

# Representation of Character in Edgar Allan Poe's Works and Biographical Dissimilarities in Scott Cooper's *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) Film

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## Abstract

*This study is aim to analyze: (1) the representation of characters in Edgar Allan Poe's works in The Pale Blue Eye (2022) film, and (2) the similarities and dissimilarities between the biography and the character of Edgar Allan Poe in The Pale Blue Eye (2022) film. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the film entitled The Pale Blue Eye directed by Scott Cooper as the objective research. The collecting data of the research method includes watching, reading, identifying, classifying, and selecting. The researcher analyzes the data by using Linda Hutcheon's theory of Adaptation and Transformation. It is done through some steps as displaying, explaining, and interpreting. The result of this research shows that: (1) the representation of some of Edgar Allan Poe's works in The Pale Blue Eye includes "The Premature Burial," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Pit and The Pendulum," "Lenore," "The Gold-Bug," and "Landor's Cottage." These works serve as crucial elements in establishing the main characters, including Augustus Landor, Edgar Allan Poe, and Lea Marquis, contributing to the portrayal of their personalities, motivations, and relationships; (2) there are similarities between the character depicted in the film and the real life Poe, such as an interest in poetry, French language skills, training at the West Point Military Academy, and alcohol preference and there are also differences, such as involvement in murder investigation, military discipline, financial problems, family relationships, and literary recognition.*

**Keywords:** *The Pale Blue Eye, representation, adaptation, transformation*

## Introduction

Literature, as defined by Chris Baldick in the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is a body of written works related by subject matter, language, place of origin, or cultural standards of merit. Eagleton suggests that literature can be understood as "imaginative writing," involving highly organized and patterned language (2008: 1-2).

In its development, literature is divided into several important periods, from which emerged the literary figures we recognize today, such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Orwell, Virginia Woolf, Edgar Allan Poe, and William Shakespeare. Speaking of literary works nowadays, there are many writers who

use literary figures as their inspiration. They involve using characters or elements of the story (characters, settings, plots, conflicts, and themes) that exist and developing them in a new way or giving a different perspective and a creative and unique touch to their work (Hutcheon, 2006:10).

## **Literary Review**

### **Adaptation**

Adaptations are usual across various media today, including television, films, musical and drama stages, the internet, novels, comic books, theme parks, and video games. This phenomenon is not new; historically, Shakespeare adapted his culture's narratives from written forms to live performances, thereby broadening their audience. Early examples of adaptations include stories by the Brothers Grimm, like *Cinderella*, Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Hutcheon, 2006:2).

The term 'adaptation' has evolved from its scientific origins. In 1597, it was defined as "the action of applying one thing to another or of bringing two things together so as to effect a change in the nature of the objects." By 1860, it referred to "the action or process of adapting one thing to fit with another or suit specified conditions, especially a new or changed environment" (Littlejohn, 2018:9).

Malcolm Bradbury, as cited in Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, posits that even without temporal or cultural changes, the context can significantly alter a story's reception. Adaptations are framed by their contexts: time, place, society, and culture. Hutcheon views adaptations as products that follow a "theme and variation" structure, implying inevitable changes due to factors like the new medium's requirements, the adapter's vision, the audience's expectations, and the context of both creation and reception.

Julie Sanders does not strictly differentiate between adaptation and appropriation. She states, "An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original... On the other hand, appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (Hutcheon, 2006:26). Furthermore, Thomas Leitch, in *A*

*Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*, describes adaptation as a subset of intertextuality, suggesting that while all adaptations are intertexts, not all intertexts are adaptations.

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, adaptation is defined as "the action or process of changing something to suit a new purpose or situation" and as "a film, television, drama, or play based on a particular book or play but changed to suit the new medium." Hutcheon describes adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art" (Hutcheon, 2006:170).

Hutcheon outlines three perspectives on adaptation: as a formal entity or product, involving transposition of specific works across mediums or genres; as a creative process, involving reinterpretation and recreation; and as a form of intertextuality, where adaptations evoke the memory of other works through repetition with variation (Hutcheon, 2006:7-8).

According to Sanders, adaptation can be a transpositional practice that transforms a genre into another generic mode, an act of recreation. In some ways, it is similar to editorial practices involving trimming and editing, but it can also be a procedure that strengthens a text through addition, expansion, modification, and interpolation. Adaptations often comment on the source text by offering a revised point of view from the "original" perspective, adding hypothetical motivations, or giving voice to silenced and marginalized groups (Sanders, 2006:18-19).

### **Transformation**

The term "transformation" refers to a complete or major change in someone or something's appearance and form. This change can be dramatic and extreme, often involving a radical shift from the original state. According to Cambridge Dictionary, transformation is a complete change in the appearance or character or something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved.

Adaptation and transformation are two related yet distinct concepts in the context of literature. Many adaptation theories suggest that the story serves as the common denominator, the core element transferred across various media and genres. Each medium and genre engages with the story in formally distinct ways and through different modes, such as narrating, performing, or interacting. In the

process of adaptation, equivalences are searched within different sign systems for various components of the story, including its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, perspectives, outcomes, contexts, symbols, and imagery (Hutcheon, 2006:10).

Dudley Andrew in *Concepts in Film Theory* explain that character is interrelated by opposition (desire, hate), by reciprocation (to desire, to be desired), and by dissimulation (hating, while appearing to desire). The events of the tale transformations within characters and among them according to a limited set of rules.

### **Edgar Allan Poe's Works in Literature**

Edgar Allan Poe was a master of the short story and narrative poem. He made significant contributions to the short story genre, influencing its development in lasting ways. Poe's work includes some of the most famous literary pieces worldwide. His early aspiration to become a poet has been realized many times over, particularly through the enduring popularity of "The Raven," one of the most well-known poems in English.

Poe is also renowned for his critical principles, such as the idea that a "long poem" is a contradiction, that poetry should have a distinct musical quality, that prose tends to convey truth more than poetry, which aims for beauty, that the short prose tale is the highest form of fiction, and that the ideal reading time for work is under an hour and a half (Fisher, 2008: 27).

In Sova's *Critical Companion to Edgar Allan Poe: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, there are some of Edgar Allan Poe's works, such as "Landor's Cottage," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Raven," "The Gold-Bug," "The Pit and The Pendulum," "The Premature Burial," and "Lenore."

### **Research Methodology**

This research use qualitative method as the principle instrument of the research. In *Research Methods for Everyday Life* (2009: 7), Vanderstoep suggested that to explain a research problem in a qualitative, it is best understood by exploring the phenomena and concept.

The object of the research includes the subtitles of *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) film directed by Scott Cooper and published by Cross Creek Pictures and Netflix platform with a duration of 02:10:06. Additionally, the research draws on the following books: Hourly History's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Life from Beginning to End*, Scott Peeples' *The Man of The Crowd: Edgar Allan Poe in the City*, and Dawn B. Sova's *Critical Companion to Edgar Allan Poe: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. The types of data used in the research is collected from the dialogues of the film.

The method of collecting data in this research is done by the researcher through some procedures, specifically watching *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) film and reading the subtitles and biography books, identifying the data from the subtitles and some books, classifying the data that is relevant to the problem statement, and selecting the data.

After the data are collected, the next step is analyzing the data by displaying, explaining, and interpreting it.

## **Finding and Discussion**

In this research, the researcher analyzes the representation of the characters in Edgar Allan Poe's works and biographical dissimilarities in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022).

### **1. The Characters in Edgar Allan Poe's Works Represented in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) Film**

#### **Augustus Landor**

In Sova's *Critical Companion to Edgar Allan Poe: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, "Landor's Cottage" is a descriptive narrative and Poe's last story printed during his lifetime, Poe's friends, including Mary Gove, suggested that the cottage described is an idealized version of his own home in Fordham, known as his "little cottage at the top of a hill." The character "Annie" in the story has been identified as Poe's friend Mrs. Annie Richmond, who bears a resemblance to the character and inspired Poe's poem "For Annie." The narrative's speaker mentions that the sole purpose of the work is to provide a detailed depiction of Mr. Landor's residence .

At the end of the film, when Edgar goes to Landor's house, the scene focuses on Gus's cottage, which is taken from Poe's short story about "Landor's Cottage." The film version, with its simple yet elegant double-winged design and steeply sloping Dutch shingle roof is an almost exact, if not better, depiction of the homestead story.

Poe's story "Landor's Cottage" is adapted into a film scene focusing on Gus's cottage. This transposition involves a shift from the literary medium to the visual medium of film. The essence of the cottage's description is maintained, showcasing sensibility to the source material while utilizing the strengths of the new medium to enhance the portrayal. The film adaptation strives to remain faithful to Poe's detailed description of the cottage, capturing its simplicity and elegance.

### **Edgar Allan Poe**

In the film *The Pale Blue Eye*, Edgar Allan Poe often talks about his mother. He said that his mother, who died 20 years ago, frequently visited him in dreams and gave instructions about Poe's difficulties. Edgar loved poetry and was full of imagination. People around him often underestimate him—friends, classmates, and every Edgar's benefactor. Therefore, he tends to be alone.

Augustus Landor : You could have woken any morning and written this.  
Edgar Allan Poe : But I didn't write it. It was dictated.  
Augustus Landor : Dictated?  
Edgar Allan Poe : Mmm-hmm.  
Augustus Landor : By whom?  
Edgar Allan Poe : My mother. She's dead. Dead nearly, uh, 20 years.  
(*The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 00:28:49-00:30:59)

During the opening credits of *The Pale Blue Eye*, an excerpt from Poe's short story "The Premature Burial," written in 1844, is featured on the screen. This part of the story talks about the vagueness of the boundaries between life and death. As depicted in the short story, Edgar states that the divide between life and death is not actually a division of the two at all, and those worlds are meshed together.

### **Lea Marquis**

On the day of meeting Lea, Edgar took Lea to the cemetery instead of to Gee's point or the flirtation walk that Lea expected. At the cemetery, while talking to Edgar, Lea's illness relapsed, and she had a seizure. Edgar was very worried about

Lea's condition and illness, but Lea felt grateful because when she woke up, there was Edgar by her side.

After the meeting at the cemetery, Lea and Edgar became frequent reunions. One day, Edgar met Lea and told her about the poem that appeared in his dream. According to Edgar, the poem was addressed to Lea. Lenore reference to a loved one. Edgar reads part of a poem to Lea in which he describes her illness, but he calls her Lenore.

Edgar Allan Poe	: It came to me while I slept. Down, down, down Came the hot threshing flurry Ill at heart, I beseeched her to hurry "Lenore" She forbore the reply Endless night Caught her then in its slurry Shrouding all, but her pale blue eye Darkest night, black with hell Charneled fury Leaving only The deathly blue eye Do you see? Lenore. Lea. It speaks of your unspeakable distress. A conclusion to what's... oppressing you. The poem... is speaking to us.
Lea Marquis	: Remember when you said you'd do anything for me?

(*The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 01:27:20-01:28:45)

The original poem is about the heartbreaking death of a young woman and was published in 1831. "Lenore" is a wealthy, proud woman, which directly parallels Lea Marquis' wealthy family and her obvious pride in keeping her health. That same pride motivates her to perform murderous rituals that she believes will heal her of the affliction she bears.

The poem "Lenore" is transformed from a literary piece into part of the film narrative, a process that involves translating the textual and lyrical elements of the poem into visual and auditory components within the film. In the context of the film, "Lenore" is used to extend character development and explore overarching themes.

## **2. The Similarities and Dissimilarities Between the Biography and The Character of Edgar Allan Poe in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) Film**

## 2.1 Similarities Between Edgar Allan Poe Biography and His Character in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) Film

### Interest in Poetry

John Allan wanted Poe to become a businessman and merchant like him. However, Poe is not interested in business. One day, he was fascinated by the English poet Lord Byron. He started writing his poetry and fantasized about becoming a famous poet like Byron. As time went by, differences in interests between Allan and Poe made their relationship less good (History, 2018: 7).

Edgar Allan Poe : Apologies for my tardiness. I hope I haven't kept you too long. This is lovely. Books! You have never interested me more. Where to begin? Oh... The lamentable Fenimore Cooper. I guess every library must have one. Ooh, what a collection. History of Egypt, and all sorts. You've been found out.

Augustus Landor : Oh?

Edgar Allan Poe : You gave me to understand you didn't read poetry.

Augustus Landor : I don't.

Edgar Allan Poe : Byron! A personal favorite, Mr. Landor...

Augustus Landor : Please.

Edgar Allan Poe : ...and might I say, terribly well-thumbed.

Augustus Landor : That's my daughter's.

(*The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 00:41:26-00:42:35)

In the film *The Pale Blue Eye*, Poe also shows his interest in poetry, especially Lord Byron. When he visited August Landor's house, he was amazed by the many books that Landor had. His gaze immediately fell on Lord Byron's book. It turns out that the book belonged to Landor's daughter and he did not want Poe to touch the book.

### French Skills

Poe has unusual talents for languages. The Allans placed him at a boarding school closer to home. After two years, Poe began boarding at a school farther from central London, in the northern suburb of Stoke Newington. At the Manor House School, run by the Reverend John Bransby, Poe would study Latin and French but would also receive instruction in music, dancing, and drawing (Peeples, 2020:20).

Jean P  p   : Well, he might have a group of assistants. And candles and torches on either side, light everywhere, a festival of light, in fact. Now, Gus, if you go to the



third shelf... On the second to the top. That volume on the top. Yes. Yes. Pierre de Lancre, redoubtable witch hunter. You read French, Mr. Poe?

Edgar Allan Poe : Oui, bien sur.

*The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 00:36:42-00:37:17)

Edgar Allan Poe : Mmm. Another, s'il vous plait. Oh, I thank you. Mmm. I can do this all night.

*(The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 00:44:35-00:44:50)

Poe's French skills in *The Pale Blue Eye* are depicted when he visits Professor Jean Pépé with Augustus Landor. He was asked to read a French book about Pierre de Lancre, a witch hunter. In another scene, when Poe is drinking with Artemus Marquis and Randolph Ballinger, as well as other cadets, he says "s'il vous plaît" which means "please."

### **West Point Military Academy**

In Hourly History's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Life from Beginning to End*, the relationship between Allan and Poe never got better. Poe decided to leave home in 1827 and went to Boston to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. He began writing under the pseudonym Henri Le Rennet. However, he could not live on his small salary and he needed someone to give him a lot of money, but he did not want to go back to Allan's house, so he turned to the United States military (2018: 7).

In 1829, Poe published his second collection of poems entitled *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems*.

Artemus Marquis : Uh-uh. Easy, Ballinger. I've gone to great trouble to secure that mash. Poe. I understand you're a published poet.

Edgar Allan Poe : I am told I evidence a humble gift.

Artemus Marquis : Well, then I demand a public reading. Pleasure us.

*(The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 00:34:43-00:35:03)

The similarity between the film *The Pale Blue Eye* and Poe in real life is that when he entered the academy, Poe had already published his books, namely *Tamerlane and Other Poems* and *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems*. In the film *The Pale Blue Eye*, Artemus Marquis mentions that Poe is a published poet.

### **Alcohol Preference**

During his lifetime, Edgar Allan Poe was someone who liked alcohol (Peeples, 2020: 35).

Dr. Marquis : Your heart rate is rather quick. Very well, Mr. Poe, keep to the house today and take care of yourself. Present this to Lieutenant Locke and his cadet commandeer, Artemus, my son. He'll make sure you're relieved of your duties.

Lieutenant Locke : You wish to be excused from class because you were feeling vertiginous?

Edgar Allan Poe : And an even worse ailment not noted. A grand ennui seizure.

Lieutenant Locke : "Grand ennui?"

Edgar Allan Poe : Of a most pronounced character.

Lieutenant Locke : Mind yourself, Poe. You may ask the doctor yourself.

Artemus Marquis : It's true, Lieutenant. My father did tell me he's never seen anything quite like it.

Lieutenant Lock : Very well. But I am charging you with unbecoming brazenness. Three demerits. Return at once to your quarters. And you would best be there when the officers come around for inspection.

(*The Pale Blue Eye*, 2022, 00:39:51-00:40:55)

In *The Pale Blue Eye*, his love of alcohol is depicted when he meets Augustus Landor at the bar, he says that he drank alcohol to take the bite off the gloom. Additionally, during his gatherings with Artemus Marquis, Randolph Ballinger, and other cadets, he said that he could drink all night.

## **2.2 Dissimilarities Between Edgar Allan Poe Biography and His Character in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) Film**

### **Involvement in Murder Investigations**

In Sova's *Critical Companion to Edgar Allan Poe: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" introduced the world to the "detective story," a genre (distinct from the mystery story) that emphasizes the 'detector' as well as the crime, and analysis instead of trial-and-error. This excerpt highlights Edgar Allan Poe's introduction of the detective story genre through "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," emphasizing the analytical abilities of the detective (in this case, C. Auguste Dupin) over traditional mystery elements (Sova, 2007: 120-121).

Both *The Pale Blue Eye* and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” are about solving murders through investigation and deduction. They both have a dark and mysterious tone, fitting Poe’s gothic style. In *The Pale Blue Eye*, Poe shows traits like sharp intellect, keen observation, and logical reasoning, similar to Dupin in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” This creates a connection between Poe’s fictional portrayal and his literary work.

### **Military Discipline**

Edgar Allan Poe in *The Pale Blue Eye* is depicted as a crucial figure in the investigation of the cadet’s murder at West Point Military Academy. According to Scott Peeples in *The Man of The Crowd: Edgar Allan Poe and the City*, Poe was to leave West Point by way of court-martial. In January, he stopped showing up for drills, roll class, and class, and on February 18, 1831, he was dismissed. This highlighted the difference between the fictional portrayal of Poe as a keen detective and the historical reality of his difficulties with military discipline and adherence to rules.

### **Financial Problems**

While at the University of Virginia, Poe acclimated to drinking and gambling. People who knew him at various stages of his adult life described him as either abstaining from alcohol altogether, sometimes for long periods, or else drinking compulsively (p. 35). Poe’s gambling habits caused him to end his education and ultimately led to conflict between him and his foster father, John Allan. Although Poe claims that Allan gave him insufficient money for his educational expenses, it is likely that his wasteful habits also contributed to his financial problems (Peeples, 2020).

Whereas, in the film *The Pale Blue Eye*, there is no mention of Poe’s financial problems and only focuses on his contribution to the investigation. In one scene, he once mentioned his benefactor, which refers to his foster father, John Allan. Dissimilarities between Edgar Allan Poe’s financial problems in his real life and his depiction in the film *The Pale Blue Eye* may occur due to different narrative focuses.

### **Family Relationships**

In *The Pale Blue Eye*, Poe rarely discusses his family. He only talked about his mother, who had died 20 years ago. In 1830, when Poe was at West Point Academy, his relationship with his father was not very good. Poe's relationship with John Allan was a significant source of stress and turmoil. Allan provided inconsistent financial support and was often critical of Poe's ambitions and behaviour.

The reason why the Poe family relationship is not told further in the film may be because the story focuses on the main plot of the murder investigation at West Point Military Academy. Edgar in the film *The Pale Blue Eye* is described as someone mysterious. Additionally, by not exploring Poe's family relationships in depth, the film can maintain a sense of mystery about its characters and focus on the development of the main characters and the main conflict in the story.

### **Literary Recognition**

While at West Point, Poe published two books. His first book was entitled *Tamerlane and Other Poems* and his second book was entitled *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems* (History, 2018: 5). His first publication went almost unnoticed, and he allowed it to remain lost for the rest of his career. During his actual time at West Point, Poe was relatively unknown and did not enjoy the literary fame that would come with his later works.

In the film, the portrayal of Edgar Allan Poe might suggest that he was already on the path to becoming a famous literary figure. Poe's poetry was once noted by Artemus Marquis during a gathering with the other cadets. Artemus and the cadets also praised Poe for the poetry he read. This is certainly different from not knowing Poe's work when he was a cadet at West Point in real life.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis in Chapter IV, the researcher concludes that Scott Cooper's *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) contains the issue stated in the problem statements. The first issue is about the representation of characters in Edgar Allan Poe's works in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) and the second issue is about the similarities and dissimilarities between the biography and the character of Edgar Allan Poe in *The Pale Blue Eye* (2022).

In *The Pale Blue Eye*, the representation of Edgar Allan Poe's character is a fictional interpretation that combines elements from Poe's original life and works with the author's creative freedom. Poe is depicted as a young cadet with a characteristically melancholic and eccentric personality, who becomes involved in a murder mystery investigation at the United States Military Academy. Poe's interactions with other figures, especially Augustus Landor, highlight the contrast between Poe's insight and poetics and his more conventional methods of inquiry. Although this character is a work of fiction, the author inserts elements that reference typical Poe themes, such as death, mystery, and human psychology, while paying attention to some aspects of Poe's real life, such as financial problems and alcohol problems.

*The Pale Blue Eye* (2022) creates a narrative that combines elements from Edgar Allan Poe's biography with creative freedom in creating his characters. Although there are similarities between the character depicted in the film and the real-life Poe, such as an interest in poetry, French language skills, training at the West Point Military Academy, and alcohol preference. There are also significant differences. One of the biggest differences is that there are no historical records to suggest that Poe was involved in the murder investigation as depicted in the film. The other differences are military discipline, financial problems, family relationships, and literary recognition.

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