THE STYLISTICS OF PROSE TRANSLATION A CASE STUDY ON EDGAR ALLAN POE'S 'THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH'

Alina MIU
University of Pitești

Abstract: *In our paper we propose ourselves to point out the necessity of a stylistic analysis as a preliminary phase of literary translation since in his quality of a decoder and then a (re)encoder of the same SL text, the translator has to approach the SL text by means of a very thorough text analysis in order to be able to faithfully render the original text style with all its components (pragmatic, semantic, syntactical and discursive), which all could be in our opinion only the result of a stylistic analysis of the SL text, which, however insufficient for the process of fiction translation as a whole, is quite useful for the translator in the stage of re-encoding when he/she has to make use of the results of the SL stylistic analysis so as to render to the TL readership most of the components of the original text style.*

Keywords: *literary prose translation, stylistic analysis, fiction writer, fiction translator, narrative technique, pragmatic level (intention of the author of the fictional theme), semantic level (choice of words), syntactical level (choice of sentence patterns, etc.), discourse level*

According to the sociosemiotic approach to meaning, the text is a semantic unit with meaning and function. It is a product in the sense that is an output, something that can be represented in systematic terms, but it is also a process in the sense of ongoing semantic choices, a movement through the network of potential meanings, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set. Consequently, a novel or a short story is a unity of meaning, function (why to convey meaning) and style (how to convey meaning), which can never be discussed separately.

The fiction writer encodes his/her message at a pragmatic level (intention of the author of the fictional theme), semantic level (choice of words), syntactical level (choice of sentence patterns, etc.) and, finally, discourse level (integrating the former three levels into the entire discourse).

The fiction translator in his turn 'perceives' the text in a reverse order, that is first of all he/she comes across the whole discourse of the prose fiction, and, then he/she analyses it at a syntactical, semantic and finally pragmatic level, with the observation that he/she will have to re-encode the message into the TL observing this time the same level-order as the fiction-writer (i.e. pragmatic level, semantic level, syntactical level and discourse level).

Taking all this into consideration, we consider that in his quality of a decoder and then as a (re)encoder of the same SL text, the translator has to approach the SL text by means of a very thorough text analysis in order to be able to faithfully render the original text style with all its already mentioned components (pragmatic, semantic, syntactical and discursive), all of which could be in our opinion the result of a stylistic analysis of the SL text, which, however insufficient for the process of fiction translation as a whole, is quite useful for the translator in the stage of re-encoding when he/she has to make use of the results of the SL stylistic analysis so as to render to the TL readership most of the components of the original text style.

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

Although the introduction of literary stylistics in the process of fiction translation brings forth a new perspective in the study of fiction translation and it particularly emphasizes stylistic analysis, we consider it worthwhile mentioning that it is limited to the study of the text style, leaving out the authorial style, which has a wider scope involving social, cultural and ideological factors.

Nonetheless, from a practical point of view, we think in many cases of prose translation, a stylistic analysis is of utmost importance since it offers the translator the tools that he/she needs in order to re-encode the "literariness" of the SL text into the TL using as much as possible the same text style as the author. More than that, more often than not fiction writers 'hide' their message or encode it even more from the very beginning by means of words, sentence patterns, predominance of theme, type of discourse, which remain 'undecodable' if the translator focuses his/her attention predominantly on the authorial style and less on the text style.

Taking all this into consideration, in the following we propose ourselves to approach E.A. Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" by means of a thorough stylistic analysis in hopes of demonstrating the sine-qua-non character of a stylistic analysis within the process of prose translation.

Poe's short stories as a whole are considered "Gothic" literature. Although this term originally applied only to stories set in Gothic or medieval period, it has been extended to include a certain type of writing observing the following requirements: first it must set a tone that is gloomy, dark and threatening and then the events that take place must be strange, melodramatic, or evil.

In the title of an 1840 edition of his collection "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque" Poe divided his short stories into these two categories, employing such terms which are often used in art, especially painting. Thus, grotesque art involves monsters and wilderness, whereas arabesque art usually involves a complex and geometric pattern. In relation to Poe's tales, then, the grotesque could refer to more realistic stories with human interaction (e.g. "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Purloined Letter"), while the arabesque are stories that involve very few people but many ideas, and are frequently set in abstract locations (e.g. "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Masque of the Red Death", "The Pit and the Pendulum").

"The Masque of the Red Death" is a special case of finding symmetry and unity in art, which in his case is realized by the concentrated action of every word, every line, every paragraph on the reader. In a famous study of his on Hawthorne, Poe says that there must be in all words the intention, direct or indirect, to follow a purpose settled beforehand. (cf. Buranelli, 105)

As for the point of view from which it was written, it is an impersonal third person narrative in which the author uses heavy symbolism to convey the underlying theme of the story which is the inevitability of death and the futility of trying to escape it, which as a matter of fact is revealed from the very beginning by the author's blunt statement in the opening of the first paragraph: "'The Read Death' had long devastated the country."

The story does not have characters in the proper manner beside Prince Prospero and Death itself. The first line opens with the word "death" which is going to be the clue word in the story to which Poe adds the qualifying adjective "red" although red is the colour of blood, which actually means life; or, if not, anger, danger, horror.

Blood, the very substance of life, becomes the mark of death as it bursts through the pores. Death, as Poe implies from the very beginning, then, is not an outside protagonist to be feared and walled out as Prince Prospero attempts to do; but instead it

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

is a part of each of us. Its presence is felt in our imagination as we become aware of the control that time has over our lives. Poe succeeds in transmitting to the reader this awareness of death from the first paragraph which is characterized by short and concise sentences and phrases, all of which stand proof of Poe's dislike of excess and exaggeration: "The 'Red Death' had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal – the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress, and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour."

In point of composition, the first paragraph consists of more abstract nouns than concrete ones, with the observation that Poe's intention was to subordinate 'concreteness' to 'abstraction' (cf. Leech, 1981, 84) with the intent of increasing the atmosphere of terror and horror by means of such a terror and horror register as: "death", "pestilence", "blood", "Avatar", "redness", "horror", "pains", "dizziness", "fellow-men", "seizure", "progress", "termination", "disease".

Another stylistic observation concerns Poe's talent to offer his readership a great visual description which is realized on the one hand by adjectives belonging to the same register as the nouns, emphasizing the horror effect: "fatal", "hideous", "sharp", "profuse", and on the other hand by adjectives of colour which in their turn bring visual imagery alongside some nouns suggesting the same thing: "red", "blood", "redness", "bleeding". It is also to be noted that the writer does not feel the need to use verbs from the same register, since he considers that the nouns and the adjectives describe best the gothic atmosphere he wanted to portray. The adverbs on the other hand, although few in number, powerfully emphasize the horror effect of some adjectives, sometimes even as part of hyperboles: "had long devastated", "ever … so fatal" (hyperbole), "so hideous" (hyperbole).

Another characteristic of Poe's style in this first paragraph is the coordination of sentences by means of the coordinating conjunctions "or" and "and", obtaining thus an increased stylistic effect of horror effect on the reader by the cumulative effect of a quantitative hendyadis: "There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores wit dissolution." The cumulative effect of the conjunction "and" is reinforced even more by Poe by means of the two commas placed before the two cumulative "and" conjunctions. On a linguistic level, there is quite a great number of prepositions (10), mainly prepositions of place and direction ("at," "upon," "from," "of," etc.), all of which stand for Poe's intent to locate and direct the imminence of death as close as possible to the reader's reality so that the awareness of death be undoubtedly felt as real.

In point of style, one could also say that Poe's is a very new and different one for his time. He cuts his sentences short, he uses dashes for the sake of cohesion with parallelism and capitalization as main means of emphasizing: "Blood was its Avatar and its seal – the redness and the horror of blood." Another stylistic means by which Poe distinguishes himself is the ample use of metaphors for the same word: thus, death is "horror of blood", "Red Death", "gigantic clock of ebony", etc.

As to Poe's overuse of the dash ("Blood was its Avatar and its seal – the redness and the horror of blood"), it is apparent that he often employs it to stand in for metanoia. In his "Marginalia" (1844-1849), he himself states that the dash is exploited to represent

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

"a second thought – an emendation", all of which he fully illustrates all through his prose pieces.

As we mentioned in the beginning Poe's declared intention was to find symmetry and unity in art, which he reinforced by his categorizing "The Masque of the Red Death" as an arabesque story with a geometrical pattern if we are to associate the meaning of the term used in painting with Poe's using it in connection with his story. It results, then, that from the very beginning, the reader should be aware of the fact that Poe constructed his story according to a geometric pattern which is to be seen, for example, if we analyse the first paragraph syntactically: the sentences are declarative, complex, or coordinated ones while their length goes as follows: the first three sentences are shorter, the next two are longer and the last one is short again as if closing a circle.

Another stylistic peculiarity concerns the extensive use of the anaphorical definite article "the" instead of some other determiners, which introduces the reader directly into the fictional world as if he or she were already familiar with the surroundings, or in Leech's (Leech, 1981, 96) opinion as if he or she was "an inhabitant of the fictional world." However, the use of the definite article in the first sentence ("The Red Death") is quite unusual for the reader who is not familiar with this world. A possible explanation to this use would be again Poe's intent to emotionally involve the reader from the very first sentence in the plot of the story and to give it the feeling that it is not a fictional reality as any other, but his/her own reality which involves life but also death, the Read Death. This theory is further sustained by Leech (Leech, 97) who considers that "the use of the definite article is part of a more general strategy of sympathetically involving the reader."

The second paragraph is a bit longer and it introduces the reader to the main character in the story, Prince Prospero and along with him into the atmosphere. Compared to the first paragraph, this contains more concrete archaic nouns such as "knights", "dames", "Prince", "court", "castellated abbey", "courtiers", with the observation that what contemporary dictionaries register as archaisms may not have had this character at the time, all of which prevents us from considering them a style characteristic of Poe's second paragraph, but rather a stylistic make-believe technique. The other concrete nouns are not common either, some of them belonging to the scientific jargon of common households or of strongholds or castles such as "gates of iron", "furnaces", "hammers", "bolts" and they function (towards the end of the paragraph) alongside with such abstract nouns symbolizing the happy atmosphere that Poe wants in a way to oppose to the gloomy, death-imprinted one in the first paragraph: "appliances of pleasure", "buffoons", "improvisatori", "ballet-dancers", "musicians", "Beauty", "wine". However, Poe does not abandon the Gothic atmosphere that he accustomed the reader with from the very beginning, since the last sentence brings out again the main character of the story, i.e. the Red Death ("Without was the "Red Death.")

Adjectives are not so frequent in this passage either and the ones present refer to psychological attributes: "happy", "dauntless and sagacious", "light-hearted", or physical attributes: "castellated", "strong", "lofty", "massy", and the same evaluative, qualifying attributes: "extensive", "magnificent", "eccentric", "august", "sudden."

In point of backward or forward movement of the story, it is to be noted that Poe uses dynamic verbs such as: "summoned", "brought", "welded", "ingress", "egress" most of them in their past tense forms.

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

From the above one can conclude that in this paragraph Poe conveys a false sense of security with his first description of the abbey and it is due to his special technique that the reader can actually visualize Prince Prospero's abbey by means of Poe's suggestive choice or words, which makes it look so big and impressive: "This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron." After describing the impressiveness of Prince's Prospero's abbey, Poe needed to awake his reader from the realm of dreaming such an abbey might induce one into, and to do this he implies that there was no way one could get in or out of that castle by the suggestive use of the verbs "ingress" and "egress", of the negative adverbs "neither" and "nor." After the courtiers enter the abbey, the gates are welded shut which in the prince's belief is enough to keep the Red Death out, but in Poe's description to the reader, this is to understand that the whole atmosphere of protection and safe living created by the prince is false and the masqueraders are actually sealing their fates when they seal the gate of the abbey.

The use of modals: "might bid defiance" and "could take care" is meant to reinforce the idea of falsity as concerns the security within the walls of the abbey by the modality nuance of 'possibility' which they lend to the infinitive forms after them. Another technique which Poe uses is the parallelism "there were" and "there was" which is meant to give both rhythm to the paragraph, but also a strong opposition between the safety of what used to be and what is no longer safe. The same technique is used in the end of the paragraph, this time with a different purpose, that is the separation of the two worlds, one within the gates, apparently the safer one, and the one outside, the dangerous one, which is realized also by means of the antonymic adverbs "within" and "without": "All these and security were within. Without was the Red Death."

In the next paragraph Poe encloses the two opposite realities that he compares, i.e. the world outside the gates which was in grief since "the pestilence rages most furiously abroad", and the world inside with Prince Prospero organizing "a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence". The striking contrast is emphasized even more by means of a cleft-sentence that Poe uses (i.e. It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence") in view of drawing the reader's attention on the one hand to the period of time that had elapsed since the beginning of the seclusion (with the observation that the ordinal numeral ''the fifth' of 'the sixth month' is the first time reference in the story) and on the other hand to the cruel reality of the outside world pointed out by an unusually placed temporal clause ('and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad').

In what follows, after long descriptions, the reader is for the first time introduced to the narrator who is disclosed by a first person address: "But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held." The story takes place in seven connected but at the same time carefully separated rooms. A long description of the rooms follows, each one different from the other in colour and placement, having a "Gothic window" of "stained glass which varied in accordance with the decorations of the chamber into which it opened". The seven rooms are laid out from east to west, reminding one of the course of the sun which measures the earthly time: "That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example in blue - and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

orange – the fifth with white – the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy fold upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the colour of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes were scarlet – a deep blood colour."

From the above description one may notice that Poe used on the one hand the symbolism of the number seven and on the other hand the symbolism of the colours associated with each of the seven rooms possibly to suggest that the seven rooms represent the seven stages of one's life, from birth to death, through which the Prince pursues a figure masked as a victim of the Red Death, only to die himself in the final chamber of eternal night. (cf. Martha Womack, *The Poe Decoder*, http://www.poedecoder.com/essays), but also possibly the seven Biblical deadly sins looming in the background of the seven virtues ignored by one throughout one's life (also seven planets governing one's birth-life-death cycle, or seven heavens).

The rooms are described by using parallelism and colour symbolism as follows: the first was blue, the second purple, the third green, the fourth orange, the fifth white, the sixth violet and the seventh black.

A close analysis of the way in which Poe describes each room reveals that from the very beginning he differentiates between the seventh chamber and the rest by means of the adversative conjunction "but" and the adverb "only" ("But in this chamber only…") which are meant to suggest to the reader that this chamber is not like the rest in that its windows are not matching its black colours like it had been the case in the other six rooms. The sharp differentiation and description of the last room as compared to all the others gives the reader the feeling that this room is to be of importance later in the story. Its black colour stands for death and destruction on account of the fact that the story is focused on a deadly disease and black is a tangible depiction of the destruction the disease caused. Unlike in the description of the rooms, Poe uses another symbolic colour to complete the effect caused by black, and this colour is the deep red colour of the windows which are no longer of the same colour as the rest of the room. One may speculate that while black symbolizes death, red may stand for how death came in the sense that the read death causes blood to flow from the orifices of a person's body, which points to Poe's purposefully using the red colour as an imagery of blood. (cf. *Colour Symbolism* in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death,* http://www.writing.com/main/view.item.php?_id?639375)

In order to enhance the reality of its description Poe makes use of concrete nouns such as: "scene," "room(s)," "place," "door," "wall," "duke," "bizarre," "apartment," "yard," "right," "left," "window," "corridor," "glass," "colour," "decoration," "chamber," "ornament," "tapestries," "panes," etc., whose meaning he reinforces by such evaluative attributes as: "voluptuous scene", "imperial suite", physical attributes: "folding doors", "tall and narrow Gothic window", "heavy tripod", "closed corridors", "stained glass", colour attributes:: "velvet tapestries", "a deep blood colour", "dark hangings", "golden ornaments", "black chamber", "blood tinted panes", visual attributes: "gaudy and fantastic appearances". These adjectives + noun phrases also stand for several figures of speech that Poe uses to contrast for the reader's sake the gaiety of the first six rooms as compared to the last seventh room, while creating the Gothic-like atmosphere that Poe intended from the very beginning: the metaphor "brazier of fire" – used to express the rays of light, the epithets "gaudy and fantastic appearances" – used for the figures formed by the light, the metaphor "blood-tinted panes" used to replace the scarlet colour of which Poe makes ample use in the story, the

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

metaphor “to set foot within” used instead of the verb “to enter”, and finally the hyperbole “so wild a look”.

Another feature of Poe’s style in this paragraph is the use of dashes or metanoia: “There were seven – an imperial suite…, … in blue – and vividly blue …, the fourth was furnished and lighted” with orange – the fifth with white – the sixth with violet”, “The panes here were scarlet – a deep blood colour.”

Although Poe takes the reader on a virtual tour through the rooms from the eastern to the western wing describing minutely all the ornaments, tapestries and decorations, which actually gives the reader the impression of moving together with the narrator, this paragraph is a static one with no verbs or nouns to suggest movement, thus acquiring the quality of a painting.

The length of the different parts of sentences differs with one another, the first part short and complex, followed by a long adverbial clause, such as a purpose clause introduced by “so that”: “In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded.” The last sentence is a long, complex one beginning with the adversative conjunction “but” ending in a grim and gloomy atmosphere with the adverb “at all”. This grim and gloomy atmosphere is in fact announced by Poe beforehand by his placing the adjective “bizarre” in italics in order to emphasize the idea that the whole ball and seclusion in the palace, extraordinary as they might appear, were anything but unusual.

The next paragraph is dedicated entirely to a minute description of “a gigantic clock of ebony,” yet another symbol that Poe uses as a metaphor for death on account of the clock’s unforgiving ticking one hourly into inexorable death and extinction. (cf. Martha Womack, *The Poe Decoder*, http://www.poedecoder.com/essays/)

The relationship between the Red Death and time is also a key to understanding the symbolic meaning of the story. The symbol of time is “the gigantic clock of ebony,” draped in black velvet and located in the final room, foreboding the coming of death. Although it is but an object used to measure time, in the story it assumes human characteristics as the author describes it as having a ‘face’ and ‘lungs’ from which comes a sound “exceedingly musical” but “so peculiar” that the “dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand”, in a momentary “rigor mortis” that anticipates the final, everlasting one.

In point of style one can notice that Poe begins this paragraph with the same introductory ‘it’ construction in order to give continuity to the text. There are two kinds of nouns that Poe uses, i.e. concrete nouns such as “clock of ebony”, “pendulum”, “clang”, “minute-hand”, “hour”, “clock”, “sound”, “lapse”, “musicians”, “orchestra”, “waltzers”, “chimes”, “echoes”, “minutes”, etc – which refer to the passing of time, - and abstract nouns such as: “evolutions”, “disconcert”, “company”, “meditation”, “nervousness”, “tremulousness”, “folly”, “vows”, “emotion” – which are used to refer to the particular mood and state of mind that the clock of ebony and the unforgiving passing measured by it of time should arise in the inhabitants of Prince Prospero’s palace.

As compared to the other paragraphs, this one is different in that there is a lot of sound suggested by using verbs and nouns which call for the reader’s auditory perception, by comparison with the previous paragraph, for example, when Poe appealed to the reader’s visual perception. To obtain this auditory effect Poe uses two kinds of devices, i.e. verbs in the past tense which either express various sound effects or render movement, and nouns which semantically express sound effects: “heavy monotonous clang”, “the hour was to be stricken”, “there came … a sound which was

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical", "to hearken the sound", "the chimes of the clock rang", "the echoes has fully ceased", "a light laughter pervaded, "whispering vows", etc.

The particular structuring of the paragraph is another device that Poe uses to render the same inevitable elapsing of time which finally brings in the Red Death. Compared to the previous paragraph for example which had 21 sentences this paragraph has only three very long sentences, each of them made up of several clauses separated by a semicolon and introduced mainly by the cumulative conjunction "and" which is meant to enhance for the reader the same kind of panic brought about by the elapsing of the sixty minutes which represent "three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies." The inevitability of the passing of Time and its symbolic significance for the understanding of Poe's story is also rendered by the writing of the word "Time" in capital letters, alongside with the other two symbols in the story, i.e. the Red Death and Beauty.

In the next three paragraphs Poe makes a thorough description of the Duke's "fine eye for colours" which is to be seen from the presentation of the ball and of the "embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fête."

While describing the prince's tastes in matter of embellishments of the chambers, with all the "glitter and piquancy and phantasm", Poe introduces again the symbol of the ebony clock which, striking enough, makes everybody be quiet and all the dreams "stiff-frozen", but after the echoes of chimes disappear, everything comes back to life "and the dreams live."

In point of paragraph structure, it is to be noted that whenever there are long paragraphs, Poe tries to cut them into small sentences using either a comma or a semicolon. For example, in the paragraph that follows Poe uses semicolon to show that even though the sentences are not related, they play an important part on the whole and they are illustrators of *time* ("for the night is waning away"), *atmosphere* ("and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes"), and *image* ("and the blackness of the sable drapery appals").

Further on, the metaphor "muffled peal" is used to express the quiet clang of the clock heard by everybody who are away from the room with the clock but are still aware of its presence. The word *their* in italics (in the original text) is meant to show there was a difference between the ears of the masqueraders and the prince's because the former were mere participants in the prince's show and they were aware and afraid of death whose presence was so close. What is also noticeable here is the use of the pronoun *who* instead of *which* as a personification of the ears. In the ball apartments "beat feverishly the heart of life", but when midnight came and the clock started chiming the gay atmosphere is again interrupted by "the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And the music ceased, as I have told you; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before."

In point of perspective, we notice here the presence of the narrator in the first person, which is quite unexpected, because all through the story he appears only three times and this is one of them. When the clock starts ringing everything stands still. The dancers stop their dance, the orchestra stops, the people cease talking and laughing as if they felt the presence of something. But this time the clock strikes twelve times, so everybody has time enough to think and analyse their situation. It is at the last stroke that a masked figure is noticed "which had arrested the attention of no single individual before." Nobody really notices this presence until the clock strikes twelve

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

times, and everybody starts whispering and this *buzz, or murmur* gradually drives the crowd from surprise to *terror, horror* and *disgust*.

If its presence was only felt, now death appears in the costume of the Red Death" and the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. Everybody stared at the corpse-like figure and they believed "that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed." The characterization of this personage is very suggestive: "The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenances of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat."

When everybody realises that this presence is the very Red Death, and when this reaches to the prince's ear, "His vesture was dabbled in *blood* - and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror." There are two words here that express the red colour so often used in this story: *blood* which is written in italics for better notice and the epithet *scarlet* which expresses the anger and fury of the prince who could not believe that the very thing he had been hiding from found him and was ready to take him.

When the prince saw the ghostly appearance metaphorically described as a "spectral image", which is put between brackets by the writer to emphasize its appearance "(which, with a slow and solemn movement, as.if more fully to sustain its *rôle,* stalked to and fro among the waltzers)" the prince "*was seen* to be convulsed" and his anger grew from terror or distaste to rage in the end. It is interesting to notice on the one hand the use *of* the passive voice to emphasize his madness and on the other hand of the French word *"rôle"* in italics symbolizing the attitude of the personage who looked and acted just as death itself, playing the role that he was dressed up for.

For the first time in this story Poe uses direct speech to show how grave and desperate the situation became: *"'Who dares'* - he demands hoarsely of the courtiers who are stading nearby him – 'who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him - that we may know whom we have to hang, at sunrise, from the batllements!'" Symbolically, the prince was in the blue room, the eastern one, when he shouted, and his words "rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly."

Poe presents the two powerful characters consecutively, approaching each other: ".. .there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder, who, at the moment was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer to the speaker." It is very interesting to observe how the hyperbolised *"vast* assembly...*shrank* from the centres of the rooms to the wall", meaning that they turned small when confronted with this figure whose presence made them shiver. The description of the intruder's way through the seven chambers is very well illustrated.by the parallelism *through the ... to the* and the dashes that Poe uses for achieving a cohesion effect: "... he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple - through the purple to the green - through the green to the orange - through this again to the white - and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him."

This very elaborate phrase takes us together with the *figure* through the rooms, at his own pace, solemnly and undisturbed by the surroundings. The repetition of the

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

words *through the... to the* might be annoying in some other context, but here it creates an effect of calmness and comfort.

"It was then" that the prince could not stand this shame anymore and he started running through the seven chambers by himself though, because "a deadly terror ... .had seized upon all." The epithet *deadly terror* suggests the feeling that overcame everybody at the sight of the Red Death.

The fight between the two seems very real and Poe describes it like a wrestle between two persons with the same strength and skills using a lot of commas to introduce new facts or simply to emphasize others. In fact, Prince Prospero does not realize that he is actually fighting his own faith and destiny: ''He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet, of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer." "There was a sharp cry" and Prince Prospero died on the sable carpet, having learnt that no one can escape death.

In the last paragraph each sentence opens with the same conjunction *and,* to reflect the connection between all these things, the cause and the effect of them: *"And* now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. *And* one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. *And* the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. *And* the flames of the tripods expired. *And* Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all." Even though everybody present knew or felt the presence of the intruder, nobody spoke a word about it, only now in the final the presence of the Red Death "was acknowledged". The elliptical construction "And was acknowledged..." without the pronoun *it* announces the inevitable end, there is no need for another subject since *Red Death* has conquered. The comparison "like a thief in the night," reminding one of the famous "night-stalker Grendel" in *Beowulf*, is concurrent with the stopping of the clock when it strikes midnight as a means and symbol of death for the revelling if not sinful party. Actually, the dead clock and the lights extinguished acquire the symbolic meaning of the end of all life. The last sentence is very rich in stylistic features; first there are the capital letter words *Darkness, Decay* and *Red Death,* all of them beginning with the letter D, all three foreboding while they "held illimitable dominion over all," that Death will have his will.

Death is not a physical entity that abides by earthly rules. No one is capable of locking death out as death resides in each individual. It is the constant companion, which travels with everyone down the seven stages of one's life. This knowledge brings with it the quality of acceptance. With Prospero's demise and the truth uncovered about the masked man they "acknowledged the presence of the Red Death". The revellers would have to accede that death would come to them all. They would no longer indulge in activities to take their mind off of that fact. The masqueraders would also understand that death could come suddenly. That it would catch them when they least expected it "like a thief in the night". It is a maturation process, associated also with age. As one grows older, one faces the constant realization that one's days are numbered and that any day could be one's last.

Death is an unavoidable and inevitable reality, one that all members of mankind must face, and consequently each person develops his/her own attitudes out of realization to this knowledge.

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

In *The Masque of the Red Death* Edgar Allan Poe presents three such attitudes. Prospero symbolizes the defiant arch rebels who believe that somehow they can avert the mortality clause of mankind's contract. The masqueraders are those who live in a state of denial, they recognize death yet wish to blot out that knowledge through diversion. The third attitude toward death is to be seen in the masqueraders' reaction to death, which is one of understanding and acceptance because the ignorance that shrouded their eyes has been removed. With understanding which comes when one becomes closer to death one may adopt the third attitude which Bhagavad Gita has, "Death is as sure for that which is born, as birth is for that which is dead. Therefore grieve not for what is inevitable (cf. Lit Cigar, *Deathly Demeanor, Symbolism and Attitudes in The Masque of the Red Death,* http://www.litcigar.com/essays/masque%20of%20the%20red%20death%20(the).htm)".

To end with, we consider that before any attempt to translate a piece of prose it is the translator's permanent and difficult, to say the least, task to have a full understanding both of the literariness of the SL text and also of the manifold accompanying aspects of it, including here on the one hand the text style (with its pragmatic, semantic, syntactic and discourse level characteristics which sometimes as in Poe's case are the result of a 'philosophy of composition'), and on the other hand the authorial style (with its social, cultural and ideological factors which are either the result of one's education (Poe used as sources of inspiration the Bible – the story has a Christian background represented by the inevitability of death and man's incapacity to escape it, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from which he borrows the name of the title character, possibly John Donne's famous line: *No man is an island*, which may represent the moral of Poe's short story) or the result of one's going with the times (the Black Death had been a reality in the history of England and Europe between 1346-1350 when England may have lost as much as half its population, with severe long-term consequences, and later on in 1665 the Great Plague afflicted London, carrying off at least 70,000 victims.).

Our contention, threfore, is that a proper way for a translator to get in close touch with the text's textual and authorial features is via a stylistic analysis meant to disclose to him/her as much as possible about the language, the author and the technique of writing of the SL text.

From this point of view, in our study we make a point of the necessity of any translator of Poe to perform a stylistic analysis in order to be aware of the following textual features:

- the theme of death is rendered at three levels: a pragmatic level (the author-narrator announces his theme via the title, the first sentence, the last sentence, or each and every paragraph), a semantic level (death is present in every paragraph by means nouns, adjectives, adverbs standing for death in the form of epithets, metaphors, personifications, hyperboles, etc.), a syntactic level (there is a geometrical pattern of short and very long sentences that Poe uses to render a death-foreboding atmosphere).
- the vocabulary used is mostly a static one represented by nouns qualified by adjectives negatively charged in most of the cases, or by verbs qualified by adverbs with a negative meaning, which results in the horror effect that Poe wanted to obtain by the gothic-like atmosphere he portrayed in this shortstory.

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)

- each paragraph is a short story in itself and adds a new facet to the horror-intended effect both through its theme and through its structure.
- each sentence is constructed in such a way as to contribute semantically and syntactically to the author's intention to render step by step man's inability to escape death.
- Each word is chosen to increase or at least to maintain the tragicality of the plot.

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1975.
Biemel, Walter, *Expunere şi Interpretare,* Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1978.
Buranelli, V., *E. A. Poe,* Editura pentru Literatură Universală, Bucureşti, 1966.
Chatman, S., (ed.), *Literary Style. A Symposium*, Oxford University Press, London and New York, 1971.
de Beaugrande, R., *Text, Discourse and Process*, Ablex, Norwood, New York, 1980.
Galperin, I. R., *Stylistics,* Moscow, 1977, second edition.
Guiraud, P., *Essais de stylistique,* Editions Klincksieck, Paris, 1969.
Halliday, M.A.K., *Explorations in the Functions of Language*, Edward Arnold, London, 1973.
Halliday, M.A.K., Hasan, R., *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*, Deakin University Press, Victoria, 1985; repr. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.
Iordan, I., *Stilistica limbii române*, Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucureşti, 1975.
Irimia, Dumitru, *Introducere în stilistică,* Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1999.
Leech, Geoffrey, Short, Mick, *Style in Fiction. A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, Longman, 1981.
Martin, J. R., *English Text*, Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1992.
Mavrodin, Irina, *Poietică şi poetică,* Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1998.
Munteanu, Şt., *Studii de lingvistică şi stilistică,* Editura Pygmalion, Piteşti, 1998.
Nasta, M., Alexandrescu, S., (eds.), *Poetică şi Stilistică. Orientări Moderne*, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1972.
Poe, E.A., *The Poetic Principle*, in Foerster, M., Grabo, S.N., et al., editors, *American Poetry and Prose*, 5th Edition, in Three Volumes, Volume 1, Houghton Miflin Company, Boston, 1970.
Poe, E.A., *Selected Tales,* Penguin Books, London, 1994.
Riffaterre, M., *Essais de stylistique structurale*, Flammarion, Paris, 1971.
Shen Dan, *Literary Stylistics and Fictional Translation,* Peking University Press, 1995.
Short, Mick, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1996.
Steiner, G., *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*. Second edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.
Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1975.
Toolan, M., *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, Routledge, London, 1988.
Toolan, Michael, *Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics*, Arnold Publishers, London and New York, 1998.
Vianu, T., *Studii de Stilistică,* Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1968.
Vinay, J.P., Darbelnet, J., *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais*, Didier, Paris, 1977.
Wales, Katie, *A Dictionary of Stylistics,* Longman, London and New York, 1991, second impression.

BDD-A5475 © 2006 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:42:42 UTC)