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Bakalářská práce

The Tradition of American Gothic in the Works of Stephen King

Tradice americké gotiky v dílech Stephena Kinga

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Anotace

Práce nejprve představí žánr americké gotiky na základě studia sekundárních pramenů (Punter, Hogle) a pokusí se definovat spojitost gotického žánru a literárního pojmu „the uncanny“, podle Nicholase Royla. Samostatná kapitola práce se bude věnovat zakladateli amerického gotického žánru E. A. Poeovi, charakteristice jeho povídkové tvorby a motivům, které žánr definují v teoretické rovině práce. Jádrem práce bude srovnávací analýza díla současného autora hororového žánru Stephen Kinga a Poeovy povídkové tvorby. Cílem práce je postihnout dílo současného autora v kontextu americké gotické literární tradice a na základě společných znaků posoudit vliv tradice na současný hororový žánr, např. motivy šílenství, hrůzy, strachu, zločinu, násilí, tajemných prostor.

Abstract

The thesis will first introduce the genre of American Gothic based on the study of secondary sources (Punter, Hogle) and it will try to define the link between the gothic genre and the literary term of “the uncanny” according to Nicholas Royle. A separate chapter of the thesis will be devoted to the founder of American gothic genre, E.A. Poe, the characteristic of his short story writing and the motives that define the genre in the theoretical part of this thesis. The core of the thesis will be a comparative analysis of the work by the current author of the horror genre, Stephen King, and Poe’s short story writing. The objective of this thesis is capturing the work of the current author within the context of American Gothic literary tradition and based on the common features, evaluating the impact of tradition on the current horror genre, e.g. the motif of insanity, horror, fear, crime, violence, mysterious spaces.

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Introduction

Horror literature and its related branches have been fascinating readers for a few centuries. The genre of the Gothic has been mostly shaped by Edgar Allan Poe, who is called “the father” of the modern Gothic, horror, detective fiction and an early forerunner of science fiction. Paradoxically, Poe was not appreciated and acknowledged sufficiently enough during his lifetime. His follower Stephen King is arguably the best-known writer of the contemporary horror, crime, or science fiction genre. He has been popular since the 1970s, and his admiration has not stopped. Both authors have influenced and shaped the genre and inspired a great number of other writers despite living in different centuries. Regardless of the “horror” label, the authors dive into an exploration of several narratives and themes which make their readerships large and diverse. Their fiction does not only consist of pessimism, misery, fear, or death but most importantly, psychological elements of the human mind and the possible presence of the supernatural influencing the story. This thesis aims at the tradition of the Gothic genre that originated in the eighteenth century and proceeded to its influence on contemporary fiction.

The thesis consists of two parts: the first part is theoretical, and it provides an introduction of Gothic literature, its origin, relation to Romanticism and Dark romanticism, differences and similarities between the American and British genre, and the connection of the Gothic literature to the literary term “the uncanny”. It is followed by the characterization of E.A. Poe’s fiction and biographies of his and Stephen King’s.

The practical part of the thesis focuses on selected short stories of Poe and King with a brief analysis of work of fiction pointing out the style of writing and themes of the Gothic genre. The thesis is concluded with a comparison of works of E.A. Poe and Stephen King, concentrating on their style of writing, main themes, motifs, setting and protagonists, with the final consideration of an influence of Gothic tradition on the contemporary genre.

1 American Gothic

1.1 The origin of American Gothic

In a literary context, Gothic is mostly associated with a group of writers and novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s. When thinking of the Gothic literature, a set of characteristics come to mind: the archaic settings, use of the supernatural, and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense. The term seems easy to define and describe, but over the last two centuries, it has acquired a few other usages (some of them indirectly related to the original Gothic), and it is now a term which appears both in academic discussion and popular fiction.¹ The Gothic label has become more common today compared to its sporadic use to describe fiction. It was first used by Renaissance historians in Italy to describe styles of medieval architecture and ways of life in general. The term refers to 'not classical' which indicates the medieval architecture to establish the superiority of more recent neoclassic alternatives,² and supposedly barbaric, primitive Goths who played a part in the collapse of Roman Empire.³

American Gothic literature originated in the English Gothic. The neoclassical values which were dominating British society in the eighteenth-century constituted a redeployment of ideas from Greek and Roman writers. The philosophical movement, The Enlightenment, produced the models of modern culture. The classical tradition was associated with civilized and polite culture, its moral and aesthetic values were brought forward as the basis of virtuous behaviour, social relations, and mature artistic practises. Here, the word 'Gothic' took on a negative meaning since it condensed a variety of historical elements and meanings opposed to the values in the eighteenth century. It signified the lack of reason, morality, and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs, and work.⁴ The eighteenth-century Gothic fascination with past, violence, magical beings and malevolent aristocrats was bound up with the massive transformations from feudal to commercial practices inside the society. Gothic resonated as much with anxiety and fears concerning the changes of the time as with any terrors of the past before.⁵

¹ PUNTER, D. *The Literature of Terror: Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*. 2014. p. 1-2.

² HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 16.

³ PUNTER, D. *The Literature of Terror: Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*. 2014. p. 4.

⁴ PUNTER, D. *A New Companion to a Gothic*. 2012. p. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 14.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) was the first published work regarded as Gothic. In a second edition, released a year later, Walpole describes his work as "a blend of two kinds of romance, the ancient and modern", "rules of probability" connected with "common life".⁶ There were other significant works released after Walpole that has been considered as typical examples of Gothic, such as Clara Reeves' *The Old English Baron* (1777), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), or Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). As we can see, the genre's popularity exploded in the 1790s throughout The British Isles and briefly in the United States, particularly for a female readership. From 1788 until 1807 the Gothic maintains a market share of around 30 per cent of novel production, reaching a high point in 1795 (38 per cent).⁷ As we can see, it remained a popular, if controversial and highly unstable, literary genre throughout the Romantic period in European literature (1790s – 1830s). After 1807, the Gothic genre began its decline, but it reasserted itself across the nineteenth century in plays and operas, short stories in magazines and newspapers, novels for women and the working class, and even in portions of poetry and art. A resurgence of the Gothic fiction was seen in works of Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Graye* (1890), or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).⁸

The 1900's finally allowed the Gothic to expand across the wider range in its history, into films, television shows, series and musicals. In the late twentieth century, it started to appear in the academic study at college, music videos or computer games. Gothic genre has become a long-lasting and major domain in modern and postmodern Western culture; however the archaic label may make it seem.⁹

Why readers enjoy Gothic descriptions of horrible events and psychological value behind them may have been answered by one of the most important gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe in her posthumously essay *On Supernatural in Poetry* (1816) where she also explained the difference between terror and horror: "*Terror and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contrasts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.*"¹⁰ Terror only suggests horrific things and shapes the psychological idea of things beyond our life and understanding. Horror by

⁶ HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 1-2.

⁹ *Ibid.* 2.

¹⁰ MILES, R. *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress*. 1995. p. 48.

contrast is always explicit and graphic, leaving almost nothing to the work of imagination.¹¹ Readers question the reality of this world, and many of them like the dark setting and atmosphere of the works. It also helps when they relate to the protagonist or can imagine themselves in a similar situation and place.

1.2 Relation of Romanticism to American Gothic fiction

Romanticism was a movement in the late eighteenth century which stand against the emphasis on reason, ideas associated with the Scientific Revolution, and the excessive optimism that dominated the Enlightenment movement. Against the backdrop of social and economic changes that eventually led to the American Revolution (1776 – 1783) and the French Revolution (1789 – 1799), the intellectuals developed their aesthetic theories and created works of art.¹² The main aspects of Romanticism were an increasing interest in nature, instinct, emotions, uncivilized way of life, exploring the human mind or soul, and Romantic hero being separated from society.¹³

A movement that went a little beyond the Romanticism was Transcendentalism in America. It shared many of the same features: a deep appreciation of nature, emotions, a belief in the self, and the distrust of the classical traditions. The difference is that Transcendentalism resembled the same values as American people, especially in its faith in an individual. Transcendentalists believed that all people had a spiritual power to intuit God, and everyone was pure and equal.¹⁴

However, some writers did not believe such a thing. American Romanticism turned into American Gothic, also referred to as Dark Romanticism. Authors who embraced a new sub-genre were Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe. Dark Romantics were the forefathers of the modern horror, thriller, and mystery stories. They were pessimists, who emphasized human sins and its consequences. The Dark Romantics were showing the darker side of human nature. Still, the Gothic genre is even darker in terms of terror, supernatural and gore.¹⁵

¹¹ TOWNSHEND, D. In: *Chilling Horror Short Stories, Gothic Fantasy*. 2016. p. 5.

¹² SCHNEIDER, J. *The Age of Romanticism*. 2007. p. 1.

¹³ BENIN, N., Ph.D. *ROMANTICISM*. 2019. [online]. [cit. 28.1.2021]

¹⁴ LADD, A. (ed.) *Romanticism and Transcendentalism: 1800-1860*. 2010. p. 34.

¹⁵ BERMAN, K. *Dark Romanticism Notes*. College Prep English III, 2013. [online]. [cit. 28.1.2021].

1.3 Differences between American and British Gothic fiction

There are not many differences between American and British fiction. Both explore the dark atmosphere, terror, madness, or supernatural events. American Gothic fiction only adapted some of the features and basic elements into their country and scouted them deeply.

James F. Cooper complained in 1828 that there was no suitable material for a writer in the new country. Without the relics so important to European Gothic, such as castles and legends, the American landscape seemed resistant to Gothic stories. But certain American experiences may be understood as Gothic: religious intensities, isolation, violence; and above all, slavery, and racial attitudes. The psychological potential of Gothic provides a metaphorical representation of trauma and anxiety, along with the way in which the American Gothic can be seen as a voice for the silenced individuals.¹⁶

In both pieces of fiction, the narrative is manipulated and distorted for purposes that include a recognition of its origin in established personal situations, which show the evil lies within the self. Individuals are mostly evil, weak, and brought to destruction. Authors use the contrast of darkness and uncertain light to produce a mood of Gothic strangeness. American civilized cities are transformed into a place of nightmare and the confusion as the protagonist's madness destabilized narrative and setting.¹⁷ Readers are left with a divide between imagination and rationalism, with a corresponding drive toward explanation. Supernatural is suggested in many tales, but it is frequently explained away by the protagonist's evident insanity.¹⁸

This particular kind of literary style; a mode of revealing the unconscious, unease or connections with the primitive and tabooed – all of these meanings have attached themselves one way or another to the idea of Gothic fiction.¹⁹

¹⁶ LLOYD-SMITH, A. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. 2004. p. 25-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 30-33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 32,47.

¹⁹ PUNTER, D. *The Literature of Terror: Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*. 2014. p. 4.

1.4 The Uncanny

The uncanny has been a focus of philosophical, psychological, and literary studies from the mid-nineteenth century, as a literary scholar Terry Castle writes: “*The eighteenth century invented the uncanny in a sense [...]. Cultural transformations that led to the subsequent glorification of the period as an age of reason, [...], also produced a new kind of human experience of strangeness and anxiety [...].*”²⁰

The uncanny is concerned with the mysterious sense of something supernatural. It involves a feeling of uncertainty regarding the reality where something seems strangely questionable. The uncanny is a “crisis” of natural, touching upon everything that might have been thought to be a part of human nature and the nature of this world. Most importantly, the uncanny is blending familiar with unfamiliar. It takes a form of something familiar happening in a strange, unfamiliar context. The uncanny is felt in response to witnessing manifestations of insanity, lifelike objects, or something gruesome, such as corpses, live burial or return of the dead. But it also can involve a feeling of something “too good to be true”, telepathy, or *déjà vu*. The uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or ‘homesickness’, perhaps unconscious desire to die. At the same time, the uncanny is tied with humour and irony. Above all, it is entangled with how we conceive the world.²¹

The term itself was first used by German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch in 1906. He described the feeling of uncanny as “*unheimlich*”, frightening and unknown. The English uncanny is not synonymous with the German term. It derived from the Scottish ‘canny’ in sense of ‘can’ – knowing. Uncanny is then associated with unknowable.²² A famous Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud wrote an essay “*The Uncanny*” in 1919 from where this apparition has been understood as not a spiritual presence anymore. “*Unheimlich*” was a figure of repression. It is ‘the home’ that we refuse to acknowledge and from which we are estranged.²³ Freud’s essay demonstrates that the uncanny is not a definition that can be controlled but rather something unpredictable and strange happening to what is being stated or described. It lays somewhere between reality and imagination. The uncanny is

²⁰ ROYLE, N. *The Uncanny*. 2003. p. 22.

²¹ Ibid. p. 1-2.

²² Ibid. p. 9.

²³ MILBANK, A. *Gothic fiction tells us the truth about our divided nature*. The Guardian, 2011. [online]. [cit. 29.1.2021].

perhaps the most and least subjective experience. It is self-centred incident with a sense of strangeness breaking down the identity of a self.²⁴

Allan Lloyd-Smith has remarked the uncanny both psychologically and politically linked to wider issues: “*Male and female interactions involving power [...] are determinants, as also may be the historical and political experiences of class, race, or age, and certain specific features of culture such as [...] the fear of what is brought back from colonial adventures.*” All of these nineteenth century issues are still with us but more widespread, global and profound. Of course, this just does not apply to issues of class, race, or colonialism, but also in relations to notions of technology and automation. The uncanny is not merely an aesthetic matter but something we analyse and question the everyday life with.²⁵

Examples provoking the uncanny feeling can be found in surrealism movement, wax sculptures, lifelike robots or seeing your double (the doppelgänger). Gothic literature is full of uncanny feeling, which helps to create terror. The protagonists and plots are frightening, yet strangely familiar. Occupied, ancient houses with hidden secrets tend to influence behaviours of the protagonists. Double figures spread from Frankenstein and Creature, Poe’s William Wilson, Dorian Gray and his portrait, to Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Dead relatives or love interests come back from the dead to disturb the lives of characters, and them not knowing if they are ghosts, vampires, demons, or real people. Ghosts have an ability to disturb present times and places and mix it with the past. Readers, just as the protagonist, never know if everything that is happening is just a product of the imagination or reality itself, which is more terrifying since everyone is driven towards the need of explanation.²⁶ But most importantly for American Gothic fiction, the uncanny provides a glimpse into the dark Gothic nightmare, conflicted by the American Dream of freedom, prosperity, and success.²⁷

²⁴ ROYLE, N. *The Uncanny*. 2003. p. 16.

²⁵ Ibid. 23.

²⁶ MILBANK, A. Gothic fiction tells us the truth about our divided nature. *The Guardian*, 2011. [online]. [cit. 29.1.2021].

²⁷ SAVOY, E. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 181.

1.5 Edgar Allan Poe

1.5.1 Biography

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents were actors David and Elisabeth. He had a brother William and a sister Rosalie. The father left the family a year after Edgar was born, and the mother died shortly after. Poe ended up with the Allans family in Richmond, Virginia, which gave him the name Edgar Allan Poe, but they never formally adopted him.²⁸ John Allan was a businessman, intellectual and storyteller. The family sailed to England where Allan opened a subsidiary in 1815. Poe attended school in Stoke Newington. He excelled in literature and history, spoke French, Latin and was the best swimmer. On the other hand, Poe was made fun of because of his American accent. The family returned to Richmond in 1820.²⁹

In 1824, Poe served as the lieutenant of the Richmond honor guard and was engaged to his platonic love Sarah Elmira Royster. John Allan sent him to the University of Virginia in 1826 to study ancient and modern languages. Poe got into gambling debts, which caused the argument with his foster father, and by the end of the year, he left the studies.³⁰ Poe went to Boston in 1827 where he published his first poems “*Tamerlane and Other Poems*” without making any profit. He enlisted in the United States Army with the name “Edgar A. Perry”. After being promoted and ending up in South Carolina, he had more time for writing poems and studying science.³¹

Poe reconciled with John Allan after Mrs Allan’s death in 1829. He moved to Baltimore, Maryland and lived with his aunt Maria, her daughter Virginia, his brother, and grandmother Elizabeth. His second book, “*Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*”, was released and brought him the first positive reviews.³²

Poe started attending the West Point Military Academy in 1830. John Allen married his second wife, which sank Poe’s dreams of heritage. Poe was disobeying orders and left the academy. He went to New York to publish his book “*Poems*” in 1831, still not getting enough money. He created the Folio Club for making fun of “*his enemies who were attacking his poems*”, some of the stories possibly being about John Allan. This is how

²⁸ MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 4-9.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 10, 13.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 17, 22-26.

³¹ Ibid. p. 32-35.

³² Ibid. p. 38-41.

Poe's short stories were created. But satiric writing slowly turned into an obsession with death and another reality. Poe soon realized that short stories make more money than poems. After winning the writing competition in Baltimore, he became the short story writer.³³

After John Allan's death in 1834, Poe had to take care of his family because he did not inherit anything. He became an assistant editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and married his 13-year-old cousin Virginia in 1836. Poe was publishing book reviews, critiques, and stories, such as "*Morella*" or "*Berenice*"³⁴ He was not making enough money, even though he brought new readers to every magazine he had worked at. There were no professional writers in the United States, and he was blocked by the lack of an international copyright law.³⁵ His first and only novel "*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*" was published in 1838. Poe later worked at *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* and *Graham's*. The very first detective story in the world, "*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*", was published in 1841.³⁶

Virginia became ill in 1842. Poe's stories turned even more morbid. He became a nervous man, who was taking care of his wife while having problems with alcohol, writing all the time, and fearing his madness. "*The Pit and the Pendulum*" or "*The Tell-Tale Heart*" were written around this period. Poe released "*The Gold Bug*", which brought him more money than usual, and returned to writing poems after 10 years of writing only short stories.³⁷ He became popular when "*The Raven*" was published in January 1845. While working at the *Broadway Journal*, he accused Henry Longfellow of plagiarism, which is now known as The Longfellow War of 1845. Longfellow never responded Poe and only commended the accusation after Poe's death: "*My works seemed to give him much trouble, first and last, but Mr. Poe is dead and gone, and I'm still alive and still writing.*"³⁸

Poe moved to a cottage in Fordham, New York where Virginia died in 1847. Poe was depressed and unstable after her death. He could not sleep alone, and his fears and

³³ MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 48-65.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 70-77.

³⁵ HILSKÝ, M. *Od Poea k postmodernismu: Proměny americké prózy*. 1993. p. 8-9.

³⁶ MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 107-114.

³⁷ Poe, E. A. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. 1972. p. 79-80.

³⁸ Staff, H. *Between Popular and Literary: Remembering E.A. Poe 165 Years After his Death*. [online]. [cit. 26.09.2020].

imagination brought him to writing “*Eureka*” where he describes his take on the universe and God. After finishing it, he writes a letter, stating he is ready to die.³⁹

In his last year of life, he was attending several events for poets where he met Nancy Richmond. Poe tried to commit suicide after she told him she cannot marry him. He got engaged with Sarah Helen Whitman, which failed due to his drinking.⁴⁰ His final days remains a mystery. Poe left Richmond in September 1849, supposedly on his way to Philadelphia only to be found walking around the town hallucinating. He managed to come back to Richmond. On October 3, he was found delirious in Baltimore. He was taken to a hospital where he died on October 7. It was said that the cause of death was “*congestion of brain*”. The actual reason is still speculated to this day. Alcohol, rabies, epilepsy, or poisoning are just some of the main ideas.⁴¹

Edgar Allan Poe wrote over 70 tales, 50 poems, six essays and one novel. He revolutionized literature in several ways, shaped the detective, horror and science fiction genre and inspired many writers and poets around the world. When he was not writing, Poe enjoyed spending time with his family, playing the flute and taking long walks through the countryside. He also owned many pets and expressed an interest in science.⁴²

³⁹ Poe, E. A. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. 1972. p. 79–80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 90–92.

⁴¹ BURLINGAME, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: deep Into that Darkness Peering*. 2008. p. 89–92.

⁴² Edgar Allan Poe Museum. *Edgar Allan Poe Museum: Poe's life, legacy, and Works: Richmond, Virginia* [online]. [cit.26.09.2020].

1.5.2 Themes and features in Poe's works

Edgar Allan Poe shaped and affected short story fiction, and he realised all the possibilities of Gothic writing. It is true that writers who were writing after him may have produced greater tales than him, but we must comprehend that it was Poe himself who 'taught' them and guided them with an explicit example.⁴³

From the very first beginning, Poe focused on psychic life and its fragmentation between reason and imagination, or between consciousness and unconsciousness. He does not reject Gothic devices of European Gothic and Romanticism, but no other author has been preoccupied with connecting terror with abstract ideas of the mental condition of his characters. Poe carries this to a great degree of abstraction but at the same time leaves a space for intense emotional impact. The quality of Gothic's focus on the symbols of states of the human mind, spiritual experience, and on the other hand, on extreme suffering, is the sublime feature. The sublime is a standard feature of Romanticism, a sense of awe as well as incommensurability of things, emotions, and thoughts in human minds. But only Poe and his predecessor, Charles Brockden Brown, took this sublime from haunted castles and dungeons to the dark side of the human mind.⁴⁴

Features in Poe's writing are no longer connected to moral and existential questions, but rather become an artistic effect. He described his qualities that made for his success in magazine fiction: "[...] *the fearful coloured into the horrible, the witty exaggerated into the burlesque, the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical.*" Whether it is achieved by imagination or with an abnormal psychic state, hallucinations, and madness of his characters, it is up to readers if they take his narration for granted or think deeply. The plot that pushes the analytical, logical, or even mathematical reasoning is best apparent in "*The Pit and the Pendulum*". Another development of this principle is found in the detective novellas and short stories ("*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*", "*The Gold Bug*"), simultaneously Poe became the founder of the detective genre. A similar appearance can be seen in the mystifying tales, for instance, "*The Balloon Hoax*" or "*The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall*".⁴⁵

⁴³ LOVECRAFT, H.P. *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. 1973. p. 52.

⁴⁴ QUINN, J. (ed.) *Lectures on American Literature*. 2011. p. 73-74.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 77.

Conventionally, his stories of both type (imagination and ratiocination) are examples of different strains in Gothic, a divide between mystery or the fantastic, and the explanation. Poe's works still show the effects of rationalism in its American form by understanding Gothic events through mental disorders, and the sense of supernatural; but at the same time, he resembles the Romantic movement with his tales compelling the effects of a disorder in the imaginative creation of his protagonist's world.⁴⁶ Rather than longing for the beauty of nature, he longs for the beauty of a spirit, especially the link between the beauty, death, and a female love interest ("*Eleonora*", "*The Oval Portrait*").⁴⁷

The sense of supernatural is a substantial part of Poe's tales and American Gothic genre itself since it attracts thoughtful interpretations of his fiction. Both Gothic and supernatural are anti-realist zones of strangeness, but the supernatural also crosses over into a world of spirits and ghosts. Poe's supernatural tales feature possessed people and objects but most importantly, there is the loss of one's regular self and the mind, set in the supernatural narrative, as found in *The Black Cat*, *The Fall of House of Usher* or *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.⁴⁸

Poe excels in broad narrative rather than in character drawing. His typical protagonist is melancholy, highly sensitive, isolated, intellectual, and sometimes mad human, who is ambitiously infiltrating and solving "forbidden secrets of the universe". More qualities appear to originate from Poe himself who dealt with his sensitiveness, loneliness, depression and "extravagant freakishness".⁴⁹

Poe's description of his literary composition can be found in a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* published in 1842 and his essay *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846). Poe developed a new brilliance in Gothic writing through his conception of "*the unity of effect*", a concern for a reading experience that left a deep impress on American Gothic development. The author should know the ending of the work and the emotional effect they wish to create before they even start: "*Nothing is more clear than that every plot, [...] must be elaborated to its denouement [...]*," and "*If his initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed his first step.*"⁵⁰

⁴⁶ LLOYD-SMITH, A. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. 2004. p. 32-33.

⁴⁷ HOWARD, M. *The Creation and Impact of Dark Romanticism*. Ouachita Baptist University, 2015. [online]. [cit. 29.1.2021].

⁴⁸ YOUNG, E. In: *The Cambridge History of American Novel*. 2011. p. 221.

⁴⁹ LOVECRAFT, H.P. *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. 1973. p. 59.

⁵⁰ ALLAN, E.A. *Review of Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales*. *Graham's Magazine*, 1842. [online]. [cit. 29.1.2021].

He believed that all works should be short. Poe applied this rule to poetry but took in a prose composition as well: “[...] *there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art – the limit of a single sitting.*” This allows the reader to experience the story all at once. He also stated that writing is thoughtful and analytical, but most writers want their readers to think that the idea of their work came from sudden inspiration, and they would “[...] *shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes.*”⁵¹

⁵¹ ALLAN, E.A. *The Philosophy of Composition*. *Graham's Magazine*, 1846. [online]. [cit. 29.1.2021].

1.6 Stephen King

1.6.1 Biography

Stephen Edwin King was born on September 21, 1947, in Portland, Maine. His father Donald is a war veteran and a seller of the vacuum cleaners across the country. King's mother is Nellie Ruth. The parents had adopted his brother David before King was born. When he was two years old, his father left the family and never came back. A single-parent family travelled from one relative to another. Ruth has never lost her optimism and was telling her sons funny stories. In reality, she had two to three jobs and was paying debts after Donald. The boys owned only old clothes and broken toys. They had learned to take care of themselves and started reading books.⁵²

King was plagued by chronic ear infections when he was in the first grade. Staying in bed all the time resulted in him reading comic books and, eventually, writing stories. He was rewriting the existing ones, but Nellie encouraged him to write something new. The King's first short story was "*Mr. Rabbit Trick*". Nellie gave him a quarter for every piece he wrote.⁵³ Shortly after that, King has developed an interest in horror and science fiction genre and studied the structure of every movie at the cinema which he later applied to his writing. When King was 11, they finally settled in Durham, Maine. King, being surrounded by "*4 families and a graveyard*", discovered that people like rumours and ghost stories.⁵⁴ He had to go to the church but lost his belief as he grew older. Religion has never "*made sense*" to him, but he would like to believe in God; he wants to believe that there is the afterlife, and he would see his family again.⁵⁵

Around the age of 13, King started reading the works of Ed McBain, E. A. Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, the representatives of horror, crime, and science fiction. One day, while looking around an attic, he found belongings of his father. He was shocked to discover that the father had been interested in horror and crime stories, and that he had tried to be a writer.⁵⁶

King attended Lisbon Falls High School in Lisbon Falls, Maine. He was an intelligent, imaginative, funny student, who was very tall. He was wearing dark black glasses all the

⁵² HERNÁNDEZ, C. *The Beginnings of Stephen King*. 2018. p. 16-20.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 21-23.

⁵⁴ ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 34, 39.

⁵⁵ BEAHM, G. *The Stephen King Companion: Four Decades of Fear from the Master of Horror*. 2015. p. 445-446.

⁵⁶ ROLLS, A. *Stephen King: A Biography*. 2008. p. 4.

time and loved sports, even though he was not an athletic type. According to King himself, he hated high school and some teachers just did not understand him. His first short story (“*I Was a Teenage Grave Robber*”) was published in 1965 in the *Comics Review* magazine.

He became an editor of a school newspaper where he gained an idea for a satirical newspaper *The Village Vomit* full of characters inspired by his teachers.⁵⁷ From 1966, King studied at the University of Maine, where he met his future wife Tabitha ‘Tabby’ Spruce. During university studies, he started writing novels, articles for *Maine Campus* newspaper, was experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and he became a radical liberal. He criticized the university system for not teaching modern and popular culture.⁵⁸ King graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. He had to work manually the first few months of marriage, and occasionally he got a check from men’s magazines he was sending his stories to. In 1971, King was hired as a teacher at Hampden Academy, Maine. He continued writing short stories, now specifically oriented on the horror genre.⁵⁹

The real breakthrough came in 1972 when King finished his first novel, “*Carrie*”, which was published two years later. He quit his job as a teacher and moved to a southern Maine town to his mother who died a year later. In the following years he wrote novels such as “*Salem’s Lot*” (1975), “*The Shining*” (1977), “*Cujo*” (1981), and his short stories were published in book collections. Some of his works were written under pseudonym Robert Backman. His popularity grew even more when some of his works were made into movies. King also wrote some screenplays for various TV shows of horror theme and adaptations of his stories.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the film industry and parties brought him back to drugs, and he started writing under their influence. At the end of the 1980s, his family and friends could not just sit by and watch him kill himself. They staged an intervention, King began the treatment and successfully managed to get rid of all the drugs he had been addicted to.⁶¹ In 1999, King was hit by a driver, went under several operations, and started

⁵⁷ HERNÁNDEZ, C. *The Beginnings of Stephen King*. 2018. p. 34-35.

⁵⁸ BEAHM, G. *The Stephen King Companion: Four Decades of Fear from the Master of Horror*. 2015. p. 42-43.

⁵⁹ ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 77, 83, 109.

⁶⁰ BEAHM, G. *The Stephen King Companion: Four Decades of Fear from the Master of Horror*. 2015. p. 14.

⁶¹ DRUG TREATMENT. *How Stephen King Overcame Addiction & Became More Creative*. 2013. [online]. [cit.26.09.2020].

taking painkillers and anaesthetic cocktails. The writing during recovery was much more difficult than he had expected, but his persistence was worth it.⁶²

Stephen King has published over 200 short stories, 61 novels, seven novels under the pen name Richard Bachman, five non-fiction books, and has won over 100 awards for his writing. He tries to release two books every year.⁶³ King likes helping students, writers, or filmmakers thanks to the *Dollar Baby* program. On his official website, there is a list of titles available for adaptation for 1\$. The adaptation cannot bring a profit to the makers.⁶⁴ King says that he hates fame. His friends describe him as “*an ordinary man with 3 kids, who doesn’t think that his personal life is interesting, or that there is even someone who wants to read about his life,*”⁶⁵ but he does interviews from time to time or has a book signing.

⁶² KING, Stephen. *On Writing*. 2002. p. 254-274.

⁶³ KING, S. *Dollar Baby*. [online]. [cit.26.09.2020]. Available from: <https://stephenking.com/works/>

⁶⁴ KING, S. *Written Works*. [online]. [cit.26.09.2020]. Available from: <https://stephenking.com/dollar-baby/>

⁶⁵ ROGAK, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. Macmilian, 2010. [online]. [cit.26.09.2020].

2 Literary analysis of the Selected Works of E.A. Poe

2.1. The Pit and the Pendulum

2.1.1. Plot

This story starts with a man being sentenced to death for crimes related to the Spanish Inquisition. When he wakes up from oblivion, he finds himself on the floor in the pitch-black cell. He decides to explore and assumes that he is in the cell in the city of Toledo, which he heard many stories about. He rips off the hem from his rope and places it against the wall so that he can count the steps and know how big the cell is. He soon stumbles and falls asleep on the ground.

After waking up, he finds a loaf of bread and water in his cell. The man explores again and finds that the cell measures one hundred steps. He decides to walk across the room. However, he trips over the hem of his rope, falls, and his chin ends up on the edge of a pit. He takes a stone from the wall and throws it inside the pit. The pit is deep, and there is water on the bottom. He remembers the stories about the pits; the inquisitors do not have a sudden death of the prisoner in their plans. The man falls asleep.

Being so thirsty, he drinks all water. It must have been drugged because he falls into a state of unconsciousness. When he opens his eyes again, he can look at his cell better because there is a little bit of light in it. He was wrong about his measurement. The cell is in the shape of a square and not rounded. Now, the man is bound to the wooden framework only able to move his head and the left arm. Above him is the painted figure of Time holding a huge pendulum. The pendulum is slowly descending toward him, and the man loses track of time.

When the pendulum gets close, he comes up with the plan. He rubs food all over the bandages and waits for rats to free him just as the pendulum is about to cut. When he is free, the pendulum stops and is drawn up. The cell becomes hotter, and walls begin closing and moving the man towards the pit. At the last minute, he is saved by the French general Lasalle and his army that has taken over Toledo.

2.1.2. Analysis

This story is a great example of the Gothic short story. It also differs from other Poe's work. Many of his stories end sadly, but this one has a happy ending. The story is also emphasizing the reality rather than something supernatural.

Death, darkness, and agony are the themes that are mostly present throughout the story. The main character, who is also the narrator of the story, is "*sick unto death with that long agony*"⁶⁶ since the beginning. Death is present at his trial, the pendulum in his cell is prepared to kill him, and the rats are waiting to consume his dead body. The cell is pitched black and seems unescapable, the narrator thinks he has been buried alive, and "*the agony of suspense grew at length intolerable*"⁶⁷. The pit symbolizes the rumours he had heard and his suffering and death. The image of the Time on the ceiling is a symbol of the narrator running out of time and getting closer to his death. The reader knows from the beginning that he survived thanks to his description of the judges, and how they appeared "*whiter than the sheet upon which I trace these words*"⁶⁸.

The reader feels bad for the narrator since Poe does not specify his crimes. The reader assumes the innocence of the man in the context of torture chambers and the cruelty of the Inquisition. Psychological terror is the worst torture in this case. The narrator does not get harmed physically, but he does not know where he is and what will happen to him, he cannot see anything in the cell and cannot stop the pendulum by his hands. He can only rely on his senses and ideas. The reader relates to the narrator, due to Poe's detailed description of surrounding and most importantly the narrator's thoughts. The narrator is in a bad situation but still manages to think rationally. When he wakes up in the dark cell, he does not panic and thinks that "*even in the grave all is not lost*"⁶⁹, and "*not for a moment did I suppose myself actually dead*"⁷⁰. His mood then swings between hope and despair. He explores his room carefully, counts the measurements, but ends up "*smiling at the glittering death*"⁷¹ on the wooden framework. When his life is about to end, he

⁶⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 590.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 593.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 590.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 591.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 592.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 600.

becomes hopeful and gets a “*feeble, scarcely sane and definite*”⁷² idea. The only time he breaks down crying is when the walls are moving him to the pit.

Poe is more focused on the human senses and reality rather than the possible supernatural elements, which is creating more suspense for the reader. At first, the narrator focuses on trivial images (the candles, lips of the judges). That changes after he wakes up in the cell and can only pay attention to his senses. The cell is an unfamiliar and dangerous place. There is no light in the cell, the narrator needs to use the hem from the robe to mark and know his location by touch while counting the size of the cell, he gets thirsty, hungry and sees and hears the pendulum on the ceiling. Every time the narrator discovers something new that is helpful, he and the reader have a glimpse of relief, which is destroyed shortly after by another unpleasant situation. The story contains distortion of space and time as well. Time seems to slow down “*at intervals that seemed ages*”⁷³ and the cell changes after each period of consciousness. This unreliability makes the reader think that the escape is impossible and how awfully the narrator will die.

Poe’s writing is full of adjectives and long clauses for detailed description. He builds the tension with anaphora for dramatization when the pendulum is coming closer to the narrator’s body (“*Down – steadily down it crept [...] Down – certainly [...] Down- still unceasingly – still inevitably down!*”⁷⁴). Even after freeing the narrator, the tension is rising, and the reader feels more anxious. Poe’s writing turns into short clauses, interjections, exclamation marks, and repetition when the walls are moving the narrator to the pit (“*A suffocating odor pervaded the prison!*”; “*Oh! Most unrelenting! Oh! Most demoniac of men!*”; “*Unreal.*”⁷⁵).

Poe explores the fear of the unknown and helplessness. It is the story of the man fighting for his life and doing everything to survive. Poe makes us consider how certain experiences change our look on life and existence, and us imagining ourselves in the same situation and thinking about what we would do on his place.

⁷² Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 598.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 598.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 599.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 602.

2.2. Eleonora

2.2.1. Plot

This story starts with the unnamed man telling the reader that he is being called mad by others, but he believes that the madness is a sign of high intelligence. The man thinks that those who daydream are aware of many things than those who only dream at night, and they can learn about good and evil. He mentions two periods of his life – the one with reason and the other with shadow and doubt. The reader should believe the first period of his life but doubt what comes later.

As a young man, he lives with his cousin Eleonora and her mother in a remote valley. The valley is a perfect place surrounded by the mountains, flowers, and trees. After 15 years, the man and Eleonora fall in love with each other. Unfortunately, Eleonora becomes sick and is scared that the man will fall in love with someone else. He vows to her that he will never marry anyone else. Eleonora tells him that her spirit will watch over the man once she dies, and she will give him indications of her presence.

The man lives in the valley for a few more years, but the valley lost its beauty. He can feel the presence of Eleonora, however, he wishes for love. The man ends up in a city but has not forgotten the vow to Eleonora. He still feels her spirit at night, but it ceased. One day, the temptation takes over him and he falls in love with a maiden Ermengarde. Eleonora visits the man one last time in his sleep and gives the blessing for the new couple.

2.2.2. Analysis

This story is considered by many as an autobiographical story of Poe and his wife. At the time of the publication, she had begun to show signs of illness. The story is a romantic short story with a relatively happy ending, which is not common in Poe's writing.

The story is told from the first-person point of view. The narrator is unreliable from the beginning when he mentions his madness. He claims he was sane, but no longer is; the narrator tells the reader how his mental existence was affected by his childhood trauma. He and Eleonora are very young when they fall in love. Love is characterized as platonic and full of innocence. His vow to her is a romantic gesture that is also unhealthy for his future life. It is possible that his memories and love for Eleonora are just exaggeration

due to his young age and being affected by Eleonora's death for the rest of his life. Once he matures, he does not seem to let Eleonora rest in peace, and still associates the valley with her. However, the place he once loved becomes unfamiliar and hurts him. When the narrator moves to a city and meets someone new, he thinks "*what was my passion for the young girl of the valley in comparison with the fervour and the delirium, and the spirit-lifting ecstasy of adoration [...]*" which shows his growth, and how love differs when you are a child and an adult.

In a horror story, a ghost of Eleanor would come back for vengeance, but she fulfils the narrator's image (innocent, angel) and forgives him. The narrator believes the "*familiar and sweet voice*"⁷⁶ gave him the blessings at night. The reader must decide whether it was just a dream or a supernatural activity. He had felt conflicted about falling in love again, there is a possibility that his subconsciousness justified his action in the dream. The supernatural theme of a woman returning from the afterlife to visit her love can be found in other Poe's stories, like "*Morella*" or "*Ligeia*". Poe often wrote about beautiful women dying very young.

At the beginning, love is something magical. When the couple fell in love, everything changed around them - "*brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees [...]*"; "*fish haunted the river*"; "*the green carpet deepened*"; the cloud's "*edges rested upon the tops of the mountains, turning all their dimness into magnificence*".⁷⁷ Eleonora is seen as the most beautiful woman who is "*artless and innocent*", but she had been "*made perfect in loveliness only to die*"⁷⁸. The contrast appears after her death - "*the flowers shrank into the stems of the trees*"; the flamingo "*flew sadly from the vale*"; the cloud "*took away all its manifold golden and gorgeous glories*".⁷⁹ The narrator projects his feelings into everything around him. Love and loss change people and how they think and perceive their surroundings. Poe's enchanted, philosophical, and intimate imaginary could confirm the theory about the story being autobiographical.

The meaning of the story is about deep romantic love and whether it can last forever or just for a moment. Poe explores how a traumatic event can divide our minds into two eras

⁷⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 535.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 532.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 533.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 534.

– before and after. We should not be afraid to fall in love again if we lose someone. It is not about forgetting the love but moving on without grief.

2.3. The Black Cat

2.3.1. Plot

The story starts with an unnamed man writing his life story, which he does not expect somebody to believe. He is supposed to die the next day.

He is a kind man who loves his wife and animals. His favourite pet is a large black cat named Pluto. They have a special bond. After several years, the man becomes an alcoholic and angry man who abuses his wife and animals. He spares Pluto, but one night, he comes home intoxicated, thinks that Pluto is avoiding him, attacks it and cuts out one of its eyes. In the morning, the narrator feels horrible about his act, but the bond with Pluto is gone. The man is still irritated and hangs the cat from a tree. Later that night, his house burns down. He returns to the ruins of his home, only to find a single wall that survived the fire. On the wall, there is a shape of a cat with a rope around its neck. The man thinks that a neighbour threw a cat inside the house to warn his family about the fire.

After months, he sees a cat, looking like Pluto, sitting at the top of a barrel. The cat becomes attached to the man and follows him everywhere. He begins to despise the cat, especially after he notices the cat is missing one eye, and the white fur on the cat's chest grew into the shape of gallows. The man is angry but terrified of killing the cat because of his memory of Pluto. Then, one day when he and his wife go into the cellar, the cat gets under his feet, and he almost trips down the stairs. Filled with rage, he tries to kill the cat with an axe. His wife stops him, so he kills her instead.

The man immediately starts thinking about hiding the body. He removes the bricks from the wall and puts the body inside. He tries to find the cat, but it is missing. He sleeps peacefully for the next three nights. On the fourth day, the police investigate his cellar. They cannot find anything. Right when they are about to leave, the man starts bragging about the well-built house and taps on the walls. A loud cry is heard from behind the wall, so the police tear it down and find the body with the cat sitting on the top of the corpse's head. The man had accidentally sealed the cat inside the wall.

2.3.2. Analysis

Poe wrote a piece with a double meaning where the events can be explained rationally, or the supernatural could be the reason for everything happening. This story is very modern, as Poe explores the idea of evil that comes from things around us rather than

fiction. The story is very similar to Poe's "*The Tell-Tale Heart*" where the murder and guilt occur as well.

The story is told by an unreliable narrator with questionable sanity. He says he is not crazy, but then hopes that someone "*more calm, more logical*"⁸⁰ will understand and explain what has happened in his life. The narrator loved animals as a young child and was spending most of his time with them. He makes no mention of friends or love interest; he was a lonely child who turned to animals for their "*unselfish and self-sacrificing love*"⁸¹. This could explain his future "*hatred of all things and mankind*"⁸² and the root of his violence and murders. The narrator was able to find a wife and share his love for pets with her. She stayed with him even when he was abusing her, which is something very common in domestic violence relationships. Their home was full of happiness and animals, but the narrator turned it into a symbol of violence and murder. After her death, the narrator says that the wife was "*the most patient of sufferers*"⁸³.

The narrator goes through a drastic psychological change throughout the story. It all started once his drinking got out of control. The alcohol pushes the narrator into violence, paranoia, wild imaginations, and accusations of his beloved cat. It got worse when the house burned down, and they lost their fortune. He was aware of his bad behaviour and violent action but did not do anything about it. The narrator admits that alcohol started all this ("*my disease grew upon me – for what disease is like Alcohol!*"⁸⁴), however, his 'perverseness' is a part of human nature. In his words: „*Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?*"⁸⁵. Later in the story, the narrator blames the supernatural elements as the cause of his problems. It seems that he lacks empathy, remorse and manipulates everyone around him.

The supernatural theme spreads throughout the story. The narrator's wife sometimes mentions the superstition of the animal. The name Pluto comes from Roman mythology with the associations of the underworld or hell. Poe probably used this name for the symbol of death. Pluto was the narrator's first victim. The reason could be that their

⁸⁰ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 650.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid. p. 654.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 649.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 652.

relationship was special, and Pluto was following the narrator everywhere. It looks that the narrator had a closer relationship with him than his wife. When Pluto is killed, the narrator's guilt brought another cat back to haunt him. The fire of the house after Pluto's murder seems like another supernatural event, especially when the image of the cat appears on the wall. The narrator sees the second cat as "*the beast*"⁸⁶ much more difficult to get rid of. The cat has an image of the gallows on its fur as a symbol of the constant reminder of the narrator's crime. The cat also becomes a symbol of his wounded conscience since he is terrified of it. He would kill the cat as well, but "*a certain sense of shame and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty*"⁸⁷ is preventing him from doing so. The plot mixes reality with the supernatural, but it is more likely that everything comes from the narrator's insanity and alcoholic problems.

Poe wrote some words with capital letters at the beginning of a word (such as Alcohol, Agony, Death or Crime) to emphasize the main themes of the story and elevate their importance. The words 'perverseness' and 'gallows' are even written with all capital letters ("*the spirit of PERVERSENESS*"⁸⁸; "[...] of the GALLOWS"⁸⁹). The story is also written with a lot of comments and explanation inserted in the middle of a sentence ("*[...] had I dared – it was now, I say, the image of a hideous – of ghastly thing – of the GALLOWS! – oh mournful [...]*"⁹⁰). It represents the narrator's unstable mind. The story does not contain any dialogue, except for the final part where the narrator is talking to the police. Even then, his voice is the only one that can be read in the story. Poe creates the suspense in the story by using the unreliable character and his description of the emotions slowly building up inside him ("*by slow degrees these feelings rose into the bitterness of hatred*"⁹¹; *evil thoughts became my sole intimates*"⁹²) or simple visuals that make the reader expect something bad happening in the future (the cat looking like Pluto, walking into a cellar, investigation, the cat being inside the wall etc.)

The meaning of the story is that no matter how hard we try, our past is always part of us, and we cannot escape it. We must take responsibility for our actions and do not blame innocence beings. Poe had pets on his own and loved his wife Victoria very much. The

⁸⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 650.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 652.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 650.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 653.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 652.

⁹² Ibid. p. 654.

story could have been written for raising awareness about domestic violence and animal abuse.

2.4. The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall

2.4.1. Plot

The story opens with a crowd in the city of Rotterdam looking at an oddly shaped substance in the sky. As the object gets closer to the ground, they realize that it is a balloon driven by a little man. The man drops the letter and ascends again. The letter is addressed to Von Underduk and Professor Rubadub at the College of Astronomy.

The letter was written by Hans Pfaall, who describes his journey of reaching the Moon. It all started five years ago. Hans is a poor man with a family to support. He gets inspired to build a balloon when he reads a pamphlet on Speculative Astronomy. Hans convinces his three creditors to help him create the balloon. He promises the secret project he is working on will pay all his debt. The canopy of the balloon is filled with a new type of gas he generated but he does not tell what it is. Hans takes a cat and pigeons on the journey with him.

When he is about to float into the air, a fuse leading to casks of gunpowder ignites and destroys his workshop. Hans is not injured, the balloon is not damaged, and he did not lose any essentials. In the next part of the letter, he explains his calculations of distance, the force of gravitation or the problem with high altitude and atmospheric pressure where human life is not supposed to survive. He believes that if the atmospheric pressure upon the surface of the body is removed, the live being can survive and even exist in a vacuum. He speculates about human bodies habituating to the atmospheric air.

Hans and animals suffer from uneasiness due to the high altitude. Hans opens a vein to get rid of the pain. To his surprise, the cat gives birth, and the kittens have no signs of uneasiness. When Hans can no longer breathe, he uses a gum-elastic bag that surrounds the basket of the balloon with the condenser of the air. He leaves the cat and the kittens outside the bag for the experiment. After a while, he sees the cat struggling. However, the kittens enjoy the situation.

On his journey, Hans sees many islands, the Arctic circle, or the Mexican Gulf. The Moon is directly overhead but hidden from his view. Hans ends up on the Moon after 19 days. He starts throwing overboard his ballast when he finds himself plummeting. Hans lands in the fantastical-looking city with ugly little people. He teases a few more details about the community, but first, he wants Excellencies to pardon the accidental murder of his three creditors. He sends an inhabitant of the Moon to deliver his letter and wait for the response.

Von Underduk and Proseffor Rubadub dismiss his crime, but cannot send the message back to Hans, since the inhabitant flew away because he feared the appearance of Rotterdam people. The letter is published instead, and the speculations start circulating. So many people believe the story is a hoax. Some of their evidence is that Hans was seen drinking with three men with money they made from a trip beyond the sea. The newspapers on the balloon from the Moon were printed in Holland, therefore, could not have been made on the Moon, and some little dwarf has been missing from the neighbouring city.

2.4.2. Analysis

Poe is called ‘the father of science-fiction’, yet this story, among his other science-fiction stories, is overlooked. The story is quasi-scientific writing where space journey and strange alien life connect with life on Earth. Poe wrote the story as a hoax with two narrations. The first one follows people on Earth and their reaction to the new phenomena. The second part is the letter of Hans Pfaal.

The reader can recognize the credibility of the story by reading the first few pages. Poe gives out little hints showing the reader that the story is a hoax. Hans’ journey starts on April 1st, the balloon is in a shape of a ‘fool cap’ and made out of newspaper, and other characters are named Excellency Superbus Von Underduk and Rubadub. Poe makes fun of the bourgeoisie and contemporary culture. The little man in the balloon is “*an egregious insult to the good sense of the burghers*”⁹³, and he flew away fast because he was “*frightened to death by the savage appearance of the burghers*”⁹⁴. Poe also criticizes “*the effects of liberty, long speeches and radicalism*”⁹⁵. People try so hard to “*read about*

⁹³ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 81.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 121.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 84.

*the revolutions and keep up with the march of intellect and the spirit of the age*⁹⁶. Social pressure and financial struggle make the main character think about suicide. The newspaper fills people's head with radical themes, and Hans escapes the modern world with these "*dirty newspaper*"⁹⁷ he has used to build the balloon.

On the other hand, Poe fills the story with scientific details and his knowledge. Flying to the Moon inside a balloon is considered an impossibility and extremely unlikely with what was known in the physics in the 19th century. The story is very speculative, yet Poe's long clauses, full of explanation and heavy scientific terms, make everything feels believable. The reader learns about the several functions of the balloon, calculations, length of the journey from Earth to the Moon, experiments with cats and pigeons, and how Hans solved the problem with atmospheric pressure. The reader does not learn about the new type of gas he invented, which is the most important invention that allowed the expedition, and it raises the questions about the credibility of his story.

Hans is a man with limited education who is actually very intelligent to a certain degree and dedicated to his craft. He is more scared about the function of the balloon than his life. Hans is a brave man who wants to do the impossible, and who does not seem like a typical 'crazy scientist'. He uses his amateur knowledge to his advantage. His biggest challenge is surviving in different air and atmospheric pressure. Even in pain, he tries to hold on the longest to see the results, and the bloodletting had been just a regular procedure at the time, which he tried as an experiment to make him feel better. On the other hand, he lets his intuition do the work, some occurrences in the story are questionable, and he seems like an unreliable narrator in some parts. He theorizes a lot, and the journey is one big experiment for him.

Flying to the Moon had seemed like a next step in the evolution of humanity, and that the "*long ere this all Europe is in an uproar*"⁹⁸. The Moon is a massive rock floating through the universe, but people had considered it as something magical and powerful as well. They were making theories about its surface and possible alien life there. In the story, there is life on the Moon, but it is not described in detail. The story hints at "*dark and hideous mysteries which lie in the outer regions*", the strange "*connection between each*

⁹⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 84.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 81.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 80.

particular individual in the Moon with some particular individual on the Earth“, the substitute of speech in *“inter-communication”*, and other observations, which *“never shall be turned to the scrutiny of the telescopes of man”*.⁹⁹ The ending is sudden. The character says that he will tell more if they pardon him for his crime. The reader must decide if the journey really happened, or he created a bizarre story just to receive a pardon when he had killed three men to whom he had owed the money. Another reason could be that Poe did not want to continue, just to keep the narrative as the short story.

There are no horror elements at first sight, but that is maybe the beauty of the story. If Poe made the story longer, the readers could have learned about the mysteries of the Moon. Now, the readers can only use their imaginations and make the whole new world up in their minds. The story is filled with the unknown. It is not sure if Hans survives, what will happen when he is up in the air, and what he will find on the Moon. Poe used his amateur knowledge of physics thanks to his interest in science with fantasy. His perception works for Hans since he *“grew as poor as rat”* with the *“limited nature of education”*.¹⁰⁰

The message of the story is that anything is possible. We know that it is impossible to get to the Moon in a hot air balloon, but it makes the reader inspired to achieve their dreams. They are so many smart people, but under certain circumstances, they do not have a social background or opportunity to go through a proper study. Poe described nature and the outside world as something inspiring, yet mysterious and tragic. Connecting science-fiction with elements of real-life can be scarier than monsters in other stories.

⁹⁹ Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 120.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 84.

3 Literary analysis of the Selected Works of Stephen King

3.1. Autopsy Room Four

3.1.1. Plot

The story begins with Howard Cottrell waking up to find himself in a dark place. He is unable to move and speak, but he hears, sees, and feels what is happening around him. From listening to the conversation of the doctors around him, he realizes that he is dead and in a body bag. The doctors are called Michael, Peter, Rusty and Katie. Howard is trying to scream and catch their attention, but it is pointless. He slowly remembers playing golf before this event. He went to retrieve a golf ball in the rough and was bitten by something. Howard comes to the shocking conclusion that he is in the autopsy room.

Howard starts to panic. He focuses all his strength on his chest since the chest is the first part of performing an autopsy on. Surprisingly, he manages to make a humming sound. It is not enough, but he proved to himself that he is alive. Just as the next sound starts to come out, the doctors turn on the radio. Only Peter and Katie stay in the room for the autopsy. Then they undress him and start recording the autopsy. Howard is praying, hoping they would see the wound from the bite on his left leg. The only problem is that he has bites from mosquitos on the leg as well. Peter jokes about Howard being possibly alive because he has a good colour of skin, no bruises, or other signs of a theoretical heart attack. Howard's temperature is low on the other hand. Peter has been an apprentice, so he is unsure about opening Howard's chest. Katie stops him, she noticed a war-wound on Howard's thigh. The door finally bursts open. Rusty is yelling about a snake they found in the bag. Katie looks down, only to see Howard's erect penis she was holding the whole time.

In an afternote, Howard explains that he was bitten by a rare snake. The snake belonged to a bachelor bank clerk who owned over sixty snakes of different variations. Howard's experience ended up in newspapers. He and Katie dated for four months but broke up due to sexual incompatibility. Howard was impotent unless she was wearing rubber gloves.

3.1.2. Analysis

This story is an example of the premature burial theme. King writes in his notes how “every writer of scary stories has to tackle the subject of premature burial; it seems to be a pervasive fear of a human”.¹⁰¹

King takes the reader inside the head of the narrator. The reader tends to imagine themselves on the narrator’s place, due to the King’s detailed description of everything happening in the room and most importantly the narrator’s thoughts. It is even worse when we remember that the narrator is paralyzed and can only count on his senses. The story only takes place in one room that is dangerous, unfamiliar, and threatening to the narrator.

There is lots of suspense in the story. The narrator and the reader know he is alive and about to be ‘killed’. There are many close calls for the narrator. The biggest example is the apprentice preparing himself for the cut, but the doctor noticed a war wound. King can create a growing panic and fear due to the narrator being completely powerless. The tension rises even more when we found out that the narrator has some knowledge about the autopsy, and he tells the reader a few steps of the procedure. The suspense would not have been that strong if the story were told from a different point of view.

What is very intriguing in the story is the behaviour of the doctors. Did they make a mistake or was the narrator’s condition really at the brink of death? King mixes tense with humour, so throughout the story, the doctors are not taking their job seriously, they are teasing each other, making fun of the character, and touching him in an unrespectful way. The only respectful doctor is female. The narrator is trying very hard to get the doctors’ attention. He even prays “for the lip to bite through my skin, pray to bleed, something corpses don’t do”.¹⁰² The psychological agony is much worse than the physical one. The ending gives the reader a big relief. There is no blood that was expected.

The story contains lots of italics. Examples can be found in rhetorical questions (“*What’s going on here?*”¹⁰³), emotions of the characters (“*gooooood*”¹⁰⁴) or singing. They are mostly used for emphasizing narrator’s thoughts, like when he is panicking, screaming

¹⁰¹ King, Stephen. *Všetchno je definitivní*. 2015. p. 45.

¹⁰² King, Stephen. *Everything’s Eventual*. 2002. p. 33.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

inside his head, or describing how the doctors must have noticed he did something which would save him. King is not afraid of using the exclamation marks which can be found in short, suspenseful clauses or single words. King also uses capital letters for full words (“*WHOCK!*”; “*CLANK!*”¹⁰⁵) representing loud sounds that are unpleasant in the context of the story, especially surgical instruments which are expected to hurt the narrator. He and the reader anticipate something bad happening every time they are mentioned.

The meaning of the story is about fighting for your life in any way possible and hoping for the best. Another potential meaning could be being cautious so you will not make any bad mistakes, either as being careful in the bushes or as a doctor.

3.2. The Man Who Loved Flowers

3.2.1. Plot

The story takes place in New York City, May 1963. A young man is walking down the street in the spring evening. The people smile when they see him. He looks like he is in love. The man suddenly stops and reaches into his pocket. He seems puzzled for a while, but then, as his hand left the pocket, he regains his former expression again. He talks with a flower vendor. We learn that he wants to buy a favourite flower to a girl named Norma. The flower vendor sells him a dozen of roses. The young man continues walking and people respond to him walking by again.

He then turns into a dark alley. He sees Norma, walks faster, and hands the flowers to her. He has mistaken the girl. It is not Norma, so she hands the flowers back. The man pulls a hammer out of his pocket, and the girl starts screaming. He kills her, because she is not Norma, just as he had done five other times before. Norma has been dead for years. The young man knows he will find Norma someday. He passes a middle-aged couple on the street. A woman thinks to herself that if there is anything more beautiful than springtime, it is young love.

3.2.2. Analysis

King has managed to write a story that makes a reader feel warm and positive, just to be shocked and disgust by the end. King uses the slow increase of tension to capture the

¹⁰⁵ King, Stephen. *Everything's Eventual*. 2002. p. 27.

reader's interest. He sets the reader for a positive experience and a love story. If someone knows the King's works, they know it is just a matter of time before something goes wrong.

King explores love in a dark way. There is a big contrast between real love and mental illness. At first, the main character seems happy, everybody thinks he is in love and wishes him well. On the inside, he is obsessed with the girl who is dead, and he cannot accept that she is gone. Ironically, he calls himself "*Love*", but his actions are far from it.

The story is told by the omniscient narrator. It mentions other people's relationships and focuses on their nostalgia. The flower vendor thinks "*how it was to be young in spring – young and so much in love*"¹⁰⁶, the woman on the street catches herself thinking "*if they're hurrying to meet the one of their dreams*"¹⁰⁷, or the married woman asking her husband "*how come you never look that way anymore?*"¹⁰⁸. Everybody is amused and jealous of the young man, but he does not care what is happening around him. It seems that he has no empathy since he hears the bad news on the radio and thinks that "*none of it seemed to matter*"¹⁰⁹.

The flowers are the biggest symbol of the story. He likes to buy flowers because he is looking for Norma and wants to make her happy. Red roses represent the blood and cruelty of the story and white symbolizes the innocence of the victims. The beautiful flowers end up in the dark alley, full of evil and clutter when they "*fell out of his hand, [...] broken open, spilling red, white and yellow tea beside the dented trash cans*"¹¹⁰. One would never imagine the flowers in this place, just like one would never imagine how the good-looking young man could kill an innocent girl.

The language used in the story is very descriptive, mainly by adjectives to help to imagine the scenery. During the day, everything is pleasant ("*the air was soft and beautiful*"; "*the doorway of the delicatessens*"¹¹¹). The only interruption of happiness is the news on the radio, talking about a murderer on the loose and Russians exploding a nuclear device. When the darkness comes, the description drastically changes ("*the stars were out*"; "*the*

¹⁰⁶ Mr. West's Wiki. *Stephen King – The Night Shift – The Man Who Loved Flowers*. 2015. [online]. [cit. 28.9.2020].

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 1.

*lane was dark and shadowy*¹¹²). The character changes into someone else too, and we learn that he is the murderer on the loose, which is a foreshadowing from the radio news. He is nameless as well, which makes the reader feel uneasy, and it relates to a real life. Any guy in the city could be like him. The story is calm and peaceful, except two paragraphs near the end where the murder takes place. King's writing turns into long clauses, without any pause, and repeating 'evil' words ("*screaming, screaming*"; "*swung the hammer, swung the hammer, swung the hammer*"¹¹³). It shows the breakdown and madness of the man. He does not think rationally, especially when he is repeating to himself that the girl is not Norma. The story slows down and goes back to romantic traits after the murder is done.

The meaning of the story is that nobody knows what goes inside somebody's mind, everybody is hiding their secrets and insecurities. It shows how it is very easy and dangerous to go from love to an unhealthy obsession.

3.3. The Raft

3.3.1. Plot

The college students - Randy, Deke, Rachel and LaVerne - have decided to go on a trip to a lake in October. Randy had come up with the idea of saying goodbye to summer when Rachel had reminisced about the summer when she was a little girl and a raft in the middle of the lake.

After swimming to the raft, Randy notices the black patch on the water. He thinks that it is just an oil slick. After a while, Randy sees the substance moving. He screams at the girls to get on the raft. Deke and LaVerne make fun of Randy's suspicions until Rachel observes colourful spirals on the creature's surface and touches it. The creature pulls her into itself, dissolves her and gets bigger.

The friends hope the creature will swim away. They realize they told no one about the trip, and they are in a remote area as well. Randy almost falls off the raft too but manages to break his nose to stop himself from falling under the creature's influence. Deke decides to swim to the shore after the creature emerges under the raft. He steps on one of the

¹¹² Mr. West's Wiki. *Stephen King – The Night Shift – The Man Who Loved Flowers*. 2015. [online]. [cit. 28.9.2020].

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p. 4.

cracks between the boards, and the creature grabs his foot. Randy and LaVerne have to watch him die while he is slowly disappearing through the cracks.

LaVerne faints. Once Randy wakes her up, she goes into a panic attack. She punches and chokes Randy. When LaVerne calms down, she takes turns in watching the creature with Randy. At night, they sit down to warm each other, and it turns into sex. Randy promises to keep an eye on the creature but is distracted by the swirling colours of it. He does not notice LaVerne's hair falling over the side of the raft. The creature tangles itself in her hair and flows down over her face. Randy panics and kicks her over the edge.

Randy falls asleep and wakes up just in time to save himself from the creature. When he sees a plane, he fantasizes about a rescue team, then cries and sings randomly. He thinks if he had a gun, he would kill himself. Randy starts contemplating if the creature could help him from the pain. Once it appears, he lets himself look.

3.3.2. *Analysis*

King describes an ordinary trip of students which goes wrong. He focuses on the relationships much more than describing the evil entity. The story is an interesting concept of how people behave when they are trapped, hopeless, and are under an influence of the supernatural creature.

Randy seems like the most rational person from the group. He notices the creature, takes care of his friends, and thinks about other possible plans. Deke is a typical football player at college who is trying to be strong and powerful. The women are passive characters, typically portrayed as the girls who need to be protected. It is interesting to watch how the characters change when they are in danger. Deke is just angry; he is relying on Randy's knowledge only to be killed while proving to him that he is a "hero"¹¹⁴. Rachel was the first character to be killed, and LaVerne went under the shock and was submissive for most of the story. Randy is remembering every possible information he knows ("There's nothing like that in any science book I ever read"¹¹⁵), but after ending up alone on the raft, he loses it and accepts his situation.

¹¹⁴ King, Stephen. *Skeleton Crew*. 1985. p. 374.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 375.

Even when the horror is appearing in the story, its focus is on the relationships and what needs to be done to survive. The friendship turns into dishonesty, rivalry, turning on each other and individuals trying to save just themselves. Randy is seen as the sanest person of the group but does not really help his friends. He is jealous of Deke, his ability to make the girls like him and seeming like ‘a hero material’. Randy is trying to save Rachel because he loves her, but when the same thing happens to Deke, he just stares. This could be explained as Randy being in shock, but at one point, he thinks that “*the two of them could almost surely have swum ashore while the black thing was busy with Deke*”¹¹⁶. Near the end of the story, when the creature grabs LaVerne, he kicks her in the water (probably in panic and shock) and is the only one alive. Randy can protect himself from the creature every time he punches himself in the nose. After the long night, Randy loses his stability, talks to the creature, thinks about suicide, and lets to kill him as well.

The creature is described as something supernatural in the real world. King never explains the origin of the monster, but it looks like an oil slick or a big mole. It can attract its victims thanks to colours swirling in spirals on its surface. The victim is grabbed, slowly dissolved (“*being clutched in a bear hug of monstrous and unknowable force*”¹¹⁷), and the creature grows in its size. When it swims under the raft, the main characters realize that the creature is intelligent and follows the smell of its potential victims. The characters slowly lose their sanity. The creature leaves no hope for them, and the surrender is welcomed. “*This time Randy did not look away.*”¹¹⁸

The story is told by the omniscient narrator who mainly focuses on Randy. King uses italics for subconscious thinking of his characters. The biggest segment of italics is used for Randy’s thoughts, such as “*That thing doesn’t look like an accident.*”; “*Got to get him out quickly or we’re never gonna get him out at all.*”¹¹⁹. Subconscious thinking is sometimes divided from the normal text by the brackets, in the example like “*buttoning the brass button above the fly – (do you love yes I love)*”¹²⁰. Capital letters are used for Randy’s screaming inside his head (“*HER HAIR IS IN THE OH GOD IN THE WATER*”).¹²¹ King’s writing turns from grammatical to sloppy when he is narrating the

¹¹⁶ King, Stephen. *Skeleton Crew*. 1985. p. 383.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 384.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 398.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 368, 382.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 395.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 393.

inner thoughts near the end of the story. He omits dots and commas. It represents having so many thoughts at once that are speeding through the mind of the character. Repetition is another literary device used in the story. King uses it when Randy is getting distracted by the creature during the intercourse (“*bikinis on the beach, the beach, the beach, oh do you love do you love the beach do you love*”¹²²) to build up the tension of another lurking attack of the creature. “*Do you love*” is a phrase that is repeated throughout the story a lot. King uses the phrase in almost every story of the “*Skeleton Crew*” collection, probably for connecting the stories.

King is very detailed in narrating the death sequences. Deke’s death is probably the goriest piece of writing in the King’s career. “*Blood burst from the pores of Deke’s calf and shin*”¹²³, “*he voided a great jet of blood*”¹²⁴, “*his face was a hideous purple turnip*”¹²⁵, or “*Deke’s stomach began to swell ominously*”¹²⁶ are just examples. King shows what the creature is capable of and how it did not end well for Deke, who was supposed to be a hero.

The typical behaviour of the characters in horror is making foolish decisions and acting brainless. King plays with this image in the story a little bit, and the reader feel sad that Randy, who started as the most stable and intelligent character, dies as well. The main point of the story could be that even though it is important to fight for your life, sometimes there is nothing you can do, and you have to let the fate or higher power to do the job. If we accept the possible theory, that the supernatural creature is just a fish who mutated, the story is telling us that living beings are just following their instincts (survival mode), and animals are sometimes smarter than humans. Humans are affected by the environment that could even destroy them.

¹²² King, Stephen. *Skeleton Crew*. 1985. p. 393

¹²³ Ibid. p. 382.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 383.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 384.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 385.

3.4. The Jaunt

3.4.1. Plot

The story takes place in the year 2424 and Mark Oates, his wife, and children (a 12-years old Ricky and a 9-years old Patricia) are strapped into their seats at the New York's Terminal. They are moving to Mars for two years. The children want to hear a story about the Jaunt and Mark has no problem with that since he wants to make them feel comfortable.

The Jaunt is teleportation used for finding resources across the universe. It has been invented around the year 1987 by Victor Carune as a part of a private project, later funded by the government. The resources on the Earth were low, starvation was spreading across the globe, and Victor wanted to help. Victor had set up two portals at opposite sides of the barn. At one end was an ion gun, on the other end was a cloud chamber. Between them was the lead shield. He accidentally teleported his two fingers, and the invention was born.

The Jaunt worked perfectly when he tried sending a pencil, keys, or a calculator. Then he decided it was time for mice. Victor discovered a side effect of the teleportation. The mice would either die instantly or behave strangely before dying moments later. He tried drugging mice unconsciousness which worked, and they survived. The first human subjects were volunteers. Mark did not tell the children about Rudy Foggia, a murderer sentenced to death, who agreed to try the Jaunt awake. He went through the Jaunt but came back saying that it lasts for an eternity and died. Mark also omits the story of a husband sending his wife through the portal and closing every possible end. The Mafia is thought to have its illegal Jaunt stations as well.

Ricky asks if the Jaunt works on the concept of a time-warp and time travelling in general. Mark explains that it revolves around the idea of consciousness. The body teleports instantly, but nobody knows how much it takes for the conscious mind. Who would not go insane if someone is alone with their thoughts in endless space and time? That is why people need to be unconscious. Patricia is scared, but Ricky seems more confident.

When Mark awakens, he hears his wife screaming. His son held his breath while having served the sleeping gas. He tells Mark the Jaunt it is longer than he thinks, starts clawing his eyes, and he is wheeled away by several attendants.

3.4.2. *Analysis*

This story is a classic example of King's science fiction. He explores the concept of teleportation, which is something that humankind has always been looking for. The story was published in 1981, but its questions remain to this day.

King plays with the idea of teleportation in a realistic way. He sees it as a possible way of supplying needed resources for the planet. The story shows negative concerns too. The Jaunt can make people insane, or it can be used for murder. In the story, most people adapted to teleportation and no longer question the consequences, but there are some exceptions. The little girl's insistence on "*What happened to the mice Daddy?*"¹²⁷ shows her concern about the possibility of her death. On the other hand, Ricky is in puberty, he is more adventurous and curious about the Jaunt. His tragic ending shows that the Jaunt is still not perfect, and it can end badly.

The story is divided into four chapters and it is told by the third-person narrator. The reader can read two stories in one. The first one is about the family and the incidents happening around them. The other story follows the father narrating the story of the scientist and his invention. The father is sometimes interrupted by the children's questions. King is detailed in both parts. He sets the scene of a normal day where people are getting ready for the regular journey, but it ends with tragedy. He describes the invention of teleportation and how it works, but lets the reader think and make other theories after finishing the story. King's characterization and his take on of scientific terms and functions of tools (a particle transformer, transmission terminal etc.) is believable, considering the fact that he is not a scientist, and it is just his imagination combined with existing concepts at the time of the writing, and the reader is easily drawn into the story, even though some ideas and functions can be harder to understand.

In this story, King uses a lot of dashes to create a better visual of a scene, or just for a complex explanation ("*touching something inert – packed straw or sawdust, perhaps –*

¹²⁷ King, Stephen. *Skeleton Crew*. 1985. p. 262.

except for the aspirating sides“; ”teleported – jaunted – across space“¹²⁸). The story is full of ellipsis when one of the characters is interrupted or as a pause for effect (*“there was a slight problem ...“*; *“it blinked ... and fell dead on its side“¹²⁹*). The word ‘Jaunt’ or ‘jaunting’ are already existing words with the connotation of ‘travelling for pleasure’.

The main question of the story is if teleportation is a good or bad thing, or if the person appearing at the other end of the portal, is still the same person or just a duplicate made by a computer. Teleportation is fascinating, but we should not forget about the consequences, and what our bodies and minds are able to go through. King’s consciousness is something that exists outside the physical body and does not follow the rules of time. The scariest thing is, that it *“turns on itself, savages itself, perhaps consumes itself in an unthinkable act of auto-cannibalism“¹³⁰* when it gets shocked. Who uses the Jaunt without gas, comes out as *“a creature older than time“¹³¹* with the body of a normal human. The biggest fear of the story is the possibility of ending up in an endless void. *“Longer than you think.“¹³²* It is so long than we are able to mentally think, we exhaust ourselves with our thoughts around us and nothing else. Who would not go insane when *“a billion eternities have passed“¹³³*, and the sudden ending comes like the *“crashing return of light and form and body“¹³⁴*?

¹²⁸ King, Stephen. *Skeleton Crew*. 1985. p. 254, 250.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 253, 254.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 268.

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 269

¹³² Ibid. p. 270.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 268.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

4. Comparison of works of E.A. Poe and Stephen King

E.A. Poe and Stephen King are both innovative authors of the genre and very similar in their writing, yet we can still find a few differences in some cases.

4.1. Style of writing

Poe's tales are a mixture of intellectual and emotional bearings. On one hand, he is a logical thinker, on the other hand, a passionate writer. His short stories are appreciated mostly because of the mixture of styles and slow development of his characters. While Poe is concerned with 'theatrical', his delight in mystification and madness of his protagonist provides the decoration of his stories, and his consciousness lends their form. Poe is combining existing material with his imagination that takes the material and vitalizes it.¹³⁵

Poe creates complex stories based on Gothic elements, grotesque, irony, or black humour. The most applied style in Poe's short stories is an arabesque style. It is a decorative one, more emotional in tone and composed of a wider range of qualities: foreign words, archaism, inversion of word order and loose sentence construction, which all can be explained by his reading and a certain degree of education.¹³⁶

Poe's writing is very descriptive. He builds the tension of the story with long sentences or anaphora for dramatization ("*The Pit and the Pendulum*"). When there is a climax of the story, his writing turns into short clauses, interjections, or words all written with capital letters ("*The Black Cat*"). When writing about philosophical and romantic scenery, his vocabulary is full of rich words and contrast of colours ("*Eleonora*").

King's style is recognized by his choice of characters that are somehow flawed and mentally scarred, yet easy to remember for the reader. King's insight into human nature makes his stories easy to read without being shallow. If the reader identifies with the character, the plot can be more impactful and possibly more frightening. But still, the most important part of King's tales is the plot itself which is influenced by the characters if they "grow a lot". In his words, some writing classes also can be "annoyingly

¹³⁵ POE, E. A. *The Complete Stories*. 1992. p. 10.

¹³⁶ CARLSON, R. E. *A Companion to Poe Studies*. 1996. p. 460.

preoccupied by theme, approaching it as the most sacred of sacred cows, but don't be shocked, it's not a big deal. ¹³⁷

King does not know how the story will end, unlike Poe.¹³⁸ He takes the most innocent-looking objects or social problems, and explores them with *what if?* He knows the fear is an integral part of life, and the people find pleasure if facing unknown in the story. King sees the story as a date with the reader where everyone should have fun. He takes the reader by a hand with *"I'll take you to a few very dark places, but don't be scared, I know the way. [...] A short story is like a kiss in the dark from a stranger.* ¹³⁹

King writes with many details to make the characters believable. His stories contain italics for emphasizing thoughts of the character, mostly when they are in a dangerous situation, and repetition of certain words. He also uses some words written with all capital letters just as Poe (*"Autopsy Room Four"*, *"The Man Who Loved Flowers"*, *"The Raft"*). Unlike Poe, King is fond of long sentences with no pause, when the story reaches its climax of unfortunate events of his characters. But still, he omits dots or commas if many inner thoughts are speeding through the character's mind. (*"The Raft"*)

4.2. Themes and motifs

Poe and King share similar experiences in their life. Both grew up without a father, they were considered as 'different' in high school, both experienced the death of people around them, and shared the drug problem and closeness to their families. All these things may have tributed to the writing and depiction of their characters.

The theme of isolation or loneliness is similar in both authors' works together with darkness and agony. In Poe's works, it is due to the psychic and social isolation of his characters, but there are exceptions like *The Pit and the Pendulum* where it depicts narrow space. King uses loneliness in both ways, as isolation in space (*"Autopsy Room Four"*, *"The Raft"*, *"The Jaunt"*) or mental instability of the character (*"The Man Who Loved*

¹³⁷ KING, S. *On Writing*. 2002. p. 189, 200.

¹³⁸ BEAHM, G. *The Stephen King Companion: Four Decades of Fear from the Master of Horror*. 2015. p. 229.

¹³⁹ King, Stephen. *Skeleton Crew*. 1985. foreword

Flowers”). His characters are often fighting for freedom and safety in those places where psychological terror or torture is much worse than a physical one.

Much of Poe’s short stories are focusing on the theme of death in any variant. He mostly writes about the death of a beautiful girl, or she is mentioned as a deceased love interest of the protagonist (“*Eleonora*”). In a different short story, the main protagonist kills his love (*The Black Cat*), or he is very close to death himself (“*The Pit and the Pendulum*”). Poe’s presence of death is described by natural causes. King also deals with the theme of death, natural (“*The Man Who Loved Flowers*”) as well as supernatural. In supernatural-oriented short stories, his characters struggle with hallucinations, madness or invisible force that leads to the death of them or others (“*The Raft*”). King may describe machines and futuristic technologies that are dangerous to human, which is shown in *The Jaunt*. Like Poe, his characters can only be on the verge of death the whole story (“*Autopsy Room Four*”).

A similar feature to death is being buried alive. Throughout the nineteenth century, the fear of premature burial has been present since tests for determining death were not always reliable, and many believed that people are buried alive while in a death-like coma. Poe wrote about it in his short story *The Premature Burial* (1844), which is about a man who fears he will be buried alive due to his catalepsy illness. *The Pit and the Pendulum*, released two years after, is a different take on this subject. In 1919, Sigmund Freud wrote about this fear in his essay stating that live burial is uncanny and terrifying because it manifests a hideous form of awakening and a dialogue between worlds that should remain detached.¹⁴⁰

King is interested in live burial too since he stated how “*every writer of scary stories has to tackle the subject*”¹⁴¹ at one point in writing. His short story *Autopsy Room Four* possibly refers to the fear of premature burial just as an accidental awareness during surgery, which is still considered a controversial and unreliable condition. Patients often cannot communicate they are awake due to anaesthesia relaxants.¹⁴² The difference of

¹⁴⁰ MANGHAM, A. *Buried Alive: The Gothic Awakening of Taphephobia*. *Journal of Literature and Science*, Volume 3, 2010. [online]. [cit. 14.2.2021].

¹⁴¹ King, Stephen. *Všetchno je definitivní*. 2015. p. 45.

¹⁴² BBC News. *Waking up under the surgeon’s knife*. 2017. [online]. [cit. 14.2.2021].

Autopsy Room Four is, the man could not move because of a snake bite, and the doctors have already considered him dead.

Another big theme appearing in the author's works is the presence of the supernatural. Both authors are descriptive in their writing, but the reader is still unsure whether the events are caused by the protagonist's decrease of psychological sanity or the presence of a supernatural creature. Poe hints at ghosts or the return from the death in *Eleonora*. In *The Black Cat*, he uses the association of black cats with bad luck together with a man who starts drinking alcohol, and his behaviour leads to the destruction of everything he had. King's *The Raft* is disturbed by an intelligent creature as well but the story is still more focused on relationships between the characters who lose their sanity.

Elements of science fiction genre appear in both authors' works. King's are not always easily classified since he uses themes from different genres as well. Both Poe and King thought up an invention that was desired during the time of writing their stories. In the nineteenth century, it seemed impossible to fly to the Moon, so it was natural for Poe to create a story about achieving this aim (*"The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pffall"*). King lives in modern times where humanity is interested in teleportation, which is a much more complex invention that can be dangerous, as he shows in *The Jaunt*.

4.3. Setting

Choosing locations is very important for creating the feeling both authors are trying to evoke in the reader. In a way, they give space for protagonists to show their psyche.

Both Poe and King use places that are inescapable, dark, and threatening to protagonists. They do not get physically harmed, but due to relying on only their senses, their options are limited, and it makes them and the reader feel uneasy (*"The Pit and the Pendulum"*, *"Autopsy Room Four"*). Poe and King are also in favour of familiar locations that represent personal and safe space, which ends up in contrast with the danger of evil intension of the protagonist or supernatural entity (*"The Black Cat"*, *"The Raft"*). King's stories are mostly set in a small town where unbelievable events take place.

When writing a story with a love interest, the authors describe a place that is colourful, peaceful, and filled with happiness at first, only to be switched into sad, shadowy, and depressing place, when the protagonists lose their love (*"Eleonora"*, *"The Man Who*

Loved Flowers”). In science fiction stories, both authors take their protagonists to several locations, either with or without horror elements (“*The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal*”, “*The Jaunt*”).

4.4. Protagonists

Poe’s main protagonist is usually unreliable and melancholy man with a mental disorder whose closer characteristics are not revealed immediately, but slowly through everyday events. The man claims there is nothing wrong with him, and he explains and rationalizes his actions in his way (“*The Black Cat*”). On the other hand, Poe can create a character who thinks rational even in the life-threatening situations (“*The Pit and the Pendulum*”), someone who is intelligent, dedicated to his craft (“*Hans Pfaal*”) and can grow in his fragile mentality (“*Eleonora*”).

King’s protagonists undergo a significant change during the story. They summon the inner strength to endure the fear they encounter and emerge with a greater degree of independence and survival.¹⁴³ It depends on the situation, whether they gain control and confidence (“*The Autopsy Room*”) or break down (“*The Raft*”). King also gives space to more than one protagonist in some stories (“*The Jaunt*”) or to a man who is mentally ill and dangerous to society (“*The Man Who Loved Flowers*”).

¹⁴³ Magistrale, T. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King’s American Gothic*. 1988. p. 91.

5. Influence of Gothic literature on contemporary horror motives

Gothic literature has been and still is an influential and popular genre. Since horror is not considered as a genre by many authors, Gothic includes just the element of horror and its feeling. The genre became more popular in mainstream society, only adapting the classic themes of Gothic to the new world. The literature of the genre in the nineteenth century was full of haunted houses, ghosts, supernatural or even murder. Later, some authors started experimenting with the genre and focused on the human psyche and science instead. This focus is still present to this day.

If we talk about the protagonists in the traditional story, they have gone through psychological trauma, and their repressed emotions come to life and cause an issue. The modern story is influenced by this basis, but the protagonists have a bigger chance of gaining control over their lives and become confident. This is also important for the readers because if they can relate to the believable protagonist, the story has a bigger impact on them, and they are open to dive into the plot.

The typical setting of the Gothic traditional story was a house or castle which were both haunted and containing secret rooms or a labyrinth. Due to industrialization and modernization between the nineteenth and twentieth century, there is a shift from these locations to something familiar and private. The setting of today's genre is in an ordinary city that is recognizable, which again makes the readers feel closer to the story.

Mysterious events, suspense atmosphere, visions or family curse help to create a feeling of dread and terror. Modern genre is influenced by these but gives more space to the human mind which rejects the rational world, and supernatural elements which only hint at something out of this world. Common things are twisted to an abnormal outcome where the reader's imagination is vital. It is up to them if they believe the cause of events is something supernatural or rather explained by the character's decreasing sanity. The story then can warn the readers about the dangers of the human psyche.

The authors have always been and still are inspired by their life experiences which they modify and use for the advantage of their story. Even now, they write and include the themes of loneliness, madness, romance, or death. They make the reader feel anxious with

the expectation of something bad happening soon. It is important to shock them when they least expect it, even with foreshadowing or misdirection. What may be different in the modern genre is the impact and better understanding of psychology and scientific discoveries that are more frequent in modern times, by which the authors get inspired and create possible incomes of inventions.

Modern authors like Stephen King studied and are still influenced by the traditional works of E. A. Poe or Howard Lovecraft, and they explore their styles of writing deeply and then applying their themes and motifs to today's world. On the other hand, it can be difficult to truly distinguish what story is recognized as the Gothic genre and whatnot, since modern authors are combining styles and different genres at once.

6. Conclusion

The thesis focuses on the tradition of the Gothic genre (mainly shaped by Edgar Allan Poe) influencing contemporary literature and Stephen King's fiction.

The theoretical part describes how American Gothic literature originated in Great Britain where it divided from civilized values of the culture at that time and signified the lack of morality or work. After a tumultuous beginning, the Gothic lost its popularity but shortly after recovered with the works of Edgar Allan Poe or Bram Stoker. The American Romantic movement was replaced by Dark Romanticism where the forefathers of modern horror and mystery stories are found. The term "uncanny" is not a foreign term in Gothic literature as the uncanny provides a sight into nightmares that are conflicted with the idealistic dreams of readers. The theoretical part also consists of the biography of E.A. Poe (and introduction of his style of writing and other features) in comparison with Stephen King.

The practical part concentrates on the selected short stories by E.A. Poe and Stephen King pointing out the prevailing Gothic elements that are used, such as agony, tense, fear of death, madness, or the sense of the supernatural. There are many similar life influences that might have affected their writing. Both authors provide narration with themes of isolation and madness of the main protagonist. They create a location that is unescapable or oddly familiar and dangerous to the protagonist. Their usage of supernatural elements does not tell much about the truthful reason of the events described in the story since the authors only hint at them. Poe's characters are often unreliable and struggling with mental illness or addiction. King's protagonists go through a difficult situation only to be stronger and more confident in the end. However, both authors sometimes create characters that are romantic or contemplating about life and fate. King's stories are usually popular because of the characters that the readers became fond of.

Their typical style of writing is inconsistency, although most of their works are labelled as horror or thriller. Both are mixing styles and genres, so it is no surprise that in their stories, readers find elements of horror, crime, fantasy or science fiction. It is not only dark themes that are found in their tales, but the authors also have a sense of humour, which appears in the story as an ironic or absurd situation. Especially King is interested in choosing a familiar place and an object and explore them in a different way than usual.

It is easy to see the influence of tradition on contemporary fiction. The genre became more popular thanks to mass media and mainstream society. The dark atmosphere and suspense are still present in contemporary fiction, but some traditional ways of writing have changed. The contemporary writers take classical themes and settings of the Gothic and adapt them into the modern world. The modern genre is more focused on exploring the human mind and its dangers. If the story consists of the supernatural, it is done gently and its focus is still on the ordinary city-life with the twisted outcome of the event, decreasing sanity of the protagonist and dark comedy.

Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King play an irreplaceable role in the Gothic and horror genre. Poe was the first one who explored the genre in a different way than his predecessors and created the basis of modern fiction. Stephen King is promoting the genre and once unpopular literary works with topics that are typically avoided in mainstream literature. Both authors' legacies are incomparable, but they show that the human mind is the most fragile, the scariest and the most dangerous "entity" in the world and that a causer of all evil is human being itself.

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