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Hororové povídky E. A. Poea a gotický román

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma E. A. Poe's Horror Stories and the Gothic Fiction vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího bakalářské práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále prohlašuji, že tato bakalářská práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného osvědčení.

V Hradci Králové dne

Poděkování

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Tato práce se zabývá charakteristikou a analýzou hororových prvků v několika povídkách slavného amerického spisovatele, Edgara Allana Poea. Mezi povídky s analyzovanými hororovými prvky patří *Berenice*, *Morella*, *Ligeia*, *Zánik domu Usherů*, *William Wilson*, *Černý kocour*, *Jáma a kyvadlo*, *Maska červené smrti* a *Zrádné srdce*. Povídky byly vybrány dle osobního uvážení. Jedním z analyzovaných hororových prvků je Poeovo vnímání prostoru či místností a jejich dekorací. Práce zkoumá také Poeovu metodu psaní hororových povídek, především jeho aplikaci nadpřirozených objektů do příběhů. Dalším výrazným hororovým prvkem v Poeových povídkách jsou postavy. Postavy jsou rozděleny na dvě skupiny; psychicky narušení lidé a ženy. Analyzované prvky jsou dále posuzovány z pohledu gotického románu, který je v této práci rovněž přiblížen. Cílem této práce je objasnit úlohu gotického románu v hororových povídkách E. A. Poea a čím on sám přispěl k rozvoji tohoto žánru.

Klíčová slova: Poe, gotický román, hororová povídka

Annotation

VOKULIČOVÁ, Sára, 2015. *E. A. Poe's Horror Stories and the Gothic Fiction*. Hradec Králové. Bachelor Thesis. University of Hradec Kralove. Pedagogical Faculty.

This thesis deals with the characteristics and analysis of the horror elements in several short stories written by a famous American writer, Edgar Allan Poe. The short stories with analyzed horror elements include *Berenice*, *Morella*, *Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *William Wilson*, *The Black Cat*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Masque of the Red Death* and *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The short stories were chosen after personal consideration. Poe's perception of space or rooms and their decor is one of the analyzed horror elements. The thesis also examines Poe's method of the writing style applied to the horror stories, especially his application of the supernatural into the stories. Another significant horror element of Poe's short stories is mentally disordered people and women. The analyzed elements are further considered from the Gothic Fiction's point of view. The Gothic Fiction is introduced and described in this thesis as well. The aim of this thesis is to clarify the role of the Gothic Fiction in E. A. Poe's horror stories and Poe's contribution to this genre.

Key words: Poe, Gothic Fiction, horror short story

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Introduction

How to recognize a good horror story? Basically, if the story was written many years ago and is still known, often republished and has a lot of adaptations, it is possibly well written and has something to offer the readers. Edgar Allan Poe, an American romantic writer, is considered to be one of the best writers of horror genre in the United States. Moreover, his stories are usually called as Gothic Fiction which refers to horror genre. To understand his horror tales properly, it is needed to understand what Gothic genre and to be able to recognize the typical Gothic features in the stories. Only then can the readers absorb the sublime of Poe's horror stories.

Poe had a wide variety of sources where he could get his inspiration. Gothic genre came from Europe but American Romantic Movement had an impact on Poe as well. Poe as the native of New England was in touch with English culture. Therefore, Poe could take the inspiration either from British or from American authors. But he went apparently beyond the limit of the others. The main difference resides in his theories of writing.

Edgar Allan Poe as a literary critic studied the language a lot, so he put special effort into it while writing his tales. He explored the idea that if a writer plays with words, then he/she is able to create intriguing stories with lots of mysteries hidden in it. Poe's game is quite simple; it is based on single words. However, Poe focused on many more layers than just on a linguistic one. He was interested in arranging settings of the horror stories to fulfil the aim of making the readers terrified. Gothic Fiction suggests gloomy mysterious houses but Poe elaborated even rooms and decorations of the places. The architectural constructions were influential for Poe. He explained in this way material reality, but he understood the entire material world as unified with the spiritual. Poe's perception of this world and the cosmos is another way how he contributed to the American literature. Spiritual feature has its certain role in Poe's works, too. Poe used all these details for a special atmosphere that touched everyone who looked into the stories. The last but not least, one of Poe's interests was human beings, especially their inner world. Poe immersed himself in complicated personalities of the characters which brought an important

contribution to the writing style of his times. He typically used insane characters and he made them face the essential fear of human beings, the fear of death. The way how Poe demonstrates their madness is very special. His characters became the victims of perverseness. One more significant leitmotif of his horror stories, possibly conditioned by his life experience, is women.

Edgar Allan Poe challenges re-reading by the audience to get total understanding of all the details he used. He created a very terrifying atmosphere in his horror tales by using detailed descriptions, playing with words, and forcing readers to dread with lunatic characters and their horrific crimes. Nevertheless, Poe did not write shallow horror stories as other writers did; he knew how to keep the readers in terror even after they finished reading the books. The horror features will be more specified and demonstrated on excerpts Poe's stories to prove or disprove his mastery. Furthermore, he is generally considered as a Gothic writer. Since the term Gothicism is not clearly defined, a short reflection about the result of the analysis regarding the horror aspects in Poe's horror tales should help to mark out more accurate definition of the term. Eventually, the consideration of the elements should bring a proof that Poe wrote his horror tales in the literary style called Gothicism.

1 Gothic Novel

It is often said that Edgar Allan Poe's horror stories are written in a similar way as the Gothic Novels (Baldick 2001, 107, Cuddon 1982, 289). Before the Gothic elements present in his horror stories will be analyzed, it is needed to explain what the Gothic writing is, where the Gothic Fiction genre comes from, how and by whom Poe was possibly influenced and what the typical features of this literary genre are.

It is not easy to say how the name Gothic came out. Its origin is most likely to come from a name of East Germanic tribe – Goths. The Ancient Empire was ruined by the barbarian tribe of Goths. As Kočudák (2011, 17) explains, the Gothic style was understood as destruction of the previous artistic style and culture by a new stream which did not refer to the ancient times. Neo Gothicism ruined Classicism and Empire style in the same way as critics saw the destruction of the classical culture by Goths. Raškauskienė (2009, 11) mentions that the word Gothic carried a negative connotation until the end of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century. One of earliest defence of the Gothic style was published in *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* written by Bishop Hurd (1762). The end of the eighteenth century is also related to the coming of Romanticism.

“Rejecting the ordered rationality of the Enlightenment as mechanical, impersonal, and artificial, the Romantics turned to the emotional directness of personal experience and to the boundlessness of individual imagination and aspiration” (Baldick 2001, 222).

Romanticism became an essential part of the Gothic style. Without this revolt of the Romantics breaking the older conventions, there would be no authors toying with their imagination and talking about taboo topics.

In the past, the Gothic style was used in an extensive scope; it can be found in architecture as well as in literature. The wide usage of the Gothic style needs to be investigated as well because it can give a hint to the later understanding of Poe's writings. Before European writers started to use Gothicism for the writing of

terrifying stories, it had been a main domain of another kind of art. Firstly, the Gothic style was an architectural style that began in half of 12th century in France and spread out into other European cultures where it was prevailing until 16th century. In these days, the huge airy buildings look very dark and full of mysteries. Even though they were light many centuries ago while being built, they probably looked similarly to people in 18th century as to us nowadays. According to Baldick (2001, 106), Gothic is “a term applied to medieval architecture and thus associated in the 18th century with superstition”. It is no wonder that the genre was so popular in England because the typical historical buildings of this country are old medieval castles and Gothic churches. Naturally, the enormous buildings full of mysteries became a great inspiration for writers of the Gothic Novels.

Origins of Gothicism in American literature come from Europe. American history is too young to have some medieval background, so Edgar Allan Poe was probably inspired by European authors. Hrabák (1989, 202) claims that horror genre is typically English and in the next phase it became an American genre. Poe possibly knew European Gothic cathedrals minutely. English Gothic cathedrals are often believed to be haunted which brings a loophole for supernatural elements and mystery (Hrabák 1989, 200). In fact, Poe lived in England for a while when he was a child. Therefore, he is more likely to have got this knowledge from a secondary source (Vandana 2013, 138). He might get the inspiration from his home town and its surroundings. Hrabák supports this statement with his own theory. He says that England is full of haunted houses and if an American writer needs to get this kind of decoration to American land, he/she must have some kind of relation to New England. New England’s houses were built by Englishmen and ghosts are said to be there (Hrabák 1989, 211). There are also some typical Gothic buildings such as New Old South Church or All Saint’s Ashmont Episcopal Church. As Poe was born in Boston, the capital of Massachusetts which located in the region of New England, the fact could prove the connection between England and the Gothic influence that Poe absorbed in the United States. However, even though the origin of the Gothic genre was heading to Great Britain, it became successful in European continent much later (Hrabák 1989, 202).

The parallel between the Gothic architectural style and Gothicism in horror tales should be also explained. First writings that could be named as the Gothic Novels appeared toward the end of 18th century (McIntyre 1921, 644). One of the first writers of the Gothic Novels was Horace Walpole (Drabble 1985, 406). His novel *The Castle of Otranto*, firstly published in 1764, was the first book considered as the Gothic Novel. According to *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, the name ‘Gothic Novel’ appeared in connection with Walpole for two reasons; partly it might be because of the fact that Walpole wrote his novel in his private gothic castle in Strawberry Hill. Partly because the mysterious and horror content of such stories, including Walpole’s novel, was associated with the Middle Ages. The stories usually were set in medieval castles with secret dungeons, a gloomy atmosphere and including supernatural elements (Cuddon, 1982, 289). Other English masters of the Gothic genre were Ann Radcliffe with *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew G. “Monk” Lewis with his book *The Monk* (1796) (Drabble 1985, 406). The parallel between those stories and the architectural style was mostly in the setting of the stories. Since the stories are usually set in darksome dungeons, monasteries, ghostly old castles and gloomy places (Baldick 2001, 106). Bowen (n.d.) claims that the Gothic Fiction is amazed by strange places.

Due to the close relation to England, Poe possibly learnt some techniques of Gothicism from English writers, from authors such as the previously mentioned Horace Walpole or Mrs. Radcliffe. Walpole is believed to start this phenomenon and his novel *The Castle of Otranto* was a novel between a romantic story and a supernatural narrative (McIntyre 1921, 644). Poe’s horror stories seem to be similar. On the other hand, McIntyre (1921, 645) adds that in the story of Ann Radcliffe there is almost nothing medieval, except for some abbeys and dungeons. The disturbed mind of the characters is considered as the Radcliffe’s merit to the Gothic genre (McIntyre 1921). However, Poe also could get the inspiration from another American writer; Charles Brockden Brown. He is considered to be the developer of the Gothic genre (Hart 1965, 325).

In the book *American Gothic Fiction: The Introduction* (2004) the author Allan Lloyd Smith says that American authors were in a close touch with British writers. Although they lived in another continent, they were still a part of the British

culture, because they were using the same language and all their knowledge came from Britain (Smith 2004, 3). There is a humorous fact; some American writers influenced later their British colleagues. Smith also assumes that American authors, including Poe, did not just imitate or adapt British ones, they transformed the Gothic writing to express their own conditions that were very different (Smith 2004, 4).

As the definition of the Gothic Fiction seems to be vague (McIntyre 1921, 645), there are many definitions of the motifs of the Gothic Novels, too. McIntyre (1921, 644) alleges typical the Gothic elements such as “darksome dungeons, ghostly manifestations and unnatural tyrants”. However, a professor John Bowen (n.d.) seems to be presenting truly comprehensive theory of the Gothic Fiction in his video *The Gothic*. He agrees with McIntyre’s idea of grim places. He assumes that the Gothic Fiction works with both, wild and remote places as well as with imprisoning ones. Then he mentions time shifting; moving the characters and settings from modern times to archaic past. He understands it as often violent conflict and claims that it is very typical for all Gothic Fiction. As the heart of Gothic fiction, he assumes power.

“On the one hand it tends to be drawn to very powerful, often supernaturally powerful, or obscenely powerful figures and on the other, to people who are completely vulnerable.” (Bowen n.d.).

In Bowen’s video (n.d.), he highlights especially the role of women at that time. He also mentions perverseness of the characters and points out the word uncanny. The word can be related to both the perverse character and the supernatural beings. As the writers wanted to break the conventions, they were also fascinated by the sublime. The Gothic authors usually saw the sublime terrifying. As Bowen (n.d.) says, the Gothic authors showed the sublime in their understanding of the world.

It can be also helpful to investigate why Poe chose the Gothic style. As Smith explains in his book, people in America were frightened of their reality. There were issues like building a new country, struggling with new experiment of democracy, problems with slavery and Native Americans. They probably wanted to overcome their problems in this way; by reading terrifying stories which would take them out of their hard reality (Smith 2004, 8). This can be the reason why this genre was so

popular in the United States and therefore Poe chose to write in this style. Bowen (n.d.) supports this theory, too. He assumes that Gothic has a tendency to appear at moments of political or social crisis. Another opinion is that the Pilgrims, Protestants who came to the American continent, knew about the sins and culpability that European people had (Vandana 2013, 138). So their descendants who were aware of it, wanted to remind the European wicked souls by reading some terrifying stories. One way or another, American land was offering very good conditions for this kind of writing. Furthermore, the Gothic Novels would be probably successful anywhere. Fear of mysterious things that are beyond understanding comes from the nature of human beings (Hornát 1970, 8). However, it is not only fear but also a great desire to comprehend these things. That is the reason why people like reading horror tales. Poe knew it and he took advantage of it. As he lived in the era of Romanticism in the United States, he was also influenced by the stream of writing at that time. The writers focused on dark places in nature as well as in human souls. There were attempts to analyze the psychology and hidden side of human nature. Therefore, Gothicism offered Poe good conditions to write his stories. The statement that Poe applied the Gothic style on his horror tales will be investigated and exemplified.

2 Setting

While writing his short stories, Poe focused on petty details. Most of the authors in his days didn't think about writing in the way as Poe did. He seriously thought over the environment in his tales. Poe apparently distinguished several layers of the setting of the space; an attentive reader can notice an embedded effort of the author in a description of buildings, rooms and in case of furniture, too. He did it on purpose because he knew it will catch the reader and absolutely immerse him/her into the story. From a technical point of view, the ways how Poe was depicting the scene are very attractive.

2.1 Furniture

While reading horror stories written by Poe, an attentive reader should notice what furniture the narrators mention. They do it intentionally. Poe wanted them to do it like that. In fact, detailed descriptions of furniture are usually used rather in poems than in short stories. Poe, as a poet and writer in the same person, tried to immerse it into horror stories as well. Why? The answer will be revealed by following examples. First stated evidence comes from the story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839):

“Gloomy furniture of the room - of the dark and tattered draperies, which, tortured into motion by the breath of a rising tempest, swayed fitfully to and fro upon the walls, and rustled uneasily about the decorations of the bed” (Poe 1850, 304).

It is apparent that Poe flirted with the idea of furniture and used it as a terror helper. Pieces of furniture such as draperies, which Poe often used in other short stories, helped him to evoke thrilling emotions in the readers. However, more interesting usage of a piece of furniture appears in the short story *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842). In fact, the piece of furniture represents a key thing in this story.

The “gigantic clock of ebony”, as Poe (2007, 194) writes, is playing the key role. Its pendulum swinging to and fro lets each reader imagine the dark strikes at midnight, expecting something terrible to happen. Poe effectively used retardation of the action by stopping other characters doing their activity and making everybody, including the readers, to listen to the strikes and eventually to the deep sound coming out of the clock. Poe probably wanted to emphasize the time the characters had until the death came. Thus, using the clock as a symbol of time was a brilliant idea.

In fact, Poe introduced his theory of using furniture in writing in his essay *The Philosophy of Furniture* (1840). He depicts things such as mirror, curtains and vases and then he describes their role in a story. According to the essay, Poe considers a carpet as the most important piece of furniture. He perceives the carpet as the heart, the soul of an apartment. He even continues with a statement that Saxony carpet is the only one that a good writer should use. To sum it up, Poe’s approaches to interior design are very philosophical and he apparently chose furniture as the appropriate source for moving readers into a mood that he had planned (Berman 2005, 128). He wanted to arouse terror in readers with a different tool, not just with the plot. This opinion is also supported by Hrabák’s statement (1989, 201) that a clue and decorations are the most important in a horror story. It is not the plot because the plot is usually very simple and it could always be expressed in a few sentences.

2.2 Chambers

Poe did not focus only on the furniture; he planned to influence the reader’s mind with chambers as well. Even though the word chamber seems to be old-fashioned, it is better to call the places like that rather than rooms. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (2015, 241), the word chamber is classified as an expression used in the past referring to a bedroom or private room. The word room does not necessarily have to have such emotional character. Poe chose several features of a chamber that he later transformed into a tool for affecting the readers.

The first examined aspect will be a size and shape of the particular chamber. According to Poe's descriptions used in his stories, he usually emphasized the ceiling and the walls. In the story *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842), the narrator is describing there the height of the ceiling which is according to him about 30 or 40 feet high. He also tries to assess how the chamber is long. Someone could object that this is unimportant information for a horror story. However, this approach comes from Poe's attitude towards writing a short story. It means he let the characters think rationally in emotionally difficult situations. The fact that the narrator cares so much about the size of the chamber and not about the situation, in which he is, causes tension in readers' minds because then they can clearly imagine how the room looks like and come to realize how terrifying the place is. Other writers sometimes try to put as much fantasy as they can into the stories but Poe decided for a different way; he probably believed that he could make the impact on readers while using exact measurement. Poe also did not forget of the material of the walls. In *The Pit and The Pendulum*, he writes about iron walls which should probably associate an image of something cold, not safe, but very strong. In *The Masque of The Red Death*, Poe uses colours. Death goes through multicoloured chambers and ends in a black apartment. It proves the Poe's interest in the decoration of the chambers because there is no other colour of a room where Death could stop. According to Drain (2006, 171), the playing with chambers' appearance is just another way how Poe expresses his literary-architectural skills which he used to terrify people. Furthermore, he also focuses on bigger material structure such as houses.

2.3 Buildings

It is obvious that Poe enormously focused on settings of his tales. He understood the importance of the environment in a short-story. As he thoughtfully decorated the rooms in his tales, he presumably meditated about whole architectural structures; houses. Gothic buildings as an essential part of Gothicism must have been embraced in Poe's short stories if he wanted to evoke certain feelings in the readers.

As Vandana (2013, 139) claims, houses in Poe's short stories are typical with their age and run-down appearance. This claim can be proved by short evidence from *Berenice*: "Yet there are no towers in the land more time-honored than my gloomy, gray, hereditary halls" (Poe 1840, 437). Poe considered indoor as well as outdoor of the houses. He could account a shape of the house, size, colour or tone or the surroundings. One of the main attributes of a house is assuredly a wall. Poe advocates his language skill when he uses a collocation such as 'the bleak walls' in *The Fall of The House of Usher*. As Poe gives a depiction of a Gothic house in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, he apparently decided that it would be useful for creating the dark atmosphere in *William Wilson* (1842), too. He touches upon a Gothic steeple, which can be considered as a part of a house, and a church-bell, "breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar" (Poe 2007, 97). The readers could easily imagine the setting because it was known on daily basis.

Whether Poe got his inspiration about the Gothic buildings from British writers or not he applied the typical features of it very well. He was apparently very inspired by cathedrals. What is characteristic for a Gothic cathedral? Massive walls, big arched windows, frowning towers and, of course, subterranean dungeons; all are contained in Poe's horror stories. The most significant example of Poe's usage of the Gothic architectural features is probably in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Poe made there an effort to precisely describe the Usher's house. In fact, the house has also a symbolic meaning.

"The house, I have said, was old and irregular. The grounds were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain." (Poe 1994, 98).

Poe uses descriptions of buildings to express his approach to material reality (Drain 2006, 171). However, Poe more concentrates on a different part of reality. Poe believed that even a building must have something spiritual inside. All the features together may build a frightening house, but it is still too material. So the soul of the house looks in Poe's eyes like a mystery, that each house should have and the very mystery that dreads every visitor of the house. Poe got possibly inspired by

Gothicism in this way. The evidence is obvious, for example, in *The Fall of The House of Usher*. The narrator is thinking there where the anxiety steaming from the house comes from, and he tries to figure it out. It is not just about windows, walls, or landscape; it's all about what the house hides inside. Additionally, the Poe's descriptions may have one more reason; Poe wanted to demonstrate his character's mentally disordered minds. It is indirectly showed in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The tale ends as the narrator is looking back at the fissure, "extending from the roof of the building, in a zig-zag direction, to the base" (Poe 2007, 95) of the Usher's house and he sees the house falling down. The fall of the house symbolically represents the fall of Roderick Usher. This statement is supported by VanSpanckeren's quote.

"Poe's twilight realm between life and death and his gaudy, Gothic settings are not merely decorative. They reflect the overcivilized yet deathly interior of his character's disturbed psyches. They are symbolic expressions of the unconscious and thus are central to his art." (VanSpanckeren 1994, 41-42).

According to the evidence mentioned above, Poe apparently applied the Gothic genre into his space arrangement. As Vandana says (2013, 140): "He rather uses the Gothic decor to evoke an atmosphere in which terrible things happen". As it has been suggested by Bowen (n.d.), the places that Poe chose for the setting are strange and could be called as uncanny, too. Matter stated in this chapter is organized logically from the inner space to the exterior and from the smallest size to the biggest. Poe enhanced the Gothic style with thought-out usage of furniture, colours and materials of the walls and overall look of the places. The space used in his horror tales also has certain power which has an effect on the characters. It was captured well in the case of Usher's house and Usher's disordered mind. The secret power hidden in the places Poe used challenges further clarification.

3 The (ir)rationality of Poe's horror tales

The Gothic Fiction was very popular genre at a time but most of the works have been forgotten. Therefore, there must be something unique about Poe's horror tales that make his stories still famous after more than a century and a half after his death. A fact that there are new film adaptations on Poe's books and new anthologies of Poe's works proves that the audience has not forgotten Poe yet. Thus the thing that makes Poe different will be investigated. Hrabák (1989, 208) alleges in his book *Od laciného optimismu k hororu* that the difference between cheap and good horror stories is caused by the rationality that is used in Poe's stories, too. A closer examination of Poe's horror tales will show if the hidden element that still keeps his stories alive is just rationality.

Horror genre generally full of vampires and ghosts is predetermined to be tawdry. In the end, the readers are sure it is impossible to happen in their real life. They are frightened while reading the stories but after closing the book, they are relaxed. Do readers of Poe's stories have the same feelings? Hrabák (1989, 208) analyzes the horror genre and proposes that the difference between "literary" horror and cheap horror stories is hidden in a "loophole" that is left in the story. He explains that the loophole must be tight enough to offer place for rational (or even supernatural) explanation. However, if the loophole was wider or tight too much, the horror would disappear and then the terror would turn into humour. This is probably the biggest difference between other writers and Poe. Poe captured the loophole exactly. He was pushing the readers into the feeling that there was something going to happen and the decorations indicated it would be something supernatural. However, the end of the stories showed it had rational explanation, although more or less believable. The ends actually make the difference because after having finished the book, the readers realize that it all makes sense. You never know what people hide inside of their souls.

In fact, Poe made the stories different in the case of the characters. His horror stories do not contain any ghosts or vampires or other supernatural beings. He

worked with human beings. Yet, there can be found some marks of the supernatural beings in his stories. He transformed the supernatural beings from vampires and ghosts into something more original. He used a gaze and a voice for a purpose of a creation of supernatural beings.

There are two lines in which the gaze and voice could appear. Poe worked with the speech of the narrators and with the voice and gaze being described in the stories. Poe's effort put into those two phenomena possibly came from his notion of such things. He perceived the gaze or the voice as a part-object (Link 2012, 262). It means that he understood the gaze and the voice as something partly material, partly spiritual, or even supernatural. According to Link (2012, 267), Poe was influenced by German Idealists and Transcendentalists which caused that his perception of the gaze and the voice was not just materialistic. In the essay *Eureka: An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe* (1848, In Link 2012, 257), Poe philosophically speculated about material and spiritual matter. A short excerpt from *Berenice* can prove Poe's perception of reality. The narrator talks about Berenice as about a dream person, he used nice explanation that he sees her "not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being" (Poe 1850, 441). After closer examination, the spiritual or partly supernatural features can be found in his horror tales and they are often related to the voice and gaze.

Most critics consider *The Fall of the House of Usher* as the masterpiece (Brown & Flanagan 1961, 260) and in fact this story comprises several techniques of writing a good story (according to Poe). The architecture of the setting has been already mentioned. Additionally, this story contains the evidence of Poe's notion of the matter being partly material, partly supernatural. Even though a voice is a sign of an alive being, Poe considered it could be used for the purpose of making the readers think there is something supernatural hidden in the house. As the narrator describes a strange behaviour of his host:

"...for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound..."
(Poe 2007, 89)

The house seems to be haunted and Roderick Usher is the only one who can hear it due to his peculiar sensibility (Link 2012, 287). Thus the house gives the impression it is a living object which is speaking with its own voice (Link 2012, 287). However, the narrator later hears also some noise:

“hearkened --I know not why, except that an instinctive spirit prompted me --to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence” (Poe 2007, 90).

At the end of the story, the readers realize that the sounds were caused by a voice of Madeline, Usher’s sister who was buried alive.

The role of Madeline can be counted as the part of Poe’s craftsmanship. As Žižek (1996, In Link 2012, 266) states, the voice means to Poe something between death and life that lives longer over the moment of death. Poe used her voice to create the atmosphere of the supernatural but eventually he gave the readers a rational explanation. The narrator gives the readers information that she is dead and the most terrifying moment comes with the discovery she is alive. The connection between the material element (her body) and the spiritual (noise in the house) is her voice.

In case of cheap horror stories, the readers just enjoy the feeling of horror but after closing the book they can get a restful sleep because they know the story is impossible to happen in the real world. In contrast to them, Poe gives the readers a rational explanation to the supernatural phenomenon and the readers suddenly realize it all makes sense and it is certainly possible to happen.

Concentrating on the voice of a narrator, a hint can be found there to reveal the gaze. In fact, Poe took a product of a voice which is a word and used it to emphasize a gaze, or rather the organ responsible for the gaze – an eye. If a voice can contribute to a terrifying atmosphere, a gaze can possibly do the same. Poe’s mastery of description would be nothing without his skill of language diction. According to Drain (2006, 169), Poe pushes the readers into more suspense by using special words that would evoke those dreadful emotions. From the following example, it will be clear that Poe managed to get the same suspense not only with special words but with a simple word that he either repeated or highlighted with writing in capitals. He

discovered how words can be vigorous. If a writer knows the rules of a word game, he immediately becomes a magician who creates an unbelievable world of fiction. At that moment all readers are just puppets in writer's hands. Poe was aware of this and he exactly knew how to cause feelings full of terror in readers' minds. Words are believed to have a strong power, so Poe tried to influence our imagination with them. The statement can be proved with the word 'eye'. The most distinctive usage occurs in *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843). It seems to be a whole story just about an eye. The main character is obsessed by the eye of an old man. The readers can be sure about the importance of the eye because of the tool that Poe used. He wrote the word repeatedly through the whole story. The following excerpt shows the frequency in one of the paragraphs of the story.

“I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture --a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees -- very gradually --I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever” (Poe 2007, 267).

In fact, the eye has a hidden meaning. As Ramirez (n.d.) claims in her article *The Central Symbol in Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe connects the symbol of the eye to death. This eye forces the main character to murder the old man. Is it literary the eye or the fact that Poe emphasized the word so much and so he caused the tension? Without using the repetition, Poe would probably not cause the dread in the readers. Poe repeats the word 'eye' a lot, and in a written version it is also noticeable that he used punctuation there. It obviously declares he concentrated all his effort on this word. Poe was aware of the effect on readers. The repetition of a certain word is typical literary device for writers who want to highlight the meaning of the word and emphasize the importance for the whole text. Poe apparently showed the audience how to work with this tool. The supernatural meaning of the gaze can be seen in the strong obsession of the narrator. Or maybe it was caused by the narrator's fear of the eye. In the past, witches were burnt because others believed they had the power to curse with their eyes. In folklore, there usually occurs the term the Evil Eye which Poe literally mentioned in his story: “for it was not the old man who vexed me, but

his Evil Eye” (Poe 2007, 268). In the end, the reader must admit that the story plot is possible even though it might sound more or less odd.

In other words, Poe thought profoundly about such details like the voice and gaze and toyed with them to create a unique atmosphere of his stories. Poe used the repetition of some words more times; the readers could notice the same thing in *Berenice* (1835), too. In this story, Poe paid the attention to ‘teeth’. Again, this part of body carries the main meaning of the whole story. The readers are totally frightened after realizing that the main character, the narrator, went to Berenice’s grave, opened it and pulled out her teeth because of his own obsession. Next evidence can be found in *The Fall of The House of Usher* or in *The Black Cat* (1843) as well. However, those examples are just evidence of Poe’s mastery of word but it does not relate to the topic sentence concerning Poe’s creation of the supernatural beings that much.

It has been shown that Poe kept the loophole in his stories to give the readers a rational explanation. The loophole was apparently accurate because the horror stayed in the stories and did not disappear or turn into something humorous. However, a part of Poe’s success is hidden in his precision regarding the way of writing. He did not underestimate the power of words and therefore he created a peculiar atmosphere of the stories to give the readers a certain amount of terror and suspense. He was possibly able to think about the things mentioned in his stories in both ways – material and supernatural – thanks to his own opinion about the cosmos around us. In other words, the secret essence that makes Poe’s stories still so popular is not only the rationality. It is a mixture of his skills and clear opinions. In the end, the following quote can basically summarize Poe’s attitude to writing as well as to life and the universe.

Life itself is live burial, and so too is the composition of the written word, which is decomposed as it awakens into the dispersal of death, brought to life by its reading and liberated—by the eye, by the voice—from the rudimental body of the page” (Link 2012, 287).

4 Main Characters

It has been mentioned few times in previous chapters that a certain role, possibly the most important, was served by the characters. However, Poe used an innovation. He concentrated mostly on the personalities of the characters. Especially their hidden or suppressed nature was Poe's favourite interest. Indeed, nobody knows what other people hide in themselves. Moreover, what he/she hides in him/her. According to McGhee (2013, 57), the sublime experience of horror comes from madness of the main characters. She explains that the protagonists are more susceptible than and they naturally do any kind of evil without the slightest reproaches. It will be demonstrated if Poe had the same opinion and what he revealed about the characters.

4.1 Perversity

Strange characters figure in many Poe's horror stories. They make an unforgettable memory for each of the stories. The key word characterizing them is called perversity. Poe apparently thought over it a lot; his essay *The Imp of the Perverse* (1845) shows his ideas and allows this opinion to be claimed. An attentive reader can observe this feature in many of Poe's stories, e.g. *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Black Cat*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and many more. This chapter will offer analysis of perverse characters in few of the short stories and will bring an explanation why Poe used the perverseness.

Firstly, it is simple to demonstrate two basic types of perverse characters. The first is Roderick Usher from *The Fall of the House of Usher*. He is considered to be mad because of live burial of his sister and a strong fear that totally blind his mind. He is not able to think clearly about the situation. Moreover, he does not even remember what he did. His acting is perverse because he is totally insane. Very similar character appears in *Berenice*. Egeus, the main character of *Berenice*, has to

deal with his monomania towards his cousin Berenice. His struggle ends poorly when he buries a live being, his beloved cousin. The second odd character appears in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The murderer highly thinks about the crime, with a cool head, he stays sane in the situation which might unsettle his mind well (McIntyre 1921, 659). Someone could argue against this, since he had also strong feelings that forced the main character into his crime, but he was somehow aware of what he is doing. Another evidence of this type of mad character, that stays calm, occurs in *The Black Cat*. A short summary can help to prove the statement. The main character of *The Black Cat* loves animals as much as alcohol. Suddenly, because of bad mood, he cuts out one of its eyes. Then, while he has another weak moment, he hangs the cat to the limb of a tree. At the moment, he is angry but he is absolutely aware of what he is doing, he just cannot resist. At the same moment, Poe is totally aware of what he is doing with a reader. The fearful provoking experience after reading this story is simply so thrilling that no reader can forget it. Finally, without any reproaches, he goes with the police officers to the place where he buried his wife that he had killed before, which becomes fatal for him.

This brings a question: Can a real mad person meditate about a murder or is it just acting without any conscious reason? This question is probably not simple to answer. Confirming answers for both of them are simply findable in Poe's horror stories, so neither Poe gives the readers the solution. Anyway, Poe got what he wanted. After reading the stories, readers think about this question, about the mad characters, what they did and why. It keeps them in suspense. It seems that perverse characters were a good choice for an improvement of the horror stories.

Analysis of Poe's mad characters made by other writers is also interesting to read. McGhee (2013, 58) supports the statement mentioned above with a claim that Poe believed in a perversity of main characters. He wanted to shock the audience, and he did indeed. As Foster (1997, In McGhee 2013, 62) says: "the pleasure of perverts begins where ordinary peoples' imagination stop dead". Roderick Usher is definitely a perverse man; he becomes a maniac under the destructive power of his family heritage and his sister. The main character of *The Tell-Tale Heart* also supports the Fosters' theory. It was inconceivable to write about a sin and not moralize but Poe did not follow this convention, which affirms that Poe was a

Romantic writer in a way. He was also shocking the readers with the characters who thought about the sin and stayed calm.

McGhee (2013, 57) states, that Usher's illness and psychics state of the others as well are approaching their climax when the characters become more sensitive to the natural movement toward death. As Poe writes in his essay *The Imp of the Perverse* (In McGhee 2013, 58), perverseness is an ever-present part of our soul, we just reject to listen to it. It can be supported by VanSpackeren's statement (1994, 36) that the dark fates of the Poe's main characters grow out of their deepest unconscious selves.

“In the sense I intend, it is, in fact, a mobile without motive, a motive not motivirt. Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should not” (Poe 2007, 358).

According to the quote from Poe's *The Imp of the Perverse*, there is something inside us which forces us to go against the stream of life. Poe's perverse characters go over the edge to satisfy the fear inside them. The principal idea is fear of death. The death drive, according to Freud (1922), called *Thanatos* was always assumed as the strongest instinct, as the goal of all life. It coerces a man to do even perverted things. It is more than clear that Poe loved the idea of death (Vandana 2013). Death seems to be a key word in Poe's image of perversity. Poe's stories are full of violent death which successfully influences the readers. Poe's perverse characters have a tendency to dwell upon morbid thoughts of death (McIntyre 1921, 656). Anyway, Poe's tales are not just about *danse macabre* (i.e. Dance of Death). Poe just sometimes tried to extend tension up to the maximum limits to absolutely satisfy the readers' expectations.

It is interesting to think why readers want to have this kind of emotions again and again. It can be explained by Hrabák. Hrabák (1989, 6) claims that writer of a horror tale gives a hint to a reader that the story hasn't actually happened and it gives the reader a slight certainty it is impossible to happen, because we live in an organized world. It is releasing information for the reader and that is what readers

want; to get terrified at one moment and then close the book and continue with living a peaceful life. However, this opinion is maybe not totally true in the case of perverseness of the characters; according to the note mentioned earlier about Freud's fear of death and his ultimate power over our behaviour, Poe's main goal might be something slightly different. The main (and probably fully hidden) goal of his stories may be a depiction of human psyche and its whole imperfectness. Perhaps more than anything else, it is an attempt to show the perversity inside of us. He uses the characters as a tool, because all of them can be named as the narrator of *The Imp of the Perverse* calls himself – the victims of the imp of the perverse.

4.2 Women

Readers of Poe's horror tales may notice that several short stories are named with female names, such as *Berenice* (1835), *Ligeia* (1838) and *Morella* (1835). Women are apparently an important part of other Poe's stories. One of them will be demonstrated, too; a sister of Roderick Usher, Madeline. As it has been already mentioned, *The Fall of the House of Usher* is considered as a masterpiece, so it may be interesting to investigate if Poe concentrated on a woman character in this story as well. It may be helpful for the final view of Poe's horror stories and for the analysis of women characters in Poe's horror stories.

Poe probably got his inspiration how to approach women in his stories from his life experience. From the view of Poe's life, his relationship with women was rather complicated; he was either rejected or bereaved (Mina 2010, In Nayef 2013, 79). Mina (2010, In Nayef 2013, 82) also points out that there were a few key women in his life and Poe seemed to be trying whole life to keep them alive. His mother died when he was two years old, he lost his sister Rosalie after mother's death because she went to a different family. Then he fell in love with his cousin Virginia Eliza Clemm who was only 13 year-old when they got married and who also died when Poe was 37. Especially the relationship with his beloved Virginia is considered to be very odd and is generally thought to be the main inspiration of some of Poe's short horror stories (Nayef 2013, 81). This chapter investigates the role of women in Poe's

work, how he dealt with them and if it was written in style including the Gothic Fiction elements.

Firstly, it is necessary to shortly introduce the characters of women in the short stories mentioned above. Berenice is a cousin of the main character Egaeus who is described by him as “agile, graceful and overflowing with energy” (Poe 1850, 438). Egaeus loves her so much that he is rather obsessed by her, especially by her teeth. Suddenly, she suffers from epilepsy and then she always seems to be in a trance. In the end, Berenice is buried alive and Egaeus pulls the teeth out.

Readers do not know much about Ligeia from another short story but they know her appearance in detail; she is a beautiful wise lady with raven hair and dark eyes. At the same time, the narrator feels some strangeness coming from her. The narrator is again obsessed; he desperately wants to find out what is hidden in her eyes. Then she dies some years after a happy marriage. In *Ligeia*, there are actually two women there. The second one is Rowena whom the main character married soon after Ligeia’s death. Rowena seems to be a right opposite of Ligeia; fair-haired and blue-eyed. Soon after the marriage, Rowena becomes ill. Eventually, she dies and mysteriously changes into Ligeia; at least the narrator thinks he sees Ligeia in Rowena’s corpse.

Morella begins with the telling of a man who is describing his friend; a very intelligent and educated woman called Morella. The narrator is not in love with her, even though they get married later, but he feels strong sympathy to her. However, after some time the woman becomes annoying for him and he dreams of her death. While dying, she gives a birth to a she-baby who becomes more and more similar do Morella. The narrator, her father, does not even give her a name. Eventually, he needs to find a name at the time the ceremony of baptism came and the only name that crosses his mind is Morella. After hearing this, the little girl dies and when the narrator wants to bury her in a grave in which her mother was supposed to lie, the skeleton of her mother is not there.

Madeline has also an important role in the horror story *The Fall of the House of Usher*. She is a beloved twin sister of the main character, Roderick Usher, and she suffers from a strange disease. She dies the day when the narrator comes to the

mansion of Ushers. Her brother insists on giving her body into one of the vaults in the mansion; he has apparently a good reason to do it, since she had a strange disease and the vault is in a remote place. After a few days the physical and mental state of Roderick gets worse and worse and the story ends with the coming of Madeline who was buried alive.

Women seem to be a leitmotif in Poe's works. However, it supports more the opinion that it is an autobiographical part of Poe's writings than that it could be considered as a Gothic Fiction element. On the other hand, women in Poe's horror stories have something in common; they are young, beautiful and wise, commonly in a close relationship to the narrator. The relationship is sometimes even odd, such as love between cousins or a strong obsession to a sister. The women also always die, suffering from a disease. As it has been already mentioned, Poe wanted to write about young ladies probably due to his trauma from the relationships with women in his life, but the death is something that should be definitely mentioned regard to the Gothic Fiction elements in Poe's works. Bowen (n.d.) sees the relation between women and the Gothic Fiction in the way of power that either internal or outside forces make the women face irrational kinds of desire. The deaths of the women carry special role. It is noticeable that the deaths of the women somehow helped other characters.

Berenice contains a few unexplained situations but the fact that the character with the same name died is clear. However, there is information given to readers; she had a strange disease and she frequently fell in trance. Therefore, there is a question whether her death was real or if it was just another trance. She seems to be truly dead because this information is given by a servant maiden. The strangest character in this story is Berenice's cousin. He suffers from a disease and he tells the readers about his obsession with Berenice's teeth. Her death allows him to find peace while his hidden desire coming true; he pulls out the thing that caused so much terror in him, the teeth.

According to Nayef (2013, 79), Poe was obsessed by bringing dead women back to life. It is probably most significant in the case of *Ligeia* and *Morella*. Ligeia comes back to life through the body of Rowena. At least, the narrator thinks so. This

story deals with the death in a rather peaceful way. The death of Rowena is maybe more important because it solves the narrator's struggle. According to the short story, the narrator wants to forget about Ligeia after her death but he is unable to do it. That is probably also the reason why he is not in love with the Lady Rowena so much. His trouble is partially released after Rowena's death. He keeps vigil and sees revivals of Rowena's body until she finally stands up, goes in the middle of the room and the narrator touching her figure, sees raven hair and dark eyes which means that Rowena changed into Ligeia. The Gothic element can be seen in two aspects. Firstly, it is the obsession of the narrator with the concealed strangeness in Ligeia's eyes. It is not highlighted in the story anyhow, but staring at a corpse reviving and relapsing many times shows a kind of obsession, too. Secondly, it is the supernatural that relates to either the mysterious gaze of Ligeia or the weird revivals of the corpse of Rowena.

In *Morella*, the symbol of bringing a woman back to life is perhaps even more obvious. Morella's death means the end of the narrator's wish for her death and also the beginning of a new life of her daughter. The daughter looks more and more like her mother. The bringing back of the first Morella can be seen in two situations; firstly, it is the birth of her daughter, secondly, calling her name at the Baptist ceremony. In fact, the narrator was so afraid of calling the name Morella that he rejected it for many years. After calling her name, his beloved daughter dies but he realizes that the body of her mother is missing in her grave. The death is related to the supernatural power here as Morella, the mother, believes in the *principium individuationis* which in other words means a notion of identity which "at death is or is not lost for ever" (Poe 1840, 470). She is the proof of her belief. A rational explanation is missing here, thus this could be simply considered as a Gothic Fiction story.

The character of Madeline, a twin sister of Roderick Usher from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, is very similar to the other woman characters. She also suffers from a disease. In the case of Madeline, the readers are assured about her death by the telling of the guest at Usher mansion. However, the weird behaviour of Roderick indicates there is something wrong with the rushed burial. Poe brought Madeline back to life in a very terrifying way; he let Roderick to bury her alive and then made her to come back from her grave. Her death made Roderick's madness even deeper

but her revival relieved him; while seeing her in his room, he fell down dead which meant the end of his sorrow.

There is one more thing that connects all those women and in fact, it can be considered as a Gothic element; vengeance. All the women come somehow back after their deceases to revenge to men. The “white and ivory-looking substances” (Poe 1840, 445) having belonged to Berenice convicted her cousin from an awful act. The man who was keeping an eye on the reviving corpse of Rowena and her subsequent transformation into Ligeia must have become mad by the odd situation. The readers can think of the reason of the revenge; it could be either Ligeia’s vengeance caused by the marriage of the man or Rowena’s wrath that the man never forgot about Ligeia and was not able to love Rowena. The Morella’s death can be seen as the revenge for the dishonest love of her man. He had to live with hidden fear of calling her name and after shouting it, he lost his beloved daughter. The impact on the man caused by his daughter’s death is left to the imagination of the readers again but his feelings were likely to be touched. The revenge is most apparent in the cause of Madeline. Her brother knew she could come back to life, therefore he decided to put her body away. To revenge on him, she came back to his room which caused his immediate death.

According to the example mentioned above, it can be claimed that one the Gothic elements which Poe used are the death and vengeance. Poe often connected the Gothic elements present in the horror stories with women. However, the Gothic elements are also recognizable in the obsession of the male characters. This issue is very close to Poe as he thought over the perverseness as it was analyzed earlier. As it is apparent from the stories analyzed here, the obsession of the men is in a direct relation to the dead women. Poe apparently liked this way of creating such specific Gothic atmosphere; otherwise he would not use dead women so often in his stories. It cannot be clearly told whether the motif of dead women was his kind of therapy or he wanted to create a specific horror atmosphere. Nevertheless, the usage does not seem to be useless as the stories are still known and being analyzed.

Conclusion

People like reading horror stories because they like being frightened. The horror genre developed in two ways; first kind includes cheap horror stories that offer only superficial terror. The second one offers literary high-quality stories full of dread. There is a style in a close relation to horror genre and it is called Gothicism. Edgar Allan Poe is considered to be one of the best authors who were writing the Gothic Fiction.

When Poe began with the Gothic writing, it had already existed for more than seventy years. The Gothic genre is closely related to the medieval Gothic style. The purpose of this stream was to express authors' free mind and their courage to break the conventions of that time which should have referred to the medieval Gothic style. In fact, the medieval Gothicism was also shocking and innovative and it developed as a reaction to the previous ancient culture. Nevertheless, the Gothic architecture had almost no tradition in America, so the writers had to look for the inspiration somewhere else. No surprise the Gothic authors went back to Europe to find the inspiration. Poe's vision of buildings may relate to England. Nonetheless, there is an argument that Poe's knowledge of Gothicism came from another source rather than from England because he lived there just as a child. The explanation seems to be simple; Poe lived in the part of United States where strong English spirit was, especially distinguishable in architecture. Poe apparently took into consideration also other aspects of the Gothic conception. He contributed to the writing style with exact theory of place descriptions. He minutely focused on the descriptions of furniture and he decorated the rooms to get the reader's attention. He also utilized his language skills to move the readers into right mood by words. He thoughtfully chose certain words just for the reason to evoke in readers the feeling of being in terror.

There are several reasons why Gothicism has been so successful in American literature. The reason is either because of the fact that Americans were descendants of European immigrants. They were said to come to American continent with all their sins and culpability, so they were supposed to like reading tales about something terrifying. It was simply close to their hearts. There are also other theories

such as dealing with political and social crisis by writing such stories. Anyway, this kind of literature is very close to humans because we are frequently moved by the fear.

In fact, the fear causes a lot of tension in Poe's horror stories. Poe's main characters are willing to commit any crime because of their fear which predetermines their mental diseases. The unbalanced personalities either cannot consider their crimes or they cannot feel any reproaches. According to Poe, those characters are under the power of perverseness. The perverse characters do insane things that get the readers into the mood full of dread. Another Poe's typical kind of characters is women. Their role is also very important for the overall atmosphere of Poe's tales. They often carry a sign of the supernatural.

Poe's supernatural elements are substantially arguable. Those elements appear in his stories but the final deal with them is the most important. Sometimes he gives the readers only hint and after finishing reading the story, they can think about the cause and the consequences. However, Poe also explains the supernatural moments in a rational way in some stories. This 'loopholes' left in the stories also helped him to achieve the success of the stories.

These features Poe frequently used in his horror tales and so he successfully explored the possibilities how to cause a scaring environment in the tales. These elements are commonly used in a writing style called Gothicism. Edgar Allan Poe was one of the representatives who wrote in this style. If a reader is aware of these components, he or she can easily recognize them in a story and enjoy the delight of terror more. On the other hand, if the reader has no idea about all these factors, that have their own value, then he or she does not completely understand Poe's attempt and may not appreciate the stories.

All things considered, Poe took advantage of both – architectural and literary Gothic style and he skilfully used the knowledge of Gothicism in his horror tales. He used many features from description of houses over dark places to supernatural elements. However, it is hard to consider if all these elements mentioned earlier could be fundamental for Gothicism. It cannot be either proved or confirmed. There is no evidence of a clear definition of Gothicism in literature so it is just proposal for

literature studies to focus on this style of writing and specify its applicability. Nevertheless, Poe worked the level of horror genre up to a much higher literary level. The Gothic Novels started gradually to deteriorate up to cheap genre that was easy to write and it was written only for the purpose of good income. But this never happened in case of Poe. He thoughtfully hid the aesthetics, the beauty into the stories and that is the reason why he is called as a master of horror (The Guardian). At least, masterwork of Edgar Allan Poe can be considered as a proof of the success of horror genre in the United States.

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