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BACHELOR THESIS

The Comparison of Supernatural Elements in Work of

Ueda Akinari and Edgar Allan Poe

OLOMOUC, 2020 Karolína Schmidtová

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I hereby declare that I have written this bachelor thesis independently under the supervision of Mgr. Sylva Martinásková PhD and that all the sources have been cited and acknowledged in the bibliography section of this paper.

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci zpracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem Mgr. Sylvy Martináskové, Ph.D., a použila jen prameny uvedené v seznamu bibliografických citací.

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Anotace

Tématem této bakalářské práce je komparace nadpřirozených prvků v dílech Uedy Akinariho a Edgara Allana Poea a jejich život. Rozhodla jsem se porovnat tyto dva autory, kteří žili zhruba ve stejné době, ale v odlišných částech světa. V teoretické části jsou stručně popsány životopisy obou autorů spolu s vybranými literárními žánry a povídkami. Hlavní část této práce je zaměřená na analogii mezi styly těchto autorů, využití nadpřirozených a hororových prvků a volbu postav ve dvou povídkách od každého z nich. Tato práce se nezaměřuje pouze na rozdíly a podobnosti v jejich dílech, ale také hlouběji analyzuje jejich myšlení a přístup k literatuře.

Klíčová slova: Ueda Akinari, Edgar Allan Poe, nadpřirozeno, povídka, horor, *kaidan*

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Děkuji.

Editorial's note

All Japanese words and names are written in the English transcription; the Czech transcription is used only in the bibliography and in the footnotes for the Czech sources. Japanese names are written in the order of family name and given name. All foreign words are written in cursive for better text clarity. First mentions of Japanese words in English transcription are followed by their equivalent in Japanese in parentheses (in cases of titles also by their English translation) and then explained in the text or in the footnotes.

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Introduction

From time immemorial, people were frightened by mysterious powers beyond their understanding but also fascinated by them at the same time. Fear is a natural body response to anything unknown as a safety precaution to preserve one's life. Yet there are people whose curiosity outweighs their fear, resulting in various stories. At first, many stories with supernatural elements were created in order to warn the next generations of evil entities and keep people on the path of piety, but later, many were written simply for the enjoyment of horror and terror.

It is for these reasons why I became fascinated by the work of the Japanese author Ueda Akinari and the American author Edgar Allan Poe. I decided upon studying their work carefully in relation to the genre of horror story. The literary works chosen for this thesis are four short stories, two from each author – “*Kibitsu no kama*” (吉備津の釜, The Cauldron of Kibitsu) and “*Jasei no in*” (蛇性の淫, The Lust of the White Serpent) from a collection of short stories *Ugetsu Monogatari* (雨月物語, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*) by Ueda Akinari and “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Masque of the Red Death” by Edgar Allan Poe. They all deal with similar themes such as ghosts, vengeance, and death. In this thesis, I aim to analyse these works with closer attention to the supernatural elements, and compare them together, and thus determine their similitudes and distinctions.

This thesis is divided into three large chapters which are as follows: Literary-Historical Context, Implementation of Time and Space in Supernatural Setting, and Supernatural Characters. The first chapter is concerned with the historical and literary life of Ueda Akinari and Edgar Allan Poe followed by a brief plot overview of all four selected short stories for better clarity of the analysed elements. The next focus of this chapter is the definition of the genres and literary styles used within these short stories as well as the general understanding of what the narrator is and the delimitation of the term *narrator* in this thesis. Each short story is then analysed separately regarding their narrative style.

The second chapter analyses the implementation of important dimensions such as space and time setting. This analysis includes connections between the time of the day or night to the appearance of the supernatural entities, allegorical meaning behind supernatural elements, and symbolism of used numbers and colours.

The third chapter is the analysis of the supernatural characters of each selected story. It describes their inner and outer characteristics, their background, and their lot. This chapter also includes a deeper analysis of their motives, character development, and theories about their allegorical symbolism.

1 Literary-Historical Context

1.1 Literary-Historical Context of Ueda Akinari

Ueda Akinari (上田秋成), born as Ueda Senjirō (上田仙次郎)¹ in 1734 in Osaka, was a Japanese author and scholar who became one of the prominent literary figures of the 18th century Japan. The origin of his natural parents is uncertain, but it is assumed he was born to an Osaka prostitute and a member of a *hatamoto* (旗本)² family of Edo.³ Akinari was adopted by a wealthy merchant Ueda Mosuke and his wife when he was four years old. The following year he became ill with severe smallpox causing permanent damage to his fingers. Due to this condition, Akinari was never able to hold a writing brush properly which influenced even his choices of pen names, such as Muchō (無腸) and Senshi Kijin (剪枝畸人).⁴ His survival might have been the very first trigger into beliefs of the supernatural because his adoptive parents had been praying for him to the god of the Kashima Inari Shrine, therefore he attributed the saving of his life to this deity.⁵ Akinari's first foster mother died during the same year (1738) and her place was taken by another young woman (Mosuke's second wife) to whom Akinari refers as "mother" in his writings.⁶ The influence of this death can be seen in his later work.

Unfortunately, not much is known about Akinari's adolescent years. One could assume that the literary styles he was exposed to during this period were the most influential regarding his adulthood writing. Akinari, in spite of his self-consciousness, was well-educated due to his newly gained background. Having studied both Japanese and Chinese classical literature, he took a deep interest into *kokugaku* (国学)⁷ which most probably created and enhanced his ability to apply old Asian folktales on the Japanese culture of that time without only copying and translating them. Supported by his wife Ueyama Tama (植山たま), with whom he shared many interests, Akinari neither stopped studying literature and philosophy nor publishing after becoming the owner of the Ueda family oil and paper business when his adoptive father died. There were other major

¹ Chambers, Anthony H., trans. and ed. "Introduction," in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1-44.

² High-ranking retainers in the service of a shogun of feudal Japan.

³ Young, Blake Morgan, *Ueda Akinari* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 2-3.

⁴ In English "The Crab" and "Pruning Odd Fellow".

⁵ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁷ "National studies" – the focus was shifted from Chinese classical literature to the Japanese classical literature during the political isolation of Japan (1635-1868).

influences on his writing besides *kokugaku*, and those were *setsuwa* (説話) and *gesaku* (戯作). *Setsuwa* is a literary style that contains short prosaic folktales from the lives of ordinary rural and urban people. There is an inexhaustible amount of types of people and supernatural entities, and these folktales emphasise their emotions, motivations, and actions.⁸ *Gesaku* is a literary genre intended as an entertaining reading⁹ for as wide audience as possible; most commonly merchants and working class who wanted to read fictional stories that were more adventurous, scary, or hilarious.¹⁰ All of these influences helped Akinari establish his literary career after he lost his business to a fire in 1771 after ten years of running it. He did not try to re-establish it but rather decided to take it as a chance to leave the unsuccessful merchant life he was feeling uncomfortable with for good.¹¹

Leaving the business world was the flourish of Akinari's career as a literary scholar, although, he never made his living as a full-time writer. He turned his interest into the study of medicine, most likely under the leadership of Tsuga Teishō (都賀庭鐘, 1718-1794?), and worked as a physician in Osaka until he retired in 1787.¹² His writings involved *haikai* (俳諧)¹³ and *waka*¹⁴ (和歌)¹⁵ poetry, and other literary styles such as *ukiyo-zōshi*¹⁶ (浮世草子)¹⁷ and *yomihon* (読本)¹⁸. The last one is a subgenre of *gesaku* which, as mention earlier, was intended for wide audience. Therefore, there is no wonder that Akinari's most famous book *Ugetsu Monogatari* (雨月物語, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*) was written in this very style. It was first published in 1776, although it is likely it was completed years earlier considering the preface is dated back to 1768.¹⁹ The book is a collection of nine supernatural stories inspired by traditional Chinese and Japanese ghost stories. His beliefs in supernatural manifestations are indubitable. Akinari

⁸ Švarcová, Zdenka, *Japonská literatura 712-1868* (Praha: Karolinum, 2005), 233-235.

⁹ *Gesaku* was considered “the low literature” in contrast to the scholarly Japanese and Chinese literature.

¹⁰ Švarcová, *Japonská literatura 712-1868*, 170-171.

¹¹ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 37-38.

¹² Chambers, “Introduction,” 4.

¹³ A playful type of Japanese verse.

¹⁴ A term denoting poetry written in Japanese in general, but it is also used as a synonym for *tanka* (短歌, “a short poem” consisting of 31 syllables (arranged in five lines – 5-7-5-7-7).

¹⁵ Winkelhöferová, *Vlasta Slovník japonské literatury* (Praha: Libri, 2008), 305.

¹⁶ “Tales of the floating world” – the first major genre of popular Japanese fiction containing romance, written between the 1680s and the 1770s in Kyoto and Osaka.

¹⁷ Winkelhöferová, *Slovník japonské literatury*, 305.

¹⁸ “Books for reading” – a type of Japanese book written in the Edo period (1603-1867). Unlike other Japanese books of the period, *yomihon* emphasises text over illustration. They were highly intellectual, moralistic, and accessible to most readers. See Winkelhöferová, *Slovník japonské literatury*, 297-298.

¹⁹ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 50.

maintained a rational view of life even though he realised that some things could not be explained scientifically, and even described some of his experiences with assumedly being bewitched by a fox or a badger.²⁰ His mind was fully sane because it could not be influenced by any narcotic for B. M. Young states:

*“He [Akinari] was a vegetarian and a teetotaller. He claimed to have disliked sake and preferred tea since his younger days, and on the wall of his home he hung a list of ‘forbidden things,’ which included wine, fish, tobacco, and oily foods—as well as literary man, tea masters, rich people, anything having a strong smell, and the selling of medicines.”*²¹

Akinari called for a language reform and a revival of classical Japanese literature and one of his ways to do so was passing his visions and knowledge to the next generations. He gathered and taught many disciples during his lifetime and developed father-son relationship with several of them, despite never having children of his own. Being seen as a promising student by Akinari was an honour, though it might have turned into slightly disturbing manner over time, since many of his favourite students died prematurely.²²

The end of Akinari’s life was accompanied by the loss of his wife and almost complete blindness (later partially regained sight in his left eye). One would assume this would discourage him from writing, but the opposite was true, and thus his second famous book in the *yomihon* genre – *Harusame Monogatari* (春雨物語, *Tales of the Spring Rain*) – was created. In spite of his literary fervour, Akinari developed a long-term depression largely caused by the deaths of his wife, friends, and disciples. It is not uncertain that he occasionally longed for it himself.²³ The long-awaited death claimed him in 1809 in Kyoto where his grave may still be found today.

Akinari’s literary success during his life secured his reputation in Japan long before his death. As he gained his inspiration from former Japanese and Chinese literature, he also gave inspiration to later authors, for example Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927). His popularity gradually grew overseas as well, and he became one of the most notable Japanese authors. A film adaptation *Ugetsu Monogatari*, based primarily on short stories

²⁰ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²² *Ibid.*, 118.

²³ *Ibid.*, 139.

“The Reed-Choked House” and “The Lust of the White Serpent”,²⁴ was released in 1953 bringing further attention to its original written form²⁵ and a TV series “The Legend of White Snake” was released on Netflix in 2019. Akinari has been the subject of many literary studies made by reputable scholars as well as university students ever since.

1.2 Literary-Historical Context of Edgar Allan Poe

The life of Edgar Allan Poe was one of the most eccentric of any American writer during the first half of the 19th century. He was born in 1809 in Boston and he was the first American writer who earned a living solely with writing. He is known worldwide for his short stories and poetry, mystical horror stories in particular, but he was also an editor and a literary critic. He was a child of wandering actors but was taken into a home of a successful merchant John Allan in Richmond when only two years old due to the loss of his parents, although he was never officially adopted.

In 1815, Poe sailed to Scotland and England together with the Allan family where he was given an education at local schools.²⁶ His five-year-long stay there, especially in London, was most probably a major influence on his later work, as he oftentimes uses British styles of architecture in his stories rather than American ones. Setting his tales into gothic mansions, castellated abbeys, gloomy or disreputable parts of cities is nothing unusual within his short stories.

Poe’s lifestyle, in comparison to Akinari’s, was of a much darker character. After returning to the United States in 1820, Poe was forced to leave the University of Virginia because his foster father Allan – with whom he had an uneasy relationship at the best of times – refused to financially support him. This resulted in Poe turning towards gambling and also being unable to keep a stable job at publishing houses by cause of being repeatedly dismissed for his drinking problems and rough behaviour. Therefore, in 1827, he chose to enlist in the United States Army under a fake name Edgar A. Perry. His problems with alcohol, drugs, and debts had already appeared during his stay in Britain, so there is no wonder they carried over, and thus he was discharged from the military. During the years spent in Baltimore – 1831 to 1835 – he lived in poverty with his aunt

²⁴ This adaptation was directed by Mizoguchi Kenji (溝口健二).

²⁵ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 139.

²⁶ Hilský, Martin, “Povídkář Poe,” in *Jáma a kyvadlo a jiné povídky*, trans. Josef Schwarz (Praha: Odeon, 1975), 423-435.

Mrs Clemm and her daughter Virginia, whom he secretly married in 1835 while she was only thirteen years old.²⁷

Poe's literary career started rather unsuccessfully, and a lot of his early writings were overlooked but he gradually grew into his nowadays fame. His early attempts to publish were including mostly poetry but then he turned his attention to prose and in 1833 was awarded a prize for a short story *MS. Found in a Bottle* published in the periodical *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*.²⁸ Poe took an interest not only in literature but also in scientific and psychological matters, which are largely used in his writings in order to control readers' emotions and create a predetermined impression. In American literature, many of his publications are in general considered being part of a subgenre of *romanticism – dark romanticism*²⁹. The themes he was using mostly deal with questions of death, the dark corners of the human mind, or the dead returning from the grave (especially women). His tough life full of quarrels, drunkenness, drugs, and death might have been the reason why we can find these concepts reoccurring in his stories. These dark themes reflected the common fear of death and the unknown beyond.

One of Poe's ambitions was to become a powerful critic. The romantic movement was at its peak during Poe's life. It was associated with spontaneity in thought and action, boundlessness, greater personal freedom, struggles against conventions, and also medievalism.³⁰ These were characteristics that Poe mastered in his writing, although he longed for perfection of all literary pieces, not just his own. According to Peter B. High, a strict and accurate critique avoiding moralising and generalisation was his way of helping American literature evolve into its best form from his point of view. Many of his reviews were published by many different houses – as well as his own poems and short stories – which brought him more recognition but also made him many enemies for the sake of his opinions on what “good” literature should be written like.³¹ His real breakthrough happened in 1845 when his poem *The Raven* appeared in *Evening Mirror* and brought him to wider attention almost immediately. Poe created his strict instructions

²⁷ Parker, Hershel, “Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849),” in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Nina Baym (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 641-721.

²⁸ Sova, Dawn B., *Edgar Allan Poe, A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2001), 162.

²⁹ This movement first occurred in 18th century, as a reaction to transcendentalism, and was focusing on grotesque, insanity, supernatural, crime, and dark atmosphere.

³⁰ Peprník, Michal, “E. A. Poe as a Critic, Poet and Short Story Writer; Neoclassical Tradition, Romanticism, the Gothic Novel Tradition, Horror vs. Terror, the Grotesque, the Arabesque, Origins of detective fiction” (lecture, American Literature up to 1880, Palacký University Olomouc, Olomouc. 6th March 2019).

³¹ High, Peter B., *An Outline of American Literature* (London: Longman, 1986), 57.

for good writing and used them in all his work. He presented his opinions in detail in his essay *The Philosophy of Composition*, using *The Raven* as an example, where he explained why all literary works should be of a certain length (read in one sitting), methods of composing them and the term “unity of effect”. The author should determine what effect they want to have on the reader beforehand and carry that effect throughout the whole story or poem using appropriate elements.

Poe’s dependence on alcohol and drugs gradually increased with his rising fame, reinforced by his wife’s illness of tuberculosis followed by her death in 1847, which made his mind-set even more unstable.³² These events led him to depression and an attempt to commit suicide in 1848. He died a year later in Washington Medical College after being transferred there from the streets of Baltimore in a delirious state. It was assumed he had been overdosed on unidentified drug, but no real proof is available nowadays since all of his medical records – his death certificate included – have been lost.³³

Poe’s reputation has only grown since his death and he has influenced many historical figures³⁴ and literary styles such as horror stories which he had mastered. He is given credit for inventing the detective fiction and re-inventing the science fiction genre and although the genre of *gothic fiction* is not one of his inventions, he contributed to it in terms of structure and tone used with a combination of beauty and terror, unreasonable violence, and other deviations of nature.³⁵

³² Preface to: Poe, *Spirits of the Dead: Tales and Poems* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1997).

³³ Bramsbäck, Birgit, *The Final Illness and Death of Edgar Allan Poe: An Attempt at Reassessment* (Studia Neophilologica, 21st Jul 2008), 40.

³⁴ For example, H. P. Lovecraft (author), J. Verne (author) or W. Friedman (cryptologist).

³⁵ Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, (Harlow: Longman, 1996), 177.

1.3 Plot Overview of Selected Stories

1.3.1 “*Kibitsu no kama*” (吉備津の竈, The Cauldron of Kibitsu)

The narrator begins to tell the story with apprising the reader with the core emotions the characters have to deal with – jealousy and resentment. Then the narrator introduces the protagonist Izawa Shōtarō whose only interests are *sake* and sensual pleasure. His family attempts to make him behave himself by picking a bride-to-be for him – Kasada Isora. Both families agree upon this marriage and exchange betrothal gifts. To ensure the happiness of this marriage, the Kasada family arranges an offering of hot water in the Kibitsu shrine, using the Kibitsu Cauldron. When the priests assembled for this ritual finish their prayers, the cauldron is supposed to “*produce a sound like the lowing of cattle*”,³⁶ if the prospects are good. However, it remains silent. The mother of Isora does not want to cancel the wedding and reasons that the priests’ bodies were not pure, therefore the ceremony proceeds as planned.

Isora serves her new family with devotion and fidelity, and the marriage is happy, at first. After a while, Shōtarō starts meeting a “woman of pleasure” called Sode, which angers Isora. She keeps serving him faithfully despite her husband’s fickleness. One day, Shōtarō conveys to Isora that he desires to send Sode to her home village and pleads his wife to help with expenses for travelling and clothing. Isora gathers enough money by selling her own clothing and accessories, borrows money from her mother, and gives all to Shōtarō. He flees with Sode instead. Isora, overwhelmed with resentment, falls seriously ill and dies.

Meanwhile, the runaway couple is accommodated by Sode’s cousin Hikoroku. Sode becomes sick with a mysterious cold which gets worse until she dies seven days later. Shōtarō, wailed with grief, prays at her grave every day, where he meets a young woman who claims to visit her master’s grave because the widowed mistress is unable to due to her sickness. Shōtarō offers to comfort her and the woman leads him to her house. The mistress, however, is Isora, longing for a revenge, and the house a cemetery chapel.

Shōtarō runs back to Hikoroku who advises him to seek a yin-yang master to request a divination. Shōtarō is instructed to stay inside for forty-two days and pray, otherwise he will lose his life. The yin-yang master gives him paper talismans to protect the house. Every night, the vengeful ghost of Isora storms around it, enraged by being unable to

³⁶ Ueda Akinari, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*, 143.

seize her prey. When the forty second night appears to end, Shōtarō, longing for company, sets his foot out and is slain, as it is still night. There is no corpse to be found, the only thing remaining after him is his topknot and fresh blood on a wall.

1.3.2 “*Jasei no in*” (蛇性の淫, The Lust of the White Serpent)

The story focuses on the youngest son Toyoo born into the Ōya family. Toyoo is not fond of hard work and thus his parents hope for him to become a priest. One day, on his way from a shrine, heavy rain forces him to seek shelter at a fisherman’s hut where he meets a beautiful mysterious woman Manago and her servant girl Maroya. He gives her his umbrella and promises to visit her. That night, Toyoo dreams of Manago’s house where she entertains him with *sake*.

The next morning, he finds her house and to his surprise, everything appears to be the same as in his dream. Faintly affected by drinks, she explains her past, including her deceased husband Agata, and asks Toyoo whether he would accept her devotion, giving him a sword decorated with gold and silver. Unfortunately, Toyoo is later arrested, for the sword is a part of a stolen treasure. Defending his honesty, Toyoo demands summoning Manago to prove his innocence. Soldiers arrive to her now crumbling house only to witness Manago disappear with a thunder.

After being released, Toyoo travels to stay at his older sister’s place and her husband in order to forget this horrifying experience. Manago finds him, however, and explains what happened from her perspective. He grows warmer towards her over time and they get married. One day on a family trip, an old man is suspicious of Manago and Maroya and they throw themselves into the waterfalls, vanishing from sight. The old man proceeds to explain the true nature of these demons as they are giant white snakes longing for Toyoo who must be brave and calm his restless heart if he wishes not to lose his life.

Toyoo, frightened by this utterance, returns back to his parents, and marries a palace lady called Tomiko. Manago, infuriated, possesses Tomiko’s body, threatening to kill him and the villagers if he does not come with her. Tomiko’s father sends for a monk to exorcise the demon. The monk, however, underestimates Manago’s powers and dies from her poisonous vapours. Toyoo wants to give himself to Manago in an attempt to make her spare Tomiko’s life. Meanwhile, a priest name Hōkai is summoned and the beast is defeated. Tomiko survives but eventually falls ill and dies.

1.3.3 “The Fall of the House of Usher”

The story opens with an unnamed narrator approaching a gloomy mansion with a single long fissure belonging to his old boyhood friend Roderick Usher who sent him a letter earnestly requesting his company claiming to be emotionally and physically ill. Roderick’s “*excessive nervous agitation*”³⁷ causes oversensitivity to light, smells, and sounds with the exception of some stringed instruments.

Shortly after his arrival, the narrator notices Roderick’s sister Madeline who appears to be ill with some kind of a mysterious sickness causing her to fall into deathlike trances.³⁸ The narrator spends several days trying to cheer Roderick up with activities such as reading stories to him or listening to his music and composing words to his songs although nothing seems to have much of an effect. Madeline soon dies and the narrator helps Roderick to place her body into the family stone tomb underneath the mansion where he notes that she has a faint blush in her cheeks. It is here the narrator learns that Madeline and Roderick were actually twins, therefore had some kind of mental connection.

Roderick grows more uneasy over the next week. One night, Roderick enters the narrator’s room, apparently hysterical, and leads him to a window, from which they can see a dense unnaturally luminous fog surrounding the mansion. The narrator decides upon reading the book “Mad Trist” by Sir Launcelot Canning in order to pass the night. As he is reading, strange noises which correspond with the story can be heard from within the mansion. At first, he ignores them, but soon realises that they cannot be purely his fantasy. He also notices that Roderick is muttering to himself in his chair and comes closer to listen to what he has to say. Roderick exclaims that he has heard these noises before, that Madeline was the one causing them, since she was, in fact, alive when she was entombed and is now trying to escape.

The bedroom door is then blown open revealing the enshrouded figure of lady Madeline standing there, dressed in a white robe bloodied from her struggle. She throws herself upon her brother and they both land on the floor, void of life. The narrator then

³⁷ Poe, Edgar Allan, *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*, (London: Campbell, 1992), 369.

³⁸ This sickness is most probably catalepsy, the loss of control of one’s limbs.

flees the scene and witnesses the entire mansion's collapse into the tarn, starting from the fissure.

1.3.4 "The Masque of the Red Death"

A disease known as the Red Death devastates the country, marking its victims with scarlet stains and blood, causing them to die in a painful and gruesome way. Prince Prospero, happy and hopeful, seals himself in his fortified abbey with a thousand other nobles in attempt to escape the Red Death.

After several months of seclusion, prince Prospero decides to hold a masked ball for his friends. The courtiers decorate seven apartments of the abbey with seven colours – blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, and black. Each apartment's colour corresponds with the colour of its Gothic window, all but the last apartment, which has a window of deep scarlet colour. The ominous atmosphere of the black apartment prevents most of the company to set foot inside. Also, a massive ebony clock stands in this apartment and each hour its heavy monotonous ringing distracts all attendants from dancing and talking. When the last clang fades away, so does the trance of the musicians and dancers, and laughter takes over once more.

At midnight, the revellers "*become aware of the presence of a masked figure*"³⁹ dressed in a dark, blood-splattered robe resembling a funeral shroud and a mask indistinguishable from a face of a stiffened corpse suggesting the presence of the Red Death. Prince Prospero, enraged by the impudence of this guest, demands the reveal of his identity and then hanging him from the battlements by morning for his mockery. The guests, however, frozen by a sudden awe, let him pass uninterruptedly through the six chambers. Prince Prospero pursues him with a drawn dagger.

In the seventh apartment, the masked figure turns abruptly to confront his pursuer, Prince Prospero lets out a sharp cry and falls dead on the floor. Outraged revellers throw themselves inside the black apartment to unmask the mysterious figure, only to discover, to their horror, that there is nothing underneath. They acknowledge the presence of the Red Death and drop dead on the floor as well.

³⁹ Poe, *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*, 607.

1.4 Selection of Genres in Texts of Ueda Akinari and E. A. Poe

Selection of specific stories and literary genres used in the works of these two authors is essential since neither of them can be categorised into a single group, especially Poe who also invented or perfected more than one literary style. This comparison is concerned with the short horror story genre and genres closely connected to it.

1.4.1 *Kaidan* (怪談)

The term *kaidan* is defined as Japanese ghost stories and horror stories written mainly in the Edo period (1600/1603-1868). It was popularised among English readers by Lafcadio Hearn in his book *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*.

Kaidan stories are based on *setsuwa* which, as mentioned above, are Japanese and Chinese Buddhist folktales which can involve the element of karma, spookiness, and *onryō* (怨霊). In Japanese folklore, *onryō* refers to vengeful spirits capable of returning to the world of living with the intention to redress the wrongs that were done upon them during their life. They are most commonly represented by women who experienced a love betrayal, although a few instances of a male *onryō* can be found as well. As Ueda Akinari says in his short story “The Cauldron of Kibitsu”, it is jealousy and hatred that turns kind and peaceful women into extremely powerful spirits after their death.

1.4.2 Ghost Story

Ghost stories could be classified as a subgenre of horror stories because they are almost exclusively written with the intention to be dreadful and frightening. J. A. Cuddon defines a ghost story as follows:

“(…) a fictional narrative, usually in prose (…) of variable length, (…)
in which the spirit of a person (or the spirits of persons), no longer bound by
natural laws, manifests itself, or seems to do so (either embodied in some
form or disembodied), and ‘haunts’ a place, person or thing as a kind of
‘presence’.”⁴⁰

Since the fundamental theme of this genre revolves around the power of the dead to return, even characters’ beliefs in the possibility that such an entity could exist is sufficient to be classified as a ghost story. Although it “does not include demonic pacts,

⁴⁰ Cuddon, J. A., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. Claire Preston (London: Penguin books, 1999), 343.

doppelgängers, *vampires*, *werewolves*, *succubi*, *poltergeists* et al.”⁴¹ Poe deals with the question of death and ghosts via his most reoccurring themes such as premature burial, decay of the body and soul, reanimation of the dead, and mourning. There is rarely an occasion in which the supernatural is good-willed and not an avenger for what has been done. On the other hand, representation of supernatural entities – those who want to bring resolution and those who only seek vengeance – is much more diverse in Akinari’s writings.

1.4.3 Gothic Fiction

I would like to introduce the genre of Gothic Fiction in words of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* which are as follows:

“‘Gothic’ is a distinct modern development in which the characteristic theme is the stranglehold of the past upon the present, or the encroachment of the ‘dark’ ages of oppression upon the ‘enlightened’ modern era. In Gothic romances and tales this theme is embodied typically in enclosed and haunted settings such as castles, crypts, convents, or gloomy mansions, in images of ruin and decay, and in episodes of imprisonment, cruelty, and persecution.”⁴²

In other words, it combines terror, horror, suspense, and at times even women’s romance. The term “gothic” is supposed to refer to the gothic architecture style which flourished in High and Late Middle Ages (12th-16th century) in Europe where the vast majority of gothic stories would take place. Poe was greatly influenced during his adolescence by his five-year-long stay in Britain which was rich in structures built in the gothic style, especially London, whereas Akinari was most likely not exposed to such influences at all.

1.4.4 Horror Story

Horror story is a genre to be found not only in literature, but also in film, which is intended to scare, frighten, fascinate, startle, or disgust the reader with emphasis on supernatural forces and feelings such as terror and horror. These two terms might seem similar, if not synonymous, but there actually is a difference, first characterised in 19th century by the gothic writer Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823).

⁴¹ Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 343-344.

⁴² Drabble, Margaret, ed. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 422.

Terror is more connected to the feeling of dread, being distressed, anxious, or fearful – emotions caused by stimulating the reader’s imagination e.g. by the feeling that something dangerous might be hiding behind the corner – which precedes the horrifying experience. On the other hand, horror is more related to being shocked, scared, or staggered by a dreadful sight, sound, or realisation which usually follows the terrifying experience.⁴³

Akinari is capable of creating uncomfortable upsetting scenes, though his intention is not always to scare. Rather than that, he interprets ancient legends. Poe’s concern with the human mind and its dark sides allowed him to master the usage of psychological matters on the reader to evoke intended emotions.

Kaidan, ghost story, gothic fiction, and horror story are genres that are largely used within Akinari’s and Poe’s artwork. Their application varies throughout their stories based on the type of narrator, intended purpose of the particular story, and historical-literary influence.

⁴³ Radcliffe, Ann, *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, (The Literary Gothic, 2002), 7.

1.5 Narrative style

Despite never meeting each other, Edgar Allan Poe and Ueda Akinari do indeed share similar features represented in their work and their way of thinking. For instance, their concern with ghost stories, fascination with the supernatural and mysticism or attempts to improve the literature of their time are the most noticeable of them. Nevertheless, their social and environmental influence made their mind develop in a fundamentally different way to each other. Akinari spent a significant part of his life in the paper business inherited from his adoptive father and decided to leave it only after it had been destroyed by fire while Poe did not want to work in his foster father's business from the very beginning. Their approach to duties is mostly set by the society they grew up in. In Japanese society, following one's *ninjō* (人情, human emotions) is in direct conflict with obeying one's *giri* (義理, duty) and this approach is reflected in Akinari's work. On the contrary, American society is more open to one's "selfish" decisions and to an individual approach as well. The most representative way to show these different approaches in literature – either consciously or unconsciously – is through the type of the narrator.

"Narrator" is usually understood in terms of a non-personal voice or a personal character developed by the author in order to deliver information to the reader. There are three basic types of narrators which are defined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* according to their participation in the story – first-person narrator, third-person narrator, and omniscient narrator:

*"in first-person narratives they are involved either as witnesses or as participants in the events of the story, whereas in third-person narratives they stand outside those events; an omniscient narrator stands outside the events but has special privileges such as access to characters' unspoken thoughts, and knowledge of events happening simultaneously in different places."*⁴⁴

Narrative style can be further differentiated according to its reliability. Reliable narrator provides us with trustworthy information about series of events within the story whilst unreliable narrator may be very subjective and provides us with inaccurate, partial,

⁴⁴ Baldick, Chris, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146.

or otherwise misleading information.⁴⁵ In general, “*most third-person narrators are reliable, but some first-person narrators are unreliable.*”⁴⁶

1.5.1. Narrative Style in Akinari’s Selected Stories

Having a look at Akinari’s masterpiece *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, it is quite obvious that the author provides us with a narrator who serves only as a medium, passing on stories inspired chiefly by Chinese sources which are applied in an adjusted form to Japanese cultural comprehension together with Japanese narratives. Akinari, as the third-person narrator, distances himself from the actual events inside of his stories which does not allow the reader to fully enter the character’s mind and sympathise with them, sometimes not even understand them or their choices. Moreover, the first-person narrator appears in the Japanese literature rather rarely before the influence of the Western literature. All information given by the third-person narrator appears to be precise and truthful which enables the reader to see the full scene. This approach of Akinari’s also corresponds to his lifestyle since he always tried to see the bigger picture.⁴⁷

The story “Cauldron of Kibitsu” is the only one from the four selected stories that does not lack a poetic introduction into the situation as well as deeper thoughts of the author about the theme. The provided foreshadowing allows its ominous potential to reach the reader’s consciousness and create an adequate atmosphere even though it is rather a tale of events.⁴⁸ The narrator once again follows the male protagonist – Shōtarō and describes what he perceives without any misleading information as far as the substantive world goes. On the other hand, depiction of supernatural entities is mostly left to the reader’s imagination – there is only one vague sentence about Isora’s ghostly appearance in human form. Undirect and incomplete descriptions make this story without any doubts one of Akinari’s most sinister short story in the collection of *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* by far.

Regarding “The Lust of the White Serpent”, the reader gets to know faintly more than the protagonist Toyoo himself. Toyoo is being repeatedly blind toward signs that the lady Manago is not who she appears to be or who she wants him to believe she is. As the story progresses, even the reader might get misled into believing that all that is happening

⁴⁵ Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 146.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁷ For example, his continuous quarrels with Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) regarding Japanese language and literature. See Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 78-87.

⁴⁸ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 61.

around Manago is only a pure coincidence due to her provided evidence. Nevertheless, the narrator of this story cannot be defined as unreliable. Despite creating minor confusion around Manago's character, the narrator is not fused with the protagonist and does not give any untruthful information.

1.5.2 Narrative Style in Poe's Selected Stories

In contrast, Poe almost exclusively uses the first-person narrative style. It gives the reader the power of accessing the deepest corners of a character's mind and usually shows the reasoning behind their choices. On the other hand, this narrative type is highly subjective, and thus, regarding the narrator's state of mind, cannot be fully reliable. Poe's personal life was almost as dark as his writing which poses the question of which stories of his were inspired by real events and which ones were a product of pure fantasy. The answer could actually be either of them, since he enjoys using the unreliable narrator who can give us very subjective, vague, inaccurate, false, or made up information about the situation. Poe is well-known for his alcoholism and usage of other drugs which might have caused him hallucinations and thus horrifying inspiration. Even some characters throughout his short stories are explicitly stated to be drug addicted.

Poe's introduction is usually similar to entering a dream since there is often no clear point from where or when the events started, in comparison to Akinari, who tends to primarily apprise the reader with the dimensions of events such as time, place, and background information of main characters. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is narrated by an unnamed narrator who acknowledges the reader with the end of life of his boyhood friend Roderick Usher and his sister lady Madeline Usher. The descriptions of places and characters are interwoven with the narrator's current thoughts and opinions, and thus it is clear that the narrator writes the story down after the horrifying events took place. The narrator's ability to recall utterances or exact words of one of Roderick's rhapsodies, however, suggest that it cannot be long after his flight from the mansion. The narrator is highly observant and provides long disturbing descriptions of the gloomy mansion as it makes him feel very uneasy. He does not include precise information about time unless wholly necessary since time does not seem very significant in comparison to the sinister events. These events heavily influence the narrator's mind and he could have overexaggerated or modified parts of the story in order to keep his sanity. For these reasons, this narrator is considered unreliable. The narrator's gloomy descriptive style for

objects, moods, and his own feelings gives the reader the impression that only shades of black and white colour occur in this world.

The short story “The Masque of the Red Death” is one of the few Poe’s stories narrated in the third-person style. This fact does not mean that the author wanted to distance himself from the story, but rather suggests an intention to imply that the real narrator is the Red Death itself – revealing itself only vaguely, but as powerful, omnipresent, and unrelenting. It is not unknown that some historical figures did in fact address themselves in third person and impersonating the plague into a human-like shape makes it seem dangerously close to people, even if indestructible. If we have a look at the story with the assumption that the narrator is the Red Death, the narrative figure changes in its essence, giving the reader much darker feelings about the outcome.

2 Implementation of Time and Space in Supernatural Settings

Ueda Akinari and E. A. Poe drew their inspiration, besides others, from their own lifestyle, experiences, and fate. In this chapter we are going to deal with essential structural features used in their writing. Madness of characters is not the only element that is helping the overall spooky atmosphere, but also the use of time and setting are crucial as well.

2.1 Use of Time

The perception of time has been an inseparable part of our society throughout history and without a way of telling time, the world would turn into chaos. People in general are frightened of the unknown, unseen, unheard. The same logic applies to horror stories – the less knowledge about time we are given, the more dreadful the plot might feel to us. Throughout various folklores, ghosts usually appear during night-time, especially hours from 2 to 4 a.m., or gloomy weather such as rain, thunderstorms, or fog,⁴⁹ and stories by Akinari and Poe are no exception.

As mentioned above, not knowing the exact time is oftentimes dreadful because people have duties to do and places to be and the only way to coordinate everything smoothly is to manage timing. On the other hand, being knowledgeable about time can be stressful as well, especially when one is suspicious that something unpleasant is about to happen.

2.1.1 Use of Time in Akinari's Selected Stories

Akinari was an open-minded man with a rational view of life, though his way of thinking was influenced by Japanese superstitions. Japanese superstitions do not include only being bewitched by an animal spirit, as mentioned earlier (see chapter 1.1), but also beliefs that certain numbers are lucky or unlucky. The number four (四, *shi*) is considered very unlucky due to its pronunciation in Japan. Japanese language contains dozens of homonyms and as it happens, the words for “number four” and “death (死, *shi*)” are pronounced the same.⁵⁰ Even though they are obviously represented by different *kanji*

⁴⁹ This might be the meaning behind the title *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*.

⁵⁰ For this reason, Japanese uses an alternative pronunciation for the number four – *yon* (四) – in order to avoid the pronunciation *shi* (四/死).

(漢字)⁵¹, the pronunciation led to connotation between these two words. Akinari uses this connotation in the tale “The Cauldron of Kibitsu” for time setting:

*“Because seven days have passed since the spirit left this world, you must shut yourself inside for forty-two more days and exercise the greatest restraint on your behaviour during that period.”*⁵²

The excerpt above is an advice of a yin-yang master given to Shōtarō to escape death. From the religious point of view, the number forty-two could refer to the Buddhistic *Sutra of Forty-two Chapters*⁵³ as a way to overcome death. From the linguistic point of view, the combination of number four and number two in this sequence is considered unlucky since the Japanese pronunciation would be *shi-ni* (四二) which closely resembles the word *shini* (死に), dying. The forty-second night is emphasized also by the fact that Isora finally succeeds at tricking Shōtarō to leave his house and kills him. The nights before, she is unable to do so since cinnabar charms are affixed to doors and windows, preventing her from entering the house.

The second selected short story “The Lust of the White Serpent” is not written with the intention of putting emphasis on time setting though it would be incorrect to claim it is completely insignificant. At the beginning of the story, Toyoo is presented as a “boy” of undisciplined manners but his character develops into a strong self-controlled man facing his problems upfront.⁵⁴ People do not change overnight and the longest short story of the collection of *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* provides him with the time he needs to properly understand the way of life and overcome his weaknesses.

2.1.2 Use of Time in Poe’s Selected Stories

Having a look at the short story “The Fall of the House of Usher”, time itself is not as important and thus it is expressed very vaguely. The narrator opens the story with this sentence: “*During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year (...)*”⁵⁵; introducing the time setting to the reader. The end of autumn is characteristic for its ancient Celtic celebration called *Samhain* which is nowadays better known as

⁵¹ Japanese character.

⁵² Ueda. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 150.

⁵³ This sutra is oftentimes referred to as the very first Indian Buddhistic sutra translated to Chinese language.

⁵⁴ Young, *Ueda Akinari*, 62-63.

⁵⁵ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 365.

Halloween. At this day, the boundary between the living world and the world of the dead becomes blurred and the dead can return to Earth. Even though there is no mention of this Celtic tradition within the story, one could still assume that the information about time setting is slightly foreshadowing the climax of the story – lady Madeline’s return in order to avenge herself and take her brother with her. The reader is aware of her deathlike trances from the beginning and could be misled into thinking that she is actually alive when breaking out of the tomb.

*“The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp, grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges. (...) We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house. (...) It was, especially, upon retiring to bed late in the night of the seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon, that I experienced the full power of such feelings.”*⁵⁶

It is explicitly said in the excerpt above that seven or eight days go by since her placing into the vault, therefore it is not possible for her to stay alive without any provisions for that long, nor would she be capable of escaping the dungeon without any supernatural powers as she was depicted as a very fragile woman during her life.

The overall time period of the short story “The Masque of the Red Death” is debatable but, since Poe is known for taking inspiration from medieval Britain, it could take place in the 14th century.⁵⁷ The story mainly focuses on a particular night when a masquerade is held by Prince Prospero. Since this short story is an allegory, time is physically represented by a gigantic ebony clock. It rings each hour, causing all musicians to stop performing momentarily and other attendants to stop enjoying themselves, and to listen to the pendulum sound. They do not listen to it voluntarily but rather as a result of some kind of trance. The closer to the midnight hour, the larger impact it seems to have on them. There is also a verbal component – the phrase “to and fro” – which is indirectly representing the ticking of a countdown. This phrase is scattered throughout the story and used for various matters, for instance, the golden decoration scattered around, the music

⁵⁶ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 376-377.

⁵⁷ The Red Death may have been inspired by the plague “black death” which devastated Asia and Europe during the 14th century.

and laughter, and the people dancing with each other. Its true form is clear right after its second usage when describing the ebony clock – “*Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang.*”⁵⁸ The countdown is voluntarily ignored by all the guests as they continue dancing each hour until they realise that there is no way back.

⁵⁸ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye.* 605.

2.2 Use of Space

Authors of horror and ghost stories have been using an appropriate surrounding and background as a tool to set the right mood for their plot. People associate horrors with the darkness of the night eliminating our dominant sense but there are many other ways to create a disturbing scene than to obscure the vision of the protagonist.

2.2.1 Use of Space in Akinari's Selected Stories

In general, Akinari focuses on characters' actions rather than on descriptions of places the protagonist happens to be in, though he does present the names of villages and provinces. This does not mean he is unable to create an upsetting scene though.

Considering the short story "The Cauldron of Kibitsu", the space setting does not become that important until Shōtarō flees with his lover Sode. Isora falls ill in the village of Niise (nowadays called Niwase in Okayama prefecture) and the couple flees to the village of Arai (nowadays a part of Takasago city in Hyōgo prefecture).⁵⁹ They are divided by one hundred kilometres when Isora's spirit kills Sode which is a significant distance, emphasising Isora's powerful wrath.

There are two places foreshadowing Shōtarō's death – the grave which suddenly appears next to Sode's and the funeral chapel. Shōtarō notices a woman visiting the grave, asks her who is she mourning, and she answers the following:

*"This is my master's grave; we buried him here some days ago. I bring incense and flowers in place of my widowed mistress, who is so heartbroken that she has taken seriously ill. (...) My master was from a prominent family in this province, but he lost his holdings because of slander and came to live miserably on the edge of this field. My mistress is known as a great beauty, even in neighboring provinces; it was because of her that my master lost his house and land."*⁶⁰

The background story of the woman's master and mistress closely resembles the past of Shōtarō and Isora. As the reader finds out moments later, the mistress actually is Isora longing for revenge, therefore the grave is foreshadowing Shōtarō's death. The funeral chapel, in which Shōtarō wakes up after meeting Isora, makes him realise his life

⁵⁹ Chambers. "Places" in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 139-140.

⁶⁰ Ueda. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 147.

is in danger and that the story of the dead master can become his own, although he is unable to prevent that to happen.

*“Holding up a torch, he looked all around, until, next to the open door, he saw fresh blood dribbling from the wall onto the ground. And yet neither corpse nor bones were to be seen. In the moonlight, he glimpsed something at the edge of the eaves. When he held up the torch to look, he found a man’s topknot hanging there, and nothing else.”*⁶¹

The excerpt above describes the most upsetting scene in the story, after Isora finally usurps Shōtarō on the forty-second night, fulfilling her revenge, and Hikoroku observes what is left of his friend. It shows that one does not need to describe the horrifying experience in detail in order to have an impact on the reader’s imagination.

Toyoo is the protagonist of the short story ‘The Lust of the White Serpent’ and thus the reader is given the description of the surrounding Toyoo happens to be in. The crucial parts of the setting, however, are centred around Manago. An important place setting is the house of Manago in which they meet for the second time.

*“(…) he dreamed of going to Manago’s house, where he found an imposing gate and a mansion, with shutters and blinds lowered and the lady residing gracefully inside. (...) Woven mats had been placed on the wooden floor; the curtain stands, the decorated cabinet, and the illustrated draperies—all were fine antiques. This was not the home of any ordinary person.”*⁶²

*“The posts of the imposing gate were rotting, and most of the roof tiles had fallen off and shattered; ferns had taken root and were trailing from the eaves. The place did not appear to be occupied. (...) In the spacious garden, the pond had dried up, and even the water weeds had withered. A giant pine, blown over in the wind, lay ominously in the drooping thicket on the wild moor. When they opened the shutters of the guest hall, a reeking gust of air came in them, and everyone fell back in terror.”*⁶³

The first excerpt shows the house as Manago transforms it into an ostentatious mansion with her powers in order to use it to appeal Toyoo. In the second excerpt, the

⁶¹ Ueda. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 152.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 162-163.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

house is described as anyone, but Toyoo, could see it before – as a mansion that is falling apart as it was unoccupied for three years. The state of the mansion is important because the guard can assume that Toyoo was bewitched by a spirit and thus innocent. This transformation and Manago’s disappearance in a clap of thunder are the first demonstration of Manago’s powers in the story.

Another significant background setting is Manago’s connection to rain which is a subtle detail implying her true form as a white serpent throughout the story.⁶⁴ The rainy weather occurs during Manago’s achievements as a highlight of her powers and confidence, such as her first meeting with Toyoo or her reunion with him in their marriage. After Manago is exposed by a monk near waterfalls, it starts raining as well, probably as a result of Manago’s frustration that her husband would not accept her with her true nature and assumes she desires to take his life.

2.2.2 Use of Space in Poe’s Selected Stories

A gloomy medieval or Gothic mansion used as the primal space setting is typical for Edgar Allan Poe’s work and is essential for the short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” since it provides the reader with extravagant yet horror background. The narrator’s descriptions of the house of Usher and its surroundings are of a rather subjective matter as they are interlaced with personal opinions and comparisons:

*“I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into every-day life – the hideous dropping off of the veil.”*⁶⁵

The excerpt above is the very first depiction of the mansion and it is an instance of the unreliable narrator’s influence upon the reader. This and the following descriptions gradually build a sensation of claustrophobia even though the mansion is imposing. They also serve as a tool to show the house of Usher in several different ways simultaneously

⁶⁴ Spirits in Japanese folklore have a tendency to appear during rainy weather.

⁶⁵ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 365.

– an ancient intimidating symbol of wealth, a comfortless dreary residence of the forsaken, and a grim foreshadowing of the events of the near future.

Poe uses personification to describe the family mansion in order to show the resemblance to the appearance of Roderick Usher and his sickened mind. There are several subtle implications about Roderick’s mental state within the mansion’s structure such as following passages:

“No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones.”⁶⁶

“The [vacant eye-like] windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within.”⁶⁷

“Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.”⁶⁸

The crumbling stones in the first excerpt above are an indication of those parts of Roderick’s mind that are already damaged and demoralised whilst the fact that no part of the mansion had actually fallen apart is a sign that Roderick’s mind is still capable of working as a whole even though some minor parts are falling apart.

The middle excerpt above describes the Gothic windows. As the saying goes: “Eyes are the window to the soul,” which is exceptionally true in the case of this mansion and Roderick. The structure and placement of the windows resembles the characteristics of Roderick – being thin and fragile but also distant from the narrator even though they keep each other company for several days.

The fissure described in the last excerpt above is probably the most significant detail of the house symbolising the sickened broken mind of Roderick’s. It is barely visible at the beginning of the story implying that Roderick is relatively sane at the time. Although the reader is not provided with the outside view on the fissure until the end of the story,

⁶⁶ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 367.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 367-368.

one could assume that it gradually widens after Madeline's death as Roderick can hear her voice from the tomb, slowly driving him into madness. With Roderick's death, the destruction of the house of Usher as a mansion and as a family (since there is no one else to continue the bloodline) begins from the fissure widening and results in the whole structure being buried in the tarn.

As mentioned above, the short story "The Masque of the Red Death" is an allegory, dealing with the literal and symbolic counterparts of death. The main spatial allegorical representation are the apartments of the palace, their placement, and their colours. The apartments' colours are aligned as follows – blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, and black in combination with red. Each colour stands for a stage of life with its main recognisable attributes in the western culture. Blue represents the beginning of life, health, and stability. Purple combines the stability of blue and the energy of red representing youth with ambitions for the future. Green is often connected to harmony, safety, but also production and money, therefore it stands for adults in the spring of their life and having their own children. Orange represents the "summer" and "autumn" of human life. White stands for purity, cleanliness, and perfection, but for aging, white hair as well. Violet is told to be a reflective colour suggesting people reflecting on their life before death. Black is generally associated with death, evil, and mystery and in combination with "*scarlet – a deep blood color*"⁶⁹ creates a very aggressive colour scheme.

*"The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect."*⁷⁰

The excerpt above shows that Poe emphasises the allegorical comparison to the cycle of life not only by arranging the apartments from east to west but also by the unusual layout. Even though one's mind can easily be caught in the regrets of the past or in the fear of the future, it is impossible to predict precisely what the reality of the future will bring, since it almost always will be something new and unexpected.

"It was in the blue room where stood the prince (...). (...) he [the Red Death] made his way uninterrupted, (...) through the blue chamber to the purple – through the purple to the green – through the green to the orange –

⁶⁹ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 605.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 605.

through this again to the white – and even thence to the violet, (...). (...) He [Prince Prospero] bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer.”⁷¹

The excerpt above portrays Prince Prospero and the masked guest both performing the symbolic human journey from birth to death through all seven apartments. As mentioned above, the last – black and scarlet – apartment symbolises human death and the majority of masquerade’s guests avoid it, however, few are brave enough to visit it. This suggest that people in general fear death, but some are capable of accepting it as an unpleasant part of life. The deaths of all inhabitants of the palace are inevitable after completing the “cycle of life” in the seventh apartment.

⁷¹ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 608-609.

3 Supernatural Characters

Akinari and Poe choose the external and internal characteristics of their supernatural characters carefully since they are the core of their stories. Regarding the selected stories, both authors describe the appearance of their supernatural characters rather vaguely than in details in order to appeal on the reader's imagination and to emphasise the fear of the unknown. Akinari tends to reveal the background of his supernatural characters in order to show the intended reasons for their behaviour. On the other hand, Poe tends to conceal this information allowing the reader to develop their own theories. This can, in a way, cause a larger impact on the reader's mind than revealing the reasoning crucial for the characters' behaviour.

3.1 Isora from "The Cauldron of Kibitsu"

Isora is not the protagonist of the short story but she plays a significant role in it as she is the typical representation of *onryō* – a vengeful spirit longing to kill her former husband. Isora is first depicted as a very beautiful and peaceful young woman coming from the noble Kasada family. Her manners are described as follows:

*"The daughter of Kasada Miki, the head priest at Kibitsu, has an elegant, refined nature and is devoted to her parents; moreover, she composes poetry and plays the koto masterfully. Since the family is a good one, descended from Kibi no Kamowake, this would be a splendid match for your family."*⁷²

According to the excerpt above, she is considered to be a perfect wife by Shōtarō's parents. Her devotion to serve her new family and husband is admirable but that does not necessarily mean it is a good thing. After Shōtarō's betrayal, Isora does not want to lose her morality and consciously conceals all negative thoughts and emotions. The side effect of this decision is falling seriously ill and her spirit acting on its own, killing Sode without Isora's knowledge.

Isora's wrath is unleashed after her death when no human morality motivates her anymore. She seeks Shōtarō and lures him into a cemetery chapel, revealing herself and announcing her desire for revenge to him. This act of hers raises a question of why she "warned" him about her plan. One possible explanation is that she was not powerful

⁷² Ueda. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 142.

enough to kill him yet but could not resist making him fear for his life. Another possibility is that she was already able to kill him but enjoyed playing with him using his fear, which seems more probable than the first option. Isora's determination to finish the task she decides upon, regardless of its difficulty, is notable already during her life and amplified by her negative emotions after her death. She attempts to murder Shōtarō every night for forty-two days until she succeeds.

3.2 Manago from "The Lust of the White Serpent"

Manago is a supernatural character portrayed as a giant white snake who temporarily assumes a form of a beautiful elegant woman of a noble origin. The inspiration for her character comes from a Chinese legend called The Legend of the White Snake.⁷³ The white snake of this legend is named Bai Suzhen and is motivated by her unconditional love to a human man. In contrast to her, Manago's motivation is her unsatisfied lust for a young man named Toyoo. There are, however, two possible interpretations of her behaviour.

Manago can be depicted as a powerful and devious demon who wants to usurp Toyoo by any means from the very beginning. It is not clear if their first meeting was a coincidence of which she took advantage or if she had targeted him before the rainstorm. Her outer appearance and elegant behaviour serve only to lure Toyoo to her and is described as follows:

*"(...) a woman of about twenty, resplendently beautiful in face, figure, and coiffure, wearing a kimono printed in fine colors with the distant-mountain pattern, and accompanied by a lovely servant girl of fourteen or fifteen (...). Drenched to the skin, she appeared to be at her wits' end, but her face flushed with embarrassment when she saw Toyoo."*⁷⁴

Manago uses her illusions together with her wit to repeatedly charm Toyoo and people around him. She persuades them by pointing out details which she would not possess if she were an apparition, such as casting a shadow or her robes having seams.⁷⁵ After their marriage, she behaves with grace until her true serpent form is revealed by monks. Then, enraged by the fact that Toyoo left her and remarried, Manago attempts to

⁷³ Boháčková, Libuše, "Přízraky a démoni Uedy Akinariho," in *Vyprávění za měsíce a deště*, trans. and ill. Ludmila Jiřincová (Praha: Odeon, 1971), 179-194.

⁷⁴ Ueda. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 160-161.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

take him back by force (unsuccessfully) and kills his new wife in the process before she is taken care of by a monk.

The second point of view depicts Manago more similar to the original character of Bai Suzhen. Manago falls in love with Toyoo and wants to prove it by giving him a sword decorated with gold and silver. She says that the sword was worn by a man called Agata she married three years ago and who died recently. No one recognises her husband's name even though she claims him to be the former assistant to the governor of this province. Taking into consideration that Manago can be hundreds of years old, this story does not necessarily need to be false. She could lie only about the time it happened in order not to reveal her true form yet. Regarding the sword and the rest of the treasure, it could have been stolen from her husband and she was unable to retrieve it until now when it was given as an offering to a shrine. She realises she cannot keep it if she wants to be with Toyoo and together with her servant Maroya prepare a plan to give up the treasure to the guards and simultaneously make Toyoo innocent. A turning point for Manago is when Toyoo leaves her after being told about her true nature by a monk and marries a young woman named Tomiko. As explained previously, love, betrayal, and jealousy of women lead to revenge.

Whatever the true nature of Manago is, she is undoubtedly a very powerful spirit which is demonstrated by rain accompanying her during important parts of the story. Her first appearance happens during a heavy rainstorm; a thunder strikes when she disappears and leaves the treasure behind; it rains the evening after her and Toyoo's wedding; and when Maroya and she plunge into the waterfalls, water boils up into the sky creating dark clouds and heavy rain.

3.2.1 Maroya from "The Lust of the White Serpent"

The character of Maroya is based on the Green Snake, called Xiaoqing in her human form, from the tale *The Legend of the White Snake* and is the only servant of Manago. Akinari, however, changed her appearance in his short story from a small green snake to a small white snake. She accompanies Manago at all times and supports her intrigues. One could think of Maroya as a leading element bringing Manago and Toyoo together.

*“He continues his inquiries wearily into the afternoon, when the servant girl approached him from the east. (...) The girl smiled and said, ‘You were good to come; please follow me.’”*⁷⁶

*“Into the crowd of customers came a beautiful, aristocratic lady with a servant girl, apparently on an incognito pilgrimage from the capital, asking for incense. Seeing Toyoo, the servant girl said, ‘The master is here!’”*⁷⁷

*“Someone emerged from behind a folding screen, saying, ‘Master, why do you fret so? This is such an auspicious match.’ It was Maroya.”*⁷⁸

According to the three excerpts above, Maroya is first depicted as a kind assistant providing guidance to Toyoo, then as a “snitch” for she is the one who notices Toyoo in the crowd and informs Manago, and last as an evil assistant guiding Toyoo into Manago’s embrace. Maroya’s character development is centred around Manago and her wishes.

3.3 Lady Madeline from “The Fall of the House of Usher”

Madeline Usher is a twin of Roderick Usher and together they are the last members of the Usher family. Her outer appearance is addressed only when the narrator refers to the similitude between her and her twin brother, and although she is not present for most of the story, her character is crucial to the story development since she is one of the supernatural elements of it. As mentioned above, Lady Madeline is introduced as a fragile woman suffering from an unknown disease (most probably catalepsy), thus her character can be easily overlooked or misinterpreted as only “the mad twin sister”.

Lady Madeline represents the changes in women’s roles in society that started appearing with the feminist movement for women’s rights in mid 1800s. Before that, women were supposed to fulfil the societal expectations of a perfect housewife – cleaning, cooking, bearing and raising children, following men’s orders, etc. They possessed little to no power outside their households. Lady Madeline, however, does not follow these standards as she passively uses her health condition as an excuse to neglect her gender assigned duties.

“The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give

⁷⁶ Ueda. *Tales of Moonlight and Rain: A Study and Translation*. 162.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all.”⁷⁹

The excerpt above depicts the overall ominous impression on the narrator which could be explained by the lack of a woman touch. Lady Madeline does not perform the hospitality one would expect in such a mansion; in fact, she does not even acknowledge the host’s presence in the house.

The relationship between Madeline and Roderick seems to be complicated due to their family background and their mental illnesses and instability. There are subtle implications of incestuous love which is most probably the cause of the “decay” of the Usher family. Their dependence upon each other supports the twin motif used within this short story. Although it is clear that lady Madeline does not need Roderick as much as he needs her, and one could say that her independence arises from her brother’s dependence upon her. Lady Madeline’s death takes away the little sanity that was left inside of Roderick’s mind as he is incapable of living and functioning as a normal human being without her at his side.

Madeline’s supernatural powers do not appear before her burial in the family tomb. The lid of her coffin was screwed down and the coffin itself was hidden behind a massive door of iron. Moreover, she was entombed for seven or eight days without any provisions. It is highly improbable that she would still be alive let alone strong enough to break out of the dungeon. Her motives for returning from the dead, however, are not clear. The most common theory is that lady Madeline simply longs for revenge for being prematurely buried by her brother who fears fear itself. “*Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste?*”⁸⁰ Roderick utters in panic right before she bursts the door open. Although, there might be another possible explanation for her comeback. As mentioned above, lady Madeline represents the changing women in the mid-1800s who do not want to be controlled by men, respectively by her brother who decided upon her “death” and knowingly entombed her alive out of haste. According to Leo Spitzer, lady Madeline is the overlooked hero of “The Fall of the House of Usher” as she resists the incestuous love but silently suffers its long-lasting consequences brought upon her by her ancestors, representing the life-in-death in contrast to Roderick who represents the death-in-life.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 368.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁸¹ Carlson, Eric W., *A Companion to Poe Studies*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 193.

She is seen as heroic for her willpower to return and end the “decaying” family of Usher as there is no one else to continue their bloodline.

3.4 The Red Death from “The Masque of the Red Death”

The Red Death is an unspecified disease personified into a mysterious guest at the masquerade held by Prince Prospero during an outburst of an unknown plague devastating the country. The embodiment of the Red Death does not appear in the story until the ebony clock in the seventh room announces midnight, attracting the attention of Prince Prospero and other revellers who are simultaneously disgusted and frightened by the impudence of choosing a mask so closely resembling a corpse.

“The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. (...) His vesture was dabbled in blood – and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.”⁸²

The excerpt above describes the physical appearance of the masked figure, though the form of the Red Death hiding behind the mask is never revealed since there is nothing tangible inside of it. It serves as an allegorical manifestation that nobody is capable of escaping death; no matter the wealth one might possess, no matter the heritage one might be born into, no matter the age one might be, no man’s attempts can stave off death.

As mentioned earlier, the most eastern apartment decorated with blue colour symbolises birth, and the fact that the first appearance of the Red Death happens within this apartment suggests the close connection between life and death as one cannot exist without the other. Prince Prospero then proceeds to chase after the masked guest in order to arrest him and later decapitate him. Progressing from the eastern apartment to the western apartment represents the life cycle of a day as well as, in combination with the symbolic colours of each apartment, the life cycle. Once in the black and scarlet apartment, the life journey of Prince Prospero comes to an end and the same fate awaits the other revellers who all throw themselves into the apartment only to find death.

⁸² Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 608.

*“And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.”*⁸³

The excerpt above is the last paragraph of the short story depicting the dying scene and demonstrating that no one can deny their own mortality nor can they shield themselves with wealth in order to escape death. By portraying society where the poor are left to die outside whilst the rich are enjoying their wealth within, Poe may also suggest that this kind of behaviour is the doom for humanity and calls for change.

⁸³ Poe. *The Complete Stories/Edgar Allan Poe; With an Introduction by John Seelye*. 609.

Conclusion

This thesis focuses mainly on the comparison of literary works of the authors Ueda Akinari and Edgar Allan Poe but also of their lives. Regarding that, both of them were adopted at an early age to a merchant family that would have been able to promise them a bright future in the business career. Neither of them, however, chose to follow this path and instead they lived a life of literary success, though, ironically, filled with poverty. Their interest in literature paved the way for their best literary skills and their lifestyle is mirrored in their work.

The theme of death and supernatural horror is presented in all four selected short stories which may suggest the authors' knowledge about the dark aspects of life, yet since they attempted to better literature of their time and to find the core of goodness in society. Both writers experienced premature death of their loved ones, including their mothers and wives, and that is why a lot of Poe's writings deal with the death of young women such as Madeline Usher. On the other hand, Akinari distanced himself from the dark topics of his stories, focusing rather on the general message of living an honourable life without leaving the path of piety.

There is a similar difference in their approach towards narrative styles, as Akinari tends to begin his stories with the time and space setting, the protagonist's characteristics, their life situation, and sometimes even with a poetic introduction on the topic. The third-person narrator distances himself from the events and presents the story as if an experienced old man were passing on the lesson of the story to the younger generation. Whereas Poe's stories oftentimes begin with no clear point from when and where the events start when using the first-person narrator, who usually is a drug addict, mentally ill person, or an otherwise unreliable narrator. Regardless of the narrative style, Poe occasionally gives the reader a vague introduction into the matter.

The implementation of time and space is an important part of the supernatural setting in the writings of Akinari and Poe. Both authors put more emphasis on the space setting rather than on the time setting, although it would be incorrect to claim that the latter is utterly insignificant. Akinari has the tendency to explicitly express the time of day or how many days have passed, since numbers have a symbolic meaning in Japanese culture. In contrast with this approach, Poe relies on the human fear of the unknown and thus expressing the time only vaguely, or not at all.

The supernatural characters analysed within this thesis are all connected to death in one way or another. Neither writer is concerned with the outer characteristics of their characters very much, each for different reasons. The physical appearance does not have a very significant role for Akinari's stories; hence the character's description is explained only briefly and is usually included exclusively for the main characters. Poe is rather concerned with the allegorical meaning of his characters and it is for that reason that he frequently makes the personality of his characters reflect on their physical appearance. Finally, an important difference in creating the supernatural characters is the background information which is commonly present or somewhat suggested in Akinari's tales, whilst it is lacked in Poe's stories for the most part. The character's background lets the reader sympathise with the character, or dislike it, much easier than if the information is omitted.

Working with world-wide known authors' works that have been analysed numerous times brought many challenges, but also a wider knowledge and a deeper understanding of the supernatural elements implemented in the horror genre. Their lives and works still contain obfuscation which might never be satisfyingly clarified. Nevertheless, Akinari and Poe contributed a great deal to the development of the horror genre and literature in general, each in their own way and conviction.

Resumé

This thesis is concerned with the comparison of lives and supernatural elements in work of Ueda Akinari and Edgar Allan Poe. Based on my two majors of study, I decided to compare these two authors who lived roughly within the same period, though in different parts of the world. Selected genres and stories are introduced in the theoretical part of this thesis as well as brief biographies of both authors. The main part focuses on the analogies between the writers' style, usage of supernatural and horror elements, and choice of characters of two selected short stories by each of them. This thesis provides not only differences and similarities within their work but also a deeper analysis of their mind-set and literary approach.

Keywords: Ueda Akinari, Edgar Allan Poe, short story, supernatural, horror, *kaidan*

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