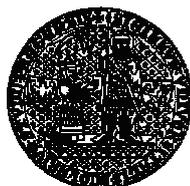


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**Comparison of lives and works
of E. A. Poe and Stephen King/
What can make people write horror stories?**

BACHELOR THESIS

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the result of my own work and that I used only the sources listed on the Works Cited page.

Prague, April 20th 2012

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Abstract

The bachelor thesis is concerned with the comparison of lives and works of Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King. In the theoretical part of the thesis the horror genre and its typical features are introduced together with outlining both writers' brief biographies. The main part focuses on the analogies between the authors' lives and similarities in the topics and motifs of their work. Poe and King are world-wide famous horror writers; and besides the obvious similarities, such as the nationality and the choice of genre, there are many parallel events and influences in their lives that might have affected the literary production. The thesis provides a deeper analysis of those facets and it puts them in context with their works. The last part interconnects the findings made throughout and explores the tentative thesis as to whether there can be something that can "make" a person write horror stories.

Key words

Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King, American literature, fantasy, gothic novel, horror, Romanticism, sci-fi, comparison

Abstrakt

Bakalářská práce se zabývá srovnáním životů a děl Edgara Allana Poea a Stephena Kinga. V teoretické části práce je představen žánr hororu společně s uvedením stručných životopisů obou spisovatelů. Hlavní část se soustředí na analogie mezi životy obou autorů a na tematiku a motivy společné pro jejich díla. Poe a King patří mezi celosvětově nejznámější hororové spisovatele a kromě očividných vnějších podobností jako je národnost a výběr žánru existuje v jejich životech mnoho obdobných událostí a vlivů, které mohly silně působit na literární tvorbu. Práce se hlouběji zabývá právě těmito aspekty a snaží se je dát do kontextu s jejich díly. Poslední část propojuje získané poznatky a zkoumá, jestli na základě uvedených informací může existovat něco, co člověka může „nutit“ psát hororové příběhy.

Klíčová slova

Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King, americká literatura, fantasy, gotický román, horor, romantismus, sci-fi, srovnání

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Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King are arguably two of the best-known horror writers in the whole world. Despite the “horror” label, both authors’ readership is very large and diverse, which confirms not only their talent and excellent dramatic narrative abilities, but also the popularity of the horror genre as such. The literary works of both authors, Poe especially, have been sources of inspiration to a great number of other horror writers; their usual themes and topics have become an almost compulsory ingredient in creating a horror story, and the influence of their writing style mirrored in the works of their contemporaries. The eventual success they both reached is not the only binding element though. That is why the main focus of the bachelor thesis is the comparison of the lives of these two authors crucial for the development of the horror genre, highlighting the similar or analogical elements in their respective lives and creative endeavors.

Despite living in different centuries, they are considered the main representatives of the horror genre. Poe as the predecessor or even inventor, King as not only his follower, but also the generally acknowledged contemporary “horror-master”; they both have highly contributed to this literary genre. What is more, the similarities between the writers’ lives may not be coincidental: the question which is also to be dealt with throughout the thesis is if there is such a thing as circumstances and outer influences that can make people write horror stories.

The thesis consists of two major parts: the first part is theoretical and it provides an introduction of the horror genre, including its history, general description, typical features, inspiration sources, and the shift which the term “horror” went through. It is followed by brief biographies of the two authors the thesis focuses on: E. A. Poe and Stephen King. In the second, practical part the analogical events and similarities between the writers’ lives are presented. Furthermore, their literary works are compared and parallel style of writing, topics, motifs, language devices and influences on others are emphasized. Finally, the conclusion shows the most important analogies between both authors and summarizes the aspects that can influence one’s life to write horror books.

1. Theoretical part

1.1 Introduction of the horror genre

Horror is a literary genre with a long tradition – its elements had already appeared in ancient myths and fairy tales. Furthermore, aspects of the horror genre can be found as far back as *Beowulf* from 700 AD; in Shakespearian drama, or in the main works of Shakespeare’s contemporary Jon Webster – *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* that are said to prefigure the later Gothic literature. However, the Gothic wave and the beginnings of horror as a distinct genre came in the end of the eighteenth century and continuing in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although horror can be seen as a typically English genre, Edgar Allan Poe was one of the innovators as he inspired many other horror writers, such as Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Also H. P. Lovecraft was one of his noteworthy followers, although his writing career spans the first of half of the twentieth century: not only his writing, but also by his life echoes Poe.

Another significant boom in horror writing came in the second half of the twentieth century. Modern authors drew inspiration from previously mentioned writers and also from some important world events like world wars (as a source of fear, the feeling of psychic isolation or hopeless future), progress in technologies and chemicals, and raising importance of psychology and new findings in this field. Author like Stephen King, Robert Bloch, Anne Rice, Peter Straub or Clive Barker are the most significant examples of this post-war era, although the topics of their works differ.¹

Gina Wisker classifies horror as a genre based on our hidden fears of pain and death, and our imagination of seeing “beyond, beneath, and through what we take for granted as normal and familiar”.² She develops Lovecraft’s³ theories about horror stories, suggesting that such experiences are much more powerful and likely to stick in our minds. That enables flourishing of the tales of folklore often containing supernatural, mystery, peril and evil possibilities, and horror fiction elements. Wisker characterizes horror as a pervading topic of basically everything. She considers it

¹ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 15-18.

² Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 2.

³ H. P. Lovecraft (1890 – 1937) was an American horror writer, similar to Poe by blending horror with genres of sci-fi and fantasy; mainly contributed to the subgenre of “weird fiction”.

entertaining and educational, as well as contradictory, combining opposites, but usually with the purpose of restoring order. However, order is culturally determined at a particular time and place – hence the characteristics such as social, cultural, political, psychological, emotional, spiritual, supernatural, natural, and part of the human condition. There are also authors who find horror in daily life – such as monstrosity of politics, terror, violence, murder or rape.⁴

Horror as a genre represents what terrifies and disgusts, what we fear and secretly desire at the same time. It uses monstrous, vile, violent, dehumanizing elements, and also employs dramatic suspense-building techniques when inserting these elements into stories. But horror fiction is not just a literary genre; it is also a construction, projection, and representation. Its elements are meaningful; their roots can be found in popular consciousness as well as unconscious, their representation in popular fictional form cover a wide range of presentation – from fairy tales and parables to blockbuster movies. Also, one of the main functions of horror and its interpretation is the crucial ‘threshold’ concept. “Horror fiction tends to gain its effects from its imaginative strategies – pace, characterization, narratives, settings, perspectives (...).”⁵

Sometimes, the detailed description of setting, circumstances, characters and also non-human figures appearing in the story are more important than the plot that would usually be possible to sum up in one short paragraph. That is why this genre was originally written mainly in shorter literary structures such as short story, novella or short novel. There are very few works that could be classified as pure horror stories: horror genre is usually mixed with elements of other genres, such as sci-fi, fantasy or a detective story.⁶

The genre of horror is deeply rooted in the Gothic: it can be seen in the closeness of horror to the reality but its appearance as fantastic, for instance. The Gothic origin does not have impact only on the form – both entertaining and culturally as well as psychologically disturbing, but also on the location of the plot, presence of paradoxical

⁴ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 2-4.

⁵ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 5.

⁶ Hrabák, Josef. *Od laciného optimismu k hororu*. Praha: Melantrich, 1989. 201.

forces, and disturbance of the safety of the routine. “It provides personal, emotional, psychic, and energetic release.”⁷

Concerning the setting, both Gothic and horror use the environment of dungeons, attics, corridors, and terrifying and threatening places. Horror continues in such a tradition, but on the whole it is more violent. Also, modern horror in the contrast with the Gothic often uses common places and ordinary things as an unexpected source of our fears: “what is terrifying is often that which is most familiar.”⁸

Fairly recently, horror has also been affected by the Freudian theory, which makes it more connected to sexuality and violence. Generally, Freud had a great influence on the interpretation of horror. Psychoanalytic readings of fantastic and horror literature discovered the frequent use of what Freud calls ‘unheimlich’ – “the intrusion of the unfamiliar when the familiar is expected”⁹ and making homely frightening and revealing hidden secrets. The topic of ‘unheimlich’ deals with alternative versions of self, relationships, or family; or results of what has been revealed after a projection of something repressed, such as the presence of ghosts, monsters, evil spirits or disruptive energies in places related to unnatural death or graves of wrongly buried people.¹⁰

Horror is a rewarding genre in terms of use of supernatural beings, mystic worlds or abilities beyond our imagination. Such stories teem with demons, witches and wizards, magicians, vampires, living dead, werewolves and other mythological figures, possessing as many horrifying characteristics as they can.¹¹

Besides the traditionally chosen horror characters, the modern conception of horror and usage of human weaknesses enable new horror figures. For example, giant insect (especially spiders and ants) became popular as well as various monsters emerged from ordinary animals or harmless plants. Such characters are usually used in science fiction and their existence is explained on a genetic or scientific level (creation by mutation, radioactive radiation etc.) – we can see the typical examples in Dr.

⁷ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 7.

⁸ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 26.

⁹ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 8.

¹⁰ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 8.

¹¹ Hrabák, Josef. *Od laciného optimismu k hororu*. Praha: Melantrich, 1989. 202.

Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, King Kong or even the Czech Golem (drawing on Jewish lore).

In the hybrid of horror and fantasy another sort of horror figures is presented. In this category we can recognize mighty demons, gods and semi-gods, enormous serpents and similar monsters. There is usually a hero fighting all his enemies with a magic sword and sometimes unusual abilities. This mixture is also called Heroic fantasy with the example of original American series of Conan the Barbarian, a softer version with more fantasy than horror elements is also *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The general description of this developing genre would also subsume the branch of demonology, which is the belief in demons and their exorcism.¹²

Contemporary horror has served as a source of mass aesthetic inspiration for nearly a decade and a half, especially in America. In its recent form it is also closely connected to movie production – thanks to this new medium the genre of horror has flourished already since 1920's. Horror stories of the twentieth and twenty-first century brim with creatures such as vampires, werewolves, zombies, demonically possessed children, ghosts, monsters of all sizes, and various hybrids.¹³

Nöel Carroll deals with the term “horror” itself – he considers it insufficient when talking about horror in the context of other arts. He argues that horror is usually marked by “the presence of monsters of either a supernatural or sci-fi origin.” However, Poe's innovative tales often called “tales of terror” do not really fit into this category then as the plots and points are connected with the mental states and processes. At the same time, there are also stories with monsters and supernatural creatures, which are not necessarily horrors – it can concern fairy tales or myths. That is why it is important to realize what exactly it is that creates “proper” horror. In fairy tales, the monsters are a normal part of the universe, however, in horrors such monsters are considered abnormal, disturbing the natural order. Also, in horror when the human character encounters a monster, it is accepted with fear, loathing or a physical sickness, whilst in fairy tales supernatural beings do not always possess bad or evil characteristics.¹⁴

¹² Hrabák, Josef. *Od laciného optimismu k hororu*. Praha: Melantrich, 1989. 203.

¹³ Carroll, Nöel. “The Nature of Horror.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Art Criticism*. Autumn 1987: 51.

¹⁴ Carroll, Nöel. “The Nature of Horror.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Art Criticism*. Autumn 1987: 51.

To conclude, “horror is an interpretation of local and global cruelties and tragedies.”¹⁵ It embodies what is paradoxically both feared and desired, dramatizing which is normally unthinkable and dwells on the connection between sexuality and violence, closely connected to Freudian theory. The current revival of horror can be plausibly interpreted as a spin-off of the noticeable increase in the growing interest in the Gothic triggered by the age of postmodernism. Besides, many questions and topics of postmodernist age influenced the development of the horror genre. “Beliefs of identity, self, social, and cultural norms” have been frequently discussed in contemporary horror stories.¹⁶ However, the revival can also be understood simply in terms of the commercial appeal of suspenseful genres, of which horror is the ultimate embodiment.

1. 2 Edgar Allan Poe

E. A. Poe was born in 1809 in Boston. Only two years after his birth he became an orphan because of his father’s abandonment and his mother’s death. He was taken in and fostered by a rich merchant living in Richmond. Together with his foster parents he spent several years in England, where he attended grammar school in London and Stoke Newington. The English environment might have had a great influence on him as he later started to write works similar to the Gothic novel, originally coming right from England.¹⁷ In 1820 he returned to USA and continued in a private school and then academy in Richmond. Six years later he began studying at University of Virginia with a specialization in poetry and Latin. Due to his financial situation and consequent gambling and drinking problems he was sent down, which is why he enlisted in the army under a false name. In the same year he published his first serious poem “Tamerlane”. To comfort his father after his foster mother’s death he started attending West Point Military Academy, however, Poe soon started to neglect his duties and then even disobey the rules. As a result, in 1831 he was dismissed again.¹⁸

¹⁵ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 14.

¹⁶ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 14.

¹⁷ Quinn, A. H. & Rosenheim, Shawn. *Edgar Allan Poe: a critical biography*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998. 65.

¹⁸ Merriman, C. D. “Edgar Allan Poe.” *The Literature Network* 2006. 20 January 2012
<<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/>>.

Then he moved to his relatives in Baltimore and soon married his own cousin Virginia in Richmond. Together they moved to New York, where Poe made his living by contributions to local magazines mainly. In 1838, his only novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* was published. Besides creating fiction (short tales) and poems, he also wrote and published theoretical essays and specialized articles on literary theory. Although his production was extensive and of a good quality, he remained unappreciated in his time and he had to contend with constant lack of money and the problems thereof. In 1847 his young wife died of tuberculosis, which brought Poe to deep depressions. Besides, for the whole life he inclined towards gloomy moods and feelings of isolation and psychic loneliness, which only increased during Virginia's dying and after her death. It was only a year after publishing "The Raven", the only Poe's poem well accepted by the public even at the time of the release.¹⁹

However, he still had to continue writing and he even wanted to make his own magazine, *The Stylus*. After Virginia's death he started seeing quite a few different women at the same time, for example the poetess Sarah Helen Whitman or Nancy Richmond, to whom he often wrote letters, being among them. In the same year he nearly succeeded in committing suicide. This attempt was followed by a year full of chaos – he tried to write poems as well as newspaper articles, but simultaneously he traveled from city to city, writing strange letters, obviously feeling depressed and drinking heavily.

27th September 1849 is the last day of any mention of his conscious activity – about him taking a steamer to Baltimore. Six days after, his body was found unconsciously lying in front of a pub. He was taken to hospital, but only after four days filled with delirious states switching to deep unconsciousness. He died on 7th October 1849 in Washington Medical College and buried one day later.

The cause and circumstances of his death will probably always remain a mystery. Nevertheless, it is not the only unclear issue of his life – and questions of his alleged drug addiction, relations to other women during and after Virginia's illness and the death itself are still unanswered.²⁰

¹⁹ Hilský, Martin. "Povídkář Poe." *Od Poea k postmodernismu: Proměny americké prózy*. Eds. Martin Hilský & Jan Zelenka. Praha: Odeon, 1993. 8-10.

²⁰ Poe, E. A. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1972. 90-94.

The life work of Poe consists of various pieces of writing and some authors highlight the connection “between Poe’s unhappy life and the tortured philosophy behind his writings.”²¹ Beginning with poems and newspaper articles on various topics, ending with short tales and even a novel, he might be considered almost an experimental writer. Poe’s works are characterized by the presence of topics such as an abnormal psychic state of hallucination, hypnosis, fear and depression, or incipient madness of most of his heroes, sometimes even death. However, at the same time some of Poe’s plots need to be thought of as merely interesting artistic constructs, such as in “The Descent into Maelstrom” or “The Pit and the Pendulum” where the mathematical and mechanical aspect of the horror plot is crucial.²²

Also the methods of writing blend and mix within individual works. We can find elements of Romanticism - he admires and adores the primitive beauty of nature, the harmony between man’s identity and nature and God; at the same time he condemns the man’s interference into the order of nature. Poe’s conception of Romanticism is, however, different from what was considered Romantic in Europe, as his writing was very much affected by his revulsion to American life and his image of it.²³ The paradox and contradiction pervade his whole life and also affect his work. The contradiction of his romantic esprit and thinking – the belief in individual creativity and advocating of classical norms at the same time – can be seen in *Eureka*, but also in his fiction. And although he emphasized rationality, he is still seen as a romantic writer.²⁴

1. 3 Stephen King

Stephen King was actually not expected to be born. His mother was told she could not have children, which is why the parents adopted Stephen’s older brother. Nevertheless, despite the medical diagnosis he was born on 21 September 1947 in Maine. His father was a restless war veteran: he had been in the Merchant Marines during World War II, and after his return, he could not settle in a civilian life. When

²¹ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 78.

²² Procházka, Martin et al. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. 72.

²³ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 80, 95.

²⁴ Reuben, Paul P. “Chapter 3: Early Nineteenth Century - Edgar Allan Poe.” *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature- A Research and Reference Guide* October 2011. 6 April 2012
<<http://web.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap3/poe.html>>.

Stephen was two years old, his father left without any explanation and never came back.²⁵

Now the incomplete family had to constantly travel across the state, searching for support of their relatives, and King's mother was looking for minor jobs. Once she even had to separate her sons for couple of months to make some money and only when King was eleven they finally settled down in Durham. Because of the frequent moving King had to change schools a lot, which is why he was usually older, hence bigger than his classmates. His poor family environment and naturally introverted character did not help him and he was frequently laughed at and marginalized.²⁶

Since his childhood he was attracted by literature, especially of sci-fi and horror genre. His mother encouraged him in his first literary attempts, and already during high school he started creating short stories and school newspaper articles. He kept sending his stories to various magazines; but he got quite a few rejections in the beginning. King's literary career took off when he was eighteen and one of his short stories, *I Was a Teenage Grave Robber*, was published in *Comics Review*.²⁷

The literary direction influenced also his later studies: after a successful graduation he got a scholarship at the University of Maine in Orono, which his brother was also attending. His specialization was English with focus on contemporary literature and pedagogy. During university studies he started to experiment with drugs and also drank quite a lot. However, these excesses were probably still considered tolerable as he also managed to find his future wife Tabitha. They married a year after Stephen's graduation and they had two children within less than three years. In the first months of marriage King had to work manually, in petrol stations and public laundries and only occasionally he got a check for individual stories he kept sending to various men's magazines.²⁸

In autumn 1971 he managed to find a job as a teacher, which did not really helped them from poverty; what is more, he did not even have time for writing as he had earlier. However, during the summer holiday he wrote his first novel, *Carrie*. It was published two years later and met with unexpected success. The earnings from his debut novel covered family expenses and he could quit teaching and become a full-time

²⁵ Parish, J.R. *Stephen King: Author*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. 7.

²⁶ Parish, J.R. *Stephen King: Author*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. 8, 18.

²⁷ Parish, J.R. *Stephen King: Author*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. 26.

²⁸ King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Pocket Books, 2002. 47, 53.

writer. Even though the Kings had to move to southern Maine to Stephen's ill mother and live in a small rented house, King succeeded in finishing his second novel, *Salem's Lot*. During this period his mother died of cancer.²⁹

The success of his subsequent novels was enormous and it was a significant turn in the family life. No longer did they have to consider themselves poor, they could afford an adequate house and the children could grow up in a safe place. Despite the rising number of published novels and increasing standard of living, for many years King was under the influence of alcohol, later also drugs. Although he usually wrote while intoxicated, it did not seem to affect the quality of his work. It is, however, necessary to say that his alcohol and drug addiction mirrored in the topics of his novels. Jack Torrance from *The Shining* was an alcoholic with aggressive tendencies, the aliens from *Tommyknockers* are a metaphor for narcotics – the energy coming from the aliens in people's heads is described as drug effects, and as the author himself admits, Annie Wilson, the main character of *Misery* was an anthropomorphic embodiment that stood for both alcohol and cocaine for the injured and immobile writer in his dependency on her.³⁰

In following years King has produced a vast number of novels and short stories. Most of them were also made into more or less successful movies and his name became a guarantee of popularity. His drug addiction did not seem to decrease, though. In the end of 1980's during King's writing *The Dark Half* his wife forced him to face this problem and for the first time she gave him an ultimatum – either her and children or drugs. Under such a threat King began the addiction rehab with Tabitha's help and after going through hard times he successfully managed to get rid of all the drugs he had been addicted to.³¹

So far, Stephen King has written 36 novels, 8 books of *The Dark Tower* series, 8 books under the Richard Bachman pseudonym, 9 collections of short stories, 5 non-fiction books and 7 screenplays based on his works. On top of that, King is now 65 years old and despite his drug history and minor problems with health he does not seem to intend to stop writing.

²⁹ Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 123-129.

³⁰ King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Pocket Books, 2002. 75-76.

³¹ Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 254-255.

2. Practical part

2. 1 Similarities in the writers' lives

One of the main aims of the thesis is to show the analogy of two horror writers' lives. Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King do not seem to have too much in common at first sight: Poe lived in the first half of the nineteenth century; the Industrial revolution had not yet reached the effects of modern technology, the contemporary American literature was under a strong influence of Romanticism coming from Europe and the genre of horror was at its beginnings, undeveloped yet forming. That might be why Poe was the most significant poet and writer of this era from the current critical vantage point, but unappreciated at his time.

In contrast, King has lived in the second part of the twentieth century, influenced by post-war conditions of the United States, by substantial findings in psychology and by the progress in technological inventions. The genre of horror has already had its history and significance, although publicly considered a junk genre. King is however one of the best-selling authors in the whole world, his novels have been translated into more than 30 languages and adapted into more or less successful movies. What is more, he won several prestigious literary awards and his name still guarantees popularity to less known authors.

Nevertheless, there are many similarities in their lives and works that are presented in following chapters.

2. 1. 1 Childhood

Poe's and King's childhood was affected by events that are very much alike. Poe was born into a family as a second child, having an older brother and a younger sister. Soon after his birth their father abandoned them and their mother died not long after his desertion. Consequently, Poe was taken into guardianship by a rich merchant and his wife, where he was supported materially, but not emotionally. King was also a second child of his parents. His older brother David had been previously adopted as the Kings had been told they could not have children, which appeared to be a mistake. King's father, having been emotionally as well as personally unstable, left the family when little Stephen was only two years old. As a result, his mother started searching for a job

among the states. Both King and Poe were therefore made to live a kind of nomadic way of life in an early childhood. Both of them suffered from the absence of a father and the values of a complete family – as well as Poe, King had to spend several months separated from his mother and brother; both of them were influenced by the act of adoption – Poe by himself (although he was actually never officially adopted, only fostered), King by his brother being adopted.

Both authors are said to be very good students at their grammar schools. In their classes they excelled in literature and writing, Poe also in Latin and French. Yet at such an early age they both started to be set apart from their classmates. In Poe's case this was understandable – as he moved together with his foster parents to England, he attended his classes as the only American, well-dressed and financially supported. King, on the other hand, kept changing schools quite often as his family moved around. He was poor, did not seem to care about his clothes, wore thick glasses and was too tall for his age.³²

2. 1. 2 High school and University studies: discovering one's talent

The paths of King and Poe were first crossed when King began spending all of his spare time in books. With his deep-rooted interest in horror stories it was only a matter of time when he came across Poe's mystery and horror tales. At about the age of fourteen he saw the film adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum" and he decided to transcribe it and sell the "new" story to his classmates. There is a noticeable analogy with young Poe, as both authors discovered their writing talent very early, practiced on writing short stories, and distributed their literary attempts within their immediate surroundings.³³

They also had very similar experiences from their high schools. Both were considered outsiders – Poe was an orphan living in a foster family and attending school together with the children of the aristocrats and high-class people. Naturally, he felt different: unlike his wealthy and eccentric classmates Poe was shy, introverted and

³² Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 21-44; Poe, E. A. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1972. 69-70.

³³ King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Pocket Books, 2002. 36-37.

poor, and that was probably when his strong asocial tendencies started.³⁴ King's high school classmates also regarded him as a "freak" – he was usually older, as the Kings were constantly moving, he was very tall and also quite corpulent, he still had to wear glasses and he was known as the boy with books and a strange sense of humor. As far as school performance is concerned, both Poe and King were unsuccessful in virtually everything but writing. They both discovered their talent of narration at high school, starting with short stories. Later it became, beside poetry, Poe's main genre; whereas King moved on to creating longer novels.

After high school studies they both went to university. King studied English and pedagogy at the University of Maine, getting a scholarship, but still hardly getting along with money. Poe's field of study was also literature: he attended courses of poetry and Latin. Although he was financially supported by his foster father, he lacked money as well, and that is why he was brought to gambling. For Poe this became a never-ending circle. His psychic instability, lack of confidence and emotional deprivation brought from home led him too soon to alcohol consumption. He needed money for drink, therefore his gambling problems started, bringing him to the hopeless situations of increasing debts and depressions. King was used to poverty from home, which is why he was able to cope with such conditions much better. However, it is necessary to say that not even he remained innocent where alcohol and other intoxicants were concerned.³⁵

Poe's debauchery and consequent debts made his foster father furious and in 1827 he was forced to leave the university and join the US military service. The same year, being eighteen years old, his first collection of poems, *Tamerlane and other poems*, was published. Two years later his foster mother died and he shortly reconciled with his stepfather.³⁶ To pursue the juxtaposition, King was affected by the recruitment because of the Vietnam War only marginally – he knew from the beginning that thanks to his shortsightedness and flat feet he will be able to avoid the enlistment.³⁷

³⁴ Hilský, Martin. "Povídkář Poe." *Od Poea k postmodernismu: Proměny americké prózy*. Eds. Martin Hilský & Jan Zelenka. Praha: Odeon, 1993. 7.

³⁵ Merriman, C.D. "Edgar Allan Poe." *The Literature Network* 2006. 20 January 2012 <<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/>>.

³⁶ Merriman, C.D. "Edgar Allan Poe." *The Literature Network* 2006. 20 January 2012 <<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/>>.

³⁷ Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 87-88.

2. 1. 3 King, Poe, and drugs

In the end of sixties it was considered normal that all kinds of drugs were fairly easily available at university campuses. King was seduced by the accessibility of psychedelic drugs and he personally admitted quite a large consumption of LSD and mescaline during his university studies. Besides, not so long after his graduation and getting married, he also had a problem with alcoholism. In a way, he got himself into a similar vicious circle as Poe, getting drunk and feeling depressed and hopeless, both situations being a cause and a consequence at the same time. Later it resulted in an 8-years old cocaine addiction, in which the similarity with the alleged Poe's addiction to opium can be seen.³⁸

In Poe's case, the accusation of him being a drug addict is still disputable. No one can deny his documented drunkenness and tendencies to be dependent on narcotics. However, it is more complicated with opium. As some of his biographers strictly claim his purity, innocence, and very infrequent use of opium for medication purposes only, others tend to label him an opium addict without any doubts. The accusatory party usually refers to one of his letters where he admits having used opium: "...- the demon tormented me still. Finally I procured two ounces of laudnum [sic]..."³⁹ However, as Poe's defenders claim, in Victorian age two ounces of laudanum (also called Tincture of Opium) were considered a usual amount of painkillers taken to lessen one's pain. However, the letter continues. "Having written this letter, I swallowed about half the laudnum [sic] & hurried to the Post-Office — intending not to take the rest until I saw you (...) But I had not calculated on the strength of the laudanum, for, before I reached the Post Office my reason was entirely gone, & the letter was never put in".⁴⁰ That is the only documented occasion when Poe almost killed himself by taking too much of the drug. On the other hand, the whole character of the letter, the fragmented, distracted style of writing can suggest the author's constant restlessness and personal disunity, which might imply drug addiction. Signs of possible drug addiction can be also found as hidden and scattered circumstantial evidence in his short stories, where the main

³⁸ Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 79-80, 255.

³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. "Edgar Allan Poe to Annie L. Richmond — November 16, 1848." *Poe's Letters* 5 December 2009. 28 March 2012 <<http://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4811160.htm>>.

⁴⁰ Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. "Edgar Allan Poe to Annie L. Richmond — November 16, 1848." *Poe's Letters* 5 December 2009. 28 March 2012 <<http://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4811160.htm>>.

characters are sometimes opium-addicted and the usage of first-person narration might suggest the closer connection with the author.

2. 1. 4 Marriage

Shortly after his graduation, King at the age of 24 married Tabitha Spruce, his classmate from the university. Poe found his bride in his own cousin in Baltimore and he married 13-years old Virginia Clemm when he was 27. Both marriages were quite happy and both writers' wives were supportive towards their husbands' writings.⁴¹

Tabitha Spruce was born into a Catholic family in Maine. Similarly to Stephen, she loved reading and writing since her childhood and according to King's words, she has always been a perfect reader since his first literary attempts. She was capable of a constructive critique and never gave him false hopes. What is more, she and her relatives provided him with the reassuring feeling of big and complete family, which was something what he until that time had only dreamt of.⁴²

Virginia Clemm grew up in a similar environment as King did. Her father died when she was four and her single mother, Poe's aunt, took care of Virginia and her older brother by herself in very poor conditions. Edgar fell in love with his cousin Virginia when she was only 13 years old. Allegedly they did not have any marital relations until she was 16, although they had been married already two years.⁴³

Poe and King both kept contributing to several magazines for a long time; King specialized in short horror stories. Poe, on the other hand, published chiefly poems, critiques and essays. Whereas for Poe publications to newspapers and magazines meant a long time business, for King it was a makeshift way of getting some extra money to provide for the poor household with already two children. When his first novel was officially published, it meant a significant turn in his life. Not only did he gain back his lost confidence in his writer's abilities, but the success of the debut *Carrie* also significantly improved the standard of living for the whole family, which also

⁴¹ Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 105; Merriman, C.D. "Edgar Allan Poe." *The Literature Network* 2006. 20 January 2012 <<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/>>.

⁴² Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 91, 93-4.

⁴³ Aldrich, Brian. "Virginia Clemm Poe." *PoeForward.com* 2007. 30 March 2012 <<http://www.poeforward.com/poe/virginia.html>>.

temporarily helped King to free himself from the captivity of alcoholism. However, despite the later success of his published novels, he never stopped sending short stories to various magazines.⁴⁴

2. 1. 5 Productive years and attracting readership

The authors along with their families moved quite frequently among states in later life possibly due to their early childhood uprooting experiences. It has mirrored in several King's novels, because many of the places where he lived triggered new ideas: for example moving to Boulder in Colorado made him write one of his best novels, *The Shining*. The nomadic way of life is in both cases connected with changes in success of their works, family life and their personal moods. The demographic aspect of both authors' lives is reminiscent of a rollercoaster ride.

Similarly as life events influenced the themes and topics of King's novels, Poe's experiences inspired and almost made him change his style and genre. In his early writing years, he inclined towards writing poems, but also critiques, reviews and magazine articles. However, Poe's wife Virginia suddenly became very seriously ill and Poe spent about two weeks in deep despair, worrying about Virginia's life and falling for alcohol again. This experience brought him to the dark corners of his mind, to his fears and demons hidden in the depth of his imagination – and awoken a new style of writing. Although he had already written short stories earlier, this new style brought a new genre, a mixture of mysterious and almost self-analytic tales with elements of horror and a frequent topic of death or dying.⁴⁵

Poe was not as lucky in attracting a wide readership as King was, and he remained undervalued despite the indisputable quality of his stories. That is why he was still dependent on the money income from newspaper articles and individual stories sent to various magazines. A minor turn came in 1845 when Poe returned to writing poems and created *The Raven*: the poem itself attracted the public interest; however, the attention was also drawn to Poe's personality and past. It was too stressful for a young man, barely recovered from the sorrow caused by his wife's poor health, to be under a

⁴⁴ Merriman, C.D. "Edgar Allan Poe." *The Literature Network* 2006. 20 January 2012 <<http://www.online-literature.com/poe/>>; Rogak, Lisa. *Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King*. New York: Saint Martin's Press, 2008. 109, 122-125.

⁴⁵ Poe, E. A. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1972. 87-88.

pressure of the public and the same way as King, he became more and more reticent and he withdrew from society as much as he could. Unfortunately, both Poe and King tried to cope with their problems by frequent drinking and taking other drugs. As already mentioned, there are strong assumptions that Poe became addicted to opium, however, the extant evidence is not enough to say such an accusation without any doubts. That is why it remains only a speculation.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Poe, E. A. *Poe aneb Údolí Neklidu*. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1972. 84-87.

2. 2 Work: outer influences and common topics

As it has been outlined before, both writers were probably influenced and inspired not only by the similar actual events in their lives, but also by their personal mental condition, feelings, opinions and life attitude.

2. 2. 1 Style of writing

When dealing with Poe's contribution to magazines as a journalist, Poe's writing was innovative at his time – he did not frequently comment on the current social and political matters, which was the usual practice. He was keen on working out cryptograms and crimes, which was probably “stimulated by the desire to prove himself logical when he felt he was going insane”⁴⁷. Despite the indisputably Romantic tendencies in his work, he wrote essays with strong rational and intellectual bent, such as *The Rationale of Verse*, *The Poetic Principle* and *The Philosophy of Composition*.⁴⁸

On the other hand, in his prosaic collection *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* Poe uses both romantic irony and the power of poetic imagination as his writing tool, which creates complex, multi-leveled stories based on horror features mixed with elements of exotic, grotesque and even black humor. In such stories several levels of meanings of the narration can be found – such as psychological, moral and philosophical; the author himself creates works of this kind with playfulness and artistic engagement.⁴⁹

Maxwell calls Poe's prosaic style a mixture of “Romantic extravagance” and classical methods of writing. In his longest fictional work, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, readers can find him very openly and successfully drawing on the previous century. Similarly, Neff speaks of Poe as of one of the fathers of “scientifiction” – prose with signs of romantic story pervaded by scientific facts and visionary images of the future.⁵⁰

From Stauffer's point of view, the style used in most of his fiction is an arabesque style. In Poe's presentation, this term means “stock Gothic epithets, bizarre and foreign words, words used for the sounds themselves, parentheses for emphasis

⁴⁷ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 68.

⁴⁸ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 68-69.

⁴⁹ Macura, Vladimír et al. *Slovník světových literárních děl 2*. Praha: Odeon, 1988. 140.

⁵⁰ Neff, Ondřej. *Všechno je jinak*. Praha: Albatros, 1986. 61; Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 72.

(rather than for clarification or qualification), loose sentence construction, inversion of word order.” Another aspect of this style is in Poe’s case mingling of rhetoric: the plain style is followed by complicated, ornate expressions; the presence of “biblical style” (sentences beginning with and) and archaisms is also significant, especially in the arabesque tales such as “Berenice”, “Eleonora” or “The Fall of the House of Usher”. The mixture of styles is more emotionally-driven rather than intellectually-driven and evokes the changing nature of one’s mental condition highlighting possible mental instability. This kind of dual style of writing suggests the two sides of author’s nature – the precise and logical thinker as a perfectionist writer with a sense for detail and description (*Pym*) on one hand, on the other hand the dreamy and passionate poet with an ear for verbal harmonies. In Poe’s case, the style of his work is very important as he is often highlighted as one of the greatest stylist of the whole nineteenth century. His still well-known tales are appreciated mainly because of the mastery of styles and language possibilities, not really because of the plots or topics.⁵¹

King’s style is also not consistent throughout his novels. However, we can find similarities with Poe’s writing in the plethora of different styles. To begin, a certain duality typical of Poe is also present in King’s *Carrie* – the emotionally colored narrative subjectively dealing with the life of the main female protagonist is interpolated with objective, newspaper-like descriptions of the happening events. Collings calls this a dual narrative structure. It is a similar method King also uses in other novels, such as in *Cujo*, *The Dead Zone* and *Firestarter*. Although the short, plausibly-looking articles and scientific references are fictional, they create the illusion of reality.⁵²

Slightly different techniques are used in a novel *Thinner* and a short story “The Reach” where he starts with realistic or naturalistic presentation and shifts into the supernatural later. The method of mixing the supernatural horror and realistic descriptions appeared to be successful and some later novels were created in a similar way. For example, *It* is an example of a masterpiece where these techniques are brought to perfection.⁵³

⁵¹ Stauffer, Donald B. “The Language and Style of the Prose.” *A companion to Poe studies*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Westport: Greenwood Pres, 1996. 460, 465-466.

⁵² Collings, Michael R. *The Many Facets of Stephen King*. Starmont House, 1985. 42.

⁵³ Collings, M.R. *The Many Facets of Stephen King*. Starmont House, 1985. 58-59.

Similarly with Poe, King puts a great emphasis on the function of imagination as a means of writing. He as well combines elements of rationalism with classic horror features and black humor (*Christine, The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*).⁵⁴

2. 2. 2 Topics and motifs

Since high school, both Poe and King shared the same resistance to snobbery and the feeling of otherness. A certain degree of psychic deprivation which they both had come through due to their fathers' absence might have created the inclination towards addiction of any kind. Not only were they very much attached to their wives and families, but they also had the previously mentioned drug problem. At the same time, both authors tend to come back in their memory when writing a story.

It is very typical of King to choose the topics of memories, adults coming back to the beginnings of their lives, and the childhood itself. It can be seen in novels such as *It, Pet Sematary* or *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, where children are the main protagonists or at least one of the main characters. Although childhood experiences are not a very frequent topic of Poe's work, the themes of memory and mind processes in general appear throughout his writings very often.

Topics such as mental and physical isolation of a person or a group of people might have arisen from the real separation both authors had to come through. Therefore the concept of isolation and loneliness of main protagonists is similar in both authors' writings. Typically, Poe's solitaires are isolated by psychic barriers, not remoteness in space. "Poe's solitary is not merely someone accidentally cut off from society: the isolation is at least partly voluntary; it is frequently accompanied by the destruction of a unified group – a family ('The Fall of the House of Usher'), a ruling *élite* ('Hop Frog'), a nation ('The Masque of the Red Death'), even the world itself ('The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion')." ⁵⁵

In King, some of his young characters in novels rebel against the social system in America (*Salem's Lot, The Shining, Firestarter*) as a consequence of the previously mentioned feeling of loneliness. The refusal to conform makes them create new social identities and interpersonal relationships. Besides, these kinds of protagonists often

⁵⁴ Collings, M.R. *The Many Facets of Stephen King*. Starmont House, 1985. 83.

⁵⁵ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 75.

represent “a moral flight to freedom” which leads to the abandonment of society as such and surviving in small interpersonal groups. This collective rebellion is distinctive for King: in contrast with his contemporaries, whose heroes and heroines are usually (self)ostracized individually, he sometimes leaves his protagonists in a minor community.⁵⁶

Lachman explains Poe’s frequent topic of death and themes connected, such as catalepsy, burial alive or engineered entombment, as a consequence of the life events: according to him, Poe lived for the most of his life in poor conditions and even after his one major success of the poem “Raven”, he earned hardly enough to keep his body and soul together. It also became one of his fields of interest: the concept of separating a soul from the body tying one down.⁵⁷

Several King’s novels and short stories also deal with the topic of death, natural as well as unnatural, together with the afterlife (*Pet Sematary*, *Bag of Bones*, *It*, “Sometimes They Come Back”), as well as other motifs revealing the dark processes of human soul and mind. Dreams, for instance, are a common topic in both King’s and Poe’s prose (in Poe’s case poetry as well). For example, images and hallucination of Ralph, a main protagonist of King’s *Insomnia*, bring him nothing but suffering and eventually a tragic ending. Also the images of Pym’s dreams are dislocated symbols of suffocation, sterility and despair, namely serpents, never-ending deserts associated with a deep level of consciousness.⁵⁸

Themes and constitutive elements of sci-fi genre appear in both writers’ works. Poe’s attempts of involving sci-fi elements into his writing can be found in “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion” and “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall”.⁵⁹ King’s novels are not so easy to classify, as they often consist of many different genres. However, sci-fi elements are in a certain extent present in novels such as *The Tommyknockers* and *The Dark Tower* series.⁶⁰

The typical elements appearing throughout King’s works also include the supernatural. “In his horror stories, Stephen successfully follows in the literary tradition

⁵⁶ Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King’s American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 8.

⁵⁷ Lachman, Gary. *A Dark Muse: a history of the occult*. New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005. 39.

⁵⁸ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 76.

⁵⁹ Macura, Vladimír et al. *Slovník světových literárních děl 2*. Praha: Odeon, 1988. 140.

⁶⁰ Adamovič, Ivan. “King, Stephen.” *Encyklopedie literatury science fiction*. Eds. Ondřej Neff a Jaroslav Olša. Praha: AFSF; Jinočany: H&H. 1995. 281.

of famous authors such as Mary Shelley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and H. P. Lovecraft.”⁶¹ King explains it as the fascination by the ability to form a certain type of relationship, and cooperation between our fantasy fears and real fears. At the same time, the surreal and fantastic events taking place throughout his stories are often symbolic representation of a larger cultural crisis.⁶²

A repeated motif of Poe’s as well as King’s works is alcohol and alcohol consumption. In the opening scenes of *Pym* one of the main characters gets drunk and it results into almost fatal consequences. However, in the following passage we can see how Poe connected the “bad” elements together: “He was drunk—bestly drunk—he could no longer stand, speak, or see. (...) It was evident that, during the evening, he had drunk far more than I suspected, and that his conduct in bed had been the result of a highly-concentrated state of intoxication—a state which, like madness, frequently enables the victim to imitate the outward demeanor of one in perfect possession of his senses.”⁶³

Reynolds calls Poe’s style of writing a “temperance fiction”, more precisely “dark temperance”. What he suggests is that although Poe probably was influenced by temperance movement, he “left didacticism behind and emphasized the perverse results of alcoholism” – for instance, in “The Black Cat” a young couple is depicted, slowly destroyed by dramatized alcohol effects.⁶⁴

In both above-mentioned tales alcohol is the central topic – in “The Black Cat” it functions as the evil tool of relationship destruction; in “The Cask” both characters are regular drinkers, one of them considers himself an expert on wines, but his love of alcohol causes his violent death at the same time.⁶⁵

The function of alcohol in King’s novels is more or less similar. Besides the previously mentioned drunkard Jack Torrance and his hallucinatory drinking in *The*

⁶¹ Parish, J.R. *Stephen King: Author*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. 3.

⁶² Parish, J.R. *Stephen King: Author*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. 3; Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King’s American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 40.

⁶³ Poe, E. A. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* 1946. 2 February 2012
<<http://books.google.cz/books?id=HFor4jL5LtYC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+narrative+of+arthur+gordon+pym&hl=cs&sa=X&ei=YqiET5q3LsTptQap8LThBg&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false>>. 6.

⁶⁴ Reynolds, David S. “‘The Cask of Amontillado’ in Its Cultural Context.” *Edgar Allan Poe*. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006. 30.

⁶⁵ Reynolds, D.S. “‘The Cask of Amontillado’ in Its Cultural Context.” *Edgar Allan Poe*. Harold Bloom. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006. 31.

Shining, almost every time his characters drink, it is uncontrolled and badly-ending. Consequences of such characters' actions appearing in *It*, *From a Buick 8*, and *Mile 81* are always harmful especially for their surroundings. The main character of *The Dark Half* is, on the other hand, a recovering alcoholic.

A motif of journey is also typical of both authors. "Throughout King's work, his characters are made to walk through dark corridors (...)"⁶⁶ The importance of going through a narrow corridor to an unknown end symbolizes the personal voyage of searching of one's self. Poe's voyages are "obsessed, driven, compulsive, voyages compelled by guilt, or fear, or perverseness; and set in surroundings whose tendency is to dissolve and crumble from reality to nightmare"⁶⁷, for example in *Colloquies* or his poem *Dreamland*.⁶⁸

Duality in thoughts is a frequent motif repeating itself throughout Poe's work, probably because of his own ambivalence; for example in *Pym*, where in the end the dilemma of rational and supra-rational is brought to an issue.⁶⁹ Similar cause of duality can be seen in King's novels – not only there are some of his later works focused on the issues of a divided human personality, but also the duality of the literary attitude can be meant. As he usually mixes two or more genre elements within one novel, there can be more than one narrative style: "King's ambivalence toward genre characterizes *Carrie*, particularly in its dual narrative structure"⁷⁰

2. 2. 3 Language and rhetorical devices

Poe's vocabulary reflects on his wide reading; it was also typical for him to use original collocations, new compound words instead of the whole phrases, such as "metaphysicianism", "sea-brilliancy" or "imparticularity". He also created new adjectives from existing nouns, like "cIPHERICAL" or "PSYCHAL". According to the manners of journalist in 1830's and 1840's, he was creating linguistic puns and

⁶⁶ Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 91.

⁶⁷ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 74.

⁶⁸ Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 91; Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 74.

⁶⁹ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 79.

⁷⁰ Collings, M.R. *The Many Facets of Stephen King*. Starmont House, 1985. 42.

wordplays (“come-at-able”, “moon-hoaxy”); generally said, in many of his works, Poe’s fascination by language and its functions can be seen.⁷¹

His desire to show a certain degree of education and to impress his readers might have caused the frequent use of foreign words and phrases – words from Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Hebrew and Arabic are very often found in his work. “Poe’s diction in general reflects his wide and eclectic reading, as already noted. He is especially fond of such unusual words as *caprioles*, *simoom*, *coir*, *jaggaree*, *ghee*, *girting*, *crank*, *huggab*, *shawm*, *gemmary*, and *ortolan*, which he seems to enjoy using for the sake of their sound or their oddity.”⁷²

In some of his comic tales Poe purposely uses different kinds of dialect and slang. For example, “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling” is narrated by an Irishman; therefore Irish dialect is used throughout the story. “The Devil in the Belfry” is partly written in Dutch dialect, in “The Spectacles” French dialect is present, “and, most unusual, the Gullah dialect of the South Carolina Negro in ‘The Gold Bug’”. Also the angel in “The Angel of the Odd” speaks in a strange accent that is according to Stauffer “a pastiche of German, French, and Southern Black.”⁷³

The typical Poe’s rhetorical devices used mainly in his prose are repetition, parenthesis, parallelism, and inversion of word order. Poe uses various types of repetition – such as epizeuxis with the main function of emphasis and it usually has impact not only on the structure, but also texture: “Long - long I read – and devoutly, devoutly I gazed.” (“The Oval Portrait”). Anaphora, another type of repetition, is used with the aim to interrupt the flow of the narration and to emphasize the key word, such as in the example from “Loss of Breath”: “Imagine – that is if you have a fanciful turn – imagine, I say, my wonder.”⁷⁴

King often provides detailed description mainly to make the characters realistic and believable – when he convinces his readers that the protagonists live a typical life as themselves, then the horrors they survive become much real, hence more frightening, as

⁷¹ Stauffer, Donald B. “The Language and Style of the Prose.” *A companion to Poe studies*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Westport: Greenwood Pres, 1996. 448-468. 460.

⁷² Stauffer, D.B. “The Language and Style of the Prose.” *A companion to Poe studies*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Westport: Greenwood Pres, 1996. 462.

⁷³ Stauffer, D.B. “The Language and Style of the Prose.” *A companion to Poe studies*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Westport: Greenwood Pres, 1996. 463.

⁷⁴ Stauffer, D.B. “The Language and Style of the Prose.” *A companion to Poe studies*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Westport: Greenwood Pres, 1996. 463.

a result of the personal identification. “In novels as diverse as *Firestarter*, *The Stand*, *The Dead Zone*, *The Mist* and *The Talisman*, King’s warning is explicit: individuals sacrifice themselves and their loved ones to psychological trauma”⁷⁵

He also uses the location of home as an image which indicates both the horror of place and the horror of self, where the room is said to be a symbol of our identity, insanity, and sense of stability of self. The domestic space can be chosen on purpose to contrast the fact that it is a place of safety, security, and familiarity. In this kind of genre, horror takes the elements of classic Gothic as it is focused on our intimate and personal spaces. Conventional Gothic aims its attention at threatening spaces, while horror usually exposes the familiar location “- exposing the family, home, attic, cellar, kitchen, bedroom, toilet, garden, and neighborhood as danger zones.” Horror transforms what is considered real by exposing what is feared and hidden. This is connected with fantasy – Wisker highlights the frequent use of place-describing prepositional constructions which introduce fantastic setting: such as “‘On the edge’, ‘through’, ‘beyond’, ‘between’, ‘at the back of’, ‘underneath’ or adjectives such as ‘topsy-turvy’, ‘reversed’, ‘inverted’.”⁷⁶

King himself deals with question of language use in horror in his non-fictional book *Danse Macabre*. In a similar way as Poe, he is educated in linguistics but at the same time he does not try to boast with this fact, sometimes he uses his knowledge to enrich his novels though. For example, in *Thinner* the gypsy language is a mixture of Norwegian and Swedish. He also admits a certain stereotype of using particular language, or words of particular language in concrete situations and as examples he speaks of (and uses) French as a language of love and German as perfect for explanation and clarification.⁷⁷

As a masterpiece showing King’s linguistic as well as stylistic abilities we could consider *It*, one of his longest novels. The chapters often end in the middle of a sentence and following chapters finish the sentence, only the setting is shifted in the past or in the future. One of the main characters stammers, which is yet another device indicating the current time of the story. The Evil, playing a great role in the novel, is personified by

⁷⁵ Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King’s American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 55.

⁷⁶ Wisker, Gina. *Horror fiction: an introduction*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005. 150.

⁷⁷ King, Stephen. *Danse Macabre*. New York: Berkley Books, 1981. 213.

many different things, but most of the time it has an appearance of a demonic clown. When the clown or other shapes of the Evil speak, repetition, interjections or nonsense word expressions are used: “A breeze rustled them and they seemed to nod together: *The boys are here, isn't that nice? More boys. Our boys.* Richie shivered. (...) The huge sunflowers nodded sagely together. *Fresh boys. Good boys. Our boys.*”⁷⁸ The repetitious and incomplete sentences induce dramatic and scary atmosphere. The similar urgency evoking fear and terror can be seen in: “ ‘*Beverly, Beverly, Beverly...you can't fight us...you'll die if you try...die if you try...die if you try...Beverly...Beverly...Beverly...ly-ly-ly...*’”⁷⁹ Similarly he uses “the mental” language to complete the protagonists’ language:

‘Stan, I saw - ’
 ‘What?’
 Eddie shook his head. ‘Nothing, I guess,’ he said. ‘I’m just a little
 (*but they were yes they were and they would have eaten me alive*)
 Jumpy. The tiger, I guess. Keep going.’⁸⁰

2. 2. 4 Characterization

Poe was concerned by presenting individualized characters whose personalities were slowly revealed throughout the story by a random sequence of everyday events. Presenting their manners played an important role when showing a type of character; this can be seen in *Pym* in characterization of the main character and his companion, Augustus. Although Poe puts his criticizing opinions into his protagonists, he avoids moralizing; he is rather investigating and displaying, not censuring.⁸¹

King’s characters usually have to undergo a significant change during the story. Their symbolical voyage brings them into direct contact with their own deepest fears; and when passing through them, each character is given a new level of self-control and confidence. The self-control is a significant attribute of the moral heroes and heroines – according to King, this is the main characteristics they need in the fight against the corrupted world.⁸²

⁷⁸ King, Stephen. *It*. Paperback ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007. 448.

⁷⁹ King, Stephen. *It*. Paperback ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007. 520.

⁸⁰ King, Stephen. *It*. Paperback ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007. 823.

⁸¹ Maxwell, D.E.S. *American Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963. 93-94.

⁸² Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 91.

2. 2. 5 King and Poe as innovators

King is generally regarded as the groundbreaker in the horror genre: he was the one who provoked serious critical attention to this genre and topics it may encompass. It was a long way, though. King struggled a lot to gain respectability, not only within the publishing industry, but also among the readers. “Some consider his books to be merely entertaining reading for the masses rather than artistic achievements with any real literary merit.”⁸³

King mainly contributed to the development of horror genre by using the horror story as a sociopolitical allegory. Nevertheless, similar attempts can be seen even in the nineteenth century literature with Poe as an innovator. In *Pym* there is a mixture of realism and symbolism when portraying the self through metaphors of motion, such as a journey quest in this case. That is very much alike to what King achieves in his novels. The moral search for self is hidden behind the storylines, which is typical not only of King, but also his nineteenth century ancestors.⁸⁴

Poe is often called a father and a founder of the genre of crime story, even though criminal stories already existed. The difference was that Poe made the genre much more sophisticated and made the readers think. He gave the detective genre a totally new form which became classic and has been repeated since. The model of an eccentric and amateur genius detective solving a crime from little pieces, his less smart assistant functioning as a contrast to the high intelligence of the detective became a popular default, and has been broadly accepted by other authors.⁸⁵

Poe remained known mainly as the American “inventor of detective story”. However, despite this label, many topics of modern science fiction can be found in his works. For example, in “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” Poe draws an image of a future world endangered by the air pollution; the hero of “The Unparalleled Adventures of one Hans Pfaal” travels to the Moon in a balloon (undoubtedly an inspiration for novels by Jules Verne); the story of “Mellonta Tanta” is set in the year 2048 and in “The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade” the sultan has his wife executed as a punishment for telling him “outrageous” lies, although her stories only reflected on the

⁸³ Parish, J.R. *Stephen King: Author*. New York: Facts On File, 2005. 2.

⁸⁴ Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 20.

⁸⁵ Hilský, Martin. “Povídkář Poe.” *Od Poea k postmodernismu: Proměny americké prózy*. Eds. Martin Hilský & Jan Zelenka. Praha: Odeon, 1993. 13.

technological inventions of the nineteenth century. Also Poe's only novel *Pym* is near to a genre of sci-fi.⁸⁶

2. 2. 6 Causing controversy

According to his contemporaries, Poe was a controversial character, indeed. Many authors critically mention his tendencies to alcoholism which probably damaged his body and soul to a large extent. Some exalt his originality and real literary genius; also defend his extravagant behavior, arguing that he was severely misunderstood and greatly misinterpreted. On the other hand, others criticize his unforgivable lack of moral fiber or hardly any values in his life (reflected in his writings), having been drunk more than frequently, and also a certain degree of plagiarism. And there were also those who did not hesitate to label him as a man without any literary merit whatsoever, with "a heart as rotten as his conduct", "as licentious as he was intemperate", "believing nothing, hoping nothing, loving nothing, fearing nothing".⁸⁷

Similarly, as Magistrale suggests, there will always be two different views on King's prose: his devoted readers who love to be thrilled by scary stories and novels, and people who consider his writings distasteful junk. Collings develops the second standpoint by concrete reasons – such critics who consider King a junk writer find him without any taste in writing and with an undeveloped and heavy-handed style. Some dislike King's explicit description of violence or blood scenes (*Carrie*), some criticize his lack of narrative strength and being "postliterate". Even the words such as "schlock", "hokum", and "trash" appear in connection with him and his literature. King has again a similar destiny as Poe or Lovecraft had: he has not been taken seriously as a result of the genre he chose and also because of his great commercial success.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Adamovič, Ivan. "King, Stephen." *Encyklopedie literatury science fiction*. Eds. Ondřej Neff a Jaroslav Olša. Praha: AFSF; Jinočany: H&H. 1995. 264.

⁸⁷ Walker, Ian. "The Poe Legend." *A companion to Poe studies*. Ed. Eric Carlson. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996. 29.

⁸⁸ Magistrale, Tony. *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988. 1; Collings, M.R. *The Many Facets of Stephen King*. Starmont House, 1985. 13.

Conclusion

The thesis focuses on the analogical features of lives and works of E. A. Poe and Stephen King. As has been outlined before, there are many similar life influences that might have affected the style and topics of their writing. The outer circumstances that might reasonably have had impact on the writers' works have been identified throughout the thesis and in this conclusive section they will be given one final brief survey.

Not only were both authors influenced by the life in an incomplete family, father issues and certain emotional deprivation, but they also had similar position of an outsider in school. Since childhood is an extremely important period of one's life, it might have had a great effect on their later writings: it might have projected onto their isolated heroes whose thinking is strikingly different from their peers, who live in their own worlds, with tendencies towards addictions of all kinds, but also onto protagonists with unusual abilities or powers, in which the authors might have reflected their desires and longings.

They both started studying at universities, although Poe never finished his studies. In their young age they began drinking alcohol rather excessively and in both cases such an early consumption led to later alcoholism and other drugs addiction. Although Poe's drug history is still disputable, the drug issue is at least a frequent topic or a side-characteristic of his protagonists. Alcohol also plays a great role in some of King's novels.

Despite their solitary personalities they got married quite young; what is more, their wives turned out to be almost ideal spouses thanks to their great support and understanding. In the years of marriage they wrote their best works, which is particularly telling in Poe's case, as his wife died very young. It can also seem surprising with King, considering his long-term drug addiction.

Family life is an important topic of both authors' works, apart from other recurrent subjects such as distinctive individuals, mental processes of a human mind - usually peculiar and focused on the "dark" side of a human soul, such as fear, anxiety, paranoia, and terror. The typical sign of their style of writing is inconsistency and mixing of styles as well as genres. Although most of their works could be labeled as horror, it is very often a mixture of more than one writing style and literary genre.

Elements of sci-fi, fantasy, supernatural, and psychological thriller blended with horror are common for both of them.

Although the choice of such topics may suggest the writers' pessimistic attitude to life, it is not exactly so. Both authors have a specific sense of humor and it usually appears in their works in a form of an inconspicuous and ironic joke. On the other hand, the kind of self-destructive lifestyle they both led for a considerable period of time must have somehow trickled into their writings – and that is why many Poe's characters are ostracized drinkers and drug users, but at the same time we can find figures like romantic and torn persons wondering about fate, supernatural, or topics close to death and afterlife. King's protagonists are not as easily classified, due to the prodigious number of his novels, but even in his works there are characters indulging in alcohol and inclining to addictions, people with low self-confidence doubting their lifestyle, who retrospectively cling to their childhood.

Both of them played an important role in the constitution and development of the horror genre. Poe was actually the first one who wrote real "tales of terror" and based his lifework upon this genre. King's merit was especially the promotion of the genre of horror, drawing attention to the topics that had been avoided in a "serious" literature until then, and bringing popularity to once degraded literary works.

Working with theoretical and specialized literature sometimes brought numerous difficulties, primarily considering Poe. Paradoxically, the writer who was neither appreciated nor acknowledged during his life has become one of the world's most discussed and read authors. The problem with valuable sources of his life and works is hence the large amount of essays and biographies and their trustworthiness. We must also take into consideration the never clarified circumstances of Poe's possible drug abuse and of his death, and we must accept the fact that such matters will probably remain a mystery.

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