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**Comparison of selected works by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and
Edgar Allan Poe**

Srovnání vybraných děl Ryūnosukeho Akutagawy a Edgara Allana Poea

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prameny a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne.....

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Anotace:

Práce se zabývá srovnáním vybraných děl dvou zásadních představitelů japonské a americké literatury: Rjúnosukeho Akutagawy a Edgara Allana Poea. Práce je rozdělena do tří kapitol. První kapitola se primárně zabývá literárně-historickým kontextem tvorby obou spisovatelů, a to formou seznámení se zásadními literárními směry západní společnosti dané doby a jejich následným zprostředkovaným vlivem na japonskou literární scénu. Druhá kapitola shrnuje život a literární tvorbu autorů, se zaměřením na analogie mezi autory a jak dané podobnosti ovlivnily výslednou podobu jejich děl. Třetí kapitola obsahuje analýzu tří vybraných dvojic děl obou autorů a jejich následné srovnání. Tyto komparace budou provedeny na základě obsahové či žánrové podobnosti děl, na podobnostech a rozdílech v nakládání se stejnými motivy a používání vlastních jmen a také na úrovni spolehlivosti vypravěče.

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Annotation

This thesis deals with the comparison of selected works by two major representatives of Japanese and American literature—Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and Edgar Allan Poe. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals primarily with the literary and historical context of the works of the two writers in the form of acquaintance with the principal literary trends in the Western society of this time period and their subsequent mediated influence on the Japanese literary scene. The second chapter summarises the lives and the literary output of the authors, focusing on analogies between authors and how the similarities affected the resulting form of their works. The third chapter contains the analysis of three selected pairs of works by both authors and their subsequent comparison. These comparisons will be based on the similarity of their content or genre of the works, on the similarities and differences in dealing with the same motifs and the use of proper names, as well as the level of reliability of the narrator.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Mgr. Sylva Martinásková, Ph.D. for all her valuable advice, devoted time as well as her patience. I would also like to thank my family and friends for all their support throughout the process of writing this thesis and the entire studies.

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Notes on the text

For the Japanese transcriptions used in this thesis, the modified Hepburn romanization is used. The exception to that are the names of authors and the titles of the Czech publications, for which the Czech transcription is used, both in the footnote citations and in the list of used sources.

Japanese personal names are written according to Western conventions, that is, forename first, surname last, except for the footnotes and the list of sources where the order is reversed as per the MLA style citation norm. The exception to this rule is also the author Edogawa Ranpo, written in the surname-forename order, given that the name is a content-dependent pseudonym.

Apart from place names, all Japanese titles, words, and concepts are written in italics for the sake of a clear arrangement of the thesis.

The names of the Japanese literary works and of other relevant appellations appear first in transcription, followed by kanji and/or kana in brackets. The English translations either precede the Japanese-writing equivalent in the brackets or are used within the text, depending on whether the form of the translation is commonly used in literature written in English.

For the names of Japanese titles, names of movements etc. I use the English translations prevalent in published literature if such translation exists. Unless stated otherwise, other translations and periphrases of non-English sources used throughout the thesis are made by the author of the thesis.

Throughout the thesis, I use both the term “literary genre” in addition to the more common “literary form” when talking about short story. That is on account of my stance that short story refers to certain aesthetic qualities rather than just a quantitative difference of length.

Introduction

In this thesis, I will analyse selected works of two major representatives of the short story genre in Japanese and American literature: Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and Edgar Allan Poe. Both authors had not only significantly influenced the formation of modern literature of their countries, but they were also major contributors to the establishment of the short story as a literary form separate from the novel. As such, both Akutagawa and Poe are regarded as the founders and representatives of this genre up to this day.

The thesis will be divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I will give literary and historical context for both authors, in the form of an overview of the literary movements which are the most relevant to the time of their literary output as well as an overview of the situation on the literary scene in Japan in the same period.

In the second chapter, I will present a summary of the lives and the literary styles of both authors, including their theoretical works on the short story genre and how Akutagawa and Poe differ in their views. In this chapter, I will also give an insight into what role literature had in the lives of the two authors as well as how the lives of the authors had influenced their works. As a separate subchapter, I will then highlight the common points in the lives and the literary output of both writers in order to have a better understanding of the sources for similarities and differences in the inclusion and treatment of the same motifs by the two authors. Subsequently, I will briefly compare the characteristics as well as specific cases of the poetry of both authors and its influence on the rest of their literary output. As a part of this chapter, I will also introduce the topic of Akutagawa's familiarity with Poe's works.

In the third chapter, I will analyse and compare several literary pieces from both authors. I will organise four short stories (two per author) and two plays (one per author) into pairs for direct comparison, based on a shared motif or genre, concentrating on the utilization of motifs by Akutagawa and Poe as well as other literary devices, such as the role of the narrator in the short stories and use of verse in the plays. In these comparisons, I will refer to other works of the relevant author which utilise the same motif and/or literary strategies. In connection with the analysis, I will also concentrate on the usage of proper names for the characters as well as look at the differences in the lengths and division of the short stories and how these devices influence the plot. I will also briefly mention the reader reception of the analysed short stories at the time of their publication, focusing primarily on the

translations of Poe's short stories into Japanese, due to their cross-cultural reach during Akutagawa's life.

For the analyses, I will work with the literary works in their original Japanese and English versions, as well as their English (in the case of Akutagawa's short stories and play), Japanese (in the case of Poe's short stories) and Czech translations (in the case of the short stories of both authors). I will also strive to find correlations between the works of the two authors, that is if a direct influence of Poe's literary output can be traced in the works of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa on the basis of the author being inarguably familiar with Poe's works or try to disprove this notion.

1 Literary and historical context

In order to better understand both the life and the works of the two authors discussed in this thesis, it is necessary to refer to the literary and the historical context of their literary output, as well as the social and the cultural context, to a lesser extent. That is, we should not only be aware of the historical period in which Akutagawa and Poe wrote and published their works but also of the literary movements which prevailed during the lives of the two authors—i.e. from the early nineteenth century until the late 1920s—the criticism they had faced from their contemporaries and the other influences which had impacted their creative process.

1.1 Romanticism, dark romanticism, and gothic novel

Romanticism was an artistic, literary, intellectual as well as critical movement which was the predominant movement in Western society from the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century.¹ Unlike the trend of its predecessors, where there was only a short period when the movements were overlapping, while romanticism was the predominant movement of its time, it was not the only one and two more movements were established during the same period. The first was strictly a literal genre² called the gothic novel, the second was an offshoot of romanticism called the “dark romanticism”, which is closer to the gothic novel genre than it is to the traditional view of romanticism. However, if we take the time to consider the evolution of romanticism as a genre, the similarities between the gothic novel and dark romanticism are much less surprising.

Both romanticism and gothic novel evolved from pre-romanticism³, which emphasized emotionality, imagination, and dreams as the source of both intellectual and creative values. Art was seen as a reflection of the authors’ yearning for freedom and as a rebellion against the strict rules and rationality, which were the pillars of classicism and the enlightenment period, i.e. the movements which preceded pre-romanticism.

¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Romanticism.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 21 January 2019. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., <https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism>. Accessed 9 February 2019.

² Romanticism affected not only literature but also art and philosophical thinking of its era.

³ Pre-romanticism, sometimes also called sentimentalism, was originally an artistic movement that later spread into other spheres of art, including literature, and philosophical thinking. It was established around the mid-eighteenth century.

The plots of the pre-romantic stories were often set in the past and the authors took inspiration from legends and oral tradition during their creation. Throughout the formation of this movement, there was a subtle split into two subgenres already developing. One of the resulting genres put emphasis on the pre-romantic desire for harmony and emotionality—be it the emphasis on romantic emotion or the loneliness of an individual within society⁴—the other on the fascination with all things exotic and mystical. It was because of this that pre-romanticism split into two separate movements. The first one further developed its motifs in a more restricted fashion and evolved into romanticism, whereas the second one delved further into the supernatural motifs and the dichotomy between dreams and reality. As a result, in the second half of the eighteenth century emerged the first works⁵ which are traditionally classified as gothic novels or “black novels” as they are sometimes referred to in Czech academic literature.⁶ The name for gothic fiction—derived from the Goths, a barbarian tribe—was originally a widespread term for anything not accepted by the predominantly neoclassical⁷ societal values: “*not modern, not enlightened, not free, not Protestant, not English.*”⁸ And although the negative connotations remained and gothic fiction, was largely perceived as a “lesser genre” throughout its existence, the root it had taken helped undermine the strict values of the classicist enlightened writing and found a widespread readership. It is especially in the view of this development of gothic novel that the development of romanticism also continued even after its establishment as the predominant genre, eventually giving rise to dark romanticism. As it stands, having only split from romanticism after this establishment, dark romanticism is seen as merely a subgenre of romanticism, though it shares many aspects with the gothic novel.⁹ The most prominent characteristics of dark romanticism are—among others—the darker motifs, the predisposition to use historical settings for the plots as well as the thoroughly detailed descriptions of dark sceneries.

⁴ MALINA, Jaroslav. “Umění, romantické.” *Antropologický slovník, aneb, Co by mohl o člověku vědět každý člověk: (s přihlédnutím k dějinám literatury a umění)*. Edited by Jaroslav MALINA, et al., c2009, p. 4329.

⁵ *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole from 1764 is considered the very first novel of this genre. Since its second edition, a subtitle *A Gothic Story* was added, which further strengthens the impression.

⁶ TÁBORSKÁ, Jiřina. “Černý roman.” *Slovník literární teorie*. Edited by Štěpán VLAŠÍN, 1984. p. 62, 129.

⁷ The terms classical and neoclassical are at times interchangeable in Anglo-American and French academic literature because both terms refer to cultural movements, which return to the art values of Ancient Greece. Both are however most used in association with the later Enlightenment period.

⁸ LUCKHURST, Roger. *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Oxford World's Classics, p. x.

⁹ Encyclopaedia Britannica and many other encyclopaedias do not contain the entry “dark romanticism” at all.

Similarly to other co-occurring movements, there are no fixed boundaries between romanticism, dark romanticism and gothic novel genre and thus they are difficult to separate. While the gothic novel is a term most commonly attributable to the works of British novel writers, not all authors of gothic novels were from Great Britain. Correspondingly some British authors are referred to as dark romanticists and not only gothic novel writers. What however remains a constant is that while not separated by all academic sources, dark romanticism is seen as a subgenre of romanticism and as such virtually all authors of dark romanticism are often referred to as simply romanticists,¹⁰ as is the case of Edgar Allan Poe.¹¹

1.2 Realism and naturalism

Oftentimes seen as its opposite, realism was a literary movement which partially overlapped and eventually replaced romanticism—and the related genres. In contrast to the idealised and/or altered views that romanticism offered, the basis of realism lies in depicting reality without any embellishments. The movement originated in the mid-nineteenth century in France and coinciding with the Industrial revolution, it affected not only literature but all methods of art, including ones newly introduced at the time, such as photography.

All forms of the realist movement are closely tied to society; the aim of the authors was oftentimes to present either the living conditions of a specific class or the discrepancy between higher–middle–lower class lifestyles. While the protagonist in romantic literature would have been an outcast—loathed or revered for his or her differences—the exemplar realist protagonist would be an ordinary member of the middle class or lower class, different only enough to brush the edge of societal isolation, but rarely to the extreme established in romanticism. Realist writing aims to depict everyday life as objectively and in as pure form as possible. At the same time, the realists chose carefully which aspects of life they wrote about, particularly revolving around the most commonplace experiences and problems such

¹⁰ While in English literature the term “dark romanticism” is not common—as is referring to E. A. Poe as a writer of dark romanticism—the classification is almost non-existent in Czech academic literature and there is no Czech equivalent of the term.

¹¹ MABBOTT, Thomas Ollive, et al. “Edgar Allan Poe.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15 January 2019. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edgar-Allan-Poe>. Accessed 7 February 2019.

as childhood, parenthood, relationships, and infidelity. It is only in breaks from the ordinary that a realist protagonist might show truly exceptional traits.¹²

The literary movement originating in France, the most cited realist authors are Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, or Gustave Flaubert, however, the influence of realism has soon spread further. Having strongly influenced even Russian literature, it is no wonder that even the Anglo-American literary scene had not been evaded by the movement, the most well-known authors likely being William Defoe and Mark Twain. At the same time, the method of realist writing can be found in the works of authors both preceding and following the period in which realism was the most prevalent. Similarly, it can be found in authors who are traditionally categorised in another movement entirely.

Side by side with realism, another art movement formed in mid-nineteenth century France—naturalism. Stemming from the new Darwinian theories and other scientific discoveries of the time, its aim was not only to show the reality of society—as realism primarily attempted to do—but rather the very nature of humankind. With this objective, the naturalist writers such as Émile Zola explored in almost hyper-realistic detail how an individual psyche is influenced and oftentimes destroyed by the societal pressures as well as the influence of base instincts and compulsions of human nature.¹³ Naturalism—being rather scientific in its pursuits—had virtually no time overlap with romanticism, as opposed to realism. At least that was the case in the regions where all three movements developed at their natural speed, i.e. over the course of nearly two centuries. It was a different matter entirely in regions where the movements were introduced with a delay, as was the case in Japan.

1.3 Crime fiction and detective fiction

Aside from romanticism—and other derivations of pre-romanticism—realism and naturalism, there were yet more literary genres, which had overlapped with them and/or had been only established in the nineteenth century. One such genre, which had only at that time become recognised as a separate genre was detective fiction, originating from a much older yet for a long time unclassified genre of crime fiction.

¹² ABRAMS, M. H. “Realism and Naturalism.” *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 1957, p. 73.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 74–75.

The origins of crime fiction are often placed as far as the fifth century BCE. Whether it was a story in the Old Testament, a story originating in Ancient Greece, or a later retelling of folk fiction,¹⁴ in its broader sense all crime fiction—whether it is an account of a crime or its investigation—adhered to the standard scheme of old, i.e. a crime is necessarily followed by punishment. The structure of this scheme also included depictions of punishments for those who committed crimes, including punishments for those, who had committed a crime to take revenge.¹⁵ In accordance, the early crime stories oftentimes took on the role of cautionary tales. It was only once the enlightenment period passed that these stories stopped including interventions of Gods of any religion.¹⁶

With the enlightenment of the mind and the advancement in science soon came its application onto everyday life and with it the Industrial Revolution. The rise in industry necessitated urbanization, however with it came a rise in criminality. It is more a correlation than causation that during this time the darker literary movements, such as gothic novel or dark romanticism started to be read. It *was* however during the same time that older crime fiction started to be read by a broad spectrum of the population. With the rise in demand came supply and as such crime fiction started to be actively written. The times had changed, however, and the variations on the genre soon split into subgenres. One of those which had gained the most momentum in this period was detective fiction.¹⁷ And although it would take a century before the so-called “Golden Age of Detective Fiction” was to come in the 1920–30s—and with it e.g. Agatha Christie and her detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple—it was in the first half of the nineteenth century that the genre began its development and many a writer would return to its nascent stages in search of inspiration. Because if there is one fact about the rise of detective fiction that the general criticism agrees upon, it is that “*the detective story begins with Edgar Allan Poe, the ‘father’ of the detective genre.*”¹⁸

¹⁴ *One Thousand and One Nights* is sometimes quoted as having early examples of crime fiction.

¹⁵ Especially in the earlier works of what we would call crime fiction, the punishment was often depicted as a will of God or Gods, or the punishment was carried out by the deities themselves.

¹⁶ SCAGGS, John. *Crime fiction*. Abingdon: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005. The new critical idiom, pp.7–14.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 17–19.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

1.4 Western literary movements in Japan

Western-type literary movements as we know them were only imported into Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the Meiji period (1868–1912), after the lift of Japanese self-imposed isolation politics. It was then that Japan started not only to establish contacts with other nations but also actively participate in cultural exchange beyond pragmatic attempts to gain as much theoretical knowledge as possible. These further ventures included various queries into European and American arts and crafts, literature included. Among the literary movements which had assimilated the best into Japanese literature were e.g. romanticism, naturalism, or realism.

Understandably connected with the literary movements, it was during this period as well that Japan was introduced to Western-type genres—such as the novel—which Japanese writers adapted to the needs of the Japanese language. Nevertheless, although some Japanese authors started actively writing novels, shorter literary forms remained the creative norm. A reason for that was possibly two-fold. Firstly, Japanese literature has a tradition of short prose, from the earliest draft and essay-like short prose called *zuihitsu* (随筆)—which originated in the tenth century and its representative pieces remained popular for centuries afterwards¹⁹—to the many novella-length genres from the Edo period (1603–1868). The most influential of these were *ukiyo-zōshi* (“books of the floating world”, 浮世草子)—fixed-format short prose pieces popular especially in the eighteenth century, which dealt with topics varying from the lives of townspeople to the issues of romantic relationships and erotica²⁰—and *gesaku* (“playful literature”, also “low literature”, 戯作), which is a term encompassing many popular genres of short literature, from the abundantly illustrated *kibyōshi* (“yellow-cover books”, 黄表紙) to the more serious *yomihon* (“books for reading”, 読本), which emphasized the quality of the text itself rather than illustrations, though they could contain some. Apart from *yomihon*, the subgenres of *gesaku* were a target for censorship, on the account of being substandard, objectionable, or even obscene. None the less, they were all popular throughout the Edo period and many of them continued to be published in the early Meiji period as well.²¹ The tradition of genre is connected to the tradition of content. Historically, Japanese

¹⁹ WINKELHÖFEROVÁ, Vlasta. “Literatura klasického období.” *Slovník japonské literatury*. 2008, p. 21.

²⁰ WINKELHÖFEROVÁ. “Ukijozōshi,” p. 305.

²¹ WINKELHÖFEROVÁ. “Předmoderní literatura,” pp. 30–31.

literary expression put more emphasis on the aesthetic values of a literary piece, rather than an interpretation of the social standing of an individual within society and/or analysis of characters and ideas contained within, as is the standard for Western-type literature.²²

In the early Meiji period—upon its introduction—Japanese writers primarily saw foreign literature as something to be either copied or translated.²³ However soon enough they also started to see Western literature as a source of inspiration, not only on the basis of a different range of motifs but a different approach to the narrative structure and the diversity of styles as well. These existed alongside the original Japanese works which continued to be produced the entire time. Consequently, by the end of the Meiji period there existed strong opposing voices advocating for and opposing against foreign literature.²⁴

One of the specifics of the Japanese turn-of-the-century authors was their tendency to unite themselves in connection to various literary magazines. In these magazines, the authors not only published foreign literature in Japanese translation, but they also published their own works inspired by the imported literature. In addition to their original works, the authors often published criticism of the existing movements, usually in efforts to promote a new one. The quantity and quality of responses to a genre in its nascent stages could mean its further introduction into Japanese original fiction or limitation to translations only. The magazines—often named after the group which published them or a movement/institution which the authors claimed allegiance to²⁵—could influence the careers of individual writers as well. The association of a writer to a well-known magazine could mean the difference between becoming a successful writer and falling into obscurity. Contrastively, when the individual contributors of a magazine attained fame, the magazine which served as their platform often ceased to exist.

²² HILSKÁ, Vlasta, “Rjúnosuke Akutagawa, mistr povídky.” *Obraz pekla a jiné povídky*, by Rjúnosuke AKUTAGAWA. Translated by Vlasta HILSKÁ. Praha: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1960, pp. 7–8.

²³ Early translations of foreign texts into Japanese often had the form of a free interpretation rather than a literal translation.

²⁴ INOUE Ken. “The Influence of American Literature in Taishō and Prewar Shōwa Japan.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 26 April 2017. Oxford University Press, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.208. Accessed 12 June 2017, pp. 8–9.

²⁵ The well-known literary magazines of the period were e.g. *Myōjō* (“Morning Star”, 明星)—specialised in poetry, among its contributors belonged Tekkan and Akiko Yosano, a married couple—and the idealism-oriented *Shirakaba* (“White Birch”, 白樺)—a magazine published by a group of the same name which included writers such as Takeo Arishima. (Novák, 6).

The Taishō period (1912–1926) continued the trend set in the Meiji period. During this time, the government focused on finishing up reforms started in the previous era, be they reforms of the army, the school system, or the government itself. Japan continued its industrialisation and the economy boomed. Due to the fast and efficient implementation of Western technology and its expansionary politics of the turn of the century, the Empire of Japan was an unbeatable opponent in the East Asian region. The economic rise and stability proved themselves as a fertile ground for literary work.

The literary movements imported into Japan in the last decades of the nineteenth century and at the start of the twentieth century evolved at a much quicker pace than their original Western counterparts. Much like it tended to happen in Europe and the US, consecutive literary movements were often contradictory, and the success of one literary movement was soon taken over by another which was accompanied by criticism of the preceding movement. However, where the Western movements, once established, tended to last several decades at least before being replaced, Japanese exposure to these movements was mediated with time delay, after the lift of the isolation. As a result, the shifts between one literary movement and the following one were much quicker in Japan, and the process which took from decades to centuries in European countries sometimes happened within the life of a single author. And as no author processed the new movements the same²⁶, it was not unusual for contemporaneous authors to be romanticist, naturalist, realist and even neorealist, which would have been impossible in Europe due to the concurrence of the original movements. In some cases, a single author went through multiple movements over the course of his/her career. This phenomenon is best illustrated by the career of Tōson Shimazaki.²⁷

Aside from the movements somewhat faithful to their Western origins, new derivations appeared in Japan as well, some of which did not take on the form of an entire movement but reformed into a strong field of literary interest none the less. One such non-movement of the Taishō period is sometimes summarised into three terms: *ero*, *guro*, *nansensu* (エロ・グロ・ナンセンス)

²⁶ Oftentimes, even the authors who supposedly wrote in the same genre had vastly different writing styles, as they interpreted the original Western literary movement differently. For that reason, labels such as “Japanese romanticism/realism” are hardly ever used and are replaced with “romanticism/realism in Japan” and the similar, the sole exception being Japanese naturalism.

²⁷ Shimazaki progressed from a romantic poet to a realist prose writer, and eventually to one of the most well-known representatives of Japanese naturalism.

ロ・ナンセンス), referring to eroticism, grotesque, and nonsense respectively.²⁸ Though the introduction of the trend was not intentional, its roots are connected to *Tanbiha* (“Aesthetic School”/“The School of Aestheticism”, 耽美派). Quickly gaining popularity and being widely recognised by the 1920s, the *ero*, *guro*, *nansensu* trend was created because of *Tanbiha*’s admiration of romanticism. Their interest in the romanticist Edgar Allan Poe drew attention to the grotesqueness of some of his tales—which the author himself had advertised²⁹—as well as the detective genre. The person responsible for the introduction of this segment of Poe’s works in Japan was Tarō Hirai—an admirer of Poe’s fiction ever since the first translations in 1888—who in a declaration of his admiration of the author adopted the pseudonym Edogawa Ranpo³⁰. Ranpo introduced Poe as not only a writer but also the author responsible for the existence of detective fiction. He extolled Poe’s works during his entire life and himself numerous detective and grotesque tales.³¹

²⁸ ANGLES, Jeffrey. “Seeking the Strange: ‘Ryōki’ and the Navigation of Normality in Interwar Japan.” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2008. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20535184. Accessed 3 Mar. 2021, p. 101.

²⁹ Poe’s first collection of short stories was called *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* (1840).

³⁰ The pseudonym is based on Poe’s name written in katakana, but with changed word boundaries: Edgar Allan Poe being written エドガー・アラン・ポー as opposed to Edogawa Ranpo 江戸川乱歩 (エドガワ・ランポ).

³¹ MIZUTA LIPPIT, Noriko. “Poe in Japan.” *Poe Abroad: Influence, Reputation, Affinities*. Edited by Lois Davis VINES. pp. 135–148. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999, pp. 140–141.

2 Authors

As a part of the analysis is based on similar life experiences of Edgar Allan Poe and Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, one should be aware of the general outline and major events of their lives and where the two writers stand within the broader literary context. To achieve that, one must look at the contemporary situation of not only their respective countries but also the influence the works of Edgar Allan Poe had on Japanese literature.

2.1 Edgar Allan Poe

While the term “short story” had only started being consistently used in the 1880s,³² it is indisputable that one of the major contributors to this genre is Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), a prosaic, a poet, an essayist, and a literary critic as well as the central figure of American romanticism. However, if we compare Poe’s stories to those of other authors of the American romanticism period (such as J. F. Cooper), it cannot escape notice that Poe’s works are different in many regards.

Where romanticism deals with the dichotomy between dreams and reality, the transcendental experiences, emotionality, subjectivity and the struggles of an individual outcast from society, Poe’s works expand on the fascination with the mystical and the grotesque and often fall into the category of horror literature. Taking his inspiration from the gothic fiction tradition, both his poetry and prose tend to have endings bordering on mysterious or have open endings which encourage the darker emotions which the stories evoked. The central motifs that Poe built his plots on are often death, murder and/or crime, whereas most of his characters suffer from semblances of madness or at least paranoia. That is one of the reasons why Poe is at times classed as an author of the earlier discussed subgenre of romanticism called dark romanticism. In addition, though he died too early to be directly influenced by the realist movement, Poe’s devotedness to detail—which lent enough plausibility to his stories that some, though fictitious, were thought to be accounts of true events—earned him the label of a writer capable of the unattainable—merge the precise

³² MARCH-RUSSELL, Paul. *The Short Story: an introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 1.

realist writing with fantastical motifs and break the boundaries between science and mysticism.³³

The capability of turning the impossible into possible served Poe well throughout his literary career. During the time when short stories, though occasionally written, were perceived as inferior to novel, it is of note that—though it was not enough to live in comfort—Poe was the first American author to earn his living on writing alone.³⁴ What is more, Poe reached out to other writers of short stories and through his work as a literary critic supported their pursuit of literary refinement. An example of such is Poe’s review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story collection *Twice-Told Tales* in which, among the praise of Hawthorne’s use of his short tales,³⁵ Poe states that “[e]xtreme brevity will degenerate into epigrammatism; but the sin of extreme length is even more unpardonable.”³⁶ Although the encouragement can be seen as self-serving, the review serves well as a mirror of Poe’s gradual cultivation of his own literary style. The establishment of boundaries of what Poe considered quality writing reached its peak in his 1846 essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’. Though much of the essay is dedicated to the process of composition of his most famous poem “The Raven”, many of the ideas within the essay align with Poe’s *modus operandi* in writing prose as well. Among these are mentioned “*the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect... [and]... the limit of a single sitting*”.³⁷ The former a necessity absent in the majority of literary pieces, the latter a limit to which all literary works of merit should adhere. The essay is seen as a condensed version of Poe’s view of literary art, and though the authenticity of the described writing process is debatable, the expressed sentiments undoubtedly match with his literary creations.

In addition to helping the establishment of the short story as a genre separate from the novel by his distinctive and memorable plotlines, Poe’s value to literature worldwide also lies in his contributions to the realm of content, in addition to form. With his short story ‘The

³³ NEFF, Ondřej and Jaroslav OLŠA. “POE, Edgar Allan.” *Encyklopedie literary science fiction*. Praha: AFSF, 1995, p. 338.

³⁴ Poe’s literary output was not limited to short stories, but they did make up a large portion of it.

³⁵ In the review, Poe laments that aside from the “prose tales” (i.e. short stories) written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving (the author credited with the first American short stories), there are none that have true artistic value.

³⁶ POE, Edgar Allan. “Review of Twice-Told Tales.” *The New Short Story Theories*. Edited by Charles E. MAY. pp. 59–64. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994, p. 61.

³⁷ POE, Edgar Allan. “The Philosophy of Composition.” *The New Short Story Theories*. Edited by Charles E. MAY. pp. 67–69. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994, p. 69.

Murders in the Rue Morgue' and its two sequels, he pioneered the genre of modern detective fiction and the framework he used remains the basis of the genre.³⁸ Poe also contributed to another emerging genre, which would later come to be called science-fiction,³⁹ particularly if we take into consideration the definition of science fiction not only as literature which deals with technical advancements but one that “*takes place in a reality, with which we had no experiences with so far.*”⁴⁰ Consequently, though the honour of being the science-fiction pioneer is traditionally attributed to Mary Shelley,⁴¹ Poe is rightly called one of the four founders⁴² of the genre.⁴³ Both these lesser-known impacts represent but an addition to Poe's more obvious contributions to the popularisation of the horror and thriller genres, which his stories are most well-known as and which have continuously served as an inspiration for authors of the genres.

Though his works were popular even during his life, Poe had gained worldwide fame only after his death. While in the twentieth century and on the fame has been attributable to Poe's contribution to fiction and the influence his works had on subsequent generations,⁴⁴ in the years directly following his death, this renown was ascribed to the infamy of the author's character. In the last years of his life, Poe had fallen further into the habit of alcohol consumption and drugs, only exacerbated by the illness and later death of his beloved wife Virginia in 1847. In his depressive states, Poe got into aggressive arguments which estranged him from his friends and created even more enemies. In 1858 *The Edinburgh Review* published a particularly scathing evaluation of the author, starting an avalanche of various literates in turn elevating and debasing Poe. One of the authors who had come across Poe's works was Charles Baudelaire who purposefully sought out Americans who travelled to Paris to find out more about the genius poet he knew Poe to be. He never critically appraised Poe's

³⁸ The topic of Poe's contributions to the modern detective genre is extended in chapter 3.2.

³⁹ Poe's contributions to the science-fiction genre are e.g. 'The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall' (1835) and 'Some Words with a Mummy' (1845), however, in addition to the short stories, Poe also wrote an essay titled 'Eureka: A Prose Poem' (1848), a non-fiction dealing with cosmogony.

⁴⁰ NEFF and OLŠA. "Science fiction," p. 32.

⁴¹ The novel *Frankenstein* was first anonymously published in 1818.

⁴² Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells.

⁴³ NEFF and OLŠA, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Poe's renown continues to indirectly influence American (mystery fiction) writers via the Edgar Award, an award established in 1946 and awarded yearly in several categories, the principal being "Best first novel by an American author".

works, knowing that his admiration would cloud his judgement, he did however introduce Poe into modern European literature.⁴⁵

Once Poe's works crossed the Atlantic Ocean, the translations quickly found their dedicated readership across Europe. It was however not much longer afterwards that the inhabitants of the widely colonial European countries took Poe's works beyond the borders of Europe. Within decades after Poe's death, his works had found their way even to Asia, Japan included. The first Japanese translations of Poe's short stories have appeared in 1888,⁴⁶ starting a wave of interest in his works among the Japanese readers. While Japanese readers of the Taishō period did not completely disregard Poe's contribution to the lyric and some of his poetic works found their following, it was primarily translations of Poe's short stories which had gained a devoted readership. This enthusiasm was eagerly supported by the efforts of Sōseki Natsume⁴⁷ who, although his own work remained largely uninfluenced by Poe's, never argued the geniality of Poe's works. In his article "*Pō no sōzō*" ("Poe's imagination", ポーの想像) and two other articles, he endorsed the qualities of Poe's short stories before any of his contemporaries.⁴⁸

Given his part in establishing it as a separate category, Poe's influence on the short story genre is indisputable in the context of any country. However, in the case of Japanese literature, there were several authors, aside from Sōseki, who were more affected by the lesson Poe gave in 'The Philosophy of Composition' than others. Among these authors number e.g. Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, who for a short period belonged to *Tanbiha* as well as Edogawa Ranpo, who dedicated his literary career to mystery fiction. The author whose appreciation of Poe most resembled Sōseki's was that of his mentee, a younger writer, who saw a resemblance in the writing of Edgar Allan Poe and that of the realist William Defoe and through it the genius of the union of the romantic motifs and the realist method, the nature of which he explored in his 1921 lecture "*Tanpensakka to shite no Pō*" ("Poe as a short-story writer", 短編作家としてのポー). This author's name was Ryūnosuke Akutagawa.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ HILSKÝ, Martin, "Povídkář Poe." *Jáma a kyvadlo a jiné povídky*, by Edgar Allan POE. Second edition in Odeon. Translated by Josef SCHWARZ. Praha: Odeon, 1978. Klub čtenářů, pp. 425–428.

⁴⁶ MIZUTA LIPPIT. "Poe in Japan," pp. 135–136.

⁴⁷ Born as Kin'nosuke Natsume, Sōseki Natsume is generally referred to by the pseudonym Sōseki rather than his family name.

⁴⁸ MIZUTA LIPPIT. "Poe in Japan," p. 142.

⁴⁹ INOUE. "The Influence of American Literature in Taishō and Prewar Shōwa Japan," p. 8.

2.2 Ryūnosuke Akutagawa

Assigning a literary movement to the works of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (1892–1927) is in many aspects much harder than it is for Edgar Allan Poe, simply for the fact that Western-type literary movements had never existed in Japanese classical literature and were only imported after 1868.⁵⁰ (See 1.4) As such, rather than assigning them to a literary movement, Japanese authors are much more frequently sorted based on the period they created their literary pieces in. Akutagawa belonged amongst the major literary representatives of the Taishō period.

Unlike many authors who had become famous posthumously, Akutagawa was already renowned for his works during his life. His writing talent was noticed early on, with the publication of two of his short stories from 1916: ‘*Hana*’ (‘The Nose’, 鼻) and ‘*Imogayu*’ (‘Yam gruel’, 芋粥).⁵¹ Though it is often ‘*Hana*’ that his success is credited to the most—as it was repeatedly praised by his mentor Sōseki—it was both stories that quickly became popular. Subsequently, Akutagawa’s later works were met with the general approval of the public and the critics alike. Choosing the short story genre, which had until that time been rather overlooked, Akutagawa based his stories on historical sources—such as old Chinese and Japanese texts from as early as the end of the eleventh century. He took these historical stories, kept their traditional aspects along with the inherent sense for the aesthetics, and turned them humorous and witty with a touch of mystery and the grotesque. Akutagawa belonged to the first generation of writers who wrote in the newly restructured literary language.⁵² As such, his style is distinctive and appealed not only to his contemporaries but also to the generations which followed, and it is rightly so that Akutagawa is oftentimes credited with the establishment of the short story as a thriving genre in Japan.

⁵⁰ Generally, we can split Japanese literature into three major categories. “Japanese classical literature” refers to literature written until the Meiji restoration in 1868, “Modern Japanese literature” as all literature that followed 1868 except for the most recent two to three decades, which would be considered “Contemporary Japanese literature”.

⁵¹ “あくたがわ・りゅうのすけ” *Kōjien*. 5th edition. 1998, p. 30.

⁵² The Japanese spoken and written/literary language had differed for centuries. It was only through the efforts of *Genbun Itchi Undō* (“The Movement to Unify Written and Spoken Language”, 言文一致運動) which started in the latter half of the nineteenth century that the written language—which had reflected the norms of the language used several centuries before—started to reflect the currently spoken language in all areas of writing by 1946. The literary language was among the first to start reflecting this change, some authors writing in vernacular Japanese as early as the late nineteenth century.

Akutagawa did not limit his works to prose only and—much like many writers of his time—wrote poetry and literary criticism as well. For the duration of his literary career, he was a part of *Shinshichōha* (“The School of The New Thought”, 新思潮派), a group which gathered around a literary magazine called *Shinshichō* (“The New Thought”, 新思潮). The *Shinshichōha* writers tried to incorporate Japanese traditions and aesthetics into the literature of the modernizing and Westernizing society—including not only the redefined written language but also the literary and non-literary innovations from the Western countries—all the while criticising the Japanese form of romanticism and naturalism.⁵³ Due to these endeavours, many of the writers belonging to *Shinshichōha*, Akutagawa included, are at times referred to as a part of the Japanese Neorealist School⁵⁴ (*Shingenjitsuha*, 新現実派).⁵⁵

Unlike many of his fellow writers from *Shinshichōha*, however, Akutagawa is also loosely associated with *Tanbiha*. This categorisation is primarily due to Akutagawa’s anti-naturalist approach, his distaste towards the *watakushi shōsetsu* (“I-novel”, 私小説)⁵⁶—which was especially popular among Japanese naturalists—the literary style of some of his short stories as well as the at-times bizarre and certainly dark motifs which he chose to explore in them.⁵⁷

Akutagawa’s choice of themes was by no means arbitrary, nor was it only a response to the concurrent *ero*, *guro*, *nansensu* trend. His tendency towards choosing topics of the macabre variety was largely influenced by his heritage, especially by his ever-present fear of inheriting the mental disease which led to his mother’s death. It was due to said illness that soon after his birth, he was put into care and adopted by his maternal uncle Michiaki Akutagawa from whom he received the family name Akutagawa.⁵⁸ Michiaki Akutagawa

⁵³ HILSKÁ. “Rjúnosuke Akutagawa, mistr povídky.” *Obraz pekla a jiné povídky*, by AKUTAGAWA, pp. 8–9.

⁵⁴ This literary movement is also sometimes called new realism. It should not be confused with the US-based philosophical movement of the same name and period, Nouveau réalisme (an art movement originating in the 1960s), or Neorealism (a theory of international relations from the late 1970s).

⁵⁵ NOVÁK, Miroslav. *Japonská literatura II*. Second revised edition. Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1989, p. 81.

⁵⁶ *Watakushi shōsetsu* or *shishōsetsu* was a literary style built on the authors’ depictions of their own life, emotions, and their perceived position within society. It was often written as a first-person narrative.

⁵⁷ NOVÁK, pp. 82–83.

⁵⁸ KRAEMEROVÁ, Alice. “Doslov.” *Tělo ženy a jiné povídky*, by Rjúnosuke AKUTAGAWA. Translated by Jan LEVORA. Praha: Mladá fronta, 2005, pp. 123–124.

encouraged the boy's interest in studies, including Chinese literature, from which the writer later sourced numerous motifs as well as drew inspiration for many of his short stories.

Having studied English language and literature at university,⁵⁹ Ryūnosuke Akutagawa had a closer relationship to the incoming foreign literature than some. He was born in the time period when most of the political changes were underway and the differences between the Japanese and the Western culture and literature were praised, accepted or loathed, depending on which societal or literary circle one found themselves to be in. Be it as it may, as it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the Western influences reached their peak, foreign literature was still an actual topic when Akutagawa started writing in the early twentieth century.

Profiling himself as not only a writer but a translator as well, Akutagawa's first literary work was a Japanese translation of—the English translation of—Anatole France's *Balthazar* in 1914, other translations of prose and poetry—such as that of W. B. Yeats—soon following.⁶⁰ However, while he was an active translator and around soon enough also a successful author, Akutagawa was also an avid reader whose primary interests lay in Japanese and Chinese classics and—by virtue of his education—in English and by extension American literature. Among the American literates, he soon encountered the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

By the time Akutagawa became an active participant on the literary scene, it had been over two decades since the first wave of Japanese translations of Poe's works which emerged after the first translated short story. None the less, Akutagawa soon became a central figure in defending and promoting Poe's work in Japan, sharing this view with his mentor Sōseki Natsume, another staunch defender of Poe's work and the person who might have introduced Poe's works to Akutagawa in the first place.⁶¹ Alternatively, it might have been through *Tanbiha* that Akutagawa encountered Poe's works as many of the authors of the school acknowledged the romanticist's influence on their writing.⁶²

⁵⁹ LÍMAN, Antonín. *Chrám plný květů: výběr ze tří staletí japonských haiku*. Praha: DharmaGaia, 2011, p. 180.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ MIZUTA LIPPIT. "Poe in Japan," p. 142.

⁶² MIZUTA LIPPIT. "Tanizaki and Poe: The Grotesque and the Quest for Supernal Beauty." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1977, pp. 221–240. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1769231. Accessed 3 June 2020, p. 223.

Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's influence on Japanese literature had not ceased with the author's suicide in 1927. On the contrary, the news of his death had shaken the literary circles and was perceived as the end of one literary era. It was mere years after his death, in 1935, that the so-called Akutagawa Prize was established in the author's memory. This prize is awarded twice a year to new or rising authors to this day.⁶³

2.3 Common traits of the authors and Poe's influence on Akutagawa

Akutagawa was born almost a century after Poe and their possibility of meeting was bridged by half a century—Poe died in 1849, Akutagawa was born in 1892. Nonetheless, there are numerous similarities in their lives as well as literary approaches.

Neither of the authors lived with their birth parents for the majority of their lives, nor were they best known by the names they were born with.⁶⁴ Both authors were especially traumatised by the death of their mother figures. In the case of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, there was also the additional constant worry about the mental illness that killed his mother which was considered hereditary at the time. In Poe's case, it was more the death of his adoptive⁶⁵ mother Frances Allan, than his birth mother who had died in his infancy, because Frances Allan died of tuberculosis, an illness which his birth mother had also died of and which later robbed Poe of his wife Virginia as well. Due to these influences, the insanity and/or death, particularly that of the female characters though not exclusively, are recurring motifs in the works of both writers.

As for their creative similarities, both authors focused mostly on the short story genre, Poe was the author who set most rules of what we nowadays know to be a short story and Akutagawa the person who widely popularized the genre within his country, to an extent referring to Poe's work for this purpose. Their interest in literature also spread into theoretical fields, such as literary criticism and literary theory, though for both authors these had

⁶³ WINKELHÖFEROVÁ. "AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke," p. 53.

⁶⁴ Edgar Allan Poe was born Edgar Poe. Ryūnosuke Akutagawa was born Ryūnosuke Nihara. It should be noted that while he mostly used—and some of his short stories were published under—his adopted name, he also wrote prose under the pseudonym *Chōkōdō Shujin* (澄江堂主人) and haiku under the pseudonym *Gaki* ("Hungry Ghost", 餓鬼/我鬼).

⁶⁵ Though the Allan family never formally adopted Poe, they are often referred to as his adoptive parents in literature.

represented a more substantial source of income as well. And although prose represented the majority of their work, both Poe and Akutagawa created in all three of the classic literary forms—prose, poetry and drama⁶⁶—and it would do both authors disservice not to mention their achievements outside the sphere of epic literature.

Although the Japanese readers largely disregarded Poe's contribution to the lyric upon its introduction, its influence did reach Japan as well. The fame of the narrative poem "The Raven" is indisputable and its status among Anglo-American poetry is comparable to the status of Bashō's⁶⁷ haiku *Furu ike ya* (古池や)⁶⁸ in Japan, including the number of translations both poetic pieces amass. The first translation of "The Raven" from English dates to 1865, its author none other than the *poète maudit* Charles Baudelaire himself. Though Baudelaire introduced "The Raven" in the form of prose, the interest the poem—and other translated works which soon followed—garnered inspired other French literates to try their hand at translating "The Raven", which helped with spreading the interest in Poe's works into other European countries.⁶⁹ In Czech, for example, there were at least sixteen "officially recognised" translations of "The Raven" as of 1985⁷⁰, when they were published in a single collection.⁷¹ Eventually, "The Raven" garnered interest in Japan as well. Poe's poetic influence on Japanese literature was separate from that of his short stories. His poetry became known via its connection to French writers, the influence of French literature being the most prevalent in the Meiji and Taishō periods. Poe's poetry often crosses the boundaries of the lyric and has many aspects of the epic, its composition similar to that of his short stories,

⁶⁶ The topic of the authors' dramas is extended in chapter 3.3.

⁶⁷ Bashō Matsuo (1644–1694), born Kinsaku Matsuo, is generally referred to by the pseudonym Bashō. Bashō is the poet who is credited with the establishment of haiku as its own form, though the then-called *hokku*, was still seen primarily as the first stanza of *haikai no renga* in his time.

⁶⁸ Japanese haikus do not have traditional titles the way Western poetry does, generally being referred to according to the first five moras from the 5–7–5 moraic pattern. As such the English literature refers to the haiku as *Frog poem* (according to the contents), *The Old Pond poem* (according to the literal translation of the first line) and variations thereof.

⁶⁹ The French literature was not the only medium to introduce Poe into European literatures. The reception of Poe's poetry in Spain, for example, was more influenced by the translation of the English originals, which came to Europe from the countries of Latin America.

⁷⁰ The oldest of the translations into Czech dates to 1869, however, the most widely recognised translation is likely the one from 1881, by Jaroslav Vrchlický. Of course, the attempts at translating the poem had not ceased in 1985 and there had been various other attempts since.

⁷¹ BEJBLÍK, Alois. "České překlady Havrana." *Havran: šestnáct českých překladů*, by Edgar Allan POE and Rudolf HAVEL. With an introduction by Alois BEJBLÍK. Edited by Alois BEJBLÍK, et al. Praha: Odeon, 1985, pp. 15–23.

including the emphasis on the motifs Poe used in his short stories. None the less, it had influenced various Japanese poets throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁷²

While Poe's poetic contribution was much more extensive than Akutagawa's, Akutagawa's ventures into poetry are also significant, though only a small fraction is translated from Japanese and thus is not as well-known beyond Japanese borders.⁷³ Publishing under the pseudonym Gaki, Akutagawa concentrated on the poetry of Japanese origin—primarily haiku. Given the strict rules of what constitutes a quality haiku—from the set moraic pattern to the necessity of including the seasonal words *kigo*—the motifs could not diversify in the same way Poe's did. As such Akutagawa's poetry is more representative of his Japanese roots than the influence foreign literature had on his prose. The emphasis on impressions told within a limited amount of words and its conveyed emotionality typical for the haiku form makes it comparable to the lyric poetry of Western literature but is by no means its origin.

From among the non-biographical ones, there are considerably fewer common motifs in the works of the authors. Akutagawa mainly based his stories on historical sources, such as Chinese and Japanese classical texts, and structured his plots in historical settings. While he was inspired by Poe's work and the short story as a genre, only a small amount of the motifs within his stories was West-inspired, aside from several works that in some measure refer to Christianity, which Akutagawa admitted that he at one point of his life “*was artistically in love with*”⁷⁴.⁷⁵ In comparison, the contents of Poe's works are for the most part fictitious and while many of his stories lack specific markers, they are more often contemporary than historical. In that respect, both authors wrote outside the norm of their times.

⁷² MINATO Keiji. “Poe and the Position of the Poet in Contemporary Japan.” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, pp. 29–46. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41498734. Accessed 4 June 2019, pp. 29–31.

⁷³ When talking about the translation of the poetry, I refer to the translations into either English or Czech.

⁷⁴ AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke. “‘The Man from the West’ AND ‘The Man from the West: The Sequel.’” In *Monumenta Nipponica*, Translated by Kevin M. DOAK and J. Scott MATTHEWS, vol. 66, no. 2, 2011, pp. 257–280. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41686468. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021, p. 257.

⁷⁵ Outside of ‘The Man from the West’ and its sequel which serve as Akutagawa's retelling of the Christian lore, his stories are almost exclusively set in Japan. As such a lot of West-inspired motifs are either intruding or used as a literary device which is not always elaborated on. At the same time, due to said fascination by Western literature and Christianity, none of the numerous references to either can be possibly perceived as arbitrary.

Due to his scholarly interest in English literature, it was no wonder that Akutagawa took interest in American literature and thus eventually encountered the works of Edgar Allan Poe as well. While it is certain that Akutagawa became well-versed in Poe's works—as is supported by the existence of the aforementioned lecture “*Tanpensakka to shite no Pō*” (See 2.1)—the answer to the question whether he actually translated some of his stories into Japanese is harder to find. The possibility of Akutagawa having translated some of Poe's work is documented in one of his semi-autobiographical short stories, a 1928 special posthumous edition of ‘*Daidōji Shinsuke no hansei*,’⁷⁶ (‘Daidōji Shinsuke: The Early Years’, 大導寺信輔の半生): “[Akutagawa] would translate one page a day of Poe's short stories. His primary intention of doing this was, more than perfectly translating Poe, to first study the composition of a story, and, secondly, to study the construction of his sentences in this hidden manner.”⁷⁷ As it is hard to discern how much of Akutagawa's actual life was included in the work and how much is an added fictional value, it cannot be taken as irrefutable proof that he had, in fact, translated Poe. The reality is all the harder to prove as no translation of Akutagawa's had made it into the translation “canon” of Poe's works.

Whether Akutagawa did publish any translation of Poe or not—and whether he had even made any—Akutagawa became a central figure in defending and promoting Poe's work in Japan. Being an author of great reputation and positive critical appraisal, his laudatory interest in Poe then helped spread Poe's renown further among the Japanese readers.

⁷⁶ HITCHCOCK, Lori D. *The works of Akutagawa Ryunosuke Lectures on Poe and their applications*. 1991. Ohio State University, Master Thesis. *OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center*. rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1318862304. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Qtd. in HITCHCOCK, Lori D. *The works of Akutagawa Ryunosuke Lectures on Poe and their applications*, p. 11.

3 Analyses of selected works

Edgar Allan Poe and Ryūnosuke Akutagawa were inarguably the masters of their craft. However, while we can trace many similarities in their literary output, the importance of their respective contributions also lies in their differences—be those differences from each other, from their contemporaries or those who came in subsequent decades.

Poe's and Akutagawa's literary output was largely influenced by the authors' lives and—given the similarities of the authors' life experiences—there are consequently numerous similarities in the motifs used as well. Among the most obvious belongs the significant presence of the motif of death, either direct or indirect, such as the motif of murder and crime—e.g. Poe: 'The Black Cat', 'The Tell-Tale Heart', the series of detective short stories centred around the character of C. Auguste Dupin, Akutagawa: '*Jigokuhen*', ('The Hell Screen', 地獄変), '*Kumo no ito*' ('Spider's Thread', 蜘蛛の糸), '*Yabu no naka*' ('In a Grove'/'In a Bamboo Grove', 藪の中)—the motif of insanity as a family legacy—e.g. Poe: 'The Fall of the House of Usher, Akutagawa: '*Haguruma*' ('The Spinning Gears', 齒車)—or the death of a loved one—e.g. Poe: "The Raven", Akutagawa: '*Jigokuhen*'—which are often intertwined with aspects of the supernatural such as a presence of a ghost/deceased or hypnosis—e.g. Poe: 'The Facts in the Case of M. Waldemar', Akutagawa: '*Yabu no naka*'.⁷⁸

Both authors were highly educated and used their extensive acquired knowledge in their work. As such, their stories are interspersed with words from other languages and concepts from different cultures. In addition, some of Poe's plots were loosely based on recent events, and as such reliant on common knowledge at the time of their publication.⁷⁹ This phenomenon of inclusion is so extensive, that in English publications especially⁸⁰, the author's collections are published with explanatory notes, some against the wishes of the author.⁸¹

⁷⁸ The works mentioned are only meant as an example and are by no means an exhaustive list of the works in which the authors used the mentioned motifs.

⁷⁹ 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' was based on a murder case from 1840s New York. It is the first recognised "murder mystery" fiction based on a true event.

⁸⁰ Poe's short stories written in English and various English translations of Akutagawa.

⁸¹ Akutagawa's '*Aru ahō no isshō*' ('The Life of a Stupid Man', 或阿呆の一生) is a biographical short story published posthumously, in which the author refers to various people who had influenced him during his life. In a letter addressed to his friend Masao Kume, he expressed his wish not to have the people identified. (Akutagawa, 2006, 186) Despite that numerous scholars throughout the years have attempted to do so.

3.1 Animals as harbingers of insanity and death

Akutagawa and Poe are both known worldwide—and particularly so, in the Western society—as authors of short stories, especially those with motifs of supernatural, mysterious, and oftentimes macabre nature. Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’ and Akutagawa’s ‘*Jigokuhen*’ (‘The Hell Screen’, 地獄変), which indisputably belong among the most famous works of their respective authors, are the embodiment of the authors’ obscure fascinations. Primarily chosen for comparison based on the animal motif which they share, the two stories might seem not to have much in common aside from being two representative pieces of the short story genre. However, there are other aspects in which the stories are similar, from other shared motifs to the narrative perspective.

3.1.1 ‘The Black Cat’ (Poe)

The short story ‘The Black Cat’ is a first-person narrative told from the point of view of the story’s protagonist. It is a retelling of a life story of a man, who succumbs to the draw of alcoholism and—though he professes himself to have been a lover of animals—in a fit of drunken rage first mutilates and then kills the family cat, Pluto. This deed is followed by the family house burning down, only a single wall with the burnt image of a cat remaining of the building. Later, another cat, which greatly resembles Pluto, enters the story. The protagonist tries to kill the second cat while intoxicated as well, however, when his wife tries to stop him, the protagonist kills her instead and walls her body up in the house’s cellar. The cat seemingly disappears following his wife’s death. Eventually, the man is forced to admit to the murder, because when the police come to investigate the disappearance of the wife, he shows them the cellar in his over-confident state. While there, he knocks on the cellar’s newest wall and the haunting cries of the missing cat—which had been walled up with the body—betray his crime.

The main motif used throughout the story is the recurring presence of a black cat. There are two (real) cats portrayed in the story—the protagonist’s first cat Pluto and the second cat, which remains unnamed throughout its life and possible death—as well as the image of a cat burnt into the remains of the protagonist’s house. The reader’s attention is attracted by the recurrence of the motif as the protagonist keeps track of the similarities and the differences

between the portrayed cats. Throughout the narrative, it also becomes apparent, that it is not only the very presence of the animal which is attributed with importance but that the colour used is meant to add to the significance of the motif as well.

Although even at the time of the publication of the story (i.e. 1843), there was no perceived connection between cats—black or otherwise—witchcraft and/or Satan, some superstitions remain. The views of the Europeans of the Middle Ages overpower the numerous cultural beliefs across the globe which regard cats as bringers of good luck,⁸² and as such the black cats continue to be presented as bad omens and harbingers of bad luck. In fact, Poe himself explicitly reminds the reader of these beliefs when the protagonist mentions that his wife “*made frequent allusions to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise.*”⁸³ Though he immediately amends— “*Not that she was ever serious upon this point – and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered*”⁸⁴—the evoked image is impossible to shake once brought up. The effect of the vocabulary activation consequently makes the reader recollect the more sinister meanings of words, even where there would be none out of context. The subliminal effect is strengthened by the protagonist’s various references to his increasing wariness of either cat. This is used throughout the narrative, for example in the scene where a silhouette of a cat is seemingly outlined on the husk of the man’s burnt-out house. Being a result of a fire, the image of the cat is of course black. Though the protagonist tries to rationalise its appearance, the image of a black cat with a noose around its neck seemingly not only reminds the protagonist of his crime but also foretells the turn for the worse that the man’s life is going to take. While it can be argued that a shape soot stain could be read about as reliably as the resulting images of cloud gazing, the protagonist’s conviction does not let the reader perceive the image as anything *but* the ominous gigantic black cat.

The second strong motif of the short story is the motif of death. The motif is introduced in the very first paragraph with the protagonist’s words: “*But tomorrow I die, and today I*

⁸² NIKOLAJEVA, Maria. “Devils, Demons, Familiars, Friends: Toward a Semiotics of Literary Cats.” *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2009, pp. 248–267, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41388926. Accessed 29 Mar. 2020, pp. 249–251.

⁸³ POE, Edgar Allan. “The Black Cat.” *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Annotated and with an introduction by John S. WHITLEY. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2000. *Tales of Mystery & the Supernatural*, p. 189.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 189.

would unburden my soul.”⁸⁵ Afterwards, the reader bears witness to the protagonist’s two murders. The first murder is the hanging of Pluto, the image of which is later reintroduced through the image on the burnt-out house. The motif of death by hanging is two-fold, on one side the image of the noose Pluto was killed with—seen again around the neck of the cat on the burnt wall—on the other side are the gallows as the punishment for murder and which also reappear later by way of a steadily clearing up image on the second cat’s fur. The second murder is that of the protagonist’s wife, whom he kills with an axe. Though the murder was not premeditated, the protagonist shows no remorse for it. Its inclusion is significant as a motif of not only death but a violent death of a woman, which is a motif recurrent in Poe’s literary works.

An important plot device of the short story is the unreliability of the narrator. The initial paragraph of ‘The Black Cat’ includes the following: “*For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad I am not – and very surely I do not dream.*”⁸⁶ Given the protagonist’s state of mind by the end of the retelling, it would stand to reason to think that even at its beginning he might not be entirely truthful, and his initial persuasions might prove false. In fact, one could read the convictions as an attempt at reverse psychology—by telling the reader that he himself does not believe it, yet pleading to be believed, he attempts to sway the reader to his way of thinking. Even without such analysis, however, the protagonist’s tendency to relocate all blame for his actions on the so-called “perverseness” hints at facts untold, thus not allowing the reader to get a complete picture of the situation. His second scapegoat for all blame is unsurprisingly the cat. The man refers to the (second) cat as the reason for his madness—it has “*seduced [him] into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned [him] to the hangman*”⁸⁷—an allusion to the silhouette of a hangman outlined in white fur on the cat—and a reference to the death by hanging which was imminent for the protagonist once his crime was found out. Mention-worthy is also the fact that the protagonist feels next to no remorse for any of his crimes, the murder of his wife included. Instead, he immediately proceeds to think of ways

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 188.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 196.

to cover up his crime and only feels satisfaction at having covered it up successfully and the quality of the wall he built to do so: “*Here at last, then, my labour has not been in vain.*”⁸⁸ Such behaviours could be attributed to a form of psychopathy or possibly sociopathy. In conclusion, none of the above-mentioned facts supports the possibility of taking the character’s words at face value.

In addition to the questionable reliability of the protagonist, another writing strategy plays a great role in establishing the shadow-like atmosphere and that is that no character is ever called by their name throughout the entire story. The sole exception to this namelessness is Pluto, one of the titular black cats. The use of the name is significant not only for its uniqueness among the characters identified by their relation to the protagonist or occupation but also for its meaning, Pluto is the Roman alternative for Hades, the god of the dead and the king of Underworld/Hell. With this in mind, the protagonist likening the cat to everything from a beast to “Arch-Fiend” gains a new meaning. Even more so, if we subscribe to the sometimes-discussed notion that the second cat is Pluto brought back to life—by reincarnation or by darker means—and not simply a cat which happened to bear resemblance to him.

In all the above mentioned, including the dubious acceptance of the events by the reader, the plot of ‘The Black Cat’ fits well with some of Poe’s other works as well as the nature of dark romanticism. Among Poe’s own works, the story ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ is the most similar, plot and conclusion-wise, though many of his other works share traits with both.

3.1.2 ‘*Jigokuhen*’ (Akutagawa)

‘*Jigokuhen*’ is a first-person narrative told from the point of view of a secondary character, one of the members of the court of Lord (of) Horikawa, whose mansion in the capital city most of the story takes place in. Set in an unspecified century,⁸⁹ the plot follows the creation of a decorative screen—a commission made by Lord Horikawa—by the court’s painter Yoshihide. Yoshihide is the focal character of the narrative. He is hated by the

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 195.

⁸⁹ Given the fact, that the source text for ‘*Jigokuhen*’ is the collection *Jikkunshō/Jikkinshō* (十訓抄) from the early thirteenth century (Odagiri, Miner and Morrell; 171–172) and Akutagawa’s fascination with the history of the Heian period (894–1185), it is likely that the story takes place between the ninth and thirteenth century—most likely twelfth or early thirteenth on account of the source text.

majority of the court for his surly nature and disdain with which he treats everyone he encounters with the sole exception of his daughter. Yoshihide is also the name of a monkey that is kept at the court for the courtiers' entertainment, the name having been given to the animal as a cruel joke aimed at the painter. The titular hell screen brings much pain towards everyone included in its creation, be it the painter himself—who is plagued by his perfectionism and inability to capture the images he desires—Yoshihide's helpers—who are made to endure trials akin to torture in order to provide inspiration for the painter—as well as other characters, principally the painter's daughter and the painter's animal namesake. The climax of the story is the moment when Yoshihide's daughter is burnt in a carriage on the Lord's orders which is supposed to give Yoshihide inspiration for the central piece on the hell screen, which he had been problems with finishing. Though the painter does finish the screen in the end, the burden of its existence is unbearable, and he eventually takes his life.

The story is told as a retrospective of the narrator's past. Even though no specific dates are given, the events had to have happened within the living memory: "*I suspect that even now there are ladies and gentlemen who would recognize the name 'Yoshihide'.*"⁹⁰ The only explicit indication of the timeline is given at the very end of the story when the narrator mentions Yoshihide's grave, which he thinks is likely unrecognisable "*after decades of exposure to the wind and rain.*"⁹¹

One of the strongest motifs in the story is the presence of the monkey named Yoshihide, much like the focal character, and the connection between the two Yoshihides. While Akutagawa could have described (human) Yoshihide's manners like that of a different animal and brought said animal into the court later—all sorts of exotic animals could have been brought to a lord's palace—the fact that it was a monkey, an animal that even naturally so closely resembles a human, plays a vital role in the short story. The mannerism of the monkey resembles that of a human on several occasions, particularly so in the connection with the painter's daughter, whom it adores. The devotion which the painter is also ascribed to feel but the reader is given little to no insight of aside from the painter's numerous attempts to

⁹⁰ AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke. "Hell Screen." *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*, by Ryūnosuke AKUTAGAWA. With an introduction by Haruki MURAKAMI. Translated and annotated by Jay RUBIN. London: Penguin Books, 2006, p. 43.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 73.

free her from her duties at the palace—easily ascribed to an effort to get the girl away from the dubious affections of the lord. The two Yoshihides are rarely depicted to be in the same place—when the painter is not in the scene, the monkey sometimes takes on the role of the focus. The monkey Yoshihide serves as a symbol of Yoshihide’s humanity. This connection seems to be established from the moment the painter’s daughter saves the monkey from punishment—on account of the monkey sharing names with her father—to the moment when the monkey commits suicide by throwing itself into the carriage where the girl is burning to death. Following his daughter’s death Yoshihide finishes the hell screen, the masterpiece of his artistic obsession for which his daughter died, and then—much like the monkey—commits suicide.

The animal motif is strong within the story and its use is not limited to the monkey Yoshihide. There are other animals mentioned within the story, those which are depicted on the hell screen and Yoshihide keeps in his studio, most notably a black snake and a horned owl. These two animals are important in connection to each other rather than in isolation. Though both animals are used as models of the possible tortures of hell, their dichotomy is clear from the moment of their appearance as Yoshihide seems to have an affinity towards the owl and be disdainful towards the snake. Considering Akutagawa’s interest in Christianity and Christian symbolism, it is possible that the snake was chosen based on the presumed connection between serpents and evil. Consequently, when the two animals end up battling the owl is defeated by the snake, which could be interpreted as a foreshadowing of Yoshihide’s imminent loss to his inner demons and thus the story’s climax.

In addition to the monkey not being the only animal motif within ‘*Jigokuhen*’, ‘*Jigokuhen*’ is also not the only short story that Akutagawa used the motif of a monkey in. In the short story ‘*Saru kani gassen*’⁹² (‘The Feud Between the Monkey and the Crab’, 猿蟹合戦) he presents an extended retelling of a folktale in which a monkey is killed by crabs as a revenge for killing their mother. The use of the two monkey motifs differs, however, ‘*Saru kani gassen*’ keeping the fable form of its original. In addition, given that the story was

⁹² ‘*Saru kani gassen*’ is the standard transcription of both the original and the retold tale, however, the form ‘*Saru kani kassen*’ also appears, as it does in Thomas E. Swann’s translation of Akutagawa’s short story.

published in 1923, its publication is debated to be a satirical response to the rise of Proletarian literature, unlike *'Jigokuhen'*, which is clear of such associations.⁹³

A motif prominent in connection to the motif of an animal is that of the painter's insanity. It is many times throughout the story that either the narrator or other characters refer to Yoshihide as mad, possessed by demons or the like. His single-minded devotion to present the ugliness of the world as if it were beautiful and the other character's repulsion of it is more than apparent in the words of the narrator and his retellings of Yoshihide's interactions with other characters. Yoshihide's obsessive state brings up the question of his humanity when the painter finishes the hell screen using the image of his daughter burning in the carriage. His struggle between his artistic pursuits and the paternal devotion to his daughter only ends when he takes his life soon after he finished the screen. Some academics, such as Mizuta Lippit, infer that the portrayal of Yoshihide as "*an insane artist who is so obsessed with his pursuit of the painful, the ugly, and the sinful that he not only loses humanity but also life as his art absorbs it with the completion of the work*"⁹⁴ could have been inspired by Akutagawa's knowledge of Edgar Allan Poe and his works and that Yoshihide's character might have been inspired by Poe himself.

Interwoven with the motif of insanity is the motif of death. The reader is faced with the motif several times on account of the descriptions on the hell screen. Its most prominent use in the narrative is the death of Yoshihide's daughter, followed by the suicide of the two Yoshihides, one immediately and one soon afterwards. The motif of death is quite common in Akutagawa's work. Spanning from one of his very first fragments of a short story *'Shisō'* ('The Shadow of Death', 死相) from as early as 1909⁹⁵, through his famous early short story *'Rashōmon'* (羅生門), to the 1926 short story *'Tenkibo'* ('Death Register', 点鬼簿)—and many more in between—Akutagawa was certainly fascinated by it. That it is a death of a female character, who though nameless had been central to the story, is what sets it apart

⁹³ SWANN, Thomas E. "Note 1" 'Saru Kani Kassen. The Feud Between the Monkey and the Crab,' by Ryūnosuke AKUTAGAWA. *Monumenta Nipponica*, Translated by Thomas E. SWANN. vol. 24, no. 4, 1969, pp. 507–510. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2383885. Accessed 3 Apr. 2021, p. 507.

⁹⁴ MIZUTA LIPPIT. "Poe in Japan," p. 141.

⁹⁵ AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke. "Shisō. The Shadow of Death." *Monumenta Nipponica*, Translated by Thomas E. SWANN. vol. 26, no. 1/2, 1971, pp. 191–193. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2383615. Accessed 3 Apr. 2021, p. 191.

from many of Akutagawa's other works. The reality of Yoshihide's daughter being killed on account of insanity—though it is insanity of another character—can be tied to the loss of his mother to a mental illness. Akutagawa's borderline obsession with the possibility of inheriting said illness is also tied to the twice-used motif of suicide. This motif is also recurrent among Akutagawa's works and it is much-analysed due to the nature of the author's death.

The narrator of '*Jigokuhen*' should be classified as unreliable. Firstly, it would be on account of the narrator retelling events which he himself has not been a part of and only got to hear about them later of which there are several mentions. In the only instance of the narrator's direct interference in the story—which can be inferred as an interruption of sexual harassment of Yoshihide's daughter, possibly by the lord—the narrator does not give clear account of the event, nor does he search or ask for the source of the girl's distress. He justifies that by saying: "*Born stupid, I can never understand anything that isn't perfectly obvious, and so I had no idea what to say to her.*"⁹⁶ It is in this scene that the second prominent reason for the narrator's unreliability comes to the forefront and that is his subservient role to Lord Horikawa. The lord's reign is set as the frame of the work, it is as an episode of his service at the court that the story is told in the first place. It is not clear whether the lord is alive at the present time of the narration, though given that it is said that the lord was young when he ordered the hell screen made it is a possibility. As such it could be expected that the narrator would alter and embellish the events to be in the lord's favour.

3.1.3 Comparison

Both the analysed stories are told from the first-person point of view; however, the utilization of the method differs. 'The Black Cat' is a first-person narrative told from the point of view of the protagonist himself. '*Jigokuhen*' is also written in first person point of view, but the story is centred around Yoshihide—for most part it is the painter Yoshihide, however after the introductory chapter, if the painter is not mentioned then the monkey

⁹⁶ AKUTAGAWA. "Hell Screen." *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*, p. 62.

Yoshihide is within the scene instead. The narrator is secondary and there is only a single occurrence of direct interference by him during the narrative.⁹⁷

Both stories are told retrospectively for the most part. 'The Black Cat' is told by the protagonist as he waits for the capital punishment the following day. The narrative starts in the present and is followed by a linear retelling of the events which led to the protagonist's current state. The introductory paragraphs in the present are not separated from the rest of the text by any kind of page break. The events in '*Jigokuhen*' are told in a less linear fashion. The non-focal narrator retells a story from several decades previous with occasional digression into the narrator's present time or at least time, which is more recent than the main body of the text. At the end of the last section he circles back to the present. However, although the text is separated into section, aside from the introductory first section, the divisions are not necessarily ruled by a difference of timeline or a change of the focal character. In many cases the division is inserted within a single scene.

'The Black Cat' and '*Jigokuhen*' share the recurring animal motif. In 'The Black Cat' the animal motif is primarily based on the titular cat, whereas in '*Jigokuhen*' it is a monkey. The use of the motif differs greatly in the two works. In 'The Black Cat' the two live cats and the image of a cat tie closely to the protagonist's mental decline. The monkey Yoshihide in '*Jigokuhen*' in many ways represents the humanity of the painter of the same name. The monkey is however also closely tied to the mental state of the character as it is at the death of the one being both Yoshihide's care for that the monkey commits suicide and soon after so does the painter. The two animals which the main motif builds on are referenced in the other author's short story as well. The protagonist of 'The Black Cat' also has a monkey, among other animals, an atypical choice of a pet in an American setting. In '*Jigokuhen*' the reference is indirectly made through an owl, which is said to have an appearance of a cat. This owl is later used to attack one of the characters and killed soon afterwards. In neither case is it the only time that Poe or Akutagawa used an animal motif as a focal point of their work. Particularly so, if we consider that although the word "animal" generally brings up the image of a mammal, Akutagawa especially oftentimes used other representatives of the animal

⁹⁷ There are very few explicit references to the "I" of the narrator, in '*Jigokuhen*'. Although from the nature of Japanese as a topic-prominent, but null-subject language, it could be expected, that references would be less common.

kingdom—particularly so those with negative associations—and sometimes, so did Poe. In Poe’s case ‘The Black Cat’ (August 1843) was preceded by ‘The Murders in Rue Morgue’ (April 1841) and ‘The Gold-Bug’ (June 1843) and followed by his most famous utilization of animal motif in the poem “The Raven” (January 1945). In comparison, ‘*Jigokuhen*’ (1918) was preceded e.g. by ‘*Mujina*’ (‘The Raccoon Dog’, 貉)⁹⁸ and published in the same year as ‘*Kumo no ito*’ (April 1918). Many short stories in which Akutagawa centred the story around an animal motif followed afterwards, such as ‘*Nyotai*’ (‘A Woman’s Body’, 女体, published September 1919) or the above mentioned ‘*Saru kani gassen*’ (1923).

Other motifs shared by the two stories are insanity, death and—though not on the surface level—also the motif of hell. The insanity of the two focal characters differs mostly in the characters’ self-awareness of it and the extent to which other characters react to it. In ‘The Black Cat’ exists the protagonist’s Perverseness which the man himself admits to but also sees as an outside force which controls him, much like he sees the cat to be the demonic presence which had seduced him onto the path of murder. Contrastively there is the protagonist’s lack of human empathy and remorse over the murder of his wife. His insanity is seemingly concealed from the other characters’ eyes until the very end. The insanity of Yoshihide in ‘*Jigokuhen*’ is mostly conveyed through his interactions with the other characters. In addition, there is a supernatural element of a possible demonic possession—or alternatively a deal with a demon that Yoshihide had made—which some of the characters seem to believe to be the reason for his nature.

The motif of death in both the short stories is similarly utilised in that it is predominantly women and animals which are killed. The deaths of the two women in particular represent not only the end of life itself; they are preceded by a breach of trust by someone in a superordinate position (a husband and a lord). All the described deaths are violent in nature and outside the natural order of things. Though there are mentions of other deaths in ‘*Jigokuhen*’, they are mostly tied to older legends or imaginary depictions on the screen with the exception of Yoshihide’s suicide at the end of the last section.

⁹⁸ The word *mujina* can refer to several animals, the referee varying depending on the region of Japan. As such translations of the titular animal vary. Unlike the English version, the Czech title is translated as ‘The Badger’ (‘Jezevec’).

The correspondence of the motif of hell in the two narratives is the most superficial of the four motifs analysed. Whereas the motif is understandably central in ‘*Jigokuhen*’ (i.e. the *hell* screen), in ‘The Black Cat’ hell is mostly evoked by the presence of Pluto, a name used for a Roman god of the underworld. Yet the protagonist’s conviction that the cat is a demon in disguise only strengthens the notion.

Neither narrators are ever given name and in fact neither are majority of the characters which appear throughout the two short stories. In ‘The Black Cat’ the only name which is told throughout the story is that of the first cat, Pluto. In ‘*Jigokuhen*’, there are more names given, the most recurring name being Yoshihide, on the basis that two characters are referred to by it. However aside from Lord Horikawa—whose life the timeline is told as a part of—other important characters remain nameless. Principally it is Yoshihide’s daughter, whose presence is a vital element to the story’s plot.

An additional aspect to consider is the reception of ‘The Black Cat’ by the Japanese readers. The short story was one of the two⁹⁹ of Poe’s short stories which were translated for wide public in as early as 1888.¹⁰⁰ Given the popularity which these two stories quickly garnered—up to and including the increased number of yet more of Poe’s works translated into Japanese—it seems obvious that the stories were well-received. However, given the amount of the translations of foreign authors and the differences in cultures in their countries of origin, many works were lost to obscurity at the time. What was it about ‘The Black Cat’, that the Japanese readers connected with?

In his study on ‘The Black Cat’ J. S. Miller claims that the main reasons why the short story caught notice of the audience was two-fold: “*it was both a foreign horror story as well as an example of printed Japanese colloquial narrative.*”¹⁰¹ Even though the novelty of the genre would have certainly aided the spread among readers and the importance of the stylistic choice of colloquial language as the medium used—in the time when its use was still severely

⁹⁹ The other short story was ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’.

¹⁰⁰ Poe’s works were known in Japan even before 1888, however that was limited mostly to universities, which used some of his stories as a learning material. As such, the possibility of earlier translations cannot be discounted.

¹⁰¹ MILLER, J. Scott. “An Early Reading of “The Black Cat” in Japanese.” *Translated Poe*. Edited by Emron ESPLIN and Margarida VALE DE GATO. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press. 2014. pp. 261–270. https://www.academia.edu/24063577/An_Early_Reading_of_The_Black_Cat_in_Japanese. Accessed 5 Apr. 2021, p. 262.

overshadowed by the use of older literary language (See Note 52)—cannot be stressed enough, there is an additional factor which Miller fails to mention and that is the element which bridged the cultural differences of the original text and its Japanese readers. In my opinion, that element was the cat motif itself.

While a lot of the imagery in ‘The Black Cat’ counts on the reader linking the cat to the common superstitions—though it is not the cat, which is the cause of the man’s “bad luck”—the associations differ in Japanese culture. Though there are indeed some accounts of negative associations tied to black cats specifically, it is “[c]ats which are pinkish or reddish-brown in color, [the] “golden flower” cats”¹⁰² which are seen as ill omens, as they are—according to folk myths—more likely to become cat demons. Conversely a three-coloured cat was a good-luck charm, particularly so for sailors.¹⁰³ Japanese superstitions more often connect bad luck and cats in association with injuring or killing a cat, by way of the cat taking revenge on the person who injured/killed it.¹⁰⁴ As such, it can be debated, that though the Japanese readers would not have necessarily understood the connection between the downfall of the protagonist and the black cat, the fact that the resolution of the story can be read as a revenge of the cat(s) in question could account for the short story’s immediate popularity, as it was close to the Japanese folklore beliefs and thus somehow familiar.

In addition to ‘The Black Cat’ paving the road for more of Poe’s stories to be introduced into Japan, the short story is also significant for its contribution to the genres. Importantly it would be the short story genre, as the form had not been widely spread in Japan previously, but also the genres on the grounds of topic. ‘The Black Cat’ was one of the ground-breaking works of the *ero*, *guro*, *nansensu* trend and as such the story which helped open the market for other narrations of not only grotesque but also the thriller or horror genre. Consequently, its early positive reception could have helped the popularity of even ‘*Jigokuhen*’ which had been published thirty years after the translation of ‘The Black Cat’.

¹⁰² OPLER, Morris Edward. “Japanese Folk Belief Concerning the Cat.” *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, vol. 35, no. 9, 1945, pp. 269–275. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24530698 Accessed 25 Apr. 2020, p. 270.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 273.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 272–273.

3.2 Crime as the centre point of interest and the rise of detective fiction

Though it is sometimes considered a substandard genre, detective fiction—and crime fiction in general—is very popular with readers and it has been popular ever since its early works. Edgar Allan Poe had been the one to pioneer the modern detective genre worldwide and both he and Akutagawa had a hand in establishing the genre in their respective national literatures. Of their many short stories ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ and ‘*Yabu no naka*’ (‘In a (Bamboo) Grove’) are undeniably works of crime fiction and—though the classification of ‘*Yabu no naka*’ needs to be elaborated on a little—both also belong to the modern detective genre.

3.2.1 ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ (Poe)

‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is a first-person narrative told from the point of view of an unnamed secondary character, a friend of the story’s focal character—C. Auguste Dupin. The narrator begins the story with a thorough explanation of the nature of analytical reasoning and its differences from calculation or mere ingenuity. It is only then that he retells the story of how he met Dupin during his stay in Paris and, feeling an immediate kinship with the man, proceeded to spend its entirety in his company. During the stay in Paris, information about a mysterious double murder appears in the newspaper—a double murder of two women which had happened in a seemingly closed room. Along with the brutality of the crime, there are discrepancies about the possible culprits, as while the testimonies seem to agree that one suspect was a French male, the information on the other suspect varies greatly—none of the witnesses had seen either of them, their statements are built on what they had heard. Upon the arrest of a suspect whom Dupin knows and owes a favour to, he and the narrator insert themselves into the investigation of the murders. Realising the reason for the discrepancies and using analysis and deduction, Dupin manages to solve the crime, finding out not only the culprit—an ape¹⁰⁵ which had escaped its owner—but also how it had been possible for the crime to happen in the first place.

The story is told as a linear retrospective from the narrator’s past. The time setting can be assumed to be contemporaneous to the time of writing and publication (1841), or

¹⁰⁵ Written as *Ourang-Outang* in the short story, the name is a less common way of referring to an orangutan.

representing the recent past, due to the presence of existing institutions such as *Gazette des Tribunaux* or references to at-the-time living people, such as François-Eugene Vidocq. The entirety of the plot is set in Paris, the murder taking place on a fictional Rue Morgue in a real section of Paris—Quartier St Roch. Consequently, though the nationality of the narrator is uncertain, the focal character Dupin is French—as supported by the narrator referring to Dupin as Frenchman several times throughout the story and Dupin’s own words.¹⁰⁶

As was the case in the previously analysed ‘The Black Cat’, one of the main motifs in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is an animal, though in the case of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ the motif is obscured to the reader at first. The reason for this obscurity lies in its close connection with the second crucial motif—the motif of murder—throughout the entire narration up to the point of the conclusion of the investigation. From the short story’s very title, it seems obvious that the subject matter will not be light. After all, when ridding the name Rue Morgue of the French element “Rue”—though the word’s English meaning “regret” also ties with the plot—we are left with Morgue, *a morgue*, which is used equivalently in the two languages. And the image of the dead bodies accompanies the reader throughout the story. From the introduction of the news of the double murder of Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye into the plot, there is something peculiar about it. As Dupin summarises: “*The police are confounded by the seeming absence of motive – not for the murder itself – but for the atrocity of the murder.*”¹⁰⁷ Given that all the valuables including “*two bags, containing nearly four thousand in gold*”¹⁰⁸ remained at the scene, the lack of sexual motivation of the crime, the brutality of dealing with the victims along with the image of strength which would have been needed for it, as well as the fact that the only points of entrance which seemed to be accessible—the chimneys—“*were too narrow to admit the passage of a human being.*”¹⁰⁹ The reason for the committed crime is indeed shrouded by mystery. The crime is made yet more mysterious by the testimonies which contradict themselves in the descriptions of the voice of one of the perpetrators. By concentrating on

¹⁰⁶ “*I pledge you the honor of a gentleman, and of a Frenchman, that we intend you no injury.*” (Poe, 2000, 87).

¹⁰⁷ POE, Edgar Allan. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Annotated and with an introduction by John S. WHITLEY. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2000. *Tales of Mystery & the Supernatural*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 73.

the manner of the crime and discouraged by its seeming insolvability, the police which investigates the crime ceases to be objective and only sees the crime for its impossibility. The conviction that a murderer of a human simply *had* to be another human clouds everyone's judgement. This belief is so strong that even when Dupin lists the main characteristics of the crime—“*an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification.*”¹¹⁰—the narrator is still convinced that the murderer must have been a man, although a mad one, until he is presented with tangible evidence to the contrary—animal hair. Through the narrator's first-person limited—i.e. not omniscient—point of view, the reader's access to information is as limited as the narrator's is. It is only with the additional information that the reader is allowed to realise that the motif of murder which they had followed from the start of the story is intrinsically and inseparably connected with the animal motif, as the murder had been committed by an animal in the first place. Yet where the murder seemed inhuman and almost supernatural for its brutality when it was thought that the murderer was a man, it is the introduction of the ape as the perpetrator that makes the manner seem more “natural”—the explanation of the murder as a response of an enraged animal not aware of its strength and the moral consequences of its actions more acceptable than any alternative.

As evidenced by murder being one of the two main motifs of the short story as well as the inclusion of the character of a detective, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is certainly one of the most prototypical representatives of the modern detective genre. Aside from being the first recognised modern detective short story, however, the short story bears another label important to the detective genre: the first “locked room” or “impossible crime” mystery. In other words, an account of a crime, which should have been impossible to commit from the first recount of evidence. Considering that ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is not only the first of Poe's detective short stories but also the very first of the genre, the locked room as a place where a crime happened takes on an almost mystical sheen and bears a semblance of the supernatural. Dupin however quickly disregards the notion—“*It is not too much to say*

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 83.

that neither of us believe in preternatural events. Madame and Mademoiselle L'Españaye were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially."¹¹¹ In these sentences lies the essence of Poe's approach to the detective genre. Dupin's no-nonsense approach to a crime which has the police stumped is further supported by his assurances that "*all apparent impossibilities must be proved to be not such in reality.*"¹¹²—a statement reminiscent of a quote later made by Sherlock Holmes.¹¹³ As such, while Poe used "true" supernatural motifs in some of his other short stories, in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', however, he used the illusion of supernatural and mysticism as a device to highlight the brilliance of Dupin's ability to solve an unsolvable, yet wholly natural crime.

The theme of a locked space is not limited to Poe's ventures into the detective genre. Various reiterations of locked, confined and otherwise constricting spaces is a recurring motif, which often ties with the death of the characters who had found themselves in these limited spaces. From the short story 'The Premature Burial' and the 'Fall of the House of Usher', which share the theme of being buried alive, to 'The Mask of Red Death', which tells the story of a rich man and his company, who had locked themselves into a set of rooms in order to escape from the illness called "Red Death", only for the illness to find its way inside anyway.¹¹⁴

As opposed to the narrators of the majority of Poe's literary output, the narrator of his series of detective stories can be classed as a reliable one. While the reader is given next to no information about the narrator and the use of the first-person point of view can arguably never give a truly objective narration, there is nothing illogical or contradictory in the involvement of the narrator or his recounting of the events that would suggest unreliability. Although he could be seen as biased on account of their friendship and hardly ever leaves Dupin's side throughout the narrative, it could be argued that it would be *because* the narrator admires Dupin's abilities that he would endeavour to embellish as little as possible to highlight his friend's natural brilliance. A comparison can be found within the story itself.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 78.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 79.

¹¹³ The most common variant of the quote—"[W]hen you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." (Doyle, 278)—appears in the 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet', however, the quote appears in various reiterations in other works centred around Sherlock Holmes as well.

¹¹⁴ HILSKÝ. "Povídkář Poe." *Jáma a kyvadlo a jiné povídky*, by POE, pp. 433–434.

There is a seeming unreliability in the recount of the witness testimonies which are included as a part of the narration. The testimonies are contradictory, which would make it probable that at least one of the witnesses is lying. However, on a closer inspection—as done by Dupin within the story—it is apparent that the witnesses’ statements mostly align but for the description of the voice of a second suspect. They are not sure whether the voice was male or female, shrill or rough, and in which language it spoke. What they do agree on is that the suspect did not speak in their maternal language, or in a language they were well-acquainted with. This is later explained when it is revealed that the perpetrator was not human. The reason for their confusion were their attempts to categorise the sounds the ape made. With this discrepancy clarified their testaments become reliable once again.

Similarly to some of his other short stories, in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ Poe manipulates names as a part of his narrative strategy. Putting aside the rather minor retraction of some of the names—i.e. “*I know G—, the Prefect of Police*”¹¹⁵—and addresses—“*Call at No.—, Rue—, Faubourg St Germain*”¹¹⁶—the major non-use in the short story is the absence of the name of the narrator. While we do know that the narrator is male, nothing is known about him regarding his appearance and other secondary information, aside from the fact that he is *not* from Paris. The readers never find out his name in this short story, nor do they get to know it in the two additional short stories which have C. Auguste Dupin as the focal character.

C. Auguste Dupin later appears in two more short stories: ‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ and ‘The Purloined Letter’ which sets yet another precedent for the detective genre of the future generations—its tendency towards serialisation. Though the serial realisation of a single work was well-known by then, the serialisation of separate stories connected by their characters started with the detective stories by Edgar Allan Poe and was later developed by Arthur Conan Doyle.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ POE. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, p. 75.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 85.

¹¹⁷ SCAGGS. “Serial fiction,” p. 148.

3.2.2 ‘*Yabu no naka*’ (Akutagawa)

Though it might not be the genre that comes to mind immediately, Akutagawa’s ‘*Yabu no naka*’ can indeed be considered a work of detective fiction or at the very least crime fiction. The story is a first-person account of several narrators in the form of a series of witness statements and confessions concerning the same crime: a murder of a samurai and the rape of his wife. As such the story lacks a protagonist.

Known worldwide through its 1960 film adaptation which borrowed a name from another of Akutagawa’s stories—*Rashōmon*—‘*Yabu no naka*’ itself is based on an older source, specifically a story from the twelfth-century collection *Konjaku monogatari*, as are many of Akutagawa’s short stories. Aside from *Konjaku monogatari* Akutagawa borrowed motifs from other classical texts such as *Jikkunshō* (See Note 89), but also from newer literary works. Influences on his other short stories from outside Japan and China were also often traced to America, such as the 1907 horror short story ‘The Moonlit Road’ by Ambrose Bierce—which was also a possible influence on the final form of ‘*Yabu no naka*’¹¹⁸—or the writings on Buddhism by the German-American author Paul Carus, which belong among the traceable influences on the short story ‘*Kumo no ito*’.¹¹⁹

The main motif of the short story is the motif of murder, along with the motif of the unreliability of information. The plot of the story is built on recounts of a crime, one which most agree was a murder and a rape, though not all involved do. Given the discrepancies between the statements of the witnesses, it seems to be impossible to reach a conclusion in the matter. The murder might have also been a suicide, or it could have been an unsuccessful attempt at a murder-suicide. If it however was murder, the bandit who claims to be responsible for it as likely committed the crime as he didn’t. Though there is an investigation of what had happened supposedly ongoing—as the reader can infer from the collection of testimonies—the likelihood of anything being solved seems slim, as the testimony of the policeman who apprehended the bandit is as unreliable in its minutiae as the rest of the statements are.

¹¹⁸ RUBIN. “Translator’s Note.” *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*, by AKUTAGAWA, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ KEENE, Donald. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era: Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 565.

The motif of murder and unreliability of information both is not limited to *'Yabu no naka'* from among Akutagawa's works. A short story which deals with a similar combination is *'Giwaku'* ("Doubts", 疑惑) from 1919, which tells the story of a man who killed his wife during a fire which broke out in their house because of an earthquake—supposedly to spare her the pain of burning alive—as retold to a professor of ethics. While the narration of *'Giwaku'* is not fragmented in the same way *'Yabu no naka'* is, the retold events are fragmentary enough and interspersed with such varied emotions that the reliability of the speaker as questionable as are the statements of the witnesses in *'Yabu no naka'*.

An important part of the plot of *'Yabu no naka'* is its incorporation of supernatural elements—which are a common occurrence in Akutagawa's works—in the form of one of the statements being given by the dead samurai via a medium. This inclusion could be viewed as yet another way of obstructing the investigation, given that there is no way to verify if the medium has indeed communicated the will of the dead man or had been paid off to tell a certain account of the story. Contrastively, we do not have the information on whether the supernatural is the norm in the setting of the story. Because while the witnesses and the involved persons refer existing in the Kyoto region—such as Kiyomizu Temple—and we can assume that the time setting corresponds with the source text—placing the plot into either late twelfth or early thirteenth century—the reader is not given explicit confirmation of these facts. As such, the inclusion of the supernatural in the plot can just as easily reflect the spiritual beliefs of the late Heian period as it can indicate a completely fictional setting.

'Yabu no naka' consists of subsections told from the point of view of several unreliable narrators. The testimonies do not add up into a coherent retelling, some testimonies outright contradicting each other. As such it is obvious that at least one witness is lying, though it is possible numerous witnesses do. The possibility of the falsehood of the statements makes the reader distrustful of all witnesses and consequently no narrator is seen as a reliable one, though some of them could be. Given that the crime remains unsolved, however, the reader never finds out the truth of the matter.

Most of the testimonies are not given under names, just occupations, the exception being the confession of the bandit Tajōmaru. He is also the only person that multiple people refer to. Though this should prove the man's identity without a doubt, when reading carefully

it is apparent that even this fact is not completely certain. The policeman (orig. *hōmen*, 放免) who had caught him does not identify him with complete certainty but would want the credit for catching a well-known bandit. The bandit is one of the few who use the name—“*Still, I am Tajōmaru.*”¹²⁰—the reference to himself seemingly illogical, unless we consider the option of the bandit wanting to take on the name Tajōmaru for its far-spread ill-repute, rather than remaining a no-name criminal. The fact that he had committed murder is presumed indisputable. The third reference to Tajōmaru is made in the testimony of a woman who claims to be the mother of the samurai’s wife, which could be explained on account of having heard the name Tajōmaru only after she arrived. It is also in the testimony of this woman—who is referred to as *ōna* (“an elderly woman”, 媼) in the original text—that two other names appear: the samurai is identified as Kanazawa no Takehiro and his wife as Masago. Given the lack of motive for claiming a missing woman for a daughter, her testimony seems to be the more reliable of those offered, though the lack of identification of the testimony itself is dubious.

On the basis that ‘*Yabu no naka*’ is a fictional recounting of a crime that is set in past, was investigated in past but was not actually written in past, the short story can be classed as historical crime fiction.¹²¹ At the same time, while the boom of Japanese interest in detective short stories can be—rightfully—attributed to Edogawa Ranpo,¹²² ‘*Yabu no naka*’ should be classified among the early detective fiction in Japan, as it fits the scheme of detective fiction defined as defined by Scaggs: “[It is] *fiction centred around the investigation of a crime that focuses the attention on the method of detection by structuring the story around a mystery that appears insoluble through normal investigative methods.*”¹²³ Though the mystery remains unsolved, the focal point of the plot is the mystery of the samurai’s death and his wife’s fate. The investigative method used is the comparison of testimonies of those involved, the confession of the presumed murderer, penitent confession of the wife, as well as the account of the crime as retold by the murdered man himself, through a medium. As such,

¹²⁰ AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke. “In a Bamboo Grove.” *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*. With an introduction by Haruki MURAKAMI. Translated and annotated by Jay RUBIN. London: Penguin Books, 2006, p. 14.

¹²¹ SCAGGS. “historical crime fiction,” p. 145.

¹²² MIZUTA LIPPIT. “Poe in Japan,” pp. 140–141.

¹²³ SCAGGS. “detective fiction,” p. 144.

although the short story lacks the character of a detective typically present in Western literature, we could rightfully sort '*Yabu no naka*' as a "historical detective fiction".

3.2.3 Comparison

All crime fiction in the broader sense, being it an account of the crime or its investigation adheres to the standard scheme of old. Some simply adhere to it more closely than others. Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'—widely accepted as the very first short story of the genre—is written as a non-protagonist first-person narrative. Unlike the previously analysed '*Jigokuhen*', however, the narrator is directly involved in the plot. Though unnamed, the narrator is a friend of C. Auguste Dupin, the man who took on the investigation of a seemingly unsolvable crime who is also the short story's focal character. As Dupin works on solving the crime, long passages of the short story are made up of his monologues—his manner of conveying information likened to a soliloquy by the narrator on one occasion—though there are also several passages of transcripts from other sources, such as witness testimonies of the crime. Akutagawa's '*Yabu no naka*' is a short story told solely through the recount of one crime from the point of view of numerous narrators. There is no single narrator, nor is there a focal character, as several testimonies refer only to the circumstances of the crime. The focus of the story is the crime itself.

Closely tied with the use of point of view in the two short stories is the reliability of the narrators involved. Though it could be argued that first-person narration can never be truly objective, there is nothing in the involvement of the narrator of 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' or his recounting of the events that would suggest unreliability. Though the narrator is emotionally invested on account of their friendship it is also because of it and his admiration of Dupin's abilities, that he would endeavour to embellish as little as possible to highlight his friend's natural brilliance. Contrastively, the retelling of events of '*Yabu no naka*' is compiled from the accounts of several narrators. This multiperspectivity gives way to contradictory statements and allegations which in turn render all statements worthless and all narrators may subsequently be considered unreliable, as there is no option of crosschecking on the evidence given. While some testimonies could be agreed to be more reliable than others, the only truly verifiable information is that the samurai had died and that

his wife had been raped by the captured bandit, everything else about the incident could be disputed on account of two testimonies contradicting each other or a possible ulterior motive. The issue of multiperspectivity is, in fact, a theme which the two short stories share. While the double murder in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is described by numerous witnesses, there also arises the problem of contradictory testimonies. However, in Poe’s short story, the witnesses disagree on only one account—the nationality and quality of voice of one of the suspects—which is later explained by the fact that the perpetrator was not human and the witnesses’ attempts to categorise a non-existent language is the reason for confusion. In that vein, whereas Poe used the unreliability in his short story as a temporary device, in ‘*Yabu no naka*’ the unreliability of the testimonies is the whole purpose of putting them into contrast. The readers are left to wonder and make up their mind as to what is true and what is not, if anything even is.

The question of the reliability of narration also arises on account of the use and non-use of proper names within the two short stories. While in ‘The Murders in Rue Morgue’ the redaction of the character names and place names is minimal, the name of the narrator himself isn’t revealed and he remains unnamed in all of the three short stories that Poe wrote with Dupin as the focal character. However, given that the narrator never leaves Dupin’s side throughout the investigation—and other people are only rarely present—it would make sense that he is not repeatedly addressed. Contrastively, though ‘*Yabu no naka*’ is made up of seven statements—made by eight characters, if the medium and the dead man’s spirit is counted separately—only three character names appear within the story, neither of which is reliably verified.

The plot of ‘The Murders in Rue Morgue’ is completely fictitious, it was only the second case of C. Auguste Dupin—‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’—that Poe based the short story on a real event. ‘*Yabu no naka*’ has its roots in a collection *Konjaku monogatari*, as do many of Akutagawa’s other short stories. Similarly dissimilar is also the supposed time setting of the two stories—‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is written as contemporary fiction, whereas ‘*Yabu no naka*’ is clearly set into the past, possibly a late twelfth or early thirteenth century. What the two stories do have in common, however, is the use of a real geographical setting. While the Rue Morgue itself does not exist, Quartier St. Roch in Paris

does and so do other places mentioned in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’. Similarly, the plot of ‘*Yabu no naka*’ refers to various existing areas in the Kyoto region.

Classed as detective fiction, the two short stories understandably share the motif of murder, however, in both cases this motif is inseparably entwined with the second main motif of the story. In the case of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, the second motif is once again the motif of an animal, as had been the case in ‘The Black Cat’. Unlike the latter, however, the animal motif is first overshadowed by the motif of murder in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’. The reminder of death is present from the moment of reading the short story’s title, and subsequently, the investigation of the two murders in the Rue Morgue brings up the motif into the forefront repetitively be it through the numerous accounts of the witnesses or the deductions Dupin makes about the crime. The animal aspect is unveiled at the end of the story when it is revealed that the culprit was an ape, which retrospectively makes the reader reconsider all the facts of the crime in the light of this information. In ‘*Yabu no naka*’ the motif of murder is just as strong and just as interwoven with the second motif of the story—the unreliability of information. The separation of the short story’s subsections with titles such as “testimony” (orig. *monogatari*, 物語), “confession” (orig. *hakujō*, 白状) and “penitent confession” (orig. *zange*, 懺悔), the reader’s mind is primed for the presence of a crime happening within the story. When the first witness account mentions a dead body within two sentences of the story starting, it becomes immediately obvious that the crime dealt with is murder.¹²⁴ It is also in the first testimony—“The Testimony of a Woodcutter under Questioning by the Magistrate”—that the unreliability of information comes into play. Because while reading the testimonies as standalone statements makes them seem reasonable and logical it is when two and eventually more are put into contrast that it becomes apparent that something is not right. It is already the first testimony that disagrees on a point majority of the others take for granted—the presence of a horse in the bamboo grove, where the crime had taken place. From the moment this information is disproved the sense of being lied to only increases and eventually, none of the information offered by any of the characters reads as true.

¹²⁴ It is not until the third testimony that it is mentioned that a woman disappeared and it is only later yet that her connection to the case is that she had been raped by the bandit who had killed the man, her husband.

An important element within the two stories is the contrast of the supernatural and the rational, particularly so when aligning it with the treatment of the crime and its investigation. The connection is inversed. The crime in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ is at first glance seen as inhuman, almost supernatural and it is through rationalizing the events that the case is solved. Contrastively, in ‘*Yabu no naka*’ the samurai is killed and where the rational approach fails in the investigation, there comes the attempt to solve the case through supernatural means. Unfortunately, the dead man’s testimony only brings up yet another account of the events which had led to his death and the crime remains unsolved.

Poe centred the plot ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ around his detective protagonist. He had done it so masterfully that detective fiction is said to have been established with this story and the plot structure and the narrative approach he used defined the essence of the genre worldwide, numerous writers after him following a similar premise.¹²⁵ An intelligent detective¹²⁶ with a seemingly less intelligent helper whose perception of the case might be flawed, but who serves as a sounding board for the detective, which eventually serves its purpose in solving the case.¹²⁷ In comparison, the scheme of ‘*Yabu no naka*’ differs. Akutagawa’s short story does not have a single focal character, detective or otherwise, much like it does not have a single narrator. Instead, there are representatives of various social classes and vastly differing degrees of involvement in the case. Nevertheless, the short story is a recount of a crime and the testimonies themselves represent proofs of its investigation, which is why it should be classed as detective fiction, specifically historical detective fiction.

3.3 Historical plays in the pen of the non-dramatists

Poe and Akutagawa are undeniably important representatives of the literary canon. Both had made great advances in prose, particularly the short story genre, and authored memorable works of poetry. What they are not known as, however, are playwrights, even

¹²⁵ The worldwide influence is, of course, relative. While there certainly are detective stories written according to Poe’s scheme all around the world, the biggest ratio of these detective stories compared to other variants would have appeared on the Euro-American literary scene.

¹²⁶ While the word “detective” existed in English as a name of a profession, the designation is never once used to refer to C. Auguste Dupin in any of the short stories he appears in. The word started being used later on.

¹²⁷ This device was later used by—and remains more associated with—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who shared the majority of the stories concerning his detective Sherlock Holmes by way of the writings of the detective’s friend Doctor John H. Watson.

though both had made contributions to this type of literature as well. The two authors' ventures into the drama are similar in that both authors had contributed only very little. At the same time, however, the two plays have features characteristic of the literary style of their respective authors and represent an important milestone in their formation. As such neither Poe's *Politian* nor Akutagawa's *Futari Komachi* (Two Komachis, 二人小町) should be lost among the writer's other works and deserve attention.

3.3.1 *Politian* (Poe)

Politian is the singular play written by Edgar Allan Poe. Written in blank verse—unrhymed verse with regular metre—it tells the story of a revenge plot against Castiglione, an heir of Duke Di Broglio. Castiglione is newly engaged to his cousin Alessandra however the news of the betrothal is taken poorly by Duke Di Broglio's orphan ward Lalage. Lalage has been previously seduced by Castiglione and consequently banished from society by the Duke, for which she swears vengeance against Castiglione. Before Castiglione's wedding can take place, Lalage meets Politian—Earl of Leicester, whose life is supposedly devoid of meaning—who falls in love with her. When Politian professes his love to her, Lalage tells him that she cannot leave with him while Castiglione lives. When Politian challenges Castiglione to a duel, Castiglione begs Politian to kill him when he learns that Politian is fighting in the name of Lalage. Politian decides not to do so, wanting him to live with his shame. Lalage however convinces Politian that Castiglione should be killed once again.

This play was never finished during Poe's life and it remains unfinished to this day. Of the existing eleven scenes, only five were published while Poe was alive in two issues of the magazine *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1835 and 1836 as "Scenes from an unpublished Drama" and later republished in 1845 in *The Raven and Other Poems*.¹²⁸ Given that Poe's work as a critic included the criticism of plays, it might seem surprising that only this one attempt at playwrighting had been made, however, given the uncomplete state of the play—obvious not only from the lack of an ending but also the discrepancies in the play's line numbering—and its many other offences against the genre, some academics argue that the

¹²⁸ The scenes published and later republished thus are not the opening scenes of the later complete edition. In order of appearance as later arranged by T. O. Mabbott they were the scenes IV, VI, VII (1835) and III, IX (1836).

play was an attempt at a satire of the genre.¹²⁹ The most complete form of *Politian*—including all eleven scenes which Poe wrote—is the work of Thomas Ollive Mabbott, a literary scholar who specialised in Poe. Mabbott’s version was published as *Politian, An Unfinished Tragedy* in 1923, the play edited in accordance with the play’s republication but also with adjustments made on account of Poe’s correspondence and other statements made regarding the play.¹³⁰

The premise of *Politian* is similar to the premise of the short story ‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ in that it is a fictitious retelling of a true event, a murder which happened in Kentucky a decade prior, the so-called “Kentucky Tragedy”¹³¹. It is important to note that the publication of “Scenes from an unpublished Drama” in 1835–1836 precedes the publication of ‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ in 1842 and even that of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ in 1841. As such *Politian* can be regarded as possibly Poe’s earliest attempts at the crime genre, later taken even further and perfected in the above-mentioned short stories. (See 3.2)

Unlike the later short story inspired by true events, the plot of *Politian* was not kept as contemporaneous but set into Rome into roughly sixteenth century.¹³² This decision was rather uncharacteristic of Poe and yet this choice of setting does not completely isolate the play among Poe’s works. One of the characters recites Poe’s own earlier poem “The Coliseum” (1833) as a part of the play, the poem slightly extended from its original version but otherwise largely unchanged. That the one to recite the poem is the titular Politian, the only character explicitly or at least presumably not of Italian descent is one of the ironies of the play. Politian’s poetic monologue is recited in scene XI (lines 1–54), the last of the scenes which Poe finished. The poem had been originally written for a contest, which Poe didn’t win, though he contested his loss as he perceived “The Coliseum” as superior to the winning

¹²⁹ RICHARDS, Jeffrey H. “Poe, ‘Politian’, and the Drama of Critique.” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2002, pp. 3–27. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41506137. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021, p. 4.

¹³⁰ POE, Edgar Allan. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe—Vol. I: Poems*, Edited by Thomas Ollive MABBOTT. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969. *The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom1p000.htm. Accessed 1 Apr. 2021, p. 241–242.

¹³¹ “Kentucky Tragedy” refers to the murder of Colonel Solomon P. Sharp by Jereboam O. Beauchamp in 1825. After Sharp had seduced Ann Cook—who became pregnant by him, but the child died young—she married Beauchamp, who had previously challenged Sharp to a duel in her honour. As Sharp refused the duel the married couple eventually decided that Beauchamp should kill Sharp, which he did. After being tried the two attempted suicide in jail, but Beauchamp survived, only to be hanged later for the murder. (Mabbott, 1969, 242–243)

¹³² The play’s setting is only defined as “Rome” in the scenes published by Poe. The time setting has been later specified in Mabbott’s edition.

poem “The Song of the Wind” by John H. Hewitt, written under the pseudonym Henry Wilton.¹³³ As such the inclusion of the poem into the play without much amendments might have been self-serving or even the reason for setting the retelling of the Kentucky tragedy into Rome in the first place. This notion seems even more probable when taken into consideration the fact that the blank verse used in “The Coliseum” differs from that used in the rest of the play as the poem was one of Poe’s earliest attempts at the form.¹³⁴

Along with the motif of revenge and the consequent murder plot, which aligns well with Poe’s usual themes and motifs of choice, the main motif in the play is the motif of a love triangle, which is unique to the story. The sphere of romantic relationships is only seldom elaborated upon by Poe—particularly in the form of an ongoing relationship—the majority of Poe’s works generally dealing with the aftermath of a relationship cut short by death. While the consequences of one’s actions are also an important part of the plot, it is more the sequence of events leading up to the tragedy rather than the tragedy itself which makes up the plot of *Politian*. Firstly, there is the reason for Lalage’s hate for Castiglione which seems to stem from more than simply her seduction. If we correlate the events of *Politian* with the truths of the Kentucky tragedy the words of Castiglione’s companion San Ozzo—“*I have not seen her for eleven months. / The Duke your father, as you very well know, / Keeps her secluded from society,*”¹³⁵ seem to hint at the possibility of Lalage having gotten pregnant by Castiglione, although given the absence of a child she would have possibly lost the child to miscarriage or early death, as happened to Ann Cook who Lalage was based on. And although Castiglione professes his regrets over Lalage’s fate and the support of her character, his self-defence is based on the importance of his status—“*Oh that I were not / Castiglione but some peasant hind / The humble tiller of some humble field / That I might dare be honest!*”¹³⁶ There is also the issue of Politian’s displeasure with life being cured by Lalage’s presence¹³⁷ which results in his devotion to her cause of taking revenge on Castiglione. However as the first attempt to fulfil her wish fails upon his decision to leave

¹³³ MABBOTT, Thomas Ollive. “The Coliseum.” by Edgar Allan POE. Edited by Thomas Ollive MABBOTT. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969. *The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. www.eapoe.org/works/mabbott/tom1p000.htm. Accessed 1 Apr. 2021, p. 227.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 226.

¹³⁵ POE, Edgar Allan. “Politian.” *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe—Vol. I: Poems*. II, 27–29.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, II, 48–51.

¹³⁷ The plot shift from Politian hearing Lalage’s voice to him professing his love to her between scenes VI and VII is abrupt and rather nonsensical, however, that can be likely attributed to the unfinished state of the play.

Castiglione alive—who refused to duel with Politian at first, only to beg Politian for death upon hearing Lalage’s name—the unfinished state of the play is all the more obvious for the absence of the climax which would have been Castiglione’s death or—taking into account the events of “Kentucky Tragedy”—possibly the eventual suicide of Politian and Lalage. While the scheming made in preparation by Lalage—as well as the secondary side-schemes done by other characters—are present, the main elements of a tragedy are missing. Taking into account the possibility of Poe not finishing *Politian* on purpose, that might have been the intention.

3.3.2 *Futari Komachi* (Akutagawa)

Futari Komachi, published in 1923, is Akutagawa’s only play. As the title suggests, the plot is centred around two characters named Komachi, one is the ninth-century poet Ono no Komachi, the other is Tamatsukuri no Komachi.¹³⁸ In four scenes *Futari Komachi* tells the story of how the two Komachis came to be denied access to hell. When young Ono no Komachi is visited by Messenger [from hell], he intends to take her to hell with him, but she deceives him by claiming that she is pregnant. When Messenger takes pity on her and says that he needs to take a woman of the same name and age in her stead, Ono no Komachi offers the name of her rival, Tamatsukuri no Komachi. Tamatsukuri no Komachi also escapes hell—by seducing Messenger. Decades later, the two Komachis are tired of life in frail bodies and upon meeting Messenger again, demand to be taken with him to hell. However, Messenger is tired of their deceptions—the deceptions of all women as well as women in general—and refuses to oblige.

In the absence of geographical markers, the reference to the Heian period poet Ono no Komachi, who supposedly lived in Kyoto, establishes a setting comparable to that of most of Akutagawa’s short stories. In the setting of the story, word choice is also important. Of particular interest is the character “Messenger”—the only character that appears in all four

¹³⁸ Tamatsukuri no Komachi is in some sources identified with Ono no Komachi. The confusion began over an eleventh-century book *Tamatsukuri Komachi sōsuishō*. Though the poet Ono no Komachi was often described as virtuous, Tamatsukuri in this work is depicted as a bitter and arrogant old woman. On the account of the vastly different personalities ascribed to the two names, it is believed that they originally referred to two different people and is attributed to the thirteenth-century works which quote the book as a biography of Ono no Komachi’s life. (Mulhern, 308)

scenes—who is called *yomi no tsukai* (黄泉の使) in the original Japanese text. The word *yomi*—as well as the longer construction *yomi no kuni*—means “hell”, “underworld”, or alternatively “the land of the dead”, one of the three lands where gods dwell according to Shinto.¹³⁹ Inseparably connected with Shinto, this term is common in reference to the concept by the eighth century, as documented in the oldest Japanese chronicle *Kojiki* (古事記). By introducing this term into the play, Akutagawa’s referential point of afterlife differs from that in ‘*Jigokuhen*’, his other widely-translated short story dealing with hell ‘*Kumo no ito*’ (‘Spider’s Thread’) or even the ones unknown to the English reader due to being untranslated, such as ‘*Kodoku jigoku*’ (‘The Hell of Loneliness’, 孤独地獄). At the same time, it should be highlighted that while *yomi* is the first introduced term, its use is for the most part limited to the references to Messenger and the alternative word for hell—*jigoku*—appears frequently throughout the play.

E.g. 何、地獄も考えるほど、悪いところではありません。¹⁴⁰

Nani, jigoku mo kangaeru hodo, warui tokoro de wa arimasen.

“No, even hell is not so bad a place as you think.”¹⁴¹

The duality of use is interesting from a historical viewpoint as well as in Akutagawa’s lifetime Shinto was favoured over Buddhism, given that it was through Shinto that the imperial family explained its right to the throne. None the less, the use of both terms is likely a device through which Akutagawa tried to further instil the atmosphere of the Heian-period setting.

Similar in use to the author’s short stories are also the play’s supernatural elements. Primarily, the supernatural centres around the presence of Messenger as the only character who appears in all scenes. However, it is also Messenger’s presence along with that of Spirit as two supernatural characters of only four characters in the play which makes it quite reminiscent of Akutagawa’s other works, the previously analysed ‘*Yabu no naka*’ included.

¹³⁹ Sometimes misclassified as a religion, Shinto (*shintō*, “the way of the Gods”, 神道) is a set of spiritual practices originating in Japan.

¹⁴⁰ AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke. *Futari Komachi*. Aozora Bunko. www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000879/files/86_15241.html. Accessed 31 Mar. 2021.

¹⁴¹ AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke. *Futari Komachi*. *Monumenta Nipponica*, Translated by Thomas E. SWANN. vol. 23, no. 3/4, 1968, pp. 485–495. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2383502. Accessed 2 Apr. 2021, p. 486.

The sameness of the name Komachi used by two different characters is one of the central points of the play. The two remaining characters, however, do not have proper names. One is only referred to by his occupation—i.e. Messenger from hell—the other is referred to by his supernatural classification as Spirit in the stage directions and while there is another designation used for him—*sanjū banjin* (“God no. 30”, 三十番神)—that name is also a mode of classification rather than the character’s proper name.

In the play, Akutagawa reflects two of the common group of legends about Ono no Komachi. First are the legends about the cruel, calculating Ono no Komachi, the characteristics which would sometimes be attributed more to the character of Tamatsukuri no Komachi. While the distinction could seem important—as the two are indeed depicted as two separate persons within the play—the fact that both Komachis in *Futari Komachi* are portrayed as such erases the distinction. The second are the legends about aged Komachi, which are included as the last scene of the play.

The presence of two Komachis within the play is possibly an allusion to a device often used in the plays of Japanese traditional theatre *nō* (*nōgakudō*, 能楽堂)—the duality of the main character who appears in two forms (his/her true form and a supernatural form). Though the natural-supernatural dichotomy is lacking, Akutagawa would have certainly been aware of the device and could have adjusted it for the dual characters named Komachi—the assumedly existing yet mysterious Ono no Komachi and the possibly separate possibly identical Tamatsukuri no Komachi. The motifs used, though common to Akutagawa’s prose, could also be connected with *nō* theatre, as *nō* plays are sorted into five categories according to their main motif—in a simplified way they are the plays about gods, warriors, women, present-day and the supernatural, generally staged in said order—of which *Futari Komachi* falls into two categories.¹⁴² The form of *Futari Komachi* is however more reminiscent of *kyōgen* (“mad/wild words”, 狂言)—its form that of a one-act play with several scenes and few characters, built on an entertaining dialogue rather than monologues.¹⁴³

Futari Komachi is written in a form of extended, barely dramatizing dialogues with a limited amount of stage directions, which are most often reduced to the instructions of who

¹⁴² KABELÁČOVÁ, Kateřina. “Nó.” *Japonská literatura 712–1868*, by Zdenka ŠVARCOVÁ, Praha: Karolinum, 2005, p. 223.

¹⁴³ ŠVARCOVÁ, Zdenka. “Kjógen.” *Japonská literatura 712–1868*, p. 202.

speaks to whom. While the play could have been written on the basis of *kyōgen*, its form does not adhere to it completely. As such a question arises: What is the genre of *Futari Komachi*? In the same vein that Poe's "The Raven" is a narrative poem—i.e. a poem, which has a lot in common with epic—it could be argued that *Futari Komachi* is a narrative drama or a dramatical short story. Its structure certainly suggests it to be a play, however, even references to *Futari Komachi* in academic literature vary on its genre definition. In her paper on the short story genre, Mary Louise Pratt addresses four assumptions made about genres in general, one of which is that "[g]enres are not essences. They are human institutions, historical through and through. The massive effort within literary criticism to maintain the lyric-epic-dramatic triad as ahistorical generic absolutes is seriously misdirected."¹⁴⁴ On account of this, while *Futari Komachi* is treated as a play in this thesis, given Akutagawa's main field of interest it could as well have been a short story literary experiment or it is entirely possible that *Futari Komachi* belongs on the borderline of the two categories.

3.3.3 Comparison

Although both compared works are considered plays, they are quite dissimilar from each other on the basis that they reflect their respective author's strengths. Poe's *Politian* is a drama written in blank verse—a form common in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century plays—whereas Akutagawa treated his drama as a short story based on an extended dialogue.

Politian has the division into scenes prototypical of drama, however, given its unfinished state, there is no division into acts only the division into scenes. The use of stage directions is extensive, up to and including directions mid-sentence. Contrastively, although the division of *Futari Komachi* is also limited to separations of scenes by numbers—ones always followed by the setting of the scene—the number of stage directions is very small. In that, the dividing technique does not differ from the numbered divisions that Akutagawa used in some of his short stories, such as 'Jigokuhen'.

Both plays are placed in a historical setting with a recognisable geographical specification. The setting of *Politian* is the city of Rome likely in the sixteenth century,

¹⁴⁴ PRATT, Mary Louise. "The Short Story: The Long and Short of It." *The New Short Story Theories*. Edited by Charles E. MAY. pp. 91–113. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994, p. 92.

whereas *Futari Komachi* can be placed into ninth-century Kyoto based on the information presumed about the life of Ono no Komachi.

Tied with the anchoring of *Politian* and *Futari Komachi* into a specific timeline is the issue of classification of the two plays. The time setting of *Politian* is presumably the sixteenth century, even though Poe himself had not alluded to time himself. The time specification was added by T. O. Mabbott's edited version of the play. The anchoring was partially presumed on account of the language but especially the use of blank verse—a form typically used by the sixteenth and seventeenth-century playwrights such as Shakespeare. The historical setting is atypical from among Poe's works, as his short stories and even the majority of his poetry are presumed to be contemporaneous. Although the play is unfinished, it can be classified as a tragedy, as evidenced by the subject matter used in the published scenes and an educated guess made on account of the play's source event. Akutagawa's play being historical in nature is more in line with the author's other literary output—i.e. his short stories. While the historical setting is only estimated from the presumed dates of birth and death of Ono no Komachi, the timeline fits into his general tendency of placing his narratives between the ninth and the thirteenth century. The atmosphere of a Heian-period setting is further supported by Akutagawa's word choice regarding the concept of hell. Based on the irony of the decisions made by the two Komachis and their dialogues with the Messenger, *Futari Komachi* is possibly connected with the comic theatre *kyōgen*. This puts into the opposite end of the traditional comedy-tragedy dichotomy of dramas. The two plays however remain connected by their anchoring in history.

The plays share two motifs. The first is the motif of deception through a love connection. In *Politian* Lalage uses Politian's love for her to get revenge on Castiglione whereas in *Futari Komachi*, first Ono no Komachi pretends pregnancy and overexaggerates the impact losing both of them would have on her lover to escape from hell and then Tamatsukuri no Komachi seduces Messenger for the same purpose. The other motif is the motif of mercy as means of escaping death. Whereas Akutagawa entwined the two motifs—it is because of the deception that the two Komachis are given mercy—in Poe's *Politian*, the mercy Politian gives Castiglione is not benign in nature, as he only lets him live to be burdened by the shame of his actions. What more, if the play stayed true to its source text, the mercy would be later retracted.

The use of proper names differs vastly in the two plays. Whereas in *Politian*, the character names were chosen to further support the geographical setting of the play—e.g. Castiglione—except for the titular Englishman Politian and unnamed character Monk, in *Futari Komachi* only the two titular Komachis are truly named. The other two characters do not have names but are referred to by their occupation—Messenger from hell—and designation of their supernatural existence—Spirit, God no. 30. In that way, the play concentrates on the two Komachis, despite Messenger being the only character present in all four scenes.

4 Conclusion

In this thesis, I focused on the comparison of selected works of two major representatives of the short story genre in Japanese and American literature. Rather than the obvious choice of comparing Edgar Allan Poe with the author Edogawa Ranpo—who openly proclaimed being influenced by Poe—I chose to compare him with Ranpo’s contemporary: Ryūnosuke Akutagawa. Though the influence was not emphasized, it is proven that Akutagawa was familiar with Poe’s works. Akutagawa highly valued Poe’s writing and employed an approach to literature similar to Poe’s. The similarities between the two authors span from their life experiences to various aspects of their literary output.

The main topics of the comparison which I concentrated on were: 1) animals and madness as the primary motifs of the authors’ works, 2) crime fiction and detective fiction and the influence the writers had on the genre in their respective countries, 3) the authors’ sole plays and their place among their respective authors’ literary output.

All four of the short stories which I analysed are told in the first-person point of view, as are many of the short stories of the two authors mentioned for secondary comparison. However, while Poe preferred the use of a narrator directly involved in the plot—in the form of the narrator retelling his own story and a narrator retelling the events surrounding the focal character in ‘The Black Cat’ and ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ respectively—Akutagawa’s narrators are more impersonal. In the case of ‘*Jigokuhen*’ the distance was created by the utilization of a peripheral narrator who only influenced the story on one occasion, while in ‘*Yabu no naka*’ the effect was achieved by fragmenting the first-person narrative into the point of view of several narrators, giving the reader minimal information about the narrators themselves.

Connected with the points of view of the narration is the degree of reliability of the narrators of the short stories. Out of the four short stories analysed three stories are narrated by an unreliable narrator—both of Akutagawa’s short stories and ‘The Black Cat’ by Edgar Allan Poe. The exception that the narrator of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ makes from among the compared stories as well as from among Poe’s works can possibly be attributed to the genre—the emerging detective modern story, which is built on rationality, the power of logical reasoning and exactness—which is incompatible with the use of an unreliable narrator.

An important device which the authors utilised in all the works analysed is the use and non-use of proper names. In the case of Poe, the plot is built on an isolating principle—the unnamed characters in contrast with the named cat Pluto in ‘The Black Cat’, the named characters in contrast with the unnamed narrator of ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ as well as the only English man Politian among the Italian characters in *Politian*. Akutagawa used the device differently. While there is also an isolating element in ‘*Jigokuhen*’—Yoshihide’s unnamed daughter and the unnamed narrator—it is the duality of the name Yoshihide which is more important. What more, similar duality is used in *Futari Komachi* where the two women of the same name end up being on the same level when affected by time. The only work in which Akutagawa’s non-use of the names resembles Poe’s is ‘*Yabu no naka*’ where nearly no character names are offered and even the few which are cannot be relied upon due to the unreliability of those who utter them.

The pervading motif used by both authors is the motif of death, its presence traceable in all six analysed works. Whereas in some cases the death is represented by murder—‘The Black Cat’, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, possibly ‘*Yabu no naka*’, *Politian* (intended, possibly committed in the unfinished ending)—in some works the death is achieved by suicide—‘*Jigokuhen*’, possibly ‘*Yabu no naka*’. Additionally, there is also the threat of death which is escaped from due to another character’s mercy—possibly ‘*Yabu no naka*’, *Futari Komachi*, *Politian*. In the majority of the works, the motif does not stand on its own but is entwined with another, such as insanity—‘The Black Cat’, ‘*Jigokuhen*’, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ (assumed but disproved)—or an animal motif—‘The Black Cat’, ‘*Jigokuhen*’, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’. In all the variants mentioned, there generally exist yet more representative works by both authors, though they are not analysed within this thesis.

Elaborating on the murder motif, both Poe and Akutagawa made advances in the detective genre. Poe’s contribution is understandably more distinctive as it was his three short stories focused on the character of C. Auguste Dupin which had pioneered the modern detective genre. The narrative structure and scheme used in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ had become the template to many works of the detective genre ever since its publication. Akutagawa’s ‘*Yabu no naka*’ is less typically a part of the genre, none the less, his contribution of the short story as a part of the *ero*, *guro*, *nansensu* trend was significant in that it helped spread the genre across Japan, just as the translation of Poe’s short story had.

Two of the four short stories contain the supernatural as a theme while in the two remaining short stories the existence of the supernatural is forcibly denied. In Poe's 'The Black Cat' the narrator is convinced that the black cat which eventually leads to his judgement is a fiend and treats it as such, whereas the idea of supernatural is immediately denied on account of rational thinking in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. In Akutagawa's case, whereas in 'Yabu no naka' the supernatural is portrayed as somewhat commonplace to the point of being included in a murder investigation, the notion that something supernatural might be the driving force behind the painter Yoshihide's talent is what scares the characters in 'Jigokuhen'. The supernatural is also present in Akutagawa's play *Futari Komachi* through its focal character the Messenger as well as the secondary character the Spirit.

While Akutagawa mostly based his works on older literary works—predominantly classical Japanese works and legends, some texts of Chinese origin and yet smaller number written by Western authors, primarily those connected with Christianity—Poe's works are predominantly fictitious. The exception to that are the analysed play *Politian*—which is based on an account of a true event, the Kentucky Tragedy—as well as the short story 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' which, while not analysed within this thesis, is the sequel to the analysed fictitious short story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'.

The specification of the setting of the works—both geographical and historical—differs for the two authors. Poe mostly obscured his geographical setting. 'The Black Cat' is devoid of any geographical specifications, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' though set in a real part of Paris unfolds on a fictional street, and the stage of *Politian* as well is denoted simply as "Rome", but no traceable point is used. In contrast, Akutagawa helped the readers orient themselves to an extent—the most easily traceable map of events is in 'Yabu no naka' the testimonies referencing various existing spots in the Kyoto region, in 'Jigokuhen' the Horikawa mansion is placed within the then-Capital Kyoto and the city is also the likely setting of *Futari Komachi* on account of the presumed residence of Ono no Komachi. As for the time setting, while both authors are largely unconcerned about tracking the passage of time as the plot unfolds, Akutagawa's works are once again the ones that are much more easily set into a specific time in history. That is partly because of the well-known range of his sphere of interest but also the historical specifics mentioned, such as the already mentioned presence of Ono no Komachi. In contrast, Poe's works are generally untraceable in time

though they are generally assumed to be contemporary. The lack of time setting is likely a device used to add to the suspense of the narrative. Both Poe's decision to write contemporaneous fiction and Akutagawa's writing of predominantly historical fiction set them apart from the norm of their times.

A separate issue is the classification of the two compared plays. The two authors chose to create only a single play rather than a range of dramas. Both are set in past and are possibly built on forms on an older form of a theatre of their respective countries. In the case of Poe, the choice of setting the play into the sixteenth century—surmised on account of the verse and language used, not on any specification of time made by Poe himself—is in direct contrast to his presumably contemporaneous short stories and poetry. The subject matter identifies the play as a tragedy, despite its unfinished state. In the case of Akutagawa, the choice of a historical setting is understandable as even the rough historical anchoring by the character of an existing ninth-century poet aligns with his tendency to place his epical narratives between the ninth and the thirteenth century. The subject matter and its treatment within the play is possibly connected with *kyōgen*, Japanese comic theatre form—i.e. a direct opposite of Poe's play. None the less both the plays can be congruently classified as historical plays.

Their possibility of meeting bridged by over half a century and half a globe, the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Ryūnosuke Akutagawa are as different as they are similar. Although it can surely be said that Akutagawa was well-acquainted with Poe's works on account of his theoretical works on the author, I hadn't found any direct correlations between the works of the two authors over the course of my analyses and the work with all the sources used. While some academics mention Poe's very life as a possible source of inspiration of Akutagawa's '*Jigokuhen*' as well as other possible connections, to subscribe to the notion without doubts would be a flight of fancy. After all, bar obtaining the information from Akutagawa's own recounts we would only be guessing. The fact that Poe influenced Akutagawa is indisputable, however at the same time, he had influenced hundreds and thousands of writers across the globe, much like Akutagawa himself came to be a source of inspiration for the writers in Japan and beyond. It is by their undeniable literary legacy that both authors should be remembered, not whether one had possibly copied motifs of the other.

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