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# **The Supernatural and Horrors of the Mind in the Gothic Tales of E.A. Poe, H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King**

## **Nadpřirozeno a hrůzy mysli v gotických příbězích E.A. Poea, H. P. Lovecrafta a Stephena Kinga**

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## **Abstract**

The master's thesis focuses on selected short-story fiction by E.A. Poe, H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, concentrating on the theme of the supernatural in combination with the theme of mental health disorders. The theoretical background overviews the development of American Gothic prose, Dark Romanticism, and the enclosed biographies of the authors with the mention of their mental health experience. The following chapters are devoted to the depiction of mental health in literature and the contemporary psychiatric description of specific mental disorders. The core of the thesis is the analysis of chosen short stories which emphasise the supernatural elements with a focus on particular symptoms and other circumstances indicating a specific mental illness. Despite the influence of one author on the other, all three authors explore psychological themes innovatively, putting them at the forefront of the genre's best authors.

## **Anotace**

Magisterská práce se soustředí na vybrané povídky E. A. Poea, H. P. Lovecrafta a Stephena Kinga se zaměřením na téma nadpřirozena v kombinaci s tématem duševních poruch. Teoretickým východiskem je vývoj americké gotické prózy a temného romantismu, i stručný odkaz k životům zkoumaných autorů s ohledem na osobní zkušenost a psychické zdraví. Následující kapitoly jsou věnovány zobrazení duševního zdraví v literatuře a současnému psychiatrickému popisu konkrétních duševních poruch. Jádrem práce je analýza vybraných povídek, které zdůrazňují nadpřirozené prvky, odrážející charakteristické symptomy a další okolnosti svědčící o konkrétní duševní nemoci. Všichni tři autoři inovativně zpracovávají psychologická témata, což je řadí do popředí nejlepších autorů tohoto žánru.

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## Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe, Howard Phillips Lovecraft and Stephen King are well-known figures of American Gothic fiction. Poe has been described as the father of Gothic fiction who mastered macabre poetry and horror short stories, and who remains one of the most analysed authors of the genre. On the other hand, Lovecraft, influenced by Poe's works, managed to create the horror subgenre connected to mythology. Despite the criticism of his thematic simplicity and standard writing style, he has been the subject of literary study, just like Poe. The contemporary bestselling author of the genre is Stephen King, who surprisingly remains unexplored by literary theory in spite of his complex fictional worlds, deeply sophisticated protagonists and other beings around them, personal storytelling, genre combination, and frequent book publishing (one to two per year).

Poe acts as a great influence on Lovecraft and King, who follow in his footsteps and explore areas of horror, fantasy, the rational, the irrational, and psychological chaos. While their work is considered horror and weird fiction, all three authors regularly explore psychological themes but camouflage them behind prevalent supernatural phenomena.

The master's thesis introduces the American Gothic genre and its relation to Dark Romanticism. This chapter also includes the authors' biographies and their mental health experience. The following chapter explores the history of mental health disorders in literature and describes particular mental illnesses and other poor conditions related to the topic. A literary interpretation demonstrates how the authors use the psychological themes and mental disorders in selected short stories, while they are highlighting the supernatural phenomena as the main cause of struggles. The final chapter compares the authors' ways how they depict mental health illnesses while disguising them by focusing on supernatural elements.

# 1 American Gothic

## 1.1 The origin of American Gothic

Gothic fiction is primarily associated with a wide range of writers and novels written from 1760s and continuing into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gothic literature relates to the images of ancient scenery, the threat of the supernatural, unspeakable terror, psychological and social conflicts, and experiments with unique literary techniques of building suspense. Over the past two centuries, Gothic label has ingressed into an academic discussion and popular culture, and the term is used in a number of different fields: as a historical term, as an architectural term, and as a literary term which publishers still use to sell a particular genre of historical romance.<sup>1</sup> *Gothic* as an aesthetic term was first used by early Renaissance art historians in Italy to describe medieval architecture and ways of life in a pejorative way to establish the superiority of neoclassic values.<sup>2</sup> As Punter puts it, the seventeenth and early eighteenth century writers used the term in a sense of 'to do with the Goths' - the barbarian northern tribes who played an unfairly reviled part in the collapse of the Roman Empire; however, writers had very little idea what the Goths were like.<sup>3</sup>

British Gothic literature influenced the birth of American Gothic, where writers only adapted the features of the genre into their concept of horror. In the eighteenth century, neoclassical values and the philosophical movement *The Enlightenment* dominated British society and constituted ideas influenced by Greek and Roman writers. The remodelling of cultural values created the model of the modern culture associated with virtuous behaviour, harmonious social practices, and moral and aesthetic values. The eighteenth-century writers liked to refer to their present as 'modern' and thus distinct from a feudal past described as barbaric and primitive. The word '*Gothic*' assumes the derogative sense about life, architecture, and writing, which failed to fulfil the standards of neoclassical practices; therefore, the contemporary understanding of Gothic emerged at a time of the massive transformation from feudal to commercial

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

<sup>2</sup> HOGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 16.

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



practices of the society where it signified the lack of morality and reason and resonated with anxiety and fears concerning the changes of the present times.<sup>4</sup>

The first published work regarded as Gothic was a “medieval” tale “*The Castle of Otranto*” (1764) by Horace Walpole who advocated “*a blend of two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern, [...] connected with common life*”.<sup>5</sup> Walpole’s novel introduces many features that Punter believes define a new genre of fiction: historical setting, discovered manuscripts, the supernatural machinations, the noble heir, and dark family ties.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, Gothic genre’s readership exploded in the 1790s due to works of Ann Radcliffe’s “*The Mysteries of Udolpho*” (1794), or Matthew Lewis’ “*The Monk*” (1796), and remained a popular yet controversial genre on the continent of Europe. As Hogle points out, the decline of the Gothic fiction in the eighteenth century, whose bright side existed in the works of Edgar Allan Poe or Mary Shelley, came to an end by the late nineteenth century, when Gothic motifs slowly emerged in flamboyant plays, short stories for magazines, novels for women, poetry, and famous works of Oscar Wilde (“*The Picture of Dorian Gray*”) and Bram Stoker (“*Dracula*”).<sup>7</sup>

Gothic tales aroused the relationship between terror and horror, which were firstly characterized and differentiated by Ann Radcliffe in her posthumous essay “*On Supernatural in Poetry*” (1816): “*Terror and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul [...] to a high degree of life; the other contrasts, freezes, and nearly annihilates [...]*.” Terror suggests a reality beyond our understanding, a suspenseful moment before the worst is revealed, and creates an anticipation of future hopelessness.<sup>8</sup> Horror brings out the cause of anxiety explicitly and does not withdraw from graphic details when horror tales map the terrible within an everyday setting.<sup>9</sup>

According to Lloyd-Smith, Gothic appealed to a relatively new American audience with political anxieties about the instability of the ‘new’ democracy and amused as a field in

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<sup>4</sup> PUNTER, D. *A New Companion to a Gothic*. 2012. p. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> HOGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> PUNTER, D. *A New Companion to a Gothic*. 2012. p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> HOGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> MELANI, L. *Terror versus Horror*. Brooklyn College. 2008. [online]. [cit. 8.8.2022].

<sup>9</sup> KING, S. *Dance Macabre*. 2010. p. 308, 443.

which previously unexamined aspects of society might be explored, while later, a growing interest in psychology and a challenge of the American Dream intrigued a wide readership. Since Gothic was based on history which America lacked, American Gothic writers had to adapt the Gothic literary characteristics and bring them to a new life. Without a feudal past and legends, writers favoured the psychological appeal: isolation, violence, racial attitudes, trauma, terror followed by horror, mystery, and scepticism, which all might be seen to offer a “voice” for the silenced individuals<sup>10</sup>; in contrary, British Gothic focused on terror caused by monsters with a great strength and a sense of revenge.<sup>11</sup>

The twentieth century expanded Gothic into a wide range of Western culture such as films, television shows and series, ghost stories, musical plays, music videos or video games, not to mention the ongoing attempts at serious fiction with Gothic elements in the works of contemporary writers like Daphne Du Maurier, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson, or Stephen King. Eventually, the Gothic genre has become a serious topic of discussion, appearing in the academic studies at university levels, and enhancing into a long-lasting symbolic realm of the modern and post-modern culture.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2 American Gothic Fiction and Dark Romanticism

From the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, in both Europe and the United States, an artistic and intellectual movement called *Romanticism* became a dominant force in arts and politics as a reaction against convention. *Romanticism* turned away from the ancient models of neoclassical correctness and rationalism. The romantics believed in the power of the individual, a higher reality existing behind the physical world, and strong emotions as a key unlocking the mysteries of the world. Imagination became one of the highest abilities of human beings, since through imagination, the individual could experience spiritual truth. Finally, *Romanticism* tended

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<sup>10</sup> LLOYD-SMITH, A. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. 2004. p. 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> WRITING BROS. *Differences Between the American and British Gothic Literature*. 2021. [online]. [cit. 8.8.2022].

<sup>12</sup> HOGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 2.

to be optimistic in its outlook of life, and the reality existed primarily in the ideal world – that is, in the mind – rather than the material one.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside *Romanticism*, a new American philosophy took root in the environment of development, ever-expanding boundaries, and a collective sense of optimism: *Transcendentalism*. The transcendentalists provided a system of beliefs that reflected the prevailing thoughts of Americans and shared many of the characteristics attributes of the *Romanticism*. A central principle of *Transcendentalism* was the faith that human beings could elevate themselves beyond their animal instincts. The transcendentalists strongly believed in God, the goodness of every soul as all people carry a part of God within them and demanded knowledge to transcend intellectual growth.<sup>14 15</sup>

Despite establishing as a growing independent country, America still battled with its issues of slavery, minority rights and social reforms. Romantic celebration of the individual and the natural goodness of man have been challenged with a new literary sub-genre, *Dark Romanticism*. Writers shifted from religious thoughts to a sinister point of view and argued that even good men drift towards sin and self-destruction, and the human psyche can be attracted to the feelings of fear and tragedy.<sup>16</sup> Dark Romantics believed that the transcendentalists ignored the dark side of human beings, so they took their readers from everyday world to the hidden reality of human life through their dark tales full of evil, sin, guilt, madness, and mental illnesses, and showed that evil existed inside of everyone.<sup>17</sup> The authors who approached the new genre were Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, who became the forefathers of the great horror, thriller, and mystery stories of today.

The genre of *Gothic* arose as a dark form of *Dark Romanticism* with extreme expressions of gore, graphic morbidity, as well as the supernatural; regardless the historical context, the setting, or the period where the story was written. Gothic literature and dark

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<sup>13</sup> LADD, A. (ed.) *Romanticism and Transcendentalism: 1800-1860*. 2010. p. 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 30, 34.

<sup>15</sup> BERMAN, K. *Difference between Romanticism and Transcendentalism*. College Prep English III, 2013. [online]. [cit. 11.8.2022].

<sup>16</sup> AMERICAN LITERATURE. *Dark Romanticism – Study Guide*. [online]. [cit. 11.8.2022].

<sup>17</sup> BERMAN, K. *Dark Romanticism Notes*. College Prep English III, 2013. [online]. [cit. 11.8.2022].

romantics used many aspects of *the uncanny* to unsettle the readers who already question the reliability of the narrator or the story, and to challenge the American Dream full of freedom and success with negative aspects of human nature.

### 1.3 Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Poe's ancestors were farmers on one side, actors on the other, and the paternal side of the family had some claim to a military tradition. His father, David Poe Jr., studied law but when he met an actress Elizabeth, he decided to become an actor as well, to dismay of his family, and they raised their son William. Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 17, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts as a middle child. Driven by the need to earn money due to financial problems, Elizabeth had still performed on stage only a week before Edgar's birth and reappeared one month later. David Poe, after many harsh reviews of his performances and alcoholism, deserted his family, now consisting of a new-born Rosalie, in July 1811. As Meyers explains, his desertion, the demands of her profession, and sole responsibility for children undoubtedly contributed to the early death of Elizabeth in December 1811, the same month David died.<sup>18</sup>

David's grandparents and Elizabeth's actor friends took care of the children, and in time, childless John and Frances Allan took Edgar Poe into their home in Richmond, Virginia. John Allan was a competent and reasonably progressive partner in the firm of exporters of tobacco, and as hundreds of letters shows, a creative writer as well.<sup>19</sup> The family sailed to England in 1815, and Poe attended schools in Scotland, west London, and Stoke Newington, where he excelled in French, history, and literature, more than many boys of an advanced age. However, Frances Allan had been in poor health throughout their stay in England, and Allan's business had not been very successful, therefore, the Allans returned to Richmond in 1820.<sup>20</sup> John Allan tried his best to raise Edgar as a businessman and a merchant, but instead, Poe was interested in poetry of Lord Byron and aspired to write himself, even described by one of his teachers as a 'born artist'. Though John Allan recognized the genius side of his young son, Poe didn't feel encouraged by the father to pursue his poetic ambitions, and the difference in their interests would continue to cause a tension in the family.<sup>21</sup> By 1824, Allan's critique of the boy and Poe's adolescent

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<sup>18</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 1-6.

<sup>19</sup> QUINN, A. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. 1997. p. 51-57.

<sup>20</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> HOUSLY HISTORY. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Life from Beginning to End*. 2018. p. 7.

rebellions while yearning for love led to Edgar's transformation from a darling child to a young man and to a secret engagement to Sarah Elmira Royster.

Poe left home to study the University of Virginia in 1826, where he accumulated gambling debts, and even burnt some of his furniture for heat. John Allan had given away some money to fund Poe's education, but Poe could not even make it through the first term and returned home, where he found out that Sarah was marrying someone else. He left for Boston to chase his dreams, and, in the end, enlisted in the United States Military Academy as 'Edgar A. Perry,' and he also published his first poems "*Tamerlane and Other Poems*" (1827) under the pseudonym Henri Le Renet.<sup>22</sup> Poe slowly recognized his desire to leave the military enlistment earlier and made some sort of attempt at amends with John after the loss of Frances, however, he wrote letters in which he begged for money. After he started to attend the West Point Military Academy in 1830, John Allan had illegitimate sons and then married again, so the path to Poe's heritage closed. The secretary of war dismissed Poe after he deliberately disobeyed orders and failed to attend the class many times.<sup>23</sup> It was not long after that when he released his third collection of poetry called "*Poems*" (1831).

Poe lived in Baltimore, Maryland, with his brother, grandmother, aunt, and cousin Virginia when John Allan died in 1834. Poe still lived in poverty, but he managed to publish few stories after realizing they make more money than poetry. After entering one of the stories to a writing contest and winning, he gained connections in the writing world and landed a job in Richmond as an editor of a literary magazine. Within one year, Poe made the *Southern Literary Messenger* the most popular magazine in the south and built a reputation of a fearless literary critic. During this period, he wrote such stories as "*Morella*" (1835) and "*Berenice*" (1835), yet writers were not paid much and there were not any international copyright laws in place. Eventually, he left the job, married Virginia and moved to New York, where he published his first and only novel "*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*" (1838); however, Poe established himself as a serious

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<sup>22</sup> Hourly History. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Life from Beginning to End*. 2018. p. 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 39,47.

writer after the release of *“The Fall of the House of Usher”* in 1839.<sup>24</sup> Poe later worked in other magazines, moved to Philadelphia and earned the title of the Father of the Detective Story with the release of *“The Murders in the Rue Morgue”* in 1841.

Virginia’s health deteriorated after 1842, which caused Poe’s writing to become darker (*“Eleonora”*, *“The Pit and the Pendulum”*, *“The Tell-Tale Heart”*) and his drinking problems escalated, even during a visit to the White House to find a government job. After popularizing cryptography with the story *“The Gold Bug”* (1843), he returned to writing poems and reached the household name with *“The Raven”* in 1845. Virginia died in 1847 which caused Poe’s writer’s block, depression, and thoughts of suicide.<sup>25</sup> During the last year of his life, Poe travelled around the cities, trying to find funders to his proposed magazine *The Stylus*. He was emotionally involved with Nancy Richmond and Sarah Helen Whitman, who he hoped to marry, but the engagement failed to his drinking.<sup>26</sup> At the end of September 1849, Poe left Richmond for New York but was found wandering the streets of Baltimore with clothes that did not belong to him. After four days in the hospital, Edgar Allan Poe died on October 7, 1849. The cause of his death remains a mystery, but, as Burlingame explains, many believe Poe died from alcohol poisoning, drug overdose, heart disease, tuberculosis, or rabies.<sup>27</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe reflected his mental health struggles and feelings through his poetry and short stories. Poe’s medical history is a source of much speculation but, undoubtedly, his struggles could have been triggered by countless environmental factors: the loss of his parents, disagreements with the foster father, financial difficulties and little financial appraisal of his work, engagement with various women, and losing his wife. As Teive and others point out, Poe struggled from recurring episodes of depression and behavioural changes, suggesting a bipolar disorder, together with sensitivity to alcohol and drug abuse, such as opium and morpheme.<sup>28</sup> As he grew older, he began to lose faith in mankind and even tried committing suicide on several

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<sup>24</sup> Hourly History. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Life from Beginning to End*. 2018. p. 11-15.

<sup>25</sup> HOLUB, M. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. 1972. p. 79-80.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 90-92.

<sup>27</sup> BURLINGAME, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: deep “Into that Darkness Peering”*. 2008. p. 90-92.

<sup>28</sup> TEIVE, H. A. G.; PAOLA, L.; MUNHOZ, R.P. *Edgar Allan Poe and neurology*. 2014. [online]. [cit. 11.8.2022].

occasions. Poe drunk to escape the loss of parental love, to calm his nerves before critical meetings and work at the magazines, to blunt his hypersensitivity to criticism, and when he was in danger of losing Virginia.<sup>29</sup> He possessed an insight about diseases – as seen in a considerable amount in his stories – though not the ability to use the insight to cure himself.

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<sup>29</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 88-89.



#### 1.4. Howard Phillips Lovecraft

Howard Lovecraft comes from the old New-England ancestry who settled in Providence, Rhode Island, after several changes of residence. Sarah Susan Phillips married Winfield Scott Lovecraft, a travelling salesman, and their only child Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890. In 1893, Winfield Scott's symptoms of mental illness forced him to remain in Butler Hospital with a diagnosis of a late-stage syphilis, where he died in 1898 after an epileptic seizure.<sup>30</sup> The hospitalization brought little Howard under the influence of his aunts, grandparents and dominantly his mother, who overprotected and pampered him by letting him eat what he pleased, go to bed when he liked and deliberately tried to feminize him as she always longed for a daughter. At the same time, Sarah Lovecraft avoided all physical contact with the boy, and told people about his ugliness, which eventually contributed to Lovecraft's lifetime shyness and timidity towards women.<sup>31</sup> As De Camp and Joshi explain, Lovecraft's maternal grandfather Whipple Phillips educated the boy in classical literature, English poetry, Gothic literature, and cured Lovecraft's fear of the dark by leading him around the unlighted house, which years later resulted in Lovecraft's productivity at night only. Lovecraft's grandmother died in 1896, which kicked off his recurring nightmares that would appear later in his writing.<sup>32 33</sup>

Lovecraft learned to read at the age of two, at the age of five he announced he no longer believed in Santa Claus, plunged into the Greek mythology and the folk tales of the Middle East, and he wrote his earliest known literary works by the age of seven (*"The Little Glass Bottle"*).<sup>34</sup> Lovecraft rarely attended school as he often fell ill due to his mother's neurotic fear of his sensitivity. He was rejected by his peers and neighbours, as they considered him an oddball who hated children's games and rather played out the events of history. Still, Lovecraft made some friends, whom he persuaded to build a model village, formed a *Slater Avenue Army*, *Providence Detective Agency*, the

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<sup>30</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2010. p. 22-25.

<sup>31</sup> DE CAMP, L. *Lovecraft: a biography*. 1975. p. 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2010. p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36-42.

*Blackstone Military Band*, and he also engaged in orgies of smoking.<sup>35</sup> At the age of eight, Lovecraft found himself fascinated in chemistry and astronomy, which influenced his worldview, he created his own laboratory, and as an adolescent he introduced handwritten periodicals *Science Gazette* and *Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy*, which all would lead to his further interests in geography, anthropology, psychology, and other sciences that he would study over a lifetime.<sup>36</sup>

From 1900 on, the Phillips' suffered a financial crisis, and the grandfather dismissed the staff and sold the carriages with horses. In 1904, Whipple Phillips died due to a stroke, and Sarah Lovecraft moved to a small house with her son. To crown Lovecraft's sorrow, his beloved cat Nigger-Man disappeared, and Lovecraft never kept another pet.<sup>37</sup> In future letters, Lovecraft remarked this time as one of the darkest of his life and even contemplated suicide, but his curiosity to learn about the world prevented him from doing so. As Joshi explains, Lovecraft craved knowledge rather than physical pleasures, and high school proved a pleasant surprise for his attention, where he excelled in Latin, chemistry, and physics, dreaming of becoming an astronomer.<sup>38</sup> During this period, Lovecraft wrote his first serious works "*The Beast in the Cave*" (1905) and "*The Alchemist*" (1908) and send letters as a response to articles in science and weird-fiction magazines.

Lovecraft did not graduate high school as he suffered a nervous collapse in 1908, the causes of which remain unknown, though Lovecraft retrospectively explained it as a stress from high school, and, therefore, he did not attend Brown University he wished to. Lovecraft closed himself from the world, did not speak to anybody, did no useful work, dismantled the basement laboratory, and used dark shades with artificial lights. Professors of psychology consider the possibility of atypical depression and chorea-like illness.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> DE CAMP, L. *Lovecraft: a biography*. 1975. p. 25-30, 35.

<sup>36</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2010. p. 60-63.

<sup>37</sup> FAIG, K.W. *The Parents of Howard Phillips Lovecraft*. 1991. p. 63-77.

<sup>38</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in His Time*. 2001. p. 47-48, 165-170.

<sup>39</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2010. p. 126-128.

In 1913, Lovecraft's first sign of the emergence from his seclusion was a letter to the pulp magazine *Argosy*, in which he denounced the love stories of the *Argosy's* popular author Fred Jackson. Lovecraft also revived his newspaper features and wrote articles of astronomical facts, lectured the readers on the philosophy of science, or retold the old myths. The war of words between the two writers and their supporters, to whom Lovecraft sometimes answered only with a poem, lasted over a year, and Lovecraft gained a recognition from Edward F. Daas, head editor of the United Amateur Press Association, who invited him to join the organization. From 1915 to 1925, Lovecraft wrote hundred essays and articles published in amateur magazines, including his own *Conservative*, and advocated for the amateur journal's superiority compared to commercialism. As De Camp explains, Lovecraft believed that professional career ought to be done in respectable journals with no pay in return.<sup>40</sup>

Lovecraft took over the chairmanship of the Department of the Public Criticism which entailed him to fight for an archaic English usage and to write lengthy articles criticising contributors of the United Amateur Press Association for their slang-infested writings, while he stated that the language has been changed by immigrants.<sup>41</sup> He came under the influence of the book "*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*" by Houston Chamberlain, which prolonged his belief in the Aryan superman, and he once said that being a member of a pure-blooded race must be the greatest achievement in life. In 1917, Lovecraft was elected president of the United Amateur Press Association and worked with members who shared his belief of the superiority of British English.<sup>42</sup> Lovecraft began working in the field of 'weird fantasy' and wrote "*Dagon*" (1917) and "*The Tomb*" (1917), which was influenced by the style of Edgar Allan Poe.

Lovecraft confessed to a feeling of depression and uselessness, so he enlisted in the United States Army, where he passed the physical examination by keeping his mouth shut about his medical history. However, Sarah Lovecraft threatened to go to any lengths to prove that Lovecraft does not fit for the army, which she repeated even later

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<sup>40</sup> DE CAMP, L. Sprague. *Lovecraft: a biography*. 1975. p. 76-84, 120.

<sup>41</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2010. p. 169.

<sup>42</sup> DE CAMP, L. *Lovecraft: a biography*. 1975. p. 95, 98.

when he attempted to join the Rhode Island National Guard.<sup>43</sup> In 1919, she suffered a nervous breakdown and went to a Butler Hospital like her husband before. She died in May 1921, several days after a gall-bladder operation, and Lovecraft thought about a suicide again. In later letters, he felt relieved as he became independent, and his health began to improve.<sup>44</sup> It was during this period that Lovecraft worked on the first Cthulhu Mythos stories ("*Nyarlatothep*", "*The Nameless City*") and "*The Outsider*" (1921), which became one of the most analysed Lovecraft's stories. After mother's death, Lovecraft continued visiting various amateur conventions, where he met Sonia Greene, who shared his literary ambitions, and the couple got married in 1924 and moved to New York City.<sup>45</sup> During Lovecraft's stay in New York, he gained literary friends, who formed the Kalem Club and encouraged Lovecraft to publish his previously written stories in *Weird Tales*. As De Camp puts it, Sonia moved to Cleveland to pursue a job opportunity but later lost her business, and Lovecraft tried to help her through making round of employment agencies and publishers, editing stories of others, and ghost-writing.<sup>46</sup> Sonia's next employment demanded constant travel, only sending her husband a weekly allowance, and Lovecraft stayed in a single-room apartment, which got burgled. Lovecraft poured his feelings about New York in stories full of racist attitudes ("*The Horror at Red Hook*", "*He*"), returned to Providence and agreed to a divorce with Sonia, which was never fully completed.<sup>47</sup> At this time, Lovecraft wrote an analysis of weird fiction and Gothic novels called "*Supernatural Horror in Literature*" (1927) as well as other prominent works like "*The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*" (1927), "*The Shadow over Innsmouth*" (1931) or "*At the Mountains of Madness*" (1931), and completed a large amount of ghost-writing.

During the last years of his life, Lovecraft served as the 'judge' of National Amateur Press Association and still fussed over the amateur's perversity in spending their energy on feuds instead of on perfecting their literacy styles.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, his detreating physical and psychological state due to the publication of "*The Shadow over Innsmouth*"

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<sup>43</sup> FAIG, K.W. *The Parents of Howard Phillips Lovecraft*. 1991. p. 66-67.

<sup>44</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2010. p. 301, 390.

<sup>45</sup> DE CAMP, L. *Lovecraft: a biography*. 1975. p. 152-184.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* p. 177-211.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*. p. 172, 242.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*. p. 213.

full of errors, and low reception of *“At the Mountains of Madness”* prevented him from continuing writing fiction. After his close friend committed suicide, which deeply affected him, he wrote a memoir *“In Memoriam: Robert Ervin Howard”* and send it to his correspondents. Lovecraft was diagnosed with a cancer a month before his death and died on March 15, 1937.<sup>49</sup> He was almost unknown outside the small circle of friends and not a single book had been professionally published. His friends throughout the years managed to print his stories and successfully continued *the Call of Cthulhu* mythology.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was a man of high intelligence, extraordinary memory, and creativity. He was a melancholy, dreamy man of a very kind yet anxious nature, and although supernatural themes dominated his works, he considered himself a rational person. According to Joshi, Lovecraft lamented his lack of accomplishment, but he built self-made barriers between himself and his goals, and he was known to put his story back in the drawer once it had been rejected. Lovecraft, raised by a neurotic and morbidly caring mother, suffered from a myriad of psychosomatic difficulties and constant worries about his mental health, given family and life burdens. He spoke of headaches, depression, fatigue, and inability to concentrate, citing his ancestry that was prone to nerve-exhaustions and breakdowns.<sup>50</sup> Under these conditions, Lovecraft became a lifelong hypochondriac with no self-confidence although he neglected his health, medical care, and invariably stayed up all night and slept all day. Like many intellectual introverts, he thought about himself, the world, and the universe so much that he was largely unaware of those around him, yet when dragged out from his trance, Lovecraft was as kind and generous as he could be, and willing to blame himself rather than others.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> JOSHI, S.T. *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in His Time*. 2001. p. 375-388.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> DE CAMP, L. *Lovecraft: a biography*. 1975. p. 64, 67.

## 1.5. Stephen King

Stephen King's paternal ancestors emigrated from Ireland to the United States, and the mother's ancestral roots run deep in the seaside of Maine. His father, Donald King, worked as a sea man and frequently travelled around the world as a merchant marine even after the wedding with King's mother Nellie Ruth Pillsbury, who worked as a teacher. Doctors had informed Ruth that she would never bear children, so the Kings adopted David Victor in 1945. Eventually, Stephen Edwin King was born on September 21, 1947, but neither his adopted brother nor him could save the marriage of his parents. Donald King, now working as a door-to-door salesman while missing adventures on the sea, told his wife that he was going to the store for a pack of cigarettes, walked out of door and never came back. During the first four years after father's leaving, the family moved from one place to another, relied on relatives and paid debts after Donald. Ruth King had two to three jobs while her sons shared bedroom and hand-me-down clothes, however, their mother dealt with their circumstances with a sense of humour and by telling stories.<sup>52</sup>

Once Stephen King turned six-years-old and started school, he ended up with an ear infection, which caused his stay at home, where he turned to comic books, rewriting existing stories, and, eventually, creating his own called "*Mr Rabbit Trick*". King has developed an interest in horror and science fiction genre and studied movies at the local cinema; he adapted their structure and special effects to his writing.<sup>53</sup> When King turned twelve-years-old, he received a typewriter, which allowed him to produce professional-looking manuscripts since magazines did not accept handwritten works. Around the age, he had already read the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Ed McBain, or Richard Matheson.<sup>54</sup> One day, King stumbled upon a box in the attic filled with not only Howard Lovecraft's stories, which were King's first encounter with serious horror fiction, but also with rejection letters from magazines addressed to his father. From the age of thirteen, King

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<sup>52</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 18, 21.

<sup>53</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, C. *The Beginnings of Stephen King*. 2018. p. 8-11.

<sup>54</sup> BEAHM, G. *The Stephen King Companion: Four Decades of Fear from the Master of Horror*. 2015. p. 36-38.

began submitting his stories to magazines with father's fate in his mind, and at sixteen, he completed his first book-length fiction.<sup>55</sup>

King entered the Lisbon Falls High School in Lisbon Falls, Maine in 1962, where he excelled in English and played sports despite being unathletic type. Within a year, King wrote his first short story that was published in the magazine – *"I Was a Teenage Grave Robber"*. During the sophomore year, he carried out the task of writing the school newspapers (only one copy appeared) and gained an idea for a pamphlet *"The Village Vomit,"* in which he ironized about teachers and ended up expelled for three days. The school administration met to discuss how they could help King channel his talent, and he landed a job as a sports reporter for the *Lisbon Weekly Enterprise*.<sup>56</sup>

In 1966, King signed up as an English major at the College of Education at the University of Maine, where he met his future wife, Tabitha 'Tabby' Spruce. As Rogak puts it, he focused on modern poetry and twentieth-century literature, he did not believe in official curriculum, talked about the authors other students and professors had never heard of, and offered to teach a class about popular fiction, which the faculty eventually agreed to. King managed to write his first novel *"The Long Walk"* during the first two semesters and sent the manuscript to the first-novel competition, where he received a rejection slip; nevertheless, the novel was published twelve years later under his now-frequent pseudonym Richard Bachman.<sup>57</sup> He began to publish his works in national magazines like *Cavalier* and *The Maine Campus*, in which he started a column 'Garbage Truck'. While he mostly reviewed movies, television shows, and rock music, he did reflect much of the state's situation and shared his opinions about *End of War* protest marches on campus, attacked an established organizations as the *All Maine Women* or *Senior Skulls*, supported police officers, or stated how he changed from a conservative to *"a radical bastard"*.<sup>58</sup> King started teaching in January 1970 at a public high school in nearby Hampden, occasionally received a check for writing stories (*"The Graveyard Shift"*, *"Suffer the Little Children"*), and worked manually at the gas station and the laundry to

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<sup>55</sup> ROLLS, A. *Stephen King: A Biography*. 2008. p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, C. *The Beginnings of Stephen King*. 2018. p. 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 53, 55,

<sup>58</sup> BEAHM, G. *The Stephen King Companion: Four Decades of Fear from the Master of Horror*. 2015. p. 63.

make more money since Tabby expected a child named Naomi. As Rogak explains, the stress from a job he did not like and never having enough money to pay the bills caused King's drinking and poker plays.<sup>59</sup>

The Kings' second child Joseph was born a year later, while King worked on his breakthrough novel "*Carrie*," which reflected his experience of high school. After gaining money from selling the publishing rights in 1972, he quit his job, and the family moved to a southern Maine so they could be closer to King's mother, who died of cancer a year later. King settled into a routine of writing several hours a day oriented on the horror genre and focused on the family life with new-born Owen. In the following years, he wrote popular novels such as "*Salem's Lot*" (1975), "*The Shinning*" (1977), "*The Dark Tower*" (1982), or "*Pet Sematary*" (1983) together with collections of short stories ("*The Night Shift*", "*Skeleton Crew*"), and since publishers did not want to publish more than one book a year, King released his other works "*Rage*" (1977), "*Roadwork*" (1981), or "*Thinner*" (1984) under the Bachman's pseudonym.<sup>60</sup>

Though King spent most of his time in Maine, publishers and movie producers demanded more of King's time. As he began to spend more time in the media and movie world – and given his experimentation with drugs in college – it was inevitable he would try out drugs he had not taken before. With King's built-in addictive and obsessive personality, he used drugs and alcohol while writing or producing movies, and he continued to deny his problems even when his family tried to intervene. While being at the top of the world with his novels "*It*" (1986) and "*Misery*" (1987), King's wife gave him an ultimatum, and after another two years of broken promises, King would never drink or take drugs ever again.<sup>61</sup> However, in 1999, King was hit by a distracted driver and spent nearly a month in hospital, seriously injured. King began an extensive physical therapy, swallowed a hundred painkillers a day and slowly started writing, not knowing if the difficulties came from a lack of confidence or a memory lapse.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 72, 84.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 90, 96, 99.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 114, 151, 181.

<sup>62</sup> KING, S. *On Writing*. 2002. p. 254-274.



In the beginning of the new century, King worked on his non-fiction book “*On Writing*” (2000), released his first e-book “*Riding the Bullet*” (2000), published another collection of short stories “*Everything’s Eventual*” (2002), worked hard at finishing the *Dark Tower* series and received a medal from *National Book Foundation* and many literary and lifetime achievement awards. King’s sons Joe and Owen followed their father’s footsteps and even collaborated on some of his novels.<sup>63</sup> King and his wife founded a non-profit organization supporting communities, and King still helps students or filmmakers with the *Dollar Baby* programme by listing titles available for adaptation for only 1 dollar on his official website.<sup>64</sup>

Anyone who has read even one of Stephen King’s stories knows that the most innocent looking items can be a cause of terror. King described himself as a resident of ‘the People’s Republic of Paranoia’ once he learned that the world was a scary place: fear of darkness, death, snakes, spiders, rats, flying, clowns, his loved ones leaving him, number thirteen, and more – the list never ends.<sup>65</sup> King has never struggled with mental health issues explicitly yet there are some events of his life that shaped his capacity to write disturbing stories. At the age of only four years, he witnessed the death of his best friend run over by a train, however, he does not remember the accident. Years later, King spent hours studying the psychopath murderer Charles Starkweather, and he already displayed a great talent to look into people’s minds and guess how they could perform such horrible actions.<sup>66</sup> In the sophomore year, he found the dead body of his grandmother, and months later, grandfather’s body as well.<sup>67</sup>

King has struggled with addiction to drugs and alcohol, which started due to financial problems and span over to his presence in a fame world, and in time, caused his irrational fear about writing without drinking, as he believed his brain would not work without external stimuli. One of the most amazing aspects of King’s life is the fact that the substance abuse did not interfere either with quality or with quantity of his works.

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<sup>63</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 235, 247, 255, 271.

<sup>64</sup> KING, S. *Dollar Baby*. [online]. [cit. 12.8. 2022].

<sup>65</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 10

<sup>66</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, C. *The Beginnings of Stephen King*. 2018. p. 14-16.

<sup>67</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 44, 49.

However, he has also spoken with regret that he could not remember writing certain novels and short stories. King has always coped with the difficult life circumstances by turning to his stories, and, as he puts it, it is the world he has never left.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 8,13.

## 2 Mental health disorders

Mental illness, also known as mental health disorder, is an unhealthy condition that affects the mind and changes emotions, thinking and behaviour. In the past, doctors used the word *madness*, which is now considered offensive.<sup>69</sup> Mental illnesses come from a biochemical imbalance in the brain, yet childhood traumas or abuse may be the causative factors as well. The most frequently used systems of psychiatric classification are the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD), produced by the World Health Organization, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), produced by the American Psychiatric Association.<sup>70</sup> Some illnesses only interfere in limited ways with daily life, such as phobias, but others are so severe that a person may need special care, however, stigma around mental disorders and treatment prevents many people from seeking help.<sup>71</sup> Treatment has become more widespread since the 1990s because of greater public awareness, availability of medication, and more effective diagnosis with screening programmes. The most common psychiatric disorders are depression, alcohol abuse, anxiety disorders, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and it is believed that 99% of us will have one of the mentioned mental illnesses at some time in our lives. Unfortunately, the overall rate of mental illnesses does not change drastically since many psychiatrists lack the time, training, and overall experience in the field. People may recover spontaneously or lower the impact of the disorder on their everyday lives after studying their problems; however, it is important to know that the possibility of relapse always remains.<sup>72</sup>

For the last decades, social media has led to an increasing coverage of mental health across many outlets, but they also sensationalized and romanticized mental illnesses. In recent years, books, social media, news networks, and movies talk about a mental health struggle as desirable, cool, cute, and worth to strive for. The individuals on social medias may fake certain mental disorders because they seek for attention, special feeling of

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<sup>69</sup> CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY. *Madness*. [online]. [cit. 19.8.2022].

<sup>70</sup> BRITANNICA. *Types and causes of mental disorders*. [online]. [cit. 19.8.2022].

<sup>71</sup> AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION. *What is Mental Illness?* [online]. [cit. 19.8.2022].

<sup>72</sup> HARVARD MENTAL HEALTH LETTER. *The prevalence and treatment of mental illness today*. [online]. [cit. 19.8.2022].

uniqueness, and they use the stories of overcoming mental illnesses as just one step on the path to success. The romanticization of mental illnesses may encourage others to avoid seeking treatment because they see their mental health as an inevitable part of their persona, or their problem is viewed as a trend. Modern media incorrectly depict the symptoms of mental disorders and social interactions of ill individuals while favouring the stereotypes; meanwhile, mental health problems are ugly and ruin lives of the sufferers and their families.<sup>73</sup>

## 2.1 Depiction of mental health disorders in literature

Human beings had been preoccupied with extreme forms of mental experience long before they recorded it in literature. The prototypical mad man or woman corresponded to the wild man who inhabits the world of civilized people and their mental problems emerged only in extreme circumstances. The literary interpretations of mental health problems both reflect and question cultural, religious, and psychological assumptions of the time, and disclose the consequences of the minds of the individual characters. Literature shows human ambivalence toward the mind itself and its problems that exposure dreams, irrational fears, and bizarre desires hidden from the world and conscious self.<sup>74</sup>

Greek literature and mythology granted the gods a determining role in mental disorders with regard to heroes, as only a god could lead the hero to losing his social world and community (Homer), or to fate that destroys his reason (Aeschylus). The Hippocratic distinction of the *psyche*, as something separate from the world, and the *physis* represents one of the first attempts to speak rationally about what cannot be seen and explained with magical causes. The depiction of mental health issues was not limited to tragedies. Comedies functioned as the curious mechanism that allowed people to explore mental disorders in various social environments and to take pleasure of such problems at a distance (Aristophanes, Menander).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> THE MEADOWGLADE. *Romanticizing Bad Mental Health*. [online]. [cit. 19.8.2022].

<sup>74</sup> FEDDER, L. *Madness in Literature*. 1983. p. 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> THIERER, A. *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*. 2004. p. 14, 16, 31

The rise of medieval manuscripts and universities that circulated Greek texts continued the discussion about the originality of mental health issues – is there a spiritual or medical origin? Christianity added a supernatural interpretation of the disbalance of the human soul through God punishing the proud and testing the just; for, if “madness” exists, it must be a part of God’s plan. Eventually, the Renaissance contributed to the birth of a modern standard of rationality when writers borrowed ideas from the irrational and believed that all products of the mind had a place in the world. In the works of Erasmus or Ludovico Ariosto, we find the willingness to cohabit with and praise poor mental health as a natural phenomenon together with the impossible desire to control human emotions. The mental illness as a condition that must be linked to and explained in a certain context was first proposed by Shakespeare, who also insisted on the dubiety of mental struggles of his characters (Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear), since people may find the reason for their illness (weakness, melancholy), and Cervantes’ “*Don Quixote*,” who showed how mental disorders result from losing a grip of empirical reality and entertaining a different belief of the worldview.<sup>76</sup>

During the eighteenth century, mental health entered the serious literary arena with writers such as Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, or Horace Walpole, and for the first time, writers explored their experience of mental struggles through texts, created the theories about where the mental health disorders come from, and brought to light the darker side of human beings no one wanted to talk about (*Dark Romanticism*). The romantics came with the concept of psychic projections through doubles (Ludwig Tieck, E.T.A. Hoffman), where one detaches from himself and wanders into a subjective world; therefore, a romantic strategy was to annex “madness” to dreams and to proclaim the superiority of dreams with hidden knowledge to create allegories.<sup>77</sup> Eventually, the contemporary views of mental illnesses have derived from the thoughts of Emil Kraepelin and Sigmund Freud, and the theories of subconscious and self-reflectivity are deeply explored in works of American confessional poets, Faulkner, Beckett, or King,

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<sup>76</sup> THIERER, A. *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*. 2004. p. 46, 51, 78, 92.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131, 186.

while the mental illnesses in literature remain a threat within an extreme unknown in fellow human beings.<sup>78</sup>

## 2.2 Illustration of the selected mental health disorders

The most common mental illness negatively affecting emotions, thoughts and behaviour is *depression*. There are many varied indicators that a person may struggle with depression, although it is important to remember that the symptoms may result from other emotional or physical conflicts. Struggling individuals experience sadness for most of the day, bad concentration, feelings of worthlessness, oversensitivity, substance abuse, weight loss or weight gain, and they lose interest in most activities and would rather sleep all day. Depression can affect even a person who appears to live an ideal life, but many theories exist as an explanation of the cause of depression: genetics, low transmit of serotonin in a brain, isolation and low-esteem, continuous exposure to violence in childhood, bad social relationships, spiritual crisis, and more. Feelings of sadness are perfectly natural but if we talk about depression, we talk about a persistent low mood that continues for an extended period, appears for no reason, and can feel like a force outside the sufferer's control.<sup>79</sup> Another disorder associated with depression is *bipolar disorder*: a person experiences an intense mood episode. A manic episode must last for at least one week during which a person is high-spirited or irritable and is replaced by a depressive episode, which lasts for at least two weeks. On average, people experience a bipolar disorder cycle one or two times a year, yet some may experience the rapid cycling, which results in more than four cycles in a 12-month period.<sup>80</sup>

Worrying is a natural and universal human emotion, which alerts human beings to potential threats and motivates them to prepare for challenges; however, a large proportion of population experiences a counterproductive worry, which has been termed as *anxiety disorder*. Anxiety disorder is a long condition that causes worrying thoughts about a wide range of situations rather than just one. Different types of anxiety

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<sup>78</sup> FEDDER, L. *Madness in Literature*. 1983. p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> BIRTHISTLE, I. *Tackling Depression: A Practical Guide to Everyday Coping*. 2010. p. 2-4, 9-10.

<sup>80</sup> AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION. *Bipolar Disorders*. [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

disorders are phobias, which people recognize as excessive, yet they cannot overcome them and rather avoid such situations as much as possible. The most prominent phobia is the social anxiety disorder with fears of speaking, meeting new people, and feelings of embarrassment or rejection in social interactions.<sup>81</sup>

*Schizophrenia* belongs to the group of psychotic illnesses: a person has lost touch with the reality, believes things that cannot be possibly true, hears voices, and sees visions when there are no sensory stimuli present. People with schizophrenia often experience difficulty of relevant speech, problem-solving, expression of emotions and appropriate response, memory problems, and anxiety. Frequency and severity of symptoms can vary but often increases with the age of the person and after not taking medication.<sup>82</sup> People with schizophrenia are more likely to die younger than the general population due to co-occurring medical diseases, such as heart disease, and while there is no known cause and cure for schizophrenia, research leads to innovative and safer treatments.<sup>83</sup> Modern media present ill individuals as violent and dangerous for society but the stigma and misunderstanding of the condition causes their human rights violation and social exclusion among community settings and mental health institutions.<sup>84</sup>

A person who suffered or witnessed violence, abuse, and neglect during the childhood is at the high risk of developing a *dissociative identity disorder*, previously referred to as multiple personality disorder, which is characterized by the presence of two or more distinct identities that recurrently take control of the individual's behaviour. The host tends to be the part with the executive control of the body most of the time while the alters view themselves as separate persons who may not understand they all share the same body. Such alters gain a specific role, mainly protecting the host in a certain situation, with their ways of thinking, remembering, talking, writing, and clothing. Persecutor and violent alters often function to silence or even kill the host because they fear of the consequences if a part talks about the trauma which has been kept secret,

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<sup>81</sup> SIMSON, H. (ed.). *Anxiety Disorders: Theory, Research and Clinical Perspectives*. 2010. p. 1, 8.

<sup>82</sup> JOHNSTONE, E., FRITH, C. *Schizophrenia: A Very Short Introduction*. 2003. p. 38

<sup>83</sup> AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION. *What is Schizophrenia?* [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

<sup>84</sup> WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. *Schizophrenia*. 2022. [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

and they may be unaware they will also die if the host's body dies.<sup>85</sup> People with dissociative identity disorder feel that they have suddenly become observers of their body with ongoing gaps in memory, or their bodies feel different (a small child, opposite gender etc.).<sup>86</sup> The most common moments the switching happens are when an identity is reminded of a traumatic event which acts as a trigger. An ill person may also carry the symptoms of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, hallucinations, and self-harm. The suffering persons are trying to prevent switching, to change an emotional pain into a physical one, or eventually end their life.<sup>87</sup>

A mental health professional will not diagnose both psychopathy and sociopathy individually since they mainly refer to the *antisocial personality disorder* with signs of violating and manipulating behaviour, impulsiveness, aggression, and lack of remorse. It is still unknown why an individual develops such disorder but both genetics and traumatic childhood are thought to play the role. If the parents are overburdened or unsocialized themselves, then even a child of a mild temperament may grow up with the antisocial tendencies of a psychopath or sociopath. Psychopathy and sociopathy are branches of personality disorder characterized by the lack of empathy and guilt, manipulation of other people and behavioural control, yet they lack clear motivation for their actions and rarely commit offences that lead to prison sentences. Such individuals seem charming, energetic, socially assertive with no sign of anxiety, and may form an attachment to at least one or few individuals.<sup>88</sup>

### 2.3 Other poor mental health conditions

The word 'psychotic' describes an individual who experiences the condition of *psychosis*. Society wrongly uses the word to characterize someone who is crazy or out of control, but people with psychosis are "simply" suffering from a treatable mental illness. Psychosis is a medical condition that occurs due to a dysfunction in the brain, and the ill individual has difficulty separating false experiences from the reality. People with a

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<sup>85</sup> RINGROSE, J. *Understanding and Treating Dissociative Identity Disorder*. 2012. p. 3, 5-8.

<sup>86</sup> AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION. *What Are Dissociative Disorders?* [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

<sup>87</sup> RINGROSE, J. *Understanding and Treating Dissociative Identity disorder*. 2012. p. 10, 14.

<sup>88</sup> PATRIC, C. *Handbook of Psychopathy*. 2018. p. 5, 22, 26.



psychotic disorder suffer from a mental illness that brings out psychosis such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, alcohol and drug misuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or paranoid personality disorder. A psychotic episode may last for only minutes to years, and a person may experience anxiety, insomnia, hallucinations and delusions, or decreased energy and motivation. Even if some people with psychosis have poor memory, they generally know who they are and pose a certain risk for injuring themselves rather than others.<sup>89</sup>

A *hallucination* is a perception experienced by few people that occurs in the absence of an appropriate context with a vivid impression similar to normal perceptions. Hallucinations most often come from schizophrenia, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, brain tumour, epilepsy, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Auditory hallucinations have been described as sounds of noise or internal voices talking to each other or even telling an ill individual to commit something. Visual hallucinations involve seeing object with a wrong shape or its movement, a flashing light, and faces of people. Such hallucinations may appear not only with a mental disorder but also with migraines, sleep problems, and delirium. Other types of hallucinations include smelling, tasting, and feelings things without logical context.<sup>90 91</sup>

To many health professionals, *delusions* and delusional disorder (previously paranoid disorder) remains a shadowy concept with a possibility of not recognizing the illness when it seems to be a human characteristic to hold on to beliefs that are often evidently wrong.<sup>92</sup> People with delusions can continue to function normally, apart from the subject of the delusion, and do not behave in an obviously bizarre manner. This is unlike people with psychotic disorders who also might have a delusion as a symptom of a specific disorder. An individual's belief is accepted as an absolute, and he or she holds to it against all logic and proof. There are many types of delusions, mainly grandiose, jealous, paranoid (persecutory), or somatic.<sup>93</sup> Realistic delusions usually involve

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<sup>89</sup> BROUSSARD, B., COMPTON, M. *The First Episode of Psychosis*. 2009. p. 4-7.

<sup>90</sup> SOMMER, I.C.E., BLOM, J. *Hallucinations: Research and Practise*. 2011. p. 14, 110, 154.

<sup>91</sup> FOWLER, P. *Hallucinations*. Medically revied by Smitha Bhandari, MD in July 2021. [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

<sup>92</sup> MCKENNA, P. *Delusions*. 2017. p. 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> MUNRO, A. *Delusional Disorder: Paranoia and Related Illnesses*. 1999. p. 1, 71, 109, 140.

mistaken experiences, like being followed, conspired against, or harmed. A bizarre delusion represents an experience that could not happen in real life, such as having your life broadcast on television or being born on a different planet.<sup>94</sup>

Millions of people suffer with reoccurring, unwanted thoughts, ideas or 'obsessions' negatively interfering with a person's life called *compulsive behaviours*. The individual lives in a world of delusion with no willingness to admit that there is a problem, minimizing the fact that the behaviour is destructive and out of control of the individual. The person does not operate within a rational decision-making process, and if the person resists the behaviour, anxiety rises. The ill individual spends amounts of time thinking about the behaviour, even when not directly engaged in it, and looks forward to the next acting out the episode. Compulsive behaviour involves eating habits (anorexia, bulimia, overeating), gambling, shopping, hoarding, workaholism, or over-exercising.<sup>95</sup> Major causes of the compulsive behaviour can be explained by the diagnosis of obsessive-compulsive disorder: recurrent impulses cause distressing emotions which cannot be resolved by logic. Among the symptoms mentioned above belong the urge to clean, count, repeat the arranging of things, or checking locks and appliances.<sup>96</sup>

One of the most harmful compulsive behaviours is the *alcohol use disorder*, already recognized as a mental illness by the World Health Organization. Certain groups are at a higher risk of developing such alcohol-related problems: alcohol consumption before the age of thirteen, socially disadvantaged persons, members of a family with the history of alcoholism, stressed and abused individuals, those with pre-existing illnesses, and users of certain medication. The individual drinks alcohol in large amounts for a longer time than intended, is unsuccessful in controlling the optimal use, neglects his work and relationships, and will turn to alcohol if there are any problems without finding an alternative solution. The alcohol abuse can lead people to low socioeconomic status, impulsiveness (anger, dangerous risks), exacerbation of emotional problems, abuse of

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<sup>94</sup> WEB MD. *Delusions and Delusional Disorder*. Medically reviewed by Jennifer Casarella, MD in December 2020. [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

<sup>95</sup> NEELY, W.T., ESTERLY, R.W. *Chemical Dependency and Compulsive Behaviours*. 2013. p. 3-6.

<sup>96</sup> AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION. *What Is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder?* [online]. [cit. 23.8.2022].

others, criminal actions, and other psychopathic behaviour.<sup>97</sup> A major difference between the compulsive behaviour and addiction is the fact that people with the compulsive disorder feel a sense of relief when performing such behaviour, but they don't feel any pleasure; an addict feels a pleasure, but the sense of relief may lower with time, and the need for more increases.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH. *Alcohol Use Disorders: The Nice Guideline on the Diagnosis, Assessment and Management of Harmful Drinking and Alcohol Dependence*. 2011. p. 17-84.

<sup>98</sup> ELSTER, J. *Addiction: Entries and Exits*. 1999. p. 3-13.

## 3 Literary analysis of E. A. Poe's stories

### 3.1 William Wilson

#### 3.1.1 Plot

An unnamed narrator, presenting himself as William Wilson, wishes not to reveal his real name since he turned to evil and denigrated his pedigree. He does not want to embody a record of his crime but rather find the origin of such misery as he feels that death is slowly approaching. William comes from a family of people with rich imagination which strongly developed as he got older. Eventually, William's parents could not stop his reckless and bossy behaviour, and he became the master of his actions and the house.

William attended school in an Elizabethan house in England, which reminded him of a Gothic prison ruled by the pastor who demanded a good behaviour with a ferule in his hand. William dominated his classmates except the one who shared his name, birth date, and looks. They started competing over the position of the leader and in the studies, while many older students believed they were brothers. William's double overprotected him and intervened into his decisions by giving him advice. One night, William decided to play a joke on his double in the bedroom but run away frightened by his transformed face.

William went to school in Eton, slowly forgot about his double, and abused alcohol to forget the past. In the middle of the revelry with other students, a mysterious man in his clothing visited him and only whispered "*William Wilson*" with a warning point-finger. When William moved to the University of Oxford, he started gambling with professional players and later used their tricks on his weak-minded friends. When playing with a nobleman and luring him into debts, a strange figure wearing Wilson's coat walked into a room and revealed Wilson as a fraud. Wilson left Oxford and travelled the world in order to escape his double, but the double always appeared at the time William wanted to commit a reckless act. At the ball in Rome, the double stopped William from pursuing a wife of the duke, they fought in the side room, and William stabbed the double with a sword. Suddenly, the body of the double changed into a mirror in which William saw his own body bleeding.

### 3.1.2 Analysis

The phenomenon of the double has been explored in many stories since ancient times but it reached his highest potential during Romanticism by putting an emphasis on the individual alongside the study of sleepwalking and hypnosis. The term *doppelganger* was coined into the language and literary tradition by the novelist Jean Paul Richter in 1796 as the situation in which people see themselves. The doppelganger imitates the original human both in physical and psychological terms and can pray into the innermost thoughts to haunt and confuse the person's own personality.<sup>99</sup> The idea of doubles has preserved its form but altered in character in accordance with changing notions of the reality and human identity, from the description of evil spirit in Christianity to modern Freudian approach of serious identity illness. There is a clear presentation of the doubles in *The Double* by Dostoyevsky, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* by Stevenson, or *The Picture of the Dorian Gray* by Wilde, among others.<sup>100</sup>

Unreliable narrators belong to the most frequent literary devices of Poe, and William Wilson isn't different as he willingly hides his real name. William describes an elevation of his wickedness and wishes for "*a little oasis of fatality*" from the reader since he claims to have been "*the slave of circumstances beyond human control*".<sup>101</sup> William himself does not understand the cause of his life events but heavily implies throughout the story that his family-inherited imagination convinced him to believe the "other" William is truly a different person. William inherits wide imagination and temperament falling to the extroverted and sanguine spectrum, "*addicted to the wildest caprices and a prey to the most ungovernable passions*," while his parents' efforts, beset with their weak-minded personalities and uncertainty, always result in failure.<sup>102</sup> From the age of ten to fifteen, William spends his school time in old monotony building, but his brain does not need "*external world of incident to occupy or amuse*" him, and he gains ascendancy over the schoolboys, however, the boy with the same name and looks resists.<sup>103</sup> William constantly struggles with the other Wilson's competition, refusal of submission,

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<sup>99</sup> TYMMS, R. *Doubles in Literary Psychology*. 1949. p. 103.

<sup>100</sup> ŽIVKOVIC, M. *The Double as the Unseen of the Culture: Toward a Definition of Doppelganger*. 2000.

<sup>101</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 794.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p. 795.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 797.

rebellion, and interference with William's commands. William admits fearing him and his superiority of keeping up the pace with every William's actions. The school associates do not seem to suspect anything wrong and eventually think about the Williams as twin brothers. William cannot describe his feelings towards Wilson but admits they always talked with each other, and only their positions and tempers prevented their friendship. After moving to the school in Eton, William doubts the reliability of his senses, and the existence of his previous life slowly leaves his memory, but when Wilson appears at his door years later, "*a thousand thronging memories of bygone days*" result in another questioning of Wilson's identity and motives.<sup>104</sup> William begins fleeing together with horrific circumstances of his actions that were interrupted by Wilson and acknowledges his power. During the ball, William faces Wilson directly, and although he cannot properly distinguish between the reality and fantasy, he realises he has not lived alone as it may have seemed.

The short story shows the cruelty of life of an individual struggling with the *dissociative identity disorder*. Though the development of the disorder is mostly associated with childhood, the disorder can affect individuals of all ages to detach themselves from any trauma.<sup>105</sup> William Wilson does not mention abuse in his childhood yet the combination of his reckless personality, poor mental health of the parents, and the principal of the school who used the ferule on his students to demand obedience, may play the biggest role in the development of William's dissociative identity disorder considering the publishing date of the short story (1839), during which the psychologists knew only about one case of such disorder until officially recognizing the term 141 years later in 1980.<sup>106</sup> The role of William's alter remains positive and protective since he appears only during Wilson's careless actions to stop him or give him advice, which, if followed, would make Wilson "*better, thus a happier man*".<sup>107</sup> The alter shares the same physical and mental similarities with its host but represents an unconscious part of William that wants to be a thoughtful, careful, and peaceful person. In one moment, the alter did not appear in William's life for months as William explained him staying home "*in mere*

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<sup>104</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 805.

<sup>105</sup> RINGROSE, J. *Understanding and Treating Dissociative Identity Disorder*. 2012. p. 3-8.

<sup>106</sup> RAYNA, L., ROGERS, D.O. *Multiple Personality and Channeling*. 1991. [online]. [cit. 19.9.2022].

<sup>107</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 802.

*idleness*”, therefore, not committing daring acts which would cause the emerge of the alter if otherwise.<sup>108</sup> During his stay in Eton, William’s life becomes even more adventurous than before, and the alter appears one night during a party which kicks off William’s anxiety, helplessness, and speculation, which are common for patients with dissociative identity disorder. William confesses losing all his morality in Oxford by gambling and abusing his colleagues, which forces the alter to appear again and reveal William’s tricks.

William was under control of the alter but after he started drinking, he begins to resist the alter and feels it’s weakened power. Eventually, William accepts the existence of the alter, and the ending could be interpreted in two ways: William truly stabbed himself and the alter at the same time, so the narrative of the story takes place shortly before their deaths, or William won his body back and moved on with a new perspective about himself. Unfortunately, there is no cure for the dissociative identity disorder but with the right treatment, individual can function properly in daily life together with their alters. William did not experience any specific memory gaps explicitly, but there are at least two very fast switching occasions mentioned in the story, where William could not see the face of the alter, because he became an observer of the situation. The first switch happened during the party in Eton, interrupted by a man standing in a hall asking for William. The second switch occurred after the play with the nobleman in Oxford, where the heavy doors of the apartment extinguished all candles in the room, and the men could hear the voice of a visitor in their midst.

As a literary dramatization, *“William Wilson”* provides an insight that the human mind can be born fragmented, which should be considered natural rather than deformed, therefore, the mental illness in the story carries the implication that the human personality can be hardly stable, which reflexes the complex nature of the humankind.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984.. p. 804.

<sup>109</sup> GUMHEE, C. *The Psychiatry of Multiple Personality Disorder in Edgar Allan Poe’s “William Wilson”*. 2021. [online]. [cit. 19.9.2022].

## 3.2 The Fall of the House of Usher

### 3.2.1 *Plot*

In the middle of the night, an unnamed narrator approached the deteriorating house of Usher which made him feel cold and gloomy without understanding it. The Usher family comes from an ancient time but only formed a direct line of ancestors without side branches, and eventually, the peasantry thought of the name Usher as both the family and the house. The narrator had received a letter from his childhood friend Roderick Usher, in which he had wished for the company as he suffered from an illness. In the house, Roderick explained he suffered from congenital illness and oversensitivity to food, clothing, sounds, and light, and he mentioned his ill sister Madeline, who suffered from the loss of control of her limbs.

For the next days, the narrator tried to cheer up Roderick's mood by reading and painting, but he realized that all efforts were in vain. Roderick mentioned his theory that the house takes control of its inhabitants' souls with the way in which walls, trees, and water are grouped. Soon, Madeline died, and Roderick decided to bury her temporarily in a tomb within the building so that the doctors could not get hold of the body due to Madeline's strange illness. Over the next few days, Roderick neglected his work, wandered around the house, and stared into the walls. The narrator realized that he started falling into Roderick's fantastic yet captivating delusions and feared the house. One day, Roderick visited his room and showed him a glowing gas surrounding the house. The narrator explained it as a natural part of the storm and a swamp and decided to read Roderick a novel. Eventually, the sounds mentioned in the story correlated to what the narrator heard around him. Roderick admitted to hearing such sounds for days but did not want to believe they buried Madeline alive and now claimed to feel her standing behind the door. Once Madeline appeared in the room, she fell on Roderick, who died of fear. The narrator fled the house as it collapsed to the ground.

### 3.2.2 *Analysis*

Poe's inspiration for the story may have been based on the Hezekiah Usher's house, who was the first known bookseller of British America in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The house was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and torn down after 1830. Rumours say the workers



found two dead bodies entombed in the cellar.<sup>110</sup> A different origin of the story may have been the Usher twins James Campbell Usher and Agnes Pye Usher – children of the Ushers who were close friends with Poe’s mother Elizabeth and who took care of her children after her death. The Usher twins suffered from a neurotic behaviour and are believed to have gone insane just like the twins from the tale.<sup>111</sup>

The mysterious narrator only exists in relations to the Ushers since he does not share any personal information. He comes to the house on a request of his childhood friend Roderick, who wrote him a letter with such a manner and heart that the narrator rushed to him immediately. Upon arriving, the narrator recalls a dreary tract of country, decayed trees, and bleak mansion which caused “*depression of soul [...] and sickening of heart*”, however, he believes the natural objects can affect humans, and the change of scenery will erase any bad feelings.<sup>112</sup> Roderick’s appearance scares the narrator because of the morbid acuteness of senses: Roderick fears the consequences of particular events, he is afraid of losing his life and reason. He has not left the mansion for years, and superstitions about the house filled his mind, yet Roderick admits that melancholy which afflicted him could be traced to natural origin. For several days, the narrator tries to alleviate despair of his friend through several activities but soon realizes how tough it is to change the mind full of “*darkness, as if an inherent quality*”.<sup>113</sup> After Madeline’s death, Roderick’s behaviour drastically changes to the point that the narrator thinks Roderick’s mind is fighting with a harsh secret. The narrator knows about the influence of Roderick’s behaviour on his thoughts and tries to believe that it can be explained by the atmosphere of rooms and a storm raging outside. In the end, Roderick confesses to hear strange sounds and Madeline’s heartbeat for many days, and her showing up is the last nail in coffin for him to die in terror.

There is no specific information about Madeline except the moment the narrator sees her when he arrives at the house. Madeline suffers from the catalepsy, which is a neurological condition causing muscular rigidity and immobility linked to schizophrenia,

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<sup>110</sup> WATKINS, W. *Days and Ways in Old Boston*. 1915. p. 91-132.

<sup>111</sup> PHILLIPS, M. *Edgar Allan Poe: The Man*. 1926. [online]. [cit. 20.9.2022].

<sup>112</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 178.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* p. 184.

Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, or drug toxicity.<sup>114</sup> Madeline's "*settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person*" suggests a major *depressive disorder* caused by her physical illness yet depression itself could cause such problem as well since person's body and mental health are closely connected.<sup>115</sup> Her lethargy could confuse Roderick, already suffering with his mental problems, to the point of premature burial as he did not notice her vital signs.

Roderick has always been a reserved and sensitive man, yet his family has been known for their devotion to art and charitable behaviour. Roderick's appearance has rapidly changed since the last time the narrator saw him, just as the house has changed into an antique, comfortless building, whose utilities laid scattered around the floors. Roderick does not seem to enjoy any activity, does not take care of himself, and suffers from dark thoughts about his death, which are all symptoms of *depression* and which even worsen after Madeline's death. However, Roderick's inconsistency of speech, absence of normal thoughts, hearing of sounds which probably not even exist, low concentration, erroneous burial of Madeline and her return may suggest signs of *schizophrenia*. Roderick's hypersensitivity of senses and other illness, which he believes to be inherited along with expectation of his death, could be explained by *anxiety disorder* or *hypochondria*, during which people believe to suffer a significant form of illness by listening to their bodily functions and misinterpreting minor problems. If there is a primary illness present, such as schizophrenia or anxiety disorder, hypochondria may result from these illnesses.<sup>116</sup> The mental health problems of twins may also originate from their relationship of "*scarcely intelligible nature*" due to genetically incestual breeding of the Ushers.<sup>117</sup>

Throughout the story, the narrator interacts with house occupants and witnesses the symptoms of the twins' mental illnesses. The incidents in the house must have traumatized him as his recollections of events may not be accurate, therefore, the narrator becomes unreliable as a result. Most importantly, the narrator feels the impact

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<sup>114</sup> TIARKS, G. *Catalepsy*. [online]. [cit. 20.9.2022].

<sup>115</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 184.

<sup>116</sup> SCHNEIDER, L. *Stop Hypochondria: understand your fear of diseases and free yourself from it*. 2021. p. 19-22.

<sup>117</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 188.

of Roderic's mental health problems and even shares some of Roderic's alleged delusions, which could hint at the rare type of mental illness: *shared psychotic disorder*. The essential features of the disorder are delusions that develop in an individual closely involved with another who already presents prominent delusions. One must rule out psychotic mental illnesses, tumours, and drug abuse before giving a diagnosis. Individuals are usually blood relatives or people living in the same environment (even socially isolated).<sup>118</sup> The narrator describes himself and Roderic during childhood as "*intimate associates*" despite Roderic's reservedness, and although they have not seen each other for years, he comes to Roderic's house with no hesitation in time of need, which indicates the close bond they still share.<sup>119</sup> He does not show signs of poor mental health as he rationalizes his worrying thoughts about the house upon arriving ("*I reflected that a mere different arrangement [...] of the scene [...] would modify [...] the capacity for sorrowful impression*") or calms a panic later in the story ("*I endeavoured to believe that much [...] of what I felt was due to influence of the gloomy furniture*").<sup>120</sup>

The narrator lives at the place over few weeks, isolated from the outside world with the exception of Roderic and servants, who are only mentioned during the arrival at the house. As mentioned above, the narrator performs various activities with Roderic. Eventually, imagination stimulated by the environment and Roderick's deteriorating mental health enable the shared psychosis to take place. The disorder would also explain a "resurrection" of Madeline since a person in declining health who survives without food and water, and with limited oxygen for a whole week (and then comes out of coffin and opens massive doors to the house) seems highly unlikely.

*"The Fall of the House of Usher"* is one of the most impressive explorations of human soul as Poe uses an image of the house affecting its inhabitants to hide forces that are even more destructive and sinister than anything mysterious the reader can think about.

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<sup>118</sup> IBRAHIM, Z.Y. *Shared Psychosis*. 2003. p. 8-10.

<sup>119</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 179.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.

### 3.3 The Black Cat

#### 3.3.1 *Plot*

An unnamed character wants to disburden his soul by writing his life story at the edge of the death, while he does not expect anybody to believe his unhinged narrative. The man describes his childhood full of love for animals. Later he found the wife who shared his affection. They raised many animals, and among them was a beautiful clever black cat Pluto.

After few years, the man's behaviour worsened as he started drinking alcohol. He threatened his wife with violence and mistreated the animals, except Pluto, if they got in his way. One night, the man came home thinking that Pluto was shying away from him. He grabbed the cat which bit him, and then he cut out one of the cat's eyes in rage. For a while, the man felt guilty about his actions but continued with drinking, which resulted in the cat hanging from a tree on a rope. The couple's house burned down later that night and on a single wall that survived the fire was a print of a cat with a rope. Eventually, the man began looking for a cat similar to Pluto, which he could bring home. The man found the cat in the pub sitting at the barrel, but the cat's fur carried a white splash, and one eye was missing.

The cat lived with the family for a while but the man found himself irritated by the cat's constant attachment. He avoided the cat, and the memories of the past and fear prevented him from abusing the cat like he abused Pluto. The man's dark thoughts intensified after he discovered that the cat's fur depicted the shape of the gallows. One day in a cellar, the cat run down the stairs, and the man almost tripped down. He took an axe to kill the cat, but he killed his wife first after she tried to stop him from hurting the cat. The man immediately thought about the best way to get rid of the body – cut the body into pieces and burn them; dig up a grave in the cellar; throw the body down the well – and he decided to immure the body as the Middle Ages' monks did. The man felt relieved when he realized the cat was gone so he slept peacefully for the next days. After four days, the police investigated the house but did not find anything. The man wanted to start a small talk to persuade the investigators about his innocence, but he talked about the walls of the house and even tapped on them with a stick. Suddenly, an

inhuman howl was heard coming from the wall behind where the investigators found the cat sitting on the top of the corpse.

### 3.3.2 Analysis

The title of the short story emphasises the importance of the cat Pluto as one of the most prominent metaphors of the narrative. The Greek god Hades (also known as Pluto) defeated the Titans, together with his brothers Zeus and Poseidon, and claimed leadership over cosmos. Hades became the god of the Underworld, where human souls went after death and strictly forbade any soul from leaving such world. Ancient Greeks feared him so much that they did not dare speak his name or portray him in art.<sup>121</sup> The dreadful events occurring in the short story might represent the imagery of the Underworld, which reflects the narrator's dark life after killing Pluto, therefore, he "offended" the god himself by killing his namesake. The psychological transformation of the narrator deepened in the presence of Pluto or the different cat similar to him, so the ending of the narration suggests that Pluto managed to drag the narrator to his future death and life in the Underworld.

Like any Poe's unreliable narrator, the narrator of the short story claims not to be mad yet contradicts himself when he hopes that a more rational reader will explain the narrator's experiences as natural causes and effects. The narrator is waiting for his death sentence, so he might be trying to avoid it and claim 'insanity defence' by writing his life-story. From the infancy, the narrator has been fond of animals for their unselfish love and was happy to find a wife who shared his passion. Years later, the narrator admits his change of behaviour due to alcohol and the neglect of the wife and animals. Intoxicated, he even hurts his favourite cat Pluto when "*the fury of demon*" possesses him, and after horror and remorse which do not touch his soul, he drinks again to drown the memory of the crime.<sup>122</sup> "*Longing of the soul [...] to do wrong for the wrong's sake only*" urges the narrator to kill Pluto in cold blood despite knowing he is committing a sin.<sup>123</sup> After seeing the shadow of the cat with the rope on the burned house, the

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<sup>121</sup> RICHARDSON, A., BOWMAN, L. *Hades*. 2003. p. 11-17.

<sup>122</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 66.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

narrator's sentiment comes back, and he regrets the loss of the animal. He brings home another cat but soon enough, he feels irritated by it while his wife loves the cat with kindness which once was the narrator's trait as well. The narrator fears the cat for the mark on the cat's fur reminiscing the gallows which's name the narrator dreads to name – "*mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime*".<sup>124</sup> Tormented by evil, the narrator loses any good side of him, releases the outbursts of rage on his wife, and hates all mankind. In the cellar, angered by the wife's interference to save the cat, the narrator kills her, entombs her body behind the walls, and sleeps blissfully for days with little guilt of his crime. During the police investigations, the narrator urgently talked to the officers to prove his innocence, but his bravado gives away his guilt and sends him to the death sentence. Poe created a character that displays textbook signs of *psychopathic personality* even though the currently used definition of psychopathy and its symptoms were not agreed upon until the 1990's thanks to research of Robert Hare, PhD. The symptoms involve antisocial behaviour, glib and superficial emotionality, impulsiveness, egocentric/grandiose behaviour, poor behavioural control, manipulation, lack of empathy and guilt, and lack of responsibility.<sup>125</sup>

The narrator's *antisocial behaviour* reveals itself in harsh treating, indifference, and manipulation of others (pets, wife), impulsiveness, alcohol abuse, and violent crimes with no remorse. Throughout the story, the narrator describes amusing and entertaining story while presenting himself in good light and trying to make the reader feel sorry for him by expressing regret, however, he describes killing of the cat and wife with no hesitation and suggests that his actions do not differ from everyday circumstances ("*series of mere household events*") during which he demands immediate satisfaction or relief.<sup>126</sup> Such actions belong to the group of *glib and superficial emotionality*. The narrator hurts his beloved cat Pluto only because the cat became "*old [...] and somewhat peevish*" and eventually kills it despite the cat giving him "*no reason of offence*".<sup>127</sup> He abuses other animals and his wife as well without considering possible consequences of his actions, therefore, the narrator acts on his *impulsiveness*. Eventually, his *egocentric*

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<sup>124</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 70.

<sup>125</sup> HARE, R. *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us*. 2011. p. 34.

<sup>126</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 65.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66, 67.

*and grandiose behaviour* causes both committing and revealing the crime (“*I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph*”; “*by the bye gentlemen*”).<sup>128</sup>

Besides being impulsive, the narrator tends to respond to frustration and trivialities with sudden threats and violence indicating *poor behaviour control*. His outbursts are generally short-lived, and he quickly resumes to calmness as if nothing happened, only to think about his actions later. The most prominent cases are Pluto, who bits the narrator out of fear and later evades him; the second cat, who almost pushes him out of stairs, and the wife, who tries to stop him from killing the cat. The narrator interprets these events as provocations or insults and acts upon them. Another sign of psychopathy is *manipulation*, which the narrator uses both in his family and on the reader. Most noticeable are his claims of loving pets and his wife yet his actions speak otherwise as most people cannot imagine hurting their loved ones, let alone believe that a good man would suddenly start abusing everyone around him (“*noted for the docility and humanity [...] my tenderness of heart*”).<sup>129</sup> The narrator speaks more about the relationship with animals than about his wife, which could indicate disrespect (“*my uncomplaining wife*”) and dissatisfaction with the marriage resulting in alcoholism and future abuse.<sup>130</sup> The narrator speaks fondly of the wife only after committing an evil act (“*most patient of sufferers*”; “*possessed that humanity of feeling*”).<sup>131</sup> He emphasises his fear or guilt many times but mentions that he “*quivered not a muscle, heart beating calmly*”.<sup>132</sup> The narrator tells the story to gain empathy and forgiveness from the reader by focusing on alcoholism and his sensitive feelings, which would probably work if he did not focus the blame mainly on his soul, the cat, and other supernatural factors influencing free will. The reader has no choice than to think the narrator bends the truth and omits important information.

The narrator’s *lack of empathy and guilt* is closely related to *lack of responsibility* as he rationalizes his behaviour any way possible, blames the others, and shows regret only

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<sup>128</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 73.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70, 71.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p. 73.

for himself (“*these events have terrified – have tortured – have destroyed me*”).<sup>133</sup> Most importantly, the narrator notes “*who has not found himself committing a vile or a silly action for no other reason than because he knows he should not?*”.<sup>134</sup> The narrator views animals and his wife as little more than objects to be used for his gratification and as his favourite targets due to their vulnerability and weakness compared to him. After hurting Pluto, his remorse was “*feeble and equivocal,*” which did not change even after his death.<sup>135</sup> He speaks of the murder of his wife as assassination and refers to her as “the body” or “the corpse”, exposing that her death was not an accident.

Even though scientists understand psychopathy today much better, Poe managed to connect various personality traits to form an authentic character, which proves Poe’s writing talent. It points out that the society must hold these individuals accountable. If psychopathy was used as defence for every criminal act, this would hurt the society since the disorder remains untreatable.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 65.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> HARE, R. *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us*. 2011. p. 195-199.



## 3.4 The Tell-Tale Heart

### 3.4.1 Plot

An unnamed narrator opens the tale by explaining that he has been sick recently and the unknown disease has sharpened his senses. The narrator liked the old man who never hurt him, but he feared his blue eye that looked like the vulture's, so he decided to kill the old man. Every night, the narrator went into the old man's room to kill him but the man's eye was always closed. After seven nights, the old man woke up when he heard the narrator's laugh and stayed up the whole hour listening for strange sounds in the dark. Once he cried out, the narrator opened his torch to let a small string of light to reveal the old man's eye. The narrator heard the man's heartbeat and got scared that the neighbour could hear it as well. He killed the old man, cut the body into pieces and hid them below the floorboards. The next day, the police officers came to investigate the house because the neighbour heard the scream at night. The narrator told them that it was him who screamed and that the old man left to a countryside, and then walked the officers around the house. In the old man's bedroom, the narrator tried to talk through the sound of ringing and beating but he panicked as he recognized the old man's heartbeat. Mad by the idea that the police officers knew about his guilt, he confessed to the crime and ordered the officers to rip up the floorboards.

### 3.4.2 Analysis

Poe based the plot on two murder cases for there is evidence that Poe read or knew about them. The main inspiration was the pamphlet (1830) by Daniel Webster describing the murder of Joseph White in Salem hired by his distant relatives Joseph and John Knapp after White changed his will. Daniel Webster writes that the murderer's guilt will slowly overcome him and will lead to a confession since "*the guilty soul cannot keep its secret*".<sup>137</sup> Another source of inspiration comes from the 1840 trial of James Wood for the murder of his daughter, which Poe covered as a reporter of *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*. Poe believed that Wood's calm demeanour comes from the "*the cunning of the maniac [...] who preserves the appearance of perfect sanity*".<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> POE, E.P. (ed. T. O. MABBOTT). *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III*. 1978. p. 789-799.

<sup>138</sup> POE, E.P. *The Trial of James Wood*. 1840. [online]. [cit. 22.9.2022].

The unreliable narrator opens the tale by admitting his nervousness and enhanced hearing but emphasises that he cannot be mad as he will calmly and reasonably tell the story to the reader. The narrator loves the old man, yet the idea of his murder haunts the narrator day and night. He insists that he is sane because the murderer would not go through slow and measured actions to kill a man because of his terrifying eye. The narrator goes into the old man's room every night (*"it was not the old man who vexed me but his Evil Eye"*)<sup>139</sup> and every morning he talks with the man in hearty tone. Suddenly, the narrator hears a groan of mortal terror he knows so well (*"many a night [...] it has welled up from my own bosom"*), grows furious as he gazes at the eye and hears the man's heartbeat, and pulls the heavy bed over the man.<sup>140</sup> *"If you still think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body."*<sup>141</sup> The narrator dismembers the corpse, lets blood drip into a tub, and puts pieces of the man under the boards of the floor. When the police come, the narrator shows them the man's room, and brings chairs to sit on upon the very spot beneath which lays the corpse. After a while, the narrator feels himself getting pale, his head aching, and he hears ringing. The narrator talks more quickly to the officers with wild gesticulations and thinks they know about his crime (*"I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer!"*).<sup>142</sup> He admits the deed and tells the police to tear up the planks.

*"Tell-Tale Heart"* shares similarities with *"The Black Cat"* in the way both short stories portrait unreliable narrators, who claim their sanity but fail as their narratives proceeds. Both stories focus on the murder caused by what first seems a supernatural element, and on the murderers, who eventually get caught. In both cases, the narrators are trying to prove their innocence and rationality, yet *"Tell-Tale Heart"* does not mention whether the narrator awaits his trial, or a death sentence as *"The Black Cat"* narrator does. However, compared to *"The Black Cat"*, the narrator of *"Tell-Tale Heart"* does not show the signs of psychopathy no matter how cruel and calculating his crime was. He cares about the old man, experiences irrational thinking, and shows guilt which drove him to confession of the murder. The narrator suffers from *schizophrenia* as he experiences

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<sup>139</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 684.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* p. 685.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 687.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p. 688.

anxiety with dread, delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, and other strange behaviours. The narrator's behaviour points to the *disorganized schizophrenia*, which is marked with disorganized speech and behaviour. Sometimes there can be silliness and giggling together with strange mannerism. The narrator also shows the signs of *paranoid schizophrenia*, which is the most common example of the mental illness. People with paranoid delusions are highly suspicious, their delusions can make them angry and threatened and they experience fear and anxiety.<sup>143</sup>

The narrator expresses his *anxiety* through the opening of the story, and he feels that way for a while ("*nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am*").<sup>144</sup> Throughout the story, the narrator feels uneasy when he watches the man's eye, and such anxiety would explain his sharpened senses due to the narrator's body preparing for a dangerous experience (fight-flight). The narrator feels anxious before the murder of the old man when he hears his heartbeat getting louder and fears the neighbour will hear it as well. During the police interrogation, the narrator answers cheerily every question yet his anxiety and guilt grows stronger in him ("*grew very pale*"; "*gasped for breath*"; "*I paced the floor to and fro*").<sup>145</sup> The narrator is influenced by the *delusion* that the old man's eye has an eye of a vulture, which scares him. He cannot say how the idea entered his brain, but he knows that taking the life of the old man will help him despite his love for the old man ("*passion there was none, [...] he had never wronged me, [...] never given me insult, [...] I think it was his eye!*").<sup>146</sup> Another delusion occurs during the police interrogation when the narrator hears the heartbeat of the dead man and believes the officers "*suspected – knew – they were making a mockery of my horror*".<sup>147</sup>

The narrator experiences auditory hallucinations, which he explains as improved senses ("*I heard all things in heaven and in the earth [...] in hell*") yet he does not claim he hears other voices, which is a very common hallucination while suffering schizophrenia.<sup>148</sup> The narrator first hears the old man's heartbeat while peeking the old man before murdering

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<sup>143</sup> NOLL, R. *The Encyclopaedia of Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders*. 2009. p. 134, 303-304.

<sup>144</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 684.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p. 688.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p. 684.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* p. 688.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* p. 684.

him (*"grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst."*), which creates another delusion – *"the sound would be heard by a neighbour"*.<sup>149</sup> During the murder, the heart beats for real, but the narrator hears the sound long after the man's death as well (*"louder! louder! louder! louder!"*).<sup>150</sup> The narrator's *disorganized speech* is present throughout the whole story by fast and nonsensical repetition of words, increased volume and speed of speech (*"talked more quickly [...] in a high key"*), and overinclusive thinking with no conversation limits.<sup>151</sup> *Disorganized and strange behaviour* is described when the narrator moves his head to the old man's room in order to see the eye (*"it took me an hour to place my whole head withing the opening [...] would a man be so wise as this"*) or when he waits over a week to kill him while standing by his door every night.<sup>152</sup> The narrator describes his plan of murder and the act itself in details while claiming his sanity and good reasons for the murder. The narrator smiles after the murder, dismembers the body but hides the pieces in the room instead of outside, and lets the police sit in chairs above the burial place.

Poe wrote the story with the stereotype of a man with schizophrenia committing a brutal murder, yet ill individuals are responsible for only little percentage of homicides worldwide. Poe described in great details an individual that was pushed over the edge and focused on how such violent acts happen mainly between close family members or friends at home and not in the public between strangers.

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<sup>149</sup> POE, E.A. *The Complete Stories and Poems*. 1984. p. 686.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* p. 688.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* p. 684.

## 4 Literary analysis of H. P. Lovecraft's stories

### 4.1 The Temple

#### 4.1.1 *Plot*

The story is told by Karl Heinrich, a lieutenant-commander in the German Navy during the World War I., whose manuscript from 1917 was found in the Atlantic Ocean. After sinking British cargo ship and other boats, the crew found the dead body of a seaman clinging to their submarine. The seaman carried a piece of carved ivory of great value which one of the lieutenants decided to keep. When they threw the body overboard, one of the officers swore the body swam away rather than sunk. The next day, a few members of the crew suffered a nausea, the officer Müller claimed to see the dead bodies killed by the Navy staring at him through the porthole, and two other members screamed about a curse on the submarine.

An unexplainable explosion destroyed the operating of the submarine, and the crew was left to travel the ocean without any control and to shoot everybody who desired to surrender to the hands of Americans. Six remaining crew members revolted against the leadership, destroyed submarine's devices, screamed about the curse of the ivory statue, and died after Karl shot them. The submarine continued sinking, the lieutenant Kienze became paranoid, started at the ivory statue for hours, prayed for all the dead they killed, and endlessly talked about sank ships.

At the bottom of the ocean, Kienze left the submarine with the statue after demanding that someone is calling them. Karl Heinrich regretted not stealing the statue from him as he now remained in the submarine alone and could not talk to anybody. Eventually, Karl found the sunken ancient city, and after thinking of the pride of the German nation, he used the diving suit to explore the ruins where he found the image of a carved god like he saw on the statue. When the batteries of the submarine run out, he spent days in darkness suffering the visual and auditory hallucinations. Following the desire to leave the submarine and visit the temple, Karl wrote the manuscript and entered the ocean.

#### 4.1.2 Analysis

The short story shares the theme of underwater ancient cities with non-human worshipers with later works such as *“The Call of Cthulhu”* or *“The Shadow over Innsmouth”*. The most famous submerged piece of land is Atlantis, which was supposed to be a home to a highly developed people, half god and half human, who created a utopian civilization. To believe Plato, whose writings represent the only known source of Atlantis’ existence, Atlantis was the mother of all civilizations, which mastered naval power, metallurgy, and arts of all sorts. At first, Atlanteans despised riches and only pursued wisdom, but in time, they grew ambitious themselves. The gods decided to punish them, and they sent floods and earthquakes which destroyed the empire. Scientists theorize the location of the Atlantis in the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Spain, or even Antarctica, however, others attribute the name to Eldorado, which also sufficed the minds of adventures aflame with gold fever.<sup>153</sup>

Lieutenant-Commander Karl Heinrich writes the message in the bottle while the submarine lays disabled on bottom on the ocean. He will present unusual facts to the public since the circumstances surrounding him involve the hopeless submarine and damage of German will. The men find a corpse of a seaman with an ivory statue, which creates disturbance among the crew who swear the corpse mockingly stared at them, and a superstitious crewman claims the body limbed into a swimming position and sped away under the waves. The tension complicates the disappearance of two men who committed suicide, yet no one observed the act of jumping overboard. *“Everyone seemed inclined to be silent now as though holding a secret fear.”*<sup>154</sup> The explosion in the engine room causes the uncontrollability of the submarine, men’s desire to surrender to Americans, which the lieutenant Kienze solves by killing such men, and muttering about the statue curse again. One-night, remaining seamen burst into a mad fury and scream about the curse and death body looking at them. Karl kills all men, Kienze starts drinking, and both agree to remain alive until the supplies run out. Facts of the upcoming death affects Kienze who prays for all the dead the men sent to the bottom *“forgetting*

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<sup>153</sup> SANTOS, A. *Atlantis: The Lost Continent Finally Found*. 2011. p. 3-4.

<sup>154</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 189.

*that all things are noble which serve the German state*".<sup>155</sup> Sometimes, Karl leads him on the delusional wanderings while thinking how the country would revere his memory, which will be passed on to future generations. At the bottom of the ocean, Kienze freaks out ("*He is calling! We must go*") and tries to drag Karl outside with him.<sup>156</sup> By complying with Kienze's suicidal request, Karl helps Kienze to get out of the submarine and frees himself from "*one who was no longer a companion but a menace*".<sup>157</sup> After the submarine sinks to the centre of the underwater city, which Karl considers to be Atlantis, Karl decides that "*I, a German, should be the first to tread those forgotten ways*".<sup>158</sup> Once the electricity runs out, Karl spends days in darkness, tormented by thoughts and memories that threatened to overcome his German will, and revives his thoughts of suicide. On the last day, Karl desires to visit the temple again as "*a man of sense and will use to the last what little will I have*".<sup>159</sup>

The short story does not only mention psychological issues of an individual but of the whole crew. The submarine crew struggles from the consequences of isolation in the submarine environment, *mass hysteria/panic attacks*, and *post-traumatic stress disorder*. Submarine crews experience prolonged periods of time in a confined space underwater, they work in the absence of day-night cues, sleep-wake cycles and under conditions of atmospheric pressure. The lack of personal space has been identified as a cause of stress, anxiety, and depression, which can prolong after the interpersonal conflict or even traumatic experience.<sup>160</sup> The submarine crew may have been living underwater since the beginning of the World War I., as the plot of the story takes place in 1917, or just months. The lack of stimuli from the outside world causes men's nervous strains, bad dreams, hallucinations, obsession with mysterious statue and need for change through rebellions and suicides as the brain tries to make up any sensory or visual input when deprived together with survival instincts. When the submarine breaks down and men get lost, the already isolated crew develop illogical beliefs and paranoid

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<sup>155</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 191.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* p. 192.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* p. 195.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* p. 198.

<sup>160</sup> SHOBE, K. (e.d.) *PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSIOLOGICAL, AND MEDICAL IMPACT OF THE SUBMARINE ENVIRONMENT ON SUBMARINES WITH APPLICATION TO VIRGINIA CLASS SUBMARINES*. 2003. [online]. [cit. 28.9.2022].

delusions through anxiety and feeling of threat: the dead man brought a curse, the ivory statue is dangerous, dead bodies are looking through the porthole, someone unknown is calling.

Mass psychogenic illness, also known as mass hysteria, refers to an outbreak of unusual behaviour and a rapid spread of panic and fear. Psychologists recognize mass anxiety hysteria, which is characterized by sudden tension and other symptoms of anxiety: they show up among people belonging to an isolated group or a community experiencing long-term stress and the fear of punishment.<sup>161</sup> In the short story, the submarine crew is isolated, shares symptoms of dizziness, weakness, panic, and trouble thinking, which involves the images of dead sailors, shared belief of the horrifying curse, and uprisings that all were *“subversive of discipline”*.<sup>162</sup> The crew also witnesses a punishment of revolts, which calms them down only to suppress the furious madness that would strike again. Soon enough, delusions of a few men spread across the whole submarine (*“delirium of cursing and destruction”*; *“roared like the animals they were”*) and result in panic attacks and in the death of all men.<sup>163</sup> Panic attacks are intense periods of fear developing over a short period time, and the crew’s panic is shown through their overwhelming fear, nausea, dizziness, urges to escape, and fear of dying.

Such symptoms also fall into the categories of post-traumatic stress disorder, which occurs in people who witnessed a traumatic event such as an accident, serious violence or war. It is also a result of repeated exposure to trauma. Individuals experience disturbing thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance for danger, inability to feel positive emotions, and they try their hardest to avoid situations which remind them of trauma. Suicide risk is higher for struggling individuals linked to poor control of impulsiveness, and rare cases may involve auditory hallucinations.<sup>164</sup> The submarine crew’s hallucinations first occur after finding the body of a dead man, and men recognize the other bodies of dead sailors as those *“having seen dying during some of our*

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<sup>161</sup> HEALTH LINE. *Mass Hysteria*. [online]. [cit. 28.9.2022].

<sup>162</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 189.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* p. 190.

<sup>164</sup> SHIROMANI, P., KEANE, T., LEDOUX, J. *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Basic Science and Clinical Practice*. 2009. p. 2-5.



*victorious German exploits*".<sup>165</sup> The crew experiences extreme emotional and physical reactions to such reminders of trauma despite no physical evidence the bodies exist. After the troublesome situation, the men encounter difficulty sleeping, reckless behaviour and distressing thoughts in everyday activities including their duties ("*babbled of some illusion of dead bodies [...] which looked at him intensely*"; "*we kept the poor devils as busy as we could even when we knew it was useless*"), increased alertness to danger ("*screaming about such nonsense as the curse of the ivory image*"), and anger outbursts ("*constant ravings concerning a terrible curse*"; "*burst into a mad fury at our refusal to surrender*").<sup>166</sup> Two men seemingly commit suicide without anyone noticing ("*as a result of fears which had seemed to harass them*"), which unfavourably affects the crew even more.<sup>167</sup>

Karl Heinrich's narration seems reliable as he describes the struggles of the crewmen but once Karl becomes alone, he admits the following events are "*the subjective and unreal creations of overtaxed mind*".<sup>168</sup> Karl's nationalist pride is not an abstract concept as it rules Karl's life every step of the way by emphasizing reason and discipline above all else. Throughout the story, Karl denies the supernatural, takes others who believe such things as traitors, and responds with violence ("*superstitious Alsatian swine*"; "*shot all six men and made sure that none remained alive*").<sup>169</sup> While other crewmembers feel guilty about killing their victims, Karl describes such events amusingly and enthusiastically thinks about the merits at home ("*English pig-dogs*"; "*I regret that [...] the film should never reach Berlin*").<sup>170</sup> Lieutenant Kienze's guilt eventually affects him as well to the point of a panic attack ("*could give no explanation save that he was overcome with the vastness, remoteness [...] and the mystery of ocean*"), which Karl abused to stay alone as the only superior German surviving ("*he was a German but only a Rhinelander*").<sup>171</sup> In full darkness, he becomes the man he did not want to be ("*my own German will no longer controls my acts*") and experiences hallucinations and delusions

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<sup>165</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 188.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 188-190.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* p. 198.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 188, 190.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* p. 192.

which lead him to his death (*“what I have seen cannot be true”; “inexplicable command which cannot be denied”*).<sup>172</sup>

Lovecraft portrayed the battle between rationality, nationalist pride and the supernatural, eventually showing how poor mental health takes over a risky environment and breaks the protagonist’s identity. After all, what’s a German compared to Cthulhu?<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 198.

<sup>173</sup> LOPES, R. *The Temple*. 2021. [online]. [cit. 28.9.2022].

## 4.2 The Rats in the Walls

### 4.2.1 *Plot*

Marked with a title of a murderer, Walter de la Poer escaped to America, where he started to create a pedigree, the reputation of which drew on a noble yet solitary family. The family tradition contained the opening of the letter with family secrets after each father's death but it was destroyed after grandfather of Delapore died in fire and the letter burned. Now, an American Delapore, the descendant of the de la Poer family, moved to England to restore the mansion which remained empty after an unexplained tragedy took place here three hundred years ago. Delapore's son arrived in England during the World War I. and sent father the legends he heard from the captain Edward Norrys. After the son's death, the captain offered himself to help Delapore in search of other family lore. Delapore found out that the building stood on the remains of the prehistoric temple which, during history, turned into the centre of a dreaded cult, and the peasantry painted the members of the family as devils. Many stories talked about an army of rats, which left the mansion and destroyed everything in its way.

Delapore moved to the mansion in order to stop the slander of his family as he was the only De la Poer descendant left. He and his cats frequently heard the sounds of pattering rats, yet it was considered impossible for rats to hide in the high walls of the building. One night, all inhabitants of the mansion heard the uncountable mischief of rats moving to the depts of the estate. Delapore and captain Norrys decided to spend the night in a crypt with Delapore's cat which drew men's attention to area under an altar. Ultimately, the men travelled to London where they talked with archaeologists and scientists about their discoveries. A few days later, they all travelled back to the mansion and began further exploration.

Under the altar, the men found an underground city full of human bones gnawed by rats. Delapore's family had raised generations of human livestock to satisfy their cannibalistic needs; therefore, Delapore finally realized the reasoning of Walter's rushed escape to America. The men entered a cave where Delapore slipped on the edge of a chasm full of bones. When Delapore's cat flashed by him, Delapore rushed into the depts of the unknown with the sound of rats behind him. He thought about the de la Poer

family, his grandfather, and the hate of Norrys since he survived the war and not Delapore's son. Delapore was found hours later upon eaten body of Norrys and placed into a mental asylum. People accuse him of a horrible crime, but Delapore knows the rats, who no one will ever hear except him, caused the tragedy.

#### 4.2.2 Analysis

Generally, rats often represented life at its worst since they thrive in urban environments, and their reputation of indestructible comes from the ancient times. The rats in the walls were also mentioned in Poe's *"The Fall of the House of Usher"* due to Roderick's abnormal sensitivity to sounds. Lovecraft mentioned the inspiration for the story in a commonplace book: *"a very commonplace incident – the cracking of wall-paper late at night and the chain of imaginings resulting from it"*.<sup>174</sup> Another possibility could be similarities of the story to Sabine Baring-Gould's *"Curious Myths of the Middle Ages"* (1862-68) and the story of rats sweeping across the land which may have been inspired by the legend of Bishop Hatto who was eaten by rats after setting starving peasants on fire.<sup>175</sup>

Delapore moves to the mansion of his ancestors, which the country folk has hated for hundreds of years, and Delapore knows he comes to the accursed house. He has been kept ignorant about the family history through the secretness maintained by the Delapores, however *"have I suspected their nature, how gladly would I have left Exham Priory to its bats and cobwebs"*.<sup>176</sup> Delapore collects most of the rumours through the captain Norrys since the villagers sullenly dislike the Delapores and any their relatives. Since 1307, the villagers have nothing but evil to say about the Delapores, and tales remain creepy yet restrained and faintly evasive. They repel and annoy Delapore greatly, and he remains sceptical about the tales of missing peasants, a howling in a valley, and a legion of rats. *"It must not be imagined [...] that these tales formed any psychological environment"* as Delapore is aided by Norrys and the antiquarians to finish restoration of the mansion.<sup>177</sup> Eventually, the cats of the mansion become restless and scratch the

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<sup>174</sup> JOSHI, S.T. (ed.). *The Dunwich Horror and Others*. 1985. p. 23.

<sup>175</sup> MARICONDA, S. *Baring-Gould and the Ghouls*. 1990. p. 42-48.

<sup>176</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 373.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* p. 377.

walls what the servants explain by saying there might be mice and rats. One night, Delapore sees a slight movement behind the curtains and hears distinct scurrying of the rats which intensifies as the days pass. When Delapore and Norrys decide to sleep in the crypt, a real terror is awakened in Delapore *“for here were anomalies which nothing normal could explain”*.<sup>178</sup> The men wanting to gratify their sense of adventure and bravery travel to London to bring back scientists and archaeologist to explore the depths of the mansion despite *“whatever horrors might await”*.<sup>179</sup> Down there, the group finds *“a subterranean world of limitless mystery”* filled with an insane tangle of human bones of many generations of people.<sup>180</sup> Once Delapore slips near a brink, he experiences ecstatic fear which makes him run away to the depths of the underground followed by the shuffling of rats, and he is found hours later with Norrys’ dead body, *“but they must know that I did not do it [...] it was the rats whose pampering will never let me sleep”*.<sup>181</sup> Throughout the short story, Delapore is under the influence of superstitions and the family history of cannibalism, resulting in *acute stress disorder*.

Exham Priory stands on the site of a prehistoric temple of a Druidical origin. The rites had been celebrated frequently and later transferred into the Cybele worship of the Romans together with other nameless ceremonies. The fall of the region did not end the orgies at the temple, and the Saxons restored the remains of the temple to the centre of a cult. The place housed a powerful monastic order with extensive gardens which needed no walls to scare off an already frightened populace. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the villages feared of barons and hinted at their responsibility for the occasional disappearances of villagers lasting for several generations. The family seemed to hold an inner cult closed to few members, but the participation in the cult was determined by character rather than family ties as those who joined the family by marriage could attend it as well. During the reign of Jacob I. of England, the devilish deeds of the family were stopped by Walter de la Poer who killed the rest of the family and escaped to America where he founded the Delapores family. Exham Priory remained uninhabited since, and the Delapores’ family traditions and history were handed down in a secret

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<sup>178</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 383.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* p. 384.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* p. 386.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* p. 389.

envelope from father to the oldest son for posthumous opening. The protagonist's grandfather died in the fire, and the envelope burned to pieces.<sup>182</sup> The legends told by the villagers turned into rumours and superstition attributed to magic or the supernatural, which trigger Delapore's obsessive thoughts and add to his anxiety. Cannibalism is often the result of some form of mental illness – schizophrenia which causes delusions or hallucinations, or psychopathy during which cannibals are aware of their actions but lack empathy and guilt to stop them. According to some, cannibalism can become addictive as the brain is flooded with dopamine, and the psychopath will then strive to produce the same feeling.<sup>183</sup> The short story mentions the ritualistic type of cannibalism and learned cannibalistic behaviour, which entails consuming the flesh of someone outside the group as a way to terrify others or survive starvation conditions.<sup>184</sup>

Acute stress disorder belongs to the group of traumatic disorders and occurs after experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with traumatic events which create fear and horror. Some people with the disorder can go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder as well. Among many symptoms may belong numbing, reduced awareness of surroundings, dissociative amnesia, hallucinations and re-experiencing the stressful event in forms of dreams and thoughts.<sup>185</sup> Delapore has always been interested in his family history, and he tries to improve its reputation by moving to the mansion and living differently than the family before (*"I looked forward to redeeming at last the local fame of the line [...] for I had adopted again the original spelling of the name"*).<sup>186</sup> Unfortunately, horrible findings of the underground city trigger Delapore's weakened mental health, caused by the death of his grandfather and son, and his imagination (*"trying to keep for the nonce from thinking of the events which must have taken place there"*) to experience a panic attack which has further shattered perceptions of his family (*"I knew now why my ancestors had had such excessive gardens [...] the purpose of the herds I did not have to ask."*).<sup>187</sup> Facing a situation that causes extreme fear and

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<sup>182</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 375, 373.

<sup>183</sup> MOYE, D. *Cannibalism Can Be Addictive, Expert Says*. 2012. [online]. [cit. 1.10.2022].

<sup>184</sup> DOVE, L. L. *There's More to Cannibalism Than Just People Eating People*. [online]. [cit. 1.10.2022].

<sup>185</sup> SICKS EDITORE. *Acute stress reaction and post-traumatic stress disorder*. 2014. p. 6-8.

<sup>186</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 377.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* p. 387.

anxiety, Delapore's physical reactions display the fight-or-flight response, and he leaves the scene as quickly as possible ("flight"). During a panic attack, the body reacts as if it is in danger, and such anxiety can provoke a violent response to anything around ("*when I ask of poor Norrys they accuse me of this hideous thing*").<sup>188</sup> Delapore experiences reduced awareness of surroundings and dissociative amnesia when he supposedly runs away from rats, he does not know what he bumps into on the way, when his mind is filled with thoughts of nonsense ("*It's voodoo I tell you*"; "*Ungl unl... rrlh*"; "*wolde ye swynke me thilke wys?*"), and how he did not perceive the murder of his friend as the last critical aspect of the all traumatic events.<sup>189</sup> In mental asylum, Delapore's numbness can be seen in his detachment from expected emotional reactions as he does not seem miserable due to cannibalism in his family or the death of a friend, and he only focuses on sounds of rats ("*the rats they can never hear*").<sup>190</sup>

The rats in the walls of the mansion are heard only by Delapore and the pets while the servants and Norrys experience disturbance of cats, yet discovery of nibbled bones in the underground confirm their presence in the mansion. Delapore is mostly sceptical about the legend of the army of rats in the village but after a servant mentions the walls could be filled with rats which would cause restlessness of cats, Delapore suffers nightmares, illusions of moving curtains and strange sounds, and gladly spends the night in the crypt to solve the mystery. Once he lives in the mental asylum, Delapore develops auditory hallucinations of rats ("*the daemon rats that race behind the padding in this room*") and of "*fearful whispers about heredity and experience,*" hinting at the symptoms of reoccurring thoughts of acute stress disorder.<sup>191</sup>

"*The Rats in the Walls*" developed a frequent Lovecraft's theme of inescapable ancestral horror, whose knowledge can be extremely dangerous and damaging to those with a fragile mind. The fatal curiosity may cost someone's life dearly, and certain secrets are better off left alone.

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<sup>188</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 389.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* p. 389.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* p. 390.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

### 4.3. The Dreams in the Witch House

#### 4.3.1 *Plot*

A university student of mathematics and folklore, Walter Gilman, rented a room in a haunted house of Arkham. The room had belonged to a 'witch' Keziah Mason, who had managed to disappear from the Salem prison in 1692. Walter looked for forbidden secrets of the town, while professors from the university tried to moderate his research. He noticed a strange geometry of the walls and the ceiling of the room and remembered that Keziah had claimed to use certain angles to travel behind the boundaries of the world. Soon enough, Walter began to stare at the corner of the room, neglected his studies, suffered fever with meningitis, and heard many strange sounds around him on the brink of audibility. For many months he dreamt of Brown Jenkin, a human-faced rat involved with Keziah, and inexplicable colours, sounds and structured objects, and suffered sleepwalking according to his neighbours. During university classes, Walter theorized about conscious walking out of the Earth to any celestial body in the universe through specific points in a comic space. He also felt an unknown push towards something which's direction changed every hour, and realized the calling comes from stars above.

A neighbour told Walter he had seen a poor light coming from Walter's ceiling, which meant that the witch Keziah and Brown Jenkin were nearby. The same night, Walter dreamt of the unfamiliar city where he broke off a statue from a balustrade. The statue was made from unknown materials, and he found it on his table the next day. Eventually, Walter borrowed flour from a landlord and scattered it around the place to track his sleepwalking. In a dream, Keziah, Brown Jenkin, and the Black Man made him to sign a book with his blood. He woke up with bites from rats in a wrist, and untouched flour on the floor. Walter described his problem to a colleague Elwood, who mentioned the conversation between the neighbours about their fear of the upcoming Walpurgis Night and feeling sorry for Walter who cannot be helped. For next days, Walter slept in Elwood's room, showed the statue to professors and museum curators, and subjected the statue to science research.



One night, Walter was taken by the group to witness a kidnapping of an infant, so he ran away but the Black Man choked him. He woke up with a handprint on a neck and muddy footsteps which did not leave the room. One of the neighbours informed him and Elwood that he heard roaring and slow pacing above him. The newspaper brought news of a kidnapped baby, whose mother had seen Brown Jenkin prying the building months prior. On Walpurgis Night, Keziah tried to sacrifice the baby but Walter stopped it by strangling her; however, Brown Jenkin bit the baby. Walter woke up to the room full of people and slowly regained a consciousness throughout the day. He went deaf, communicated with Elwood by writing and agreed to leave the house as soon as possible. Later that night, a giant rat killed Walter by eating out its way from his chest, and tenants left the house, which gained a suffocating stink.

The newspapers wrote about the police intervention in a ravine but did not find the kidnapped baby. Rumours of the supernatural went quiet and no one has ever seen the witch or Brown Jenkin again. After the roof collapsed due to a strong wind, workmen found books of black magic, exotic knife, unidentifiable bowl, a statue similar to a Walter's, and a space behind the walls filled with bones of children and an old woman. The biggest surprise came from crushed bones of a giant rat with a human-like skull and monkey-like paws.

#### 4.3.2 Analysis

The origin of the short story can be traced to the lecture of Professor Willem de Sitter *The Size of the Universe* which Lovecraft attended in late 1931, and he later mentioned de Sitter in group of intellectual geniuses and mathematicians in the story. De Sitter developed a model of the universe very similar to Einstein's, and the motifs of mathematics, geometry and curvature of space are developed in the Lovecraft's narration.<sup>192</sup> The idea of travelling through space and dimensions through shortcuts alludes to A. S. Eddington's *"The Nature of the Physical World"* (1929), which Lovecraft mentions in one of his letters. Despite all of this, the short story happened to be one of the worst received Lovecraft's plots due to its badly paced narrative, none of the

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<sup>192</sup> STEADMAN, J. *Aliens, Robots & Virtual Reality Idols in the Science Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft, Isaac Asimov and William Gibson*. 2020. p. 33-34.

subtlety that Lovecraft was capable of, and overwhelming evidence favouring the supernatural explanation.<sup>193</sup>

Walter lives in the room of the ancient town after learning about the legend of the Witch-House, expecting supernatural anomalies to happen. The nights are always teemed with unexplained sounds which make him sensitive, and sometimes he shakes with fear the noises would subside and allow him to hear other noises, “*which he suspected were lurking behind them*”.<sup>194</sup> Soon enough, Walter’s curiosity in the irregular walls and ceiling increased, and he finds himself “*staring more and more intently at the corner where [...] the ceiling met the wall*”.<sup>195</sup> Walter suffers with fever, unexplainable dreams, fears mostly the human-rat Brown Jenkins, and fails two subjects in the semester. Walter experiences sleepwalking according to his fellow lodgers, who hear the creaking of the floor and shod feet at night, interacts with the witch and Brown Jenkin in his dreams and spends hours following a mysterious pull, which comes from the sky. He believes his sleepwalking after waking up with rat bites, which did not happen in his bed, and asks Elwood for help to stop the sleepwalking while the superstitious talks of the neighbours continue. Sleeping in Elwood’s room does not help, and Walter wakes up in his own room full of footprints and with marks on his throat. When a baby disappears, Walter and Elwood could not doubt crystallization of “*phantasm of nightmare and the realities of the objectives world*”.<sup>196</sup> On Walpurgis Night, Walter stops the scarification of the baby, kills the witch, and wakes up being deaf and bitten only to be killed by a giant rat later that day. Walter’s dreams and the room circumstances have never been explained, and the gossip of the town diminished.

Just like Delapore from “*The Rats in the Walls*”, Walter’s interest in the room and superstitions of the neighbours cause his *sleeping problems, compulsive behaviour*, and triggering of *schizophrenia*. From a superstitious loom-fixer, Walter finds out about the details of the Walpurgis Night, the violet glow indicating that the witch and Brown Jenkin

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<sup>193</sup> LIVESEY, T.R. *Dispatches from the Providence Observatory: Astronomical Motifs and Sources in the Writings of H.P. Lovecraft*. 2008. [online]. [cit. 3.10.2022].

<sup>194</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 1314.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1317.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1339.

are on the hunt, and he even receives a crucifix for protection. After each occasion, the heard rumours come true in forms of Walter's dreams or actions, indicating that Walter would not experience these events if he did not know about them in the first place. Walter read about Keziah Mason's trial where she had claimed how certain curves could point out directions leading through the walls to travel to other space beyond, and he knew he wanted to rent the room which showed an insight into mathematic depts since he will study mathematics himself. While tracing other information, Walter connects mathematics with the legends of magic when reading forbidden books (*"Necronomicon"; "Unaussprechlichen Kulten"*) and becomes obsessed with the room. During Walpurgis Night, hell's evil and the Satan's slaves roam the earth, and *"a child or two would probably be missing"* which foreshadows the final events of the story where the baby gets kidnapped.<sup>197</sup> At first, Walter dreams of objects, colours, and sounds, which changes into dreams only about the witch and Brown Jenkin after spending months in the town and hearing that *"Keziah and Brown Jenkin had not been near anyone's room [...] they must be up to something"*.<sup>198</sup> The same night Walter learns the violet glow from his dreams represent danger, the witch and Brown Jenkin mock him in the dream with intensified violet light. Walter is pushed to obtain the crucifix from a pastor but leaves it on a dresser due to naïve reports of seeing Brown Jenkin, however he manages to have it on himself to kill the witch with it during the Walpurgis Night after listening to the constant fear of neighbours (*"a very bad time of year for Arkham, the young gentleman had better be sure to wear the crucifix"*).<sup>199</sup>

Walter's fascination with the room, mathematics, and his obligations to the university lead to meningitis accompanied by fever and bad dreams. Walter does not report his problems to the doctor as he knows he would be ordered to the college infirmary *"when every moment was needed for cramming"* and exploration of Keziah's claims during the trial since *"he was so close to great results in his equations"*.<sup>200</sup> Eventually, Walter develops sleepwalking, which occurs within the first hours of falling asleep, and people usually do not have any recollection of doing so. Some of the common causes of

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<sup>197</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 1322.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1323.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1338.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1320, 1323.

sleepwalking include illnesses and fevers, sleep deprivation, and other sleep disorders. There are certain mental health conditions that may increase a person's risk of experiencing sleepwalking such as depression, compulsive disorders, or schizophrenia. Some adult sleepwalkers exhibit violent behaviour which result in either injury to themselves or others.<sup>201</sup> Walter's illness and sleep deprivation because of the university studies and the research of other dimensions contribute to the development of sleepwalking, which leads to his violent behaviour masked behind the actions of the witch and Brown Jenkin, and to signs of schizophrenia. Walter walks around the room, turns on the lights (violet gloom), screams due to hallucinations and nightmares, or strolls around the town. His obsession with the witch's room and its secrets indicates compulsive behaviour, during which Walter studies every spot where the paper had peeled for traces of cryptic designs (*"not everything of the monstrous past might have utterly perished"*), stares at the walls while neglecting the studies, and an unknown attraction pulls him in nonsensical directions. However, *"that the influence of the old house was unwholesome he could not deny but the traces of his early morbid interest still held him there"*.<sup>202</sup> Walter engages in compulsive behaviour to alleviate the anxiety brought on by not particularly rewarding information coming from his interest yet he cannot stop performing such actions in order to find the secrets.

Walter's imagery of the old witch and Brown Jenkin can be explained by an old woman *"he had twice encountered in the dark tangle of the lanes"*, and *"an overgrown rat darting across the shadowed mouth of a neighbouring alley"*.<sup>203</sup> Walter seems to struggle with a paranoid, or undifferentiated schizophrenia since he experiences hallucinations and delusions coming from the belief of the witch and Brown Jenkin, constant fear, and sleep deprivation, which can cause the symptoms of schizophrenia to increase and trigger hallucinations. In combination with sleepwalking leading to his memory problems, Walter senses *"a growing feeling that somebody was constantly persuading him to do something terrible"*, and he walks around the town to kidnap the baby during the Walpurgis Night, and probably kills it while his brain explains such events as dreams

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<sup>201</sup> WISNER, W. *What Is the Connection Between Sleepwalking and Mental Health?* 2022. [online]. [cit. 3.10.2022].

<sup>202</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 1316, 1320.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

and the actions of the witch and Brown Jenkin.<sup>204</sup> The inhabitants of the Arkham swear they saw a group of three, however, witnesses were either drunk or scared of the Walpurgis Night (*“children had been taken that way every year”; “Joe was whining unintelligible prayers”*).<sup>205</sup> Walter’s hallucinations consist of not only the witch and Brown Jenkin (*“he saw little face in the rat-hole [...] resemblance to old Keziah’s”*) but also sounds *“from regions beyond life”*, noises other than rat-scratching whose *“rhythm did not correspond to anything on earth.”*<sup>206</sup>

Walter became the victim of the town’s superstitious beliefs and his overwhelming interests, which resulted in his neglecting everyday activities, sleeping problems and hallucinations. Geometry and quantum physics are enough to tire any brain and when one mixes them with folklore and strange Gothic tales hinting at multi-dimensional reality, *“one can hardly expect to be wholly free from mental tension.”*<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> LOVECRAFT, H.P. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Ultimate Collection*. 2009. p. 1323.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1326, 1329.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1317, 1323, 1340.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1314.

## 5 Literary analysis of Stephen King's stories

### 5.1 The Boogeyman

#### 5.1.1 Plot

Lester Billings visited a psychiatrist Harper to explain the murders of his three children during the past several years while looking frightened at the doctor's closet during the session. Lester married Rita when she was expecting their first child Danny and soon became pregnant again with Shirl. Danny cried everytime he went to sleep and repeated "*light*" over and over again, but Lester forbade Rita to buy a nightlight. After Danny pointed at the closet and cried out "*Boogeyman*", Lester accused Rita of teaching him such words and threatened to hit her. Danny died that night with bloody bruises all around the body, and the autopsy closed the case as an infant death syndrome. Lester demanded Rita to move Shirl to Danny's room even when he caught a shadow slithering into the closet one night. Eventually, Shirl choked on her tongue from the brain convulsion, and Rita lived a lifeless life for months.

Rita's doctor sold her an IUD, and she became pregnant again after a year, which Lester did not believe it was an accident. At first, Lester did not want anything to do with a new-born Andy but warmed up to him as Andy was the only one of the children that looked like his father. The family moved to a different town, and Lester kept his boots in the hall because he did not like to open the closet anymore as he could hear squishy noises as if something was moving around in there. Rita left Lester and Andy alone as she had to take care of her mother after a car accident. Andy slept in parent's bedroom, but Lester moved him to the next room once he found broken mirrors, muddy footprint coming from the closet, and heard more sounds. The same night, Lester witnessed the Boogeyman shaking Andy and breaking his neck. He run away to a night bar and called the police in the morning.

A psychiatrist Harper stopped the session and offered Lester to arrange more sessions with a nurse. Lester added to the story that he lied to the police and told them that Andy fell from a crib, but Rita knew the truth. He came out of the office only to find the

reception empty and after coming back to the doctor's, he saw an open closet and the Boogeyman holding the mask of Doctor Harper's face.

### 5.1.2 Analysis

The *bogeyman* is a mystical malevolent creature whose impact can be seen around the world. The first mention of the creature dates to 1500's, when the bogeyman was originally a reference for otherwise light-hearted hobgoblins yet some of them were said to frighten a person to death. Hundreds of names for the bogeyman exist around the world (*El Coco, Butzemann, polednice, Awd Goggie etc.*) though descriptions share similarities. The bogeyman comes after naughty children at night with a wide range of punishments it can choose from, but some bogeymen do not discriminate the age of a target and simply attack all guilty. Many bogeymen have long claws, terrifying eyes, horns, and skeleton-like figures while others form into humanoids, witches, and shape-shifting creatures. Among famous bogeymen belong Pennywise ("*It*"), Freddy Krueger ("*A Nightmare on Elm Street*"), Michael Myers ("*Halloween*"), or The Beldam ("*Coraline*").<sup>208 209</sup>

Lester wishes to go to jail so his troubles would be over since he would see into all the rooms in the jail, and there are no closets. The troubles begin when Lester works endlessly in a warehouse, and Danny starts crying when Rita puts him to bed, which Lester took into his hands and would give Danny a whack if he did not stop. After Danny's death, Lester does not suspect it was the Boogeyman but notices the closet door is open. Lester demands to move Shirl to Danny's room as he does not want to overprotect her. Once she cries in fear like Danny did, Lester thinks about moving her into the main bedroom for the night but does not want to seem weak in front of Rita and admit the truth about the Boogeyman. After Shirl's death, Rita wishes for another child, but Lester demands more free time without children to spend together. Lester changes his job, falls in love with their new-born Andy, buys gifts, and the family moves into a new house. Eventually, Lester feels the house has changed and believes the dark past has returned

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<sup>208</sup> PROF. GELLER. *Bogeyman*. 2018. [online]. [cit. 7.10.2022].

<sup>209</sup> RATHGEB, DOUGLAS. *Bogeyman from the ID: Nightmare and Reality in Halloween and A Nightmare on ELM Street*. 1991. p. 36-43.

and wants them dead. One night, Lester moves Andy to his room despite knowing the Boogeyman will come for him. Once Lester calms down, he calls the police but does not tell them about the Boogeyman. He meets him again when he leaves the doctor's office.

Lester shows the signs of *schizophrenia* with a possibility of *dissociative identity disorder*, however, the chances of developing both disorders at once are low, or one of the disorders is not officially diagnosed. Schizophrenia and dissociative identity disorder may have common symptoms, which include visual and auditory hallucinations, delusions, memory issues and dissociation yet people with schizophrenia are less likely to experience dissociative symptoms unless they encounter trauma. People living with schizophrenia are more at risk of dangerous behaviour because of the influence of the hallucinations and delusions on their thinking and while being poorly.<sup>210</sup> In the story, Lester expresses his dissatisfaction of having children and his strict view on upbringing ("*children tie a man down*"; "*you can't get overprotective, you make a kid a cripple that way*"; "*I'd give him a whack*").<sup>211</sup> He wants Rita "*to do what he tells her [...] a wife should follow her husband*" and feels betrayed by her when discussing children ("*when they're that little you don't get so attached to them*"; "*Andy was an accident [...] I think that it was more than that.*").<sup>212</sup> Serious mental issues lead Lester to contribute to the deaths of his children together with contributing factors of the pressure of early fatherhood, and memories and scars from his childhood. Lester remembers how the overprotectiveness of his mother caused his phobias in the adulthood ("*When I was a kid my mum used to take me to the beach and then scream herself hoarse [...] I can't even go near the water now*") and "*If a kid doesn't get over being afraid of the dark, he never gets over it*".<sup>213</sup> Lester begins to put children into the bed himself without Rita's presence, during which he might try to teach his children independence and confront their fears of the dark by pretending to be the monster in the closet without remembering it since schizophrenia causes quite substantial memory deficits. Scaring the children would explain the rare causes of deaths of Danny and Shirl as they could

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<sup>210</sup> ELMER, J. *Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) vs. Schizophrenia*. Medically reviewed by Alex Klein, PsyD in June 2021. [online]. [cit. 7.10.2022].

<sup>211</sup> KING, S. *Night Shift*. 1979. p. 89, 90, 91.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89, 94.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90, 91.



have died due to intense fear (*"You can scare a kid into convulsions."*).<sup>214</sup> Lester also experiences visual and auditory hallucinations concerning the closet (*"something slithered back in the shadows by the closet"; "something black and green and wet was moving around"*), paranoid delusions (*"what if it's in there all crouched down and ready to spring the second I open the door"; "it found us, it's back"*), disorganized speech and behaviour (*"Billing's voice had become a high treble, like a child's [...] then his voice clicked back into an adult range."; the same cool, dead voice"; "he smiled at nothing"*), and he does not believe he has the condition (*"I'm not one of your freaks strutting around and pretending to be Napoleon"; "I know what you think, just another goofy for you casebook"*).<sup>215</sup> Once the children disappear from his life, Lester feels happier and eventually likes his son Andy, however, when he takes care of him alone, the pressure of fatherhood comes back and ends with the murder of Andy followed by Lester's lies to the police. During the therapy session, Lester stares at the closet uneasily and experiences the last hallucination in the story (*"the closet door was open [...] the boogeyman shambled out"*).<sup>216</sup> The physical appearances of the Boogeyman in the short story correspond to the image of the monster Lester remembers reading about in a comic book as a child (*"It made a squishy noise [...] all rotted, with long claws."*).<sup>217</sup>

The short story does not present any clear evidence of the dissociative identity disorder, most importantly its cause – childhood trauma. Lester mentions his mother only in terms of overprotectiveness, which affects upbringing of his own children, and intimate conversations with Lester she was not afraid of (*"told me diseases you can get if you went to a prostitute [...] how penis has just a little tiny sore on it one day and the next day it's rotting off"*).<sup>218</sup> Lester does not mention memory problems yet people with the disorder may not realize memory gaps and remember important events if they occurred while an alter was present. Lester recalls the unexplainable need to move children into their rooms despite expecting danger, thinks about the death eyes of his children expressing *"Daddy, you let it get me, you killed me"* or *"lying on the floor and staring at*

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<sup>214</sup> KING, S. *Night Shift*. 1979. p. 93.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89, 92, 95, 96, 97.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94.

*me, accusing me*”, and inappropriately smiles during the therapy session due to his alter coming out when talking about the children’s deaths.<sup>219</sup>

King drew attention to the fact that the protagonist encountered a supernatural creature from his childhood world, yet the protagonist could have been pulled into the delusion simply because of wide imagination and feelings of guilt stemming from natural deaths of his children, whose conditions were more common at the time of writing than now.

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<sup>219</sup> KING, S. *Night Shift*. 1979. p. 93, 97.

## 5.2 Secret Window, Secret Garden

### 5.2.1 Plot

John Shooter showed up at the house of a writer Mort Rainey and accused him of plagiarizing a subject of his novel. Mort tossed a manuscript "*Secret Window, Secret Garden*" in the kitchen wastebasket and went writing his next story. Next day, the cleaning lady took the manuscript out of the wastebasket, and Mort read few first lines. He immediately compared "*Secret Window, Secret Garden*" with his short story "*Sowing Season*" and understood they varied in style in some places, but they were the same, word for word. When Mort's ex-wife Amy phoned him, he told her about Shooter, and she suggested to call the town constable. On the way to an estate agent to sell his farm, Shooter had randomly picked up Mort's collection of short stories in the store and later found his tale. Mort informed Shooter the "*Sowing Season*" came out in a magazine two years prior to "*Secret Window, Secret Garden*", and Shooter gave him three days to get hold of the magazine with the short story inside. While Mort was sleeping, Shooter nailed Mort's cat to the roof of a shed and burned down Amy's house which started in Mort's office and contained the magazine with "*Sowing Season*".

Mort called the caretaker of his house Greg to help him find the Shooter and requested to talk with him together with Greg after he finds him. He also informed Greg that the old man Tom was driving nearby when Mort talked with Shooter. Meanwhile, a literary agent Herb promised Mort to obtain the magazine from archives of the publisher. Mort met with Amy and her boyfriend Ted by the burned house, and Amy told a detective about John Shooter. Mort lied to him about Shooter's car and visual appearance and noticed his web of lies as he told different stories about Shooter to everyone he talked with. While looking at the house, Mort remembered Amy's room with a secret window to a secret garden but questioned his memory. Mort finally understood their real loss at the meeting with an insurance investigator Fred, where they signed a list of insurable property. When saying goodbye to Amy and Ted, Mort asked jokingly asked if he was born in Mississippi (Shooter's car had a licence number of Mississippi), but Ted replied with a town of Shooter's Knob. At home, Mort imagined Shooter standing in the bath with a hammer in his hands. Mort burst into the bathroom with a fire poker, saw Shooter swinging the hammer, and realized he broke a mirror at the last minute. In the evening,

Shooter called him to make fun of him attacking the mirror and a picture of the burned house in a newspaper. Shooter demanded Mort to write a short story with Shooter's name on it and threatened to hurt Amy if Mort does not fulfil the order.

The literary agent Herb informed Mort that the copy of the magazine has been sent, but Mort convinced him to ask the archives for the original. In the next call with Greg, he announced to Mort that Tom had not seen Mort accompanied with Shooter. The men agreed to meet Tom together since Mort suspected that Shooter had threaten Tom to not say anything. They found the note on the door saying Tom is sleeping and planned to talk with him the next morning. The next day, Mort woke up with pain in his body which he explained as him breaking down the door of the bathroom. He saw the car keys on the kitchen counter instead in a box and Shooter's black hat lying on the porch. When Mort arrived at the parish office where Tom has been working as a labourer, he found a workman Sonny who told him that Tom called in sick. Soon, Shooter called him to go to the place they had talked earlier where Mort found both dead Greg and Tom killed by Mort's tools – a screwdriver and a hammer on which's handle was Mort's surname. When Shooter called again, Mort told him about the magazine which will be at the post office the next morning. If the magazine contained the story, Shooter would confess his crimes to the police; if not, he would kill more people in Mort's life. Mort dreamed about his college classmate John Kintner, which reminded him of Kintner's short story from the class called "*Crowfoot Mile*". Mort was jealous of John's writing abilities and after he had received a few rejection letters, he had submitted John's story as his own.

When Mort finally received a package with the magazine, he noticed that it has been opened and seventeen pages have been cut out. In his office, Mort found a broken computer on the floor, Shooter's manuscript on the keyboard, and Mort's old typewriter on the desk. Mort realized Shooter does not exist and it was him who killed Tom and Greg. He heard Amy's car in the driveway and hoped she would drive away. Amy arrived at the house alone, because she thought that Ted's presence would set off Mort to commit suicide as she expected such an act from the way Mort sounded on the phone. Mort's house was full of garbage, spilled food, manuscripts on the floor, and walls and

furniture with *Shooter* written and carved on them. Amy saw Mort standing in the office with the old black hat he had worn when Amy had needed help with the garden. Mort spoke with Shooter's voice, told Amy that Mort is dead, and attacked her with scissors and the screwdriver. Outside the house, Mort was shot dead by Fred. Three months later, Amy and Ted visited Fred in New York to share what they knew about the circumstances of the last months.

The day of the house fire, Amy let the doors of the house unlocked since she had grown up in a small town where unlocked doors are a common village habit. The insurance investigators found a large chunk of champagne bottle which was used for the Molotov cocktail in the Mort's office. The bottle came from family's wine room that was always locked and only Mort and Amy possessed the key. The investigator did not know the motive of the crime as both Mort and Amy lived a financially comfortable life. However, the fingerprints on the bottle belonged to Mort, but the laboratory tests showed that the fingerprints were made before the bottle ended up in fire. The day Amy talked with Fred about the suspicious fire, Mort kept talking over the phone about the secret garden where he left something. Fred followed Amy to Mort's house and managed to save her. When Amy and Tom drove down to clean the Mort's house, they met Sonny, who informed them that Tom had probably seen Shooter with Mort but did not want to share the information to not be considered mentally ill since he could see right through Shooter like he was a ghost. Eventually, Amy found a paper with a message from Shooter coming back to Mississippi.

### 5.2.2 Analysis

*"Secret Window, Secret Garden"* stands as one of the main examples of King inserting himself into characters who write for a living and are modified versions of the author himself. King has been accused of unfounded plagiarism on number of occasions. In 1991, Erik Keene broke into the Kings' house with a bomb where he found King's wife Tabby and claimed that King stole the plot for *"Misery"* from Keene's aunt.<sup>220</sup> In 1990, Annie Hilter wanted to take King to court because she claimed he had plagiarized her

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<sup>220</sup> ROGAK, L. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. 2010. p. 189.

books, and in 2005, she sued King for invasion of privacy, claiming that Annie Wilkes from *“Misery”* was based on her. Most recent accusation took place in 2017, when Benjamin DuBay sued King and *“Dark Tower”* publisher for ripping of the character of a comic book series created by DuBay’s uncle in 1976.<sup>221</sup>

Mort experiences a divorce as he witnessed Amy cheating in a motel, and she decided to be with Ted instead. After living in a lodge for six months, John Shooter accuses him of plagiarism, yet Mort could always remember where he had been when certain ideas came to him, however, he knows he cannot give Shooter the solid proof of the origin of his short story. In both stories, a man killed his wife who was a cold woman who only cared about her garden, the man buried her in the garden and eventually went crazy and was discovered by the police. His thoughts suggest he could have forgotten stealing the story but Mort reflects that *“a person’s mind certainly get up to some weird ideas every now and then”*.<sup>222</sup> After coming home from the city, Mort believes that Shooter is hiding in the house and then hears a slight shuffle in the bathroom upstairs. He finds out *“the madman was him”*, even draws his lips *“into the grimace he had imagined on Shooter’s face”* and cannot recognize his voice as it evokes the image of *“listening to himself on tape for the first time”*.<sup>223</sup> Mort suspects that something bad happened after he finds his car parked in the driveway and Shooter’s hat on the doorstep. When he cannot get hold of Greg and Tom, he panics that Shooter killed both. Eventually, Mort realizes the origin of John Shooter’s name – the man Mort stole the short story from, and the man who stole Amy – and he takes over his body to kill Amy. Mort Rainey struggles with *dissociative identity disorder* to the point of recognizing the illness himself.

An individual usually develops the disorder by traumatic experience from childhood; however, the dissociative identity disorder can also represent a psychological defence against any unbearable trauma as a form of escapism. Due to a traumatic experience, the brain escapes the reality by repressing the unpleasant memories because the

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<sup>221</sup> BYRNE, R. *The times Stephen King has been accused of plagiarism*. 2022. [online]. [cit. 8.10.2022].

<sup>222</sup> KING, S. *Four Past Midnight*. 1990. p. 315.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.* p. 334.

individual cannot handle it anymore. After the formation of the alters, the switch usually happens when the host needs help in handling the reality and flashbacks, or to achieve something. An alter fights against the trauma and allows the person to perform actions without feeling guilty afterwards due to amnesia.<sup>224</sup> Mort catches Amy having an affair which leads to his move out of the city, bad eating habits, constant sleep, difficulty writing stories, and thinking of a new one about a man who finds out his wife is cheating on him. Morty experiences flashbacks of finding Amy and Ted in the motel and recalls himself that *“he might have said something about killing them both.”*<sup>225</sup> Mort cannot talk with Amy without irritation and *“ugly and mean-spirited thought [...] he didn’t seem to be able to help it”* as any conversation brings forward the hurtful memories of the past.<sup>226</sup> Mort’s mind creates John Shooter acting on rage and jealousy Mort is trying to suppress and to force Mort to admit stealing the story which’s memory he repressed already (*“Plagiarism was outright theft. And he had never done it in his life, never.”*).<sup>227</sup> Mort welcomes his presence initially as he was full of *“an unfocused rage for months and it was good to finally have a donkey to pin this rotten tail on.”*<sup>228</sup> He notices he lies about Shooter’s details to everyone, yet Mort continues hiding the truth in order to deal with Shooter himself since the unconscious cannot risk the consequences of revealing the alter to him and his closed ones. Shooter expresses close relationship with Mort and knowledge of his life with Amy (*“I know you, Mr. Rainey, that’s what matters.”*; *“The good I want are inside your head.”*), and for Mort *“it was harder to believe all of this wasn’t tied together in some strange, supernatural fashion”*.<sup>229</sup>

The short story does not show typical switches between the host and the alter as Mort expresses *“the disorienting sense of being outside yourself, [...] just an observer looking through dual TV cameras with blurry lenses”* while seeing and speaking with Shooter in person.<sup>230</sup> The alter appears when Mort thinks about him (*“he was in the house now, looking around”*; *“he was somehow not surprised to see the lean figure of John Shooter”*),

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<sup>224</sup> BARLOW, D. (ed.). *Abnormal Psychology: An Integrative Approach*. 2016. p. 197-210.

<sup>225</sup> KING, S. *Four Past Midnight*. 1990. p. 317.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* p. 267.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* p. 341.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* p. 282.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.* p. 262, 337, 323.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* p. 276.

after falling asleep, and when stopping Mort from receiving the magazine, however, the alter also uses its position to terrorize Amy by burning down the house or attempting the murder in order to punish Amy for cheating and satisfy Mort's unconscious desires (*"She had stolen his love and a woman who would steal your love when your love was really all you had to give was not much of a woman"; "It was Shooter who hated her [...] who meant to kill her and then bury her down by the lake"*).<sup>231</sup> After months of a dull life, Shooter makes Mort's life interesting again by bringing forward the suppressed memories of stealing the short story through the accusation of plagiarism of Shooter's story. *"He felt guilty because writing stories had always felt a little bit like stealing. [...] John Shooter just happened to be the first person to show up on his doorstep, [...] he had been expecting something like that for years."*<sup>232</sup> In university, Mort came into the creative writing class confidently expecting the success, because it had never been any other way with him, however, John Kintner showed talent. Mort kept his short story, submitted it under his name without telling anybody, waited *"sick with terror"* that he will get caught and *"quite calm and rationally"* thought about suicide.<sup>233</sup> Eventually, he got away with it and forgot about the incident which begins haunting his unconscious for many years.

Any form of escapism serves as a great defence mechanism to help humans in coping with their problems, however, the repression of thoughts and behaviour as a response towards a traumatic experience could result in issue that can be dangerous if not diagnosed. Acknowledgement and understanding of the disorder help the individual to co-live with other personalities and cope with any problems to live emotionally and mentally healthy life.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> KING, S. *Four Past Midnight*. 1990. p. 331, 281, 388.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.* p. 275.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.* p. 378.

<sup>234</sup> SANDJAYA, C., LIMANTA, L.S. *Mort Rainey's Split Personality in Secret Window*. [online]. [cit. 22.10.2022].



### 5.3. Stationary Bike

#### 5.3.1 *Plot*

Richard Sifkitz finally visited Doctor Brady for the medical examination where they found the high level of cholesterol due to Richard's fast-food consumption six times a week. The doctor compared human's metabolism to a work crew, how 'they' are not as sufficient as they were when Richard was younger and warned Richard of 'them' not coming to work anymore in the future. Richard worked as a freelance painter for advertising agencies and on his way home he got an idea for a painting of four workmen at a side of a country road. Richard spent the next days fantasizing about lives of the painted men (Berkowitz, Whelan, Carlos, Freddy), Doctor Brady's monolog, and even bought a stationary bike. Richard needed a goal for the exercise, so he imagined the road on the painting to be the one he rides on the bike. He bought a roadmap to investigate why the men work so hard to keep the road clean and where it goes. Richard hung a map of the United States on the wall and imagined biking to a town more than three hundred kilometres away near Canadian borders.

Later, Richard ordered salads instead of hamburgers, drank vegetable juices, painted for agencies, worked on the painting of road, and his cholesterol plummeted to even lower points than Doctor Brady's. However, Richard became obsessed with the stationary bike to the point he could not stop riding it even after two hours despite setting an alarm clock. After seeing a television program about a hypnosis, he realized the stationary bike leads him to an autohypnosis and fantasy where he is not in the basement but on the road. At night, Richard experienced a realistic dream where he emerged into Carlos' body and brain full of memories, only to commit suicide with a shotgun. When Richard woke up, he painted a picture of Carlos' garage with a hidden dead body. For a week, he did not use the bike but could not sleep and was behind on his latest project for the agency. He started riding again but felt that somebody was watching him, and the picture changed the small elements of itself.

Richard changed the map of the United States into the Canadian one and added non-existing roads and curves. He caught himself looking back over the shoulder and seeing the road instead of the basement. Richard tried dismantling the stationary bike but

allowed himself one last ride. This time, he was chased by the Freddy's truck and soon, he fell off the bike on the driver's door. The men dismantled the bike, accused him of abusing them at work and destroying their lives by stopping their income due to Richard not eating unhealthy food anymore. Richard promised to get better and wished for the men's cap. Weeks later, Richard relaxed in his diet, stopped riding a bike, and obtained a package with a baseball cap inside.

### 5.3.2 Analysis

King has always seen a potential nightmare in even most mundane experiences and objects, for instance a lawnmower in *"The Lawnmower Man"*, alive trucks in *"Trucks"*, a typewriter affecting a reality in *"Word Processor of Gods"*, a drain in bathroom sink in *"The Moving Finger"*, danger of new technologies like a Kindle in *"Ur"*, teeth in *"Chatterly Teeth"* and many more. In case of *"Stationary Bike"*, the idea came out of his hate relationship not just with stationary bikes but with every treadmill he ever trudged, and he explores the idea of *"if you've ever ridden one of those things, you know how bitterly boring they can be"*.<sup>235</sup>

Richard's doctor finds the high number of cholesterol in his body, yet the body weight is not so bad considering what Richard consumes. Richard continues to eat as he did in teenage years and to this point, the metabolism has kept up with him, however, the doctor warns Richard if he does not make changes, the pace of gaining weight will speed up since the metabolic working crew is not getting any younger (*"They say stuff like, 'Isn't he ever gonna slow down? [...] does he care about us anyway? He's on top, ain't he?"*).<sup>236</sup> On the bus ride home, he sees various work-crews and realizes a picture in his mind with four workmen and their backstory. Richard buys a stationary bike but feels bored during an exercise in a basement and knows that things would improve once he starts painting a new picture here. Richard's motivation becomes the imagination of the road where he rides the bike which *"felt like the real deal and he didn't have to tell anyone what he was up to, did he?"*.<sup>237</sup> Eventually, the work-crew has been set aside and

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<sup>235</sup> KING, S. *Just After Sunset*. 2008. p. 307.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.* p. 107.

covered with a sheet, and Richard focuses on the image of the road for his “travels”. Richards sets an alarm clock to quit riding on time but finds himself falling asleep while riding the stationary bike with high speed. The painting never changes unless he is riding, but Richard needs to be aware of its underlying sameness as “*a way of assuring himself this was something plugged into his subconscious that he could unplug whenever he wanted*”.<sup>238</sup> After he dreams about the workman with a shotgun, Richard stops riding the bike for a week to avoid lunacy. The painting turns into dark colours and Richard knows the rest of the crew is looking for him for revenge the man who committed suicide. Once they catch him, Richard feels angry and says he created workmen in his imagination and named them after people he knows. The men demand that Richard would not “*kill the job*” and “*let the job die on its own*”.<sup>239</sup> Richard slows down in his life, believes he will only live once and that he should enjoy every bit of it. Despite supernatural explanation, Richard’s behaviour may be explained by *schizoaffective disorder* with psychotic and manic symptoms, *dissociation*, *maladaptive daydreaming*, and *compulsive behaviour*.

Schizoaffective disorder is closely related to both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder and shares symptoms with both disorders. Although the exact causes of the disorder are not known, one major cause seems to be stress which can not only trigger initial episodes of the disorder but also subsequent episodes of the illness. An individual with abnormal manic behaviour gets triggered by a major life change and stimulating environment and will spend a great time and energy working on projects. The individual experiences high level of energy, euphoria, inflated self-esteem, or obsession with an activity among psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, or paranoia.<sup>240</sup> Richard endures two life changing moment - Richard’s wife dies years prior to the short story, which clearly worsened his eating habits, and he drastically changes his lifestyle after a warning from the doctor about future health problems. Richard spends most of his time in the basement, which he modifies to refresh the panting activity and the exercise, while he keeps thinking about the metabolic working crew, “*ordinary joes who were really trying*

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<sup>238</sup> KING, S. *Just After Sunset*. 2008. p. 112.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.* p. 125.

<sup>240</sup> DANIEL, M. *Schizoaffective Disorder Simplified*. 2011. p. 13-20.

*their best to do their job but getting no help from him*".<sup>241</sup> Over the day, Richard works on painting assignments but cannot wait to ride the bike for hours despite the alarm clock and falling asleep during the process (*"The thing's aggressive bray was just enough to...well...wake him up."*).<sup>242</sup> Richard does not feel tired, *"he felt the way people did before setting out on a trip"*, deepens his obsession by buying maps of the routes and altering the painting from time to time (*"by then his workouts had gotten odd"*), and his self-esteem increases (*"even a figment of one's imagination could have its pride"*).<sup>243</sup> Eventually, Richard's *"sense of being followed grew stronger with every ride, [...] he was pedalling faster, looking over his shoulder often"*.<sup>244</sup> At first, Richard imagines the lives and voices of the working crew as a part of the painting process (*"What did you do today, boys? Put in a couple of culverts, a voice whispered. Then we knocked off early."*), but soon enough, Richard struggles with paranoid delusion and hallucinations concerning the painting – changed details, signs on the road, animals, sounds of the truck, conversation with workmen – together with a realistic nightmare of the workman's suicide, who ended his life due to Richard's healthy lifestyle.<sup>245</sup>

In terms of dissociation, Richard does not mention forgetfulness or memory gaps, yet he gets absorbed in a fantasy world that seems real (*"he was getting trouble getting back now, [...] the alarm sounded distant and strangely mellow"*; *"he didn't see the basement when he looked back"*<sup>246</sup>), hears voices, and feels little to no pain.<sup>247</sup> Most people daydream now and then, but the sense of disconnect from the world around is often a lot more complicated. Daydreaming can evolve into an extreme behaviour, up to the point where it turns into a clinically significant condition. Individuals with maladaptive daydreaming feel the need to engage in vivid imagery with their own characters and detailed features that may last for hours on the end and leads to distress as it hinders with social and work performance. Other conditions alongside maladaptive daydreaming include compulsive disorders, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, or

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<sup>241</sup> KING, S. *Just After Sunset*. 2008. p. 105.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* p. 110.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108, 110, 126.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.* p. 109.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* p. 118.

<sup>247</sup> WIGINTON, K. *What Is Dissociation?* Medically revied by Jennifer Casarella, MD in June 2021. [online]. [cit. 13.10.2022].

psychosis.<sup>248</sup> Richard's daydreaming is triggered by doctor's likening metabolism to a work crew, which leads to a creation of a painting with Richard's complex detailed inner world (*"He fantasized quite a lot about them."*; *"I cared about those guys and the road [...] why should they work so hard to keep it clean? Where did it go?"*) and a desire to continue daydreaming to find more.<sup>249</sup> Richard stays in the other world for lengthy periods with slight awareness that fantasy world is different from reality, and once he stops engaging in such behaviour, he fails his job duties (*"he was behind on his latest project"*; *"he'd had a call from both his agent and the guy in charge the Fritos account at the ad agency"*), and cannot sleep properly.<sup>250</sup> One night, Richard comes across a program about hypnosis which states that people use hypnosis when reading novels, watching movies, enter a work-oriented frame of mind, or to get to sleep at night. Richard concludes he spend his daily workout in a state of light to medium autohypnosis during which his attention is focused on riding on the roads in the painting while other thoughts and emotions drift into consciousness. Richard's obsessive behaviour comes mainly from the manic and daydreaming episodes, yet his persistence in exercising also indicates compulsive exercise or exercise addiction. Even if tired, he seems anxious when missing a workout, he loses a significant amount of weight, and abandons his social life and responsibilities.<sup>251</sup>

Overall, Richard's stress, obsessive lifestyle, imagination, daydreaming and social isolation all contribute to his poor mental health yet followed by Richard's realization of his psychotic problems (*"I created you out of memories"*; *"you have to stop this [...]: Tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow"*; *"This was just a little too close to lunacy."*), indicating the possibility of future treatment and recovery since *"maybe you should allow yourself a little bit of everything"*.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> SOFFER-DUDEK, N., SOMER, E. *Trapped in a Daydream: Daily Elevations in Maladaptive Daydreaming Are Associated With Daily Psychopathological Symptoms*. 2018.

<sup>249</sup> KING, S. *Just After Sunset*. 2008. p. 106, 108.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid* p. 115.

<sup>251</sup> LICHTENSTEIN, M., HINZE, C., EMBORG, B., THOMSEN, F., HEMMINGSEN, S. *Compulsive exercise: links, risks and challenges face*. 2017. [online]. [cit. 13.10.2022].

<sup>252</sup> KING, S. *Just After Sunset*. 2008. p. 115, 116, 123, 127.

## 5.4 Rat

### 5.4.1 Plot

The writer of short stories and a teacher Drew Larson got an idea for a Western novel and decided to write it in his father's log cabin despite displeasure of his wife Lucy and children. Drew promised Lucy to call her every evening and to return home if he struggled with the writing. In a shop near the cabin, a shop assistant Roy informed Drew that the caretaker of their cabin Old Bill committed suicide in the dooryard of the cabin. The log cabin was situated on the Shithouse Road where Drew slowed the car to two miles an hour, waddled across washouts, and moved fallen trees of the road. The next day, he performed his preparation-for-writing ritual – make a coffee, create a new Word document on a laptop, format it and choose a font – and lost himself in writing.

After four days, Drew caught a cold and bought a remedy by Dr King. Roy's daughter told Drew that her father battles with pneumonia, which made Drew uneasy since he had shaken Roy's hand after it had held a bandana full of snot. The daughter also warned Drew about an upcoming storm coming from the Arctic Circle and how he would get stuck in the cabin. Back in the cabin, Drew felt annoyed again by Lucy's demands to call her, and they argued about the novel and the storm. The next day, Drew watched the weather channel which cautioned inhabitants against the storm Pierre, strong wind, dropping temperatures, and sleet. He continued working on the novel but began to struggle the same way he did on the previous one. Drew thought about going back home, but the storm arrived and stopped the power supply. In the middle of the night, Drew went out to investigate the fallen tree and found a dying rat scratching on the cabin door. He planned on killing the rat but felt empathetic and brought it inside the cabin.

After waking up in the middle of the night, Drew's fever lowered, and the rat spoke to him while sitting on the manuscript of the novel. The rat knew about his struggles to find right words during writing and began the monolog he had heard during the lecture at the university about the authors producing narration while facing choices of right expressions. The rat offered to help Drew with finishing the novel under the condition that someone he cares about must die. The rat mentioned the former head of English

department Al Stamper who was dying with pancreatic cancer, and Drew agreed, taking the offer as a hypothetical question. The next day, Drew found a stuffed rat inside the spilled toy box. Days later, Drew returned home, finished the novel, and Al Stamper's health improved. In spring, a truck skidded on the ice and crashed into the Al and his wife's car, and Drew said to himself he would never write another novel again. In summer, Drew went back to the log cabin, burned the stuffed rat, and fell asleep drunk. The rat came back to him and said that Drew never mentioned Al dying specifically to cancer and without his wife.

#### 5.4.2 Analysis

King does not know where the story came from but it gave him a chance *"to write a little bit about mysteries of imagination, and how that translates to the page"*.<sup>253</sup> Nevertheless, a rat has always functioned as an apt figure for horror and the target of loathing, yet in certain cultures throughout the history, the rat is a highly charged figure what can warn and threaten or bring salvation and good fortune. In literary tradition, a rat first appeared in Aesop's fables which were reinterpreted by different cultures (rescuing elephants in *"Panchatantra"*, or befriending cows in *"Kalilah wa Dimnah"*). Mythological rats could gnaw people out of dangerous situations, portent signifying joy in Ancient Greece and Rome, or help others in India.<sup>254 255</sup>

Drew becomes preoccupied with an idea for a novel while Lucy and Al are careful about it because of the past attempts that almost cost Drew's mental health. Drew is driven forwards by an unknown desire but to Al, he speaks about completion and the excitement of exploring uncharted territory. Once he arrives at the cabin, he feels annoyed at Lucy's worrying voicemail as he has come up here to avoid distractions and doubts *"he was going mental over a book he hasn't even started to write"*.<sup>256</sup> Four days later, Drew coughs, sneezes, his ear is stuffed up and suffers fever. The upcoming storm does not scare him as the idea of the long drive home makes him tired. Drew wants to believe the growing health he feels is just a pressure of trying to choose right words

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<sup>253</sup> KING, S. *If It Bleeds*. 2020. p. 376.

<sup>254</sup> BURT, J. *Rat*. 2006.

<sup>255</sup> GIAMO, C. *Why Are Rats Always the Bad Guys?* 2017. [online]. [cit. 9.10.2022].

<sup>256</sup> KING, S. *If It Bleeds*. 2020. p. 314.

when writing but soon enough, he suffers from coughing attacks, spiking fever, and headaches. When the storm arrives, Drew thinks he could die here alone or the flames from fireplace could set the cabin on fire, and no one would save him due to instability of the Shithouse Road. Drew saves the rat from the storm, which understands his struggles with writing, and the rat offers to help him finish the novel which Drew manages fast enough. Drew drives home, crushes under the news of Al's death and swears to love his wife and children as best as he could, live the best he could, and he gladly joins the ranks of one-book writers. Overall, Drew struggled with fever, sleep hallucinations, and possible anxiety hallucinations.

A fever is a temporary rise in body temperature as a part of the body's immune response often accompanied by chills, headache, muscle aches, and general weakness. Some people may experience disorientation, strange dreams, and hallucinations which are not dangerous themselves and usually pass in a few minutes.<sup>257</sup> Drew catches the illness from the shop assistant by shaking his hand (*"the one that had been manipulating the snotrag"*), and endures headaches, sore throat, cold, fever, and difficulty of writing the novel.<sup>258</sup> Drew's irregular sleep, frequent awakenings and high fever result in sleep-related hallucinations which generally occur while falling asleep or waking up. Such episodes may appear during medical condition, medication use, anxiety, alcohol abuse, or irregular sleeping pattern, and involve visual images and senses of sound and motion.<sup>259</sup> Drew hallucinates the conversation with the rat he saved from the storm yet the stuffed toy he finds the next morning could have functioned as a false perception of the object resulting in hallucination as well. The rat represents Drew's unconscious mind since it comforts his anxiety regarding the novel and promises he will finish it eventually (*"Do you know how many half-finished novels are stuck in desk drawers"; "I'd guess it will be published. As I said, you are talented."*).<sup>260</sup> Drew has never written a novel before despite trying which resulted in burning the manuscript, the house on fire, and Drew's mental breakdown which Lucy and Al remind him to this day. Drew wants to prove

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<sup>257</sup> EL-RAHDI, A.S. *Clinical Manual of Fever in Children*. 2019. p. 1-10.

<sup>258</sup> KING, S. *If It Bleeds*. 2020. p. 308.

<sup>259</sup> WEB MD. *What Are Hypnagogic Hallucinations?* Medically revied by Dan Brennan, MD in June 2021. [online]. [cit. 20.10. 2022].

<sup>260</sup> KING, S. *If It Bleeds*. 2020. p. 349, 352.



everybody wrong yet cannot dismiss the feeling *“he was reverting to the nervous and neurotic man who’d almost burned down his house”* to the point of arguing with his wife and irritation about her phone calls.<sup>261</sup> In exchange of writing the novel, the unconscious mind demands the death of someone Drew cares about as a *“Faustian bargain”*, or a twisted fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, all fiction stories he read as a child.<sup>262</sup> Drew knows about Al’s cancer, does not feel any hope about his recovery, and agrees with the offer, but Al dies months later due to a car accident. Driven by guilt and anger, Drew burns the stuffed animal, falls asleep drunk, wakes up to another hallucination of the rat mocking him he would not finish the novel without the bargain, and ends up convincing himself *“this was just a dream”* because *“rats did not talk and rats did not grant wishes.”*<sup>263</sup>

After coming back home, Drew mishears the words during every conversation as they start turning into the word “rat” – *“I’ve got this damn rat to contend with.”*; *“I was wrong and you were rat”*; *“As of rat now all the tests are calling me cancer free.”*<sup>264</sup> He cannot stop thinking about the deal with the rat just *“as he knew part of him would keep mishearing the word ‘rat’ from time to time like a splinter in his mind instead of under his skin”*.<sup>265</sup> Mishearing information is not uncommon in life but Drew’s anxiety and guilt over the novel and Al’s death increase the chances of developing anxiety hallucinations. Living on edge and distraction by anxiety leads to struggles with focus and hearing incorrect noises and sounds which the brain is unable to process correctly. Auditory hallucinations do not have a clear cause other than the body reacting to significant stress.<sup>266</sup>

Drew’s mind tried to protect him from another mental breakdown by scaring him off from writing another novel by the imagination of the rat, something small but with giant consequences. The accomplishment he desperately wanted his whole life but failed

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<sup>261</sup> KING, S. *If It Bleeds*. 2020. p. 337.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.* p. 350.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* p. 372.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.* p. 357, 363, 365.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.* p. 365.

<sup>266</sup> SIMSON, H. (ed.). *Anxiety Disorders: Theory, Research and Clinical Perspectives*. 2010. p. 32-35.

everytime until now was ruined by Al's death, which managed to take the joy out of writing a big piece of work ever again.

## 6 Comparison of E.A. Poe, H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King

Edgar Allan Poe's short stories derive from the tradition of the science fiction genre, the detective genre and the Gothic horror tales, which enable him to depict irrational conditions of the human mind – melancholia, hallucination, dreams, violence and sadism – that push an individual over the edge of insanity.<sup>267</sup> Poe depicts a delicate individual in a terrifying situation and hints at the existence of entities too awful to describe, while profoundly analysing the protagonist's psychological and emotional states of mind. Poe explores the theme of psychological deterioration by detailing a crumbling building and a glooming environment, which affects and worsens the mental condition of the protagonists (*"The Fall of the House of Usher"*, *"The Cask of Amontillado"*, *"The Masque of the Red Death"*). He writes about the suppressed desires, feelings or obsessions of mentally ill individuals, who rationalise their cruelty by blaming a supernatural phenomenon and insist on sanity, while unintentionally revealing their dark side (*"The Black Cat"*, *"The Tell-Tale Heart"*, *"Berenice"*). Poe also inspects the idea of an evil twin, or the conflict between a moral authority and a compulsion to act destructively (*"Ligeia"*, *"William Wilson"*, *"The Purloined Letter"*).

Even when Howard Phillips Lovecraft shows the influence of Poe's pure horror tales, he focuses on scientific themes and accurate descriptions of perceived events rather than the psychology of his protagonists. They reject the supernatural phenomena not to become subjects of mockery and rejection, yet they try to narrate their experience the way it happened. In Lovecraft's stories, a mental breakdown protects the individual from an excruciating misery which would come from the understanding of the cosmos. Lovecraft frequently uses synonyms of "mad" to describe the environment and characters, and he lets his protagonists confess their mental instability due to consequences of seemingly supernatural events (*"The Temple"*, *"The Music of Erich Zann"*, *"The Dreams in the Witch House"*). Such influence may leave them unscathed (*"The Dunwich Horror"*, *"At the Mountains of Madness"*), or cause long-term mental disorders accompanied by obsession, flat emotions, or addiction (*"The Rats in the Walls"*, *"Dagon"*). Unfortunately, Lovecraft may rely on stereotypes of mental instability

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<sup>267</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 122.

and portray the protagonists as insane, drawing on their bizarre claims; however, strange behaviours turn out to be intelligible given the stressful situations they had to experience (*"The Shadow Out of Time"*, *"The Dreams in the Witch House"*).

Following the tradition of Poe and Lovecraft, Stephen King restlessly dips into his nightmares, fears and concerns. King focuses on the characters, the environment, the thin line that divides good from evil, and on what turns certain people into human monsters.<sup>268</sup> King describes particular types of personalities, who act upon their unfulfilled desires in contrast with social norms (*"Shining"*, *"Misery"*, *"The Man Who Loved Flowers"*). Supernatural phenomena control the actions of the protagonists directly (*"The Boogeyman"*, *"IT"*), or they influence their lives without any violent damage (*"Rat"*, *"Riding the Bullet"*). Like Poe, King writes about an evil twin, which emerges into a physical entity and tortures the protagonist (*"The Dark Half"*, *"Dark Tower"*, *"Secret Window, Secret Garden"*). In some of King's stories, certain individuals develop a mental illness due to personal trauma and suppressed emotions (*"Stationary Bike"*, *"Suffer the Little Children"*, *"Big Driver"*), or such experience can give them the strength to survive extreme situations, which gradually restores their sanity (*"Gerald's Game"*, *"The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon"*).

Poe employs a colourful vocabulary to depict a subtle and ambiguous horror which can be interpreted in many ways. His narrators omit essential information from the story, rationalize their insanity and contradict themselves by the very end. Poe emphasises that all human beings hide their dark thoughts and mental health problems, which can be revealed under specific opportunities. Poe had a co-influence on Lovecraft along with the mythology Lovecraft consumed as a child. Lovecraft's stories interfere with the fantasy area rather than naturalistic, with a carefully chosen vocabulary indicating the human's insignificant and weak role in the cosmos compared to alien entities and gods. Nevertheless, his narrators do not reveal precise details of their lives and personalities. On the contrary, they are always confident yet brief about what happened, and their mental illnesses and breakdowns guard them against falling apart if they grasp a true

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<sup>268</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, C. *The Beginnings of Stephen King*. 2018. p. 3-7.

nature of a hostile cosmos. Lovecraft continues Poe's tradition based on the fear of the unknown and expands the idea through the fear of the unimaginable.

King carefully crafts his narrations, which are more vital to him than characters, settings or themes. He focuses on detailed images that later create the whole scene alongside flashbacks, as another feature of his writing. King creates flawed characters that still evoke sympathy due to their human traits and tragic lives. When writing about evil coming from within, he remains optimistic as it often can be defeated. Influenced by Poe, King slowly increases a sense of dread, extensively describes the inner thoughts and feelings, reflects on the life tragedies that may have caused the delicate mental health of his characters, and he also uses humorous circumstances to cope with the protagonist's dark side. Lovecraft's horror inspires King to explore an ordinary individual who suddenly faces hidden demons, unsuspected danger beneath the surface, and alienation of the known world.

## Conclusion

Edgar Allan Poe, Howard Phillips Lovecraft and Stephen King relate their writing to the genre of American Gothic fiction, which focuses on the reminders of the past, suspense and fear, on the supernatural, tragic personal lives, psychological conflicts, and nightmares in physical forms. American Gothic writers adapt British Gothic characteristics to their country and address the issues of trauma, violence or suppressed desires. Gothic fiction emerges from Dark Romanticism, which expresses the hidden side of human beings, emphasising that evil comes from within. Most of the time, Gothic writers use supernatural elements and entities to create horror, yet true terror and explanation of supernatural events are found mainly among humankind.

In literature, mental illnesses usually represent the individual's hidden desires and dreams, unreasonable fear, or the consequences of trauma. Historically, people could explore their fascination with mental health through various plays, medieval manuscripts and novels. The idea of God punishing humans and testing their resistance by worsening their mental health was slowly replaced by scientific research and theories of contemporary psychologists like Kraepelin and Freud. The most frequent mental illnesses are depression, anxiety disorders, psychotic disorders, eating disorders, or trauma disorders. Nowadays, globalisation enlarges the space where people can learn about poor mental health; however, social media tend to romanticise mental health struggles and support their stereotypes.

Poe's works are a model for many writers, including Lovecraft and King, emphasising science and psychology, and representing a practical proof that horror works best in a short story form. As the thesis attempts to show, Poe delves into the ideas of depression, schizophrenia, shared psychosis, psychopathy, and dissociative identity disorder. Poe's narrators tend to assign the source of horror to ordinary objects or living beings, who eventually become their objects of obsession. The narrators are driven by their primary emotions rather than rational thinking, which leads to self-destruction, to the ruined lives of their closest ones, or to a murder.

Lovecraft created a “cosmic horror” genre (*“Lovecraftian horror”*) by joining together his mythos, the supernatural, and extra-terrestrial elements to distinguish himself from existing Gothic themes. However, as seen in the analysed stories, Lovecraft may also focus on the struggles of living with post-traumatic stress disorder, acute stress disorder, schizophrenia, and sleeping disorders. Lovecraft’s protagonists usually witness a terrifying experience, during which they come closer to finding the truth about the nature of the universe, and their mental breakdown functions as a result of such experience but not as a central focus of the story. They face powers which eventually damage their sanity and reduce their superiority to an insignificant position; however, insanity protects them from dealing with the horrible truth. Nevertheless, some of Lovecraft’s tales (*“Dagon”, “The Tomb”, “The Rats in the Walls”*) are considered direct continuations of Poe’s elements and stories.

King favours realism over fantasy in his writing, yet he usually explores ordinary objects and people he can think of, presenting them in ‘what if’ scenarios. In the chosen stories, King analyses the presence of schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder, compulsive behaviour, schizoaffective disorder, maladaptive daydreaming, sleep hallucinations and fever. King’s characters usually deal with the loss of innocence, abuse, gore, fear of the unknown, monsters, and constant conflicts between good and evil. His exhaustive descriptions of characters make the plot more impactful and memorable. Poe’s focus on the inner thoughts and feelings of his characters, life tragedies and humour, and Lovecraft’s exploration of worlds outside our own, fear of the unknown and danger hiding just around the corner, influence King’s writing and push him into the position of one of the best authors of the horror genre and psychological thrillers of today.

Stereotypes surrounding mental health illnesses influence not only the judgement of others, but they also create an unhealthy perspective on the identity of those who have a mental illness themselves. Individuals cannot be defined by their mental illnesses since they suffer from a manageable illness, which doesn’t prevent them from living their lives fully. Struggling with mental illness does not indicate that a person acts foolishly all the time since most symptoms are invisible, or the individual hides them not to be exposed to mockery, bullying, discrimination or social isolation. Mentally ill people are more

likely to be victims than abusers, untrustworthy individuals or murderers. Some mental illnesses can be life-threatening due to their symptoms, leading to self-harm, fear of the others, or suicide. Most importantly, presenting mental disorders as desirable, funny or cool ignores such illnesses' real nature and consequences. The contribution of all discussed authors to our understanding of psychological complexity is, therefore, quite essential.



## Resumé

Edgar Allan Poe, Howard Phillips Lovecraft a Stephen King spojují svá díla s žánrem americké gotické literatury, která se zaměřuje na vliv minulosti, napětí a strach, nadpřirozeno, osobní tragédie, psychologické konflikty a noční můry ve fyzické podobě. Autoři americké gotiky rozvíjejí typické rysy britské gotiky, které přizpůsobují tradici své země, a zabývají se otázkami traumat, násilí nebo potlačovaných tužeb. Americká gotická fikce vychází z temného romantismu, který se zaměřuje na skrytou stránku člověka a zdůrazňuje, že zlo vychází z jeho nitra. Gotičtí spisovatelé většinou využívají nadpřirozených prvků a bytostí k vytvoření hrůzy, avšak skutečnou podstatu hrůzy a vysvětlení nadpřirozených událostí najdeme především mezi lidmi samotnými.

Duševní nemoci v literatuře obvykle představují skryté touhy a sny jedince, nepřiměřený strach nebo následky traumatu. Lidská fascinace duševními poruchami se odráží v literatuře od jejích počátků (středověké rukopisy, divadelní hry, poezie, romány). Myšlenku, že příčinou duševní nemoci je boží trest či zkouška odolnosti, postupně nahradily vědecké výzkumy a teorie soudobých psychologů (například Kraepelin a Freud). Mezi nejčastější duševní nemoci patří deprese, úzkostné poruchy, psychotické poruchy, poruchy příjmu potravy nebo traumatické poruchy. Dnešní doba díky procesu globalizace vytváří prostor, kde se lidé mohou o problematice duševního zdraví dozvědět; sociální média však mají tendenci boj s duševním zdravím romantizovat a podporovat stereotypy.

Poeovo dílo je vzorem pro mnoho spisovatelů, včetně Lovecrafta a Kinga, a to jak svými odkazy k vědě a psychologii, tak i vytvořením působivé povídkové formy hororu. Poe se zabývá tématy deprese, schizofrenie, sdílené psychózy, psychopatie a disociativní poruchy identity. Poeovi vypravěči mají tendenci přisuzovat zdroj hrůzy obyčejným předmětům nebo živým bytostem, které se nakonec stanou předmětem jejich posedlosti. Vypravěči se řídí spíše svými primárními emocemi než racionálním uvažováním, což vede k sebedestrukci, ke zničeným životům jejich nejbližších nebo k vraždě.

Lovecraft vytvořil žánr "kosmického hororu" ("Lovecraftovský horor") tím, že spojil dohromady svůj mýtus a nadpřirozené a mimozemské prvky, aby se odlišil od existujících gotických témat. Jak je však patrné z analyzovaných povídek, Lovecraft se může zaměřit i na problémy života s posttraumatickou stresovou poruchou, akutní stresovou poruchou, schizofrenií a poruchami spánku. Lovecraftovi hrdinové jsou obvykle svědky děsivého zážitku, během něhož se přiblíží k nalezení pravdy o podstatě vesmíru, přičemž jejich duševní zhroucení působí jako důsledek takového zážitku, nikoli však jako ústřední téma daného příběhu. Hrdinové čelí silám, které nakonec naruší jejich přičetnost i nadřazenost; šílenství je však chrání před ničivostí hrůzných pravdy. Přesto jsou některé Lovecraftovy povídky ("*Dagon*", "*Hrobka*", "*Krasy ve zdech*") považovány za přímé pokračování Poeových prvků a příběhů.

King dává při psaní přednost realismu před fantazií, přesto obvykle zkoumá obyčejné předměty a lidi, které si dokáže představit, a popisuje je ve scénářích typu "co by se stalo, kdyby". Ve vybraných povídkách King analyzuje přítomnost schizofrenie, disociativní poruchy identity, kompulzivního chování, schizoafektivní poruchy, maladaptivního snění, spánkových halucinací a horečky. Kingovy postavy se obvykle potýkají se ztrátou nevinnosti, se zneužíváním, s příšerami, s násilím, se strachem z neznámého a s neustálým konfliktem dobra a zla. Díky jeho vyčerpávajícím popisům postav je děj působivější a zapamatovatelnější. Poeovo zaměření na vnitřní život postav a Lovecraftovo zkoumání světů mimo náš vlastní zásadně ovlivňují Kingovu tvorbu a posouvají ho do pozice jednoho z nejlepších autorů hororového žánru a psychologických thrillerů současnosti.

Stereotypy týkající se duševních nemocí ovlivňují nejen naše posuzování druhých, ale narušují i identitu těch, kteří sami trpí duševní nemocí. Jednotlivci však často trpí zvládnutelnou nemocí, která jim nemusí bránit v plnohodnotném životě. Boj s duševní nemocí neznamena, že se člověk neustále chová šíleně, protože většina příznaků je neviditelná nebo je jedinec skrývá, aby nebyl vystaven posměchu, šikaně, diskriminaci nebo sociální izolaci. Duševně nemocní lidé jsou častěji oběťmi než násilníky, nedůvěryhodnými jedinci nebo vrahy. Některá duševní onemocnění mohou být svými příznaky životu nebezpečná, což vede k sebepoškození nebo až k sebevraždě. A co je

nejdůležitější, prezentování duševních poruch jako zajímavé zkušenosti ignoruje skutečnou povahu těchto nemocí a jejich následků. Přínos všech zkoumaných autorů k pochopení složitosti lidské duše je tedy tím zásadnější.

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