as cited in Barberis, 2018, p. 189). Also, far from being effeminate, they are closer to beastly instincts. “Closer to nature than upper-class men, hysterical men are closely linked to women, who have traditionally been linked to nature through the biological processes of childbearing” (Barberis, 2018, p. 188). Another gender-

biased assumption is related to the different symptomology displayed by hysterics, depending on their gender, with the male patients exhibiting one permanent symptom, closer to melancholia, while women are more capricious, volatile, reporting a multitude of symptoms: “Men still remain stubborn, tenacious, severe, even austere in the monosymptomatic nature of their hysteria. Their symptomatology remains stereotypically ‘masculine’ [...] The male may suffer from hysteria but is never a hysteric” (Kavka, 1998, available online). Women, mostly confined in a domestic space, are not exposed to the traumatic events of the outside reality, domestic traumas being completely overlooked: “Women have psychic interiority, either capricious or mysterious, whereas men consist of visible exteriority, a hard surface in contact with a hard world” (Kavka, 1998, available online).

The male characters discussed in this paper fail to meet the 19th century standard of the “homo hystericus”. They display symptoms of what was considered female hysteria (sudden change of mood, excessive behaviour, capriciousness), which are all deeply interiorized. At the same time, most of them are ‘domestic’ characters, limited to domestic and familial spaces – the marital household, the manor, the bachelor apartment.

2.3. Hysterical narrative

Apart from assigning symptoms of hysteria to their characters, the three writers under scrutiny, when settling for first person, male narrators, adopt a ‘hysterical voice’, most of the time, attributed to female characters. Hysterical narratives, “the waste-basket term of literary criticism”, are described as “fragmented, evasive, and ambiguous”, “unmanly and incoherent”, adopting “disturbing connections with femininity”, thus “rigidly gendered” (Showalter, 1993, pp. 24, 25). Both experimental and fantastic narratives fall into this category, hence failing to comply with the demands of literary realism which refuses to “tolerate any irrational elements”, just like the patriarchal discourse of psychoanalysis (Jacobus, as cited in Showalter 1987, pp. 201).

It is Max Nordau (2016), in his infamous *Degeneration*, who labelled fantasy, and consequently the Gothic, as decadent and hysterical. Both Sedgwick (1986) and Brown (1987) read Perkins’s gothic story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, as an example of a typically hysterical narrative that “caricatures domesticity” (Brown, 1987, p. 152). What criticism overlooks when discussing Perkins’s classic is that its writer confessed to having been inspired by Poe’s in her autobiography (Hume, 2002). If her narrator is a hysteric, she is one inspired by Poe’s neurotic, self-obsessed narrators. It is Harold Bloom (2006, p. 1),

who famously compared Poe, the Dark Romantic, to Emerson, the Transcendentalist, the former being considered “our hysteria, our uncanny unanimity in our repressions”, while the latter, “the mind of America”, the father of American pragmatism. Emerson appears to be a patriarchal figure, a beacon of reason, and Poe, with his proclivity to create highly disturbed characters, the opposite, a feminine man, bearing one very negative attribute of femininity- madness.

2.4. Gothic and hysteria

If hysteria is “a female malady”, thus related to femininity, a hysterical man becomes a feminine man. If it was initially associated with spirit possession (North, 2015), then being a hysterical man meant being possessed by a feminine spirit, “inhabited, displaced, or self-alienated...by uncanny forces” (Brinks, 2003, p. 12), in this case, by a feminine other. Terry Castle (1995), when defining the “female man” as adopting characteristics typically associated to women, “moodiness, heightened sensitivity, susceptibility to hysteria”, is signalling the gradual blurring of boundaries between femininity and masculinity, created by the 18th century cult of sensibility (p. 34). When it comes to boundary breaking, the Gothic seems the most appropriate genre to create alienating, uncanny effects. “Gothic fiction opens possibilities for depicting gender and sexual transgressions not available in other, more ‘respectable’ genres” (Neff, 2010, p. 6).

It was Eve Sedgwick (1986) in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* who claimed that the blurring of boundaries between self and other, between exteriors and interiors creates fear. Concerned with “received notions of masculinity and femininity” (p. vii), Judith Butler (1999) raises a very pertinent question: “is the breakdown of gender binaries, for instance, so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender?” (p. viii).

What the three writers seem to imply indirectly, through their characters, is that masculinity is never fixed, always ambivalent, at many times at odds with the norms of the institutional power or going against patriarchal family. By adopting a hysterical discourse within the framework of the Gothic, they question received notions of masculinity and display a fascination with otherness, with a feminine other, without actually being feminist themselves. The symptoms of hysteria as exposed by 19th century doctors: precipitated discourse, possession, hypnotic trance, hypersexuality, mysticism and excessive behaviour (Goldstein, 1991), (Goulet, 2013), (Finn, 2017) are to be found in the characters under scrutiny.

2. Gothic hysterics – from fear to total rejection of domesticity

3.1. Hysteria and Hoffmann

Hoffmann enjoyed a wide readership during his life, despite harsh criticism, notably Goethe's and Scott's shocked rejection of his art on account of his eccentricity. After his death, he gained the reputation of "Gespenster-Hoffmann" (ghost-Hoffmann), and his work was ignored for almost a century (Röder, 2013, p. 1). In the 20th century, Hoffmann's work gains critical attention, most of the studies focusing on psychoanalytical, biographical and narratological readings of his fiction.

"Hoffmann was fascinated by the porous boundaries between madness and reality, life and death during a time when the psychosomatic body was threatened by social and political as well as personal experience" (Spreizer, 2013, p. 237). In order to express this fascination, he created alienated male characters always walking the thin line between effeminacy, deceitfulness and virility, and normative masculinity. Most of them are examples of hysterics (displaying the symptoms associated with hysteria as a female malady): precipitated discourse, extreme moodiness, excessive and obsessive behaviour, similar to religious devotion, and hypersexuality. They adopt this so-called feminine self to reject the model of masculinity, of the 'whole man', idealized in the epoch and, ultimately, to run away from a domestic life. Kessel (2003) discusses this ideal masculinity as it was imagined by the educated élite during the late Enlightenment in German speaking countries. The 'ganzer Mann', "(the whole, well-rounded, but also 'real' or 'proper' man)" (Kessel, 2003, p. 2), is most definitely a fictitious projection, an ideal, which combines in one formula, "the scientist, the artist and the warrior" (p. 2). Such a man had to combine reason with empathy, passion with sensitivity. His sexuality, a mixture between reason and controlled passion found expression "within the orderly context of the family" (Kessel, 2003, p. 6). This harmonious "model of a Protestant upper-class man" suggested, according to Hull (as cited in Kessel, 2003), that "sexual, professional-societal, and political identities were intimately linked" (p. 3).

In "The Vampire" (Vampirismus) (2018), one of the first modern vampire tales, written after Polidori's novel (2008), but prior to Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (2016), the male character, Count Hyppolitus falls into a frenzy after discovering that his young, innocent wife has unusual pregnancy cravings. One night he follows his wife to the graveyard only to discover that she is feasting on the corpse of a young man together with other half-

naked, old women. The count's worst nightmare comes true as his beautiful wife turned into her mother, a most repulsive woman, with "fingers cold and stiff as death" and eyes "deprived of the faculty of sight" (Hoffmann, 2018, pp. 165). A psychoanalytical reading of the unconscious dread the count feels of his mother-in-law and wife would reveal the same fear of domesticity, fatherhood and marriage.

Most of Hoffmann's characters are overly sensitive loners that avoid the duties of a patriarchal family. In "The Mines of Falun" ("Die Bergwerke der Falun") (2018), Elis Froebom leaves his bride-to-be in the morning of their wedding to go deep in the mines of Falun to ask for the blessing of the Queen of the Mines, a maternal figure meant to be a substitute for his lost mother. The young man dies as the stone womb of the mines collapse on top of him in one last smothering embrace. In "The Lost Reflection" ("Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht") (2018), Erasmus becomes obsessed with a prostitute in Florence to the point of giving his own reflection to her. His obsessive pursuit of Giulietta transforms him into one of many Hoffmann's hysterics: agitated, anxious, moody and prone to hypersexuality. When he returns home, his wife notices that he has no reflection in the mirror and she subsequently rejects him. To her, he is no longer 'whole', no longer 'Ganzer mann', no longer able to be the head of the family. Giulietta, by taking his reflection, emasculated him.

In "The Sandman" ('Der Sandmann') (2018), also compared to Maupassant's "Horla" by Jackson (1981), as both are "fantasies of subjective dislocation" (p. 29), the protagonist, Nathanael, who is also one of the narrators, struggles between rationality and madness. His nightmare started when he was a child, growing up in the bosom of a seemingly happy family. Every evening he would spend time with his brothers, sisters and mother in his father's room, enjoying his stories until it was time to go to bed as the Sandman was coming. When Nathanael asked his youngest sister's attendant who the Sandman was, she gave him a dark, perverted variant of the mythical character, one who sprinkles sand on children's eyes till they are bloody, then he steals them to feed his creatures on the half-moon. From that moment on, Nathanael developed an obsession with the terrifying creature, associating it with his father's lawyer, Coppelius, whom he blames for his father's death and his family's subsequent hardships. Each time, the young man seems to find some domestic peace, for example after his betrothal to Clara, the Sandman makes his entrance, under a different disguise and name, triggering Nathanael's hysteria. The use of multiple narrators, Nathanael, Clara and his friend, with the last two appearing more reliable, makes us question the protagonist's story. Is Nathanael really followed

around by the malevolent Sandman or can he not separate reality from illusion when he thinks he discovers his archenemy in the figure of Coppelius or Coppola?

Just like in “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Perkins, 2009) or the “The Black Cat” (Poe, 2004), the protagonist projects his fear of domesticity on an exterior element. His erratic behaviour is triggered by the literal interpretation of the metaphor of the Sandman and by his irrational fear of losing his eyes. Nathanael seems far from the ‘whole-man’ (‘ganzer Mann’), his hysteria and his inability to accept a rational explanation feminize him. As said, the German ideal of masculinity at the end of 18th century imagines men as self-sufficient in an almost pre-romantic longing for androgyny. A self-sufficient man that covers both accepted ‘feminine’ traits, sensitivity and empathy, and ‘male’ traits, controlled passion and reason, but only in the context of the family, may seem contradictory. All these features need the validation of a family to be accepted by society. Paradoxically, Clara, his fiancée and later his wife, seem closer to this model of perfection. She stands for the voice of reason and logic, the perfect embodiment of the Enlightenment ideals of rationalism and science, always trying to offer logical explanations for Nathanael’s hallucinations.

Towards the end of the story, Nathanael seems to have overcome his obsession with the Sandman and embraced a domestic life alongside Clara when the Sandman reappears as Coppola. Thrown into a frenzy, the protagonist imagines his wife to be a doll, an automaton, and wants to kill her by hurling her off an old tower they were visiting; instead, he ends up killing himself. Defined by liminality, being both a figment of imagination and an oppressive father figure, The Sandman is a gothic villain *par excellence*. Freud (2004, p. 424), when defining *the uncanny*, was inspired by Nathanael’s obsession with losing his eyes, which he interpreted as a deep-seated castration complex. However, I would argue that the repulsive figure of the Sandman, an example of aggressive masculinity, but also a Doppelgänger bachelor, stands for the main character’s fear of domesticity and his unconscious refusal to adopt the pater familias, ‘ganzer Mann’ role. The repulsive character towers over the protagonist’s father, taking advantage of the latter’s weakness, and pushing him to his untimely death. Nathanael feels unconsciously drawn to this aggressive masculinity, the same way he felt attracted to Olympia, the mute, sex-doll who would listen to “his poems, fancy sketches, visions, romances” “with great reverence” (Hoffmann, 2018, pp. 75), unlike Clara, who questioned all his extravagancies. His erotic obsession with Olympia, the opposite of ‘the angel of the house’, the character’s acute sensitivity, excessive imagination, his self-destructive tendencies – Nathanael prefers

to succumb to his otherness to the point of self-annihilation to avoid domestic ‘bliss’ – coupled with his precipitated telling of his story turn him into a ‘female’ man, into the opposite of the *ganzer Mann*.

3.2 Hysteria and Poe

A lot has been written about Poe’s female characters, starting with his famous assertion “the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover” (Poe, 2017, available online). The emphasis is always placed on the dead, beautiful woman who is constantly looked at, spoken about, but the lips, the voice belong to the lover, in most cases a male narrator, whose (non)normative masculinity is seldom discussed by criticism. For an unexperienced reader of Gothic fiction, the genre is just an exercise in escapism with no connection to the context in which it was written. However, this genre reflects anxieties, fears contemporary with the society in which the writer lived and created. To better understand how Poe constructs his male characters, one has to visit the concept of masculinity as it was imagined, propagated in and regulated by the American society, first half of the 19th century.

Kimmel (2005) argues that to be a man, at the turn of the 19th century America, meant to be a responsible adult: “[To] be manly was to accept adult responsibilities as a provider, producer, and protector of a family” (p. 38). According to the same author, two models of manhood were prevalent: “the genteel patriarch”, represented by the landed gentry, and the “heroic artisan”, meaning the farmer and the artisan (p.39). These models were characterized by hard-work, aggression, independence, virility and familial values. However, around 1830, a new model came forth, the marketplace man whose identity depended on success “in the capitalist marketplace, from his accumulated wealth, power, and capital” (Kimmel, 2005, p. 38). “The self-made man” had to seek his own fortune in a mobile society in which identity was increasingly fluid. “Achieving manhood became a concern for men; for the first time in American history, young men experienced ‘identity crises’” (Kimmel, 2005, p. 39). In fact, Kimmel (2005) argues that, to be successful in the market, “the American middle-class man had to first gain control over his self”, which meant also control over one’s body and sexuality (p. 39). The economic and sexual behaviour were so interlaced that a contemporary writer came with the phrase “spermatic economy” – if a man could control his inclination for vice, his bad habits of “luxury, indolence, voluptuousness and sensuality” and his sexuality, always “predatory, lustful,

and amoral”, he could achieve success (p. 40). The belief that sexual fantasies, daydreaming might render the young man effeminate, diseased, weak, possibly leading to premature death created enough sexual panic to drive him to project his anxiety on others (women, non-white, immigrant men) (Kimmel, 2005, p. 42). However, David Leverenz (1989) claims that in the 19th century American male writers “sought alternative states of manly creativity” in a world obsessed with economic success (p. 14). One such example is undoubtedly Poe, who created fascinating, but also disturbing alternative masculinities.

Broadly speaking, there are two models of masculinity Poe uses in his stories: one is very contemporary and very attuned to the urban American – the marketplace and self-made man, I mentioned earlier; the other is the atemporal aristocrat, somehow akin to the genteel patriarch. The latter is meant to illustrate Poe’s fascination with aristocracy, decadent and on the brink of extinction, atemporal and aspatial (though the setting alludes to Europe, the birthplace of the Gothic). In the former category, one can include “The Black Cat” (2004), his famous story of “marriage and murder” (Neff, 2010, p. 18), ironically described by its narrator as a “most *homely* narrative” and “a series of *mere* household events” (Poe, 2004, p. 61, *my emphasis*). The words highlighted are suggestive of an accepted normality in which domestic violence was a daily occurrence. The unnamed narrator, probably the representative of a whole category, has to “embrace normative masculinity through marriage” (Neff, 2010, p. 66), but he needs to be a successful self-made man as well. His subsequent hysteria, his extreme agitation and moodiness, his final surrender to an extreme act are brought about by his being caught between the demands of a patriarchal family life and his (self-)imposed role of a successful provider. Additionally, the “docility and humanity of [his] dispossession” and his “tenderness of heart” (Poe, 2004, p. 62) are at odds with models of normative masculinity, indicating, thus, an effeminate nature.

Urban America is the site of the main character’s struggle, a place of increased violence and economic competition. The narrator does not seem to fulfil his ‘duties’ as the family is facing financial problems. To fail at being “successful in the market [...] meant one was impotent, effeminate, and less than a man” (Neff, 2010, p. 79). His failure coupled with his innate ‘feminine’ nature attracts ridicule from his peers, leading to frustration and growing anger. To assert his masculinity, he resorts to aggression towards the physically weaker members of his household, wife and pets, and to heavy drinking as a form of male-male bonding. Male violence, drinking and “violent codes of masculinity that required constant bravado” were favourite activities in antebellum urban America, “with taverns

playing a central part in male culture” (Neff, 2010, p. 85). In his case, murder becomes his annihilation as a pater familias, but also a desperate assertion of masculinity. Ironically, his monomaniac obsession with the black cat, especially with his eyes, his agitated discourse, acute sensitivity, irritability and nervousness turn him into a hysterical murderer. His final act is similar to Perkins’ narrator’s futile crawling over her husband’s body – a desperate act of trying to free oneself from the chains of normative gender roles.

Interestingly enough, Poe’s female characters, just like Hoffmann’s, are more sensible than their spouses or lovers; Ligeia, Morella, even the murdered wife in “The Black Cat” (2004) try to talk some sense into the sensitive lovers, to no avail. Another similarity to Hoffmann is the obsession with the eyes. Nathanael is afraid he might lose his sight, that he might be castrated by a male figure of authority, but most of all he associates the loss of eyes with that of freedom from marital engagements.

In “The Tell-Tale Heart” (2004), Poe describes another household incident in which the narrator is a hysterical killer, suffering from an over-acuteness of the sense, who tries hard to prove his sanity while confessing his obsession with the old man’s vulture eye. The relationship between the old man and the narrator is very unclear. They share the same house, but whether they are family related or not remains a mystery. It might be speculated that the old man, though frail and sickly, is a patriarchal figure of some authority that unknowingly threatens the main character’s fragile masculinity. The latter feels constantly watched by the eye which, through metonymic displacement, becomes synonym with the old man, thus with patriarchal order and authority. The pressure to conform to the antebellum normative masculinity, the narrator lives with the old man, thus failing to be independent, pushes him to murder – a violent assertion of masculinity. His precipitated discourse, self-confessed nervousness, constant oscillation between love and hate for the victim and final impulsive confession betray his hysterical, ‘effeminate’ nature. In fact, Gita Rajan (2009, p. 52) claims that the unnamed and ungended narrator is female. She kills the old man whom she both hates and loves to escape patriarchal order and gain her freedom. Therefore, “The Tell-Tale Heart” becomes “a tale of escape, but escape into deliberate captivity so that she can articulate a female discourse” (p. 53). Her capture allows her to tell her story using her own voice, in her own distinctive manner.

Poe’s atemporal aristocrat is in most cases greatly indebted to Gothic re-imaginings of aristocracy: overly refined, anguished, in love with art, suffering from “a morbid acuteness of the senses”, “sensitive nervousness” (Poe, 2004, p. 175) or “excited...diseased intelligence” (p. 5), “given to most intense and painful meditation” (p.

166). Poe's effeminate males are the perfect illustration of the romantic, gothic nineteenth century aesthetic that "reclaimed aspects of the feminine as a foundation for male alternatives" (Goodlad, 2007, p. 106). Not surprisingly, when writing *Edgar Allan Poe: Sa vie et ses ouvrages* (Baudelaire, 2016), Baudelaire found a kindred spirit in Poe's literary persona, a *poète maudit*, just like him. Going back to Poe's aristocratic effeminate men, one notices two categories: the lover (the narrators of "Ligeia" (2004), "Morella" (2004) and "Berenice" (2004)) and the confirmed bachelors (Dupin from "The Murders in Rue Morgue" (2004) and Roderick from "The Fall of the House of Usher" (2004), the latter allegedly inspired by Hoffmann, according to Von Der Lippe (1977)). The lover has the same murderous tendencies, just like the narrator in "The Black Cat", with the victim being the wife or the fiancée. The same desire to escape domesticity is prevalent in the three stories; mainly due to the spouses' illnesses and the burden of seeing them decay, a situation which was well too familiar to Poe. Deep down, all these almost androgynous narrators dream of Dupin's freedom to roam the streets of Paris, unhindered by any domestic duties or by the pressure to assume the normative masculinity of the marketplace man. At the same time, Hoffmann's characters reject the 'ganzer Mann' model by choosing ill-fated affairs with demonic or elusive lovers over their too normal and down-to-earth wives.

3.3. Hysteria and Maupassant

From Poe's aristocratic bachelors, the analysis moves to Maupassant's sterile, self-sufficient and sometimes quite sexless bachelors. Robert Nye (2007) discusses the bias regarding French masculinity, which has always been suspect, mainly because of "French excess in the arts of civilized comportment" (p. 232), meaning its overly civilized and somehow effeminate nature. Thus, since starting with the turn of the 18th century French philosophers and educators have regarded "conjugal heterosexuality and the familiar model" as pivotal when it came to integrating male individuals in society (Surkis, 2006, p. 11). Most often "perversion" was considered the threat interposing between masculinity and conjugality (p. 11). Thus, students, soldiers and bachelors were constantly warned against less orthodox practices, with marriage becoming a safe haven. Considering that starting with mid-19th century or even earlier France was faced with an unprecedented low birth-rate, single men were a potential threat to social order. This presupposed 'sterility' was explained using the pseudo-scientific language of degeneration. "There was a particular tendency in France to consider suicide and crime, alcoholism, mental illness,

venereal disease, and even tuberculosis as the behavioral and organic symptoms of a degeneracy infecting the whole population” (Surkis, 2006, p. 77). Additionally, Christopher Forth (2007, p. 92) claims that after the defeat suffered by the French army during the Franco-Prussian war, many physicians expressed concern over the ‘softening’ of male individuals who became physically weak, effeminate and overly intellectual. Alcohol, sexual licentiousness and excessive study all led to a loss of vitality of the male body.

Madness, in general, and hysteria, in particular, was thought to threaten the already too ‘soft’ French masculinity. Ever since Charcot dedicated his work to categorizing and curing hysteria, male hysteria included “One needs to be very ordinary, very common, very reasonable to not be classed among hysterics” (Maupassant as cited in Straub, 2015, p. 19). Flaubert (as cited in Goldstein, 1991) openly admitted to having been diagnosed with hysteria: “For I maintain that men can be hysterics just like women, and that I am one.... I have recognized all my symptoms: the ball [rising in the throat], the [sensation of the] nail in the back of the skull” (p. 134).

When discussing Maupassant’s fantastic prose, it is difficult to select one hysterical male character, since most of them fall under this category. *Fin de siècle* comes with many anxieties and controversial theories, such as Morel’s theory of degeneration, and other notoriously decadent writers willing to challenge preconceived ideas about society, morality and gender. Maupassant, a realist writer, tries his hand at fantastic prose, coming with a wide range of highly disturbed male characters. Most famous example is “The Horla” (“Le Horla”) (2013) in which the narrator, a bachelor, initially very happy with his life, starts feeling an alien power taking over his house and finally his self. The entity has no name attached to it; it is something utterly unexplainable. At some point, the unnamed narrator looks himself in the mirror only to discover that he has no reflection since the ‘unnamable’ was standing between him and the mirror. The loss of reflection calls to mind Hoffmann’s story in which Erasmus gives away his reflection at his lover’s request in an almost Faustian pact. In the case of “The Horla”, the effect is even more uncanny since the reflection is not stolen, just absorbed or covered by another who starts possessing the main character. Considering that initially hysteria was seen as spirit possession, the narrator seems a classical example of a hysteric, displaying all the symptoms: excessive nervousness, anxiety, exacerbated sensitivity. Additionally, his drama takes place in the domestic space, but devoid of any feminine presence. In fact, most of Maupassant’s characters are men of interiors, who choose the private space over the masculine public sphere. Therefore, it would not be far-fetched to consider the male narrator possessed by a

female other robbing him of his domestic space. The narrator finds solace in public spaces, but he always returns home to find it haunted. His final gesture is as violent as that made by “The Black Cat” narrator: he sets his house on fire to escape the usurper but forgets about his servants trapped inside.

“Him?” or “The Terror” (“Lui?”) (2013) is very similar to “The Horla”, excepting the violent ending – the narrator is possessed by another who claims his house and his personal objects. The main character’s solution is not to burn down the house but to marry someone, anyone, as if suggesting that a domestic space would be more tolerable with a female companion. As stated, the bachelor was a controversial figure in the epoch, his choice of staying single being considered somehow unnatural. To this, we add the over-refinement of many of the French author’s characters. For example, in “The Hair” (“La chevelure”) (2013), a patient in a mental asylum explains how he fell in love with a tress of hair he found in an old desk. Up until that moment, he has never been in love, leading the life of a free bachelor and enjoying his passion for antiquities which he associates with ladies of bygone times. After discovering the long, blond tress of hair, his initial fascination turns into erotomania, verging on mysticism to such a degree that he completely loses his mind. Just like the narrators of the previously discussed short stories, he lives alone with no desire to fulfill society’s expectations and start up a family. Moreover, his being possessed by a dead female other is reminiscent of Poe’s female revenants who haunt their lovers long after their deaths.

In “The Apparition” (“L’Apparition”) (2013), the old Marquis de la Tour-Samuel recounts to a gathering of people a most unusual encounter he had in old manor when he was a young man. A close friend asked him to retrieve his papers hidden in a desk in the bedroom he used to share with his deceased wife whom he deeply loved but died shortly after they had got married. The narrator travels to his friend’s old manor to accomplish the latter’s desperate wish only to be scared out of his wits by a tall woman dressed in white who begs him to comb her long, dark hair. The encounter takes place in the bedroom, the most intimate domestic space, which soon becomes a place of unspeakable horror for the narrator. It is not so much the supernatural apparition that terrifies him, but the unbearable intimacy of her cold hair which still clings to his cape after he ran away from the manor and reached his lodgings. The story calls to mind “The Hair”, with the two narrators being both attracted and repulsed by an uncanny femininity and the domestic intimacy it fosters. The husband bereaved by his young wife’s death recalls Poe’s grief-stricken male characters, who, after the loss of their wives, succumb to madness.

A similar story in which the female other is seen as both repellent and tantalizing is “On Cats” (“Sur les chats”) (2013). Just like in Poe’s “The Black Cat”, the narrator, a confirmed bachelor, projects his contradictory feelings about women on felines which he loves to caress, but would also like to smother as they are both sensual and treacherous. Two memories stand out in the narrator’s soliloquy: the first, when as a child he watched a cat dying as it was struggling to release itself from a trap and the second, when awoken from an erotic dream just in the key moment, he found his hand caressing the round body of a big cat. In “A Divorce Case” (“Un cas de divorce”) (2013) a lawyer pleads for a young woman’s divorce case as she was neglected and mistreated by her husband. He reads extracts from the latter’s diary to prove that he suffers from “poetic madness”, “hysterical dementia and corrupted decadence” (p. 217, p. 223, my translation). The husband completely lost his mind after he got married to the woman he initially worshipped. Just like Poe’s insane narrators, he exposes his madness by confessing in writing his hatred for the physical aspect of marriage and his wife’s body. Instead, however, he develops a pathological attraction to flowers. If initially his love for flowers exposes an almost feminine nature, an embracement of a feminine other as a reaction against marital duties, his obsession soon turns into erotomania. He describes in minute details the texture, smell and colour of his new companions, among which the orchids, with their intoxicating flavour, warm sap and pink petals, are his favourite. The greenhouse, especially the hot and humid room where he keeps the orchids, becomes the marital bedroom. No wonder, the lawyer, a respectable member of society whose reliable narrative frames that of the lunatic husband, calls him a hysteric and a degenerate, as his ‘perversion’ is a threat to domestic and conjugal domesticity.

Another story where hysteria is indirectly alluded to is “Mad?” (“Un fou?”) (2013). The death of the narrator’s friend, Jacques Parent, in an asylum, prompts the former to tell the story of their last encounter. What is worth noting about Jacques is his incessant agitation and the fact that he is constantly hiding his hands in the pockets. Previously, I have said that hysteria was associated to spirit possession and later, through Charcot’s less than orthodox practices, linked to hypnotism, meaning the possession of another. If the hypersensitive narrators of “Him?” or “The Horla” seem possessed by an alien other, Jacques Parent confesses to being able to possess both animals and objects. The question mark in the title is meant to cast doubt on the (in)sanity of the main character and, somehow, is in tune with the fin de siècle fascination for the unusual combination between

occultism and psychiatry. The main character is just one in a long line of lonely bachelors created by Maupassant, who desperately haunt the deserted precincts of their apartments.

Far from being a warning against bachelorhood, Maupassant's fantastic prose offers an alternative to the normative masculinity of fin de siècle France. The narrators discussed openly reject marriage as unnecessary or abhorrent; therefore, they adopt a hysterical discourse that gothicizes them. They choose an alternative masculinity by embracing a female other in a desire for an androgynous unity. Nonetheless, even though Maupassant, just like other fin de siècle writers, tries to recuperate effeminacy as an alternative against combative masculinity, he was not a feminist. All these decadent dandies, Baudelaire, Maupassant, Wilde are not masculine women, they are men who want to free themselves from any bourgeois constraints by recreating "themselves through androgynous possibilities" (Goodlad, 2007, p. 107). According to Goodlad, feminists such as Fayad and Cixous have dismissed androgyny as expressing "a flawed patriarchal desire for wholeness" (p. 107).

4. Conclusion

Thematic and structural similarities between the three writers have been extensively explored, with Cobb (2008) investigating Hoffmann's and Poe's fascination with mesmerism and metempsychosis, Gruener (1909) analysing the commonalities between "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "Das Majorat" and Von Der Lippe (1977) and Labriola (2002) discussing the two writers' similar use of the image of 'the double'. Poe's influence on Maupassant was researched by Moore (1918), Vines (1999), who both make an extensive study of the latter's foreign affinities, and Urdiales (2015), who approaches the theme of madness in both authors. However, this article's main aim was not to show that these writers directly influenced one another, but that they all created alternative masculinities, which, on the one hand, are in tune with the "Hero of Sensibility" (a late 18th century creation and combination between the "Gloomy Egoist" or the "Man of Feeling" (Thorslev, 1965) and, on the other hand, go a step further by adopting a female hysterical voice. Since sentimentality and sensibility, according to Haggerty (as cited in Heiland, 2004, p. 12) "threaten established social orders", with the latter considered "a 'symptom' of what a culture has repressed" (p. 12), these characters are already transgressive, reflecting existing anxieties about gender roles. By assuming the symptoms of so-called female hysteria – excessive, volatile behaviour and moodiness, as opposed to male

hysteria, which is constant and austere – these characters, besides challenging received notions of normative masculinity, adopt a more androgynous persona, free of gender constraints.

Additionally, to question the ideology of domesticity, all the three writers challenge models of masculinity admired in the 19th century: the ‘ganzer Mann’, the marketplace man, the conjugal heterosexual, all family men, dedicated to a harmonious life of domestic bliss. In order to un-do such categorical and utopian structures, Hoffman, Poe and Maupassant create hysterical characters within the Gothic genre which allows them “to baffle every attempt to summarization of meaning and limiting, repressive interpretation” (Cixous & Cohen, 1974, p. 389). Mixing madness with the Gothic creates ambiguity and ‘uncanny’, disturbing effects and the right space for alternative ways of expressing masculinity and male desire. Hoffmann’s characters chase impossible partners in an attempt to flee domesticity and normative masculinity, Poe’s resort to domestic violence or to effeminate aristocracy, while Maupassant’s characters choose bachelorhood and an almost androgynous self in an attempt to distance themselves from the conjugal heterosexual.

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