

Edgar Allan Poe's "Silence": Intertextuality in the Meaning-Making Process within Systemic-Functional approach

"Silêncio" de Edgar Allan Poe: A Intertextualidade no processo de construção de significados dentro da abordagem sistêmico-funcional

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the semiotic elements that make up Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Silence," so as to stir up a discussion about the place of the reader as the one who will construct meaning by bringing to the text his intertextuality and his reality. The study draws on Hasan's (1989) theory of Verbal Art and Halliday's (2004) Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG). This choice stems from understanding language as an expression of social activity and as a representation of the meanings produced in that context. The results highlight that the text's architecture develops through choices on its expression plane towards the content plane. At a deeper level, by incorporating intertextuality into the analysis process, the textual architecture of the short story alludes to that of the biblical narrative, portraying the drama of a self, confronted with emotional and spiritual dilemmas.

Keywords: Intertextuality. Verbal Art. Reader. Reading experiences.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa os elementos semióticos que compõem o conto de Edgar Allan Poe "Silêncio", buscando mobilizar uma discussão em torno do lugar do leitor como sujeito construtor de significado, através de suas experiências intertextuais e sua realidade. O estudo baseia-se na teoria da Arte Verbal de Hasan (1989) e na Gramática Sistêmico-funcional (GSF) de Halliday (2004). Esta escolha se dá a partir do entendimento da linguagem como expressão da atividade social e como representação dos significados produzidos nesse contexto. Os resultados destacam que a arquitetura do texto se desenvolve por meio de escolhas em seu plano de expressão até chegar ao plano de conteúdo. Em um nível mais profundo, ao incorporar a intertextualidade no processo de análise, a arquitetura textual do conto alude à estrutura da narrativa bíblica e retrata o drama de um 'eu' confrontado com dilemas emocionais e espirituais.

Palavras-chave: Intertextualidade. Arte verbal. Leitor. Experiências de leitura.

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1 INTRODUCTION

One of the basic premises of scientific research is to look for evidence (or not) of what is grasped by intuition. In the case of the linguistic analysis, lexicogrammar investigation alongside the logical relations that bind them into a cohesive text unveils what Hasan (1989, p. 98) describes as "first and second order meanings", regardless of whether what is being investigated constitutes a literary work or not. The same view is presented by Leech and Short (2007, p.4) who say that the various approaches to linguistics nowadays have one single common aspect, namely "to explore for pattern and system below the surface forms of language". That doesn't mean that there is a meaning produced by the writer which needs to be found by the analyst. Rather, the approach entails a dialogue between the analyst both as a reader and as a linguistic observer, a process which requires the analyst to draw on his store of past readings to construe his own meaning, according to his social, ideological, and linguistic reality. Hence, the importance Birch (1989, p.262) gives to the analyst's "intertextual experiences", a path we follow to investigate Poe's tale, *Silence – a fable*, in order to unveil our understanding of the story from the writer's first-order semiotic signs. In other words, we read beyond the text using it as a surface on which we connect our reading heritage. It's a combination we make of the different semiotic elements from those readings that come together to help us build up our semantic construe of the tale. In this regard, we once again emphasize Birch's view (1989, p.257) that in analysing a text, Burton's (1982, p.195) question "where do you go from here?" must be preceded and determined by a *why* (*that* text) and a *so what* (what do we do with it). In the present study, we also aim to come up with an answer to each of these questions. To begin with, the *why* can be explained by both our personal liking of Edgar Allan Poe's works and life and our interest in the subject's construction of identity through their narratives.

A name in the world's literary canon, Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most brilliant writers of Gothic style. A deep mental unrest resulting from a series of misfortunes associated with a sharp mind and a sharp tongue would bring him many enemies in life, adding to a long-lasting financial instability. The result of this gloomy, unstable scenario, unlike what one might have expected, was a life that produced a number of masterpieces. These talk about the individual's inner world, precisely the conflicts of the soul: guilt, fear, spiritual darkness, foreboding, and the like. Poe is unquestionably an explorer of the human mind, carrying out his enterprise with great artistry, which, in addition to our personal liking, explains why he was the subject of our analysis.

As for the *so what* question, though *Silence – a Fable*³ doesn't take pride of place among Poe's most famous works, it's the tale's spiritual undertone, in particular, that drew our attention. Being familiar with Poe's biography and most of his works, we started off from the assumption that this religious connotation of the narrative entailed more of the author's identity than simply his religious conflicts, and *that* was worth investigating. Precisely, we aimed to show how crucial our intertextual knowledge was in helping us identify the "gaps that need to be filled" (Riffaterre, 1990, p.57). Therefore, we saw that, while on the surface level the story depicts a conversation between the Demon and the narrator, in which the former gives an account of a peculiar experience he had gone through in his own domain,

³ Fable available at: [file:///C:/Users/Usu%C3%A1rio/Downloads/the-works-of-edgar-allan-poe-071-silence-a-fable%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Usu%C3%A1rio/Downloads/the-works-of-edgar-allan-poe-071-silence-a-fable%20(3).pdf). Accessed on: January 7, 2025.

on the deeper level, the story, crafted in the moulds of the biblical narrative, portrays the drama of a tortured soul, confronted with social, emotional and also spiritual dilemmas. Getting to this level of reading is possible when we bring our intertextualities into the analysis process that constitutes “a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sorts of realities are constructed through language” (Burton, 1982, p.201). In the next section, thus, we review some concepts of intertextuality and explain our position adopted in this study.

2 INTERTEXT

The expression ‘intertextuality relationships’ was coined by Kristeva (1986, p.40 – author’s italics) as she built on Bakhtin’s concept of *dialogism*, which posits the transcendence of a text beyond its limits in order to dialogue with other texts. Voloshinov (2017, p.11) postulates that “the understanding of a sign is, after all, an act of reference between the sign apprehended and other, already known signs; in other words, understanding is a response to a sign with signs.” This response is the reader’s response, for, as put forward by Riffaterre (1990, p.56), a text is not an end in itself, but a confluence of texts, “an intertext, readers must know” to understand the overall meaning. The same viewpoint is defended by Frow (1990, p.45), who claims that it’s not a structure of presence “but traces and tracing of otherness”. This is the view we hold in the present study, that it’s the reader’s foremost role to build up meaning during the reading process by referring to his array of past readings. This will allow the reader to recognize the traces, or signs, in the writer’s text and create meaning – a text of his own – out of his experiences. The discursive and cultural aspects brought to the intertextual analysis is presented by Miola (2004, p. 23), in his article on the different textual interactions, he states “In the age of intertextual *écriture*, this last category consists of what any audience brings to a text rather than what the author put in. The focus moves from texts and traditions to the circulation of cultural discourses”.

A critical linguistic investigation, such as the one carried out here, considers a semiotic production of meanings in social discourses, taking into account the realities – both the reader’s and the writer’s – interwoven in the textual context. To this aim, a theory of language that considers the social and cultural contexts in the meaning making process (Lemke, 2002) is required. Birch (1989), one of the theories that base our investigation, expresses deep concerns about an analysis that assumes that meaning resides in the text rather than being subjectively produced by the reader. He argues that language and reality are intertwined in the reader, that’s why it should be left to the reader himself the creation of meaning. Meaning, he insists, must be constructed in a social context of which language isn’t just a mirror but a constitutive part.

In this light, we also refer to Halliday, whose works have highlighted language as a social semiotic. This means that language is a social fact and “arises in the life of the individual through an ongoing exchange of meanings with significant others” (Halliday, 1978, p.1). As Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 23) point out, “a language is a resource for the production of meaning, and meaning resides in the systemic patterns of choice”. Therefore, the systemic approach gives theoretical priority to the relationships of choices made in the systems of language. Also, Halliday (1978, p.21) argues that language has to fulfill certain functions for us regardless of differences in the physical and material environment. These functions are briefed in the next section.

3 SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS (SFL)

Systemic-Functional Linguistics is an approach whose study of language is centered on the notion of "function". In this way, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) highlight "the systemic analysis shows that functionality is intrinsic to language: this is to say, the entire architecture of language is arranged along functional lines. Language is as it is because of the functions in which it has evolved in the human species" (p. 31).

From this perspective, the authors established an important point by relating a language model that can be naturally related to the organization of the context with ideational meanings - sources for constructing content - used to construct the field (social action); interpersonal meanings - sources for interaction - used to negotiate relationships (the role of structure); textual meanings - sources for textual organization - used to develop the mode (the symbolic organization). Understanding that language is not devoid of social commitment but realizes and is realized in the social contexts that make up our lives, we turn to what Halliday and Hasan (1989) call social semiotics: the use of language (i) to express the individual's views on the inner and outer worlds (experiential function); and (ii) to enact their social interactions (interpersonal function). These two functions of language are instantiated in the text (textual) by means of logical relations (logical). By text they mean "a social exchange of meaning" (Halliday; Hasan, 1989, p.11), which also may refer to multimodal discourses.

The ideational metafunction, one of the focal points of this paper, is divided into two components: the experiential – related to the options within a transitivity system – and the logical – related to the interrelations of the sentences that are supported by the processes (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004). From an experiential perspective, language reflects our view of the world as a construct of events (Processes) involving entities (Participants) with a backdrop of details of time, place, manner, etc. (Circumstances). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) propose the language transitivity system to order and represent our experiences. It presents an input condition called experiential, allowing, for the representation of a fragment of experience, the choice of one of the six available processes (verbal, mental, behavioral, material, existential or relational)

For Martin and White (2005) the ideational dimension of meaning is crucial for the investigation of inequalities and power in discourse, in addition to these aspects it allows the reader to raise questions about who is acting, what types of actions are being undertaken and who or what agrees. SFL is, then, a system of linguistic choices which we can choose from to instantiate these metafunctions and produce meaning. Developing his investigations in SFL, Halliday published his Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) in 1985, a seminal work that has assisted and influenced all those researchers in the field of SFL. As our objective isn't a thorough discussion of SFG, we invite the reader to research Halliday's works (particularly the 2014 edition of the *Introduction to Functional Grammar*), as here we just introduce the reader to the basics of the ideational metafunction, the metafunction we use to investigate Poe's tale, *Silence*.

3.1 Clause as representation – the ideational metafunction

It's worth pointing out (as Halliday does) that there's no distinct instantiation of this or that metafunction in a clause, rather, "the three metafunctional lines are unified within the

structure of the clause" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p.211). Though here we discuss the ideational function separately, we do so for the sake of shedding light on the features that make up the experiential aspect of the story's protagonists. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 212) states that in experiential terms, the clause construes a "configuration of a process, participants involved in it and any attendant circumstances". We start with the fact that we think of our experiences in terms of happenings or "goings-on", i.e., "a figure of happening, doing, sensing, saying, being or having" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p.213). Each one of these figures entails a process that is experienced by participants at a given time and under certain circumstances, though the latter do not interfere in the process but, rather, characterize it. These processes are realized in the grammar of the clause by the system of Transitivity and are presented in table 1.

Table 1 – Types of Process in the Transitivity System

TYPES OF PROCESS	PARTICIPANTS	EXPERIENCE
Material	actor / goal	doing, happening
Mental	senser / phenomenon	sensing: seeing, thinking, wanting, feeling
Relational	carrier/attribute - identifier/ identified - possessor/ possessed	being: attribution identification
Verbal	sayer / verbiage	Speaking
Behavioural	behavior/ behaviour	Behaving
Existential	Existent	Existing

Source: Adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p.311)

Circumstantial elements, in turn, are the elements in the clause which refer to the place, time, manner, and cause of the processes taking place. They are thus linked to the four WH- forms of adverbs rather than nouns and "don't have the potential of becoming Subjects." Their relevance lies in that being connected to the processes, they give us an "idea of the semantic space being constructed" (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p.312). Before we move on to the analysis of the tale, we sketch out next a few words on Hasan's verbal art framework so as to explain why we used it in our study.

4 THE VERBAL ART SYSTEM (VAS): BRIEF IDEIAS FROM HASAN

"If there's art, it's because the way language functions in the text" (Hasan, 1989, p.91). The line above expresses Hasan's view regarding the cruciality of language to produce literary texts. Nevertheless, the VAS was created by Hasan as a framework to be applied to any kind of text. One of the basic premises of verbal art is the identification of patterns, better still, of patterning of patterns that are essential in creating meaning. This patterning of patterns differs in literature from other text forms while it produces art due to what Hasan calls *foregrounding*, a term coined by the Circle of Prague linguists and greatly developed by Mukarovsky (1977), one such scholar. Foregrounding, in turn, is defined as "something that stands out against an established tendency" (Hasan, 1989, p.94). In other words, it occurs where it is not expected to be, while it highlights the background against which it stands out as well.

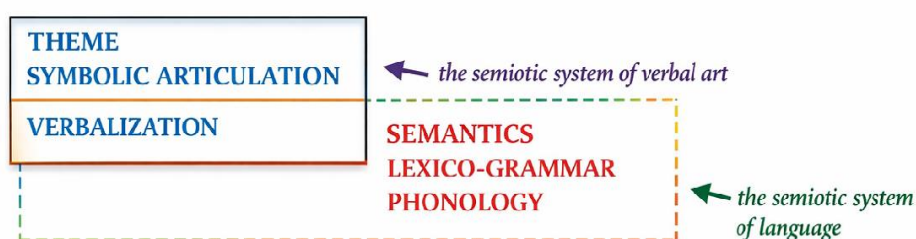
However, foregrounding is not relevant *per se*, rather, its consistency is what makes it worth considering. This consistency entails two aspects, namely stability of semantic direction and of textual location. In the first case, all the occurrences of foregrounded patterns lead to the same general semantic aspect of the text; in the second case, textual

location makes reference to a "significant point in the organization of the text as a unit" (Hasan, 1989, p. 96). In short, foregrounding needs to contribute to the semantic aspect of the text to be considered relevant

As Hasan's verbal art framework isn't the aim of this study, we won't delve deep into her theory, but simply present the reasons that motivated her for having designed such a useful resource for the investigation of a literature text. We do so because the same reasons explain why we singled out some of the tale's stylistic choices. For those interested in the details of Hasan's work, we suggest a look at the References herein.

The basic premise of Hasan's theory is that there's no such thing as language of literature but language *in* literature. It means that we should look at how language functions in a text, keeping in mind that function isn't a property of the text but a way of using language in order to give it artistic value (Hasan, 1989, p.94). To explain how language contributes to the creation of verbal art, Hasan turns to the concept of foregrounding, that is, the presence of a significant contrast in relation to the norms of that specific text. As Hasan defines it, "we think of something as foregrounded when it stands out against an established tendency" (p. 94). The figure 1 below sketches out her ideas:

Figure 1 – Verbal Art and Language



Source: Designed by the authors, based on Hasan (1989)

Verbalization is the lowest level of the strata where wording, meaning and sounds lie. It's one's first contact with the text through which he is able to understand the logical relations between the linguistic elements and their meaning - a knowledge that is kept on the surface and defined as 'first order meaning' by Hasan (1989, p. 98). A deeper meaning can be achieved in the deepest stratum - theme. The meaning at this level is reached when the text is "dissociated from the particularities of that text" (Hasan, 1989, p.97). The theme of verbal art is very similar to a generalization one can make about the text, a hypothesis about some aspect of a person's social life. These two strata are connected by the semiotic system of the verbal art model, symbolic articulation. It corresponds to the lexicogrammar stratum of the semiotic system of language (Hasan, 1989), i.e. the system of signs that through the patterning of patterns and foregrounding leads one to a deeper meaning, or second order meaning in Hasan's words.

Hasan aims that foregrounding consistency entails two aspects: the stability of its semantic direction, and the stability of its textual location. With regard to the first, the various foregrounded patterns point toward the same general kind of meaning, while by textual location Hassan means the tendency of the significant patterns to occur at a textually important point "in the organization of the text as a unity". This means that to be significant, the foregrounding must have a semantic consequence (Hasan, 1989 p.95-96). As an example, here, as in Hasan (1989), *parallelism* and *repetition* attract attention because we can attach significance to them. They contribute to the meanings of Poe's tale, *Silence*, our

corpus of analysis. Thus, it's the way language is used as a semiotic resource that led Hasan to design her verbal art framework with an internal structure similar to that of the semiotic system of language (*ibid.* p. 96). Details of how we employed the aforementioned theories to construe our understanding of the tale are presented in the Methodology section.

5 METHODOLOGY

This research, as stated above, uses Edgar Allan Poe's tale "Silence" as its corpus of analysis and is guided by a qualitative approach, seeking a reflection on intertextuality based on systemic patterns of choices made. According to Minayo (2001), the qualitative approach works with the universe of meanings, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships and phenomena.

As regards the analysis of the tale *Silence*, we follow a tripartite theoretical framework. Firstly, we start with Hasan's verbal art (1989), as the narrative structure stands out when we first look at the tale. In this regard, attention is drawn particularly to the tale's planes of narration and the use of repetition and parallelism, stylistic techniques that foreground the deeper meaning.

Secondly, Halliday's SFG accounts for the experiential line of organization as described in Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p.211), which allowed us to identify the participants, processes, and circumstances that make up the first-order meaning of the narrative, highlighting thus the elements we found needed to be referenced. We mapped the processes and, consequently, the participants, and circumstances, however, without the aid of any software, that is, manually by choosing successive readings with the aim of capturing the metaphorical nuances of each clause. This mapping led us to Birch's (1989) intertextual proposal, the last step that enabled us to move beyond the ideational investigation towards a deeper semiosis, into which we brought our array of past readings and our realities, so as to, in Riffaterre's words, single out the "gaps that need to be filled" (Riffaterre, 1990, p.57). For limitations of space, however, these intertextual sources are not fully developed in the study.

Still worth mentioning is that despite considering each theoretical framework separately for the purpose of showing how each one can contribute to the meaning-making process, we are aware that in the analysis of a text, the metafunctional (ideational, interpersonal, textual) choices and the lexico-grammatical patterns are investigated in terms of the relations that bind them into a whole rather than a fragmented piece of verbal art.

6 ANALYSIS

6.1 Plane of narration

The fable presents the following planes of narration: (i) *an indirect objective narration* (carried out by an outsider whom we'll call *the Imp* after (Hasan, 1989, p.68), since he's not an actor in the kernel story); (ii) *a direct subjective narration* (by the Demon); (iii) *an indirect objective narration* (by the Demon); and (iv) *a direct objective narration* (by the *Imp*), as illustrated in table 2 below.

Table 2 – Planes of Narration

PLANE OF NARRATION	EXAMPLE	NARRATOR
Indirect objective narration	"Listen to me," said the Demon	The Imp
Direct subjective narration	And mine eyes fell upon a huge grey rock which stood by the shore of the river	The Demon
Indirect subjective narration	And the man turned his attention from the heaven, and looked out upon the dreary river Zaire,	The Demon
Direct objective narration	And as the Demon made an end of his story, he fell back within the cavity of the tomb and laughed.	The Imp

Source: Designed by authors

The tale's main narrative is itself a verbal projection of the clause "'listen to me," said the Demon", which alternates between the direct/indirect and objective/subjective planes of narration, according to the Demon's description of the swamp and the man on top of the rock, as well as his own behaviour. The semantic value of the Demon's account is further enhanced by the patterning of patterns of the linguistic elements. As Hasan (1989, p. 47) explains, it's not the patterning variation per se that is significant but whether this variation constructs certain elements of meaning. The point thus is one of contrast to the expected norm in the text. The patterning of patterns thus foregrounds a second order meaning to be construed by the reader, as shown next.

6.2 Repetition and parallelism

Repetition and Parallelism are patterns carefully explored by the writer to foreground the theme of the story. They evoke feelings, highlight the processes taking place, as well as the setting and actors of a story. Hasan (1989, p.12), for example, points out that repetition occurs when "it shows complete identity of lexis and grammar", as the clauses repeated throughout the fable which we show in table 3 below.

Table 3 – Clause Repetition in *Silence*

They sigh one unto the other
But there's no wind throughout the heavens
And the rocker was grey
And the man trembled in the solitude
And the man trembled in the solitude

Source: Designed by authors

Now, as for parallel structures, Hasan (1989, p.12) states that although there's the need of structural identity, "those presenting lexical congruity are the ones to draw more attention." They make up most of the text in *Silence* and are exemplified in table 4.

Table 4 – Parallel Structures

CONJUNCTION	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	CIRCUMSTANCES
And	I	Stood		in the morass among the tall lilies
And	The tall primeval trees	Rock		eternally hither and thither
And	There	Is no	quiet [...] nor silence	[...] there
But	There	is no	Wind	throughout the heavens

Source: Designed by authors

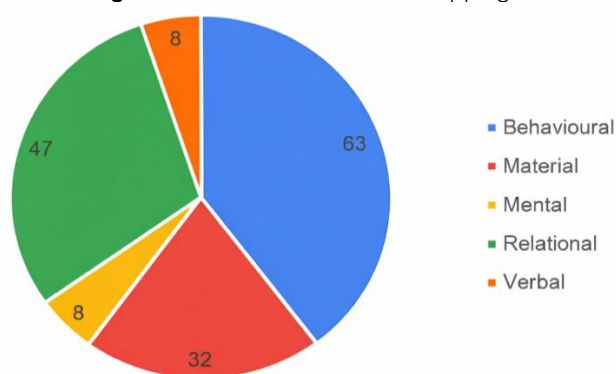
Together, these resources serve a two-fold purpose: First, they enhance the misty and ghastly marsh where the devil dwells. The description is rich in its intertextuality which we discuss further below. Second, besides adding to the description of the devil's place, repetition makes more evident the flow of events and reinforces the immutability of the status quo, leading the devil to take extreme measures in an effort to change it. Quim (1941,

p. 665) recognized that “the repetition in Poe's poetry was natural to him because it is the natural expression of intense feeling”. In the next section, we detail this ideational analysis of the tale on the basis of Halliday and Matthiessen's systemic-functional grammar (2004).

6.3 Ideational structure

Within the bounds of SFG, the tale reveals the processes, participants, and circumstances described below. To begin with, the demon's narrative entails material, mental, verbal and, mainly, relational and behavioural processes (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Ideational Processes mapping



Source: Designed by authors

Material processes are intransitive and, thus, not directed towards any goal. They refer to both nature's phenomena and acts by human and non-human participants – “It was night, and the rain fell”,

Example 1

they [the waters of the river] flow not onwards to the sea, but palpitate [...], he [the man] raised his head from his hand, and came [the hippopotami], with the behemoth, unto the foot of the rock.

The few verbal and mental processes are somehow related: While the former is used to show the demon's power and control over his kingdom, the latter, made up of cognitive and perceptive clauses, show how the elements responded to the demon's command.

Example 2

and the hippopotami heard my call, and the murmur was no longer heard from among them [the water-lilies]

As well as the demon's curiosity regarding the man and his incapacity to understand him.

Example 3

but I could not decipher the characters, that I might discover the actions of the man.

Alongside these processes, relational and behavioural processes, also, have proven crucial in the construction of the text's scenario. Relational processes detail the devil's kingdom, while behavioural processes refer to the beasts' and inanimate elements' acts and attitudes, corroborating the intransitivity of the material processes. At the same time, these relational processes foreground the tale's core meaning – the spiritual battle between good and evil within one's soul.

Example 4

*and there stood a man upon the summit of the rock,
and I hid myself among the water-lilies, I cursed the elements with the curse of tumult,
and the thunder rolled, - and the lightning fell.*

In terms of participants, in addition to the narrator and the devil, the story introduces a man on the rock. He is the one who intrigues the devil to the point of fury, leading the latter to use the Elements and the beasts to disturb and affect the man somehow, as we can see in example 5:

Example 5

*And I lay close within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude
[...] Then I cursed the elements with the curse of tumult.*

Lastly, circumstances build up the context of the events in the tale.

Example 6

*beneath the red eye of the sun with a tumultuous and convulsive motion
in Libya, by the borders of the river Zaire
in the solemnity of their desolation*

As we can see in example 6, the circumstances not only define the place and manner of where and how the processes took place but also add to the "gaps that need to be filled" (Riffaterre, 1990, p.57). By 'gaps' Riffaterre means the reader's perception that something is missing and needs to be supplied by means of reference to their reading sources.

The analysis, so far, allows us to make some preliminary considerations: This is a story that takes place in the devil's realm, a richly detailed, dark and sombre swamp, portraying an apocalyptic scenario where he shows off his power over all the creatures and even the Elements at the sight of an unexpected and uninvited deity look-alike man. Curiosity grows into suspicion that leads to indignation at the man's unchanged expression amidst the chaos stirred up by the devil as an attempt to see whether the man would show any response. However, while this ideational analysis highlights major aspects of the text as social semiotic, which, otherwise, would go unnoticed, it's still limited to the text itself.

For an analysis that aims at a subjective (the reader's) construe of meaning, it is crucial that we read beyond the text, which means to consider our reading experiences and realities as crucial elements in the analytical process. That was how we could understand the fable to reflect Poe's conflicted existence. Right from the very first clause, for instance, we can see the importance the bible exerted on Poe's life. We are required to relate the 'hypotactic' clause (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p. 467), 'as he placed his hand upon my head', to the Book of Revelations (Bible, 1903, p.1273) chapter 1, verse 17 – "And he laid his right hand upon me". Actually, Poe's scholars and biographers (Forrest, 2011; Thomas and Jackson, 1987; Quinn, 1941 among others) agree that despite being an atheist, Poe's works such as *Eureka*, *The Imp of the Perverse*, *The Duke d'Omelette*, *Shadow*, *Morella*, *Silence-a fable*, for instance, show a deep influence by the bible and other religious and mystical philosophies. Forrest (2011), for example, in an in-depth examination of Poe's short stories, affirms that "the Tales confirm the conclusion that their author was deeply interested in the higher realm. With a few exceptions in a lighter vein, they belong to the domain of morals and conscience. Therein good and evil are shown in mortal combat in the soul of man" (Forrest, 2011, p. 15).

Another biblical allusion that is possible to make is to the narrative of Jesus's temptation by the devil, described in the Gospels of Matthew 4, Luke 4, and Mark 1. Returning to the notion of the patterning of patterns described in Hasan's verbal art (Subsection 6.2) as a means to convey semantic value, we notice the narrative structure is grounded on what Halliday calls "paratactic" (or independent) clauses (Halliday; Matthiessen, 2014, p.440). These clauses start mostly with the additive conjunction *and*, which reflects another biblical influence on the writer, as shown in table 5.

5 – Table Clause Relations in 'Silence'

The Edgar Allan Poe's Narrative in Silence – A Fable	The King James Version (KJV) Bible Text
It was night, and the rain fell; and falling it was rain, but having fallen, it was blood. And I stood in the morass among the tall lilies, and the rain fell upon my head. And mine eyes fell upon a huge grey rock which stood by the shore of the river, and was lighted by the light of the moon. And the rock was grey, and ghastly, and tall — and the rock was grey. And the moon ceased to totter up its pathway to heaven -- and the thunder died away -- and the lightning did not flash -- and the clouds hung motionless -- and the waters sunk to their level and remained -- and the trees ceased to rock -- and the water-lilies sighed no more -- and the murmur was heard no longer from among them,	⁷ And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. ⁸ And all the people answered together, and said, all that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. [BIBLE, 1903, p. 83]. ⁷ And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? ⁸ And he said, take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near [BIBLE, 1903, p. 1083].

Source: Designed by authors

This view resonates with that in Forrest (2011, p.87):

[...] examination of Poe's noblest writings reveals resemblances to the Bible of a most noteworthy kind from the point of structure and style. [...] The most distinguishing characteristic of Scripture narrative is its extreme simplicity of structure. It moves forward by a succession of co-ordinate sentences and clauses usually connected by "and."

As it was the case in Hasan (1989, p.12-13), here also, the patterns of coordination are textually significant and contribute to defining the style of the text.

Religious influence on Poe was not, however, limited to the Christian principles. Poe's works reflect philosophies that range from Greek mythology to India's Vedanta and the Islamic Quran. This influence comes from the Romantic writers, Poe himself being one of them, Thomas Moore, Lord Byron, Shelley, Woodsworth, and Coleridge (Al-Kamal, 2015, p.14), in addition to others. The Romantic Age, knowingly, witnessed the opening of the Western gates to the Eastern world – the Orient. Al-Kamal (2015, p.35) points out that "during the 18th and 19th centuries, Europe helped to introduce the Near Orient to America. Through these European efforts, the Orient became a source of activity, influence, and knowledge." He also singles out Edgar Allan Poe as one of the first writers to introduce the Quran in his works, being specially interested in the Near East geography which he connects with biblical prophecies (Al-Kamal, 2015, p.45). A good example is the present tale.

Poe's references to the Eastern geography and Greek mythology are used to enhance the portrayal of the devil's murky domain. For instance, the lexical choices *Libya* and *Zaire* (Poe, 1902, p. 220) reflect the importance attributed to the study of the Orient by European and American literature and cultural studies scholars. As Al-Kamal (2015) suggests, Poe's turn to the culture and the civilizations of the Middle East was not only for new worlds of imagery, but also to introduce Oriental culture to American "traditionalists" (author's quotations, p.6).

Now, as for the choices above, *Libya* can be easily explained for its importance in the European and American history. Sitting in the north of Africa, it enjoyed a privileged position which granted it the control of the Mediterranean Sea and, therefore, the West-East trade, but not without a succession of battles, both within its own territory and out at sea against Western, mainly American, vessels (Wright, 2012, p.73-81). Although the Barbary wars, as these battles were known, belonged to Poe's parents' generation and not to his own, the impact they left on Poe's time was considerable as "Americans had warfare as a counterweight against the idealized Orientalism of the British/European Romantic poets" (Al-Kamal, 2015, p.4). In addition, the Orient was attractive for its religious sites, literary works and accounts given by travelers. *Zaire* river, in turn, today's Congo river, is most surely mentioned due to Poe's familiarity with its historical and literary relevance in and out of the African continent. Hence his mention of the dense rainforest and the place's fauna – *the behemoth* (another biblical reference as we can see Job 40:15), the *hippopotami* – and flora – the *water-lilies*, the *primeval trees*, and the *poisonous flowers*. The sense of foreboding conjured up throughout the tale is greatly emphasized by the setting's description. The other few mentions used in the tale come from the Greek mythology, a knowledge evidenced by the writer and which he relies on the reader to have so as to grasp the 'second order' (Hasan, 1989) meaning: *Deity* – a reference to the man seen by the devil whose features "... but his features were the features of a Deity" (Poe, 1902, p.204) – *sybils*, *Magi*, *Dodona*, and *Genii*. Also, there's a mention of *Allah*, a reference which makes clear Poe's familiarity with the Quran.

6.4 Poe's conflict of the soul

However possible and acceptable the aforementioned biblical allusions may be as one reading of the tale, the sources that make up the intertext cited herein take us down a wider path. The tale's dichotomy *chaos-silence* foregrounds what we understand takes place within Poe's outer-inner self. It is in this light that we read *Silence*: the expression of a wretched soul regardless of its boisterous life.

In his biography of E.A. Poe, Quinn (1941, p.125) lists four themes that made up the writer's personality and writings: pride, love, beauty, and death. Death is the *leitmotif* of Poe's works as he had to put up with it since he was an early child: First, with the losses of his parents and his uncle – his foster father – and then, and most devastating, with the loss of his 'sweet and young' wife, Virginia, whose death he was never able to get over. This, added to a life pervaded with financial hardships and disappointments, took Poe to the depths of despair, bringing him into drinking and severe depression, culminating with his death on October 7, 1849. The sadness and unhappiness which were Poe's companions for life, notwithstanding the many *soirees* he attended, the romantic outings (after Virginia's death), and the professional opportunities that were presented to him, are foregrounded in the writer's description of the 'man on top of the rock', as can be seen in "and his brow was lofty with thought, and his eye wild with care; and, in the few furrows upon his cheek I read the fables of sorrow, and weariness, and disgust with mankind, and a longing after solitude" (Poe, 1902, p.222).

Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman (1860, p.59), a close friend of Poe's and one of his objects of courtship to whom he dedicated his poem 'To Helen', was precise in her heartfelt description of the writer:

Yet, as out of mighty and terrific discords noblest harmonies are sometimes evolved, so through the purgatorial ministries of awe and terror, and through the haunting Nemesis of doubt, Poe's restless and unappeased soul was urged on to the fulfilment of its appointed work — groping out blindly towards the light, and marking the approach of great spiritual truths by the very depth of the shadow it projected against them.

Mrs. Whitman's words are particularly expressive of Poe's innermost fight, helping the readers to decipher not only the man but also the genius's masterpieces, such as *Silence*, which portray a sensitive soul entrapped by questions concerning the spiritual realm and one's spiritual battle. Thus, Poe's wretchedness grew visible to those who knew him as his mental condition worsened, withdrawing him deeper into the recesses of his soul. As a result, the greater the silence that enclosed him, the more devastated he felt, a condition semiotically foregrounded in the tale. As we can see in Poe (1902, p.223)

And mine eyes fell upon the countenance of the man, and his countenance was wan with terror. And, hurriedly, he raised his head from his hand, and stood forth upon the rock and listened. But there was no voice throughout the vast illimitable desert, and the characters upon the rock were SILENCE. And the man shuddered, and turned his face away, and fled afar off, in haste, so that I beheld him no more.

While the patterns "lofty with thought", "wild with care", "fables of sorrow and weariness", "disgust with mankind", and "longing after solitude" mentioned earlier refer to a feeling of 'desolation' which mirrors, as we read it, how Poe was seen by his acquaintances, the semiotic choices in the second excerpt – "wan with terror", "shuddered, turned his face away, and fled afar off" – embody Poe's incapability to put up with himself, his innermost fights, and his 'silence'.

6.5 Analysis of the tale's coda

After the devil had finished his account of the unexpected meeting, the *Imp* once again takes over the narration, in the coda. The semiotic construction foregrounds Poe's thoughts of a way to end his deep suffering and severe depression. The devil going back to its tomb, his laughing at the whole episode, the *Imp*'s awe at the tale's in-depth lore, which he holds "to be the most wonderful of all" (Poe, 1902, p.222), and his not being able to laugh along and being cursed by the devil all point to Poe's unhappiness and longing for death as an escape from his misery. This reading is corroborated by Quinn's (1941, p.618) mention of a letter from Poe to his mother in his biography of E. A. Poe:

The very instant you get this, come to me. The joy of seeing you will almost compensate for our sorrows. We can but die together. It is no use to reason with me now; I must die. I have no desire to live since I have done "Eureka." I could accomplish nothing more. For your sake it would be sweet to live, but we must die together. You have been all in all to me, darling, ever beloved mother, and dearest, truest friend. I was never really insane, except on occasions where my heart was touched.

Two months later Edgar Allan Poe's death would make headlines in the main newspapers in the country.

The other semiotic sign, the lynx, embodies significant spiritual meanings. It symbolizes the unseen, the hidden, and the unknown. In addition, the lynx's secretive and solitary nature echoes the spiritual significance of introspection and the exploration of the inner self

(Rivera, 2025). All these elements in the coda, thus, foreground Poe's personality which, despite his charisma and sociability, is found to be inward, melancholic, and unstable.

7 CONCLUSION

Starting from the premise that a text is a social semiotic event which emphasizes the social function of language as it constructs "all sorts of realities" (Burton 1982, p.201), this study aimed to shed light on the reader's protagonism in the meaning-making process of a text. To accomplish this, we (readers) used Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) SFG to help us identify the participants, processes and circumstances that make up Poe's fable - *Silence*. In addition, we considered it essential to our investigation Hasan's verbal art framework as it highlighted patterns in the text which foregrounded the meanings we made. Surely, the whole process of analysis that led us to these meanings of Poe's choices would not have been possible without us bringing our intertextual knowledge and reality to the study.

Although any text can be investigated through different perspectives, such as, for instance, the Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) aforementioned, these perspectives are limited to the text itself. Hence our focus on the reader's intertextuality to enable the dialogue between the different sources of information so as to fill in those gaps essential for a more comprehensive construction of meaning. This was our aim in this study, to show how our intertextualities and our realities made us read the tale from one perspective.

We are aware, however, that this is a study of limited scope which is subject to further revision and testing. Nevertheless, we highlight that by bringing his intertextuality into the study of a text, the systemic-functional analyst can open up his array of possibilities of building up second-order meanings.

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