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The Ethical Aspect of Disease: Poe's "Morella" and *Life*

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Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe's obsession with the morbid and the death of beautiful women not only serves as the embodiment of the sources of melancholy, but also functions as the embodiment of the beautiful. Readings of Poe's terror tales commonly emphasize the beauty that is beyond the realms of ordinary life and even human perception. These readings constitute what I call aesthetic readings of Poe's works. This paper attempts to develop an alternative reading of Poe, which involves the ethical aspect of disease and the notion of life. I argue that many of Poe's readers, however impressive their readings may be, understand "disease" in a negative way and hence might overlook the insights within Poe's tales. While aesthetic readings celebrate Poe's dark, destructive, morbid, and even nihilist style, an ethical reading of Poe intends to illustrate that disease can "liberate" an individual through the "transmutation of values" and leads to the affirmation of life. Life, in this sense, refers not to a particular individual life, but to that which is never completely specified and always indefinite. The tale "Morella" depicts a return to life—but that which returns is difference instead of identity, and that which returns brings a new mode of living. This new mode of living requires people to know life as such differently, to know what is in oneself as more-than-individual, to actively engage with vitality, and to eventually realize that life is impersonal and indefinite.

Keywords

Poe, "Morella," Deleuze, life, disease, Nietzsche

Edgar Allan Poe's short tale "Morella" is conventionally found to be related to other tales such as "Ligeia," "Berenice," and "The Fall of the House of Usher." As Jules Zanger observes, "[a] customary device of contemporary Poe criticism is to explicate one tale in the light of several others to which it appears to have some thematic or structural or symbolic affinities" (533). This device can be conveniently justified partly because of Poe's own belief in mechanical and mathematical designations of composition, that is, his belief that a structure, or a style, possesses commonality, if not universality, and that its effects can be invariably measured. The link between these tales lies in such themes as the death of a beloved woman, the perversity of a prolonged or premature death, and the protagonist's fanatic obsession with a woman that eventually leads to self-destruction. It is therefore not surprising that Poe's tales have usually been labeled as "morbid." "Moralists have always wondered helplessly why Poe's 'morbid' tales need have been written," D. H. Lawrence states, and he justifies Poe's writing by claiming that "[t]hey need to be written because old things need to die and disintegrate . . . before anything else can come to pass" (71). We may thus read the morbid perversity in Poe's writing as something new, something emergent, and, more importantly, as I will argue, something that "carr[ies] life to the state of a non-personal power" (Deleuze and Parnet 50).

As is widely agreed, Poe's terror tales have a strong connection with the Gothic tradition. Terror tales play a crucial role in Poe's writing not simply because the short tale form appealed to the readers of his time, but also because in his refined terror tales, Poe, in his unique grotesque style, pursues something in the human mind that is inconceivable and imperceptible. Poe once mentioned, "[i]f in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is . . . of the soul,—that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources . . ." (qtd. in Fisher 84). His persistent intent to create terror effects in his writing can be understood as his insistence on the aesthetic sublime, however perverse that may be. Poe's goal might be termed "Gothic sublimity," since the term "Gothic sublime" refers to the intricate connection between terror and the sublime. The term is derived from Edmund Burke's explanation of the sublime, in which terror rules over the sublime (Morris 300). In David Morris's study, the connection between the Gothic novel and the sublime also reflects people's fear of losing control as well as their dark desire. "Gothic sublimity—by releasing into fiction images and desires long suppressed, deeply hidden, forced into silence—greatly intensifies the dangers of an uncontrollable release from restraint" (306). This is the reason why the sublime is terrifying—the sublime in this sense does not exactly correspond to the

Kantian view of the sublime as a state where humans confront something grander than what is conceivable. Gothic sublimity, on the other hand, with its grotesque style, usually expressed in the protagonists' excessive emotion and abnormal behavior, explores "a terror of the unspeakable, of the inconceivable, of the unnameable" (Morris 312). Such terror commonly involves a deep desire for what may also be a social taboo, typically incest, consanguineous marriage, and so on. In short, Gothic sublimity arises, not from without, but from within the depths of the mind.

Along with recurring factors such as exaggeration, repetition, death, supernaturalism, and issues of identity and sexuality in the Gothic novel,[1] Poe seems obsessed with the morbid and the death of beautiful women, which not only serves as the embodiment of the sources of melancholy, but also functions as the embodiment of the beautiful. It is therefore clear that the intent of Poe's terror tales is not merely to frighten, to entertain, or to attract readers, but also to demonstrate the intricate connection between terror and the sublime in order to ground "a unitary theory of metaphysics, nature, art, and the human mind" (Moldenhauer 284). A frequently quoted statement from "The Poetic Principle," regarded as Poe's manifesto declaring Art for Art's sake, conveys Poe's aesthetic stance. He writes, ". . . the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified . . . than this very poem—this poem *per se*" (Poe, *Portable* 272; emphasis in original). Although there has been much commentary on Poe's aesthetics,[2] readings of Poe's terror tales commonly emphasize the effects and the beauty that are beyond the realms of ordinary life and even human perception. These readings constitute what I call aesthetic readings of Poe's works.

Instead of focusing on morbid "perversity" in Poe's writing in aesthetic terms, this paper suggests reading Poe through the lens of the Deleuzian notion of *life;* that is, turning an aesthetic reading into an ethical one. In order to avoid confusion, the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical needs to be clarified, since these two terms are complicated, and their distinction may evoke controversy. Early studies of Poe's works express interest in the aesthetic rather than the ethical value

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[1] David Morris states that "[e]xaggeration or hyperbole had long served as a favorite device of poets who pursued the sublime through sheer excess of style" (302), and "repetition leads a strangeness to terror" (303). Fisher also mentions that issues of identity, power, and sexuality are important in early Gothic works (74).

[2] Various discussions of Poe's aesthetics can be found in Baldwin, Moldenhauer, Thompson, Polonsky, and McGhee.

of Poe's works. Summerfield Baldwin, for example, makes it clear that "Plato views aesthetics from its ethical side while Poe views it as the science of art" (215). The difference lies in what we see as the great end of artistic creation. For Plato, poetry is the means with which to lead man upward till he "arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is" (Plato 211 c). Poe, meanwhile, believed that the great end is the creation of supernal beauty. Moldenhauer elaborated on this distinction. He reminds readers that the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical faculties is given by Poe himself in "The Poetic Principle," where Poe asserts, "[d]ividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense" (Poe, *Portable* 560; Moldenhauer 286). Here Poe does not simply differentiate these faculties; in making such distinctions he intends to "elevate artistic values into the sphere of a morality; ordinary ethical factors are demoted to a secondary ("incidental") place, and have value only insofar as they subserve the aesthetic supermorality" (Moldenhauer 289).

In Moldenhauer's reading, Poe subsumes ethical factors within artistic values and hence the ethical is merged into the aesthetic; nevertheless, in so doing, while the artistic values are granted superiority, the boundary between the two is blurred. In a similar fashion, although Baldwin indicates the distinction between Plato and Poe, which entails seemingly antagonistic attitudes toward artistic creation, Baldwin argues that what Plato calls absolute beauty is actually the same as Poe's notion of supernal beauty. This, in turn, dissolves the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical. Both Baldwin and Moldenhauer notice the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical, and yet, interestingly enough, they reach the same conclusion that such a distinction is actually blurred. This indicates that the ethical aspect is indispensable and if we pay more attention to it, it may shed new light on our reading of Poe's works. The ethical aspect of Poe's works is concerned with "life," a fundamental issue that affects every literary work. Yet the idea of "life" seems vague and abstract here. To manifest the reason why *life as such* is an ethical issue, this paper proposes an understanding of life in terms of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical discourses in order to seek an alternative reading of Poe's terror tale, with special focus on "Morella."

"For Deleuze," Daniel Smith argues, "every literary work implies a way of living, a form of life, and must be evaluated not only critically but also clinically" (*CC* XV).[3] By "ethics" Deleuze means "a set of 'facilitative' rules that *evaluates*

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[3] Citations from Deleuze's works are abbreviated as follows: *Critical and Clinical* is abbreviated as *CC*; *Dialogues II* as *Dialogues*; *Expressionism in Philosophy* as *EP*; *Nietzsche and*

what we do, say, think, and feel according to the immanent mode of existence it implies" (*CC* XIV; emphasis in original). The Deleuzian notion of life refers not to a particular individual life, but to that which is "never completely specified," and "always indefinite" (*PI* 8). It unfolds "a logic of *impersonal individuation* rather than personal individualization, of singularities rather than particularities" (*PI* 8; emphasis added). Although this may be familiar to readers of Deleuze, the ethical aspect of this direction of thought needs to be emphasized. Whereas Poe's "Morella" indeed shares some common themes with his other tales and hence a relatively solid reading of this tale seems have been established in Poe scholarship, recontexualizing "Morella" in light of Deleuzian *life* is meant to develop an alternative reading that concerns an ethical aspect of disease. This paper is thus composed of two parts. In the first part I examine the aesthetic readings of "Morella," which are prevalent in Poe scholarship; in the second part I show how *life* is an ethical issue.

Aesthetic Readings of Poe

It appears not an easy task to pinpoint the effects that Poe intends to create in "Morella," since the effects of this story seem to cause wonder rather than understanding. This is even clearer in the cases of the unfathomable, the mysterious, and the poetic. The plot of "Morella" is simple. The narrator is attracted by a lady named Morella, whose "talents [are] of no common order" and whose "powers of mind [are] gigantic" (Poe, *Unabridged* 164). Morella is fond of studying "the forbidden knowledge," that is, the doctrines of identity, as is implied in the story. The narrator thus explains how he understands the notion of identity:

> That identity which is not improperly called *Personal*. . . consist[s] in the sameness of a rational being. And since by person we understand an intelligent essence having reason, and since there is a consciousness which always accompanies thinking, it is this which makes us all to be that which we call *ourselves*, thereby distinguishing us from other beings that think, and giving us our personal identity. But the Principium Individuationis, the notion of that identity *which at death is or is not lost forever*, was to me, at all

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Philosophy as *NP*; *Pure Immanence* as *PI*; and *What Is Philosophy* as *WP*.

> times, a consideration of intense interest. . . .” (Poe, *Unabridged* 165; emphases in original)

This passage shows that the narrator understands personal identity in terms of consciousness and thinking. Identity, for the narrator, belongs to the particular person who bears it, and it cannot be shared with others. Identity in this sense is close to personal will. Understood in this fashion, identity is particular to a certain person, but if the mortal individual is only a form which a particular identity occupies, what happens when the mortal form of the individual vanishes? This leads to the narrator’s inquiry on death—does death disrupt the consciousness and rational thinking of an individual, or, does an individual survive death? Although the narrator is attracted by Morella’s erudition and learns from her the doctrines of identity, his understanding of *principium individuationis* seems to stray from Morella’s teaching. As Martin Bickman claims, “Morella’s interest in Fichte, Schelling, and the Pythagoreans affirms her belief in a larger unity *beyond* what we think of as our personal identities” (30; emphasis added). In short, the doctrines of identity are not concerned with the consciousness of a particular individual. In Schelling’s philosophy, for example, the meaning of identity is “the absolute unity of all opposites, as opposed to the ‘self-identity’ of immediate, personal consciousness” (Bickman 30). In this sense, the true spirit of “identity” is not confined to any particular person’s self-formation of the personality, but signifies a unity with differences intrinsic to it.[4]

As the story moves on, readers learn that the narrator’s wife Morella dies while giving birth to a daughter. The daughter grows “strangely in stature and intelligence” to such an extent that she bears “too perfect identity” with her mother. When the girl is to be baptized, she answers to the name Morella, despite the reluctance with which her father gives it. Just like her mother, the daughter dies young. The cause of her death is never mentioned in the story. The narrator describes burying his daughter: “with my own hands I bore her to the tomb; and I laughed with a long and bitter laugh as I found no traces of the first, in the charnel where I laid the second—Morella” (Poe, *Unabridged* 169). “Morella” is a story about a return to life which problematizes the issue of identity. The narrator wonders whether identity can be sustained even after death. However, this is not

[4] One may sense possible connections among Schelling, Nietzsche and Deleuze concerning how the contradiction or opposition can coexist. These connections are elaborated in works such as Christopher Grove’s essay “Ecstasy of Reason, Crisis of Reason: Schelling and Absolute Indifference” and Peter Durno Murray’s monograph *Nietzsche’s Affirmative Morality: A Revaluation Based in the Dionysian World-View*.

simply a story about the return of a woman to life—this is a story about identical repetition, which arouses a sense of horror and hideousness. To explain the uncanny sense in the tale "Morella," readers can take two possible paths—for one, we may read Morella's return to life as an extraordinary, supernatural event. The other way is to read this event as a reflection of the narrator's manic psyche. There are divergent interpretations of the narrator's state of mind. Stephen Rowe, for instance, reads the story in light of Poe's interest in the "transmigration of souls" and his "acquaintance with the rituals of necromancy" (41). With the support of historical materials and Poe's private letters, Rowe argues that in two tales, "Morella" and "Ligeia," Poe illustrates the mysterious and powerful effects that the theme of metempsychosis and the ritual of necromancy create; for him, "metempsychosis [is] a sublime subject for a tale of horror" (45). When commenting on the use of the "transmigration of the soul" in writing, Poe claims that "[t]he attention of the author, who does not depend upon explaining away his incredulities, is directed to giving them the character and the luminousness of truth . . ." (qtd. in Rowe 46). If this is true, then, we wonder what exactly is the "luminousness of truth" that Poe intends to show, with readers left in the midst of a mystery? What exactly is the secret of a return to life, and why does it appear horrifying and hideous to the narrator?

It is at this point that J. Alexandra McGhee's essay "Morbid Conditions—Poe and the Sublimity of Disease" is of great help for our reading of "Morella." McGhee argues that "only perverseness makes the sublime experience possible" (55) and this is what he calls "Poe's revisions of the sublime aesthetic" (56). For Poe, the access to the sublime experience is not attained by rational meditation, but by situating the sense of horror as the core, creating an uncanny experience that "hints at a greater truth: a void hidden behind this horror, accessible through a perversity that leads to dissolution" (56). The aim of such uncanny experience is to dissolve common sense, which is possible only when the sane human mind is confronted with what appears incomprehensible. Perversity, therefore, plays a crucial role in Poe's horror tales. "For Poe," McGhee argues, "perversity is something that pits the body/mind against itself, that moves in competition rather than concordance, with life. Under the influence of perversity, the body/mind works *against* the desire to sustain life, with the goal of achieving ideal existence in the unknowable realm beyond life" (61; emphasis in original). Strange illness in Poe's horror tales exemplifies such perversity. With strange illness, the character's body and mind are "out of joint," yet life persists in an unusual way.

One interesting thing about Morella is that readers are not informed of the cause of her death. Various speculations are made, including tuberculosis

(Stephanou), and childbirth (Keetley). James W. Gargano calls Morella "the principle of blight and death" (263). Be it tuberculosis or childbirth, these suggested causes of death show that the terrible fact about Morella is precisely her potential to reproduce, to contaminate, to spread, and, eventually, to consume and exhaust living beings. Morella, with her strange illness, is able to reach an unknowable realm beyond ordinary human life and survive death. How is this possible? Her disease is precisely the key. As Elana Gomel discusses the contagious body: "Pestilence shatters the symbolic defenses of the individual self and dissolves the boundaries of the individual body" (qtd. in McGhee 61). Contagious diseases engulf living beings and cause hostility between body and mind; this perverse condition further spreads and contaminates other living beings. Infected with a contagious disease, the individual self cannot sustain its own identity since it cannot separate itself from others. The dissolution of the individual self thus challenges the *principium individuationis* as the narrator understands it—if identity can be called personal and distinguishes one being from others, what would happen to such an identity when a contagious disease dissolves the boundary between individuals, when knowledge passes from one being to another so as to modify one's reasoning, and, even when two beings fall in love and gradually become indistinguishable from each other?

This is why D. H. Lawrence's reading of Poe appears so insightful. He claims that love is "a ghastly disease"; he asserts that love is "the prime cause of tuberculosis" (88, 73), since "to try *to know* any living being is to try to suck the life out of that being" (76; emphasis in original). "Love" is a key word here because it gives individuals the power to affect one another and hence to dissolve the boundary between individuals. Nevertheless, at some point, even D. H. Lawrence, a remarkable reader of Poe, claims that "[i]t is the temptation of a vampire fiend, is this Knowledge. Man does so horribly want to master the secret of life and of individuality *with his mind*" (76; emphasis in original). Indeed, what is necessary in love is to know one living being, but this knowledge, involving the secret of life and of individuality, is never anything negative or consuming. Instead, any individual comes to be as such by *relation* and relation only. D. H. Lawrence's reading, among many insightful ones, represents an aesthetic reading of Poe's love tales. Taking Poe's own account on poetic effects into consideration, we then understand that such aesthetic readings make perfect sense since Poe believes that "the death . . . of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe, *Unabridged* 1084). For Poe, the artistic and poetic require "the excess of the suggested meaning" (1088). Even if such a suggested meaning is indefinite, obscure,

or abnormal, it is this excess that makes possible the literary sublime. In this case, "love can be terribly obscene" (Lawrence 73). This aesthetic reading pointing to the sublime is best illustrated in McGhee's argument on the sublimity of disease, in which he concludes: "Poe's darker speculations on his particular kind of sublimity make his contribution to the philosophy of the sublime uniquely different from contemporary notions, because it relies on a degeneration of body and mind *rather than an affirmation of life*" (68; emphasis added).

Life: An Ethical Issue

McGhee brilliantly argues Poe's alternative sublimity, but such a downward tendency into the depth of the human mind turns away from the affirmation of life. This argument may attain aesthetic value, but I think that its insight is to lead to an alternative way to read Poe. What if we understood themes such as death, life, love and diseases in Poe not as aesthetic effects but as ethical issues? In the following I argue that many of Poe's readers, however impressive their readings may be, understand "disease" in a negative way and hence might overlook the insights within Poe's tales. While aesthetic readings celebrate Poe's dark, destructive, morbid, and even nihilist style, ethical readings of Poe intend to illustrate that disease can "liberate" an individual through "the transmutation of values."

In his reading of Nietzsche, Deleuze claims that Nietzsche "saw in illness a *point of view* on health; and in health, a *point of view* on illness" (*PI* 58; emphasis in original). Therefore, illness is not simply something that consumes life or degenerates the body. On the contrary, illness "constitutes . . . a secret intersubjectivity at the heart of a single individual. Illness as an evaluation of health, health as an evaluation of illness: such is the 'reversal,' the '*shift in perspective*'" (58; emphasis in original). A novel idea of illness is presented here. Illness enables us to evaluate health from different perspectives, and precisely in the evaluation from different perspectives, the reversal, the shift, or the mobility is possible. What exactly is great health? The value of health and illness is not set in stone. In other words, what we call health and illness represent a certain value in which people make judgment, that is, to elevate health while devaluing illness. Nevertheless, great health is, for Nietzsche, the *mobility* from health to illness and from illness to health. What should be affirmed is this very mobility because "the strong man accepts the world of becoming and finds value in change, chance and variety" (de Huszar 263). The true significance of illness is to bring forth the revaluation and the mobility. In this understanding, illness is necessarily involved with relations: the

relations between health and disease, and the relations between different individuals.

Confronting the overwhelming crisis of nihilism in his time, Nietzsche's proposal of the "revaluation of all values" represents his response to nihilism, in which people mistakenly believe that life is meaningless and therefore not worth living. To overcome such despair, Nietzsche accents the importance of "the affirmation of life." The affirmation of life is an attitude, and also, an ethical issue.[5] To affirm life, old conventional values need to be revaluated, including becoming, decadence, suffering, and pain. The pursuit of eternal life in the religious sense implies that life is detached from any possible change and becoming. It also devalues "this life" and hence encourages the pursuit of infinity. In the same fashion, physiological decadence, suffering, and pain are condemned and devaluated. For Nietzsche, however, eternal recurrence is the "highest attainable formula of affirmation" (*Ecce Homo* 65). This statement demonstrates a strong connection between the affirmation of life and Nietzsche's somewhat mysterious notion of eternal recurrence. We may take two ways to understand this connection. First, as Reginster concisely puts it, "the desire for the eternal recurrence is compatible with the desire for life to go on indefinitely" (226). One should note that this does not refer to the pursuit of infinite life, but a life that goes on indefinitely, in other words, a life that is becoming. A life, in this sense, is not confined to individual finite human life, but a life that "goes on," a life in which personal traits are blurred to the extent that the distinction between individuals becomes indiscernible. Only in this state are personal pain and sufferings no longer condemnable, and life, freed from the imprisonment of a particular living being and individual conditions, is impersonal and singular, not singular to any individual, but in itself singular.

Second, "returning" is necessary precisely because Nietzsche's proposal is not the creation of new values *ex nihilo*, but the "re-evaluation" of unexamined, unconditionally accepted existing values. One shall be aware that "to affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives" (Deleuze, *NP* 185). Affirmation, however, is not simply to evaluate life in an active way, but to take itself as the objective as well. Here we see two senses of affirmation. The first affirmation is to create values that make life affirmative. The second affirmation is "for affirmation itself to be affirmed. Affirmation must divide in two so that it can redouble" (*CC* 103). In brief, to accomplish affirmation,

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[5] In *The Affirmation of Life*, Reginster mentions that recent scholarship, his own work included, has recognized the ethical significance of the affirmation of life. See Reginster (14).

the notion of eternal recurrence is necessary, since affirmation is double. Only with the second affirmation, that is, only when affirmation itself is affirmed, can the affirmation of life be possible. Yet, the eternal return does not refer to the unconditional repetition of everything, but itself selective: "there is no return of the negative. . . . Only that which affirms or is affirmed returns" (*NP* 189). What returns is affirmative and active, and what is capable of returning must be what is transformed, changed, and reevaluated. In other words, what returns is *difference*. "It is thus in the nature of affirmation to *return* or of difference to *reproduce* itself" (*NP* 189, emphasis added). Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche grounds what I call the ethical understanding of "life."

Morella's return to life is not repetition of the same. The narrator, who admits his own "weakness or folly" (Poe, *Unabridged* 165), never fully understands Morella's final words: "I am dying, yet shall I live" (166). In this tale Poe depicts a man who refuses to know how life becomes and hence suffers from his ignorance and passive affections. If "Morella" is indeed a tale of horror, what is terrifying is neither the rebirth of a dead woman, nor her spell and her curse on her husband, nor the unexplainable disappearance of her corpse from the coffin. The horror lies in the fact that the narrator sickens when Life comes to the fore, and he becomes "giddy with the giddiness of the one who gazes downward into some dreary and fathomless abyss" (166). Morella's return, understood in light of Deleuze's words, "*is not the same that comes back*. . . . The same doesn't come back; only coming back is the same in what becomes" (*PI* 87; emphasis in original). Life in this sense refers to "infinite, productive multiplicity" (Toscano 98). To affirm life, we must know that "affirmation is itself multiple, that it becomes itself, and that becoming and multiplicity are themselves affirmations" (*PI* 85). What happens to Morella exemplifies a possible attitude toward life, which affirms multiplicity and becoming, and which affirms in multiplying and in becoming. But how shall we understand life through Morella's "becoming"?

I suggest taking a closer look at the contrast between the narrator and Morella in order to clarify their different perspectives on life. The narrator's changing attitude toward Morella reveals the way he reflects upon life. At the beginning of the story, he has a deep and singular affection for her, to the extent that he "abandon[ed himself] more implicitly to the guidance of [his] wife, and entered with a bolder spirit into the intricacy of her studies" (165). But gradually, the narrator finds his wife unbearable; "the mystery of [his] wife's manner oppressed [him] like a spell" (165). His abhorrence increases so strongly that he "long[s] with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella's decease" (166). After

her death, he comes to realize the striking similarity between, or even the "perfect identity" of, his daughter and his late wife. His constant changing attitude in effect stages a complete scene of Freudian "fort-da" game—"disappearance and return" (Freud 14). In Freud's observation, the child who has no control over his parents' going away from him invents the fort-da game to "compensate himself . . . by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach" (14). Even though the child is inevitably set in a passive situation over which he has no power to control, in repeating his losing and regaining the object as a game, "unpleasurable though it [is], he take[s] on an active part" (15). Freud's fort-da game seems to perfectly explain the narrator's behavior and his attitude toward Morella. In losing his sick wife, his abhorrence for her increases for he wants to stage her disappearance in order to wait for her return in the second Morella, his daughter. But his fort-da staging does not yet end. The source of pleasure in this staging is its repetition, for, in repeating, the narrator turns the situation where he can only experience passively, namely, his losing Morella, into one in which he can attain mastery over life. Hence, the narrator sees the second Morella as the returning of the first one, and in order to attain pleasure, he must once again make his daughter disappear, so "she dies, and with [his] own hands [he] bore her to the tomb" (Poe, *Unabridged* 169).

Morella, on the other hand, demonstrates another understanding of life that is different from that of the narrator. Common readings of this story emphasize Morella's influence on the narrator, and hence the narrator's passivity. Nevertheless, any relation between individuals assumes reciprocal knowledge and influence, or, to put it more accurately, it is not individuals that make relation possible; instead, "relation is what makes for the being of the individual, whereby an individual comes to be as such" (Combes 18). While attention has been paid to the narrator's suffering, what happens to Morella seems less recognized. After her encounter with the narrator, Morella "shun[s] the society" to live in solitude, that is, in a new milieu (Poe 164). Solitude is an indispensible condition for individuals to experience a trial; it paves the way for individuals to strip off the social function, to "disindividuality" in order to find their *more-than-individuality*. But how can a being be aware of what in itself is more-than-individuality? It seems that what can be called an individual need to be understood on the borderline between life and death, and this is precisely what Nietzsche illustrates in the plot of the tightrope walker in *Zarathustra*. In witnessing the tightrope walker's falling and dying, Zarathustra sees himself as "a midpoint between a fool and a corpse" (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 12). The dying tightrope walker, likewise, is a midpoint between a

living being and a corpse. However paradoxical it may be, it is precisely situated at the midpoint that Zarathustra affirms the greatness of human beings: "What is great about human beings is they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*" (*Zarathustra* 7; emphasis in original). This episode demonstrates that Zarathustra's solitude is a necessity for self-overcoming, for crossing over and going under. The trial of solitude nevertheless can only be evoked by an exceptional event. The event is "like a spark that spurs the unfolding of the entire process of the constitution of transindividual, but it only happens in isolation" (Combes 36). The significance of the exceptional event is, paradoxically, to allow others to show us their more-than-individuality as well as to force us to see what in ourselves is more-than-individuality in our solitude. It is "the condition for new individuation" (Combes 38).

Understood in this fashion, we may read Morella's disease as an exceptional event. With her disease, Morella gradually loses her companion, the narrator, and thus begins her ordeal, in isolation. The disease changes her physiologically: "the crimson spot settled steadily upon the cheek, and the blue veins upon the pale forehead became prominent" (Poe 166). However, her disease is not necessarily consumption; from another perspective, her gradual disfiguration is a process of the decomposition of the self. Her diseased body is midway between a living being and a corpse. She is "'between' these two individualized states, purely a relation, a bridge and without a purpose in becoming-corpse" (Scott 115). Only in this disease, an exceptional event, can she "become," in crossing over and going under, not for the purpose of rebirth, or giving birth of another personal life, but as a process. This is, Deleuze argues, "a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived" (*CC* 1).[6]

Liberating life from the living and the lived is only possible in becoming. "It is always a question of *freeing* life wherever it is imprisoned, or of tempting it into an uncertain combat" (Deleuze, *WP* 171; emphasis added). "Life" in this sense does not refer to the personal living being; the imprisonment of life does not refer to illness or exhaustion. Life is what becomes; illness liberates life from its

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[6] In *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, Deleuze considers becoming as "the passage from one to the other," and this is the kernel of what he calls "transcendental empiricism." It opposes the world of the subject and the object. For Deleuze, life should be understood as pure immanence. It does not mean something immanent to life, but "the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life" (27). Therefore, life as pure immanence refers to neither any given individual life nor anything immanent to an individual's life, but on the contrary, an individual life is an event, an accidentally going through *a life* (impersonal life, namely, immanence).

imprisonment, leading to a shift in perspective, and hence to perpetual creating and producing. As a matter of fact, many artists' health is commonly fragile; it is not because they are too sensitive or ill, but because "they have seen something in life that is too much for anyone, too much for themselves, and that has put on them the quiet mark of death" (*WP* 172). To witness something that is too much for an individual evokes an ordeal, a trial in which one suffers in solitude, and only in this condition can one realize what is in oneself "more-than-individual." The narrator's insistence of the identical return of Morella as an individual leads him nowhere but to endless suffering. The narrator describes Morella's manner when she mentions the infinity of identity as "marked and agitated" (Poe 165), which, to him, is of great interest. But his reaction to her manner soon turns loathsome. He begins to treat her mysterious manner as an oppressive spell on him and gradually alienates himself from her. This implies that the narrator regards the spell as that of everlasting identity, that is, an identity that survives death. Identity that may survive death thwarts the narrator's will to mastery over life, that is, to make life disappear and return at his will. He persistently imprisons life in a specific identity, in a name called Morella. He insists on repeating her name at her deathbed and even after her physical death. Keeping "no reckoning of time or place," the narrator sees nothing, hears nothing, while all "the figures of the earth passed by" him, except "Morella" (Poe 169). In imprisoning life in the name of "Morella," the narrator imprisons and enslaves himself in his own invention—in a spell of "a worm that would not die" (Poe 168).

The narrator is initially fascinated by Morella's erudition and becomes her "pupil." In other words, he is willing to be and capable of being affected by her study and her company. At that time, the narrator experiences happiness. As soon as the narrator turns away from her, he ceases to know, and the relation is cut off. In so doing, he is swallowed by the whirl of passive affections, which entails his suffering. This force of suffering, experienced as impotence, limits his force of acting. His refusal to recognize the cause of his own abhorrence and feelings of hideousness toward Morella, and his convenient view of it as fate prove his passivity. To become active, one shall not negate affections, and affections involve the relation to others.[7] To cut off the relation to others is to cut ourselves from what we can do. Once the narrator refuses Morella's influence upon him and even longs for Morella's death, he turns away from life, without realizing that what one can do is involved with how one can be more than individual. The affirmation of life is

[7] As Deleuze claims, "[a]n affection is not a passion, . . . it then of course involves the body, but is explained by the influence of other bodies" (*EP* 218-19).

indeed an ethical issue. Affirmation in this sense is the affirmation of becoming active, of the capacity to be affected, exercised by active affections. Life in this sense refers to *a life* that "releases a pure event freed from . . . the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens" (*PI* 28). The ethical issue, then, is to ask ourselves what we can do in order to liberate *a life* from *the* individual life and hence to see what in life is more than individual.

The narrator is not a victim of Morella's perpetual torture; he victimizes himself. Living in a world where everything is defined by fixed, unchangeable identity can be nothing but terrifying. The terror in "Morella" precisely lies in the narrator's self-victimization. It is not Morella who is a worm that will not die; it is the narrator's negation of life that is a worm that survives death. Many readers take Poe's female characters—Dark Ladies: pale, mysterious, inscrutable—as threatening because, as Karen Weekes explains, "Poe's female characters . . . [are] a receptacle for their narrator's angst and guilt" (150). The female characters in his stories are seen to function as a mirror to the male narrators, although in many of Poe's tales the narrators disregard their relation to the mirror. In examining the subordinate role of Poe's female characters, Weekes claims: "Poe never truly wrote about women at all, writing instead about a female object" and "[o]nce a woman steps out of the narrow boundaries of the stereotypical feminine role, she is reviled rather than revered" (150, 154). While the gender issue can shed light on our reading of Poe, I think that powerful female figures, who are commonly interpreted as a reflection of male protagonists' anxiety or a threatening capacity of spreading and reproducing, can be interpreted as something close to the Nietzschean *Macht* (power).

Nietzsche defines life as will-to-power based on his reflections upon European Christianity and metaphysical tradition, with a specific reference to the historical background of his time. Will-to-power can be understood as an attitude toward life. On the positive side, will-to-power says yes to life and seeks self-overcoming. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche contends: "And this secret life itself spoke to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that *which must always overcome itself*'" (89; emphasis in original). The involvement of life and will-to-power is apparent, since "[o]nly where life is, is there also will," but it is crucial to keep in mind that will is "not will to life, instead . . . will to power" (90). Self-overcoming is everlasting in life because life must overcome itself for a stronger force to grow out of the existing values, which in turn entails a new overcoming. "Power" in Nietzsche is far more complicated than its literal sense, and as such, it would be impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis here. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that

power in Nietzsche's sense is intrinsic to life; it is never external to man and is never simply exercised by some higher authority over man. "It is synonymous with *vitality*, enthusiasm," as de Huszar puts it (260; emphasis added). To do justice to Poe's powerful female figures such as Morella or Ligeia, it would perhaps be more effective if the vitality and enthusiasm intrinsic to them are properly recognized. The point is not to describe what personal traits these female figures have, but to know that they are the embodiment of power, vitality, and enthusiasm; that is, they are "life."

Yet "life" never *is*; "life" *becomes*. Life can never be defined as what is, for life is *difference*. Interestingly, Poe's Dark Ladies usually bear a certain disease, but those diseases are not opposite to life, and not against life. Instead, disease in Poe's fiction is the shifting part of life; the mobile states between health and illness reveal that life can only "become." Two remarkable points in Nietzsche's notion of good health help us better understand disease as an essential part of life. He states: "*To become* sick in the manner of these free spirits, *to remain* sick for a long time and then, slowly, slowly, *to become healthy*, by which I mean 'healthier,' is a fundamental *cure* for all pessimism" (*Human* 9, emphasis added). In this context, illness evokes the becoming of life. The changing states between illness and health also make possible the shift in perspectives and revaluation. If, for Nietzsche, to become healthy is a cure for pessimism, it is not because one gets rid of illness in its literal sense. Becoming healthy refers to the mobility, the shift in perspectives and revaluation; this is precisely what is depicted in Poe's "Morella." In the process of decomposing the self, Morella illustrates how life becomes. Furthermore, Nietzsche emphasizes that to become "healthier," one must "become sick" first. This explains why he takes "convalescence" as the beginning of his *Zarathustra*, a self-overcoming project. Health "does not consist in never having been ill, but in overcoming all decadent elements" (de Huszar 270). It is at this point that we find a convergence in the connection between Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Poe. My reading in this paper intends to show how health leads to the affirmation of life. The affirmation of life, however, cannot be achieved without a certain transmutation. Both Nietzsche and Deleuze emphasize the necessity of *returning* as a solution to overcoming. Nevertheless, returning in this sense does not refer to a repetition of the same. For Nietzsche, "great health" is achieved by overcoming decline, which is also to say, one must experience illness. In the same fashion, for Deleuze, the eternal return "does not occur without transmutation" (*CC* 105). Such a return refers to a double affirmation, and signifies necessary change and transvaluation.

Suffering, decline or decadence, and disease—all of these are not merely unpleasant conditions; they evoke the movement of life.

Poe's tale "Morella" illustrates the ethical aspect of disease. Such an ethical aspect of disease is founded upon the affirmation of life, that is, to know that life is becoming, active, and itself difference. The narrator in this tale persistently takes Morella's returning scene as a repetition of the same—the returning of an identical Morella terrifies and pushes him to the edge of madness. Apparently, he is haunted by an identity that survives death. But the abhorrence presented in this tale is not the power that Morella attains over the narrator. As is described in the tale, Morella is an enthusiastic woman who has talent, power of mind, and erudition. All these traits point to a simple fact: vitality. Even though "life" is a great theme in many literary works, our understanding and perception of "life" can be approached from various angles. While many writers choose to demonstrate their idea of life by giving sophisticated, exhaustive, and complex depictions of certain characters, some, like Poe, take an alternative path to show the luminousness of life as what it is. Indeed, Morella's state of mind remains obscure for readers, but by manifesting the ethical aspect of illness, the significance of life appears inseparable from disease and the return of the different. Taking Nietzsche's "great health" and Deleuze's notion of life as key concepts, I intend to show a reading that refuses to interpret Morella's return as an evil ritual of necromancy. Both assertions—that "Morella" is a tale about metempsychosis, and that Morella embodies herself once again in her daughter—follow the same logic of "identity," in which life is confined to personal identity. Life in this sense can only be narrow, limited, and fixed. Instead of focusing on the narrator's self-torturous state of mind, this paper suggests that Morella's illness and return are not simply elements of a gothic plot. Illness brings a possibility of changing the stabilized state of the body and the mind; illness also affects one's relation to others. The relation of body and mind, and that of different individuals can be set in motion when illness occurs. When the disease appears more threatening, for instance, when it can affect others upon an encounter, when it strengthens itself by spreading, reproducing, or consuming the sick, it should be understood as a process in which the ill one is decomposing oneself for transmutation. The tale "Morella" depicts a return to life—that which returns is difference instead of identity and that which returns brings a new mode of living. This new mode of living requires people to know life as such differently, to know what is in oneself more-than-individual, to actively engage with vitality, and to eventually realize that life is impersonal and indefinite. The idea of "becoming" can be conveniently used to claim all kinds of change, but the discussions on becoming

cannot be complete without taking returning/repetition of the different into consideration. Returning is indispensable for the affirmation of life. One cannot become "healthier" without ever becoming sick. One can never fully grasp the becoming of life without realizing that disease is a differential process for life. Perhaps one needs to go to the depths of the abyss in order to see the possibility of re-evaluating depth as well as height.

Nietzsche proposes to overcome nihilism by radicalizing nihilism. In a way, such Nietzschean thoughts correspond to Poe's cosmology, that is, the universe as a Void. Poe's *Eureka* presents what he believes as "truth," which can be briefly summarized as what G. R. Thompson calls the "cycle of Nothingness"—"[t]he origin of the Universe lies in Nothingness, its present material state is but a variation of the original Nothingness, and its final end is a *reconstitution* of the original Nothingness" (299; emphasis added). Even though everything ultimately returns to nothingness, Poe does not stop writing. He must go down to the depths of the void to fully realize that the universe "refers ultimately to nothing outside itself but the Nothing outside itself" (300). But let us remember, that the *reconstitution* of the original Nothingness, and the *returning* to the original state of the Universe, are not repetitions of the same. Repetition of the same only renders any mode of living, any efforts of creation and writing frustrated and futile. On the contrary, that which returns is different, affirmative, and becoming. The overcoming of Nothingness is perhaps only possible through the cycle of Nothingness; we, however, in the returning of Nothingness, have a glimpse of how writing liberates life from its imprisonment.

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