

# **DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

***Analýza humoru v próze Edgara Allana Poea***

***Analysis of Humor in Poe's Fiction***

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## Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma „*Analysis of Humor in Poe's Fiction*“ vypracovala samostatně s použitím pramenů uvedených v bibliografii.

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## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank the supervisor of this work, Mr. Christopher Koy, M. A., for providing necessary information on the cultural context of America in Edgar Allan Poe's times. His help proved absolutely essential for full illustration of Poe's cultural background.

# **Annotation**

Irena Jarošová

## **Analysis of Humor in Poe's Fiction**

The topic of my diploma work is the analysis of humor in Edgar Allan Poe's fiction. This genre is, in comparison with the author's better-known work, considered marginal.

The theoretical part deals with the definition of humor itself. At the same time it attempts to state the basic influences which formed American humor and makes a brief comment about Poe's humorist predecessors. The second half of this part is dedicated to the biography of Edgar Allan Poe, where I summarize his work as a whole.

The following part of my work deals with the analysis and interpretation of selected short stories. Herein I analyse in detail Poe's satire, irony and hoax as well. In addition, I look into the language devices, Poe uses in his work of humor.

Supervisor: Christopher Koy, M. A.

# **Anotace**

## **Analýza humoru v próze Edgara Allana Poea**

### **(Analysis of Humor in Poe's Fiction)**

Tématem mé diplomové práce je analýza humoru v díle Edgara Allana Poea. Tento žánr je v porovnání s autorovou známější tvorbou považován za spíše okrajový.

Teoretická část se zabývá definicí humoru vůbec. Zároveň se pokouší stanovit zásadní vlivy, které formovaly americký humor a stručně zmiňuje autory, kteří se humorem zabývali ještě před Poem. V druhé půli této části se věnuji životopisu Edgara Allana Poea a shrnuji jeho celkovou tvorbu.

Následující část práce se zabývá analýzou a interpretací vybraných povídek. Zde se podrobněji zabývám rozbořením jeho satiry, ironie, ale i poplašnou zprávou (angl. hoax). V neposlední řadě se věnuji i jazykovým prostředkům, které Poe používá ve své humoristické próze.

Vedoucí diplomové práce: Christopher Koy, M. A.

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# 1 Introduction

## **1. 1 Motivation**

The name of Edgar Allan Poe is a synonym of horror, mystery, wild imagination and the deduction method. He is best-known as the founder of the detective story and we would hardly find a criminal story reader who would not know his “Murders in the Rue Morgue” or a horror freak innocent of his “Tales of Mystery and Imagination”. His mathematical brains reflect in his poetry. A flawless technique and a perfect style work with the reader’s imagination to take him far away from reality to the deepest fantasies. When reading “The Raven”, the reader is first taken into a real room – a room they can easily imagine as it is a common room, with common objects. When the author is sure that his reader’s mind has fled into his own image, step by step, he starts to develop it with more and more obscure moments until the reader is trapped in the author’s fancy. Then, like in a river, the reader helplessly watches the story being presented by Mr. Poe and simply cannot avoid the feeling of being involved. Therein I find the reason for Poe’s great popularity with readers and his significant influence on writers, especially French symbolists.

I was also familiar with the “classical” Poe and so I was first impressed by the symbols in his works – either poetry or prose. Poe’s style has a great impact on my own imagination and literally grabs my mind and carries it to the most secluded corners of my subconscious experience and fancy. He stretches my imagination to create “films” which I watch instead of TV. Poe’s captivating stories made me think of a thesis on a topic connected with the symbols he uses. Unfortunately, the supervisor who I intended to address in this matter had to leave the university temporarily from personal reasons so I had to ask for supervising Mr Christopher Koy, M. A. It was him who came up with the idea of writing about Edgar Allan Poe’s humor. First, I (as probably most of others) was not really sure about what to write about. However, after I had read the first satirical story, I found this topic extremely interesting.

Edgar Allan Poe uses original style, recognizable by its quick wit and intransigence. Although he is often criticized for certain imperfections and inaccuracies, he gained hearts of many;

some consider him a genius the others look down on him. One way or the other, Poe's style winds from his poetry through his horror stories to emerge in his humorist prose as well.

My efforts turned towards this not widely-known area of Poe's work. His horror stories already imply a certain kind of humor. For example, in the story "The Black Cat" the ending bears the marks of black humor. The main hero kills his wife in an attempt to kill her beloved pet – a black cat. (This cat is actually the doubler of the original cat since this one became the victim of the main character's rage some time before.) The murderer tries to hide the corpse of his wife into a wall of the cellar in his house. Ironically, it is exactly the same cat that actually causes his revelation. A certain trace of humor can be found also in his grotesque. "The Mask of the Red Death" represents a perfect example of this genre. Some of the ball masks are so bizzare that they might be considered even funny. When reading his horror stories I sometimes could not avoid the perception of something impalpable funny.

My curiosity therefore grew stronger and when reading the story "The Business Man", I revealed a mixture of Poe's grotesque, humor and horror. I realized that sometimes it is hard to say whether the plot is more a horror story or a satire. In other words, Poe uses these tools – grotesque, humor and horror – as fundamental ingredients in his work. By mixing them in different doze rates he reaches different genres. Thus "The Business Man" could easily become a horror story, supposing Poe would use less humor and not more horror elements. On the other hand, some horror stories, e. g. above mentioned "The Black Cat" might represent black comedy if mixed only in a slightly different doze rate.

Not only the literary means he applies but also and above all the way Poe works with the reader's imagination made me decide for this topic of my diploma work. In his "Tales of Mystery and Imagination" and in his most famous poems he proves great psychological skills and so I was extremely interested in the way he uses them when writing satire.

## **1. 2 Objectives and Structure**

The objective of this thesis is not to compare Poe's major work with the less known satire. The thesis establishes its objective in giving examples of his humorist work. I made an attempt to outline Poe's satirical range and cover different styles from the hoax to social or cultural satire. This work suggests a topic divers from the commonly known ones associated with Edgar Allan Poe's name. It should offer different view on Poe and uncover slightly his art of satire.

However, this work does not represent a complex study on Poe's humor. This would demand much wider range of comparative work which would include not only the writer's different humor attitudes. Moreover it would demand deeper study also of the other genres he worked with, as the trace of satire and wit can be found nearly at any of Poe's work. Last but not least my work might widen the public knowledge of Poe's broad range as a writer and surprise many a reader with the fun he can provide.

My thesis is divided into three main parts – the Introduction which includes my motivation for choosing this topic. Subsequently, there is the theoretical part which attempts to describe humor as a whole and touches the problem of comparing American and Czech aspects of humor. In addition, it provides a brief in-look into the humor background of the author of this diploma work. The following part is dedicated to the interpretation of five humorous stories of Poe's. The choice of the stories was subordinated to the attempt to cover as many different styles of humor as possible. The Conclusion then provides the evaluation of the work and its possible contribution to the studies of Edgar Allan Poe.

The method of work we decided for was to interpret the stories before reading any other reviews. Consequently, I used these to enrich my interpretations with the opinions of experienced literary critics. Thus, we could achieve relatively original notions. As the secondary literature I used the Internet sources.



## 2 Theory

### 2. 1 Humor

Humor represents an integral part of any culture in the world. Different nations laugh at different things at different situations. Even members of the same nation have their individual senses of humor. The question is; what humor and the sense of it actually stand for.

Aristotle defined comedy as the following: “Comedy is... an imitation of inferior people’ (Poet. 1449a32f., cf. 1448a2-5, 16-18, 1448b24-6). ‘Inferior’ (phaulos) contrasts with the admirable (spoudaios) characters of tragedy (1448a1-4, 1449b24).<sup>1</sup> According to this definition the main characters of a dramatic comedy are people of low origins. This provides space for creating funny-looking figures finding themselves in funny situations from life. Art as a whole, according to Aristotle, is imitation of life, of real people. In ancient times the strong class consciousness defined the difference between comedy and tragedy in drama.

Tragedy was about noble topics and about noble people. These were untouchable by comedy in those times; it was inadmissible to laugh at noble people. Only low people could be laughed at thus also humor started imitating their life. In the course of time, the untouchability of certain classes lost its rigidity and the genre of comedy could touch them as well.

Humor itself vitally depends on life. Humor must be lifelike, real, otherwise it is not viable. Humor describes and reflects life. It exposes it and in this way forms life to a certain extent. Humor causes smile and laughter. Perhaps that is the reason why it is not always taken seriously in contrast to tragedy: It lightens serious situations and belittles serious social or political issues but only at the first sight. Good humor makes you think and it can even give you a shudder. Humor is a very complex and complicated topic to study and describe. It depends on time, place – situation, political and social context and last but not least on both the personality of the author and the receiver.

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Heath University of Leeds, Aristotle on comedy, <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/heath/Aristotle%20on%20comedy.pdf>, [cit. 6. 5. 2011]

The perception of humor varies depending on time of its occurrence. For example jokes which were found extremely funny in Poe's times would leave people cold nowadays. Typical examples of this are racial jokes. Anecdotes making fun of slaves and Afro-American or darker skinned people at all were absolutely relevant 150 years ago. Nowadays, these topics are totally unheard in a modern society.

The source of humor which will probably never dry out is represented by gender jokes. Men satirize women and vice versa. If a male author writes a satire on men, it tends to be a better success, especially with male readers than if a female author does so. Women's perception of man-made jokes about them may be awkward. These days the efforts of most writers lead to gender correct writing. In Poe's times these efforts would be found absolutely inappropriate.

An important factor of humor perception is also the age of the receiver. Jokes of our grandparents are found funny again only by seniors, whereas jokes of our children are sometimes hardly understood by their parents. The most relevant example is represented by teenage humor; if a film director nowadays wants to create a successful movie for teenagers, he or she must get familiar with the contemporary teenage culture and background. The situation in Czech literature in this field illustrates this clearly - there are not many attractive titles for this target age group. In other words, writing not only humor for different age readership requires different attitudes, technique and topics.

Social and political contexts are factors which shorten humour's lifetime dramatically. Especially political jokes are funny only in a certain political situation. To comprehend a political joke, you need to be familiar with the political context. Therefore many anecdotes criticising political situation in one era lose their humor only a few years later since the situation in the society changed. For example many humorists lost their wits literally overnight when the Velvet Revolution in 1989 in that time CSSR "stole" the topic from them. In this way, political satire of 1830's in the U. S. A. can be found incomprehensible to present Americans.

Social aspects of humor can even define the difference between a joke and an insult. Frequently a joke about policemen told by a policeman to another police officer is accepted with laughter whereas the same joke may insult the same officer if being told by a person out

of the police community. This is especially true with socially lower classes, more precisely with ghetto communities. If an Afro-American teases another Afro-American from the same neighbourhood calling him or her a “Nigger”, it is usually accepted. This is totally impossible for a person out of the ghetto.

Social and political criticism is mainly represented by satire. Satire grows from discontent: discontent then is based on improper or unfair social and political conditions. Satire reflects society and politics, satire does not only entertain but above all it reveals and denounces negative aspects of social and political systems as well as the lifestyle itself. Satire goes hand in hand with flexibility.

Flexibility also represents a significant humorist feature. One of the factors which make a good joke is how quick-witted its author is. In addition, if the author is the first to find the joke in a particular situation, the funnier and more successful the joke is. In other words, the ability to surprise with a satirical respond to a, at the first sight, not so funny situation makes a successful humorist.

Humor is strongly specified by its nation. To define a national humor presents a more difficult problem than it might seem. National humor derives from national culture. It is bound to the territory – it is defined by the particularities of the land; for example humor of Nomads of Africa would say nothing to Eskimos in Alaska. Similarly the social system forms humor significantly.

Due to the fact that American nation – meaning the nation of the U. S. A. – has been formed in a unique and specific history, its humor was thus affected and developed in an extraordinary way. An English critic specified American native humor as the following:

Humour is national when it is impregnated with the convictions, customs, and associations of a nation. ...National American humour must be all this transferred into shapes which produce laughter. The humour of a people is their institutions, laws, customs, manners, habits, characters, convictions – their scenery whether of the sea, the city, or the hills, - expressed in the language of the ludicrous. ...<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Blair W. *Native American Humor*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc. 1960. pp. 3

As well, therein it is stated: “American humor – in this sense of the term – did not come into widespread existence until about 1830, ...”<sup>3</sup> The reasons for that are seen firstly in the inability of most American authors to actually discern the humor in their environment, and secondly in the lack of technique which would have described it. The first colonists’ writings were strongly influenced by the above-mentioned contrast of the American nature and the smallness of man. Their great amazement reflects in the exaggeration they use, thus making their texts funny for the future generations unintentionally. The grounds for the tall tale were laid during this early period in the development of American literature.

American culture necessarily diverted from its mother British culture and so did American humor. First it was derived from British humor, subsequently American writers started to use “inland sources”. American humor then needed to distinguish American character which grew from the new inhabitants of the continent. The way to its finite shape – Yankee Doodle - is lined by first generally portrayed characters; later on more closely specified (e. g. by their dialect and intonation) and gradually individualized to be ultimately perceived broadly. The evolution of American characters was recorded in jest books and almanacs, later on in plays and newspapers and last but not least in popular travel books.

The American experience is based on contrasts and conflicts; H. R. Haweis in his book on American humorists stated his theory of three shocks;

The first shock he specified as “the shock between Business and Piety”<sup>4</sup>. The Pilgrims left the old continent for their religion. In the new continent they faced the reality which was represented by also new business opportunities. The religious rules sometimes did not accord with the rules of business. In other words, the first settlers were looking for religious freedom in America. On the other hand, they were fully aware of the economical and business opportunities this land offered and were ready to use them although it could have meant breaking or not keeping strictly to their religion rules. Such conflict holds true nowadays as well and constitutes one of the most used sources of humor not only in America.

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<sup>3</sup> BLAIR W. *Native American Humor*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc. 1960. pp. 3

<sup>4</sup> WALKER, Nancy A. (ed.) *What’s So Funny? Humor in American Culture*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1998. ISBN 0-8420-2687-8 (cloth:alk. paper). – ISBN 0-8420-2688-6 (pbk.: alk. paper). pp. 11

Apparently, the second shock was caused by the confrontation of European Settlers and Native Americans which Haweis describes as “the clash between the European settlers and native inhabitants of the continent”<sup>5</sup>. Next to the undisputable dramas and tragedies brought about by the (that time) unsurpassable differences, the same differences definitely created numerous funny situations.

The last shock defined by Haweis creates the land itself. “The contrast between the vastness of American nature and the smallness of man”<sup>6</sup> gave rise to tall tales based on exaggeration which is considered a typical feature of American humor.

The shocks, or better to say, contrasts continue. Americans experience the contrast of the lofty and the mundane. The lofty are represented by the political ideals of democracy which counter the reality of everyday life.

Consequently, the American mind faces the verbal incongruity having roots in the previous conflict. Semantically the formal language describing for example ideals does not concur with the concrete ordinary speech.

Conflict which originates in difference is probably the most characteristic for American humor and American culture itself. Racial humor derives from racial distinctions and racial inequality at the same time. Racial humor exists anywhere where there live more than one race in one territory. The Czech Republic also has its racial humor towards its minorities. The most frequent anecdotes are about Romanians and Vietnamese people. At the same the minorities create anecdotes on the Czech minority. Some of these are found even better quality than the latter ones. The minorities in the Czech Republic and in the U.S.A. are not the same. Nonetheless, the topics of the jokes on them most probably tally.

Similarly, most nations have their typical figures of humour. For American literature it is Yankee Doodle, in German literature we can find Till Eulenspiegel. Czech literature also

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<sup>5</sup> WALKER, Nancy A. (ed.) *What's So Funny? Humor in American Culture*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1998. ISBN 0-8420-2687-8 (cloth:alk. paper). – ISBN 0-8420-2688-6 (pbk.: alk. paper). pp. 11

<sup>6</sup> WALKER, Nancy A. (ed.) *What's So Funny? Humor in American Culture*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1998. ISBN 0-8420-2687-8 (cloth:alk. paper). – ISBN 0-8420-2688-6 (pbk.: alk. paper). pp. 11

disposes of a strongly humorous and always winning character – good soldier Švejk. Of course the different figures emerge in different periods of time in different countries (e. g. Eulenspiegel is a medieval character). Nevertheless, there are certain features which can be found similar. They all represent lower or the lowest classes of society. They all can find their way out of troubles using their wits, regardless how shrewd and fair they are, and they sometimes win. Humor definitely does differ from country to country. Nonetheless it remains international in certain features or at certain moments of their evolution.

We can include spoken but also written humor; Humor in newspapers and magazines and now such media such as the Internet provides humor in various forms – texts, cartoons, videos. The Internet provides its “viewers” with numerous examples of the hoax. Today, the hoax serves mainly to business or political purposes – in other words it should make money to its creator. An internet hoax, which should only make its addressee forward it and thereby makes him or her spend money on distributing it to other addressees, has usually very little to do with humor. Its purpose is to evoke sympathy and compassion or on the contrary fear so that the receiver would never allow him or herself not to pass the information on.

The classical hoax consists of a more elaborate form. It is time-demanding and its effect is limited to the actual understanding of the receiver. Although the audience is supposed to be deceived, the response of it is directly proportional to the comprehension of the joke. The more understanding the reader or viewer proves to be funnier the joke is for him or her. Receivers who did not really get the joke obviously cannot enjoy it to such an extent. The hoax also changes its value in the course of time; the famed Orson Welles’s radio hoax would definitely be accepted differently today than it was at its time.

These days, written humor is nearly as flexible as spoken humor. Spoken humor proves to be leaner as to respond to social and political issues due to the fact that there is little sometimes no delay between the very moment of humorous reaction to a situation and the actual emergence of a piece of humor. Both written and spoken humor is preceded by an impulse followed by forming the idea. Spoken humor demands quick wit, good vocabulary and cool head as to respond in a witty way often means to respond promptly.

Written humor, on the other hand, needs to go through the necessary procedures connected with publishing the written word which prolongs the interval between the actual situation and

the appropriate humorous respond. Needless to say that pronouncing the joke in written language provides more space for accuracy and polishing the style. These can also become advantages supposing that the humorist wants to pronounce to a more or less timeless issue or to an issue which occurs in a long term.

Spoken humor is represented by anecdotes and puns. Anecdotes actually describe a funny situation or story and nowadays they have developed into sitcoms or comedy films. Puns, on the other hand, are linked to language. They work with ambiguity and play with words.

Ambiguity is very specific to each language and makes a joke difficult to translate. To transfer a joke from one language background to another demands deep knowledge of both languages, including their idioms. Moreover, it requires profound awareness of the social and political situation at the time being. Thus, some jokes are simply non-transferable. These are especially jokes, which draw from the particular social background that is strictly specific not only to each nation's culture but even to a region or town. These non-transferable differences come out from different social, political and cultural background. For instance, many forms of humor use intertextual links within particular literature; readers from a different cultural background cannot be familiar with these links and therefore some jokes remain unrevealed to them. Translating humorous texts then demands not only excellent translators but also gifted narrators with rich imagination and deep knowledge of both backgrounds and even then the transfer simply does not reach the quality of the original.

Humor disposes with many forms and topics, it shows various different faces and its effects vary not only with its mode but also with its audience. Humor is socially, territorially, politically, religiously, racially and gender bound; needless to say that it changes accordingly in the course of time. Humor may play significant role in society when it addresses many people. It also adapts extremely fast to new realities and reflects them aptly and comprehensively. Thus humor represents a powerful tool how to influence society.

Before Poe and his generation of writers there were above all two famous writers dealing with humor: Washington Irving (1783-1859) and Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). The latter is known for his *Autobiography* where he satirizes a typical American. According to "*Lectures on American Literature*": "...Franklin still relies on the Puritan classification of virtues, but

he uses it for entirely practical purposes.”<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin’s writing represents an answer to one of the above mentioned shocks which actually formed American literature. His response is pragmatic and creates one of the significant features of American culture and society at all.

Washington Irving reached world-wide fame. His works were translated into many languages and his *Rip Van Winkle* remains funny and interesting even today. Although he was the first anti-hero and actually represented the counterpart of Benjamin Franklin’s American, *Rip Van Winkle* gained great popularity to his creator.

Both of these writers strongly influenced Poe as many others. Poe had vast knowledge of not only his contemporaries but of world literature as a whole. He even criticised Irving for using German motifs in American environment. On the other hand Franklin’s influence is obvious in Poe’s “*The Business Man*”.

Edgar Allan Poe’s work includes hoax, puns, satire and last but not least exaggeration. His funny stories bear his recognizable handwriting and style. They are funny but at the same time merciless. The critique concerning either an individual or the whole society unscrupulously exposes Poe’s attitudes and views regardless whether they are general or they are pronounced only by him.

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<sup>7</sup> PROCHÁZKA, M. „The Eighteen Century: The Great Awakening & the Enlightenment“ In *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6. pp. 38-45



## **1. 2 Biography of Edgar Allan Poe**

In my work, I deal with the specific humor of Edgar Allan Poe. He is not usually considered an American humorist; nevertheless, his satire represents not a negligible part of his work and definitely has its place in his impact.

Edgar Allan Poe was undoubtedly one of the most powerful spirits of world literature. He is recognized the founder of modern detective story and his poem „The Raven“ became an icon for many poets and artists of all times. His work is full of contrasts and conflicts and so was his life.

He was born on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1809 in Boston into the Poe family. The origin of his mother's family is not known very well. Most probably she came from an immigrant family of actors. She herself also became an actress even as a child. She first acted on the stage at the age of nine. Elisabeth definitely was a gifted artist, not so much her second husband (her first husband Charles Hopkins died three year after the wedding), David Poe. Edgar was born into a family of arts; nevertheless, he was adopted by a family of enterprise and means.

His mother – Elisabeth –gave birth to three children – older brother William Henry, and younger sister – Rosalie. She never rested after the labour and always came back to work, to the theatre shortly after her children were born. Her husband, probably broken by his failure as an actor, became an alcoholic. Both Edgar's parents fell seriously ill. His mother died of tuberculosis, his father shortly after.

His new family, family of means, became the Allan family. Mrs. Allan did not have her own children so they adopted little Edgar. His life with them was a happy one. Mr. and Mrs. Allan took care of Edgar's education and he paid them back with being an excellent student. After the family moved for business reasons to Great Britain, Edgar attended boarding schools there and he achieved outstanding results, especially in French and Latin. After five luckless years in the United Kingdom, the Allans moved back to Richmond where Edgar continued studying and being a brilliant student. His results at mathematics did not lag behind languages and his physical condition was exceptional as well. This was also the time of his first attempts in poetry. Unfortunately, none of them have been preserved. When studying at University of

Virginia Poe wrote his only comic novel. He read it to his friends who, unfortunately, did not respond according to the sensitive author's notion. Poe burnt this piece of work without even finishing the first reading.

Such intellectual and imaginary energy of the young Poe combined with his troublesome life story brought a lot of restlessness and an uneven temper. The "first love of his soul" was his schoolmate's mother. The fifteen-year-old Edgar was heart-broken when she died. He also deeply loved his stepmother and apparently took her side in family differences. Disagreement with his stepfather did not wait long.

Mr. Allan was successful in business and when the student Edgar, who enjoyed the boisterous life at university including wild drinking parties and playing cards, needed money to pay off his card debts, he refused to help him, Edgar was popular with students thought, he was looked down by them at the same time for his lack of money and origin. Once again asks young Edgar his stepfather for help and once again he is refused, and he leaves University of Virginia for good.

This time he decides to leave for his native town – Boston. There he joined the army and published his first works – the first book of poetry *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, which he signed as Bostonian. He works in different places in the U. S. but in the end he makes the decision to leave the army. However, he needs his stepfather's approval. Over again, he has to write modest letters and he is refused over again...Only Mrs. Allan's death reconciles the two – father and son – for a while. Later in the year 1829 his second book of poems is published – *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems*. The reviews are favourable.

In July in 1830 young Poe enters the Military Academy of West Point in New York. His talent stands out over the other students but unfortunately so does his special delight in wild drinking. After some time Edgar comes to a conclusion that the environment of West Point does not provide him enough space for his creative spirit and he would like to leave again. His father does not consent therefore Edgar breaks the rules deliberately and consequently appears before court and is sent down. In the same year he publishes another book of poems in New York. In his *Poems by Edgar A. Poe, Second Edition* he introduces his principles of poetry.

Poe moves to Baltimore where he lives with his grandmother – David Poe’s mother – and other members of the Poe family. Living is not easy for him and he publishes only occasionally, but then the early thirties are filled with creativity by Edgar. He finishes his book of short stories – *Tales of Folio Club*; he works feverishly but without any success. The only light moment in his working life is the prize that he wins in a writing competition held by *The Baltimore Saturday Visiter* in June 1833. His famous short story “The Manuscript Found in a Bottle” wins first prize.

In the mid-thirties, except for the stories “Berenice”, “Morella”, “King Pest”, Edgar starts writing also a drama written in blank verse called *Politician* but this drama was never finished and meant utter failure. His life is increasingly filled with trouble and poverty. He starts to work at salary for the magazine *Southern Literary Messenger*. At the same time he starts having serious drinking problems. He even loses his job with the *Messenger* for some time. After he promises not to drink any more he is accepted back and works frantically. He writes articles and reviews for the magazine and does not have time for his own writing. Although he works hard he is paid inadequately. Even though he believes in better future and marries his young cousin Virginia. She was only fourteen years old.

Unfortunately, Edgar’s problems with publishing and hence with poor living do not come to an end. On the contrary, he loses his job with the *Messenger* for good. He and his family – Virginia and his Aunt Mary – try their luck in New York – unsuccessfully. Then they head for Philadelphia but their first year there is not the best either. During those sad years Poe creates “Ballad”, “To Zante”, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, “Ligeia” and “The Haunted Palace”. Paradoxically, the only successful work, which makes Poe some profit, is *The Conchologist’s First Book*, a scientific handbook.

The second year – 1839 - in Philadelphia brings the family better luck. Poe starts to work for *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine*. He writes reviews and once a month contributes with a short story, for example “The Fall of the House of Usher” or “William Wilson”. This year also means Poe’s dream comes true as he publishes his first book of short stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, which is highly praised by the critics but not accepted as well by the public.

Another time alcohol causes fiasco at work. Poe is accused of excessive alcohol drinking and has to leave the Burton's even though he denies it. The following years do not bring any significant change in the young author's life. He writes a lot of short stories and reviews and publishes them this time in *Graham's Magazine*, among others also "The Murders in Rue Morgue", "A Descent into the Maelström" and "The Mask of the Red Death".

Unfortunately, once again bad luck strikes and Virginia falls ill (she later dies of tuberculosis) and Poe himself suffers from bad health as well. When he comes back to *Graham's* after having been ill for some time, he finds his post occupied by somebody else and feeling insulted leaves the office immediately.

The year 1842 brings Poe's game to find a new job and frantic work on new stories, among others "The Black Cat" and "Golden Buck" which wins the first prize in *Dollar Newspaper's* writing competition the following year. He scarcely publishes his short stories and in the end, he starts publishing them in 12.5 cent-books.

In 1844 Poe moves back to New York, where he publishes "The Balloon Hoax". This story means immediate success and Edgar starts writing reviews and even giving lectures on American literature. The following year brings even greater achievement – Poe publishes "The Raven" in *American Review*, which causes sensation.

The following years are on average successful. He publishes his older works and his second book of short stories – *Tales by Edgar A. Poe* and an anthology *The Raven and Other Poems*.

Then good luck turns its back on Edgar. At that time he was a recognized author. His wife Virginia dies and Poe himself suffers from very bad health. The following years are filled with alternate drinking and fits of work. His unstable and fidgety mind produces such stories like "Hop-Frog" or "Lander's Cottage" and such significant poems such as "The Bells".

Nevertheless, his drinking brings him to delirium tremens and finally he is found in a terrible state in the streets of Baltimore during elections. According to one version a bunch of hecklers seized Poe, who had been under the influence of alcohol, and dragged him round the polls rooms. His poor health and jaded body could not bear it any longer. Edgar Allan Poe died four weeks later, on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1849. His funeral was a modest one, only four people

took part. His grave is in Baltimore, the bodies of his wife and aunt were later transported there to rest with him as well.

Edgar A. Poe is known first of all for his short stories. The synonym to his name is nevertheless his poem "The Raven". Poe's poetry represents significant synthesis of influences of the contemporary poets, mainly romantic, such as Thomas More and Lord Byron but also and first of all Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose *Biographia Literaria* (1817) affected Poe's attitudes to poetry fundamentally, and the unique concept of poetry by Poe himself. Especially his poetry after the year 1848 bears the stamp of Poe's unmistakable handwriting. He inspired many other poets; among his contemporaries such was Elizabeth Barrett-Browning.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century America lost interest in Poe mainly for his excessive Romanticism and sentiments which fell out of favor in the realism period. He became more popular in Europe, particularly thanks to so-called "Cursed Poets" and especially thanks to the translations of Charles Baudelaire. Poe's work became a source of inspiration and starting point for prose writers. We can mention for instance adventure writers – Louis Stevenson, or detective story writers – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as well as the newly formed genre – science-fiction – H. G. Wells.

The strongest influence of Poe's poetry is born in the work of T. S. Eliot or later on Wallace Stevens. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Poe represents one of the three main streams in American poetry; the other two are represented by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson.

Poe's work has gone through all possible stages of public acceptance – from total neglect over to absolute adoration, subsequently over silent ignorance up to current insolent abuse by modern type of art such as film. Nevertheless, the writer can also offer more "civil" kind of stories. In them he expresses his attitudes towards society. He uses the same sharp and piercing intellect, precise and rich language not to make his readers dream; this face of Edgar A. Poe makes the reader laugh and last but not least think. His horror stories, like those of Kafka, also can make readers laugh with their "black humor".

Poe the writer was not very successful during his lifetime in the sense of reward and particularly in the sense of money. Doubtless, he was and is one of the most talented writers;

what he wrote, he wrote in immense accurateness and beauty. Despite his high qualities he was not accepted broadly by the readership. That is the reason why he used a number of genres. He simply looked for the most convenient topics for the readers; he searched for sufficiently attractive topics for them in his work.

A great part of Poe's work incorporates satire – sophisticated, severe and apposite. The style, meaning the quality and precise language, remains the same – intelligent and funny. This work deals with Poe's very humor and the way he uses it in his satirical stories.

Poe's humor is the more precious the more we are aware of his qualities. He aimed with his satire at intelligent readers. If he uses vulgarity he uses it only to show how vulgar vulgarity is. He uses it to make grossness ridiculous not funny. Poe does not avoid vulgar situations but again, they only represent space for satire; they are like mirrors following the reader and reflecting the negative aspects of society. This attribute of Poe's satire makes him timeless.

On the contrary, other specifications of writing satire challenge today's reader; particularly references to various spheres of culture – art, theatre or literature. Common people nowadays do not naturally have such scholarly knowledge about ancient gods and contemporary theatre. Especially the newspaper issues create white spots in Poe's work. Today's readers are deprived of the relevance of the jokes in his stories as they obviously are not acquaintant with the contemporary periodicals.

We do not know whether Poe really made attempts to change the society he was living in. Humor was probably another means to reach the longed-for success. Nonetheless, these attempts are worth reading even today.

## 3 Interpretations

### 3. 1 *The Business Man*

#### 3. 1. 1 Introduction

Poe's satire "The Business Man" apparently makes fun of people of business. In Poe's times these people were not as common as in our times. The pre-industrial USA was mainly agricultural, business then employed far fewer people than today.

Reading this thought-provoking story brings us to contemplation what causes laughter today. We can ask for the reasons for a satire in these times. We may boldly say that Poe today would not be forced to change a line in his story. He is not taking to task the times but the principles of business. These, I dare say, remain the same whether you live in America or Europe, whether you lived two hundred years ago or whether you look at business nowadays. The story bears a lofty title – "The Business Man" and starts with a lofty old saying. The very first words, the very first sentence indicate a proud and successful narrator – the business man.

#### 3. 1. 2 Plot

In the first paragraph he gives the reader a notion of a well-situated person with great experience in his employment that is fully competent to express his radical and strict opinions and give advice on business. Herein the narrator reveals a bit the following atmosphere of the story, the satire, when he says: "True method appertains to the ordinary and the obvious alone, and cannot be applied to the outré."<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, he supports it with the oxymorons "methodical Jack o'Dandy"<sup>9</sup> and "a systematical Will o'the Wisp"<sup>10</sup> When we learn that the name of the main character is Peter

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<sup>8</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 658

<sup>9</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 658

Proffit, our vague impression gets a real outline of a man fixated on making money. The writer puts the satire already into the name. When we hear the word profit, most of us get the notion of a creative and original way of thinking which can bring money to its owner – an original and creative person. Herein, on the contrary, Peter Proffit claims, that making money is definitely not a question of new fresh ideas, but a question of method and rigid system.

Elisabeth Duquette in her essay ‘Accounting for Value in ‘The Business Man’’ discovers the satire not only in the name of the main character but also in its homophone – prophet. Therein she opens the question of who actually Peter Proffit is. She sees the exceptionality of the story in the fact ‘that what counts as parody and what counts as normal are so intertwined that discriminating between the two is difficult, a problem that is precisely the point of the satire.’<sup>11</sup>

Poe continues in developing his satire in the following paragraph, slowly and discreetly as he usually does in his work. What is significant is how he is making fun of his character. At the end of the second paragraph the reader can still feel uncertain about the intentions of the author even when he describes a bulge on the character’s head as “an organ of order”<sup>12</sup> and hints that it is a bulge on ordinary people or ordinary businessmen.

In the third paragraph a certain suspicion is revealed that Poe will not give professional advice of a skilled self-made man but jest at such a man. The first shock we get when we read: “Your geniuses are all arrant asses – the greater the genius the greater the ass.”<sup>13</sup> This is bolstered with pertinent similes.

At the end of this paragraph the narrator claims that anybody who runs a decent business is considered a genius which leads to a conclusion that all these poor creatures are merely a “bunch of asses”. At the same time, he keeps coming back in circles to the same word – method. With vehemence Poe argues that one must believe that anyone who follows for

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<sup>10</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 658

<sup>11</sup> Duquette, Elizabeth: Accounting for Value in ‘The Business Man’, *Studies in American Fiction*. Boston: Spring 2007.

<sup>12</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 659

<sup>13</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 659



example their intuition or (for God's Sake) are carried on a wave of an original idea is only an irresponsible ignorant "hunk".

If we look under this first plan of the text, what can find out what Edgar A. Poe wants to say; all the businessmen are people with no imagination, following the rules blindly and thereby making a good living. He is satirically referring to the vast majority of common Americans pursuing money.

Under this first plan we can also feel Aristotle's poetics. His comedy consists of laughing at common stupid people. Poe's main character fell into this group when he was hit into his head as a little child. This accident deprived him of creativity and doomed him to a life within the limits of a method and principles. The narrator makes an advantage of this and any time he mentions his nanny, who actually caused this little but substantial accident, he never forgets to express his gratefulness to her.

The following part satirically describes the curriculum vitae of the main character – Peter Proffit, who succeeds in business. This is a satirical portrait of an American business man's early childhood. The way his parents – "eccentric old people"<sup>14</sup> make an attempt to assure him a good job in which he fortunately did not succeed thanks to his "organ of order" which gave him such a pain that he nearly died. When his "button-headed"<sup>15</sup> family try to find a different normal job, our young man of business considers it a caprice and prefers to run away from home.

This rebellion against parents is a romantic idea – idea which would definitely not find its origins in somebody like Peter Proffit - a man of method. American ideal of a self-made man is put under a satirical view. Peter succeeds even though he goes straight against the principles of the American phenomenon.

At the age of eighteen he starts his own career in the Tailor's Walking-Advertisement line. His successful movements fell at a difference of opinion on a little item of booking – a

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<sup>14</sup>POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 659

<sup>15</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 659

dickey. In a precise enumeration of more or less ridiculous items the cost of a dickey seems the most reasonable and legitimate and that is why Proffit made it the bone of contention and breakpoint in the character's honesty. From now on, our hero turns to not so white and clean economy.

In this invoice Elizabeth Duquette sees the key to the parody; she looks deeper into the use of the word "do". Not only she notices its repetition, she also explores the nineteenth century slang connotations of this word. To do somebody at those times carried the meaning of to cheat somebody.

The repetition is also an issue which Elizabeth Duquette sees in wider context of Poe's work. He uses this means of expression to associate with the mind, nevertheless herein it bears only the relation with business. More precisely in business the repetition is common, in other words it does not mean anything special.

Moreover, she finds a great significance in the way Poe uses the numbers. She presumes that Poe recounts the invoice in such a detail to "generate only the effect of accuracy"<sup>16</sup>. She supports the idea with the fact that there is a deliberate mistake in the total of the charges by one cent. Elizabeth Duquette suggests that Poe uses numbers metaphorically, like words, which could be proved by the temperature in one of the items which is enumerated with incredible 706 (in the shade).

She develops this theory even further and claims that if Poe treats numbers like words, an invoice can be read like a poem. In addition "...Americans had already accepted the equation of time and money '...if poetry is predicated on time, and time and money are exchangeable, then an invoice is surely a poem.'<sup>17</sup>

At this point we can continue with the idea of making something from nothing. On the list of charges Proffit includes abstract immaterials such as for instance to promenade or standing on one leg. We can add time which is money and suddenly Poe lays before us a society where things are made of no things.

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<sup>16</sup>Duquette, Elizabeth: Accounting for Value in 'The Business Man', Studies in American Fiction. Boston: Spring 2007.

In this part of the story Proffit speaks about his principle in business, which makes him (in the context of the other items on the list) a real businessman and his employers a pair of bungling fools. Profit wants to be independent. Nevertheless, at the same time he clings on his method absolutely. He feels contempt for anything far similar to intuition or creativity, which go hand in hand with independent mind. Herein, repeatedly, we witness a conflict, a contrast in Poe's story.

Next to his love for independence and method, Peter Proffit shows a great deal of impatience. Any time anything goes wrong or more precisely not exactly according to his concept or method, he withdraws from what he is doing and changes his activities completely. Whereas "Tailor's Walking-Advertisement" was based on an agreement of two parties (and which thereby kept profit from being as independent as he'd like), the following occupation was based on a disagreement.

"Eye-sore line" is basically what it describes. Peter Proffit chooses a locality where a large and obviously costly house is being built and buys an allotment nearby, ideally just opposite the latter one. Then he starts to erect a building which nobody would like to look at such as "an ornamental mud hovel...; or a Down-East or Dutch Pagoda, or a pig-sty, or and ingenious little bit of fancy work, either Esquimau, Kickapoo, or Hottentot."<sup>18</sup> Of course the owners of the large and costly houses do not wish to have anything looking like that in close proximity to their residencies and do as much as their solicitors can to get rid of them. The result should be a nice large sum of money as a bonus for our businessman and no extravagant pieces of architecture within the eyesight of the palaces.

Once again we can see evidence of Elisabeth Duquette's theory that a commodity is made of nothing. At this moment it is no appearance of something which should be treated as goods and thus also paid for.

In this case, though, Peter Proffit proved to possess once again very little patience. A "rascally corporation"<sup>19</sup> refused to pay the "reasonable" bonus of five hundred per cent of the costs for

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<sup>17</sup> Duquette, Elisabeth: Accounting for Value in 'The Business Man', Studies in American Fiction. Boston: Spring 2007.

<sup>18</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 661

the land and material, which acerbated our main character so much that he decided to take appropriate actions to show his disapproval. He listened to the voice of his business moral and lamp-blacked the whole of the palace in question.

In this case the narrator turns to the reader to call for their approval of the sum of the bonus and takes for granted that nobody would denounce his deed. To Peter Proffit's great disillusionment, he was sent to jail for this and consequently abandoned the Eye-Sore trade.

Poe shows the immorality of some businesses and how they are declared the fairest thing in the world. The way he addresses the reader corresponds to the way business people dress their shady transactions in the coat of pure and generally accepted rules. The businessman portrait declines even lower in the next episode of Peter Proffit's CV.

The Assault-and –Battery business is a slightly less complicated than the previous one, nevertheless more risky. Already the name of the occupation or precisely the contrast of the general notion of the name and its actual meaning in the story contains a clever satire. In Poe's story a man of this business tries to insult you and he does this in such a way to get you so angry even furious that one cannot avoid a certain extend of violence. On this extend the price of the damage is dependent.

The contrast of the name and the actual activity lies in the contradiction to the reality. Poe uses a reverse of the normal trick. He turns the violence against the instigator him or herself. In this way he can shockingly show the senselessness and absurdity of violence. I dare say that in this case he is not making fun of business in itself; He is making fun of cruelty and violence. The more ludicrous this business appears, the more powerfully the satire impacts. Peter's profit from this kind of enterprise was ridiculous. In his eyes, on the contrary, it was an unusual success which he evinces in his Day-Book.

In the end our hero comes to a conclusion that health is most important above all ("...money is nothing in comparison with health."<sup>20</sup>) and again decides to "alter his line of business"<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 661

<sup>20</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 662

<sup>21</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 662

“Money is nothing in comparison with health” denies completely the whole of Peter’s actions so far.

Poe exposes the hypocrisy of business in this very sentence – say one thing, do another. Also Peter Proffit closes his eyes from the fact that the money he actually earns is less than a poor reward for being beaten black and blue.

Mud-Dabbling – the first notion the reader gets is “nothing special” or “ordinary”. Yet Peter Proffit employs such lofty terms such as retail business, trust and even the word trade. At the same time he emphasizes the importance of method and system in his work and thereby raises it in rank.

Poe openly projects the way people try to declass their competitors when describing them as incompetent fools doomed to failure although they themselves do the same routine – with a great difference, unlike the others they of course have incomparably better perspectives. Business is built upon competition. The arguments made by businessmen are satirized “I am better than my competition because he or she 1) is stupid, 2) uses bad method, 3) does it wrong.

The punch line of this period of the main character’s life lies in the part when he says: “Never imposing upon any one myself, I suffered no one to play the possum with me.”<sup>22</sup> These words do not need an explanation. It represents independence, not accepting commands or domination from anyone lese.

In this paragraph Poe also touches the banks in his criticism; Through Peter’s mouth he says: “These, however, are not individuals, but corporations; and corporations, it is very well known, have neither bodies to be kicked nor souls to be damned.”<sup>23</sup> Concretely, corporations are not people. In the context of Proffit’s complaint on the bank’s “defraud” these words are more than illustrative.

In fact, Peter does not find banks his partners. They seem to be rather a kind of enemies. An insidious, hardly palpable something or someone whom you consign your money and at this

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<sup>22</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 663

very moment you totally lose control over it. I can see no change in comparison with today's corporations.

The following paragraph takes us into a tricky merge of our hero's business in the Cur-Spattering. He was made into this transaction with his dog (which he used as a mark of a trustworthy man in his previous enterprise) – an experienced partner who, unfortunately, turned out to be more confident than Peter was willing to accept. They parted after an argument about the provision.

Depicting a business partner as a little fat puddle may even insult the people of business. On the other hand, Poe intends to show how senseless trade can seem and how ridiculous the businessmen may appear. Just imagine a little fat puddle and you will see a self-confident businessman.

The next business – Organ-Grinding – contains, according to the main character – in not leaving the position until he is paid a shilling at least. He uses a similar tactic as his eye-sore business.

The taunt on the democrats as well as the regret Peter expresses in the association with having no employee – “no monkey” directs us straight towards the critics of exploiting labour. Even at this moment Proffit proves to be the man of business not only in his deeds but mainly in his mind – when he calls the democrats “obstrusive rabble” and “damnation mischievous little boys”<sup>24</sup>.

Sham-Post – a little clever trick with false post which is paid by the addressees - makes fun of naive people. Once again we can contemplate whether it is foolish people who are being taken advantage of while at the same time this little remark on double letters which perhaps should evoke the feeling of loneliness being abused by our clever Peter Proffit. “Serious scruples of conscience,” just for a second turn the business man into a human being to be thrown down off the table a second later when these words accompany the emotion towards the false addresser of the sham-post.

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<sup>23</sup> POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 663

<sup>24</sup>POE, E. A. „The Business Man“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 663

Next Peter Proffit finds the business of his life in Cat-Growing. In the beginning the reader is deliberately confused by the innocent name of the enterprise. Not for long though. In the very next moment we find out that this activity is not connected with growing cats for themselves, for their beauty, character or, God forbid, from pure love for the animals!

Profit is what matters at any time. Peter is paid for each tail he cuts off as the government needs to diminish the number of cats having infested the town. The original act spoke about cats' heads which was later amended to cats' tails for humanitarian purposes. In other words to kill somebody seems too fatal, to mutilate is all right. Once again Poe does not criticise only business, he shows the morality and ethics of the whole society especially politicians. The selfishness and heartlessness of business are sketched in by the way Proffit speaks about the poor creatures – he calls their tails appendages – something they actually do not need – and talks about “three crops a year”<sup>25</sup>.

At first sight, again, we see the cruelty, at the second however, we can decipher the author's strongest idea; Business which can really bring you good profit deals with others having been forced to give up a part of themselves and letting themselves being paid for that with seemingly high price and luxury; Additionally, taking advantage of others.

Elisabeth Duquette even elaborates the idea of slavery in association with this Peter Proffit's enterprise. Poe never declared openly his attitudes towards slavery in his works not even in the public. However, according to Elisabeth Duquette ‘Poe [instead] points to the bottom line – the entire nation enjoys the profits of this “peculiar institution.”’<sup>26</sup>

According to the tradition of happy-ending comical stories, Poe lets his character come to the longed-for career in the world. Having taken living creatures a part of their bodies and subsequently bribing them with oysters and turtles brings Peter such a profit that he can afford to buy a country seat. It is not surprising to us any more that the highest position in Proffit's eyes is a post in politics.

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<sup>25</sup> POE, E. A. *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems: The Business Man*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp 664

It is more than interesting though that Poe actually includes politics into business. He puts it next to such enterprises such as the Assault-and-Battery business or the Sham-Post. We can deduce his attitudes towards politicians; they do not represent the highest ideals of society, they are not bearers of philosophical values. They comprise the best businessmen, the cleverest, the slyest of all, the successful.

### **3. 1. 3 Conclusion**

Edgar A. Poe uses the language of commerce in this work. He uses it with brilliant preciseness and accuracy. He puts over-correct high language into the mouth of his rather vulgar businessman to describe the low character of his actions.

We can find other contrasts than this in the story. In contrary to the cultivated language, Poe lays down thick the low language when he speaks about the real and decent big businessmen. Expressions such as “hunks”, “ass” et cetera somehow do not correspond to the manners of Peter Proffit – the common business man.

If we look at Poe’s biography, we can easily spot another contrast. Poe the romantic admires the wealthier successes in fact, his stepfather John Allan disposed of great possession. On the other hand we should not forget Poe’s contradictory attitudes to John Allan and his wealth at all.

Another contrast lies in the way Peter reminds his nanny whom he credits his business to. He definitely does not want to forget her in his last will; the reader though cannot avoid the doubts whether Peter will ever dispose of such property that he could even afford to write one.

Not only there is satire in the plot itself, the author disguises it in the very names of the occupations, even into the name of the main character. Mere deceptions are given names which do describe them quite clearly, nevertheless we are not absolutely sure what they actually mean...or perhaps we are not sure whether we should believe it or not.

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<sup>26</sup> Duquette, Elizabeth: Accounting for Value in ‘The Business Man’, Studies in American Fiction. Boston: Spring 2007.



We may understand this as a mere social satire but we can also look a little bit deeper. Edgar Allan Poe, peering out from behind this satire goes beyond the first layer. He wants to say: “Look, all your necessary trades, businesses and fares, all the follies you pompously claim are the movers of the world, are just mere nothing in comparison with geniuses, romantic poets and creative spirit itself.”

Particularly, Elisabeth Duquette sees the critique of American society, to be more precise, especially of Benjamin Franklin’s self-made man – “a central symbol of American society”<sup>27</sup>. Not only takes Poe to task the way Franklin instructs people how to become successful, she explains, he also challenges the assumption that ‘moral economies make moral societies’<sup>28</sup> In “The Business Man” Poe shows how a philosophy can be degraded to mere and simple instructions.

Moreover, she develops the idea that a self-made man actually is nobody to take example of. Peter Proffit bases most of his businesses on unscrupulousness and even heartlessness. She asks what qualities and values such a figure represents. It is more than interesting to find out that approximately 150 years ago, writers and intellectuals were concerned about the same things as today. The question remains the same: What can society where time is money bring to the man.

Poe usually writes multilayer texts. Any layer of his stories, regardless whether they are horror stories, detective stories or a satire like this, bears a full-bodied line and we can enjoy each line separately as well as the combination of all. At first the lot opens our views of basic satire but then it opens our hearts to a deeper and more complicated message.

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<sup>27</sup> Duquette, Elisabeth: Accounting for Value in ‘The Business Man’, Studies in American Fiction. Boston: Spring 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Duquette, Elisabeth: Accounting for Value in ‘The Business Man’, Studies in American Fiction. Boston: Spring 2007.

## **3. 2 *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall***

### **3. 2. 1 Introduction**

The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall represents another satire in Poe's satirical work that is a hoax. The author chose a popular topic of the travels to the Moon, the closest satellite to the Earth. The nineteenth century brought a great progress in science and the attention of the mankind turned to the skies and what is beyond them.

Many hoax stories have been written about what the space might be like and specifically what the life on other planets is like. The general lack of knowledge provoked the imagination of many a writer particularly concerning the description of extraterrestrial life. Poe looked at the issue from a different point of view. In his story he focuses on the journey itself and practically ignores the amazing discoveries his hero made at the destination.

### **3. 2. 2 Plot**

The plot starts with a description of a hustle caused by the arrival of an extraordinary craft looking exactly like a bizarre hat turned upside down and fastened to a balloon. All the people of Rotterdam gather to see its landing. However, a minute before the craft might touch the ground the captain and the only member of the crew in one person throws overboard a letter and with a slight sign of disgust in his face he turns to reascending again.

The letter is addressed to the burgomaster and a well-known professor of the local university. It contains the motives and reasons for Hans Pfaall to undergo such a risky business and the description of his journey itself; A mender of bellows – Hans Pfaall, comes from an old Rotterdam family and has himself lived in Rotterdam all his life, got married and had children there. Due to the political situation he got poor and found it extremely difficult to earn his living. When his liabilities became unbearable, he, under a sudden spell of inspiration, decided to construct a balloon and undertake a travel adventure to the Moon.

The crucial moment occurs at the time of the greatest dejection. By accident he comes across a book on Astronomy and having put together chips of information gained before and a

certain discovery made by his cousin, he comes to a conclusion that he is erudite enough to accomplish a daring experiment.

Hans makes himself a balloon and uses his creditors to help him erect it and get it to the air via an explosion at which all of them die. He killed two birds (in this case three) with one stone. He arranged for the labour and got rid of unwanted companions. Hereafter Hans Pfaall describes the ascent until the moment of leaving our atmosphere and thereafter he keeps a diary. His notes record in great detail not only what has happened but before all they keep elaborate descriptions of the devices necessary for the success of the enterprise.

The journey ends on the Moon. Poe gives the last facts, supported by that time scientific evidence, about the dense atmosphere of the satellite and lets himself only to a brief description of the life and the inhabitants there. At that moment the letter ends. Therein, Hans makes a proposal and appeal at the same time to the people in powers that he could continue in revealing his other discoveries to them unless he is granted a pardon for the unfortunate crime he committed at the very beginning of the adventure.

Poe's hoax looks at the first sight as a hoax. Untypically, he uses though, scientific and verifiable information to explain all the inventions used. As a matter of fact his hoax is supposed to be a hoax. Nevertheless, the hoax "facts" it offers are actually supported by temporary science. So, in the end, all what happens in the story is actually feasible.

### **3. 2. 2. 1 Inventions**

The first invention which actually also caused that Hans Pfaall makes the decision to leave the Earth was a special kind of gas which procedure of making was revealed to him by "a citizen of Nantz, in France"<sup>29</sup> The author avoids potential disputes of the realness of this invention by referring to an unknown inventor, who actually did not realize how substantial his discovery might be, and to the correctness of not revealing the facts that belong to the intellectual

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<sup>29</sup>POE, E. A. „The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 372

property of someone else. This honesty stands in the direct contradiction to Hans Pfaall's previous deeds (the assassination of his creditors).

Furthermore, in the description of the journey itself, the author puts into context all the ingredients and materials Hans Pfaall mentions in the beginning of his letter.

So we are introduced a sort of a spacesuit for the whole craft to which directly relates the invention of an air-filter to help the crew breathe.

To the operation of the air-filter Hans Pfaall helps himself to construct a "water-clock" which wakes him up every hour.

The diary contains other moments when the author explains the aspects of the journey in a very scientific way as well as the moments which explain how to cope with them.

As a matter of fact, the way the main character copes with all the hardships on board shows an inventive spirit of a self-made man. This is contradictory to the way of life he led down home on the Earth. A desperate failure turns into a bright and undaunted self-made scientist and astronomer. Hereby, Poe suggests that the conditions in Europe, in Holland, on the Earth in a modern society do not create a fertile ground for those who must and want to start from nothing. He implies that if a man can do so, he simply cannot avoid certain dishonesty. In this case, the bankrupt craftsman was forced to get rid of the creditors who made his life unbearable.

### **3. 2. 2. 2 Animals on board**

At the beginning of this adventure though there were other members of the crew as well. They were a couple of pigeons and a cat. The pigeons should have originally served as the carrier-pigeons. As a matter of fact they could not carry a single letter as one of them dies in the very upper part of the atmosphere and next is sent home to be saved from torturing pains related to the flight.

The cat bears another message. She is actually pregnant and thanks to the dramatic changes in the press and physical discomfort connected with them, she gives birth to little kittens who surprisingly do not suffer from the same ill-condition as their mother. Hans Pfaall suggests that thanks to the fact that they were born to those particular atmosphere conditions, they are apparently naturally habituated to them. Unfortunately, Hans Pfaall throws them off the

balloon by accident. Thus, they cannot be subjected to any kind of research to find out whether they could survive in our normal conditions or not.

De facto, every living creature apart from Hans himself does not survive the trip. He then has no evidence of the experiment being successful.

### **3. 2. 2. 3 Other Discoveries**

What is also typical for a hoax is the non-verifiability of the facts it declares. After the gas and the animals, the possible scholars would be made to rely on merely Pfaall's word in other matters, too. The findings that could be verified are evaded by a transparent excuse. For example when Hans describes the Earth from the immane heights, he cannot prove his statements as all he sees cannot be accurately discerned. His claim that he went through the atmosphere and broke through the "habitual endurance of the atmospheric pressure"<sup>30</sup> is impossible to support with any tangible evidence as all his animals die and he himself cannot be considered a piece of evidence not even in a hoax. So is it with the fact that at a certain height the atmosphere is too dense to be able to carry a balloon, which Hans disproves but again, only verbally.

### **3. 2. 3 Names**

Names in this story bear their meanings too. Hans Pfaall can be read as Hans fall. It hints the actual life story of the main character, his fall from a prosperous craftsman to the abyss of the poor. On the other hand, we can see an irony "upside down" in it; In spite of his name, Hans Pfaall cuts himself adrift from the Mother Earth and despite his origin and uneducated background, reaches the heights many a scientist does not in his or her life.

We come across a fall again at the very end of the story when Hans enters the atmosphere of the Moon. It is so dense that avoiding a free fall becomes nearly a superhuman deed. Nonetheless, despite his name, Hans Pfaall succeeds even in this case.

As well as the name of the neighbourhood Hans lives in bears a telling name: Sauerkraut. I suppose the author intends to evoke a pot full of this food, its smell, its consistence and last

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<sup>30</sup> POE, E. A. „The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 383

but not least its taste. If we imagine all these, we can feel as if in the very place. Another explanation may offer the association with the residents living there. Poe implies that local people are not very friendly.

Poe refers to a specific social phenomenon of (not only) his times in the U. S. A. and this is immigration. Many immigrants came to America from the Old Continent and not only from the English-speaking countries. A lot of them came from Holland and their names sounded slightly comically to most Americans.

As well as the name of the burgomaster Mynheer Superbus Von Underduk evokes an old Dutch name. Mynheer means Dutch, Superbus should imply to the high post his bearer holds and Von Underduk referring to the phrasal verb to duck under makes the whole name an oxymoron.

However, the name of the professor is simple – professor Rubadub. The author probably wants to criticize academicians for idleness and actually doing nothing similar to an active scientific work.

### **3. 2. 4 Motives, Allusions**

Poe quite often alludes to the politics. Not surprisingly he uses the newspapers which form a combination of politics and his work. In the nineteenth century they have already become a powerful media and Poe often hints this fact. Always when he does so, he puts them subject to criticism.

Newspapers are first mentioned at the very beginning of the story and are referred to as the cause of Hans Pfaall's misfortune. As I have mentioned above, he is a mender of bellows used for fanning the fire. Thanks to the political situation though, people have started reading newspapers massively and: “If a fire wanted fanning, it could readily be fanned with a newspaper;”<sup>31</sup> The real purpose for using – reading newspapers is surpassed by the secondary

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<sup>31</sup> POE, E. A. „The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 370

purpose (for old newspapers) which has nothing to do with the actual power the media disposes.

Inversion of the meaning or purpose is once again a fertile source of satire. Besides, Hans Pfaall used the same newspapers as material for his balloon. First, the newspapers are used to replace bellows, which indirectly leads to Hans Pfaall's fall. In the other case the newspapers serve him and also indirectly bring him success.

### 3. 2. 5 Note

My hypothesis that Poe presents facts in a coat of a hoax is supported by the extensive note at the end of the story. Therein, the author lists the "facts" in a story called 'Moon-Story' by Mr. Locke and one after another disproves them.

He compares the story of Hans Pfaall with the "Moon-Hoax": "...the above sketchy trifle and the celebrated 'Moon-Story' of Mr. Locke: but as both have the character of hoaxes (although the one is in a tone of banter, the other of downright earnest)..."<sup>32</sup> and blames the public for being gulled by the "Moon-Hoax" due to their insufficient knowledge of astronomy.

Not only satirizes Poe Mr. Locke, he also ironizes French translators then, which reflects in the translation of an English name – most probably Davidson – into French D'Avisson. The author continues in his satire when criticizing other books relating to the "astronomical topic" precisely journeys to the moon. He goes even further when commenting a review on one of them: "...a criticism in which it is difficult to say whether the critic most exposes the stupidity of the book, or his own absurd ignorance of astronomy."<sup>33</sup>

In other words, Poe criticizes the works' sketchiness and the writers' lack of (in his opinion) elementary knowledge of the topic being satirized. Then again, his comment of his own work is the following: "In 'Hans Pfaall' the design is original, in as much as regards an attempt at *verisimilitude*, in the application of scientific principles (so far as the whimsical nature of the

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<sup>32</sup> POE, E. A. „The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 400

<sup>33</sup>POE, E. A. „The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 403

subject would permit), to the actual passage between the earth and the moon.”<sup>34</sup> This comment apparently explains the long and detailed even scientific description of the technical aspects of the adventure. In addition, it even subdues the plot time and time again.

The extensive note de facto illuminates the author’s motivations to write another moon hoax. As usual, Poe presented himself in this piece of work as a sharp and witty critic of ignorance and shallowness, above all the glibness of writers in general. This satire of Poe’s is not aimed at the society and its aspects; it is not aimed at readers. On the contrary, it is aimed into his own ranks, at the writers themselves.

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<sup>34</sup> POE, E. A. „The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*.. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 403



### **3. 3 Loss of Breath**

#### **3. 3. 1 Introduction**

The story 'Loss of Breath' belongs to the wide range of Poe's fantastic stories of humor. The emotions and situations seem common while the plot is unbelievable. Poe describes feelings, works with his own imagination and daringly writes of experiments with imagination.

#### **3. 3. 2 Plot**

This adventure nominally originates in the well-known saying associated with breath: 'to lose one's breath', 'to be out of breath', 'to catch one's breath' etc. Poe brings these to their absurdly literal consequences; during a quarrel with his newly-married wife the main character suddenly loses his breath and cannot continue swearing and scolding her to his great discontent. After several vain attempts to find his breath in places such as drawers and closets, he comes to a conclusion that the only way out of this precarious situation is either to commit suicide or to flee from the country.

The latter he finds more appealing so he sets off to leave the town "on business". On the coach he suffers severe injuries when, having been crammed in between two corpulent passengers, another obese man sits on him. After the third man gets up, Mr. Lackobreath (this is the hero's name) is not able to move as all his extremities have been dislocated and his neck has gotten stiff. After all the passengers have "tested" whether he is dead or not by pulling his ear or hitting him, etc., a young physician present on the coach comes to a conclusion that Mr. Lackobreath really is dead. This rattles the rest of the passengers to such an extent that they, with no hesitation, throw him out of the coach. This act naturally causes him other serious injuries.

When a tavern landlord discovers the body, he finds a man with broken arms, dislocated joints, stiff neck and broken head. Nevertheless, he also finds a large suitcase in which he finds a sufficient reward for sending the "body" to a doctor.

The surgeon cuts off Mr. Lackobreath's ears, and at the same time has to admit that the "body" is probably alive. Slightly confused, he calls an apothecary for a consultation. They cannot make up their minds about their future deeds with the finding which leads to Mr. Lackobreath getting "storing" in the loft. Having been tied up, he is deprived of the possibility of defending himself in the fight with two cheeky cats who are trying to bite off his nose. His quiet despair (he is unable to speak as his jaws have been tied up) gives him so much power that he frees himself in a burst of anger and jumps out the window.

His bad luck is to continue though. By accident just under the surgeon's garret window, an escort with a convict sentenced to death passes by. Mr. Lackobreath has a dubious honor of being the spitting image of the mail-robber. All the rotten luck of the world brings Mr. Lackobreath to the gallows and subsequently to death by being hanged instead of him. Apart from the fact that this little "accident" has put his neck back in the right position, Mr. Lackobreath finds himself in a city morgue.

"Bored to death", he keeps himself amused by trying to deduce the hard-luck stories of the dead-bodies in the other coffins. Speaking up his speculations, Mr. Lackobreath's attention is fully occupied by a deceased person of an enormous size. While developing theories on his life story, the main character pinches the dead body's nose which, to the great astonishment of the intruder, raises the poor body up and makes him express his displeasure more than extensively. Mr. Windenough turns out to be Mr. Lackobreath's neighbour. He apparently suffers from having one breath extra. Apparently, he found himself in front of Mr. Lackobreath's house at the very moment when he was arguing with his wife and was just about to lose his breath. At that very moment Mr. Windenough caught it.

This has accidentally brought him to the same place as Mr. Lackobreath. After a short dispute the two gentlemen arrange for the lost breath to be returned to its original owner.

The plot itself is a source of humour. This is only one layer out of many in Poe's satire. It was the writer's intention to build up a thorough and multilateral structure of satire and irony.

### 3. 3. 3 Humor

#### 3.3.3.1 Names

For the start we can mention the names of the characters. The main character Mr. Lackobreath is revealed not in the beginning but just after his ill-luck is described which occurs to him only in association with his wife.

This name is not revealed before Mr. Windenough appears in association with his, probably platonic, love-affair with Mrs. Lackobreath. The connection of the two names naturally indicates a perfect pair. They neutralize each other like a positive and negative charge.

A sexual allusion is made by Poe that Mr. Windenough disposes with something which Mr. Lackobreath lacks. With names respiration is overtly meant!

Poe did not write the full name of the mail-robber who was replaced by Mr. Lackobreath at the hanging. One explanation could come from the initial he gives – W. It is no mere coincidence that the same initial is in the name of Mr. Windenough who might be trying to seduce Mrs. Lackobreath. In addition, he even causes all the hardships, having deprived Mr. Lackobreath of his respiration. Another, slightly presumptuous explanation may lie in the pronunciation of the letter – “double you”. Poe wants to point at the reader. Perhaps, he would like to involve us into the story directly, invite us into the misfortune which can easily strike any one of us.

The name of the pub in front of which Mr. Lackobreath ends having been thrown out of the coach is ‘Crow’. There is an intertextual link with ‘The Raven’ (‘The Raven’ was first published in 1845 and ‘Loss of Breath’ in 1850). In that case we may presuppose that Poe wished to expose some kind of destiny. The main character is lying on the ground motionless, wordless, helpless. He is literally left to his destiny, to the ‘Crow’ from which actually comes out “help”. Assuming that the Raven represents an intermediary between this world and the other world, the hypothesis that its relative – the Crow – represents destiny does not seem so daring. In the light of Poe’s vast imagination it is even humorous to put such significant figures into the talons of sinister birds of prey.

In comparison with the latter, 'Blab' sounds completely transparent, even childish. The writer expressed his feelings negatively towards this insignificant character in an expressive gesture when not using Mr. or Mrs. in front of his/her name.

The last telling name is the name of a Whig editor – Scissors, which evoke a notion of a pair of scissors cutting out sections of articles in a censorship. Poe uses names which most people in the nineteenth century could probably not have any doubts about, such as Captain Barclay – a well-known Scottish walker. Poe refers to his record (he walked 1,000 miles per 1,000 hours for 1,000 guineas.) to illustrate the figure of Mr. Windenough: 'Captain Barclay, who walked against Time, would not walk against *him*.'<sup>35</sup> A sentence later he fluently comes back to made up names of writers – Windham and Allbreath and an artist - Phiz. It seems that if Poe did not have a real name at hand, he used his imagination to create a joke. Nonetheless, all these made up names form allusions with breath or respiration even when ciphered by a different spelling as in the latter mentioned name – Phiz – fizz.

The name of a painter who allegedly painted 'Marsyas' is Pinxit – which is actually a word used behind the name of the artist when a painting is reproduced. Poe is describing the scene he gives to the audience while Mr. Lackobreath is being hanged by mistake. The satire lays in the fact that he is actually enjoying it. Besides, it helps to fix his neck again. The author uses this "pun" to raise the tone of the joke.

### 3.3.3.2 References

More questions arise from the striking amount of references to personalities from ancient history; Shalmanezzer The Old Testament figure, Psammenitus – an Egyptian king, Sardanapalus – the alleged last king of Assyria. Sardanapalus, for instance, was well-known to certain social classes in the nineteenth century as he had become quite popular with the artists of that time. The death of Sardanapalus inspired the painter Eugene Delacroix to create a famous piece of work. Lord Byron wrote a drama based on Diodorus, also mentioned in the introduction of the story. Poe refers to Anaxagoras, Demosthenes or Hippocrat, as well as Zopyrus or the Magian or Mige-Gush of Persia.

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<sup>35</sup> POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 569

Poe uses ancient names to deepen and sketch in the situation. The reference to Epictetus who Poe cites as follows: "..., and it is precisely at that time when men are most anxious to throw off the burden of their own calamities that they feel the least desirous of relieving them in others."<sup>36</sup> Epictetus claims that a man cannot influence what happens to him. However, he can face anything calmly and with serenity. The story brings this philosophy to an extreme.

The list of references closes up the return to the Old Testament. Epimenides – a favourite of gods who survived many hardships, some of them even effortlessly just with the help of nymphs and gods, Mr. Lackobreath is extremely lucky, regardless of his broken limbs and dissected intestines. He thankfully remarks: "My body is ruined but I have regained what I lost and life goes on." In the conclusion, the story turns full circle to the very first sentence and at the same time deciphers its meaning. The sentence: 'The most notorious ill-fortune must, in the end, yield to the untiring courage of philosophy - as the most stubborn city to the ceaseless vigilance of an enemy.'<sup>37</sup> is followed by a flood of curses addressed to Mrs. Lackobreath.

This process of cursing based on his "philosophy" is crowned with the explanation:

I cannot conclude these details of some very singular passages in a life at all times sufficiently eventful, without again recalling to the attention of the reader the merits of that indiscriminate philosophy which is a sure and ready shield against those shafts of a calamity which can neither be seen, felt nor fully understood.<sup>38</sup>

This Poe concludes with the reference to the Old Testament and above-mentioned Epimenides.

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<sup>36</sup> POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 571

<sup>37</sup> POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 563

<sup>38</sup> POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 571-572

### 3.3.3.3 Situations

Poe questions whether people can survive literally anything. We can detect certain disapproval. Seemingly Poe searches the borders of human limits; how much a human being can bear not to be affected. Mr. Lackobreath regains his lost respiration at last. Yet, it is left up to readers to speculate about the quality of his life without some organs such as ears, for instance.

With regard to human pain, Mr. Lackobreath describes laconically how he had his ears cut off and some of his intestines taken out of his body without any discomfort. Yet speaking about his nose his physical feelings alarm all his powers that he is obviously able to tear his manacles by merely using his muscles – so strong is the pain.

The absurdity and implausibility of this part of the plot evokes another satire – an animated cartoon. A cartoon character also survives anything and shows pain only when it suits the script.

Another cause for laughter is the absurd optimism Mr. Lackobreath declares throughout the whole story. The most stunning moments are satires. They also are described in a sophisticated and funny way;

When the main character suffers under the weight of the big man on the coach, Poe describes it as follows:

I suffered myself to be placed between two gentlemen of colossal dimensions; while a third, of a size larger, requesting pardon for the liberty he was about to take, threw himself upon my body at full length, and falling asleep in an instant, drowned all my guttural ejaculations for relief, in a snore which would have put to blush the roarings of the bull of Phalaris. Happily the state of my respiratory faculties rendered suffocation an accident entirely out of the question.<sup>39</sup>

This section represents several layers of Poe's satire; the first, the most obvious one pictures the situation itself.

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<sup>39</sup> POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 566

The next is the delight of the language and the way Poe plays with it: ‘...two gentlemen of colossal dimensions...’ – we picture two men obese to the largest extent we are able to imagine. The author crowns this picture when he describes the third man even a size larger! Another one lies in the contrast the writer puts in the way the character of the large man looks and, apologises politely before crushing Mr. Lackobreath.

Poe’s humour is referenced from mythology again: ‘...the roarings of the bull of Phalaris...’ – Phalaris was a Sicilian ruler who used to put his enemies in an iron statue of a bull and burnt a fire under it. The wails of the victims then came out through its nostrils. Poe compared these petrifying sounds to the “guttural ejaculations for relief”<sup>40</sup> which the main character produced when trying to attract attention of the large man having sat on him on the coach. The last but definitely not the least is the endless optimism Mr. Lackobreath demonstrates when he actually appreciates his lack of breath because he cannot lose it now.

### **3.3.3.4 Satire – Social Critique**

To understand the satire in the endless body-mutilation, we should get familiar with the 19<sup>th</sup> century readership. They are provided by more or less periodicals with a lot of details concerning human bodies. Precisely, they can read about the human body in even medical particulars generally from two sources; one represents the medical circles which try to popularize new discoveries in their journals.

Daily newspapers, particularly criminal reports and reports of different disasters and tragedies also went into great detail. The serious journals, in the attempt to educate their readers, sometimes reported acts which would more suit criminal reports in daily periodicals and the daily periodicals indulged in bloody details of any catastrophe just to delight their readers.

Poe, as a writer, perceives such news sensitively and tries to show how ridiculous and non-sense this reporting is. It does not educate nor does it cause more empathy. It only brings sensation. Poe provides social mirror not only to the periodicals but above all to their readership.

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<sup>40</sup>POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 566

To emphasize the absurdity of such body destruction and “dismembering”<sup>41</sup>, Poe includes seemingly unreasonable few lines into the initial part of the plot. At the very moment when Mr. Lackobreath has to face the fateful accident of losing his breath, at the very moment of panic, he gets himself looking for “it” in the interiors of his furniture. On the way to his failure though, he comes across a few quite bizarre objects such as: false teeth, a pair of false hips, etc. Nobody actually questions the genuineness of such findings in the household of a newly married, supposingly healthy couple. Poe creates an absurd coulisse to an even more absurd situation.

Another satire could be revealed if we look into the context from Poe’s era of the reference to the drama of “Metamora”. It is mentioned at the moment when the hero tries to regain his voice. “Metamora” was a period drama which fell under of melodramatic rules that time that Poe finds simply vulgar and tasteless.

The last but not least, social critique lies in the very disintegrity of a body. Mr. Lackobreath’s body lacks breath, so it is not complete and is abnormal. Abnormality and social attitudes towards it is another object of Poe’s satire. People do not wish to be exposed to any kind of (body) abnormality which the author illustrates the best when the main character says: “To be sure they spoke of confining me in a strait-jacket – but good God! they never suspected me of having lost my breath.”<sup>42</sup> Anything which the audience might think of Mr. Lackobreath is better than being considered abnormal.

We can ask why Poe’s character was so petrified at the idea of being different. Via body otherness the author comes to any otherness. Remembering the reference to the drama Mr. Lackobreath mentions, William Etter suggests even racial vertones. Basically, being different in antebellum U. S. A. means being literally invisible, impossible to identify. Anything is better than that.

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<sup>41</sup> Etter, William: "Tawdry physical affrightments": The performance of normalizing visions of the body in Edgar Allan Poe's "Loss of Breath" *American Transcendental Quarterly: 19th century American literature and culture (Univ. of Rhode Island, Kingston)* (17:1) [Mar 2003], p.5-22.

<sup>42</sup> POE, E. A. „Loss of Breath“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 565



W. Etter summarizes the idea aptly in the conclusion of his article:

While Poe asserts ideals of artistic capabilities and aesthetic taste using the racial discourse of his time, he necessarily also participates in the antebellum construction of the racialized "normal" body via such ideals. „Loss of Breath" reveals notions of physical normality and notions of race being constituted simultaneously, each reinforcing the other. Poe's tale both legitimizes and excuses the enactment of violence against Native Americans in the project of federally-sanctioned removal even as it critiques the American public's "tawdry" delight in the physical violence so prevalent in the culture and popular media of the antebellum period.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.3.3.5 Verbal Humour

Another source of satire is provided in Poe's verbal humour. He polishes his expressions to perfection. Not only the series of curses in the very beginning but also the section where Mr. Lackobreath describes Mr. Windenough, shows Poe's wit. Three paragraphs are crammed with irony and satire. It seems literally a collection of intelligent, humorous and in addition precise phrases.

B. Zimmermann describes this device as Bosphiologia: "two cats ...alighting opposite one another on my visage, **betook themselves to indecorous contention for the paltry consideration of my nose.**" and adds: "Poe's narrator might have written, simply, "two cats fought over my nose":<sup>44</sup> Bosphiologia is a language device Poe uses frequently and especially to emphasize the comical effect.

### 3. 3. 4 Conclusion

Poe's work is typical for its elaborate, precise and adequate language. Nonetheless, this story is carved as thoroughly as a piece of filigree jewellery. Not only does he entertain, he moreover creates an intelligent web of remarks and references to keep readers amused. Not surprisingly, we keep discovering new layers and messages when reading Poe repeatedly.

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<sup>43</sup> Etter, William: "Tawdry physical affrightments": The performance of normalizing visions of the body in Edgar Allan Poe's "Loss of Breath" *American Transcendental Quarterly: 19th century American literature and culture*. Univ. of Rhode Island, Kingston (17:1) [Mar 2003], p.5-22.

<sup>44</sup> ZIMMERMANN, B. „A Catalogue of Selected Rhetorical Devices Used in the Works of Edgar Allan Poe“ In: *Style* 33:4 (Winter 1999), p. 637-657.

Herein though, we come across something unexpected. Poe invented a satirical layer to amuse himself.

### **3. 4 The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether**

#### **3. 4. 1 Introduction**

The background of the story “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether “ is an asylum for mentally ill people. In Poe’s times very little was known about brains and mental diseases at all. This is illustrated by the fact that Poe actually does not use the expression mental disease. Instead he applies the words such as fancy, crotchet or oddity.

150 years ago mental patients were dealt with very little respect. It was believed that treating them like children would cure them, in other words educate them. Education and rising children at those times included corporal punishments and strict even military discipline. The methods at institutions for the mentally ill followed these rules completely including physical punishment and confinement. Such asylums would now be compared to a prison in a non-democratic country.

In this plot though, Poe introduces an experiment called “soothing system”, which basically means avoiding any punishment and free roaming of the patients in the premises of the asylum and only exceptional confinement in the most severe cases. At Poe’s times this system represented something new and unknown, thus suspicious.

#### **3. 4. 2 Plot**

In most of Poe’s works, the plot starts suddenly and seemingly in the middle of another plot. The other plot is only vaguely outlined and the author touches it merely when he needs some background information. This short story is not an exception;

The narrator – who is identified nor by a name neither by appearance – describes briefly how he found himself in the particular place and only interjectional remarks give us a rough idea about himself. Thus, we find out that the narrator is most probably a foreigner and is familiar with medicine to a certain extent. Apparently, he is not a doctor himself; nonetheless, he seems to be interested in medicine more than an ordinary mortal. He mentions “a long

acquaintance with the metaphysics of mania”<sup>45</sup> which indicates that he apparently looked after a person or people stricken with this kind of disease – presumably a member of his family or a close friend.

The place itself would serve a great coulisse to any other horror story of Poe’s. A neglected and dilapidated mansion veiled in a deep and dank forest evokes a sinister atmosphere itself, on the top it is an asylum. Moreover, the fearful atmosphere is supported by an apparent reluctance with which the narrator’s companion shows him the way to it and introduces him to the superintendent of the institution. Having done that, he disappears swiftly not to be seen anymore. Peril is sensed in this scene and the reader is captivated to find out what is going to happen to the hero next.

The superintendent seems a perfect gentleman though and he dispels all doubts when showing the main character round the establishment. During an elegant conversation the hero learns that Monsieur Maillard – the inventor of so called “soothing system” renounced this well-known and widely used system of care of lunatics just a few weeks ago. The narrator cannot hide his astonishment but his questions remain unanswered until later on.

After a short rest the hero is invited to a dinner. In front of him a fantastic and grotesque scene of a lush reception opens with the most bizarre costumes and an obscure music. He finds himself in the middle of an odd dream and he becomes comforted only thanks to his guide Monsieur Maillard, who provides him with plausible explanations supported by his neat language, polished manners and respectable expression. There is only one particular moment when his words seem to have no reason but the contrary is true; “Believe nothing you hear, and only one half that you see.”<sup>46</sup>

Not only the clothes of the guests evoke suspicion, also the table seems out of this world. During the conversation over the most delicious food, the guests exchange episodes from the asylum about different patients.

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<sup>45</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 548

<sup>46</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 552

Meanwhile, Monsieur Maillard tells his young guest about an incident which made them replace the well-proved soothing method by a new system of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether. He explains that the former method enabled one of the lunatics to prepare a conspiracy and seize power over the asylum. He supposed that he had discovered a much more effective treatment of psychic diseases. The dialogue itself provides the reader with bits of information which may reveal the truth. The main character, however, still does not see through it all.

In the meanwhile, revealing the patients' aberrations gives the company unusual amusement which after a while leads nearly to a wild roister that can be interrupted only by the strict and adamant orders to quiet from Monsieur Maillard. The situation goes adrift just at the moment when a roar coming from the inside of the house comes the closest and a horde of the most weird savages bursts in beating all the present guests including the narrator.

In conclusion the main character explains that Monsieur Maillard had actually worked in the asylum as the superintendent. Nevertheless, he himself became a victim of a psychic disease. However, "a madman is not necessarily a fool"<sup>47</sup>, as he himself says in the story, and having experienced being a lunatic, Monsieur Maillard managed to organize the other patients and accomplish a putsch at which the staff was covered with tar and feather and further on put into the underground cells. The patients thereby gained power over the asylum under his leadership. Their reign lasted no longer than a month. One of the prisoners managed to escape through a sewer and freed the others. After everything settled again the asylum continued in the "soothing system".

### **3. 4. 3 Humor**

#### **3.4.3.1 Names**

The names in this story are more or less descriptive and bear the marks of that time pun. A set of "lards" distinct by different prefixes is more than obvious. The word lard refers to the word lords; the prefixes more or less define the person himself. The former superintendent and

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<sup>47</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 560

leader of the conspiracy is called Maillard. In other words, Milord, which implies his position among the others and a noble origin as well.

Mr. Boullard – the prefix bou- well implies the fact that this patient believes to be a tee-totum and keeps turning around upon one heel. Mr. Petit Gaillard would presumably be a patient who keeps laughing all the time yet the opposite is true. His name is a piece of irony as this mental patient is depressed by the fact that he cannot take himself between his own finger and thumb since he believes to be a pinch of snuff.

To continue with male names, Monsieur De Kock insists on the fact that he is a donkey. He keeps eating thistle and kicking around. The animal association of his name and his fancy seems to be the only link.

One patient got possessed by the idea of having two heads – one belongs to Cicero and the other one actually contains two personalities – Demosthenes and Lord Brougham. Demosthenes dwells in the upper part of the head and the lower part from the mouth to the chin is governed by Lord Brougham. He excels in elocution which he enjoys displaying. His name is Bouffon Le Grand. The link between the French bouffon and English buffoon is apparent. Poe connects the personalities of ancient philosophers and puts a contemporary politician on the same rank. Lord Brougham was a British Chancellor. We should not pretermit the fact that Lord Brougham was very active in the anti-slave movement and had an affair with a member of the royal family. (That is the reason why he is the only one who is provided with a kind of anamnesis by the author – the reasons for his madness are lofty ones – love.) The allusion with the British politics is more than clear. Poe satirizes it not only by the name of the lunatic; irony is contained also in the simile of Lord Brougham and the famous Latin orators.

The new government of the patients is characterized by their actual names. As I have mentioned above, all of them tend to show noble origins. The name of the main rebel in the asylum – Maillard – positively refers to the British peerage. The names of the rest of the men mentioned in the story contain either the allusion to the word lord or the particles de or le indicating the affiliation to aristocracy.

Also the fact that the occupants are formed by merely one third of men - the rest are all ladies – suggests their ruling role. Nevertheless, the connections of the nobility-referring allusions

and the descriptive parts make ironical combinations of names which are found funny not only in Poe's times. This feature is particularly typical for tall tales which use exaggeration.

Jules Desoulieres, a man who grew crazy because of love, seemingly defies the line of "Lords" as his name does not show the marks of aristocracy at the first sight. Yet, the French "de soulier" means something like "of shoes". It might imply an affiliation to lower gentry or another kind of lower origin (in comparison with the high origin of the nobility). Also his aberration – persuasion that he is a pumpkin pie – might be explained ambiguously. A pumpkin pie can be considered a symbol of America. It is a traditional meal at a Thanksgiving dinner. If the patient insists on being made into pies, it can imply, daringly to say, a naive willingness of a member of the lunatics' alternatively British government to sacrifice for America.

On the other hand, as the main character comments: "For my part, I am by no means sure that a pumpkin pie *a la Desoulieres* would not have been very capital eating indeed!"<sup>48</sup>, this oblation might not be accepted at all. Jules Desoulieres seems to have an exceptional position since his name appears to conceal its origins. Poe does not use De Soulieres; instead he calls this character Desoulieres – one-word surname.

All the male names intend to show the noble origins of their bearers. However, most of the patients in the asylum are women, precisely speaking two-thirds. M'am'selle Laplace, an elderly lady is not specified clearly via her malady. Nevertheless, her name might imply a certain reference to the mathematician of that name or to a square as place means square in French. M'am'selle Laplace is further mentioned later in the story when the narrator refers to a "gentleman who had broken the shins of Ma'm'selle Laplace"<sup>49</sup>. (The different spelling of M'am'selle and Ma'm'selle can only be a typo. Nonetheless, Poe sometimes used seeming misprints intentionally.) This kind of injury has never been mentioned before in the text.

Another lady – Madame Joyeuse – believes to be a chicken-cock. Her name may imply sexual vertones which is supported by the fact that she "gave pleasure to all who had the honor of her

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<sup>48</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 555

<sup>49</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 557

acquaintance.”<sup>50</sup> The allusion to sexual misbehavior is cloaked by the following description of her impressive crew. Madame Joyeuse – whose name reflects her actual malady – does not correspond to the notion of the name.

Another contradiction could be present in the name of M’am’selle Laplace as well, supposing that the name Laplace should refer to the mathematician. Either this suggests that ladies who want to equal men need to take on a man’s role or that some British gentlemen are so gentle that they have been stripped of their masculinity to their female core and they only pretend to be men.

The sexual overtones grow stronger when the scene is governed by Eugenie Salsafette who is convinced that clothes need to be dressed inside out and purposes to show the present guests how to do it, which she fails completing as the others prevent her from doing so. Her name indicates a vivacious Latin-American young beauty.

The ladies’ names make allusions either to strictly women’s domain – M’am’selle Laplace – suggesting her origin from a square perhaps being a prostitute -or Eugenie Salsafette – her name evokes Latin America with its salsa, fetes and certain simplicity of its inhabitants in the eyes of Americans. The fact that Eugenie nearly gets naked when demonstrating the way she dresses, shows gullibility and innocence.

The female names might also illustrate the structure of the population of that time U. S. A. or more precisely of the female part of the population. M’am’selle Laplace suggests conservative part of American women or America as a whole, Madame Joyeuse represents the suffragettes and progressive part of America. Eugenie is an example of new immigrants.

The similarity of the maladies with the characterization of each class creates a satirical simplification. To understand the names of the “experts” – Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether means recognizing that the names also fully comply with the features of tall tales - connecting the words associated with churlish chastisement with academical degree.

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<sup>50</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 556



### 3.4.3.2 Situations

This story represents a conspiracy and putsch with consequent crushing and bringing the situation back under control and back to the old orders. The original system in the asylum represents a highly liberal system of no punishment and rare confinement. The story shows how fragile this system might be and how easy it is to abuse it and overthrow.

The reverse therein contains in the fact that a utopia was replaced by the government of lunatics. The previous liberal system is supposed to be American; the new system – insane – represents the British system. The British system is satirized via the names of the members of the “government” and also via their efforts to disguise the truth. They pretend to be sane even though at first sight it is obvious that they do not look so.

Their evidently poor taste, explained as the following: “...having been informed, in Paris, that the southern provincialists were a peculiarly eccentric people, with a vast number of antiquated notions;”<sup>51</sup> This satirizes the proverbial eccentricity of the British and their adherence to traditions. In addition, Poe calls the representatives of the royal power provincialists, which turns the British attitudes up side down.

At the dinner the narrator first does not realize that he is actually sitting amongst lunatics and he is surprised to hear the guests talking and as a matter of fact making fun on the topic of mental diseases. Every guest, who takes the word, apparently speaks about a patient of the asylum from the past, until Monsieur Maillard shouts one lady down, addressing her by exactly the same name she has just used in her story.

The scene that the lunatics speak about their maladies as if they were someone else’s could simply describe one feature of mad behavior. On the other hand it can expose hypocrisy. If we go further we can see the display of a typical feature of a politician at any times – speaking about your own faults as if they belonged to another person, to a person who may be laughed at and disparaged.

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<sup>51</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 553

One way or the other, making fun of people who are mentally ill represents low humor. Supposing the patients stand for the British aristocracy, this criticizes their culture and manners. It shows them as uncultured and uncivilized people.

The satirical view on the British government is further displayed in the scene of the reception. Not only costumes prove lack of good taste but also the table. Both consist of all the lush and luxury though the arrangements show “very little taste”<sup>52</sup> The table represents huge waste and indulgence reaching the borders of barbaric waste. This, considered as the British approach, is exposed to the criticism of the American society which is supposed to be cleared of these aristocratic burdens. These manners are satirized via the context of the asylum and the guests – lunatics – pretending not to be lunatics; on the contrary – pretending to be members of aristocracy.

This aristocracy overthrows their previous “government” of sensible and sensitive people of America. This attitude is represented by the way the staff is treated after the rebellion. They are tarred and covered with feather. For the following month they keep being re-tarred and re-feathered and the only food they are provided with is some bread. Water is poured on them every day. Pouring water on lunatics was once believed an effective but at Poe’s time a long obsolete method of treatment.

The “soothing method” applied in the asylum before the rebellion included a consistent approach; it means that if a patient believed to be for example a donkey – he or she was given only thistle to eat and water to drink and nothing else – consistently. This should bring him or her to the realization that he or she is not a donkey and made them gradually cease persisting being an animal. It is not mentioned though what would have happened if the patient had not come to the presupposed conclusion... The author places this method just next to and at the same rank as tarring and feathering, which was generally used as a corrective punishment – the aim was to inflict both pain and humiliation in such an extent so that it made the victim change his or her acting or leave for good.

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<sup>52</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 553

Nowadays, to tar and feather someone is considered barbaric – at the times, when this story was written, this procedure was not legal, though it was not once used as vigilante justice. Needless to say, it was imported from the United Kingdom. Using tarring and feathering – the system of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether – to “cure” the staff of the asylum signals social criticism.

“Yankee Doodle” is sung by the orchestra at the very time when the freed staff storms into the room. Then this society of lunatics is forced to the realization that their game is over, and this only crowns the satire.

The author does not go into deeper details concerning the character of Monsieur Maillard. It is known that he once worked in the asylum before becoming a patient himself. We also know that turning to a lunatic made him revise his methods in the terms of intensity and vehemence. He alters individual approach into a uniform treatment of tar and feather.

Poe exposes not only blind retribution to criticism but he also suggests that only a lunatic can believe in effective functioning of it compared to individual attitudes. In other words, Poe satirizes the uniformity and totalitarianism and contradicts with individuality and freedom.

The ‘soothing system’, with important modifications, has been resumed at the chateau; yet I cannot help agreeing with Monsieur Maillard, that his own ‘treatment’ was a very capital one of its kind. As he justly observed, it was ‘simple-neat-and gave no trouble at all – not the least’.<sup>53</sup>

The hero’s conclusion reveals more than simple-mindedness, more than that; it conceals an important message about how dangerous “simple and neat” solutions are. They serve as perfect and highly effective tools for any totalitarian system. When the author supports this warning by the naive efforts of the main character to search any literature by either Doctor Tarr or Professor Fether, the reader feels fun and shiver at the same time.

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<sup>53</sup> POE, E. A. „The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether“ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 562

### **3. 4. 4 Conclusion**

The ambiguous conclusion does not state clearly, which side Poe stands for. On one hand he seems to be absolutely sure about the rightness of the democratic system (When the main character expresses his admiration to it). On the other hand the hero seems impressed by the totalitarian system as well.

Poe brilliantly exposes the immense danger totality contains. Any system like this looks well-organized and denies every mark of disorder caused by variety. Everybody involved has to act to the system rules and any diversion is severely punished. Democratic system, on the contrary, faces a lot of problems since it allows differences. Freedom provides space for any one thus for conspiracy as well. If freedom is not sufficiently protected it can be overthrown in the same as it was in the case of the “soothing system” in the asylum.

This story presents de facto a reversal of most revolutions. Revolutions usually try to overthrow a non-democratic system and establish law and order on democratic principles. One of the first measures such movements take is to get rid of the ruling class, usually aristocracy and replace it by new, more just government.

Poe turns this upside down when placing the aristocrats in the position of rebels. Further on, in standard revolutions the defeated rulers are usually executed or driven away, according to the new rules thus perfectly legally. Not in this case; they are tarred and feathered. They are humiliated and kept in humbling conditions. This once again indicates the moral corruptness of aristocracy.

Poe definitely stands on the side of the democracy. The last sentence of the story should appeal to prudence from superficial assessment. It should alarm to protect democracy by being cautious and thoughtful. Above all it warns the common sense not to get confused by ‘simple and neat’ solutions.

### 3. 5 'Thou Art the Man'

#### 3. 5. 1 Plot

'Thou Art the Man' is one of the less complicated plots Edgar Allan Poe wrote. The author specifies the time very vaguely as summer of 18-, though he is more specific about the place. He gives a name – Rattleborough and implies at the very beginning that it represents an example of a small town with its little sins and hypocrisy.

In the introduction, it is indicated that "the Rattleborough enigma" concerns a sexual affair:

...miracle, which put a definite end to infidelity among the Rattleburghers, and converted to the orthodoxy of the grandames all the carnal-minded who had ventured to be skeptical before.<sup>54</sup>

The narrator, calling himself Oedipus, leads us to a typical conflict of three; the main character – Mr. Shuttleworthy, his bosom friend – Mr. Goodfellow and Mr. Shuttleworthy's nephew – Mr. Pennyfeather. Mr. Shuttleworthy and Mr. Goodfellow are such good friends that the narrator calls it a very intimate relationship. This he supports by an episode when Mr. Shuttleworthy having drunk some wine with his friend, told Mr. Goodfellow about his intention to send him a couple of boxes of their favourite wine in the near future since he enjoyed the way "Old Charley" drank with him:

'Od rot me,' says he, 'if I don't send an order to town this very afternoon for a double box of the best that can be got, and I'll make ye a present of it, I will! – ye needn't say a word now-I will, I tell ye and there's an end of it; so look out for it-it will come to hand some of these fine days, precisely when ye are looking for it the least!'<sup>55</sup>

The bone of contention, without Mr. Shuttleworthy's even knowing, becomes his property, more precisely his last will. Originally, everything was supposed to be inherited solely by Mr.

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<sup>54</sup> POE, E. A. 'Thou Art the Man' In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 536

<sup>55</sup> POE, E. A. 'Thou Art the Man' In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 537

Pennyfeather. After a successful manipulation by Mr. Goodfellow and a not inconsiderable contribution of Mr. Pennyfeather's blithe attitudes to money, Mr. Shuttleworthy decided to change his testament and thus leave his nephew penniless.

With this background the plot actually begins. Mr. Shuttleworthy leaves for the city to change his testament not to return any more. This event brings Mr. Goodfellow to an ingenious idea – to kill Mr. Shuttleworthy and arrange for all the evidence to serve against Mr. Pennyfeather. Since the latter would be imprisoned and sentenced for a murder, there would be no obstacles on Mr. Goodfellow's way to Mr. Shuttleworthy's wealth.

After a few days, during which Mr. Shuttleworthy does not turn up and is not heard from, it is Mr. Pennyfeather who alarms the Rattleburghers to organize a search party for his uncle. Until then, Mr. Goodfellow remains quiet.

Yet, when the search parties begin, Mr. Goodfellow shrewdly takes the initiative and stands himself in the role of their leader. He deliberately chooses such a route which seems out of the usual way, definitely out of the presupposed Mr. Shuttleworthy's way. Also the evidence discovered proves to be against Mr. Pennyfeather. In addition Mr. Goodfellow passes "innocently unconscious" remarks, which always point at Mr. Shuttleworthy's nephew.

Mr. Goodfellow abuses his good reputation with the Rattleburghers and premeditated speeches at the court to turn all the incensed attention against his rival. Mr. Pennyfeather found himself in a hopeless situation when being accused of a murder and being forced to accept all the evidence Mr. Goodfellow simply could not avoid submitting. The loop around Mr. Pennyfeather's neck would definitely tighten up were it not for the narrator.

This disgusts him and excites his suspicions. He then realizes that some traces are questionable and notices that Mr. Goodfellow is always involved either in the discovery of them or contributes to their explanation. All these discrepancies make the narrator start his own investigation. Following his mind and instinct, he eventually spots Mr. Shuttleworthy's grave, reveals his corpse and arranges for a *deus ex machina*.

At the moment, when Mr. Goodfellow feels his success ripe for picking, he receives a letter announcing a delivery of two boxes of Mr. Goodfellow's favourite wine. This had been

ordered by poor Mr. Shuttleworthy in order to display his goodwill for Mr. Goodfellow – his bosom friend. This moment is picked up by the narrator as an opportunity to reveal the truth.

Having received the letter from the wine merchant, Mr. Goodfellow holds a little party for the Rattleburghers. For some reason, he does not mention the fact that the expected wine had actually been a present from his dead friend.

The narrator takes the advantage of the social gathering and accomplishes his plan. He arranges to place Mr. Shuttleworthy's body into one of the boxes in such a way that it springs straight just at the very moment of opening. It is only then when the dead body says the words: "Thou art the man!"<sup>56</sup>, which are actually uttered by the narrator himself, since he admits to have ventriloquial abilities to the great astonishment of the reader. The shock encountered by all the present guests including the host causes that Mr. Goodfellow makes "a rapid, vehement and detailed confession" after which he falls down dead.

In the conclusive explanation the narrator gives details about how he discovered the body and made appropriate arrangements to reach the detective success. Mr. Shuttleworthy wait to see the condign punishment, Mr. Pennyfeather comes to realization that his life needs a change and uses his heritage to "lead happily ever afterwards a new life"<sup>57</sup>.

### **3. 5. 2 Names and Characters**

The descriptive names in this story are more associated with a human character than anything else. Although therein they are so transparent that the author used them ironically.

Mr. Shuttleworthy's name implies his destiny – especially after death, when his corpse was used as a piece of key evidence in the case of his own murder. The verb "shuttle" describes what happened with its poor bearer after having been assassinated by his bosom friend.

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<sup>56</sup> POE, E. A. 'Thou Art the Man' In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 545

<sup>57</sup> POE, E. A. 'Thou Art the Man' In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 546

Nevertheless, if we take into account the way the character speaks, we can assume him an example of a typical American, even a Yankee Doodle. Poe uses antistoecon (Zimmermann 1999:642) to express his dialect: "...I tell ye..."<sup>58</sup> supporting it with mild swearing. The reader pictures a character with clearly visible American features. He swears but not too much to disturb the reader. He is rich, honest but at the same time naive and gullible.

Mr. Charles Goodfellow – a name which speaks for itself – also called ‘Old Charley Goodfellow’ - Poe explains the denotation of the name and depicts its bearer as somebody as frank and honest as he could be: ‘And thus all the hearty, careless, ‘walking gentlemen’ of the stage are very certain to be called Charles.’<sup>59</sup> The irony turns this trustworthy fellow into the actual “bad man” in the end.

However, the spoof consists in the very name of the character. Although the reader is introduced Charles Goodfellow as a genuinely good fellow and to his description is paid a particular attention, at the same time a certain air of suspicion is felt from the very beginning.

On the contrary the seemingly “bad guy” turns out to be innocent and nearly becomes a martyr when victimized by Mr. Goodfellow’s crime. His name is Mr. Pennyfeather and he does not owe in his own name a penny. (He is light-hearted and finds it difficult to actually keep a penny.)

### 3. 5. 3 Narrator and His Plot

As I have mentioned above, the narrator introduces himself as Oedipus in the first sentence of the introduction: “I will now play the Oedipus to the Rattleborough enigma.”<sup>60</sup> This drama by Sophocles starts with a prophecy which says that Oedipus will kill his father and marries his own mother. Oedipus fulfils the prophecy and has children with his own mother without

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<sup>58</sup> POE, E. A. ‘Thou Art the Man’ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 537

<sup>59</sup> POE, E. A. ‘Thou Art the Man’ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 536

<sup>60</sup> POE, E. A. ‘Thou Art the Man’ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 536



actually knowing that he is her son. After he reveals the truth he blinds himself. This classical tragedy became a part of nowadays language thanks to Sigmund Freud who described the well-known Oedipal Complex.

The allusion to Oedipus suggests sexual vertones. Nevertheless, this association seems out of the question in this plot as the main characters are only men. Regardless, there is a triangle – From the position of possible heritage the friends – Mr. Shuttleworthy and Mr. Goodfellow - are meant to be partners. Mr. Pennyfeather is the only heir. If we accept Oedipus triangle as a scheme, Mr. Shuttleworthy represents the king – Oedipus’s father, Mr. Goodfellow stands for his wife and finally Mr Pennyfeather plays the role of their son. This scheme though somehow does not work.

What does work, is the same scheme without the mother. Oedipal context herein represents a metaphor for rivalry. Oedipus and his father are actually rivals. Oedipus can carry on in life successfully only under the condition of non-existence of his father – thus he must kill him.

Now the outline gains more particular features. The narrator – Oedipus – de facto stands for Edgar Allan Poe himself. In this plot the narrator plays a significant role, he even enters the plot in the end and becomes the main character himself.

His oedipal father then must be a writer whom he supposes a literary rival or even an enemy. In the plot the “bad guy” eventually turns out to be Mr. Charles Goodfellow. This characteristics and moreover the name directs us to Henry W. Longfellow – a significant figure of American romantic poetry and a professor at Harvard University.

Henry W. Longfellow was at Poe’s times a recognized poet and a respectable citizen. His reputation was literally unspotted. He was popular not only with literate circles but also with the public as a whole. That is why Poe encountered lack of understanding when instantly criticizing him.

The narrator seems to remain in the background for most of the plot. He steps back into the shade of objectivity to step out suddenly and provide the reader with his very personal views. First he appears in the introduction, when commenting the character of Mr. Goodfellow in great detail (see above).

Further in the text, Poe enters the plot straight and openly and by the mouth of the narrator makes a comment on contemporary “crack novels”. He provides the correct translation of a Latin phrase – ‘Cui bono?’ and at the same time does not forget to mention its frequent mistranslations. He openly criticizes the way some contemporary writers use foreign languages without actually being familiar with them. He puts at the same rank real authors, real names and straight next to them names made up of puns. Not only does he align real and fictive authors he also aligns authors of different quality: “...- in *all* the crack novels, I say, from those of Bulwer and Dickens to those of Turnapenny and Ainsworth ...”<sup>61</sup> Zimmermann (1999:654, 655) indicates this device as *soraismus*, which is typical for Poe and can be found frequently in his work.

Poe expresses his disillusionment over the general insufficiency in education or makes merciless criticism on literature as a whole. One or another, Poe’s great fondness on accuracy emerges therein in an angered ebullition. The mention of money in connection to the latter two names refers to the general attempt of the writers then to earn money to the exclusion of the quality of the literary work.

During the narration, Poe actually makes other hints for the reader to increase the negative attitudes towards the character of Mr. Goodfellow. He suggests him being a drunker when enjoying himself in Mr. Shuttleworthy’s house. Also, if we accept that the character of Mr. Shuttleworthy represents a typical American, Poe indicates that Mr. Goodfellow, in other words Henry W. Longfellow, tries to deceive America.

The last but not least open contribution of the narrator to the plot is found in and actually creates the denouement itself. First, the narrator informs about himself only as if parenthetically; once again he steps out of the background to make a personal comment on the plot being in progress. Further on his presence in the plot grows stronger and more apparent and suddenly, he assumes a significant and crucial role in the unravelling. Therein his role doubles; in one line, he remains the omniscient and objective narrator and in the second line, he becomes *de facto* a character. Needless to emphasize he becomes the main side character.

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<sup>61</sup> POE, E. A. ‘Thou Art the Man’ In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 541

The unravelling in the narrator's plot dwells actually in the final scene when he uses his ventriloquial skills to prove Mr. Goodfellow a murderer. Ventriloquialism is supposed an open allusion to plagiarism. Poe accuses Henry Longfellow of plagiarism which represents his literary disclosure. The ominous moment is supported also by the biblical style of language he uses: "Thou art the man!"<sup>62</sup> (Zimmermann 1999:650)

### **3. 5. 4 Conclusion**

As a matter of fact, this story provides two plots. The first obvious one does not correspond to the elaborateness which is so typical for works by Edgar Allan Poe. The irritating and imagination-provoking conclusions appear to miss this story. This layer of the short story presents a parody on simple nonetheless good-selling books of his times.

The other layer represents Poe's personal war against Henry W. Longfellow whom he attacked regularly and seemingly for no reason. Poe develops his oedipal struggle against his literary father into a "happy-ending" when his rival is revealed and dies.

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<sup>62</sup> POE, E. A. 'Thou Art the Man' In: *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems*. London: Reed International Books Ltd., c1981. ISBN 1 85152 630 7, pp. 545

## 4 Conclusion

This work deals with stories which are supposed not characteristic for Poe's work. My thesis does not intend to analyse Poe's humor fully and completely. My ambition was to lay an outline of the part of his work which is generally considered marginal. However, humor and satire represent a significant mark in not only comedic stories he wrote. As a matter of fact, satirical undertow can be sensed even in his stories of terror.

Aristotle's comedy imitates people of low origins. Poe uses this type of character in "The Business Man" but also in "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall". Peter Profit in the first story tries hard to get to the higher society. He uses unfair policy and seems to be successful. Nevertheless, his polished manners disguise his real character. In other words, Peter Profit pretends to be a member of a higher class but he actually acts in a low way.

On the other hand, Hans Pfaall admits his low origin (and is not ashamed of it). His actions though could be assessed as straight. We can object to this statement if we regard the "accident" he has with his creditors at the beginning of the plot (They all die at the start of his aircraft when he has promised that they could get their money back.) This definitely cannot be stated a fair action. However, Hans never justifies it. As a matter of fact, the contrary is true. From the very beginning till the very end of his story he feels guilty and never denies having committed the crime. The fear of justice actually makes him change his plans and never come back home. Hans Pfaall comes from the lower class, nonetheless, his manners can be considered fair, thus higher than Peter Profit's.

Apart from traits typical for Poe's humor, "Loss of Breath" exemplifies one of the features typical for American humor as well and it is exaggeration. All the injuries and mishaps the main character is exposed to and "survives" are characteristic for western-style humor.

Punning (Zimmermann 1999:653) plays a special and strong role in Poe's satire. It permeates through his entire work. In "The Business Man" he uses puns when giving names to the different businesses the main hero does. A pun plays a key role in "Thou Art the Man" when it actually creates the punch line of the plot. In "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor

Fether” puns literally bear an essential layer of the plot as well. Punning is frequently used by Poe especially in his comedic stories.

One of Poe’s typical characteristics is alienation; alienation in the sense of feeling even superior or more precisely aloof from the other world. This feeling gives him the courage to criticise even such names such as Henry W. Longfellow – a highly recognized author in Poe’s times. On the other hand, this kind of alienation also gives Poe the feeling of an outsider, or some one out of reach of normal happiness such as love. (The author expresses these emotions mainly in his poetry.)

This consciousness of being different results from his childhood. He went through the experience of an orphan and actually never got along with his stepfather. He was different and hardly found understanding in his family. He was different in his work as well – the full recognition of his talent came de facto after his death. Poe went through the hardships of life which made him hard in his work. I dare say that Poe - the acrimonious critic grew from Poe – the hurt child.

Poe’s criticism derives also from the high level of his education. He was extremely well-read. That is why he felt confident enough to accuse famous writers of his time of plagiarism. For instance, his suspicion of Washington Irving concerning his plagiarism of German old stories turned out to be true.

In his criticism Poe pronounces often harsher towards the writers than towards the society. In his story “Thou Art the Man” he fiercely criticises not only the main character impersonating Henry W. Longfellow, but also the whole genre by writing its parody. Part of this is dedicated to translating in literature. Poe himself spoke many languages e. g. Latin and French. In his work we encounter untranslated passages especially in French. This may be explained either by Poe’s efforts to simply show off (soraismus – Zimmermann 1999:654, 655) or by his efforts to remain the most accurate. Ultimately, accuracy characterizes Poe’s literary work most.

His works criticize the authors and their attempts to earn money although he actually does the same. The strong critical tune present in his satire shows Poe in his typical posture. In his serious work, he uses his rhetorical skills to enable the reader a picture which is possibly the

closest to his own. In his satire he uses them to express his critical attitudes. In his criticism Poe remains merciless and unforgiving.

His criticism is obvious even in the hoax “An Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall”. The hoax primarily does not deal with biting satire or social critique. It should deceive people and make them believe that something impossible is actually true. Poe uses ingenious and sophisticated means to do so. The criticism emerges in the excessive footnote where he supports the quality of his hoax by attacking hoaxes of other authors.

Another type of satire is represented by the story “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether”. Disregarding the social critique it doubtless presents, I would like to emphasize the warning it bears. The story above all warns from any totalitarian system which makes it timeless and shifts it higher from an ordinary criticism.

Warning is contained also in “The Business Man” which mainly represents social satire. Poe alludes to Benjamin Franklin’s pragmatism but more than that; he applies intelligent means how to actually warn from misapplying it. Pragmatism used with selfish intents leads to a selfish society. Poe exposes this when making fun of this philosophy. What he actually does, is not persiflage of pragmatism, on the contrary, Poe warns against abusing it.

Edgar Allan Poe is a highly descriptive author (Zimmermann 1999:638) whose language skills outstand many of his contemporaries. His ability to express a special kind of humor in his different forms but even out of them belongs to these skills and creates its integral part. Poe pronounces in his satire to serious topics. After the reader laughs at the jokes, he or she has to start thinking, which actually makes Poe’s satire serious, too. If humor makes people think, it proves its quality. Edgar Allan Poe’s humor unquestionably represents high-quality humor.

Therefore I find this topic worth further exploring. A more detailed research could involve investigation of Poe’s serious work for traces of humor and an analysis of rhetorical devices he applies to express his comedic ideas.

## 5 Resumé

Původním tématem této práce nebyl humor v díle Edgara Allana Poea, nýbrž jeho klasické dílo, zejména symboly v jeho poezii, ale i próze. Z organizačních důvodů však bylo třeba požádat o vedení mé diplomové práce pana Christophera Koye, M. A., který toto zajímavé téma navrhl.

Nejprve jsme začali s interpretační částí práce. Prvním krokem byl výběr povídek, který měl pokrýt různé druhy humoru. S povídkami jsem pracovala v pořadí, ve kterém je uvádím ve své práci. Jednotlivé povídky jsem vždy nejprve interpretovala sama. Pokud bylo k mému výkladu potřeba dohledat informace, používala jsem různé zdroje - od encyklopedických slovníků po elektronické encyklopedie dostupné na internetu.

Jednalo se především o povídku „Loss of Breath“, kde autor často odkazoval na antická božstva či osobnosti. Dále bylo v některých případech třeba zjistit alespoň střípky z dobového kontextu, a to především v momentech, kdy Poe odkazuje na své současníky. Takovým případem byla opět již výše zmíněná povídka „Loss of Breath“, kde autor odkazuje především na současné drama.

Tento druh práce vyžadoval zvláště velké množství času. Jelikož Poe byl velice vzdělaný člověk a i své současníky převyšoval sečtělostí, zjišťování dobového kontextu a doplňkových informací vzhledem k odkazům se ukázalo jako časově náročné, zároveň však velice zajímavé. Nelze opomenout ani příspěvní vedoucího diplomové práce pana Christophera Koye, který mi velkou měrou pomohl osvětlit kulturní prostředí, v němž Poe tvořil. Tyto informace posloužily k dokreslení celkového obrazu povídek, a obohatily tak jejich porozumění o další vrstvy.

Neméně zajímavé byly i rozbory Poeova díla. Další literární zdroje, které analyzovaly Poeovu satiru, jsem použila až po dokončení vlastního rozboru. Ten jsem pak doplnila o následně získané poznatky. Zejména povídka „The Business Man“ a zvláště rozbor týkající se použití čísel pro mne osobně znamenal překvapivý objev.

Z dalších uvedených zdrojů jmenuji ještě „A Catalogue of Selected Rhetorical Devices Used in the Works of Edgar Allan Poe“, kde Bret Zimmermann uvádí přehled literárních

prostředků používaných v díle Edgara Allana Poea a zároveň konfrontuje své názory se stanovisky autorů zabývajících se stejným nebo podobným tématem před ním.

Teprve po zpracování základního literárního tématu jsem přistoupila k psaní teoretické části. Tato část práce představovala nejnáročnější fázi, jelikož bylo potřeba se seznámit s rysy amerického humoru a s tématem humoru vůbec. Již při výběru tématu diplomové práce bylo jasné, že analýza humoru bude složitá. Tento předpoklad se ukázal jako naprosto správný.

Jak uvádím v úvodu, humor je pevně vázán na kontext. Kontext v tomto smyslu slova znamená nejen dobu, ale i společenské a politické prostředí. Je vázán na sociální podmínky, odvíjí se od sociální skupiny, je závislý na náboženské orientaci nejen autora, ale hlavně čtenáře. V neposlední řadě je třeba přihlídnout i k samotné osobnosti autora a nelze opomenout ani osobnost čtenářovu. Humor je tedy téma komplexní a složité, nicméně nesmírně zajímavé a objevné. Je to téma tak aktuální, jako humor sám.

Při zkoumání dobového kontextu jednotlivých povídek nejvíce napomohly odkazy, které poskytl sám autor. V téměř všech použitých povídkách Poe odkazuje na konkrétní osobnosti či díla. Většina z nich byla v jeho době všeobecně známa, ovšem především ve vzdělanějších vrstvách obyvatelstva. Jednalo se ale i o díla tendenční, tedy svým způsobem módní, a tudíž díla v současné době nepříliš známá. Tak tomu bylo konkrétně v případě obrazu *Marsyas*, na který Poe odkazuje v povídce „Loss of Breath“.

Druhá polovina teoretické části se věnuje životu Edgara Allana Poea, jenž významnou měrou přispěl k formování jeho díla. Uvádím zde nejen fakta, např. o jeho vzdělání, ale i dostupné informace o jeho soukromém životě. Ten podle mého názoru hrál klíčovou roli v autorově vymezení se vůči světu a do velké míry vlastně určil jeho umělecké směřování.

V závěru práce se vracím k jednotlivým formám humoru Edgara Allana Poea. Pokouším se srovnat nejen jejich podobnosti, ale i kontrasty. Také se zamýšlím nad vlivem autorovy životní cesty na jeho tvorbu – v rovině emotivní, ale i rozumové – a mírou vlivu Poeových osobních zkušeností např. na volbu jazykových prostředků. V neposlední řadě se opět vracím k tématu samotných jazykových prostředků, které autor používá.



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